

# Identification of “exceptional circumstances” where reconstruction of cultural heritage is accepted

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When discussions are held around the reconstruction of cultural heritage, a common understanding of the language is not often established. Even among so-called experts in the field of cultural heritage, definition of ‘reconstruction’ varies from the very monumental, strictly differentiating reconstruction and restoration, to social, urban and environmental. The ICOMOS University Forum Workshop on Authenticity and Reconstructions, held in Charenton-le-Pont, France, in March 2017, proved such diversity of visions and approaches. The intended scale of the intervention also differs between the partial addition to an existing structure and the complete rebuilding of a lost built environment.

This paper offers a necessary descriptive review of documents and literature, notably the principle, international, platform-setting texts which have shaped the doctrine and attitude towards reconstruction of cultural heritage internationally. In order to argue a possible shift in the paradigm, to place, as it were, cultural heritage as a future-making tool, seeing future as equally important as past and present in the life and spirit of a place, no principle could be put forward without respecting the accumulation of existing literature which reflects the continued discussion on the justified or non-justified acts of reconstruction.

In the *Riga Charter on Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage* (2000, hereafter the *Riga Charter*), reconstruction is defined as “evocation, interpretation, restoration or replication of a previous form”. In the same text, conservation is defined as “all efforts designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard, and as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement.” At what times and situations could reconstruction be an appropriate method of conservation to understand cultural heritage and to ensure its presentation and enhancement?

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Reconstruction may be seen as paradoxical to what heritage conservation means, especially when the theory focuses on the 'preservation' aspect. This cautious way of understanding the international doctrine, as well as trying to be sure to conform to the international standard-setting instruments, may occur for appreciation that nuances of language matter in the field of cultural heritage.

Such cautious and attentive attitude towards international standards became the principle incentive for the Japanese authorities to convene a conference of experts in Nara in 1994 that resulted in the *Nara Document on Authenticity* (hereafter the *Nara Document*). There had been an unexpected incident on the occasion of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Wooden Architecture, held in Kathmandu in 1992, when strong criticism was made of one of the examples of 'restoration' led by Japanese experts in Patan, within the greater Kathmandu Valley area. In those times nobody would dare argue "why not reconstruction?" The method of dismantling and reassembling of building material has been a common and skilled practice in Japan, where wood remained as the principal material throughout history. The criticism came during the same year in which Japan became a State Party to the *Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972, hereafter the *World Heritage Convention*). In view of putting forward some future nominations of cherished cultural heritage and justifying them as being of Outstanding Universal Value, the Japanese authorities felt a strong need to be understood by the international scientific community on the Japanese cultural philosophy and traditional techniques regarding restoration of refined wooden architecture. At times, in order to replace damaged wooden pieces, restoration could mean dismantling and reconstructing the entire structure, based on careful documentation and calculation, using the transmitted traditional techniques. The criticism given at Kathmandu was against such operation, which had illustrated the Japanese way of restoration that appeared to be 'reconstruction' to some experts from other parts of the world. The *Nara Document*, now having become a widely consulted reference upon consideration of authenticity, in fact does not clearly articulate what authenticity itself means. However, it certainly states how much diversity could exist in the world towards the notion of authenticity and successfully expanded the grounds, or "aspects of the sources" of information, on which the evaluation of authenticity could be made. Reconstruction may be justified in line with some of those grounds. Article 13 of the *Nara Document* states as follows:

Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgments may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information.

Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. (...)

The achievement of the *Nara Document* was that it allowed diverse cultures of the world, not only Japan, to be able to put forward the values of their cultural heritage as authentic. On the other hand, the notion on authenticity, having become relative in the absolute sense, seemed to have had lost its threshold of standardized judgment. Despite the applause and respect given to the achievement of the *Nara Document*, explanation on the notion of reconstruction seems to have been carefully avoided within its text. The *Nara Document* of 1994 is silent about the linkage of the two notions, although it might have otherwise become an opportunity to guide some development in reconsidering the significance of reconstruction within the international standards. It was not yet time to come to that point. Relativizing of the notion of authenticity was enough of a big step forward at that stage, in order to pave the way for universality in the international doctrine.

Here we shall review how, until today, the field of cultural heritage conservation treated “reconstruction” on the international level. In the *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (1964, hereafter the *Venice Charter*), Article 9 reads as follows:

The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp. The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument.

Articles 12 and 13 instruct the principles for replacement of missing parts and additions.

Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.

Additions cannot be allowed except in so far as they do not detract from the interesting parts of the building, its traditional setting, the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings.

The Venice Charter respects honesty in conservation decisions and attempts to ensure material integrity of the built heritage. Then, we see in Article 15 the exceptional admittance of ‘reconstruction’.

(...) All reconstruction work should however be ruled out "a priori". Only anastylosis, that is to say, the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts can be permitted. The material used for integration should always be recognizable and its use should be the least that will ensure the conservation of a monument and the reinstatement of its form.

The condition of reconstruction here is to use the practice of anastylosis. This also demonstrates the respect for honesty in conservation decisions, towards the material integrity of the built heritage. However, Article 15 is where the Charter talks about archaeological excavations. There is little assumption of a situation where reconstruction of the built environment may be needed for anything that continues to be used and lived in. This is clearly restrictive to certain category of heritage, using some limited variety of material.

When we review the content of the *Riga Charter*, within its conciseness, it shows the result of a revisited debate on reconstruction. The *Riga Charter* was signed in 2000 following concerns on reconstruction and authenticity issues in some former Soviet countries, which had recently regained independence. This Charter became an alert, from the doctrinal point of view for the conservation of cultural heritage, to the use of re-invented monuments as symbolic narratives for national identity building and the restructuring of national history. One may argue why not, since the common motivation of concerned communities towards reconstruction tends to be the restitution of historic and cultural identity. However, the Charter reminds the public that any reconstruction is the least necessary for the conservation and presentation of a cultural heritage site.

In the *Riga Charter*, the issue of authenticity and reconstruction is linked within the single text. It states that:

Authenticity is a measure of the degree to which the attributes of cultural heritage (including form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other factors) credibly and accurately bear witness to their significance.

In the above text, one could read the essence of the principles of Herb Stovel, who was the major contributor to the texts of both texts the *Nara Document* and the *Riga Charter*. It was one of the crucial achievements of his, that those principles were documented and immortalized in such doctrinal texts in which the background and contexts of each period as well as of geographic regions could be studied in later years.

Needless to say, the approach towards reconstruction in relation to authenticity that can be seen in the text of the *Riga Charter* is aligned within paragraphs 79 to 86 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (2016 version, hereafter *Operational Guidelines*). Article 86 of the *Operational Guidelines* could be cited as the following:

In relation to authenticity, the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture.

As seen in the above texts, discussions on reconstruction and authenticity have been repeated. However, in our times, we need to re-open the debate in order to identify how to consider reconstruction of destroyed or damaged cultural heritage, due to the fact that pressing international expectations towards a persuasive viewpoint of the ‘heritage experts’ on this question becomes non-negligible. What appear in doctrinal texts as ‘exceptional circumstances’, where reconstruction might be supported, are frequently happening in today’s world. When we see armed conflict destroying emblematic World Heritage Sites or natural disasters destroying cherished historic monuments and urban heritage, devastating the identity and esteem of the local community and a larger public far beyond, we tend to think it is the moment of exception. The recent case of the monuments in Timbuktu, Mali, provides a case study on successful reconstruction. Based on detailed documentation and materials laid by skilled local craftsmen, work by the living community for the living community, this case merited international applause, far from being criticized because of ‘reconstruction’. Older cases can also be cited, such as the city of Dresden, Warsaw or the Bridge of Mostar, although the context and scale of the reconstruction varies from the case of Timbuktu.

Then, ongoing international discussions towards decision for actions are observed for the Giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan, as well as the monuments and remains at Palmyra, among others. They are the most emblematic victims of armed conflict deliberately targeting cultural heritage. Then there have been the even more pressing and cases of living heritage at Bagan, Kathmandu, as well as Kumamoto, or the churches in central Italy, which have all been severely damaged by natural disasters; those cultural heritage sites which have an important function in the social livelihood of the concerned community and where there is no doubting the need of a large-scale intervention, which may be called ‘major restoration’ or ‘reconstruction’.

In our days when documentation of cultural heritage is possible thanks to technology and dedicated expertise, we also need to review what conjecture means. Strong criticism against conjecture became the basis of a caution towards reconstruction since the 19th century in countries such as the U.K or France. We may look into the large-scale restoration works of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in those years. The works he undertook in Pierrefonds or Carcassonne, even Notre-Dame de Paris, included what we today call ‘reconstruction based on conjecture’. This is a longstanding point of criticism. However, Viollet-le-Duc did study the vast amount of documentation upon designing his restoration works, which made him struggle amidst a swirl of hesitation between

various forms that the monuments may have taken in the course of history. He eventually and decisively chose to put on additions to the monuments, in view of bearing their future forms; for those monuments to live in the hearts of the future nation. In the field of conservation, authenticity commands the highest respect, but in the hearts of the future community a new form may also be accepted. In order to persuade the large global public, the principles of cultural heritage conservation would need to justify and better advocate the cautious approach towards reconstruction and the denial of what is considered as conjecture. When we talk about ‘future-making’, the stance taken by Viollet-le-Duc may be re-evaluated as such an approach. The above-mentioned re-evaluation is an attempted argument, which the present author intends to study and articulate in a separate paper. The ICOMOS University Forum Workshop on Authenticity and Reconstructions, held in Charenton-le-Pont, France, in March 2017, has informed the present author to strengthen contemplation of the significance of intended memory-building processes. Some monuments, literally speaking of the Latin word *monere*, to remind, were intended as cultural heritage from the beginning, while other cultural heritage became heritage, targets of conservation, venerated by later people who attributed value to certain vestiges of the past. Future-making or history-making; since it is a continuous process in which we are involved at present, why not reconstitute a memory from the past, when symbolically lost, as memory for the future?

If all conjecture on past forms were to be denied, cases such as the reconstruction of the pagodas in Bagan for tourism purposes during the military regime would not be able to justify the evaluation of authenticity. Yet, Bagan today has faced a renewed need for reconstruction after a major earthquake. Buddhist pagodas being places of worship by the continuously living community, justification of authenticity may be sought using some of the “aspects of information sources” mentioned in the *Nara Document*, transcending beyond the above-mentioned period of reconstruction, a few decades ago, upon incomplete documentation.

In Japan, in Okinawa, we can see today a prominent example of reconstructed cultural heritage, namely the Shuri Castle. First built in the late 14th Century by the Ryukyu dynasty, it was a living castle until late 19th Century and was listed as a national treasure before the Second World War. However, entirely devastated by heavy naval gunfire in 1945, the memory of this castle through physical attributes could only be transmitted through reconstruction. Because Shuri Castle was highly important for the identify of the people of Okinawa, in the rubble of the entire city of Naha, even under the America occupation, some reconstruction works started as early as in the 1950s, on one of the castle gates. The surface, which used to belong to the castle site, was listed as a national historic site in 1972, and what remained of the castle, such as underground foundations,

was part of it. Reconstruction works then continued, of which the majority took place in the early 1990s following an extensive research and planning period in the 1980s. Documentation was available, especially through excavation and documents from the earlier restoration. Further documents were then found by historians and engineers of the reconstruction team during the preparation phase. Nevertheless, we cannot expect documentation to be a perfect guide to reconstructing a vast area from scratch. In heavily bombed places such as Okinawa where countless lives of civilians were lost during war, local documentation was also severely damaged or lost. We could also be reminded that documentary technology decades ago was not as complete as today and some details such as the colour of the roof-tiles had to rely on the memory of elderly survivors from the pre-WW2 period, whose opinions varied. In 2000, the land surface and scarce remains of the foundations of the original Shuri castle became part of a newly inscribed serial World Heritage property of ‘Gusuku sites and related properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu’. Although, precisely speaking, the reconstructed monuments and ramparts did not become part of World Heritage of Outstanding Universal Value, in the eyes of the present day’s community, it is the reconstructed castle, which illustrates the recovery of Okinawa. The reconstructed castle complex has also become the symbol of the identity of the lost kingdom of Ryukyu and evokes the beauty of the urban landscape of Shuri, which existed until 1945. Although the historic urban landscape around Shuri Castle was all gone in 1945, even without this historic urban context, the newly made Shuri Castle is again at the heart of the local community. The reconstruction could take place with the right momentum, when the elders could link their memories of the original castle to its new form. This large-scale, nationally and locally cooperated reconstruction project had been shaped at first in the resilient hearts of the local civil society, then voice through their determined actions.

Any reconstruction, in ‘exceptional circumstances’, needs initiative and the motivation of the local community, with large financial support. Clarification of the process of consensus building and decision-making is key to justification of reconstruction. The discussion should possibly converge into the topic of who decides the future status of certain cultural heritage, who takes the responsibility for it, and for whom?

The present author, in consideration of the exceptional acceptance of reconstructions, intends to emphasize the following arguments for the making of future. Significance of reconstruction is not only about rebuilding the monument in the material sense, but also to revitalize the living environment of the local community in their familiar context. This is to foresee the rehabilitation of social livelihood and restitution of self-esteem among the directly concerned community. On the condition that reconstruction of an architectural space could enable such

situations, should it not be acceptable as an appropriate conservation method of a forward-looking future society management? In order to justify this argument, ‘exceptional circumstances’ of reconstruction must be positively identified and put into practice with an appropriate momentum, before the place loses an eager and motivated community with an expectation of a regained sense of place.

In order to respond to the expectations of international society, we may be envisaging a new paradigm for the conventional field of conservation. No radical decision or deliberate re-orientation would be suitable for the responsible and intellectual experts. We need to extensively review any cause that has been taken, until today, as the basis of this cautious approach towards reconstruction. Only from there, we may find a path towards creation of a stronger platform with a new orientation concerning the issue of reconstruction.

Cesare Brandi, in his *Theory of Restoration*, mentions that falsity does not lie within the object, but within the judgement. A fake becomes a fake when it is recognized as such and falsity is not an inherent property of the object. He underlines the importance of distinguishing between imitations (or replicas) and falsifications, and that this differentiation is not based on specific differences in production methods, but on the underlying intent. The former is the “production of an object that resembles or reproduces another object, either in the technique or in the style of a given historical period or a given artist, with no purpose other than to document or enjoy the object” (Brandi 1977: 87). The latter is “production of an object as above, but with a specific intent to mislead others as to its period, its material nature or its creator” (ibid). According to his theory, entire or partial reconstruction or destructed built environment could be perhaps seen as ‘imitation’. Imitation is not falsification, so it is still honest. In this case, couldn’t reconstruction be accepted, if it is achieved without concealing that it is indeed a reconstruction? This may lead to another level of debate that cultural heritage could still be significant without being entirely authentic from all aspects. However, in the Riga Charter, it is believed that:

Replication of cultural heritage is in general a misrepresentation of evidence of the past, and that each architectural work should reflect the time of its own creation, in the belief that sympathetic new buildings can maintain the environmental context.

Couldn’t there then be a way to approve the authenticity in the reconstruction, if it meets the affirmative judgement on authenticity within the grounds given in the *Nara Document*, therefore also in the *Operational Guidelines*? There is no mention in any doctrinal texts on the specific way to evaluate authenticity in reconstructed cultural heritage. When we study the case of the entirely reconstructed Old City of Warsaw, we can see that the Polish authorities did not intend to declare



an authenticity in the destroyed layers of history within the reconstructed city fabric, but declared contemporary fabric within the reconstructed Old City to be the exertion of the 1950s itself.

Within this paper, having reviewed major international doctrinal documents with focus on reconstructions, continued consent is given to the fact that careful and conditioned approach towards reconstruction of cultural heritage should remain. There seems no need to drive towards a radical shift in the conservation principle. However, on the other hand, more and more exceptional circumstances, where reconstructions are approved and acknowledged, may also be justified in today's world. Action should be taken while the momentum for possible reconstruction is not lost. In the *Riga Charter*, 'exceptional circumstances' is stated as the following:

Circumstances where reconstruction is necessary for the survival of the place; where a 'place' is incomplete through damage or alteration; where it recovers the cultural significance of a 'place'; or in response to tragic loss through disasters where of natural or human origin.

Even under exceptional circumstances, it is to be noted that the Charter clarifies conditions of reconstruction that:

- appropriate survey and historical documentation is available (including iconographic, archival or material evidence);
- existing significant historic fabric will not be damaged: and
- (...) the need for reconstruction has been established through full and open consultations among national and local authorities and the community concerned.

Among various examples of reconstruction projects, the previously mentioned reconstruction project of the Shuri Castle, in fact, had met the conditions as set out in the *Riga Charter* as an exceptional circumstance, as well as all the three conditions of reconstruction under exceptional circumstances.

The provisions in the *Riga Charter* are based on thorough studies of the *Venice Charter* as well as other ICOMOS doctrinal texts namely the *Burra Charter* (1979), the *Florence Charter* (1981), the *Declaration of Dresden* (1982), the *Lausanne Charter* (1990), and the *Nara Document*. It re-organized and summarized in clear words what thoughts against various backgrounds had developed until 2000 on the notion of reconstruction of cultural heritage. Thus it could be noted that covering the conditions set out in the *Riga Charter* would be able to respect the accumulation of the preceding conventional texts.

If a cluster of exceptional circumstances and acceptable reconstruction processes could be demonstrated, besides that of Shuri Castle, it could create new best-practice principles for affected

societies of the present day to move on to rebuild their familiar contexts, to revitalize the living environment, and self-esteem through reconstruction of architectural spaces. The paper concludes its position in the assertive support towards identification of ‘exceptional circumstances’ for reconstruction, and that any action should need to take advantage of momentum, before any place loses hope of a motivated community working towards recovering their cherished sense of place.

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