Clarifying dynamic authenticity in cultural heritage. A look at vernacular built environments.

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1. Authenticity and reconstruction

Authenticity and reconstruction have largely been referred to as concepts applied to the material world where the values of objects from the past convey to the contemporary observer (Wang, 1999; UNESCO, 2003; Martin & Patti, 2009). Authenticity –based on the static qualities of an object- and reconstruction – referring to a dynamic process that might blur these qualities- were understood as two apparently disparate concepts which were more likely to repel each other than to intertwine (UNESCO, 2015). However, given that heritage is not merely understood as the material result of a process but also as a psychological one, reconstruction requires material and cognitive transformation processes, either with new constructions or reinterpretations of inherited objects.

Only by acknowledging that new paradigms in the perception and assessment of heritage are needed to properly address what authenticity and reconstruction mean, can we analyse the need for authenticity to be thought of as a dynamic process, completely dependent on the context. In line with the idea of dynamism, this paper moves on from the assumption that heritage is based on continuous cultural, natural, political and intellectual colonization and decolonization processes, which use methods of social construction, decay, maintenance, destruction and reconstruction. Therefore, since heritage is a continuously evolving entity, we turn away from the assumption that meanings and values expressed in ideas of authenticity are somehow inherited, and see them as varying and mutating over time.

Through the last decades, there has been an evolving discourse on the conceptualisation of authenticity. The Nara document on authenticity (ICOMOS 1994) grounded values and authenticity in the ability to understand historical periods, the original characteristics of cultural heritage and its meanings. More recently, the Nara+20 Convention (ICOMOS 2014; Holtorf & Kono 2015) stressed the need for authenticity to accommodate changes over time in perceptions and attitudes. In other words, how a heritage object can be perceived differently through time. What previous conceptualisations of authenticity failed to mention was the role of the creation, the

"authentic creation", or the truthful and continuous –stratified- response of objects to different times and evolving places.

Lately, Bortoloto (2015) referred to authenticity as an extrinsic process, while Kristensen (2015) chose to emphasize its social connotations. Recent literature has linked the term "value" to the social valuation of heritage at a given time and place. This implies that value involves understanding the nature of the valued object, also referred to as the intrinsic values –shape, textures, materials- of the original creation, or what we call "static authenticity"; the one once acquired by an object. What this paper wants to convey is the need to ascertain that "static" cultural heritage is affected by continuous manifestations that not only evolve in time, but also depend on different actors and contexts. Those manifestations of heritage are hereby referred to as "dynamic authenticity" (García-Esparza)[1].

2. Dynamic authenticity. Noun or verb?

An Abstract by Ganiatsas[2] highlighted the etymological and philosophical dimensions of authenticity. He argued that Greek language relates authenticity to authentikós, meaning "to act by oneself", to be "the master of oneself", while in Latin, the word means "thriving, inventing, being a promoter". Thus, in etymological terms, being authentic refers to an entity being able to appeal to an observer.

Both languages pose interesting differences. While Greek highlights the importance of the creator, Latin stresses the importance of the object, the entity, the ritual, the fact. In his Abstract, Benson[3] noted the importance of the research examining interactions between subjects and objects, "the reconstruction processes of the self" by individuals where facts and memories are reconstructed reliably and truthfully - "being true to oneself".

The authors mentioned above argue that the act of ascription or recognition of authenticity is a function of cognition, creativity, and perception. Therefore, it is logical to assume that a verb might be needed between subjects and objects. Why not explore authenticity as a function of dynamic interaction? It might be fleeting or permanent, but

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[1] The paper is presented in the context of the Workshop on Authenticity and Reconstructions held in Paris in 2017. It will therefore make explicit reference to Abstracts circulated in anticipation of the Workshop.
García-Esparza, J.A. Forgotten cultural landscapes and the problem of integrity and authenticity.
[2] Ganiatsas, V. Monuments and Heritage Sites as Authentic Beings: A Philosophical Approach to the Role of Reconstructions.
[3] Benson, C. Cultural Psychological Reflections on the theme of Authenticity.

always dynamic if reference is made to the action from a biological perspective. To create and to abandon are both verbs, neither of which can be said to be a false response to a moment. So, is a ruin authentic because of its materiality –static authenticity-, because of its process of decay –dynamic authenticity- or because of both? (García-Esparza, 2015; DeSilvey, 2017).

Not unrelated to what can be considered as part of the dynamic authenticity of an object is a reflection on the "loss of evidence" and the ways in which this evidence can be "manipulated" through the exercise of power, actions from the "dark side that lies beyond the discourse on the authentic" (Winter)[4]. But, does this mean that authenticity is only about beauty and truth? There are cultures in which true and false are both authentic. Sometimes "fake" responds to the fluent and spontaneous creation and perception - without "artifice" - of objects in societies, making these connotations of "fake" a response to the "true nature or true condition" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005).

Authenticity is therefore dynamic and plural. It is built through facts, narratives and time. Narratives come from a position - cultural, natural, political or intellectual - where objectivity and subjectivity play a fundamental role. Perspectives can either follow mainstream positions or be the prerogative of a minority. They may be biased, truthful, false or even pretentious, but each one of them will determine the "ongoing product". The main goal now is to determine whether new dialectics on moral obligations, hope, behaviour, empathy and disposition can serve as a dialogical stance to establish what is authentic without polarising the discourse, shifting towards a mainstream position and diminishing an ontological plurality of different realities.

In this regard, built environments prompt assumptions about how space and materiality might otherwise be understood, practised and imagined. These may allow us to answer not only textual questions on why buildings look the way they do, but also processual questions on why they were built and how they changed along the way. Those changes depend on contextualization, because the transfer of ideas from theory to practice shows how variations in the articulation of arguments can be upheld or refuted by knowledge, culture and tradition.

3. The significance of time and cognition for authenticity

An approach to heritage, authenticity and reconstruction, from different arts can be helpful when trying to understand the dynamism, twists and turns of authenticity, and

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[4] Winter, T. Reconstruction with ties?: heritage diplomacy and international preservation aid.

its importance. De Marco[5] pointed out how authenticity has to do with certain cultures and with the quality of an artwork, its materials and its adherence to well-defined models. However, the relationship between the creator and the object, both loosely defined models, still requires the dynamism of a verb to define it. A psychological process in which brilliance or craziness, utopia or dystopia, determines the authentic dynamic interaction.

One way to approach the plasticity of authenticity in artistic creations is through songwriting. The interdependence between musicians, places and times dictates the extent to which rhythms, chords and styles may merge. Paul Oliver provides excellent examples of this in certain forms of urban blues in the United States, especially soul music, which took on traits from African music through the filters of various American and European pop music genres (Kubik, 1999). Therefore, songwriting seems like a more ephemeral Art in which reconstruction and deconstruction processes turn music into something new; a new creative beginning (Kealy)[6].

In any case, creativity and quality are given priority, as was once pointed out when referring to the legacy of the past. Creativity and quality sometimes define the binomial distinctiveness of every heritage object in which values are rarely represented and perceived as absolute. It happens because representation and perception allow for alternative interpretations that depend on contextualization. Therefore, the prioritization of creativity and quality is fully dependent on the cultural contexts where the heritage object is created and re-created.

As stated by Edensor (2005), transformations are forms of contextualizing objects that shed light on the icons constructed by memory over time. It is a matter of reinterpretation and recontextualization where not only the normatively ordered, but also the accepted and the discarded are potential allegories. There are habitats that respond to parallel processes of cultural and social co-existence, leaving room for the articulation and integration of the "other" (Groth and Corijn, 2005). Such places may contravene the usual sense of perspective challenged by "other" emergent aesthetics, where things are understood differently. Their success may rest on cognition and the true value of the object certified only by time.

Cognition, time and place are the spatial categories used to describe the interrelationships of elements in built environments. The importance of these

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[5] De Marco, L. Authenticity in/of Conservation. Shifts and ambiguities in the light of reconstruction practice.
[6] Kealy, L. Conservation, mind-tools and points in between.

categories depends on accepting otherness over memories and representations. New epistemologies attempt to recalibrate sequences - semiotic, practical, social and aesthetic – and the potential of places from the various interpretations of the past. The idea is based on Benjamin's interpretation of actualization (Martin, 2014). It may seem disdainful of the past (Abbott, 2007) but it is based on the ability to convey social realities (Burke, 2006).

4. Cultural habitats and the making of the dynamic authenticity

From an analysis of several examples of World Heritage Cultural Landscapes in the Mediterranean (Garcia-Esparza 2018) it was observed that none of the statements concerning authenticity referred to it as a response to rural life, inherited vernacular architecture, or the modest contemporary architecture of pseudo-indigenous people. The result was a conceptualisation of vernacular spaces that was devoid of spontaneous expressions of humility, necessity and faith. A position that needs to be revised to take into account how such expressions are imprinted and have evolved in the landscape, observing how forms of intangible heritage such as folk performances can be pure, spontaneous and contemporary. In so doing, the making of inherited vernacular built environments can hold the autotopias[7] of the disenfranchised, which refer to a 'cognition networking'[8] that authentically fluctuates through tradition, behaviour, knowledge, social interconnectivity, practice, adaptation and innovation.

The complexities of understanding the dynamic authenticity of vernacular landscapes that have been by-passed or have evolved unattended in terms of contemporary cultural policies justifies that contextual veracity and character appear to be the two features that lead towards an authentic original but dynamic response to place. Perhaps vernacular landscapes exploration can lead to reflections about events and the nature of history itself as eternal and dialectic cyclic processes (Hell and Schönle 2010). These processes are far from naïve and do not exclude dark pasts -and present- nor do they shy away from loss of evidence, with new solutions arising from the transposition and decomposition of things.

Several authors have recently provided further insight into vernacular built environments. Bronner (2006) talked about the necessity of processual questions

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[7] Autotopia refers to spatial practices where the role of the non-expert is empathised, where ordinary residents participate in the intellectual and material construction of places (García-Esparza 2018).

[8] 'Emotion networking' or 'emotional constellations' stems from the experience that the significance of heritage is too often and easily considered as being the result of a shared sense of connection with an item (Rana et al., 2017).

about why buildings are built and how they change along the way. In the process, materiality may fluidly merge with individual innovations, social customs, popular understanding and acceptance. Therefore, dynamism and perhaps ephemeral behaviours in communities may well be part of the evolved materiality of a given object. Vellinga (2006) explained how previous theorists had neglected Bronner's theories, and stressed that creative amalgamation had not really been incorporated into the discourse. Hence, following Vellinga, dynamic authenticity opens up a wide and largely unexplored field of research through the critical assessment of spaces and objects being constantly redefined by changes and practices.

Özkan (2006) confronted traditionalism by arguing the need for vernacular buildings to emerge and be sustained through complex social and cultural processes. Lawrence (2006) referred to the ignorance of complexities; the interrelations of the intangible lying behind the tangible in the scrutiny of human settlements and landscapes. Asquith (2006) established the need for innovative approaches for the codes of practices to be structured and re-structured through time. Therefore, transformations and adaptations of vernacular landscapes will give rise to cultural diversity claiming singularity and discouraging homogeneous spatial languages. Rapoport (2006) talked about studying systems of activities –or habitats as introduced earlier- instead of buildings or settings. This leads to a specific view of "culture" restricted by evolution, as suggested by sociology, behavioural ecology and evolutionary psychology (Rapoport 2000).

Also according to Rapoport, dynamic authenticity affects static authenticity by providing variations –different expressions- that may lead to new questions, new hypotheses, etc. Lewcock (2006) referred to these processes as "generative concepts", processes of "recharging ideals" (Jung 1922) through which a created, recreated or reconstructed work is both the mediation and the regeneration of ancient values. Similarly, Davis (2006) claimed not only practising holistic thinking, but also allowing vernacular landscapes to develop from the ground up, according to Oliver (2006), who presented new research on the evolution of such vernacular landscapes in order to understand how change –dynamism- is made and assimilated. Therefore, this may be one of the uncertainties we face in future processes of cultural and intellectual colonization of habitats.

Therefore, dynamic authentic cultural heritage is affected by current perception, action, experience, and social practice, by the values of time and place, by the objects that not only are part of the space but also make or transform it. Therefore, dynamic authenticity is the output of cumulative socio-cultural re-constructions. Regardless of

the cultural background, flows or transmigrations, static authenticity is present in every heritage object in which embedded values of the past are somehow conserved and valued; it is basically the primal making of the object. Then, understanding the veracity of cultural landscapes may require the extrapolation of the dynamic behaviour to objects or even to their perception and valuation.

The Operational Guidelines (UNESCO 2015) claim that authenticity must be considered and judged primarily within its cultural context and by its significant attributes. To do so properly, landscapes need to be approached as habitats, rather than "settings", showing significant material evidence of their historic – and contemporary – evolution; dynamic cognition, time and sense of otherness. This should be done in the understanding that both the way of life and material evidence evolve under conscious and unconscious cases –creations, reinterpretations and negations- of contemporary socio-cultural processes.

Back to the concept of dynamic authenticity, the critical analysis ~~which~~ this research aims to promote extends social participation to social understanding and creation, or community reactivation, as introduced by Ohnuki[9]. Accordingly, dynamic and static authenticity interact only to the extent that each culture understands, allows, and regulates these interactions in every landscape, object, form, practice, and relationship. Therefore, critical decisions relating to the pieces of the past need to meet the contemporary whole (Kealy)[6], according to the contextual resilience and the determining structure: abandonment, decay, reconstruction, deconstruction, etc.

5. Future-making of cultural habitats

Contexts can be said to simulate theory, and their heritage is based on a cultural simulation of feelings and emotions. Contextual diversity provides multiple visions and interpretations, while conjectural appropriations and adaptations determine what is culturally authentic. Artefacts can help establish dialectical environments where the past never settles, but opens up to a plural future. The ambivalent interpretation of built environments may lead to a rich semiotic form of expression with a progressive and plural view of alternative places. Tewdwr-Jones (2011) spoke of the failure of the displacement of emotional and humane aspects of territories in cultural orderings that do not adapt to the social and cultural diversity of the place, which can impair the weak and marginalized.

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[9] Ohnuki, M. Protection and revitalization of endangered 'living cultural heritage' in Post-Conflict States: the community's reactivation as a part of reconstruction.

It is also likely that the dynamic "outcome" will enforce fluid and permeable social constructions, reconstructions or deconstructions, all processes that may legitimate constructive practices (Rico)[10], conscious and unconscious simulations that build up the future-making of the habitat (Harrison)[11]. However, UNESCO (2015) does not clarify how these interactions could take place, given that some of these uncertain dynamics are perceived as "threats and risks" which, in a dynamic making, cannot be controlled "at all", but constitute interesting evolving transactional processes according to Holtorf[12].

As stated by Holtorf and Högberg (2015), current societies must allow for future Nows to create their own space on which they can act. This seems to pose a double challenge for the present generation, which is required to make the wisest decision for its Now while also considering almost aseptic actions towards future Nows. Therefore, regardless of the critical analysis, the time factor and the moral space occupied by the future become constraints. This means that any actions taken or decisions made in the past Now or the current Now are catalysts for the future-making. This is why conscious and unconscious interpretations of cultural habitats should not be discarded, but thoughtfully approached.

To do so, new paradigms are needed to perceive and assess cultural built environments in order to determine their capacity to convey meanings over time. However, what interpretations could provide meaning in the analysis of vernacular built environments? In these evolving habitats, narratives and facts merge in various ways so that authenticity - sometimes permanent, sometimes merging, and occasionally transcending our understanding - can be understood in its "solid, liquid and gas state".

6. Conclusions

This paper has attempted to enrich the dialogue through a different perspective. Aiming to ensure a more social context -than object- centred approach to authenticity and reconstruction, it suggests that cultural landscapes should be considered endemic habitats where endangered species – rural societies – in a process of continuous adaptation still inhabit the landscape. This approach would require the implementation of static authenticity within the dynamics of the place, so that the attributes can provide accurate responses in terms of time and place.

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[10] Rico, T. The Heritage of Aftermath.
[11] Harrison, R. Heritage as future making practices.
[12] Holtorf, C. Heritage as future-making.

Reconstructing the cultural process of habitats is thought to ensure integrated continuity. Critical analysis of the term "continuity" show that the approach to this concept should be twofold, examining material and social continuity. In turn, authenticity leaves room for different interpretations that justify diversity and give credibility to the concept of plural heritage. Therefore, clarifying the authenticity of these different epistemologies and paradigms is understood as the logic (and illogic) of the current things viewed from a distant perspective of an eventual future time.

The paper raises questions that require further analysis. As part of future-making factors, uncertainty plays a part in accepting creativity and spontaneous expressions in vernacular landscapes. To what extent can uncertainty be accepted as part of an authentic future for vernacular landscapes? Do contemporary analyses on vernacular landscape future-making depart from idealized concepts of future and from those of heritage? Do terms like "nostalgia" and "empathy", which are linked to perception, constitute "noxious" pre-conditions that the cultural habitat must transcend?

Acknowledgements

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