

## **Towards a Socio-culturally Sustainable Definition of Authenticity** *Re-thinking the Spirit of Place*

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**Abstract.** In protecting the building heritage, the preservable value of a site is usually defined by an expert. I am participating as a Finnish expert in a multicultural project started in 1998, in which the definition of authenticity is being considered in a new way, more immaterially, as an interactive socio-cultural action that concentrates on creating a local identity. The project is focused on a historical Livvik Karelian settlement in Russia, the authentically preserved wooden village of Kinnermäki. In the doctoral dissertation I am preparing for defining authenticity in the preservation of traditional timber architecture, the work being done in Kinnermäki serves as the main practical example. In international preservation of the building heritage, the definition of authenticity has evolved from emphasizing genuineness and originality towards appreciating the layers of history and taking cultural diversity into consideration. Defining a preservable value is still mainly considered to be the job of experts, but social pressure to undo this authority is growing, especially in multicultural situations. In protecting the building heritage, the definition of authenticity is undergoing a process of change towards communication and socio-culturally sustainable activity.

### **Defining Authenticity Under the Pressures of Change**

Authenticity is the most essential conservation value of the building heritage and it is one of the preservable values. In defining authenticity, an expert's task is to verify the genuineness and originality of historical buildings. During his/her studies a Finnish architect receives instruction in building preservation, building

renovation and art history, which includes learning to define the value of the building heritage on the basis of similar universal professional criteria. A Finnish architect's total view is usually based on the fact that, culturally and historically, Finland is a part of Europe. From the viewpoints of the Western countries and cultures, preservation of the most valuable historical buildings is based on appreciation of their history, aesthetic natures and authenticity.

Preservation experts' professional knowledge, recognition of their values and critical assessment of those values are essential to perceive what kind of attitude professionals take towards local cultures that cherish their traditions, and how they adapt themselves to today's challenge of communicativeness. In multicultural situations the authorization included in an expert's authority is not without problems. I find a change towards a polyphony of protection situations necessary. In my mind, the definition of authenticity has to be in the common interest of all involved parties.

In my case study I examine practical interactive situations between experts and villagers related to the protection of the wooden building heritage in Kinnermäki. Kinnermäki is an Olonets Karelian Livvik village in Russian Karelia where protection and development work have been being implemented as Finnish-Russian-Karelian collaboration since 1998. The actors are Finnish and Russian experts in building preservation, architectural and *artenomi* students studying restoration and building renovation, as well as inhabitants of the village. In the protection and development of the Kinnermäki village, I examine the definition of authenticity in interactive situations between the experts and villagers. From the very beginning, the common objective of all the actors has been to preserve the wooden building heritage. As the protection and development work progressed, all the actors adopted a joint view of the necessity of preserving the village alive. The building heritage is an essential part of a living culture's own identity.

#### CHANGING VIEW OF AUTHENTICITY

In the 1970s UNESCO's World Heritage Committee included the test of authenticity in its operational guidelines. At first it was supposed to be applied to four different aspects of the building heritage: design, material, workmanship and setting. (Stovel 1995, xxxiii.) According to the Nara document (1994), truthful assessment of the authenticity of a

site requires as many different sources of information as possible. The suggested aspects were to be form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, spirit and feeling as well as other internal and external factors. (Nara 1994, Article 13). In accordance with the guidelines, inclusion on the World Heritage List may also require authenticity of design, material, work and the environment, which includes the aesthetical and historical factors of the site, its physical, social, historical and religious context as well as its use and purpose of use (Larsen 1995; Nara 1994). A large spectrum like this invites many different interpretations (Jokilehto 1999, 298).

The word *authenticity* was recorded for the first time in the preamble of the Venice Charter (1964), when it was emphasized that historical monuments have to be preserved in the full richness of their authenticity with consideration of temporal layers. At that time, there was a consensus based on the common European background about the questions of building preservation among the experts who drew up the charter (Stovel 1995, xxxiii). Thirty years later, in the document of the Nara Conference (1994), layers depicting historical progress and authenticity defined from as many viewpoints as possible were in a crucial position. Particular emphasis was placed on the truthfulness and credibility of related information sources. Appreciation of the diversity of cultures and emphasis on their significance in enriching the world heritage was an entirely new viewpoint.

On the basis of the charters described above, the views of building heritage preservation experts on authenticity outline internationally three historically formed categories, phases that partly overlap and partly follow each other: *genuineness - originality*, *historical layers* and *multiculturalness*. As to historical layers and multiculturalness, a change in the paradigm was to be seen to start in the 1960s. It was then that the term *authenticity* was recorded for the first time in the Venice Charter. Thus, the concept of authenticity was established as part of the criteria and protection conversation concerning the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The change in the paradigm I perceived has in no phase been comprehensive or unambiguous. For instance, appreciation of genuineness and originality of materials has been unchanging. In restoration of historical buildings, authenticity meant preservation of the original material and form, as well as protection of the history and outward appearance of a site as early as the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. Preservation of the original form and material as authenticity was also a recommended method in the Athens Charter in 1931.

One of the basic messages of the Nara document was that the enormous diversity of the world's cultures and cultural heritages shall be respected and no country or culture shall be obliged to use predestined preservation-related value systems or ideas. A site shall be respected as part of a living tradition within a larger cultural context. The change in the paradigm culminating in multiculturalness includes the fact that cultural differences are regarded as a starting point for defining authenticity. In addition to the tangible heritage, cherishing of the intangible cultural heritage like local habits, skills and traditions, has along with the Nara document been understood to be important even in the Western cultures, in which authenticity in restoration for a long time meant preservation of the original material. In the Nara document, multiculturalness comes out as a change in the paradigm, when multicultural starting points and living traditions are acknowledged, but in spite of this, dependence on experts still remains in force, even if the document emphasizes local expertise. The problem is that the inhabitants, or those concerned, do not themselves participate in the assessment of their own cultural environment.

### **Articulation of a Meaning in Practical Interactive Situations**

From the dialogical viewpoint, a meaning is constructed in a dialogue between actors. It emphasizes that all meanings are not ready-made or previously agreed upon, but they are constructed as a result of the speakers' collaboration. Two of the concepts belonging to this viewpoint are dialogue and polyphony. (Linell 1998, 48.) They are included in Russian language philosopher Mihail Bahtin's (1895–1975) view about a word being structured in a dialogue between the past and the future. Words are formed in relation to what is already spoken or written, but at the same time anticipating future words: "The world in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue." (Bahtin 1981, 280.)

The sound landscape of interaction is more polyphonic than an expert's or inhabitant's voice in itself. In the background of an expert's speech is learned and cultural valuation. An inhabitant speaks on the basis of his/her own experiences and cultural meanings. As I see it, going into the articulation of a meaning and an expert's share in this process may open the intangible socio-cultural construction of the definition of authenticity.

From an expert's and inhabitant's viewpoints, construction of a meaning is at its best an understanding and communicative event, in which the parties construct meanings together and aim at mutual understanding. When several interpretations of the reality come across, there are meanings that cannot be directly returned to the original meanings of the parties, i.e. the speaker or listener. This is what the idea about the creativity of a polyphony-preserving dialogue and the possibility of revising the definition of authenticity is based on.

### **Identity Construction**

Stuart Hall, who developed the theory about a cultural identity, thinks that the rising of identities to the cultural centre is closely related to globalization and the change in the relationships between the West and the rest of the world brought along by it. Identity-related problems, i.e. identity crises, arise in situations in which usual identities start to fall to pieces and change. According to Hall, it is a question of the fact that old identities, which for a pretty long time stabilized the social reality, are falling into decay. They give way to new identities and break the modern individual as a coherent subject into pieces. (Hall 1992.)

A Russian-Karelian village, which is far away from the main culture, not only constructs on its old cultural identity, it also adapts itself to today's new demands. In a situation like this, identity is a most telling related concept of authenticity. The task of a meaning is to strengthen a local identity. As I see it, in multicultural situations a good objective is to support inhabitants' own processes that aim at preserving the cultural heritage.

#### **EPISODES FROM THE PROTECTION OF THE WOODEN BUILDING HERITAGE IN THE KARELIAN KINNERMÄKI VILLAGE**

The village of Kinnermäki (Kinnerma) is located in Olonets Karelia near Vieljärvi (Vedlozero) in the Prää\_ä (Prjaza) district, in the area of the

Olonets Karelian Livviks. The centre of the Kinnermäki village is an Orthodox chapel devoted to the Smolensk Mother of God from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Around it, there are 17 dwellings and three smoke saunas left. The oldest houses were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one smoke sauna at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Russian preservation institutions and Petrozavodsk State University under Professor Vjatseslav Orfinsk's leadership studied the village in the 1990s. Since 1998, Finnish parties, e.g. the Department of Architecture of the University of Oulu and the Arts Council of Oulu Province, have taken part in the protection and development of Kinnermäki, and the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have implemented many cooperative projects with neighbouring areas, in which different phases I have actively participated. Kinnermäki was originally an Olonets Karelian village of Livviks and as to its historical background, it today represents a culture that is alive only to some extent: in the speaking, singing and death- and burial-related habits of old people who spend their summer in the village, as well as in the traditional wooden buildings representing their culture.

In my case study, the protection and development of Kinnermäki brought out episodes in which the definition of authenticity was articulated. The crucial episodes were the renovation of the smoke sauna of the Kuznetsovs' house as well as the renovation of the Vokulovs' house and rebuilding it as the local Livviks' cultural centre. On the basis of their background knowledge, the Finnish architects and renovators started to renovate the old Karelian smoke sauna themselves. This caused a surprising opposite reaction from the villagers' side, seen as restoration of renovations made by the Finns. The old dwelling gable of the Vokulovs' house was repaired, and the spacious two-storey household part, which had been as its extension but pulled down a decade ago, was rebuilt. An exhibition of the phases and inhabitants of the village was erected there. Although the episodes were protection and development work common to all the parties, they brought out the actors' own professional and cultural knowledge, which was articulated through action directed to the old wooden buildings of the village. The episode of the Vokulovs' house brought out both a Finnish and Russian expert's and a villager's interaction.

#### *Renovation of the Smoke sauna of the Kuznetsovs' house*

The old smoke sauna of the Kuznetsovs' house needed to be repaired: the roof, benches, floors and bottom wall logs had decayed. The sauna was still in the dwellers' everyday use, because it was a good bathing place. In accordance with a building-historical study made by Petrozavodsk State University, the special value of the sauna was in its traditional floor plan and archaic roof structure, and there had been a suggestion about it being protected as a monument of building art, the exterior of which should be preserved (Orfiniski et al. 1991).

In the renovation of the smoke sauna, the grey outside and soot-black inside were preserved as a harmonious whole. Old wood material was protected, damages were repaired and only the most decayed logs were changed. The use of the building as a smoke sauna was not changed. Two big changes in the building tradition and maintenance of the buildings of the village were made: the foundation of the old sauna was changed by raising the bottom logs clearly off the ground and the roof was made of grooved board, which had once been rejected in the course of history. As soon as the guests had gone away, the villagers spaded sand to cover the bottom log layers, which was their critical attitude towards the change. They thought that warmth, the heat of the sauna oven, which is the most important thing in a sauna, escaped because of the changes made by raising the bottom log layers. Later, they also found that the board roof made by the Finns did not hold water, and they rebuilt it by returning the modern solution. When the smoke sauna was being renovated, a dialogue started to develop between the assistants and those to be assisted. During it, both the parties defined the authenticity of the site and things worth preserving as their statements, accounts from their own viewpoints as well as through action.

#### *Renovation of the Vokulovs' house as the Centre of the Livvik culture*

My other case example is about the renovation of the old part of the Vokulovs' house, rebuilding of the household part and erection of an exhibition. In the protection and development of Kinnermäki, it represents a phase during which all the parties had the same aim. It was to protect and develop the village as inhabited and living, which was promoted by building the new centre of the Livvik culture. The old dwelling gable of the Karelian house and the oven in it were repaired and the household part was rebuilt.

Conflicts and problems arose in the planning phase. After the sketches had been completed, the Finnish architects saw, as the

representatives of the association which had ordered the work, that the suggestion drawn up by the Russian architects did not correspond with the operational aims as to the height of the rooms, light conditions as well as the stairs and roof solutions.

The conflict that arose between the Finnish client and the Russian architects was solved in joint negotiations in Petrozavodsk, in which the representatives of the Russian preservation authorities also took part. They took a conciliatory attitude towards the dispute. After the negotiations, the agreed final solution was that the household part would be built higher than was first designed, a few windows important from the viewpoint of the lighting conditions of the utility rooms were added to the plan, and the meagre budget was considered by building first a cheap felt roof as the underlayer of the intended traditional grooved-board roof. The episode was an example of a polyphonic dialogue between the Finnish and Russian experts, which was proceeded to when the project grew demanding and complicated.

In the designers' negotiations, the inhabitants of Kinnermäki and local carpenters were silent parties. Local activity came out when something new was constructed. Then the carpenters worked with the resources, skills and tools they had at hand during the work. The details of the architects' plans were not followed precisely at work, but logs were also shaped with a chain saw. The final result does not precisely correspond to anyone's original aims. What has been achieved with polyphony can no longer be reversed, as the villagers did in the case of the smoke sauna, unless the whole building is pulled down. Nobody has started that work.

#### *Significance of the Exhibitions*

The projects of protecting and developing Kinnermäki also include arrangement of exhibitions. The Kinnermäki Live Exhibition, which was erected in the centre of the Livviks' culture in 2006, brings out the history, special features, visual recognizability and materialness of the village. Village tourism is supported and the local identity is strengthened by displaying the phases and inhabitants of the village. (Herneojja 2007.)

During the projects, constructive social action with its cultural differences and conflicts develops at Kinnermäki into the protection and development of the village, both based on the dialogue between the actors and directed outward and towards the future. Old grey round-log buildings are the basis of constructing the village's identity



and they remind the present inhabitants about earlier events related to the village and younger people about the meanings already being forgotten.

## **Conclusions**

Defining the conservation value of the building heritage is usually considered to be an expert's task. In European building preservation, appreciation of the authenticity of a site is still idealistically linked with genuineness, truthfulness and honesty. The highest selection criterion is considered to be reliable information about values, the genuineness of a site.

The challenge of multiculturalness made an international expert community discuss their authenticity paradigm and protection philosophy. In the 1990s, the static way of defining the criteria for selecting monuments as UNESCO World Heritage Sites dating from the 1960s was changed and extended to concern objects of building protection in different cultures and their authenticity. The challenge of communicativeness was not yet realized at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but experts still had the authority to define protection of the building heritage.

My case study about the phases of protecting and developing Kinnermäki brought out how authenticity as a meaning was articulated as protection work went on. First the dialogue included methodicalness of experts and outlining of the aim. As the action proceeded to collaboration with the inhabitants, forcing adherence to choices made by an expert was abandoned and the solutions were sought in collaboration with the various actors. Polyphony not only brought creativity to the dialogue, it also brought the possibility of an unpredefined final result.

In modern society, the objective of fostering locality can be seen together with internationalisation, which widely concerns the world's people. It is no longer a question of old identities strongly rooted in a limited locality. At the same time, both new international and new local identifications arise. From the Kinnermäki villagers' viewpoints, it is a question of adaptation, which partly takes place on a local basis and is partly constructed in relation to the rest of the world. In it, both old and new are present. As I see it on the basis of my Kinnermäki experiences, it is good to aim for socio-culturally sustainable authenticity in the preservation of the cultural heritage by seeking

cultural conventions and shared meanings that lead to the protection of buildings in communities.

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