

Safeguarding the spirit of an historic interior on the basis of the ‘Nara-grid’

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Abstract. The spirit of an historic interior can be found in the layered concept of value(s) of the interior. The Nara-grid is a tool to indicate the multidisciplinary values. This grid is developed at the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation (R.L.I.C.C) and identifies the ‘Aspects’ and the ‘Dimensions’ based on Article 13 of the Nara Document on Authenticity. After collecting and comprehending all the data of the interior the Nara-grid can be used to provide a definition of the several values of the interior. Proceeding from this definition the essential spirit of the interior can be specified and be used as a guide to future treatment and monitoring for safeguarding the spirit.

Case studies: The interior of the Bourse of Antwerp (Belgium) is one restoration project with different interiors in the matter of history, erection, architecture, style, remains and finally also different restoration approaches.

- The neogothic interior of the 19th century Bourse building is perfect preserved and will have a soft restoration
- The connected 18th century rococo mansion ‘Hotel du Bois’ has a partly preserved interior space concept. The disappeared space concept of the ground floor will be reconstructed.

An historic interior is originally often created out of a ‘gesamtkunstwerk’-idea, with immovable goods: space concept, ground plan, interior finishing, craftsmanship...; movable goods: furniture, curtains, paintings... and technical/industrial elements: stoves, light fittings, fittings... which are all related to each other. Mostly the immovable goods of the interior are preserved and the movable and technical/industrial goods are renewed. The room itself and its building structures are difficult to remove or demolish, this part of the interior can conquer several generations.

So authenticity within interiors is sometimes complex and hard to find, but does always lie in the values of the interior. The research for the authenticity is based on research of the valuation. The valuation of an historic interior depends on the presence of the original immovable, movable and technical goods. But the value of an interior can also be found

in its history, the architect, the sanctity, the owner or an historic important happening...

The spirit of an historic interior is implicitly connected with the authenticity of the interior and depends on the different values which provide the feeling of this authenticity. The different values can only be identified by a good documentation of the heritage.

Documenting the historic interior

First of all the interior has to be placed back in its historical context by the use of all different kinds of documentation: contemporary sources from the original time; cahiers des charges; ground plans; biographies; iconographical sources like photographs, plans, drawings... and oral sources. Generally, everything which makes it possible to know the nature, specifications, meaning and history of the interior. This documentation will give a general overview of the original interior and how and why it was established. Not only the style and the interior finishing is important, but also the context which determined the finishing and decoration of the interior. The original building context needs to be investigated and understood. With this knowledge it's possible to go to the object, the interior itself, to identify the original elements and their specific importance. Next to the general building context the interior space division in the building needs to be examined. This deals with the original concept of the ground plan, the circulation, the location of primary and secondary spaces or the width, height and length of a room. Further the location, the date and the function of the room needs to be identified. Then the sum of all the possible present elements: immovable, movable and technical/industrial elements need to be inventoried. To complete all the documentation of the interior, photographs and sketches of the present state must be taken. With this knowledge the Nara-grid can be used.

The Nara-grid

As already explained authenticity can be seen as a complex and layered concept. The proposed Nara-grid helps to deal with this concept.

In the framework of education and research efforts at the Raymond Lemaire International Center for Conservation (R.L.I.C.C) at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, an evaluation scheme based on the Nara Document on Authenticity (Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention, held at Nara, Japan 1994) has been developed.

The layered concept of authenticity is reported in the Nara Document and allows us to understand the heritage value of workmanship and to bring

this relationship to a more western heritage value of material-authenticity. It is an example of how we can gain from exchanging diverse insights from different cultures to enrich our understanding. This approach was used to define a more appropriate understanding of the input of craftsman's skills in the preservation of tangible and intangible aspects of the heritage than it was the case in the Venice Charter.

The Nara Document on Authenticity states in Article 13 that *“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 use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.”*

In an attempt to develop an instrument that would help to understand this layered concept of authenticity better, the R.L.I.C.C. used this description of the Nara Document and defined it in a grid in which Aspects and Dimensions each represent ‘an axis’. The synthesis of documentation can be filled in. When filling in the Nara-grid one has to take the subject of investigation in consideration. For an interior the subject can be the general interior of the building, only one floor, several similar rooms or just one room. The interior aspects like form, design, material, substance, use, function, tradition, technique, location and spirit can then be examined on its artistic, historic, social and scientific dimension. The Nara-grid already deals with the aspect ‘spirit and feeling’. Here the answer for this aspect can be seen as a conclusion of the previous aspects.

Research showed that when the Nara-grid is used for the valuation of religious buildings and interiors the ‘sacral’ value is lacking. In this case the grid can be completed with a fifth ‘sacral’ dimension, which refers to the capacity of the church building to embody the ‘House of God’. With interiors it's often recommended to add also an ‘architectural’ dimension, while the artistic dimension frequently emphasise the importance of the designer. So this means that the grid can be adapted or extended to the special and sometimes also unique values an interior can contain. It can happen that a certain aspect or dimension or a combination is not conceivable. This conclusion can also offer an item that can be taken in consideration in the global restoration approach and the future function of the interior.

At the end the Nara-grid visualizes the relationship between the above-defined aspects and dimensions and functions as a summary of multidisciplinary values. In general the Nara-grid documents clearly the explicit nature of authenticity for monuments and sites as a particular guide to future treatment and monitoring for safeguarding the spirit of the interior.

ASPECTS of the sources (Related to documentation)	DIMENSIONS of heritage			
	Artistic	Historic	Social	Scientific
Form and design	Designed in an eclectic style including neogothic and neorenaissance style. Also an important architect.	References to the previous 16 th C. Bourse. The original surface as been reused.	The vaulted interior made it possible to gather disregarding the weather.	The way of vaulting a large room wit glass and iron. Impressive iron decoration.
Materials and substance	The original materials are still present and in very good state.	Use of traditional 19 th C. materials from regions in Belgium.		Evidence of how material can be used and decorated.
Use and functions	The form and decoration of the interior design followed the original function.	The interior of the Bourse shows the evolution in trade history.	The latest years the Bourse has been used for many cultural events.	
Tradition and techniques	Craftsmanship in brick, natural stone, stucco and wood.	How the iron decoratively has been used.	Shows how many craftsman have worked on the whole building	A lot of evidence of 19 th and 20 th C. craftsmanship is still present.
Location and settings	The space concept shows the difference between primarily and secondary spaces.	The space concept shows how the trade in Antwerp was organised	The inner court has played a role in a public connection between four streets.	Evidence of how the ground plan has been designed and used.
Spirit and feeling	The beauty of the interior makes every visitor speechless.	The original interior is still present and brings people back in the 19 th C.	The Bourse is a very important building in Antwerp's society.	

Figure 1. Completed Nara-grid used for the example of the general interior of the 19th century Bourse.

Case Studies

For the case studies of this paper two totally different interiors integrated in one restoration project will be explained: the 19th century Bourse of Antwerp and the nearby building block, which contains two 20th century buildings and the 18th century ‘Hotel du Bois’. The whole complex will be transformed into a five star hotel with 80 luxury rooms. It’s a very complex restoration project, because the different buildings have each their own style, space concept and historic importance. Finding the right approach to respect the monuments and to integrate at the same time the high standards of a five star hotel is truly a challenge.

The Nara-grid has been applied on the interiors of the Bourse and the ‘Hotel du Bois’.

1 The Bourse of Antwerp

The Bourse of Antwerp was since the 16th century situated in the centre of Antwerp. This Bourse was enclosed in a building block, where only the four small façades gave a glimpse of the monumental inner court. Unfortunately the building burned down in 1850. The famous Antwerp architect Jozef Schadde designed in 1870 a new Bourse. He reused the same surface of the previous Bourse and designed with also only four little visible façades. These façades hide an impressive eclectic interior in a dominant neogothic style combined with neorenaissance elements that refer to the previous 16th century Bourse. A new and very impressive element in the design was the large iron vaulting. The ribs of the iron vaulting have an iron plant decoration which refers already to the art nouveau. Every adaptation or addition during the 20th century was executed in the same typology. The original space concept stayed, only the interior finishing and furniture of the rooms were adapted. These new interventions always used the neogothic style for its decoration. The last adaptation happened in 1932, since then the Bourse has been preserved in its original state. All the original technical elements are disappeared and replaced by new ones, but most of the movable goods of the interior are still present and the original interior finishing is conserved in a good state.

Using all the historical information of the collected documentation the Nara-grid can be filled in. Figure 1 shows the completed Nara-grid and illustrates its application.

While the whole interior is well preserved the subject of investigation was the general interior of the 19th century Bourse. The Nara-grid shows that many aspects and dimensions underline the authenticity. Many combinations between aspects and dimensions are possible. The artistic and historic dimension is highly present and the scientific and social dimensions

are not always conceivable. But they still play an important role in the valuation. The conclusion of the Nara-grid shows the importance of the space concept and craftsmanship in the decoration.

By treading the Bourse you feel like entering another century. The spirit of the place feels tangible. The present condition of the Bourse prefers the application of the principle of minimal intervention. The interior will be softly cleaned, damages will be repaired and the iron vaulting will be stabilised. Unfortunately the contemporary (fire) safety standards asks some interventions, which will be kept reversible and as minimum and invisible as possible.



Figure 2. The interior of the Bourse

2 'Hotel du Bois'

The building block next to the Bourse contains two 20th century buildings with in between the formal mansion 'Hotel du Bois'. This 18th century mansion has original been created out of three 15th century houses. In 1743-1745 the family du Bois engages the famous Antwerp rococo architect J.P. van Bourscheit to establish an impressive mansion with an inner court, a garden, a coach house, various salons, a dinning room, a banquet hall, a library and different rooms. The mansion had on the ground floor various monumental salons decorated with carved wood, marble, tapestry, paintings... all in a rococo style. In the 19th century the interior underwent some general renovation and style adaptations. Unfortunately the ground floor with the salons, the inner court, the garden and the coach house was demolished during the 20th century to create more space and a direct connection to the next-door buildings. There are still three original van Bourscheit creations preserved: the entrance, the stair case and the banquet hall. These three spaces still show how monumental the rooms originally really were. The new spaces situated on the location of the previous inner court and garden received a shed roof. The first floor, in contrary to the ground floor, kept mainly its original space concept and ground plan. Here are the rooms around the previous inner court and garden (now around the shed roofs) preserved. Also the places of the chimneys and passage-ways are, if not remained, still recognisable. Contemporary archive documents of the 18th century show how monumental and impressive the salons and rooms were designed and decorated.

Using all the documentation and taken in consideration of what is still present, the Nara-grid can be filled in. In this special case different Nara-grids were filled in depending on the subject of investigation. One has been made for the general interior, one for the first floor and one for the three remaining van Bourscheit rooms at the ground floor, leaving the 20th century interventions out. While filling in the grid of the general interior it turned out that an 'architectural' dimension had to be added. The artistic dimension focused itself more on the valuation of designers and craftsmanship then on the architectural value.

The conclusion of the three grids was remarkable, while entering the 'Hotel du Bois' the sense of value is rather limited: the spirit is missing... There are barely immovable goods on the ground floor present that refer to an 18th century mansion. In contrary, the conclusion of the Nara-grids shows that many aspects and dimensions underline the authenticity; only the social dimension is not always conceivable. The added architectural dimension specifically emphasised the importance of the space concept. The Nara-grids underline the importance of van Bourscheit, the remaining rococo finishing and the original space concept of an 18th century mansion.

It is out of the question to reconstruct the whole ground floor, but the reconstruction of the 18th century space concept is possible. The chosen intervention has the aim to recreate the spirit of being in an important 18th century mansion. At the end this intervention will enlarge the valuation of the building and will partly bring the spirit of the original mansion back. So the exterior walls (inner court and garden) of the first floor will be extended to the ground floor. Also the places of the chimneys of the first floor will be extended, which helps to understand the original interior space concept, whereby the original inner court, the garden and some of the monumental salons will be recreated. The reconstruction will only be focalized on the space concept. There is no notice at all for the reconstruction of new rococo elements. Of course the remaining rococo decoration prefers the application of the principle of minimal intervention and will be softly restored. The new finishing will be modern and recognisable, but respecting the original materials.

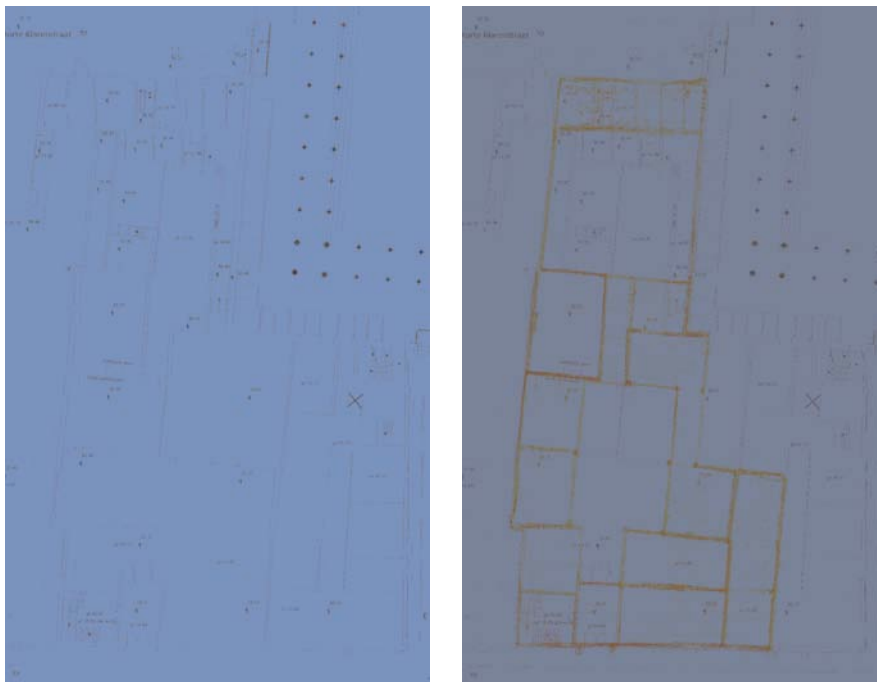


Figure 3. 'Hotel du Bois'. The left ground plan shows the present state. The right ground plan shows the reconstruction of the space concept. The rooms and walls in red are still original. The orange spaces and walls are the reconstruction: the inner court en garden will be recreated.

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