

The architectural heritage of cities: some thoughts on research methods, theories and strategies for preservation and sustainable re-use in a global context.

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Abstract

In this paper, I outline approaches both to theoretical and historical research into the cultural dynamics of cities and the ways in which these can inform future policy and planning in regard to the preservation and sustainable re-use of architectural heritage. My aim is to identify methodologies and approaches to architectural heritage that assists in situating the architectural heritage of Tianjin in a global context. I also consider how we can best use the experience of architectural heritage preservation and sustainable re-use in Europe to inform decision making in Tianjin and in turn what can Europe can learn from the Tianjin experience. The re-use and conversion of historic and heritage buildings and sites continue to be the prime challenge for conserving and revitalising cultural heritage. In order to place the architectural heritage of Tianjin in a global, or at least a European, context attention is paid to both its tangible and intangible heritage to reveal the uses of the past in patterns of development and growth as well as the value placed on historical symbols and cultural memory. I focus on strategies for sustainable re-use, including heritage tourism, an essential part of the cultural and economic landscape of present-day Tianjin that is both a benefit and a threat to the historic environment, as well as mixed-use development and co-design.

Key Words: Cultural Heritage, Architecture, Theory, Architectural History, Sustainable Re-use

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Cities collapse both space and time to allow a dynamic analysis of the relationship between past and present and the interaction of culture and identity. The architecture, planning and heritage of a city reveal the way in which urban culture relates to the past and the value we attach to the present-day urban spaces. This enables the consideration of how national and regional identities are formulated and change over time. The trans-generational and trans-regional dynamics of culture and identity, as explored through the lens of cities, shed new light on the current debates relating to the use and value of heritage. In this paper, I outline approaches both to theoretical and historical research into the cultural dynamics of cities and the ways in which these can inform future policy and planning in regard to the preservation and sustainable re-use of architectural heritage.

Tianjin

My aim is to identify methodologies and approaches to architectural heritage that assists in situating the architectural heritage of Tianjin in a global context. I also consider how we can best use the experience of architectural heritage preservation and sustainable re-use in Europe to inform decision making in Tianjin and in turn what can Europe can learn from the Tianjin experience. The uniqueness of Tianjin has added value here, as the foreign concessions that comprise its historic core were designed to project different national identities.¹ These concessions have in turn inscribed into the urban fabric of Tianjin a fascinating mosaic of international identities that endures to the present day.

From their beginnings in the mid nineteenth century the foreign concessions were occupied by leading European countries and the United States of America. But as global geopolitics shifted, for example after the First World War (1914-18) and the Russian Revolution (1917), the ownership and occupancy of the concessions changed. These changes offered fresh opportunities to consolidate and enlarge existing concessions, as seen in the expansion of the British Concession.²

It is important to think about the architectural heritage of Tianjin in the light of the impact of both early and late globalisation which has brought important transformations in our understanding and historical interpretation of urban space. National space becomes global space dissolving national borders so the organization of urban space – that is to say the networks, localities and centres and peripheries come to the fore. This both ruptures and re-informs the uses of the past and helps shed

¹ Arnold, D. (2014) Construire la modernité urbaine: la concession britannique à Tianjin 1860-2014, *Outre-mers: revue d'histoire* (sfhom) No 382-383; 2012.

² Arnold, D. (2012) Ambivalent Geographies: The British Concession in Tianjin, China 1860-1946 in Julie F Codell (ed), *Transculturation in British Art, c1770-1930*, New York and Aldershot, Ashgate pp.143-155

new light on Tianjin and at the same time shows how the past is repositioning the city on the world stage.³

Uses of the Past

There is no doubt that the past is enjoying a revival in its usefulness to contemporary cultural, social and environmental practices and debates. The relationship between the present day city and its architectural heritage is key here. First of all, I would like to think about the changing uses and perception of urban space. Particularly here it is helpful to think about the ways in which the past is used to inscribe cultural memory into the urban fabric. We can also look for reciprocities between various forms of cultural encounters. This helps us think about strategies for preservation and sustainable re-use and identify the new ways of fusing past and present that are emerging in contemporary urban practices. Perhaps as an architectural historian I am most interested in the lessons we can draw from the past for the future development and construction of cities.⁴ Thinking about cities and especially their architectural heritage in a global context is helpful here. This can enhance our knowledge of the complex dynamics of the transformation of urban space and cultural heritage in a transnational context.⁵ Moreover, an historical appreciation of the present state and trajectories of cities and their interaction both with each other and other global cities is an effective a means of planning for the future. In other words we can learn from each other in terms of our architectural past, present and future.

Interdisciplinary approaches

In order to place the architectural heritage of Tianjin in a global, or at least a European, context attention should be paid to both its tangible and intangible heritage to reveal the uses of the past in patterns of development and growth as well as the value placed on historical symbols and cultural memory. One of the most effective ways to conduct this type of complex analysis is through interdisciplinary enquiry that synthesises knowledge and approaches on heritage re-use across art, humanities, social and conservation science disciplines. Most obviously, historical knowledge of the architecture and cultural life of a city is a core part of any strategy for preservation or sustainable re-use. We have to know and understand the original significance and in some cases physical state of a building or urban space before we can identify its cultural value and the role it might play in a forward strategy for adaptive and

³ Arnold, D. (2012) 达纳·阿诺德 Dana Arnold 赵纪军 译Tr. by Zhao Jijun 场所的复杂性*:对天津的跨文化解读 The Complexities of Place: Transcultural Readings of Tianjin, New Architecture, China, 5/2012 pp18-20

⁴ Arnold, D. (2012) 文 / 德纳·阿诺德教授(Professor Dana Arnold),建筑历史——不仅仅是研究建筑物 (Architectural History is more than the study of buildings), Urban Environment Design (Beijing) Special Issue Feb 2012 ‘World Architectural History International Teaching and Research’ pp 92-100

⁵ Norberg-Schulz, C. (2000) Architecture: Presence, language, and place. Milan: Skira

sustainable re-use.⁶ This kind of historical knowledge is enhanced by the gathering of biographical information about residents, architects and in the case of Tianjin the interaction between the different nationalities that inhabited the city between c1850-1940.

It is not unlikely that these kinds of cultural memories have been lost in the years between 1940 and the present day. But to ensure strategies for preservation and sustainable re-use work and add value to urban environments the spaces must mean something to the present-day inhabitants. One possible research method to examine contemporary perceptions of the past is the technique of Cultural Mapping. This is an innovative way of visualizing how the cultural resources of places reveal their perceptions of the past which in turn might point to ways in which architectural heritage can be successfully adapted and re-used.⁷

Strategies for sustainable development, co-design and re-use

The re-use and conversion of historic and heritage buildings and sites continue to be the prime challenge for conserving and revitalising cultural heritage. Here, I will focus on heritage tourism as this is an essential part of the cultural and economic landscape of present-day Tianjin. Tourism has long been a key strategy for re-use and economic viability both to finance conservation and ensure future survival and maintenance of these heritage assets.⁸ Indeed, heritage tourism has also been an important area of growth within the tourism industry with emerging and developing countries now generators, as well as receivers of, cultural tourists – and we see this quite markedly in the case of Tianjin.⁹ But we must also recognise that the commodification of heritage also poses a threat to the historic environment that is supposed to be being preserved.¹⁰ Perhaps most obviously any notion of authenticity may be lost or missing and local vernacular culture may be devalued. Many European examples show an absence of inclusive design and public consultation that results in an effective privatisation of ‘public’ heritage and concomitant loss of access. In other words, heritage tourism becomes a predatory practice that springs from the change of use: touristic functions leave behind the other functions of a building. As an aside, we might also want to think about in what context and at what point do the pre-existing functions cease to exist? The slippage between the original and the touristic function of a building is evident for instance in exclusive heritage facilities that operate as luxury hotels and resorts. For example St George's Hospital was opened in the original Lanesborough House in 1733. By the 1800s the hospital was falling into disrepair. Lanesborough House was demolished to make way for a new 350-bed

⁶ Bazelman, J. (2014) *The Valuation of Cultural Heritage: A Roadmap*, Dutch Heritage Agency, Amsterdam

Bluestone, D. (2000) Challenges for Heritage Conservation and the role of Research on Values. In: *Values and Heritage Conservation*, The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles

⁷ Duxbury, C. et al. (eds) *Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry*. London: Routledge

⁸ ICOMOS (1998) *International Cultural Tourism Charter. Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance*, 8th Draft, Paris

⁹ Brook, G. (2011) *Heritage as a Driver for Development*, ICOMOS, Paris

¹⁰ Harrison, D. & Hitchcock, M. (2005) *The Politics of World Heritage. Negotiating Tourism & Conservation*. Channel View

facility. Building began in 1827 under architect William Wilkins. The new hospital was operational by 1844, serving continuously as a hospital until transferred to Tooting, south London in the 1970s, leaving the Hyde Park Corner premises vacant in 1980. Rosewood Hotels & Resorts refurbished and re-opened the building as a hotel in 1991. Ten years later the management contract passed to Starwood's St Regis operation as its first and only hotel in England. The hotel left Starwood in November 2014 and is currently managed by the Oetker Collection.

Several world heritage and national historic sites contain hotels and other residential uses, including good examples of eco-tourism, but with the growing attention to urban heritage, integrating these within the urban fabric and economy requires a more sensitive and sophisticated approach to re-use, interpretation and management.¹¹ Historic urban quarters have emerged as a focus of many conservation and regeneration schemes within which major heritage buildings often provide the anchor development. Urban design and planning need to draw on the local context to inform new design uses and the continuity of urban character, historic fabric and street pattern.¹²

Increasingly, heritage schemes are based on 'mixed-use' projects combining hotel, residential, retail, cultural and other spaces and uses. Here a greater understanding of what mix works in a heritage and design context is required, including economic and temporal mix, as heritage spaces can be used differently, for different users and visitors, at different times of the day/week.¹³ Heritage redevelopment can also take many years, often decades, to realise with temporary use and interpretation a feature of their phased and ultimate redevelopment. Unfortunately, many buildings and sites are never fully re-used, suffering active demolition or benign neglect and even in these cases, temporary use is valid and undertaken over many years. In this sense, heritage re-use is a process as much as a finite conversion project and the extent to which interim uses can create awareness and engagement with re-use and interpretation efforts is also in need of review.¹⁴

Another way to think about and approach the sustainable re-use of heritage buildings and sites is through co-design. This combines 'design thinking' that is to say creative and innovative processes we associate with the production of architectural and urban space with a more socially inclusive and iterative process of examining re-use options and scenarios that draws on historic and community knowledge and culture. In this way we are able to explore the pros and cons of inscribing a building with a new use value set against social negotiations at local, national or global level and tensions

¹¹ Evans, G. (2002) Living in a World Heritage City: stakeholders in the dialectic of the Universal & the Particular Int Jnl of Heritage Studies 8(2): 117-35

¹² Toc, T. et al. (2010) 'Design in Historic Urban Quarters', Rivista Di Scienze Del Turismo, 1(2): 51-74

¹³ Evans, G.L. (2005) Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration, Urban Studies, 42 (5/6): 959-984

Evans, G.L. (2009) Creative Cities, Creative Spaces, Urban Studies, 46(5&6): 1003–1040

¹⁴ Gravari-Barbas, M. (2005) Habiter le Patrimoine : Enjeux, Approches, Vécu, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Collection Géographie Sociale, 760p.

between the use value and the worth of cultural heritage.¹⁵ Historical research that draws on official archives, visual records (photographs, postcards and the like) and literature, including diaries and letters is essential to the process of co-design. In addition, this kind of approach may help us to understand how heritage theories have evolved through redevelopment and re-use, and to critically use redevelopment approaches as a criterion of understanding shifting values of heritage.

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¹⁵ Getty (1999) *Economics and Heritage Conservation*, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles

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