

**From
Vernacular
to World
Heritage**

edited by
LETIZIA DIPASQUALE
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


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Introduction



THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY IN VERNACULAR HERITAGE

Gilberto Duarte Carlos
Mariana Correia
Emília Simão
Escola Superior Gallaecia

Introduction

It is rather common to establish orthodox criteria when addressing built heritage subjects, especially regarding operative procedures that range from valorisation to conservation measures.

The scientific accuracy, on behalf of unarguable validation, is often mistaken with broad standard methods that consider little or nothing, the distinctiveness that compels a certain asset to be documented as heritage. The built environment, and in particular vernacular heritage, on which technical issues play a significant role, constitutes an example of such approach. In vernacular heritage, the concept of creativity is often intentionally suppressed from the object interpretation and the preservation process.

This paper intends to be a critical essay on the implications of the creativity approach in the vernacular architecture research, contesting formal prejudices linked to etymologic distortion and formal assumptions. The paper also intends to consider the potential impact of creative-based strategies and approaches regarding the preservation and awareness of World Heritage Sites.

Creativity meaning and definition

The most general association of the meaning of creativity relates to the production of *original* and *unusual ideas*, which, in turn, does not encompass a negative connotation. However, the confluence of perception in scholar spheres that *unusual*, as 'out of the typical', implies an inevitable subversion of methodical procedures, where transversal analytic indicators cannot be directly applied, has contributed to a very sceptical approach to this phenomenon. And, obviously, within the framework of quantitative-comparative studies, this approach is particularly reasonable (Chalmers, 1988).

Therefore, this specific 'categorisation' is easily admitted within abstract thinking sectors, where cognitive and perception mechanisms are commonly incorporated in the veil of the intuitive/sensitive phenomena creation. The artistic sector used and abused of such definition, in particular after the decay of figurative representation and upraise of the conceptual artistic movements (Harris, 2006). This relatively recent paradigm placed creativity, as the 'out of the box' thinking, on the fundamental premises of the aesthetical domain with such an intensity that almost exhausted the term for other areas.

Presently, little attention is driven to the first part of the word definition, on which the explanation is set upon the action instead of the content. In most of the English language dictionaries *creativity* is described as an ability or skill. The focus on creativity as a capacity, instead of a result of abstract nature, is particularly interesting when addressing the scope of vernacular built heritage. Moreover, it can be ap-

opposite page
Communities technolog
inventiveness, Cuenca
'rascacielos'
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Collective and individual artistic expression, Pico's strong color painting, winery gate
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Collective and individual artistic expression, Svanetti's wood carving, Temple door
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plied to both its tangible and intangible aspects, which reinforce the cultural relevance of the architectural asset, also emphasising the associated empirical knowledge and its forms of transmission.

Creativity and innovation

As stated previously, the tendency is to consider 'creativity', almost exclusively, within the scope of the artistic production, forgetting its immense significance at technical and scientific levels. For most of the authors, this narrow perspective can easily compromise the potential progress of determined communities (Davis, 2006), especially in cases of cultural network limitation.

When addressed in technologic terms, 'creativity' is directly associated with 'innovation'. In this case, the semantic connotation of the concept takes a twist on its scientific perspective. It is understood as a paradigmatic jump, that a technical solution development can be extended from the available resources to the operative application (Addis, 2015). Nevertheless, this proclaimed evolution does not oblige a compulsive rupture on the current technologic process. In empirical based activities, as vernacular building techniques, the paradigmatic shifts are usually characterised as a progressive technical adjustment or appropriation (Frey, 2010).

Creativity in vernacular architecture

Another essential aspect regarding vernacular architecture is the rigidity associated with enduring building stereotypes. In fact, this has been transversal to all architectonic categories since the development of the typo-morphological theories, so well disseminated during the last quarter of the 20th century. The building type representativeness should not be confused with an inflexible model.

As Rapoport argues (2006), in most cases, vernacular heritage reflects the consolidation of site-specific logics and principles, rather than imposed elements or solutions. Therefore, when analysing vernacular buildings, enhanced by its informal nature, one can observe a wide range of practical variations based on the same logic, i.e. placing the individual expression within a systemic dynamic. This formal liberty enables that inventive results within a collective coherent framework always consider the available resources. On the previous VerSus Research Project, this issue had already been approached within the vernacular built heritage inherent characteristics (Correia et al., 2014). VerSus researchers argued that one of the fundamental principles of vernacular heritage was to *enhance innovative and creative solutions*. Integrated in the

socio-cultural scope of the phenomenon, this attribute is associated with the development of native forms of cultural expression, corroborating, as recalled by Guillaud (2014), the consolidation of the overall regional identity, in which the establishment of originality features constitutes a fundamental premise. The creative capacity of the vernacular architecture is predominantly expressed by the following socio-cultural principles (Guillaud, 2014):

- The development of collective intelligence;
- The encouragement of diversity in building system solutions;
- The consideration for other building cultures influence;
- The opportunity for experimenting building techniques and processes;
- The improvement of using building techniques from previous know-how, through selective trials.

The implementation of these principles is key for the consolidation of active building cultures with sustainable aspirations, capable of creating stimulating habitats, in order to preserve and transfer their inherited values. Nevertheless, this interpretation has always to consider the socio-economic context and their main activities evolution, avoiding patronising approaches, regarding the maintenance of socio-cultural value (Asquith, Vellinga, 2006).

Creativity in World Heritage

The creativity component presents an essential contribution for the definition of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). This becomes a core-value of the World Heritage justification of vernacular sites, especially when focusing on the analysis of the Integrity and Authenticity foundation principles. But it is upon the community's stimulation of inventiveness that one can achieve outcomes prone to be considered as site-specific attributes, with evident significance to contain and manifest the OUV designation (ICOMOS, 2008). All the cultural properties represent a valid contribution to the creativity concept, recalling the OUV attributes in World Heritage. Nevertheless, properties located on challenging geographic environments, less susceptible to human occupation and with scarce natural resources, represent wider cultural challenges. The 3DPAST case study of Pico's Island cultural landscape seems to reflect this condition, as stated by Pico's World Heritage justification: "The Landscape of the Pico Island Vineyard Culture is an outstanding example of the adaptation of farming practices to a remote and challenging environment" (UNESCO-WHC, 2004). This reveals that the Outstanding Universal Value of Pico's site is composed by a man-made landscape based on the "inventiveness" of local communities (back in the 15th century) of surpassing the sterile volcanic soil found.

Creativity in 3DPAST research

The 3DPAST project approach considers creativity on different, yet complementary, scopes within the developed research: (i) A dimension of the Heritage asset, as a specific component of the selected object itself; (ii) A resource for the World Heritage's attributes identification; (iii) An instrument for the



3DPAST digital technology, Photography overlapping, panoramic view, Svaneti, Georgia
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World Heritage Site's interpretation; and (iv) A tool for the World Heritage Site's promotion. As it may be inferred, the connection between creativity and the first two scopes is conceptual. However, the operative relation with the term is obviously addressed in the last two scopes. This strategy was set according to the priorities of the European Commission 2016 program: to assure the society adaptation to digital technologies and to contribute to the development of the local creative industries.

The impetus to address World Heritage research assuming digital technology as the outcome touchstone constitutes already a conceptual challenge by itself. The urgent need for adaptation to this resource is far from being implemented on technical and artistic levels. A good example of the potential associated with creativity is the development of a *serious game* for Pienza World Heritage site, in Italy, under the 3DPAST project framework. In this case, the scenario of the game action is a digital simulation of the city during the XIV century period. The narrative of the game also allows the display of historical and technical information regarding architectural and urban features of the site.

Technology improvement

The change between the analogical record and the digital database is also a significant step for the data collection sector. The benefits brought to World Heritage documentation are overwhelming between the advantage of condensing physical archives and speed of information exchange, which was made possible by digital networks. The technology regarding the physical survey and the resulting information assessment presented an exponential increase, in terms of approach and accuracy.

In recent years, the development of areas such as aerophotogrammetry and laser scanning increased greatly, more than the previous recording instruments that become almost obsolete. The compatibility between the generated data and the available computer programmes is creating a wide new range of possibilities that are often reduced to ludic purposes without scientific validation. The construction industry, particularly the one dealing with the rehabilitation of law-protected heritage, has already assumed the paradigm shift, understanding its technological improvement.

Conclusions

The application of these innovative tools in heritage domain requires creative approaches and creative techniques, in order to enhance their value. However, despite some preliminary efforts of the education



sector to create more appellative didactic tools regarding historical themes for new generations, there has not been much systematisation on the congregation of interests in terms of built heritage exploitation.

Recently, the institutions that manage touristic assets have increased their investment in the expansion of the visitor's experiences throughout digital resources. The trivialisation of mobile devices and the impact of immersive events have set the heritage related industry into a receptive mode, understanding the potential of such an instrument.

The relentless access to Virtual and Augmented Reality displays and to their sensorial quality interaction is changing broad audiences' expectations, increasing their interest and comfort, while accessing it. From a more ethical stand, these tools also create an alternative to the display of certain contents, protecting sensible matters from unnecessary disclosure or degradation risks. It is therefore believed that heritage assets that encompass this type of displays are more competitive, attracting new audiences.

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