

Heritage Sites and the Challenges of Tomorrow

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ABSTRACT

As climate change alters the environment, many coastal cities and other places of historical and cultural significance are at risk of being damaged, if not disrupted altogether. How should we confront the prospect of these disasters? And how are we to cope with the reconstructions that will be needed as these phenomena occur?

In this paper, I articulate some conceptual tools for thinking more deeply about the philosophical implications that surround choices concerning heritage sites conservation. Recent work in environmental psychology has investigated people's emotional bond to places and the threat that changes in a place's structure may pose to individual and social cohesion. In a similar vein, everyday aestheticians have emphasized the role played by quotidian intercourse, relationship and attachment for the ascription of aesthetic qualities to a site and the environment.

Drawing on these debates, I argue that strategies for a sustainable reconstruction in the aftermath of a natural catastrophe must emerge by considering the affected community of people, then the affected artefact. In this regard, rather than being whether potential replicas and copies may constitute a threat to a site's authenticity, the question should be whether reconstructions are able to keep the values alive for the people for whom the site is perceived as significant.

KEYWORDS:

Climate Change; Heritage; Reconstruction; Place Attachment; Everyday Aesthetics

1. Introduction

We can now be pretty sure that before the end of the century the effects of anthropogenic climate change will become widely perceivable. Even if we were to keep global temperature increase to two degrees Celsius – in fact, an optimistic expectation – by the year 2100 the predicted rise in global sea levels would bring thousands of kilometres of coastal areas to be flooded¹. This threatens to make a substantial part of our coastlines uninhabitable if not completely devastated in the next future, with 300 million people living

¹ As estimated by the last Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as to September 2019. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/> [accessed May 28, 2020]

in areas submerged by the ocean at least once per year.

With its 7,456 kilometres of shoreline, home to 70% of its total population², Italy will be strongly affected by events of extensive flooding. The phenomenon of rising waters might concern a rather vast area ranging from Veneto, Romagna, the Five lands in Liguria, part of Tuscany and Lazio to the coastline of Sardinia, Calabria and Sicily (Antonioli et al. 2017; Marsico et al. 2017). Several old towns like Venice, Ravenna, Portofino, Noto, Ragusa, Marsala, and many others are at risk of being frequently and repeatedly inundated, let alone the rest of the territory that will be affected by global warming effects – including extreme weather events like hurricanes or severe droughts.

Given that Italy, as a single country, possesses the largest number of heritage sites listed by UNESCO³, a substantial part of what constitutes today's world cultural heritage might be severely injured if not completely destroyed in the next few years. How should we approach the prospect of these disasters, with all these valuable places being sooner or later devastated? And are we to cope with the on-going reconstructions that will be needed as these phenomena occur?

The aim of this paper is not to adjudicate different measures against climate change, or even to address any particular environmental policy, though this is certainly a question of the utmost importance. Rather, I confine discussion to the conservation of places, in particular the built environment and public areas of historical and cultural significance, which are going to be harmed by the consequences of climate change. I will focus on articulating some conceptual tools for thinking more deeply about the philosophical implications that surround choices concerning the reconstruction of these places in the aftermath of extreme natural events.

A revised understanding of the notion of heritage site suggests that symbolic, aesthetic and broadly conceived affective factors may be as important as political, scientific and engineering issues when it comes to reconstructing sites that have been damaged. These sites are included as part of our heritage primarily because they matter to us. People live in, form relationships with, and derive existential meanings from them. In this sense, climate change poses a challenge that is more than just a challenge to our material properties (Adger et al. 2011; Allison 2015; Nomikos 2018). It is also a

² Compare with the 2018 Environmental Data Directory of the Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research in Italy (ISPRA). Available at: <https://annuario.isprambiente.it/content/annuario-dei-dati-ambientali-2018> [accessed May 28, 2020].

³ More than fifty. The Unesco World Heritage List can be consulted at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/> [accessed May 28, 2020].

challenge to the values these properties embody as a result of the role they play in the everyday life and social practices of people, who transform them into places of human significance.

2. *The Notion of Heritage*

What makes a place a piece of ‘heritage’? And what makes it part of the “world’s heritage”? Heritage is a familiar concept, but one that is also hard to pin down. Most people seem to have an idea of what heritage is, and what kinds of thing could be described using the term heritage. Most people, too, would recognise that heritage sites and historically significant objects and places demand preservation, perhaps above and beyond other valuable things (Matthes 2019, p. 175). Things get tougher, however, when it comes to providing a convincing definition of heritage. Heritage is in fact a controversial notion (Davison 2008), a “conveniently ambiguous” concept (Lowenthal 1998).

In the last decades, we have seen an exponential growth in the number of things that are defined, conserved and exhibited as ‘heritage’ (Lowenthal 1985, p. xv). Heritage can be understood to encompass *material objects* as diverse as historic buildings, paintings, stone tools, handicrafts, books, heirlooms; *places* including archaeological sites, ruins, urban and natural landscapes, parks, gardens, natural sacred sites, museums, art galleries; *practices* such as rituals, oral stories, languages, festive events, rituals, music, culinary traditions etc., that have some significance in the present which relates to the past.

As this list shows, heritage is invoked today to describe anything from the most solid (buildings and monuments) to the most ethereal (songs and languages); from the largest (whole urban and natural landscapes) to the smallest (fragments of bone and stone in archaeological sites); from the grandiose (grand palaces and natural sites) to the humble (ordinary objects such as domestic objects). Despite the elusiveness of the notion, for the purposes of this paper I am only taking into account so-called ‘heritage sites’ – places and environments, particularly built and architectural ones, endowed with historical and artistic significance.

How does a place become a ‘heritage site’? Technically, the process of selecting a place for inclusion on the World Heritage List is managed by a body representing the sovereign state of the territory in which the site exists and is submitted to a committee in charge of assessing the nominations (the UNESCO world heritage commit-

tee). The process by which a site receives formal recognition as heritage and is placed on a heritage register constitutes the dominant ‘*top-down*’ approach to the creation and classification of “official” heritage: “a set of professional practices that are authorised by the state and motivated by some form of legislation or written charter.” (Harrison 2013, p. 23).

Relevantly, how national and international institutions choose which sites deserve to be part of heritage, alongside how they decide how to conserve and preserve them, inform an understanding of how they represent themselves as a civilization and shape ideas about the past, but also about the present and future. Heritage is indeed not a passive process of keeping and conserving places, but “an active process” of selection “that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future” (Harrison 2013, p. 4; Lowenthal 2004, pp. 19-23; Graham & Howard 2008, p. 1)⁴.

Although a place only becomes ‘heritage’ in a formal sense upon inclusion in the official UNESCO list, heritage sites are more than mere items on a catalogue. A place becomes heritage in a substantial sense when it is *perceived* as a site of human significance – when its particular features come to matter to individuals and communities. As such, heritage can exist only in relation to some individuals or group of individuals (Smith 2006). So, while the notion of ‘heritage’ may be ambiguous in itself, the understanding of heritage sites as places of human significance is relatively uncontroversial, and it is the one I will assume in the rest of this paper.

I understand this significance as an ‘intangible heritage’ that ‘wraps’ around the tangible objects – buildings, places, constructions. Sites of heritage are embedded in an experience created by various kinds of recipients and by the people who are entrusted to manage this experience. This ties the notion of heritage to that of a work of art. Whatever our definition of art is, we assume that there is no artwork without a recipient, and what the recipient (and critic) makes of the artwork sits alongside what the artist intended and what official culture designates in a discursive and often contested relationship (for this kind of approach, see, among the many, Danto 1964, 1986; Dickie 1974, 1984). Similarly, around each individual heritage site, there is a series of intangible

⁴ This also accounts for the substantial difference that insists between ‘heritage’ and ‘history’. As David Lowenthal has convincingly argued, heritage is not history at all: “It is not an inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it [...] a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes” (Lowenthal 1997, p. x). It is the result of a choice of *re-packaging* the past for some present purpose, as it occurs in museums and sites throughout the world.

aspects (the language we use to describe it, its cultural significance, its contribution to social, historical and cultural processes, its associations of local or national identity, its role in everyday life etc.) which are crucial to determine what we may call the 'perceived' significance of the site and contribute to decide its formal recognition as part of heritage.

An important point is that part of the intangible significance heritage sites possess depends on their being *reference points* by which a certain group of people understand themselves in relation to the world around them. Apart from their officially recognized relevance, heritage sites function as landmarks for the individuals who interact with them on a daily basis, and shape their ways of knowing, making sense, and valuing their everyday experience. Here, I place particular emphasis on the 'everydayness' of this experience, a notion to which I shall later return. Although not explicitly protected by heritage legislation, everyday practices are indeed responsible for what may be called a '*bottom-up*' process of heritage creation, which is not in conflict but rather adds to the official significance of a site as heritage. As we are about to see, everyday practices can be understood to generate perceived heritage significance.

3. *Heritage and Place Attachment*

Drawing on the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996), heritage scholar Denis Byrne (2008, p. 151) has referred to the ways by which communities quotidianly use heritage sites to strengthen their connection to particular places and to each other the "production of locality". The locality production process is all the stronger when the heritage site is a public place, as it happens in the case of many historical centres or urban tourist places in Italy, which are recognized as part of the World Heritage. In these cases, the site plays the role of a unifying hub around which the daily routines of local people unroll. Locality is produced for example in most old towns' historic squares, where the gathering places are located (the market, the church, the cafés etc.), (see Andreotti 2001, pp. 55-68).

Consider for example *Piazza del Campo*, the main square of the city of Siena (Tuscany). The official heritage status of the square resides in its legislative protection as part of the historic centre of Siena World Heritage Site, which was inscribed in 1995 on the basis of the city's undiscussed historic, architectonic and artistic value. However, the site's everyday significance might be seen as residing in the set

of practices surrounding its use by a range of different groups of people, who gather there to meet, stroll, perform their daily activities. As is well known, the square is also the setting for the ancient practice of *Palio*, a horse race that dates back to the Middle Ages. *Piazza del campo* works thus as a daily source of sociality, conviviality and recreation for many inhabitants and foreign visitors from around the world. These and similar present-day uses demonstrate the ways in which a heritage site can create a sense of connection between people and place (Clemente and Salvati 2017, p. 13).

It would be inaccurate, however, to consider this as a conflict between the “past” and “present” values of the site, according to Alois Riegl’s (1903) classic terminology. In the same ways in which contemporary visitors make and remake the meaning of *Piazza del Campo* from the past in the present, its architectonic, artistic and historic significance also represents a form of ascribed value assigned to it by generations of recipients – architects, archaeologists, art scholars, engineers, historians as well as common citizens and visitors – who have remade the meaning of the place to address contemporary interests. As museum scholar Laurajane Smith (2006) has argued, value is something that is *attributed* to a site by particular people at a particular time for particular reasons. This value resides on the role the site has played in shaping the dynamics of human daily and social life throughout time (Cresswell 2009, pp. 176-177).

The special bond that arises between people and places like for instance public heritage sites can be described using the notion of “topophilia”, a term invented by the Chinese-American geographer Yi-fu Tuan in the Seventies. According to Tuan, *topophilia*, the love for a place, refers to both a sense of belonging to a place, the acceptance of a local identity, and a ‘sense of community’ (Tuan 1974). In recent years, the analysis of the feelings people develop toward certain places and the function these places fulfil in their lives has been receiving increasing attention on the part of environmental psychologists. Since the pioneering work of psychologist Mark Fried (1963), studies have gone further into explaining people’s emotional bond to places, showing that places may have a dramatic influence on how people self-represent themselves and their relations with a given territory (Hidalgo & Hernández 2001). This sentimental relationship is known in the literature as “place attachment”⁵. In general, place attachment is defined as the affective rapport, link

⁵ Although the phenomenon has been also referred to as “community attachment” (Kasarda & Janowitz 1974), “place identity” (Proshansky 1978), “place dependence” (Stokols & Shumaker 1981), “sense of place” (Hummon 1992; Haapala 2005), etc. For

or involvement between individuals and specific locations of their everyday life (Low & Altman 1992; Hummon 1992), which develops over time often without awareness. Interestingly, according to many authors, place attachment is an integral part to identity-creation processes, both for individual subjects and for members of cultures and communities (see Kyle, Graffe & Manning 2005; Raymond, Brown & Weber 2010). One of the ways in which humans build their personal identity is indeed through relation to the physical environment that surrounds them (Hernandez et al. 2007).

Although there is still no agreement among scholars over what kind of places people mainly develop attachment to, or what place aspects or dimensions are more likely to awaken attachment, it is widely acknowledged that heritage sites represent strong purveyors of attachment feelings (see for example Byrne et al. 2001; Avrami et al. 2000; Smith et al. 2003, p. 66). Indeed, heritage sites seem to be deeply embroiled in the construction of personal and group identities, and not merely in their reflection. In so doing, they act as cultural symbols and create the basis for shared narratives that reinforce feelings of belonging and 'being in place'. Again, these feelings are not wholly dependent on the 'official' values of a heritage site itself but are rather generated collectively through the everyday practices of people. Collective attachment occurs because there is a basic agreement on the part of present-day users that a place has some value to them. If people no longer attach value to a place, the place simply loses its (heritage) status (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 152). For this reason, as Smith (2006) contends, all 'sites of heritage' need to be constantly re-evaluated and tested by current social practices, needs and desires that link the values, beliefs and memories of communities in the present with those of the past.

4. Everyday Aesthetic Value and Heritage Sites

Interestingly, there seems to be a close relationship between the attachment generated by a heritage site and its aesthetic character.

On a first glance, one could notice that one main criterion for a place (archaeological, natural, artistic) to be inscribed on the World Heritage list rests on its having exceptional aesthetic value. In this regard, the UNESCO reports that a site must be either a unique "masterpiece of human creative genius"; "an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or

discussion, see Gerson et al. 1977.

landscape” [...]; or contain “areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance”⁶.

Here, however, I am interested in a notion of aesthetic value other than that summoned by traditional aesthetic theory⁷. In particular, I refer to the enlarged understanding of aesthetics that has been developed in recent work in the area of everyday and environmental aesthetics⁸, and that considers quotidian intercourse, relationship and interaction central for the ascription of aesthetic qualities to objects and places.

It is widely assumed by authors working in these fields that our everyday lives have a characteristic aesthetic import that emerges when we are involved in, engage and interact with the objects of our daily experience (Saito 2007, 2017; Berleant 1992; Leddy 2005). In this sense, the attribution of aesthetic value is an experience of pleasure and meaning that results when a special relationship exists, or is established, between a subject and an object, or between several subjects brought together and coordinated by an object. In her oeuvre, Yuriko Saito, for example, has extensively supported the claim that our appreciation of an object cannot be dissociated from the personal, as well as cultural and societal, relationship we have with it. Particularly regarding environment, our personal relationship and affective response should not be detached from the perception of its aesthetic value. Referring to Tuan’s notion of ‘topophilia’, Saito believes that people’s involvement and engagement toward a place should be fully considered in an account of the aesthetic value ascribed to places (Saito 2017, p. 107). Attribution of aesthetic value is inseparably linked to how we feel in a given environment and what meaning we give to it, which indicates the existence of a significant *relational* component in our aesthetic appraisal of environment.

In line with this approach, many environmental aestheticians (Brady 2003, 2008, 2014; Berleant 1992; Haapala 2005, among the others), have pointed the way to appreciation of aesthetic qualities of a place by focusing on the entire lived experience we

⁶ Cf. with the list available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/> [accessed May 28, 2020].

⁷ The relationship between everyday aesthetics and ‘traditional’ aesthetics is a problematic one. For the purposes of this paper, I take the difference between the two approaches as relying mainly on the role they attribute to personal associations and investments in the context of aesthetic judgments. As Saito points out: “If we subscribe to the traditional, art-oriented aesthetic theory, our personal relationship to and stake in an object should be irrelevant to its aesthetic value” (Saito 2017, p. 106). Conversely, this idea lies at the basis of the ‘engaged’ approach promoted by everyday aesthetics.

⁸ Although the fields of everyday aesthetics and environmental aesthetics do not coincide, there is considerable overlap. In particular, environmental aesthetics meets everyday aesthetics by focusing on the entire lived experience of our environment.

make of it. Whether the subject is native to a particular place, having lived and worked there their entire life, or just a tourist passing by, will affect how (perhaps even whether) aesthetic value is attributed and what kind of aesthetic experiences are engendered. Emily Brady (2003; 2014), for instance, has contended that aesthetic value cannot be reduced to any of the place's constituent aesthetic qualities; nor can it be inferred from any set of non-aesthetic qualities. In this sense, to grasp the aesthetic value of a place one must experience it first hand, because aesthetic judgments, especially those concerning natural and built environment, have always a strong experiential basis (2014, p. 554). To this extent, according to Brady, the aesthetic qualities that we perceive, our emotional responses to those qualities as well as the meanings we attach – all upon which aesthetic value rests – vary depending on the subject's bond with a particular place, and so does the attribution of aesthetic value (Nomikos 2018, p. 454)⁹. The important bond established between the subjects and the place is also acknowledged by philosopher Arnold Berleant, who describes it as a sort of "sympathetic interrelationship" (1992, p. 149). This interrelationship, he argues, lies at the basis of our aesthetic appreciation of the built environment and architectural works in particular. What we call 'a place' is indeed the result of a combination of factors – among which the people who live in the place, the built structures and the meanings associated with them, our perceptual involvement and the shared spatial dimension of the place itself – that together are responsible for engendering an aesthetic experience. All these factors, according to Berleant, testify to the profound "interpenetration, indeed the continuity" that exists between people and places (Berleant 1992, p. 149).

Interestingly, as Arto Haapala (2005; 2017) has suggested, this interpenetration can be seen as reflected in the two basic modalities we have to relate to a place, what he refers to as 'strangeness' and 'familiarity'. Strangeness is the basic experience we all have when we find ourselves in a new environment, for example when visiting a foreign city for the first time (2005, p. 43). Familiarity, on the contrary, is the quality of everyday living environments, which bring us aesthetic pleasure through a feeling of "comforting stability" (2005, p. 50), the awareness that, as he puts it: "things are in their places; they are there where they should

⁹ In this sense, the question for everyday aesthetics is not what are the *formal properties* of an object or place that make it aesthetically valuable, but rather what is the *relation* between subject and object that makes this particular experience of that object valuable. Aesthetic properties of places "are emergent on interaction between the communities and their surroundings" (Leddy 2005, p. 19).

be, where I am used to seeing them” (2005, p. 6). When we have settled down into an area, Haapala claims, not only do we recognize the buildings and sites, we also establish a personal relation to them. Again, this relation is as much *existential* (“It is part of my existence, and accordingly part of my essence, that I live in a particular city rather than in another” 2005, p. 45) as it is *aesthetic*, because it generates a specific form of aesthetic appreciation (2005, p. 52).

The interaction between aesthetic and existential aspects helps us understand the role that place attachment plays in our everyday experience of the environment, influencing how we perceive a place’s overall aesthetic quality, and how we experience and evaluate it. Particularly when it comes to culturally significant places like heritage sites, the importance of this affective dimension for our aesthetic appraisal should not be ignored. Our appreciation of a heritage site – even more clearly than that of other places or environments – seems to be a complex ‘holistic’ phenomenon involving perception, interpretation, evaluation, personal memories, and abstract knowledge (Jaśkiewicz 2015), all contributing to the complex “webs of meanings” (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 160) that are conveyed by a site, and makes it appreciated and valued. Bluntly put, mere places become heritage sites when they become particularly significant; they become significant as they are perceived as familiar (in both an aesthetic and an existential sense, as described by Haapala 2005); and they are perceived as familiar precisely because people feel they are attached to them. So, whereas the specific historical, artistic and material features of a site are key for the attribution of official heritage status to it, the happenings of the everyday are key for the formation of feelings that are responsible for, and constitutive of, the site’s perceived heritage value.

This is not to say that the two sets of values are independent from each other. There is an essential interplay between a site’s ‘official’ significance and its perceived significance. So for example, the aesthetic value of a site as recognized by the UNESCO is contingent upon, and emerge from the continuous ascription of aesthetic qualities by generations of recipients, who have renewed their aesthetic interest in the site over time through their life experience.

This challenges a model that sees aesthetic value as an intrinsic property of an object. An intrinsic property is one that is ‘built-in’ to an object; it belongs to the basic and essential features that make the object what it is. Under such model, heritage sites are attributed particular aesthetic value by professionals such as architects, art historians, and archaeologists through a process of ‘uncovering’ the

value that already exists in an object. The idea that aesthetic value is intrinsic also leads to a focus on the physical fabric of a site. If aesthetic value is inherent, it follows that it must be contained within the physical fabric of a building or a place.

Drawing on recent work in everyday aesthetics, we can argue that the aesthetic value of a place lies instead in the relationship between the subjects and the place. In Brady's words, aesthetic value is rather sensitive to "the appreciative situation of the subject" (Brady 2003, pp. 236-237) with regard to the place itself. As we shall see in the remainder of this paper, this has interesting consequences with regard to the issue of heritage conservation, leading us to reconceive the importance given to the authentic material of a site in reconstruction.

5. *The Challenges of Change*

Whether construed in the light of the everyday aesthetic character of a site, or of the kinds of activities we engage in within those environments, or of the cultural meanings we ascribe to them, attachment is at the heart of the perceived significance of heritage sites. In fact, we might say that attachment *marks* sites as meaningful to us – as *heritage*. Importantly, attachment is also a crucial element to understand what happens when a site is severely damaged or destroyed, for example as a result of an environmental catastrophe.

Causing a variety of effects on the geophysical system – including globally rising temperatures, increased heavy precipitation, glacial retreat and sea levels rise – climate change poses one of the most significant threats to our environment, bringing about an extraordinary amount of uncertainty concerning our future, and challenging any assumptions we have regarding the continued existence of our built and natural surroundings, and traditional ways of life. This threat may manifest as a multitude of attacks on our material heritage: the drastic and unexpected destruction of historic buildings, the sudden decay of entire cities and historic centres, the erosion of urban and natural landscapes. Glimpses of this future we saw already in November 2019, when Venice experienced an extraordinary 187 centimetres tidal peak, with St Mark's Basilica being flooded twice in just one single week. According to Gianmaria Sannino, oceanographer and head of the Laboratory of Climate Modelling and Impacts of the ENEA, what happened then "is just a sample of what awaits us in the coming years". With the Mediterranean Sea level 40-50 centi-

metres higher than today, every time the tide is high Venice will be flooded: “Normal weather conditions will suffice to render ‘ordinary’ circumstances that appear ‘extraordinary’ to us now”¹⁰.

Climate change brings us to face important tangible losses: a massive part of our artistic and historic properties, historic centres, landscapes and cityscapes may be endangered as a result of the environmental transformation that is underway. But along with the material loss, a profound intangible loss of meanings, histories, and memories comes, and this inevitability is nothing short of tragic either. Although this latter challenge is often neglected – largely due to what Adger et al. (2011) call a dominant “material paradigm” of climate change, focused mainly on the physical, biological, and economic dangers resulting from the weather alteration¹¹ – especially when heritage sites are involved, climate change should be seen as a menace that jeopardises equally the external environment *and* a community of human actors. This “dual threat” is all the more frightening when considering the Italian case, for a large part of Italy’s heritage properties consists of urban and architectural clusters – ranging from single buildings to entire districts, town centres and whole cities – that have never ceased to be populated and inhabited over the centuries.

Empirical research has shown (Kyle et al. 2004; Vorkinn & Riese 2001) that people who are more attached to a place – those who make the place significant through their daily routines and practices – are also more sensitive to negative changes occurring in that place. In particular, in the aftermath of a natural catastrophe, people of a certain community tend to feel that they have been ‘robbed’ of a part of their identity together with the disrupted place. Importantly, as long as the place is disrupted, this identity remains taken away from them (Brown & Perkins 1992, pp. 291-293). To a similar extent, it is possible to see climate change as a harm done to a generation that it is robbed of something it cares about by forces it has no control over and contributed only very little to the existence of. This brings about the moral claim that victims of climate change have some kind of right to reparation that what has taken away should be restored to them (Matravers 2019, p. 191). Justice demands that we compensate them for their loss. Seen in this light, the important question becomes, therefore, in what way people can get what they deserve: in what way a ‘robbery’ that has been done against value and identity

¹⁰ Interview available at: https://www.agi.it/fact-checking/venezia_cambiamenti_climatici-6544013/news/2019-11-14/ [accessed May 28, 2020].

¹¹ As Nomikos notices (2018, p. 453) however, this “materialist interpretation” is somewhat inevitable, firstly because the material threat is easier to discern, and secondly because the nonmaterial threat is largely dependent on the material one.

can actually be compensated or restituted.

6. *Reconstruction and Conservation*

This argument – the claim that what has been taken away from a community should be restored to them – has consequences upon the whole logic of reconstruction. One first lesson to draw is that if the harm caused by climate change acts on both the tangible and the intangible level, reconstruction too should be carried out accordingly. Although this does not give us clear instructions on what to do in all circumstances of heritage destruction, it provides us with a rationale for deciding which considerations should play a role and which should be sacrificed when it comes to reconstructing a damaged site.

In the first place, we may want to reconsider skepticism about so-called stylistic reconstructions, that is, reconstructions designed to reproduce the original object in its basic form. Up until present days, the dominant view from those professionally concerned with cultural heritage has been to err on the side of caution with respect to issues of stylistic reconstruction. Much resistance in this regard is based on a commitment for the material authenticity of the original place (Petzet 1995; Jokilehto & King 2001; Lowenthal & Jenkins 2011). Reconstructions are considered fakes; we might know they are fakes (we might not, of course) but they are fakes nonetheless. Philosophers, on their part, have traditionally questioned the idea that a replica or an exact reconstruction might ever replace the original work. Most consider art objects of aesthetic interest only insofar as they could prove to be original, namely, genuinely created by the creator to whom they are attributed, and genuinely of the era and location to which they are said to belong (Goodman 1976; Sagoff 1978; Danto 1981; Korsmeyer 2008; 2012). Architectural works, in particular, are seen as instances where authenticity is especially prized, the salient fact about these sites being that they have been constructed in a long-gone era; to this extent, if they were built neither in the time, place or manner so attributed to them – it is argued – they would fail to attract aesthetic attention (Fischer 2019, p. 108). Some authors also contend that replicating a destroyed site or building may be counter-educational with respect to the way in which people in a society conceive of their own past. Replicas may, in fact, be a prompter of deception for future generations, who will thereby be misled in their evaluation of history (Korsmeyer 2008, p. 121; 2019).

Emphasizing the role of place attachment in our dealings with cultural heritage turns the tables. Once the ‘perceived’ everyday

significance of heritage sites is acknowledged, respect for material authenticity simply ceases to appear the most pressing criterion to be followed in reconstruction. Rather than being whether reconstructions would or would not comply with an abstract claim to the authenticity of the original site, the issue is now whether interventions are able to keep the values alive for the people for whom the relevant place is valuable. Reconstruction works in this sense as a ‘value-restoring’ process, focused more on the subjects than on the objects themselves. Indeed, we reconstruct the site not (or not only) because of its material features, but because of the symbolic, aesthetic and affective harm that its unwarranted disruption has caused to the subjects that make up society.

Notice that this does not amount to a plea for reconstructions ‘in the style of’. Reconstructions may reproduce a destroyed site exactly “where it was, how it was”¹², but may not be able to recreate the value and the meaning that a place had acquired over the same time. Restoring the physical fabric of a heritage site cannot be effective if the perceived significance of the site is not equally taken into account. As Clementi and Salvati argue (2017, p. 2), although the reconstruction process should aim to reconstruct an “image of the ancient villages where the inhabitants can recognize their own place identity”, this does not mean that “everything has to be preserved”.

A consequence of this approach is that people with a greater degree of attachment to a site – those who are more affected by the site’s disruption – should have a greater degree of authority than those for whom the object has less perceived significance. These people are generally called ‘stakeholders’ in the literature (Goral 2015; Myers, Smith & Ostergren 2016; Avrami et al. 2019), a term which is especially apt: metaphorically, stakeholders own a small part of something bigger; as such, they are affected by the decisions that are taken regarding it, so they have the right to have a say in relation to it. The authority people have on heritage objects is thus based on two closely related factors: (a) their perception of the site’s significance, (b) their being affected by the site’s alteration (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 161). In this regard, although the number of people involved when a heritage site is disrupted can vary from a single individual to all humanity (since sites included on the World Heritage list are supposed to have global value), people’s right to

¹² The slogan “where it was, how it was” was used for the first time by the mayor of Venice during the aftermath of the collapse of the San Marco Bell Tower, in 1902. The Venice Bell Tower collapsed because of the deterioration of the bricks walls and the Venetians wanted to rebuilt it “in loco”, like a copy of the ancient one, against the opinion of many architects of that time, who proposed a new design (Jokilhto 2007, p. 345).

impose their views should be proportional to their involvement with the place¹³. Insiders' or inhabitants' (aesthetic) interests, needs, and priorities should take precedence over those of outsiders or visitors. Again, this is because the appreciation or depreciation of residents is rooted in their intimate interaction with the site and invested with their life values – it affects their lives profoundly on a daily basis.

The realization of this idea opens up new space for rethinking how we conceive of our conservation activity. Particularly when designing a reconstruction project for a damaged heritage site, the affective dimension of people's everyday experience should be addressed, possibly with the hope of turning it into an asset. As everyday aestheticians have argued, people's direct involvement with a site generates affection and attachment, which then leads to a positive aesthetic appreciation. One effective way to recreate a positive experience of a particular harmed place is thus for people to be participants in creating it, which helps strengthen their affection, attachment and aesthetic appreciation of the place (Saito 2007, p. 214). This thinking can be referred to a newly emerging ethic approach called civic environmentalism (see especially Light 2003), which recognizes and emphasizes citizens' commitment in planning solutions to various challenges facing the environment. No matter how sound and well-intentioned a certain goal, policy, or project may be, if it is perceived as something imposed on citizens from above or outside, such as by a government or an outside institution, its success and cultural sustainability are doubtful. On the contrary, when citizens are enfranchised, this sense of empowerment will positively affect their appreciation of the place and project (Saito 2017, p. 107). In the field of conservation, civic environmentalism gives us an argument in favour of actively involving local communities in the rebuilding process that follows an environmental catastrophe. Obviously, most decisions require scientific expertise and have to be taken on technical grounds: no common citizen can be authorized to decide which material is best suited to withstand humidity, or what thickness a reinforcing wall should have. The conservation profession has many experts-only aspects, but it also has many aspects in which no technical knowledge is involved, aspects which call into question people's feelings, memories, preferences and interests. Importantly, it is on these aspects that the significance of

¹³ Clearly, since a site recognized as part of World Heritage matters (at least culturally) not only to local people but also to the world community, there is the potential for a range of different ways of relating to, understanding the meaning of, and feeling attached to this place. In certain cases, this kind of differences may give rise to conflicts over who has the right to determine access and management of the site. In these cases, the official and the local can be thought of as competing (see, for example, Silverman 2010).

cultural heritage is based (Smith 2006).

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that an effective reconstruction strategy for the compensation and mitigation of future heritage harm caused by climate change should not only provide the site's refurbishment, but also include a more comprehensive strategy for preserving the social meanings and values connected to that site. From the perspective of environmental aesthetics, heritage resides in the "sympathetic" interaction between humans and a given place, to which significance is attached. So, while a 'place' is seen as the background of human action, the setting where social and personal dynamics take place, 'heritage' reflects the societal perception of such dynamics, acting as both the 'producer' and the 'product' of collective and individual identity. Within this perspective, everyday significance and attachment are considered key elements on which to base an effective reconstruction's program. Emphasizing the relationship between people and places is indeed essential to achieve interventions that are both positively received and aesthetically appreciated by the affected community. Allocation of value (and aesthetic value especially) depends and is contingent upon people's familiarity, involvement and engagement with a site.

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