

CONCLUSION

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This thesis arose from an understanding that the built environment reflects national identity and that urban conservation is the best way to present this. The concern that Western nations apply their conservation expertise to Eastern nations without due consideration to socio-cultural factors, raised doubts about the validity of the conservation process to achieve the objective of maintaining national identity. The thesis was conceived in the manner of an unfolding journey, searching out the problem and following a sequence of methods based on current conservation philosophy.

We began our journey by visiting a selection of sites in Syria and analysing their contribution in reflecting historical evidence that supports cultural identity. This included examining conservation techniques and the effectiveness of their presentation in communicating cultural identity.

The numerous conservation charters specifically produced to assist directing conservation practice revealed a Eurocentric focus that concentrates on the material factors of conservation but generally ignores the underlying social and cultural factors. This examination led to the identification of a three-tiered system of the charters that highlighted their process of passing down from one level to the next their philosophical intentions to the objectives and methods of implementation. In this the charters left much to be desired. Although it could be argued that the passage of time after many of these charters were drafted meant that current attitudes and the philosophy of conservation are constantly changing, this only strengthens the argument for constant revision to reflect current thinking. Selecting urban conservation emphasised the lack of social and cultural factors, and the three tiered system highlighted these specific areas of concern.

The notion of authenticity, so exhaustively argued through the Nara Conference, was revisited for its application to urban conservation. This revealed that charters again, except for their insistence to retain as much of original historic fabric as possible give little direction for authenticity. Some delegates of the Nara Conference, particularly those from Eastern countries, saw authenticity in terms of

social and cultural issues, but the charters fail to address these. Following through the application of authenticity in urban conservation, this thesis has highlighted the factor of change as a vital necessity for the continued development of an urban area. Further to this arose other important aspects of ethics, morality, integrity and honesty, and the part they play in the conservation process and in the presentation and acknowledgement of cultural identity.

Working through the ethical arguments led to the issue of responsibility. This came in several guises: firstly the responsibility of the practitioner to the conduct of the project, and secondly to the responsibility of the resident society to maintain the historic environment during continued development following the completion of the initial conservation project. The acceptance of society is in the first place the responsibility of the practitioners to ensure that the society fully understands the implications of the project, from the philosophical reason of maintaining cultural identity, and then the necessary technical expertise required to carry out further conservation maintenance in a manner that respects and enhances the historically significant evidence.

The inclusion of archaeological sites in this investigation reinforced the destructive nature of archaeology. This has led to the acknowledgement of ethical problems that have arisen, and as a consequence, the calling for an ethical approach to social and cultural responsibilities. In contrast conservation could be seen as a “saviour” of historical evidence and hence has not been perceived as destructive. Given the responsibility of urban conservation to social and cultural concerns, the approach was taken to introduce a draft ethical code based on similar archaeological codes in order to bridge the significant gap left by the charters. The code is not seen as an end product, but rather a beginning for practitioners to understand and accept the great social, cultural and economic responsibilities involved in carrying out area and urban conservation. Initially to be used in conjunction with existing urban charters, it is to be hoped that such ethical concerns could be integrated with other charters to form one overall document for area conservation.

Although the built environment is composed of historical evidence vital to the understanding and presentation of cultural identity, this thesis has argued that conservation should begin with the underlying social structure. Development plays a key role in the continuation of society, and must therefore continue to play a strong role into the future. To prevent the world's historic areas from becoming open-air museums presenting a singular view of some section of the past but ignoring the contribution of the present in relation to its continuous history, the development that has brought these places to their present significance must be recognised and encouraged into the future. Conservation practice must be based on an ethical approach that recognises the society and its cultural identity. This requires the involvement of the inhabitants and their representatives through education, and acceptance of the responsibilities of their own patrimony, and sees it as their place within the world's mosaic of collective heritage. Only in this manner will the resulting built environment be an authentic reflection of that society, through its past history and development to the present day, and as a pointer to the future.