

Teaching Conservation/Restoration of the Architectural Heritage

Goals, Contents and Methods

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Keynote Lecture by

Herb Stovel

Heritage Conservation Program
School of Canadian Studies
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada

**Challenges in Moving
from Architectural Conservation Education
to Heritage Conservation Education**

While this talk is taking place in a workshop bringing together for the most part schools of architectural conservation, its primary goal is to look beyond the world of architectural conservation, in order to link the latter to the larger world of heritage conservation. I am here suggesting the importance of embracing this larger context not just to improve links to other areas of conservation, but to more broadly attempt to situate the world of architectural conservation in a context which establishes its role and function. This paper will explore the value of this approach and also offer some ideas on how efforts to strengthen architectural conservation can move in this direction.

My thoughts on this derive from my experiences in post-grad conservation programmes in two universities (both inside and outside schools of architecture) and at ICCROM, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, an intergovernmental body devoted to strengthening training for all aspects of cultural heritage. I spent 8 years (1990-98) directing the graduate conservation programme at the School of Architecture, U. de Montreal, Montreal, Canada. There a programme founded in 1987 as the 3R (“Renovation, restoration, recycling”) programme in architectural conservation became by 1992 a programme in “Conservation of the Built Environment”. While in a School of Architecture, probably 50% of the students came from fields beyond architecture. I spent 6 years (1998-2004) at ICCROM; there, its 32 year old ARC (Architectural Conservation) course ended in 1998; it has been replaced by a series of interlinked thematic conservation courses touching all aspects of heritage management: from documentation to decision-making to risk prevention etc. From 2004 to the present, I have been directing a graduate heritage conservation programme in the School of Canadian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Carleton U., Ottawa. This programme, initially planned within the Carleton School of Architecture, was moved to Canadian Studies in 1989, and embodies an interdisciplinary approach to conservation, one situated in the humanities, and which draws in both teachers and students from architecture but puts them together with those from many other fields.

Each of the schools – two national, one international - has moved in one way or another from an initial concern for architectural conservation, to a concern to place conservation education and training in a much larger context.

This paper explores its principal contentions by looking in turn at the following four areas:

- Why might it be important to link architectural conservation education to a larger framework?
- How can architectural conservation professionals adapt to the requirements of the big picture approach?
- Ongoing challenges to achieving effective architectural conservation.
- Key challenges in strengthening architectural conservation.

Lets look at each of these in turn.

Why might it be important to link architectural conservation education to a larger framework?

It is important to recognize that at one level, this change in emphasis only recognises the slow broadening of the focus of the field over the last 40 years. We have moved generally from a concern for “monuments and sites” in the 60s to a concern for “cultural heritage” today. UNESCO had begun to replace “monuments and sites” by “cultural property” already in the late 60s, partly as an attempt to give emphasis to the legal implications of the designation of property which expressed cultural heritage values. “Cultural heritage”, first used in the 1972 World Heritage Convention itself also gave way on occasion to the use of “cultural resources” in the 1980s (born in the desire of the era of sustainability to view cultural and natural heritage as finite resources which could be squandered and used up without sufficient care), and now, more recently, in many jurisdictions, to “historic places” to explicitly indicate the wide range of heritage typologies now being recognized. The contemporary approach to heritage is essentially integrated in conception, and can be defined to include tangible/ intangible, moveable/ immoveable, cultural/ natural, urban and rural aspects of heritage etc.

Another force propelling the contemporary heritage movement is the current preoccupation for context in decision-making . The recent ICOMOS General Assembly in China (Xi’an, China, 2005) was focused on setting. The Declaration of Xi’an on setting illustrates specifically the many ways in which context should be taken into account in the conservation world. Article one states:

“The setting of a heritage structure, site or area is defined as the immediate and extended environment that is part of, or contributes to, its significance and distinctive character.

Beyond the physical and visual aspects, the setting includes interaction with the natural environment; past or present social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use or activities and other forms of intangible cultural heritage aspects that created and form the space as well as the current and dynamic cultural, social and economic context.”

In the search for “big picture” approaches which emphasize holistic and integrated ways of seeing, architectural conservation has its place – but always in relation to a set of social, cultural and economic factors and circumstances.

And finally, it is important to recognize that no matter how well or how much the architectural conservation expert may study and learn, that individual is rarely in charge of the key decisions in the conservation process. The key decisions about when to initiate a project, at what scale, for what purpose and in what way etc. are not the province of the architectural conservator, or of the architect. Rather, those key decisions – concerning what? (what kind of project? What kind of approach?) when? (when will the project take place? in what sequence will different phases of work be carried out?) how? (what will be the methods? guiding principles? etc.) and finally who? (which professionals will be involved? in what relationships? with whom?) are generally made in administrative systems by planners.

In the contemporary heritage world, where emphasis has switched in the last two decades from action and intervention to structures to “management” systems which govern processes of change within structures and in the variables in context around the structure, it is planners who decide when there is a “project”, and how that project will be framed; planners create the legal, institutional and economic support frameworks which support the work of the architectural conservator.

This widening of concern for what constitutes the heritage – and for the context in which it is judged, analysed and cared for – suggests the importance for those involved in architectural conservation to find ways to situate themselves meaningfully within this emerging bigger picture approach.

How can architectural conservation professionals adapt to the requirements of the big picture approach?

Contemporary architects working with conservation can respond to the changing locus of decision-making by moving consciously to work within interdisciplinary, and inter-sectoral contexts, in order to place their expertise where it will have most effect. In this way, the potential contribution of architectural conservation is best recognized by partners in the conservation process and the conditions necessary for effective architectural conservation inputs well established for all.

Equally, the move from concern with “intervention” to concern for “management” requires strengthened involvement by architects and architectural conservationists begin with different community “actors” and “stakeholders” in various phases of the decision making surrounding the future of heritage resources. Architects working in these contexts must take on the “facilitation” and “advocacy” skills which can bring attention, support and understanding to the technical, scientific and analytical skills they may bring to heritage projects.

In order to move in these directions, architects and architectural conservators must recognize for themselves the benefits that immersion within this larger frame will bring them, and how to fit their skills into these frameworks. The emerging demands that contemporary architects involved with conservation must show themselves adept at handling are noted below:

- There is growing demand in the conservation field for “big picture” (holistic) approach focussed on managing change. For example, there is growing interest in the value of a “cultural landscapes” approach (not just treating cultural landscapes as another heritage typology but as a way of seeing or understanding) . This has brought about approaches to conservation at all scales including that of the building which are as concerned with sustaining the dynamic processes that produce landscape (or building) features, as the features themselves. This approach has acquired sufficient acceptance now that UNESCO for example has begun to rename “historic cities” as “historic urban landscapes”. This offers an opportunity to architects concerned with conservation to bring to bear their long established concern for sustaining use and function in buildings while maintaining features.
- There is growing demand for the skills involved in managing in contemporary conservation what may be understood as processes of transformation in buildings and cities. This involves a more detached philosophical approach, one in which the architect can situate analysis and planning for intervention within a perceived con-

tinuum of successive phases of change on a site or structure. Architectural theory – theory developed to underlie this design process well equips architects to apply this detachment to conservation work.

- There is growing demand for those able to build decision making frameworks around the elusive and subjective interpretation of significance. We have been living in the world of “values based conservation”, at least, internationally, since the Australian Burra Charter of 1979 made explicit the need to identify cultural significance as the fulcrum point around which all heritage sensitive decision-making needed to develop. Most major jurisdictions in both western and eastern worlds have acknowledged the need to imbed decision-making in respect for the heritage values of a place, in one way or another – in legislation, in national or regional doctrine, or in commitment to preparing significance statements for heritage buildings. This has become the status quo with the adoption by the World Heritage Committee of this approach ten years ago, and the commitment to prepare “statements of outstanding universal value” for properties on the World Heritage List, and for use in their management planning. Those involved in architectural conservation need to show that their well developed capacity to respond to defined architectural values can be extended to the definition and use of values defined in other areas- historical, contextual (environmental), social.

Ongoing challenges to achieving effective architectural conservation

Any review of recent efforts to improve architectural conservation practice reveals a number of challenges confronting those working with architectural conservation:

- Ultimately, the need to integrate concern for values in other areas than architecture requires that architects and architectural conservators develop skills in social sciences, in order to deal with subjective interpretation of heritage values. This may be a field that architectural conservators need to include in their basic training programmes.
- There is a need to confront the continuing failure of intervention based doctrine (e.g., the Vienna Memorandum, 2005) to improve decision making frameworks for managing heritage. The Vienna Memorandum, for example, born out of the desire to improve analysis of efforts to insert contemporary architecture within historic districts, returns to principles stated first in the UNESCO Nairobi Recommendation of 1976 on Historic Towns, articulating what considerations “appropriate” interventions might take into account, but not proposing a process suitable for fitting interventions within long term development processes. Architectural conservators need to be asking how best to articulate the modern principles of process oriented sustainable management, rather than just those that might apply to isolated interventions.
- There is also a need to confront the failure of the architectural conservation movement to link adequately with “sustainability” initiatives in contemporary conservation work. North America and western Europe have adopted “green” renovation standards which reward the sustainable operations of new and existing buildings, but give little credit to the contribution of traditional building systems to long term sustainability. The imbedded energy of existing construction materials and the

savings occasioned by the performance of traditional technologies, if recognized, can reduce the tendency of green initiatives intent on demonstrating operational sustainability to reduce the needless destruction of important heritage fabric and values. Architectural conservators need to be attempting to define systems for sustainability which take into account both the long term operating characteristics of the structures they adapt but also the inherent pro-sustainability qualities of these structures.

- There is also a need in the architectural conservation field to strengthen the ethical treatment approaches which have grown up around “appropriate treatment” for heritage structures, but not about professional responsibilities to the larger sense of heritage in the heritage management systems now emerging. This involves clarifying the focus of ethical responsibility of those involved in conservation work – the client paying for the intervention? the public and their interest in survival of heritage in meaningful ways? the heritage itself? In this larger framework of heritage definition, and broadly focussed heritage management, it is important that architectural conservators are able to clarify whose interests their efforts are meant to serve.

Key challenges in strengthening architectural conservation?

In conclusion, there are a number of key challenges for those involved in architectural conservation to pick up and integrate in any efforts to strengthen the place of architectural conservation in heritage decision-making. These are detailed below:

- It is critically important to bring architects and architectural conservators into contact with those from other disciplines and other sectors, and to work with them as equals in the decision making process. This necessarily involves efforts to place architectural conservation activity within a well defined, well balanced, fully interdisciplinary, inter-sectoral and integrated approach to conservation education and training.
- Equally, it is important to confront the degree to which the processes of engagement now open to architects and architectural conservators, prepare such professionals to act as “specialists” or “generalists”. Where once heritage professionals were called upon to act as “expert” specialists, today the emphasis has moved to involvement of such professionals as “generalists” capable of assisting the facilitation and negotiation of solutions suitable to all involved, including community stakeholders. Architectural conservators need to define their educational and training goals in terms of their capacity to act as generalists.
- Finally, it is important for architects and architectural conservators in defining their approaches and beliefs, to confront the nature (and existence) of a possible conservation/ restoration discipline in which they could situate their efforts. This question requires such professionals to ask a number of key questions:
 - Is there an emerging discipline of conservation within which architectural conservation might have a place?
 - What are the principal constituents of this approach? Is this approach (this discipline) set inside architecture? Or outside architecture, but inclusive of architecture?

- If these efforts are part of a newly building discipline, how will this discipline be defined? What are the core requirements for establishing a discipline? Is it enough to define shared ethics? Is it necessary to define educational qualifications for practitioners? Who will decide?

Final words

The broad conclusion of this paper is to suggest that efforts to improve the effectiveness of architectural conservation need to be rooted in recognition of the importance of linking architectural conservation methods and approaches to their appropriate place in the emerging inter-disciplinary heritage conservation field.