

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The Recent Past Comes of Age. 20th-Century Heritage: Agency, Challenges and Motivations

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18 years after the beginning of the 21st century, research on the signification and conservation of the cultural legacy of the previous century has become a mature debate in the heritage field: the unavoidable passing of time has enabled the chronological distance that orthodox scholarship demanded for objective evaluation. Once this prerequisite is fulfilled, it is an appropriate moment to reflect on who the main agents responsible for this change were; how they achieved this normalisation; and most importantly, with which purpose the 20th century is being finally heritagised. The main goal of this Special Issue of *Built Heritage* is to cast light on these three important questions, through seven contributions from international scholars presenting a rich variety of answers.

Agency

The early struggle of citizens and scholars advocating for the conservation of 20th-century heritage started in the streets as a contestation for urban renewal demolitions during the 1960s in Europe and the United States. Images such as those of Jane Jacobs demonstrating shoulder to shoulder with Philip Johnson against the demolition of Penn Station in New York City in 1963 later resonated in university and institutional departments, gaining incremental momentum more than one generation afterwards with the highlight of the creation of DOCOMOMO (which stands for Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement) in Eindhoven in 1988. Since then, agents have proliferated in all fields, places and extensions: a process that remains open and growing, on which NGOs like DOCOMOMO and ICOMOS; private institutions like the Getty Conservation Institute; and public regional, national and international bodies like universities, governmental agencies and global leaders like UNESCO are working intensively in the last years.

Each from its own perspective, all the articles in this issue reflect about who these main characters have been in diverse times and geographical locations. Of particular importance is the contribution from Song Zhang (Tongji University, China), presenting an exhaustive report of the situation in China after the recent advancements in listing, that analyses its institutional dimension. This article will for sure constitute an exceptional reference, due to the novelty and limited international knowledge about the conservation of the recent past in China. Adding to this insight, this issue of *Built Heritage* is also bringing a much needed critical vision on agency, requested for the success in the appraisal of heritage. In this sense, Carlos Eduardo Comas' (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil) paper reflects about the roles played by architects and conservation officials in the vicissitudinous transformation of the rich modern architectural heritage of Brazil. Doing so, it constitutes a much valuable piece questioning the certainties of regulations and conventions, and claiming for the creative spirit of innovation as a key for the continuity of the legacy of the 20th century. A comprehensive review of the state of the art is brought by Roberta Grignolo (Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland) through her contribution, where she introduces the readers to the ambitious extent of the Encyclopedia of 20th-Century Heritage Conservation: an initiative that has aimed to settle down a general and well informed overview about the situation in a wide international context, which is currently ongoing and that is promising with extraordinary results.

Challenges

The 20th century gained heritage acknowledgement due to a varied nature of initiatives; mainly oriented towards the

areas of documentation, conservation, protection and dissemination. Documentation efforts started from academic and scientific institutions, covering both geographical areas, building typologies and authors. Here, the expansion of the limits of heritage already identified by Françoise Choay in the 1990s (Choay 1992) applies to this field too: the symbolic 'centrality' that signifies either the masters of modern architecture like Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright; to monuments like the Ville Savoye in Poissy, the National Gallery in Berlin or the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and to territories like France, Germany and the United States, has given way to the emerging importance of 'peripheral' areas like mass housing, post-colonial contexts and indigenous modernities, about which recent scholarship is reflecting according to its depth and complexity.

Conservation has also gained systemisation due to a better knowledge of the material culture of the 20th century and a rising sensitivity towards the functional obsolescence of its architecture. The contribution from Susan MacDonald (Getty Conservation Institute, USA) offers an authoritative vision on the rigorous specific methods that the Getty Conservation Institute has defined and applied for two major masterpieces in California, such as the Eames House and the Salk Institute. Ana Tostões (Docomomo International, Portugal) brings her privileged insight about the current challenges on the conservation of modern masterpieces around the world like the Tugendhat House, the Crown Hall, the National Museum of Western Art and the Gulbenkian Foundation, pointing at both the specificity of responses and to the general need of a clear value assessment as a basis for sound conservation criteria. And also the 20th-century heritage is contributing to the growing popularity of participatory modes of urban conservation, exemplified in the *machizukuri* (Ariga 2017) that Paolo Scrivano (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China) and Marco Capitanio (Keio University, Japan) present for the case of the Hyuga Villa in Japan.

Protection has been one of the most controversial fronts due to its legal and economic implications. As the contributions in this Special Issue show, this field has also experienced a giant leap, with extensive listings that no longer include the iconic works that could be easily assimilated to traditional monuments like Gaudi's work in Barcelona, but also address the complexity of huge modern living ensembles like Brasilia, listed as UNESCO World Heritage since 1987, or the Berlin modernism housing estates, also in the same list since 2008. Carlos Eduardo Comas provides a clear example of how statutory

protection does not always guarantee the quality of heritage interventions. In a situation where the transference of experience and knowledge meets the difficulties of untranslatable legal frameworks, the experience of the Swiss project that Roberta Grignolo analyses in this Special Issue is a fundamental reference, particularly after the development of an extensive row of activities that included the celebration of several seminars and the publication of a reference study on legislation (Grignolo 2013).

The dissemination of 20th-century heritage is currently undergoing profound transformations. On the one hand we may recognise the good shape of traditional media like specialised exhibitions, with the sponsorship of major museums such as MoMA New York, the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine in Paris, and a broad spectrum of international to local cultural institutions defining their own visions of modernity, normally through consensual top-down perspectives. Simultaneously, the two last decades have been witness to the development of new initiatives on the Internet and social media, that benefit from ubiquitousness to favour the decolonisation of knowledge and the construction of a shared memory from the grassroots (Giaccardi 2012). Ana Tostões' article reflects on the effects of the digital era, posing important questions about the challenges in the appropriation of the most recent cultural heritage. Innovative experiences in education, and particularly with children, constitute also an important field of development, which has been addressed until now from relatively marginal positions. Nevertheless, this is gaining relevance in recent times mainly with the support of regional institutions like the Iberian section of DOCOMOMO, which reflected on the strategies about education in the values of the Modern Movement in its 8th Conference (DOCOMOMO Ibérico, 2015), as well as through the educational initiatives developed by museums and a growing body of professionals in this field at a local level.

Motivations

The last question to pose is 'why', asking with which aims all this rising mobilisation around the 20th-century heritage currently unfolds. Early advocacy started as the expression of local conflicts of power, and the first studies on the heritage signification of recent architecture shared a similar spirit of contestation emanating from the ivory towers of academia. Nevertheless, and once the limits of heritage have been expanded, greater interests have come into play. Identification with the civic values of progress and social improvement supposedly embedded in modern architecture has undoubtedly motivated a highly active

scope of researchers and institutions in Europe and the United States, generally identified with the political left, despite the association of modern architecture with conflictive pasts, such as European fascism, or colonialism in Africa and Asia. But in the last years a sense of appropriation of the cultural capital of 20th-century architecture is prevailing as the motivation for the interest of a rising number of real estate developers and the creative industries that represent the interests of transnational global capital. Yi-Wen Wang (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China) and Xiangyi Wang (Urban Space Planning and Architectural Design Co., China) reflect on this important issue in their study about the association between heritage conservation and the creative industries in Shanghai, particularly dissecting the changing role of stakeholders in what constitutes a genuine proving ground for heritage not only in China, but also internationally.

Last but not least, it is important to reflect on how in the recent years, 20th-century heritage has also become a battlefield for the expression of national identities. It is being appropriated as a symbol of modernisation and cosmopolitanism since the Opening Up and Reform Years of China. Its acceptance has also been a key to smoothen the assimilation of the recent history of countries like Spain. But at the same time, modernism has been rejected as the expression of bygone political eras, as the controversial demolition of the monumental and everyday symbols in East Germany after the Reunification in 1990 showed. The variety of perspectives brought to this Special Issue aims to advance on this open question, knowing also that it is subject to complex social and economic factors reaching well beyond the scope of its pages. It also aims to depict the extent of the transculturation and hibridation that characterised the 20th century, about which the article by Paolo Scrivano and Marco Capitanio beautifully reflects using the case of the Hyuga Villa, and that Susan MacDonald presents on her insight to the Thematic Framework developed by the GCI in cooperation with ICOMOS.

100 years encompassing modernisation and the contestation of modernisation; the liberating aspirations of cosmopolitanism and the miseries of colonialism; the brightness of social reform and the painfulness of exile. The actuality of 20th-century heritage is as intense as ever; not only for what it left, but most importantly, for what it still treasures for the future.

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