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Roundtable VII: Time and Unlisted Heritage

Hedieh Arfa, Uta Pottgiesser

Date: 28 November 2019, 11.00

Moderator: Uta Pottgiesser (TU Delft, The Netherlands)

Catalysts:

Prof. Wessel de Jonge (TU Delft, The Netherlands)
Susan Macdonald (Getty Conservation Institute, USA)
Kurt C. Reinhardt (Stiftung Zeche Zollverein, Germany)
Prof. Ana Tostoes (Tecnico/Docomomo International, Portugal)

Rapporteur:

Hedieh Arfa (TU Delft, The Netherlands)

INTRODUCTION

The roundtable wanted to look at specific developments in the built heritage of the last 100 years in order to compare the recent past with heritage from former periods. Its aim was to identify aspects and particularities that need further attention. The participants were asked to discuss how public awareness and responsibility can be increased as part of building culture and stakeholder involvement.

The 18 participants were experts with different disciplinary backgrounds ranging from preservation and conservation, urban planning, architecture, and design, to philosophy, from the following countries: Brazil, Dubai, Germany, Iran, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Singapore, Turkey, UK, and USA. Four catalysts were invited to present their case study contributions, which were further explored in the roundtable format based on questions that the moderator had prepared:

- 1 What are the peculiarities of modern heritage compared with older heritage?
- 2 Should modern heritage be listed and if so, which criteria should be applied in listing it?
- 3 With more than 1,000 inscriptions, the World Heritage List is perceived as a success. Since the 1970s the definition of cultural heritage has been extended. What is the role of modern heritage in the current discussion about World Heritage?
- 4 How could more everyday heritage profit from listed (World) heritage?

CONTRIBUTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The contributions of the catalysts focused on modern built heritage from different professional perspectives, and different geographic and political contexts.

Ana Tostoes believes that the differences between older heritage and modern heritage are not so great except when we talk about materiality (concrete, steel, plastic) and the influence of mass production. There is a need for very specific, scientific research concerning how to preserve constructions, materials, and technologies. The conceptual approach to both older and modern heritage is similar. So there is not such a big difference. She argued that modern heritage should be listed as well, because it's very important to increase public awareness of the value of modern buildings and sites.

Wessel de Jonge believes that there are some differences between modern heritage and older heritage. He explained his ideas using the example of the Van Nelle Factory as one of the few buildings on the World Heritage List that also has an economic life. Because it is privately owned and has a specific use, it is not a tourist destination. He then referred to larger groups of buildings such as social housing estates, which are accorded value due to their enormous volume and social relevance. But dealing with them is very delicate and challenging. Educating the community has a significant role to play in their maintenance and reuse. Wessel added that as an architect and teacher he tries to teach architecture students to learn to make decisions: "We very much deal with what to keep and with value assessment. I try to teach my students to also look at those things that can go. Because the things that can go without destroying the essential values of the building can open up opportunities for new developments". However, as a heritage conservationist, it is not easy to follow that path. Wessel also thinks that it is very important for businesses to be involved with heritage buildings, since it is not possible—not affordable—to turn all such buildings into museums. The pragmatic approach to the economic and social values of the building should be considered.

Susan Macdonald stated that the approach to preservation of modern heritage may be the same, but the solutions are different. She explained that one of the things that listing does is to focus attention on places that are unappreciated. In order to identify which places are important enough to preserve, it is important to have a framework of common 20th-century-themes. Such a framework would enable governments and organizations to start from a certain point of knowledge about modern heritage.

Kurt C. Reinhardt used the example of the World Heritage Site Zollverein in the Ruhr area in Germany to illustrate goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals (sustainable cities and communities). He explained the mindset behind the project: the masterplan of this industrial site applies the idea of reframing, reusing, rethinking, recycling, re-evaluating, restructuring, and reducing. The extensive reuse of the former coalmine site has transformed it from an area without tourists into the second most visited tourist destination in Germany. Like Wessel, he believes that heritage buildings can only be preserved by reusing them, otherwise it would not be economically feasible to preserve them.

During the roundtable the discussion highlighted the following points:

- Different countries have different definitions of modern heritage and the Modern Movement, and some still have to define the criteria. Instead of looking only at the international level it is important to define a methodology that can be adapted to different countries according to their cultures.
- Non-appreciation and demolition of modern buildings are common concerns in many countries.
- Adaptive Reuse can be very challenging and contradictory when deciding between novelty and integrity value in the intervention in the modern buildings.
- The justification for the importance of a site being listed was discussed. It was explained that different places have different legislation, and it is very important to consider that. That is why it is important to look at heritage impact assessments, which are not used in all countries.

- The use of social media and other tools is very important in raising general appreciation and awareness of modern heritage. Places that are not listed are usually left to themselves.
- Research and rethinking of modern heritage will reveal the other aspects of modernism. A machine for living: the Modern Movement's treatment of human beings as elements of machinery.
- Migration and mobility change the preservation of modern heritage because the different nationalities in a neighborhood may not value a building or an area in the same way.

CONCLUSIONS

Peculiarities of modern heritage compared with older heritage are: typology, functionality, materiality, context, etc. A summary of those aspects has been developed within the thematic framework of ICOMOS 20C (Developing a Historic Thematic Framework to Assess the Significance of Twentieth-Century Cultural Heritage 2011) and will be updated and published soon.

Modern heritage should be listed. The conceptual approach may be the same as for older heritage, but the impact of listing should also be explored. It should help to raise awareness and recognition among ordinary people and experts in a bottom-up approach. Context is very important and building and context should always be considered as a whole.

Modern heritage nominated for World Heritage listing often becomes iconic and self-focused instead of serving as a role model for more everyday modern heritage.