World Heritage on the Move: Abandoning the Assessment of Authenticity to Meet the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: At a time when climate change, conflicts, disasters, and other global crises and challenges are increasingly affecting World Heritage properties, the utility of conservation assessment standards must be rethought. This article proposes abandoning the assessment of authenticity to treat properties less as "things", deemed authentic or not, and more as evolving "processes" that embrace continuity and compatible change, which, it is argued, helps meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, namely climate change mitigation and adaptation; building back better after conflicts, disasters, or pandemics; and, ultimately, achieving sustainable development goals. Drawing on policy analysis and a wide range of literature, the article explains why authenticity is not a useful concept and why the idea of "heritage as process" is more relevant to the contemporary world. It shows how this idea can be put into effect and linked to Outstanding Universal Value, integrity, protection and management, which are already requirements in UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. In doing so, it contributes to aligning the implementation of the Convention with that of the global agendas of our time.

Keywords: world heritage; authenticity; continuity; change; compatibility; integrity; global agendas; climate change; building back better; sustainable development goals

1. Introduction

The World Heritage Convention is an international legal instrument for the protection of cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) [1]. OUV is not defined in the text of the Convention, but it is understood as the threshold for the inscription of properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List. As of 2020, 194 countries (States Parties) have ratified this Convention, in which the notion of "authenticity" does not appear. According to the Operational Guidelines for its implementation, the assessment of authenticity—also known as meeting the "test" or "conditions" of authenticity—applies only to cultural properties and to the cultural aspects of mixed properties [2] (paragraph 9), [3] (paragraphs 79–86) (see also [4] (p. 61)). It still reflects an outdated understanding of heritage as a thing, rooted in the Venice Charter, especially with regard to reconstruction [3] (paragraph 86) (see also [5]). The Operational Guidelines do not pin down what the term "authenticity" means, but the World Heritage Committee revised the Operational Guidelines in 2005 to expand its attributes and to explain what OUV means: "cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity"—a definition that remains today [3] (paragraph 49). Given that the Operational Guidelines can be revised over time to reflect new knowledge, this article proposes abandoning the assessment of authenticity to treat properties less as things, deemed authentic or not, and more as evolving processes that embrace continuity and compatible change, which, it is argued, helps meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Before discussing these challenges, it is important to clarify from the outset that assessing authenticity, when heritage is treated as a thing, is not as straightforward as one

may assume. The Ship of Theseus, also known as Theseus' Paradox, is a case in point. World Heritage experts often mention this case when tracing the roots of authenticity (e.g., see [6,7]). Theseus, a hero of Greek mythology and founder of Athens, won naval battles and killed the Minotaur. The Athenians kept his ship in the harbor as a memorial, which:

> had to be maintained in a seaworthy state, for, as remembered by Plato, in return for Theseus' successful mission, the Athenians pledged to honour Apollo every year henceforth: they sent a religious mission to the island of Delos [. . .] on this very ship to pay their fealty to the god. Therefore, in order to preserve the ship, any wood that wore out or rotted was replaced. Over time it became unclear just how much of the original ship actually remained, giving rise to a philosophical question on whether it should be considered the same ship or not. [7] (p. 27)

Theseus' Paradox is an ongoing discourse (e.g., see [8,9]). It raises questions not only of identity, but also authenticity. Many questions come to mind. For instance, this author would ask: Where exactly does authenticity reside? Does it reside in the ship's physical fabric? If so, when do changes made to the fabric result in "loss of authenticity"—after one wooden plank is replaced, after half the planks, or after all the planks? Given that the rotten timber planks were replaced with new and stronger timber planks according to Plutarch [10], which is a compatible material that respects the form and design of the ship, would this replacement render the ship "more authentic" than if an incompatible material were used instead? Is a restored ship that continues to perform its function "less authentic" than an untouched ship that lost its function to the natural cycle of decay? Is an untouched ship, no longer in use, left to rot in the harbor, "sufficiently authentic"? Whose assessment of authenticity matters—the Athenians' (who maintained the ship) or the conservation experts' (centuries later)? Is an assessment of authenticity valid for all times?

People from different geo-cultural contexts or disciplinary backgrounds will provide different answers because such questions do not have entirely objective and clear-cut answers. In fact, the notion of "authenticity" itself remains problematic. The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) recently published a collection of papers in which experts admit that "authenticity is perhaps the conservation profession's most nebulous term", especially because it is not "directly translatable" into many languages, for example in Asia where some professionals "rely upon inexact synonyms" [11] (pp. 12, 14). With regard to World Heritage, they acknowledge that authenticity is often "the weakest part of any SOUV" [12] (p. 21)—i.e., Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, which justifies the inscription of a property on the World Heritage List and serves as the key reference for its protection and management [3] (paragraph 51).

The ambiguity surrounding the assessment and meaning of authenticity neither strengthens the *credibility* of the World Heritage List nor ensures the effective *conservation* of properties in accordance with the first and second strategic objectives of the World Heritage Committee [3] (paragraph 26(1)(2)). The Convention cannot actually be successfully implemented worldwide if a clear and shared understanding of authenticity is still lacking among States Parties, conservation professionals, site managers, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples.

It is therefore not surprising that experts continue to question and discuss whether authenticity is "really a useful concept" in the World Heritage system [12] (p. 22). The current article puts forward a policy proposal that contributes to this discussion and to a fruitful international exchange of ideas. It proposes abandoning the assessment of authenticity and, instead, embracing the idea of "heritage as process", which is more useful and relevant to the contemporary world, as it will be shown later. This idea is rooted in critical heritage theory (e.g., see [13–15]) and can be summarized as follows:

> "heritage" is not a "thing", it is not a "site", building or other material object. While these things are often important, they are not in themselves heritage. [. . .] the physical fabric [. . .] is not the full story of what heritage may be. Heritage

[. . .] is a cultural process [. . .]. What is important, however, is that this is a process that is more about change than cultural stasis. It is a process [. . .] in which [. . .] values are rewritten and redefined for the needs of the present. [15] (pp. 44, 273)

Accordingly, change and continuity are integral to heritage, which should be understood as an evolving, dynamic, process in which things and values may or may not stay the same depending on "the needs of the present". To demonstrate the applicability of this idea, one may apply it to the Ship of Theseus. This thought exercise raises the questions of what, how, when, why, and who to better understand "the full story of what heritage may be". In simple words, (what) the rotten planks of the ship were replaced with new and stronger planks (how) through human intervention (when) whenever it was necessary to keep the ship in good physical condition (why) because the Athenians (who) continued using the ship to pay their fealty to the god Apollo, as remembered by Plato. A noteworthy detail is that the Athenians changed the planks to continue using the ship. The attribute they needed to retain (in their present) was use. What appears to be meaningful is the *continuity*—not *authenticity*—of use. Therefore, assessing the ship's authenticity in terms of use or material or other attributes is redundant given that the value of the ship appears to come from the *continuity* of use. This is an important point because it suggests that the attributes mentioned in the Operational Guidelines [3] (paragraph 82) should be linked to continuity (and change) rather than authenticity if the idea of "heritage as process" is embraced. To return to the ship, one may add that the Athenians were thoughtful because they selected a *compatible* material to respect the form and design of the ship (timber) and they were *honest* about their interventions because the public understood that the ship had changed (otherwise we would not know this story).

Compatibility and honesty, it must be noted, are important conservation principles. For example, the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada require that interventions be "compatible with the historic place and identifiable", clarifying that "the main reason for making interventions identifiable is honesty" [16] (pp. 22, 32). The principle of honesty, also known as absence of deception or legibility of intervention, helps people understand the construction history of a place, for example by using "subtle visual means" or "date stamping" [16] (p. 32). Documentation, record keeping, and dissemination of information (e.g., informational panels, guided tours, publications) can be other means. In fact, the principle of honesty is embedded in the Venice Charter, i.e., the foundational doctrinal text of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). According to the Charter, "any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition", "Replacements [. . .] must be distinguishable from the original", and "The material used for integration should always be recognizable" [5] (Articles 9, 12, 15). "Distinct", "distinguishable" and "recognizable" suggest that interventions should be identifiable to maintain honesty so that people can understand the construction history of a place (i.e., what came before or after what) to prevent them from thinking that new work is original.

The principle of honesty can be traced back to John Ruskin, a preservation purist who rejected architectural deceits such as new work made to appear old or materials made to appear different from what they actually were. In his view, "The rule will apply to all alike, that whatever is pretended, is wrong" [17] (p. 89). He also discussed truth, which he associated with the age of a building or "that golden stain of time" [17] (p. 340), in other words, the stamp of truth on the original fabric of a building. However, emerging contemporary theories of conservation, contrary to Ruskin's classical theory, are not characterized by a close adherence to truth or authenticity, but rather to people and their needs in the present and the future. The spotlight has shifted towards the people for whom heritage is, and will be, meaningful, valuable, beneficial, or useful. This shift has brought to the forefront the concept of cultural significance. The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, also known as the Burra Charter—in which the notion of authenticity is not mentioned—is noteworthy in this regard [18,19]. The Burra Charter, however,

requires that interventions, whether new work or reconstruction, be "identifiable" [18] (Articles 20.2, 22.2). Accordingly, conservation is not an activity whose ultimate goal is to pursue authenticity (see also [20,21]), but it is one that maintains honesty in intervention work to facilitate the understanding of a heritage place, its construction history, and its cultural significance.

Honesty also echoes "integrity" [22]. This notion does not appear in the Burra Charter, but it does in the Venice Charter: "The sites of monuments must be the object of special care in order to safeguard their integrity" [5] (Article 14); however, its meaning here is rather "wholeness and intactness" as noted in the Operational Guidelines [3] (paragraph 88). It is noteworthy that integrity (not authenticity) was initially recommended, in 1976, by ICOMOS Secretary General Ernest Allen Connally for the nomination of cultural properties for inclusion in the World Heritage List [23] (Annex III). However, Raymond Lemaire, President of ICOMOS at the time and one of the co-authors of the Venice Charter (with Paul Philippot and others), "proposed changing *integrity* to *authenticity*" [24] (p. 12, emphasis in the original). The World Heritage Committee approved Lemaire's proposal and adopted authenticity in 1977, which explains why cultural properties had to "meet the test of authenticity in design, materials, workmanship and setting" as noted in the Operational Guidelines until the year 2005 [2] (paragraph 9). These four attributes were among the six *attributes of integrity* recommended by Connally [23] (Annex III). The other two were "function" and "condition."

It is worth clarifying here that the World Heritage concept of authenticity was born from the American integrity recommended by Connally in 1976 and defined as "the ability of a property to convey its significance" according to Herb Stovel [24] (pp. 11, 12). When integrity became an additional requirement in the Operational Guidelines in 2005 for the nomination of cultural properties for inscription on the World Heritage List, Stovel [25] (p. 21) suggested that "authenticity may be understood as the ability of a property to convey its significance over time, and integrity understood as the ability of a property to secure or sustain its significance over time". In other words, Stovel maintained the initial American definition of integrity for authenticity, and gave integrity another definition. However, one may argue that if a property is able to secure or sustain its significance, it is, logically, able to convey it in the first place. Thus, integrity may be understood as the ability of a property to both convey and secure/sustain its significance—thereby rendering authenticity redundant. In fact, the word "convey" appears in paragraphs 88(b) and 89 about integrity in the Operational Guidelines [3]. A simple observation, but an important one nonetheless because it shows that this article's proposal to abandon the assessment of authenticity (and keep integrity) is indeed possible.

Although Stovel defended authenticity, especially when he became ICOMOS Secretary General in the early 1990s [24,25] (see also [26,27]), other experts questioned its validity. Their remarks are of particular relevance to this article. Michel Parent, ICOMOS Vice President and Rapporteur of the World Heritage Committee in 1979, had already noted that authenticity judgements are relative because "the nature of a material, its finishing, its structural use, and its expressive use, the very nature of the civilization which built the building [. . .] are all different factors according to which the idea of authenticity can be understood differently" [28] (p. 19). Moreover, Léon Pressouyre, ICOMOS advisor in the 1980s, openly "objected to the use of the term 'authenticity'" in a meeting of experts "criticizing the World Heritage Committee's inconsistent interpretation of what he called a 'European criterion of authenticity'" as noted by Christina Cameron [27] (p. 98). The fact that not all experts agreed with Stovel that authenticity is a key factor for the successful implementation of the Convention, due to its inconsistent interpretation, shows that this article's proposal to abandon it merits consideration.

The issue of cultural relativism and diversity, raised by Parent, was later acknowledged in the Nara Document on Authenticity. Intangible attributes, derived from Article 13 of the Nara Document [29] and from the proceedings of an expert meeting held in Zimbabwe [30], were included in the Operational Guidelines in 2005 to broaden the range (attributes)

of what authenticity might be taken to mean [31] (paragraph 82, Annex 4) (see also [3]). However, the Nara Document was not without critics. For instance, Guo Zhan, an expert from China who attended the 1994 Nara Conference, pointed out that it does not provide practical guidance. In an interview with the Canada Research Chair on Built Heritage, Zhan said: "When I check the document, I have found almost nothing except diversity, the importance of diversity. But for the standards, for the principles, for the methods, approach of conservation, nothing . . . instead of anything from the Venice Charter" [32] (p. 89). Moreover, scholars have shown that both the Venice Charter and the Nara Document are far from perfect [33,34] and do not actually define "authenticity". The Operational Guidelines do not pin down what this term means either despite the many paragraphs dedicated to it [3] (paragraphs 79–86).

Scholars who attended sessions of the World Heritage Committee over many years observed that delegates often base their decisions on "what feels authentic rather than on the basis of clear guidelines" [35] (p. 269), which, of course, undermines the credibility of the World Heritage List. Decisions must not be based on feelings, but on "objective and scientific considerations" [3] (paragraph 23) as per the text of the Convention [1] (Preamble, paragraph 8).

Despite the ambiguity surrounding the assessment and meaning of authenticity, and despite the fact that it undermines, rather than strengthens, the credibility of the World Heritage List, it remains a requirement. The only scholar who has explicitly argued for removing it from the Operational Guidelines to improve consistency and clarity in World Heritage policy and practice is the present author. Previous work published in the journal *Heritage* has shown that its removal can refine the standard format of a Statement of OUV and bridge the culture/nature divide by adopting one common approach to integrity applicable to all properties [36,37]. This article also proposes abandoning the assessment of authenticity in keeping with previous work, but for a different purpose, namely to help meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

2. Methodology

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the author draws on policy analysis and a wide range of credible sources of information—notably the Operational Guidelines; the decisions of the World Heritage Committee; meeting reports and other reports prepared by experts; policy documents such as the World Heritage Climate Change Policy and the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy; ICOMOS Charters; UNESCO Recommendations; global agendas; and academic peer-reviewed publications. Section 3 explains why abandoning the assessment of authenticity and, instead, treating World Heritage properties as evolving processes that embrace continuity and compatible change can help meet the contemporary real-world challenges of: climate change mitigation and adaptation; building back better after conflicts, disasters, or pandemics; and, ultimately, achieving sustainable development goals. Section 4 outlines a way forward. It shows how the idea of "heritage as process" can be put into effect and linked to OUV, integrity, protection and management, which are already requirements in the Operational Guidelines. In doing so, it contributes to aligning the implementation of the World Heritage Convention with that of the global agendas of our time. Section 5 highlights why this policy proposal is timely and useful.

3. Results

3.1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Climate change poses threats to heritage places worldwide [38]. Rainfall increase, flooding, sea level rise, hurricanes, drought, desertification, erosion, coral bleaching, glacier melting, frequent wildfires, species migration, and loss of biodiversity are some of its devastating consequences. In addition to its impacts on tangible heritage, whether cultural or natural, climate change can also adversely affect intangible heritage by forcing local communities and Indigenous Peoples to modify their living conditions, habitats, and traditions. For example, the millennia-old traditions of the Inuit People of Canada are

"already being altered because of the warming Arctic, and (they) face the possibility of having to completely reinvent what it means to be Inuit" [39] (p. 158).

The World Heritage Convention was adopted before climate change emerged as a global crisis; however, the Convention does make references to some of its effects, such as "changes in water level, floods and tidal waves, calamities and cataclysms" [1] (Article 11.4). The threats posed by climate change were brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee in 2005 by a group of concerned organizations and individuals. For this reason, the Committee requested the establishment of a working group of experts tasked with preparing a report and a strategy on the matter [40,41]. The Committee subsequently endorsed the Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties [42], also known as World Heritage Climate Change Policy. Moreover, the Committee revised the Operational Guidelines, adding that elements of an effective management system could include an assessment of the vulnerabilities of a property to climate change [3] (paragraphs 111(d), 118, 118bis).

In December 2019, the World Heritage Centre launched an online consultation to gather feedback with a view to updating the Policy Document as per the Committee's decision [43] (point 16). The Policy Document is currently being updated and will be presented to the Committee at its extended 44th session in 2021 [44] (p. 2). Of particular relevance to this article is the fact that authenticity is barely addressed in the Policy Document [42] and that the questionnaire of the online consultation and the summary of the results do not even mention it [45]. A simple observation, but an important one nonetheless because it shows that protecting the authenticity of World Heritage properties from climate change impacts is not what matters. The emphasis is rather placed on climate change mitigation and, particularly, adaptation.

In simple words, mitigation implies that properties need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, such as improve energy efficiency in buildings or expand transportation options to provide alternatives to vehicle use. Adaptation implies that properties need to reduce their vulnerability and build resilience, such as upgrade infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events or improve flood defense systems. In other words, properties need to accommodate *change.* World Heritage Cities in particular need to become more environmentally conscious, low-carbon, and resilient. The question this raises is not whether change is a threat to authenticity, but whether change is *compatible* [46]. Some properties are trying to become more climate compatible, such as the City of Quito in Ecuador, the first property inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1978 [47]. Mitigating, and adapting to, climate change and developing a city or area simultaneously can be called "climate compatible development", which is gaining momentum in Quito [48,49] (p. 149) and other World Heritage Cities—none of which show a concern for authenticity according to a report prepared by the World Bank [50]. *Continuity* can also contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. For example, continued learning from Indigenous or traditional knowledge systems and practices, which often use locally sourced natural materials, can lessen the use of new materials that require high energy consumption in their production and transportation, thereby keeping emissions low (e.g., see [51] (pp. 2, 3)), and continued learning from earlier interventions can help develop effective adaptation strategies in the present (e.g., see [52] (pp. 110, 111)). Abandoning the assessment of authenticity and, instead, treating properties as evolving processes that embrace *continuity* and *compatible change* can therefore help meet the challenge of climate change mitigation and adaptation, which is this article's proposal.

While it is important to retain the integrity and OUV of these properties as much as possible when intervening to mitigate and adapt to climate change, scholars predict that "some form of heritage loss, particularly in coastal contexts, appears to be inevitable" [53] (p. 2). Sea level rise, shoreline erosion, and extreme weather events are some of the consequences of climate change in coastal contexts. Other serious consequences are migration, displacement, and relocation when people have not been able to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change—hence, "loss and damage" [54] (p. 187). "Loss and damage" should

be the third pillar of climate change policy following mitigation and adaptation—all of which are addressed in the Paris Agreement adopted by Parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December 2015 [55]. This third pillar is not addressed in the current World Heritage Climate Change Policy [42], but it is elsewhere, most notably in a comprehensive report prepared by the ICOMOS Climate Change and Heritage Working Group. Of particular relevance to this article is the fact that the report admits "climate change will have unprecedented impact on what is now considered to be good conservation practice. [. . .] Many conservation management and assessment standards, such as the constructs of authenticity and integrity will need to be rethought" [56] (p. 16). One may argue that they need to be rethought *soon* not only to address climate change, but also other crises and challenges, such as the ones discussed below.

3.2. Building Back Better after Conflicts, Disasters, or Pandemics

Armed conflicts and natural hazard-related disasters have recently damaged and destroyed many World Heritage properties, for example in Iraq, Mali, Syria, Yemen, and Nepal. In response, the World Heritage Committee requested the development of new guidance directed at reconstruction [43] (points 11–13). To meet this request, many international conferences, meetings, and workshops were held in different parts of the world. Most notable among these is the International Conference on Reconstruction: The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery, which was organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the State Party of Poland in 2018. Its purpose was to develop and provide "guidelines" to the World Heritage Committee [43] (point 13) (see also [57,58]); however, instead, a recommendation, known as the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage, was prepared [59].

With regard to authenticity, the Warsaw Recommendation [59] (pp. 3, 5) echoes paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines, which reads as follows: "In relation to authenticity, the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture" [3] (paragraph 86). This guideline maintains the logic of the Venice Charter [5] because it dismisses the idea that authenticity may reside in function, use, spirit, feeling, traditions, and other intangible attributes as per the logic of the Nara Document [29] (Article 13). This creates confusion and inconsistency when assessing authenticity. If "authenticity may be understood as the ability of a property to convey its significance over time" as suggested by Herb Stovel [25] (p. 21), and, if, for example, the significance of a reconstructed historic building comes from the recovery and continuity of its *function*, then basing authenticity judgements on the accuracy of its *physical fabric* or on the *exceptional circumstances* surrounding its reconstruction would be irrelevant. This is not to say that documentation is unimportant or that reconstruction is always justifiable, but to show that paragraph 86, which is in keeping with the logic of the Venice Charter, does not align with the rest of the paragraphs about authenticity in the Operational Guidelines, which are more in keeping with the logic of the Nara Document [3] (paragraphs 79-85, see also Annex 4). It is therefore not surprising that the decisions of the World Heritage Committee oscillate between Venice and Nara, showing little consistency and undermining the credibility of the World Heritage List (e.g., see [35]).

Although the Warsaw Recommendation puts forward important principles, these actually work against meeting the test/conditions of authenticity as set out in paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines. For example, the Recommendation supports the principles of "build back better" (BBB) and the use of "traditional knowledge and communal memories" associated with a property to guide reconstruction if technical documentation is unavailable [59] (pp. 4, 7); however, paragraph 86, as presently worded, neither accommodates principles of BBB nor accepts reconstruction if documentation is unavailable [3]. This is an important observation because it suggests that changes to World Heritage reconstruction policy are on the horizon.

In fact, experts who attended the international conference in Warsaw agreed that changes are necessary. For instance, Christina Cameron noted "an amendment of paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines, revisions to the World Heritage resource manuals and the preparation of practical standards and guidelines" are needed [60] (p. 62). The Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre Mechtild Rössler and the former Deputy Director Lazare Eloundou Assomo reaffirmed that "we need a joint vision, with solid theoretical guidance, agreed principles and operational frameworks" [61] (p. 31). It is also worth noting here that one of the participants, Rohit Jigyasu, an expert on disaster risk management and BBB, discussed "Shedding the myth of authenticity in post disaster reconstruction of heritage" and introduced other considerations for sustainable recovery, such as improving the quality of life of people associated with heritage [62] (pp. 110–112).

BBB is a means to improving people's quality of life. It may include reconstruction, restoration, rehabilitation, new development, or improved services. It is Priority 4 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in March 2015 [63]. BBB avoids recreating the same vulnerabilities that existed before damage/destruction caused by armed conflicts and/or natural hazard-related disasters such as cyclones, earthquakes, fires, or floods. Some of its principles include building resilience, ensuring safety, improving living conditions, regenerating livelihoods, promoting equity, establishing stronger governance systems, as well as maintaining the sense of familiarity, belonging, and identity that people often need for a sustainable recovery [64] (p. 11). BBB does not necessarily entail using modern construction materials and techniques to rebuild damaged/destroyed properties. Local resources and traditional skills can also be used [65] (p. 213). The characteristics of the local context and the needs of people—i.e., what they need to *continue* (retain) and what they need to *change* (improve)—must be clearly understood to determine how to BBB. Failure to do so can adversely affect people and their heritage. The post-earthquake reconstruction and relocation of villages in Marathwada, India, is an example, where "It was found that the spatial plans for the relocated villages were totally incompatible with the villagers' 'way of life.' [. . .] The case brings out the importance of understanding traditional architecture, construction technology and settlement layout and skilfully incorporating it in the reconstruction so as to ensure social and cultural *compatibility* of the new environment. Equally important is [. . .] to reinforce *continuity* between past and present" [62] (pp. 97–99, emphasis added) (see also [66] (p. 217)).

One may deduce that it is rather the *loss of continuity* and the *loss of compatibility* that adversely affect people and their heritage than the *loss of authenticity* from reconstruction projects. One may also deduce that it is rather the concepts of continuity and compatibility that contribute to BBB. Although BBB does not (yet) appear in the Operational Guidelines, it does in significant UNESCO documents, such as the UNESCO–World Bank joint position paper, entitled Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery. The term "authenticity" is only mentioned twice, in passing, in this 60-page joint position paper [67] (pp. 38, 49). Its stated aim is not to safeguard the authenticity of cities, but "to help make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" [67] (p. 9). This is an aim that calls for continuity and change (that is compatible), especially when it comes to sustainability. In addition to conflicts and disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time of writing, is causing disruption in heritage management and adversely affecting cities and other World Heritage properties [68]. In this context, too, UNESCO urged building "back cities to be stronger, more sustainable, more resilient" and urged "safeguarding *continuity* in heritage values and identity" [69] (online, emphasis added). Therefore, this article's proposal to abandon the assessment of authenticity and, instead, treat properties as evolving processes that embrace *continuity* and *compatible change* is timely and relevant to the contemporary world. Not only does it help meet the challenge of BBB, but it also helps implement global agendas, notably the one discussed below.

3.3. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, is a plan of action to transform our world for the better by 2030 [70]. In simple words, it is about sustainability and transformation, which call for continuity and change. Its focus areas encompass 17 goals (SDGs) and 169 targets that are interconnected and universally applicable. They are grouped into 5Ps. "People, prosperity, and planet", which reflect the three dimensions of sustainable development—i.e., social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental protection—are complemented with "peace and partnership." The implementation of this ambitious agenda is the responsibility of local and national governments, including the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as BBB (which were discussed in the previous subsections of this article) are part of this agenda. Climate change is explicitly recognized as one of the greatest challenges of our time [70] (paragraph 14, see also SDG 13), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, which includes BBB, is explicitly mentioned [70] (SDG 11 target 11.b) (see also [63] (Priority 4)). The agenda also recognizes culture as a contributor to, and enabler of, sustainable development, and calls for strengthening "efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage" [70] (paragraph 36, SDG 11 target 11.4). This particular recognition is the result of UNESCO's advocacy [71].

Sustainable development is now integral to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. In addition to Goal 3 of the Strategic Action Plan for its implementation [72], the 20th General Assembly of States Parties adopted, in November 2015, a World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy, also known as the Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention [73] (see also [74]). The Operational Guidelines were subsequently revised to encourage States Parties to mainstream the principles of this Policy Document and those of the 2030 Agenda into management systems, for all types of properties, including their buffer zones and wider setting [3] (paragraphs 14bis, 15(o), 132.5). These revisions to the Operational Guidelines show that UNESCO is trying to align the implementation of the Convention with that of the 2030 Agenda, see also [75].

The problem, however, is that World Heritage concepts, such as authenticity, do not contribute to implementing this agenda because, in reality, it is not the authenticity of heritage that contributes to achieving SDGs; it is the *continuity* of heritage and its ability to adapt to *change*. For example, the continuity of building cultures and traditional knowledge systems can help build the resilience of cities and human settlements [70] (SDG 11) and help them mitigate and adapt to climate change [70] (SDG 13). In addition, SDGs should be localized [76]; in other words, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be *compatible* with local capacities and resources (e.g., human, institutional, financial) and local needs and priorities (e.g., cultural, social, economic).

Treating World Heritage properties as evolving processes that embrace *continuity* and *compatible change* can therefore help achieve SDGs at the local level. To clarify this point further, one may give the example of SDG 12 target 12.5, which connects the first and second subsections of this article. It reads as follows: "By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse" [70]. Conflicts and disasters usually generate material debris at a massive scale, which is waste. Material debris salvage, management, and reuse can help reconstruct destroyed buildings and contribute to climate change mitigation at the same time. For example, the Syrian civil war generated nearly 15 million tons of debris in Aleppo according to the World Bank [77] (p. 27). Under these circumstances, the reuse of salvaged materials in situ such as stone and timber in the reconstruction of the Old City of Aleppo World Heritage property, which are already compatible materials, can help mitigate climate change by reducing energy and transportation requirements to keep emissions low while ensuring "continuity of the

city's urban cultural heritage" and providing a much needed "sense of familiarity" to its residents [78] (pp. 90, 92).

Such circumstances are not so "exceptional" anymore, as noted in the Operational Guidelines [3] (paragraph 86), given that climate change, conflicts, disasters, COVID-19, and other factors/threats such as incompatible new development projects [79] are increasingly affecting World Heritage properties at an unprecedented global scale. A recent example is the Old City of Sana'a, a World Heritage property in Yemen, where a combination of factors, including war, heavy rains, floods, neglect, and poverty, has left the city in a devastated condition [80,81]. It is time to move beyond the assessment of authenticity and to *adopt more useful concepts* not only to support the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, but also to meet contemporary challenges and needs, including the need to BBB and to achieve SDGs for the benefit of present and future generations.

4. Discussion: The Way Forward

This article proposes abandoning the assessment of authenticity and, instead, treating World Heritage properties as evolving processes that embrace continuity and compatible change. This policy proposal echoes the idea of "heritage as process". It can become operational once the concepts of continuity and compatibility are put into effect and linked to OUV, integrity, protection and management, which are already requirements in the Operational Guidelines [3]. These concepts are more practical and easier to understand than authenticity and can be translated more accurately into many languages. This is important given that the Convention is ratified worldwide by 194 States Parties.

For clarification, continuity means "not stopping or not changing" [82]. This concept would apply to the values and attributes that people need to continue/retain over time—i.e., *material continuity* (tangible attributes) and/or *immaterial continuity* (intangible attributes). This may include, for example, traditions or traditional knowledge systems, which can help mitigate and adapt to climate change, or BBB, or achieve SDGs. Rights-holders, stakeholders, and decision-makers—e.g., local and Indigenous communities, States Parties, Advisory Bodies, World Heritage Committee—would have to identify these values and attributes. Their identification can be difficult, especially when many people are concerned, but dispute resolution methods and dialogue, for example, can help create common ground and mutual understanding of underlying needs to eventually build consensus (e.g., see [83,84]). On the other hand, compatibility means the ability to "exist together without problems" [85]. This concept would apply to proposals for *change,* such as interventions proposed by States Parties to mitigate or adapt to climate change, or BBB, or achieve SDGs whilst avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts (problems) on the identified values and attributes. Impact assessment studies and community stakeholder input, for example, can help make thoughtful decisions about proposals for change and determine compatibility (e.g., see [86]). Conservation, also known as "protection and management" in the Operational Guidelines [3], would therefore be understood as *management of continuity and compatible change* to *protect the integrity and significance* of a property (i.e., all its identified values and attributes, including OUV) or to *re-establish the integrity and significance* of a property if deemed necessary to meet contemporary needs after its damage/destruction (e.g., BBB). Accordingly, a property's Statement of OUV would be part of a more inclusive and comprehensive Statement of Significance. The latter would be the key reference for the protection and management of the property and would be open to periodic review because values may change over time, as explained, for example, in the Burra Charter [18,19].

It is worth noting here that the Burra Charter embraces the concept of compatibility [18] (Articles 1.11, 7.2) and the concept of continuity because it emphasizes the need to *retain* cultural significance [18] (Articles 1.4, 2.2, 6.4, 7.1, 10, 11, 15, 16, 20.1, 24.1, 27.1). As explained in the Introduction, this internationally recognized Charter does not mention the notion of authenticity, but it does uphold the principle of honesty given that "Reconstruction should be identifiable on close inspection or through additional interpretation" and "New work should be readily identifiable" [18] (Articles 20.2, 22.2). This principle can be

linked to integrity in the Operational Guidelines [3], under paragraph 88(c), noting that development projects or interventions should be compatible to prevent adverse effects and identifiable to maintain honesty. Visual indicators (e.g., date stamping) or other indicators that engage different human senses (e.g., story-telling in situ) should be considered on a case-by-case basis to make an intervention such as reconstruction identifiable or to distinguish it from the original.

Generally speaking, if we agree "there is no shame in abandoning a policy that turns out to be unsuccessful or counterproductive" [87] (p. 195), we can also agree that the assessment of authenticity could be abandoned for the same reason. This article has shown that keeping it is counterproductive because it does not help meet contemporary real-world challenges.

Abandoning the assessment of authenticity does not diminish the impact that the Nara Document [29] had on the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. One may argue that the Nara Document was especially useful because it broadened the Operational Guidelines' initial focus on the *material continuity* that was privileging cultural heritage built with durable materials such as stone, mostly in Europe, to include in the World Heritage List cultural heritage built with less durable ones, such as earth and wood in other regions, for example Africa or Asia, where people attach value to *immaterial continuity*—hence, the addition of traditions, spirit, feeling, use, function, and other intangible attributes in the Operational Guidelines. In fact, the notion of "continuity" appears in paragraph 83 of the Operational Guidelines [3]; moreover, as shown in recent research, it is of greater practical utility than authenticity [88]. For instance, it can facilitate the application of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach [88].

Adopting this author's policy proposal does not require modifying the text of the Convention in which the notion of authenticity is not even mentioned [1]; however, it does require revisions to the Operational Guidelines—which can be revised and have been revised almost thirty times since 1977 to make room for new knowledge. In particular, the attributes listed under authenticity should be linked to continuity and, where change is involved or proposed such as interventions and development projects, compatibility— i.e., continuity or compatibility of form, design, materials, function, techniques, etc. [3] (paragraph 82)—and should be listed under integrity. It is worth noting here that the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Convention (ICCROM, ICOMOS, and IUCN) have considered replacing the "test of authenticity" with "conditions of integrity" at the World Heritage Global Strategy Natural and Cultural Heritage expert meeting, held in Amsterdam in 1998, to adopt one common approach to integrity, applicable to all properties [89] (p. 3). This replacement was not achieved, but it could be achieved if integrity is understood as the ability of a property to convey and sustain its significance through continuity and compatibility as explained in this author's previous work [37]. Moreover, because the significance, including the OUV, of a property may change over time, integrity should be considered dynamic.

Many scholars agree that OUV is not a fixed or inherent quality of a property, but one that is "attributed by people and through human appreciation" [90] (p. 54). OUV is "a judgement made at a specific time by individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds" [91] (p. 135) and is "negotiable" [92] (p. 575). It may change as a result of people's changing views over time or, for example, as a result of new information about a property. This would explain why a State Party can submit a request to have a property inscribed under different criteria, as noted in the Operational Guidelines [3] (paragraph 166). Therefore, it is possible to revise a Statement of OUV. This also means that it is possible to revise the section about authenticity. The fact that this section is often "the weakest part" [12] (p. 21) is in itself a good reason for the World Heritage Committee to consider its removal with a view to refining the standard format of a Statement of OUV.

5. Conclusions

This author's policy proposal—i.e., to abandon the assessment of authenticity and adopt one common approach to integrity, underpinned by continuity and compatibility, in order to treat properties as evolving processes—can refine the standard format of a Statement of OUV and bridge the culture/nature divide, as explained in previous work [36,37]. It can also, as shown in this article, simultaneously align the implementation of the World Heritage Convention with that of the global agendas of our time. This is important because tackling climate change, building back better, and achieving sustainable development goals are now priorities [55,63,70].

This proposal allows the World Heritage Committee to base its decisions on *scientific considerations* [3] (paragraph 23), especially because the concepts of continuity and compatibility are more practical than authenticity. They are also more understandable, which is why they can improve *clarity* and *consistency* in World Heritage policy and practice and, eventually, strengthen the *credibility* of the World Heritage List and ensure the effective *conservation* of properties in accordance with the first and second strategic objectives of the Committee [3] (paragraph 26(1)(2)).

Finally, this proposal is timely and useful because sustainable development is gaining importance, as shown in the latest revisions of the Operational Guidelines [3], and because climate change policy and reconstruction policy are being updated [45], [59] (p. 9). This is an opportunity to put World Heritage on the move.

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