ГОДИШНИК НА УНИВЕРСИТЕТА ПО АРХИТЕКТУРА, СТРОИТЕЛСТВО И ГЕОДЕЗИЯ
СОФИЯ

Том Volume 51 | 2018 | Брой Issue 1

ANNUAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE, CIVIL ENGINEERING AND GEODESY
SOFIA

Получена: 15.09.2017 г.
Приета: 22.12.2017 г.

IT'S NOT BINARY
or Economic Accessibility to Cultural Heritage

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Keywords: *cultural heritage, accessibility, economics*

ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage is claimed to be an inseparable part of our life. Hence, the accessibility to cultural heritage is of paramount importance for all of us. Nevertheless, the understanding of accessibility to cultural heritage is in general limited to provision of means for physical contact of disabled people with the environment. Such a narrow-minded approach not only may lead to the loss of knowledge but also furthermore, in many cases, may leave heritage sites incomprehensible and – which is worse – alienated.

The paper explores in particular the economic accessibility to cultural heritage. It is aiming at reducing the scepticism against what can be perceived as an undue intrusion of economics into the domain of cultural heritage. The focus is on the economic perspectives of cultural heritage – on the opportunities and not on the constraints. In this context, the current Bulgarian reality puts debatable questions that reveal quite opposite extremes. This, in turn, outlines some aspects concerning life of heritage. Further, the paper introduces two controversial examples that manage, though, to bind rather successfully economics and heritage.

The paper also attempts to put forward an alternative concept for the decision-making process in terms of economic accessibility and its impact on cultural heritage conservation. The approach will hopefully contribute not only to the discussions on binding economics and heritage but also, most importantly, to a better understanding of the role cultural heritage plays as a truly integral part of our life.

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1. Economic Accessibility to Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is claimed to be an inseparable part of our life. Hence, the accessibility to cultural heritage is of paramount importance for all of us. Nevertheless, the understanding of accessibility to cultural heritage is in general limited to provision of means for physical contact of disabled people with the environment. Such a narrow-minded approach not only may lead to the loss of knowledge but also furthermore, in many cases, may leave heritage sites incomprehensible and – which is worse – alienated.

The requirements for the accessibility to cultural heritage have grown considerably since the 1990s, but the theory in the field has developed only recently. The accessibility to cultural heritage is addressed in various specialised studies, national documents, and standards (UK, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, USA) targeting groups such as heritage professionals, owners, and management bodies of cultural heritage sites. While the initial efforts were primarily focused on improving the physical accessibility, today there is a growing international interest on the need to improve also the 'intellectual access' [8]. The Cultural Heritage Act in Bulgaria also envisages the provision of 'physical and intellectual access' without damaging or endangering the heritage sites.

Given the belief that the people stand in the core of the today's understanding of cultural heritage, the accessibility may be considered mostly in terms of our needs and potentials. So the concept of accessibility to cultural heritage could be broken down to three aspects: (1) physical accessibility, which is associated with all human senses; (2) intellectual accessibility, which concerns the mental abilities of a person; and (3) economic accessibility, which refers to the use of cultural heritage for a continuous interaction with heritage sites [4].

The paper explores in particular the economic accessibility to cultural heritage from the perspective of an architect. It is aiming at reducing the scepticism against what can be perceived as an undue intrusion of economics into the domain of cultural heritage. The study is inspired by the current context in Bulgaria that does not encourage either investors or architects to engage with heritage buildings. Therefore, the stress is put on the built heritage, more specifically in the rapidly developing historic cities. But all in all, some ideas are valid also for other types of heritage. Likewise, although the paper focuses mainly on the Bulgarian reality, some of the explored issues are internationally valid. The economic accessibility to cultural heritage is inevitably related to the various economic activities that include three distinct spheres: market, governments, and the so-called third sphere of non-profit organisations [10]. Although they all play a particular role, the present paper confines the discussion only to the markets and more specifically the private sector investments. For analytical purposes, the paper also excludes another debatable topic related to economic accessibility – the personal financial ability to afford access to certain cultural heritage sites.

Twenty years ago, even internationally, it looked almost impossible to discuss economics and cultural heritage together (excluding the publications on the economics of museums and heritage tourism). These were generally considered two different worlds, using distinct tools, working seemingly separately. Now researchers believe that not only they have some common ground, but also economics can contribute to the valorisation of cultural heritage. The more systematic studies started in the early 1990s with an ICOMOS symposium [6] followed by a report on the economics of conservation [7]. Since then the literature in the field has been rapidly growing. The first attempts to integrate economic practice into the general discourse on cultural heritage were the series of studies on economics and heritage conservation launched by the Getty Conservation Institute between 1999 and 2002 [10, 1, 3]. Experts stress that the conservation field should engage in serious research regarding the economic perspectives. Their efforts were aiming at finding a way to harness the opportunities that economics give in the field of cultural heritage conservation, thus raising series of questions and fostering new studies on narrower topics [14]. All these researches put a vast theoretical background to the economic perspectives on cultural heritage. Therefore, the economic accessibility to cultural heritage in this paper focuses on the opportunities and not on the constraints.

Economic accessibility to cultural heritage is about enabling the development of the cultural heritage sites for making them useful. It acknowledges the ‘right’ of cultural heritage sites to continue their life and serve the diverse and dynamic present contexts. From this point of view, the economic accessibility examines the possibility of heritage sites’ development within the conservation process and the need of appropriate supplements. In a broader sense, the concept the economic accessibility to cultural heritage refers to vitality of those sites.

Many inherited sites or traditional practices still play a key role in today’s life of local communities. For other sites, though, we seek an appropriate integration of constant or cyclic function that could meet the needs of our society and mainly in such cases we face the challenges of economic accessibility. Admit it or not, our built environment has always been driven by economic forces. So is cultural heritage – the lack of beneficial current use unavoidably leads to obsolescence and therefrom to unconcern, alienation, oblivion, deterioration, and even loss of heritage sites. The more efficient inclusion of cultural heritage into the economic life is inevitable. Moreover, it is not about mere tourism industry but about investments in heritage sites playing continuous and functional part of our everyday life. It is about rational and balanced economic activity (not excluding supplements and change of fabric *a priori*) that enables the vitality of the heritage site.

Thus, the economic accessibility aims at moving beyond the passive and almost canonical approach to alterations in heritage sites towards their active and respectable engagement with our social, cultural and economic reality. It also strives for resilience in order to guarantee the wholesome balance between the cultural and economic considerations.

2. Opposite Extremes

“As it is a cultural heritage site, you cannot touch it”. One can often come upon such a catchword in Bulgaria admiring a long abandoned and almost ruined building. Most reconcile themselves and move on maybe hoping for better days. Few start asking themselves. The pragmatic questions at hand are: (1) what actually means a building to be a cultural heritage site, and (2) why not integrate the building (in most cases located right in the heart of an old city) in the contemporary life and take advantage of its values?

Recognition of a building as cultural heritage generally involves a process of evaluation. In Bulgaria (being a former Communist country), heritage used to be totally under the control of the state. It was up to government experts’ appraisal which sites would comprise our heritage. No detailed identification of heritage values was actually needed and respectively no guidance on conservation policy has been elaborated. It was the government’s will where to invest and in the hands of the experts how to conserve. Following the collapse of the state socialism, this cultural system gradually fell apart, the government was chronically underfunded and therefore barely involved in direct interventions, and the politicians preferred to allocate funds to develop new assets rather than to preserve old structures [2]. Moreover, most of the heritage buildings became (again) privately owned.

Thus, the new century saw Bulgaria with a vast number of listed heritage buildings, but unfortunately most of them lacking clear and proper identification of cultural values. This serious lack leads to ambiguity how to treat a heritage building and results in unwillingness to conserve. It gets even more complicated when we add to the picture also the continual expansion of the notion of heritage, the increase of the number of stakeholders with their different understandings of heritage values, and the economic processes.

In general, listing a heritage site would mean recognition of a broad spectrum of values. These multivalent values bear the cultural significance and manifest the importance of heritage to our society today (or a specific social group). Listed sites are subject of regulations – measures requiring certain behaviour towards the cultural heritage site. Experts distinguish "hard" regulations (involuntary measures such as permissions, standards, and penalties for non-compliance) and "soft" regulations (encouraging voluntary agreements such as codes of practice, guidelines) [16, 13]. So the heritage site status does not automatically reject any interventions – conservation, restoration, renovation, alteration, addition. However, there are limitations due to the particular values of the site.

Ironically, the listing does not help the actual protection of the buildings. Similar issues are not unfamiliar to other countries, too. A survey taken at the end of the 20th century by the England's Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors considers the economic effects of listing buildings [15]. The results suggest that listing of buildings is expected to lower their capital value mainly due to highly restricted options in the site use and because of ignoring economic values during the assessment process. Thus, we approach the second question posed.

For several decades now, the built environment of Bulgarian cities has been suffering from the tension between the old and the new, between the nostalgic memories of the past and progressive visions of the future, between the inherited buildings and today's architecture. Abandoned or poorly maintained old buildings along with lustrous new ones is a common sight in the streetscape. Many private economic initiatives aiming at adapting and reusing heritage buildings collapse under one repetitive scenario. It is claimed that the society wants the building as it is or as it has been in its heyday. References are made to distant memories, to old postcards where in most of the cases the surroundings were quite different, to past activities, to the patina borne by the materials. Opposed to that it is claimed that the owner (the private investor) is aiming at severe deterioration of the values or even total replacement of the building. Accusations range from incomprehension of heritage values and lack of cultural attitude to private capitalisation on heritage, strictly economic interests and strive towards fast revenues. Generally, all these concerns come only from the "society voice". Therefore, from the perspective of the owner, it would be fair to add better living and working environment and alternative usage. The existence of such opposite stances is neither worrying nor surprising. In fact, it is very important to express clearly all the different (even conflicting) expectations for the conservation of a site. What is worrying though is the total lack of constructive measures aiming at combining the two interests and looking for opportunities that will advise a convenient inclusion of the building in the contemporary life (Fig. 1). It looks like no party wants to compromise and as an unwritten rule the investors are implicitly accused of being destroyers of cultural heritage values. This bias kills the economic interest way in advance. The consequences: more and more abandoned buildings, inaccessible and alienated cultural heritage, and even possible irreversible loss of heritage sites.

Clearly, the described scenario is a generalisation of similar cases only as a daring illustration of general problems. Further interpretation should be cautious, given the variety of specific contexts in each individual case. This scenario, however, introduces several key issues concerning economic accessibility to cultural heritage that require special consideration (explored in the following sections of this paper):

- Nature of cultural heritage: Cultural heritage is multivalent as it bears various meanings for different stakeholders. In turn, they attach various values (that happens even to be in conflict sometimes) to heritage sites and thus shape the role of cultural heritage in the society's everyday life. This process shows the constant flux of cultural heritage values and their non-intrinsic but dynamic nature. The key to a successful conservation intervention is the clear expression of all (current and even potential) values.

- Cultural heritage as capital: The public nature of heritage puts forward challenging issues from economic perspective. On one hand, the private owner of a heritage building possesses the rights to benefit from their property. On the other hand, everyone has the right of accessibility (direct or indirect) to that same building because of its character of a public good. The opposition clearly outlines the incapability of economic sphere to "calculate" in terms of price all the cultural values as well as the underestimation by the cultural sphere of the economic tools potential (especially when it comes to the market and private investments) for heritage valorisation. The smart decisions would be ones that reconcile economic and cultural interests.
- Lack of appropriate mechanisms for decision making: As cultural heritage sites are expected to meet contemporary conditions, they inevitably attract certain economic concerns. The cultural sphere though still underestimates the economic arguments when assessing the heritage values. To overcome the presupposed clash of cultural and economic values, the developing international methodologies rely on cross assessments and analyses that use a variety of methods. The approach seems logical for clear identification of the areas of consent and conflict. The establishment of a working (not just desirable) economic accessibility should go further and rely on impact assessment of clearly specified opportunities for the cultural heritage site's development.

Figure 1. A heritage building today – Bulgarian opposite extremes

3. The Life of Heritage

The scale and the content of what falls under the category of cultural heritage today continuously escalated to such an extent that pushed the prediction of an imminent ridiculous moment of changing the conservation activity from retroactive to prospective [9]. In the long term, such a hypothesis as logical as it seems, threatens the very core of the concept of heritage as something inherited. In the short term – as literally every building is potentially susceptible to listing – the above assumption puts some questions on the life of heritage and respectively on current conservation understandings.

Could heritage develop? And if the cultural accumulations eventually were a product of a change that was based on the current needs, then why not put forward the needs of our time? How do people really communicate with heritage – by deliberately visiting a site in case of spare time or by everyday encounters while working, travelling, strolling, eating, relaxing?

3.1. Philosophical Perspective

We praise a cultural heritage site with complex stratification: churches or houses with centuries of additions. We admire all the periods, experts scrutinise all the layers to track back the building's life. Looking at a city, we honour exactly the unique amalgam of past cultures inheritance that we subconsciously value at some point of our busy daily routine. We acknowledge the contribution of different historical periods to the variety of heritage sites typology: from ancient time's stone structures to brutalist concrete ones. We even admit (maybe not in a loud voice) that the presence of a prominent example of modern architecture would not have been possible without losing urban fabric from the beginning of 20^{th} century. Yet, surprisingly, we get quite conservative when it comes to adding a clearly distinctive contemporary layer – be it a supplement to a historic building or an entirely new construction between old ones.

Cultural heritage sites were subject of constant change – of their appearance, function, perception. Nevertheless, today, once a heritage building gets listed, the options for its potential future development almost disappear. After an unusually intensive research work of the conservation theory and experiments in the conservation practice during the second half of the 20^{th} century, it seems the conservation field is getting more and more conservative. The theoretical formulations develop, recognising the necessity to incorporate a wide spectrum of disciplines – economy, sociology, anthropology. However, the practical tools are still in development. The ongoing process, where the pragmatic is seriously falling behind the theory, lies in the core of an abnormal situation we are experiencing today. Although the economic values are recognised as an important aspect of consideration, besides the social values impact and despite the determinative importance of continuity, most evaluation methodologies yet focus primarily on current cultural (and tangible) values. The various opportunities for intervention are to a great extend limited. On the surface, the impression is that conservation activities today are stepping backwards aiming at freezing the *status quo*. We may say that in a way such actions suddenly end the life of heritage sites – so is to say, we interfere the dynamic nature of heritage and risk exactly the continuity as part of our reality. Do we have that right?

3.2. Ethical Perspective

With the continuously increasing number of heritage buildings in the cities, the obvious decisions would be reuse, adapt, supplement. After more than half a century of experiments, it seems we have reached a saturation point where almost everything as architectural approach has been already seen. There are almost unnoticeable, although quite sizable additions – one or two new storeys above the initial ones, built in the repetitive model as the lower floors, with same visible materials, colours, even details. For the non-professional eye, it is a one-period-old building. There are entirely new buildings with contemporary materials envelopes that mimic old architectural styles – the ones of the surrounding structures or the one of the torn down heritage building at the same spot. The perception could be quite confusing – for some the building might represent a genuine heritage site, for others – simply a new structure built in a historic style. There are also clearly distinctive contemporary additions. Some merely reproduce the inherited architectural elements in new materials and colours. Others skip the obvious elements in the architecture of the supplement and instead try to exploit the (hidden) genetic code of the heritage building and interpret values that are more varied. For the observer the demarcation between the old and the new are obvious. So even though we are keen on the old romantic architectural environment, taking the road of gradually substituting materials and meanings, actually trivialises the cultural heritage we have once recognised.

If we accept the practice of architectural supplementation in order to sustain cultural significance [9], the paper argues that the ethical approach towards a heritage building would be the new design that appropriately expresses and respects its own time. This not necessarily means invasive architecture but rather subtle contextual gestures inspired by the multiple values of the site. Just think of all the possible connections between past and present that contemporary architecture could offer. Such an approach gives opportunities for unique indoor and outdoor spaces that would inspire people for extraordinary communication with their heritage. In fact, many of the liveliest cities offer namely a blend of truly distinguished and honestly revealed historical layers. In addition, a professional supplementation approach has the power to enhance the cultural heritage site (and in perspective add new significant values). Take Rome for example. The way Michelangelo gave new use (and apparently new significance) to the ruined frigidarium of the Baths of Diocletian incorporating the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri is precisely a contemporary (for the 1560s) architectural addition as from a textbook. Who wouldn't distinguish the massive brickwork of the Romans from the Baroque interior? After centuries of changes (some quite radical), it is impossible to confuse the structures from Imperial Era with the mediaeval ones or with the new interpretive and communication elements in the Trajan's Market. The famous Ara Pacis altar clearly stands out within the pure volumes of Richard Meier's museum. Why oppose the old and the new as they work even better together for the perception of the life of cultural heritage?

3.3. Human Perspective

The key issue from the perspective of people – not surprisingly – is again the different kinds of interweaving and changing values they attribute to cultural heritage sites. The behaviour of the society is in a way contradictory when it comes to the place of heritage buildings in our everyday life and especially to private investment initiatives. We would appreciate the idea of breaking in and activating a long-abandoned building. However, we would not accept any changes and additions. Although it is obvious, that if the building were meeting the contemporary lifestyle needs and the owner's requirements, it would not have be abandoned in the first place.

For a long time in the past, only single outstanding buildings of public interest have been listed – ancient structures, religious sites. Moreover, the right to evaluate and to decide was a privilege of small groups of experts, validated by the authorities [3]. That fact created a certain isolation of heritage from our daily routine and alienation from conservation challenges. Cultural heritage sites were an extra supplement and not an integral aspect of life. (To some extent, this is still valid – even today heritage and conservation are underestimated and considered addition to other fields of activities.) In addition, more or less those limited heritage sites were not expected to completely fulfil the human changing needs, e.g. in terms of air-conditioning, wiring, etc.

The scene reshaped with the listing of buildings we live or work in and the subsequent increase of the number of stakeholders. One difficulty people often encounter is the heavy restrictions when they try to adapt the property to their current needs. In addition, in many cases the heritage values determined in the listing process are not clear, incomplete (e.g. not considering economic values), or simply outdated. It is quite understandable though that change of the lifestyle would lead to changed requirements to the buildings we inhabit. Owners face a complex conundrum: their demands to improve the living (respectively working) conditions confront with current regulations and/or society expectations. The owners' private rights on their property collide with the public interest. Apparently, being proprietors and investors in a heritage site, the owners too have right of certain benefits. For now, this remains an open social and economic issue. However, as long as we lack mechanisms for re-evaluation of heritage significance to correspond to the changing demands and values, it is impossible to expect people to acknowledge cultural heritage as substantial part of their life. For whom do we conserve the cultural heritage then?

4. Meeting Economics and Heritage

Economic and cultural approaches towards our built environment are still generally considered separate and always competing ones. We can admire architectural features and even romantically revere the old buildings, but at the end of the day, it is our reality out there – and it is economically driven. Therefore, at the end of the 20th century the economic concept of cultural capital emerged. In the paradigm of this concept, the heritage is understood as an economic phenomenon that enables the application of standard investment appraisal techniques [17] while admitting that no traditional economic tools are capable of taking into account all the values. The idea of the cultural capital is acknowledged as a perspective common ground having the potential to successfully meet economics and heritage. Moreover, viewing heritage as an asset in flux that requires (sometimes risky) investment, and as an asset that one appreciates over time, gives ground for a very creative thinking not only in the scope of financing [10] but also in the scope of architectural approaches towards conservation.

Below are briefly told the stories of two debatable and yet – after all – working examples of conservation interventions on private cultural heritage buildings that manage to meet the economic and the cultural interests. The examples are not aiming at a profound analysis of all the aspects of the conservation and of the economic considerations. The intent is rather to show that economic accessibility is possible through private investments and that instead of a threat, the owner's development plans could be seen as an opportunity for new life of the heritage building.

Although there are plenty of similar cases worldwide, the chosen and not well renowned ones are from Melbourne for several reasons. Australia's tangible heritage is multicultural albeit strongly influenced by Western European architectural and building traditions. It can be said it is also relevantly new heritage with some of the oldest buildings dating back to the first half of 19th century and the early colonial period (excluding the tangible manifestations of the aboriginal patrimony). Australia's contribution to the evolution of the theory of conservation is internationally renowned.[1] Australian people are genuinely attached to their cultural heritage but at the same time are surprisingly open-minded when it comes to new interventions as long as they are aiming at actual incorporation of the heritage site into the dynamic city life of today.

Story 1. In the summer of 2017 the real estate market of Melbourne was hit by the sale of a four-bedroom apartment in the former Cairns Memorial Church, located just twenty-minute walk from the so-called Central Business District (or CBD). Twenty years after its revalorisation the building value has even increased, expecting a price of more than AU$4

[1] A good example is one of the most referenced documents – the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, which is in constant development in order to follow the fast changes in the field of cultural heritage. Another example is the great influence the works of J. Kerr and the cultural economic theories of D. Throsby have on the conservation practice worldwide.

million for just one of its exclusive apartments. The Presbyterian Church was completed in the end of 19th century to a design by Twetyman & Askew. Although a work of a renowned Melbourne architectural practice, the building was never listed in the Victorian Heritage Register. Big fire burnt the church down in 1988. Only the stone walls remained amongst terraced houses with future unknown. It was not until 1995 when private developers saw the economic and cultural potential of the site. Instead of tearing down what remained from the church, they decided to use it as a perquisite for a unique apartment building (Fig. 2). Expectedly, the conversion had its fans and its opponents. The latter did not accept the contrast supplement claiming the church had to be rebuilt. While the first group accepted the compromise as they had understood that such an investment actually saved the remains from future deterioration. Today, brokers distinguish the building as a rare piece of real estate. Moreover, from architectural point of view the adaptation approach (unfortunately with an unknown author) clearly articulates the building history retaining the last standing pieces of tangible values years after the fire. The massive stone structures definitely stand out against the background of the dark glass volumes even raising their cultural significance.

Figure 2. The life of Cairns Memorial Church: 1963 (image: State Library of Victoria); 1988 (image: East Melbourne Library); 2015 (image: the author)

Story 2. An overnight stay in an old wool stores in Melbourne CBD can hit AU$500 if one chooses to sleep in a turret. One of the most luxury five-star hotels of the city today started its story as two separate buildings – Rialto and Winfield. They date back to the golden years of the city and were erected by progressive entrepreneurs between 1890 and 1891. They are recognised as architecturally significant being some of the best examples of the commercial Gothic style (Rialto building by the prominent architect William Pitt) and of the Queen Anne style (Winfield building by architect Charles D'Ebro). With the special spatial relations – sharing a narrow one-block-long laneway – the two buildings together form an integral part of the streetscape of the late Victorian boom period. In the early 1970s, a new development boom brought huge private initiatives that required the demolition of many of buildings of the precinct. Although the Rialto and Winfield buildings were listed in the Victorian Heritage Register by the end of 1974, the preservation of the entire streetscape was hampered by the lack of appropriate statutory tools. A compromise was reached with the new owners at the beginning of 1980s. The Rialto and Winfield buildings were combined in a hotel, the front portions of the buildings to the East were also retained allowing office development behind, but the adjacent to the West Robb's building was sacrificed to give way to the then tallest office tower in Australia. There were public disagreements but the government saw the decision as an opportunity for a new life of the long abandoned buildings. In 2008, the hotel was acquired by a new owner and was again renovated as part of their strategy for offering unique destinations with identity. All the interventions were limited to the interior of the buildings and demonstrate respectful approach to the significant materials, elements and spaces with clear distinction between old and new. The former laneway retains its connecting character as the new hotel atrium and allows views across the block and alongside the inner facades of the two buildings. After all the battles and compromises, the Rialto and Winfield are again in profitable use, open to the public and a living piece of Melbourne's heritage (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. The life of Rialto and Winfield buildings: Beginning of 20th century, Winfield building (image: unknown) and Rialto building (image: National Thrust); 2015, exterior and interior view along the laneway (images: the author)

Melbourne can offer even more similar examples. Some people might denounce the architectural approaches as quite daring; others might find the compromises too big. Nevertheless, examples like this demonstrate how new supplements that are honest to the old days can be clearly honest to their own time. They also indicate that the reconciliation of economic and cultural interests is not only a matter of legislation (without denying its importance) but of constructive dialogue that looks beyond the constraints in search of new opportunities. From an economic perspective, similar realisations increase the demand of unique properties and encourage private investments. As for the cultural domain – they foster the rethinking of values (including the economic ones) for a fair integration of such heritage buildings in the contemporary society.

5. Decision-Making Process

The provision of appropriate economic accessibility to cultural heritage (as defined above) concerns the site's management as well as the appropriate conservation activities – both largely driven by certain economic considerations. Respectively, the economic accessibility involves dynamic decisions over time. Such an understanding, together with the concept of constant change of cultural heritage values, presupposes a continuous and sometimes even contingent decision-making process.

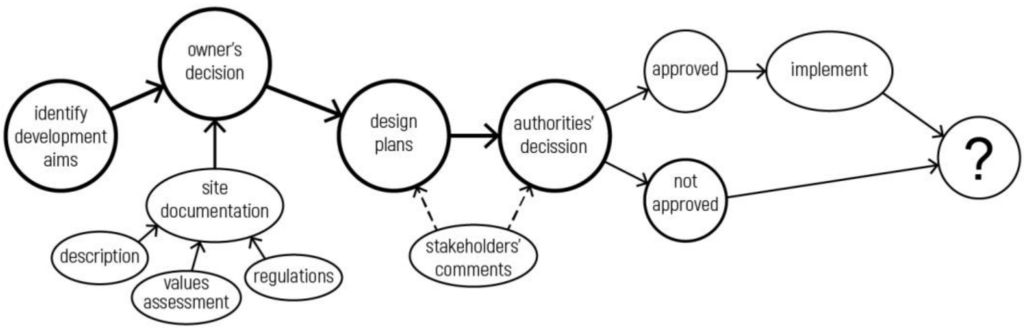

Figure 4. The general decision-making process in cultural heritage conservation in Bulgaria

How is it (not) working in Bulgaria now? The course of events is depicted as a linear sequence (Fig. 4); although in some cases, an event can be repeated anew starting from redefinition of the aims that respectively reflects in changing the decision and the design plans.

The investor sets the aims on developing their cultural heritage property. The decisions on how to achieve those aims follow almost immediately together with the acquisition of the site documentation – professional records kept by the responsible authorities. The developed design plans are the basis for only two options – the approval or disapproval of the economic initiative from the responsible authorities. Whether the economic accessibility is achieved (in either case) remains unknown as far as economic appraisals are not considered important for the conservation process. Therefore, the future management activities remain out of the scope of the decision-making process thus leaving it incomplete. Different stakeholders are not integrated in the process and as a rule they start to comment directly the developed design plans. Without information on the general aims and the diverse significant values, the stakeholders easily tilt the scales towards one or another extreme decision.

The described process rather hampers the economic accessibility to cultural heritage buildings as it has many weaknesses. One of them – and not an obvious one – is that the current legislative system expects the identified development aims to conform to the existing data about the site in the official documents without taking into account their current relevance to possibly changed contexts (including economic processes). It is so mostly because the Bulgarian evaluation system is still only based on the concept of the intrinsic value of cultural heritage sites. Therefore, in many cases the assessment excludes the different understandings of values, as well as the need of periodic reassessment. Although the values assessment includes some economic aspects criteria (e.g. utilitarian value indicating functional and economic relevance), the guidelines for their assessment are markedly retrospective. In addition, the site's assessment documents do not offer clear correspondence between the attributed values and their physical manifestations. This, together with quite conservative, often outdated and too specific regulations (almost prescribing designs) excessively limits the chances of developing different opportunities – in terms of economic and design alternatives.

Having in mind the aforementioned considerations and the strong (and increasing) influence on the economics in the cultural heritage field, the paper attempts to put forward an alternative concept for the decision-making process in terms of economic accessibility and its impact on cultural heritage conservation. It combines popular models for conservation planning [11] and traditional decision-making frameworks (Fig. 5), while considering the general planning process of the accessibility to cultural heritage that focus on human abilities rather than disabilities [4].

The proposed process tries to overcome the outlined weaknesses of the current situation in Bulgaria and more specifically the limited economic thinking in cultural heritage conservation. It proceeds from several fundamental assumptions: cultural heritage and its significance are changeable; every case is unique and requires a case-based approach; economics can contribute to the redefining and new understanding of heritage values; private investment initiatives (especially in situations of government underfunding) could be regarded as an opportunity for the life of heritage sites, rather than as a threat. The process is described conceptually allowing further specification for each particular case.

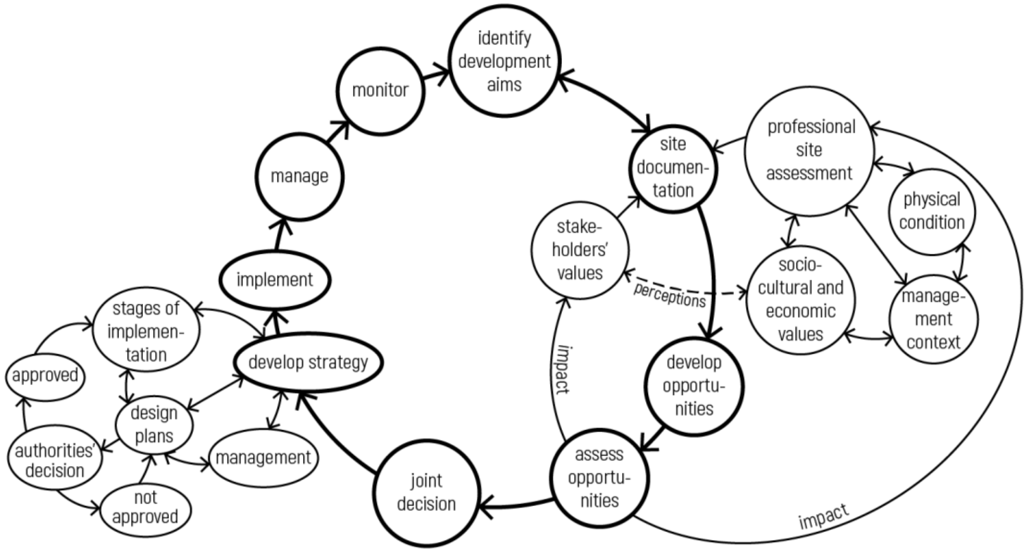

Figure 5. Alternative decision-making process in cultural heritage conservation (focused on economic accessibility)

Below are outlined the key advantages of the alternative decision-making process:

- *Changing cultural values*. The process suggests two-way connection between the aims of development and the site documentation. This allows for updated and deliberately case-orientated data, site reassessment against the aims that have been set and more precise definition of overlaps between values and aims. As heritage buildings are living, changes (in function, structures, and people's perception in response to the changing needs) are an essential aspect of their values, too. Hence, the necessity to re-evaluate every time an economic initiative arises in order to take into account the possible change of values – some enriched, others already irrelevant or even lost. In addition, such a two-way connection helps to concentrate the assessment – as far as a fully completed and objective evaluation is practically impossible – firstly because of the different perceptions of the individuals (professionals or other stakeholders), and secondly because of the variability of the values.

- *Stakeholders.* The role of the heritage buildings in the everyday life of the society is undeniably important. Therefore, stakeholders such as experts, citizens, communities, investors, etc. must be involved in the process. So far as it is the public that perceives heritage in their own unique way, the stage of values identification seems most appropriate to engage stakeholders. Their voice could be compared more effectively if they are introduced to the same values typology framework used in the professional assessment. Although beyond the scope of this paper, it would be worth bearing in mind that while the conservation decision-making worldwide acknowledges the positive impact of communication with stakeholders, it also confirms that it comes with series of challenges (beyond the scope of this paper). Some of them include identification of 'valid' stakeholder groups; too many diverse views and needs; and lack of sufficient criteria to set priority opinions [5, 12].

- *Economic values.* The process includes economic evaluation along with the sociocultural one. It suggests a value assessment based on the provisional typology developed by Mason [11] presenting value categorie[1] that encompass most of the heritage values that shape the decision-making. For practical reasons the matching values to physical elements and specific building's characteristics is of determinant importance for the next steps. However, it should be noted that economic and cultural perspectives are 'two alternative ways of understanding and labelling the same, wide range of heritage values' [11] and in the course of assessment they would often overlap. Moreover, not all economic values can be expressed simply in terms of market price or money.

- *Opportunities*. No conservation decision is 'right' or 'wrong' – so it is important to develop opportunities. Considering the initial aims and the complexity of the values, the purpose of this section of the decision-making process is to cover as much as possible potential directions for the development of the heritage site and sustaining its significance. The opportunities would enable (although only provisionally) the experience of several possible futures at the same time. Expectedly, each opportunity would offer a different degree of compromise. Hence, the opportunities are the basis to envisage the more likely consequences. Before taking a decision, each alternative needs to be assessed in terms of impact on values: how and to what degree it influences diverse values; how it results in the perception of the building by the different stakeholders. The meaningfulness of this stage relies on the establishment of proper impact assessment criteria (a potential area for further research) having in mind also that each opportunity would require values reassessment. This smaller circle in the decision-making creates a basis for the development of adaptable and sustainable assessment process. And finally, we cannot also exclude the possibility that more than one opportunity could meet the accepted criteria.

- *A two-phase decision*. To prevent the total collapse of the investment process and alienating the potential investments, the alternative process provides for decisions on different levels. Once the joint decision (investor/owner + responsible authorities) on the wider principles for the development of the heritage building has been made, any further objections would concern only the specific design proposals. It is further a matter of architectural creativity. We have also to admit that new additions even have the power to enrich cultural significance.

- *Management.* The loop nature of the process guarantees the continuity of the decision-making and (if/when necessary) the facilitated repeat of stages. It also rends an account that management matters for the life of a heritage building. Management context for example (without ignoring all the other contexts) is important for the understanding of the heritage site and its integration in the contemporary life. It refers to aspects like organisation capacity, legislative frameworks, constant maintenance, financing, benefit realisation, etc. And

[1] Mason [11] offers two major categories of values: (1) sociocultural that comprises five subcategories: historical, cultural/symbolic, social, spiritual/religious, and aesthetic; and (2) economic in two subcategories: use/market and nonuse/nonmarket (the latter is further broken down into existence value, option value and bequest value). These categories and subcategories are not considered distinct and exclusive, but rather extensively overlapping.

although its integration in the conservation field in general is still in process, it is of great importance to initially connect management dimensions with the physical condition and the values. Management plans are essential part of the strategy for the interventions in the heritage building and their implementation is of considerable importance for the life of the site.

The suggested decision-making process will hopefully contribute to the discussions on binding economics and heritage. Although the starting point is the economic perspective, it alternatively considers the importance of heritage being closer to the people to be the focus of the accessibility. The overall aim is to set a reasonable framework to find the appropriate compromise that corresponds to the current economic and cultural climate.

6. It's Not Binary

Because of the continuous expansion of the notion of cultural heritage, we encounter more and more difficulties when making decisions in conservation field. The obvious obstacles are outdated methods and legislation but the real stumbling block is the narrow-minded thinking. Economy can offer a new life to heritage buildings and thus make them accessible. However, relying purely on economic tools is hazardous, as they would put the power to decide what is valuable and what is not only in the hands of the investors/owners. Nevertheless, this should not be used as an argument to exclude economic considerations from the conservation field. Such an extreme approach would rather alienate good business practices from the cultural heritage thus leaving it inaccessible.

The decisions on investment initiatives on heritage buildings involve supplements in the structures and respectively imply change of values. It does not necessarily mean the investors (in most of the cases the owners) are destroyers of cultural heritage values. At the same time, the decisions not to invest may also be hazardous as the loss of economic interest and the gradual obsolescence could lead to irreversible loss of heritage structures. Therefore, to circumvent the bipolar attitudes, a broader perspective on decision-making process in terms of economic interests in the field of cultural heritage is needed. To be realistic, even so conflicts will arise but a more comprehensive process is fundamental for a much more informed and resistant decisions.

It looks untenable in an era of constant change of cultural perceptions to conclude that all architectural interventions that are made (or are to be made) today are 'wrong', while all the realisations of the past are 'right'. Yet, every past was future to another past. Whether the concept of economic accessibility to cultural heritage will overcome the aforementioned bias remains to be seen. This paper attempts to show that it's not binary; that we can encourage the economic initiatives and preserve our cultural heritage as a truly integral part of our life at the same time. After all, cultural heritage buildings are not places we visit, but places we live in.

Acknowledgements

I extend my thanks to the University of Melbourne for the opportunity to work there on my research on the accessibility to cultural heritage. The academic exchange was possible thanks to the cooperation with the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia under AUSMIP+ Programme. Some of the insights in this paper follow from personal impressions of Australian culture of an 'outsider'.

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НЕ БИНАРНО
или икономическа достъпност до културното наследство

Д. Георгиева[1]

Ключови думи: *културно наследство, достъпност, икономика*

РЕЗЮМЕ

Днес твърдим, че културното наследство е неразделна част от нашия живот. Следователно достъпността до културно наследство е важна за всички нас. Въпреки това, разбирането за достъпността до културното наследство обикновено се ограничава до осигуряване на начини за физически контакт със средата на хора с увреждания. Подобен посредствен подход обаче не само може да доведе до загуба на знания, но в много случаи може да остави наследството непонятно и, което е по-лошо, отчуждено.

Докладът разглежда по-конкретно икономическата достъпност до културното наследство. Той цели намаляване на скептицизма към действия, които често се възприемат като прекомерно навлизане на икономиката в областта на културното наследство. Затова акцентът е поставен върху икономическите перспективи пред културното наследство – върху възможностите, а не върху ограниченията. В този контекст днешната българска действителност поставя спорни въпроси, които разкриват крайно противоположни мнения. Това на свой ред очертава някои аспекти, свързани с живота на наследството. Затова докладът представя и два спорни примера, които обаче успяват успешно да обвържат икономиката и наследството.

Докладът също прави опит да предложи алтернативна концепция за процеса на вземане на решения по отношение на икономическата достъпност и нейното въздействие върху опазването на културното наследство. Представеният подход би могъл не само да обогати дебатите относно обвързването на икономиката и наследството, но и да допринесе за по-доброто разбиране на ролята на културното наследство като действително неделима част от нашия живот.

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