Why Do Old Places Matter?
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Foreword: The Power of Old Places

STEPHANIE K. MEEKS

Why do old places matter so much to us? What is the essence of their enduring magic? How do they continue to hold such sway over us long after they were formed or built? These are questions we have been pondering since the dawn of recorded history.

Just as the Romans marveled at the ruins of Troy, many over the years have noted the role of old places in bringing to life, across millennia, the long continuity of the past. “From the heights of these pyramids,” Napoleon Bonaparte once told his troops at Giza, “forty centuries look down on us.” While Napoleon saw his vast ambition reflected in the stones of Egypt, another Frenchman, Gustave Flaubert, drew the opposite lesson from them. “All this ancient dust,” he shrugged, “makes one indifferent to fame.”

Other writers have highlighted how places help us to establish a sense of identity—to recall who we are and where we come from. “How hard it is to escape from places,” observed the modernist writer Katherine Mansfield, early in the 20th century. “However carefully one goes they hold you—you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences—like rags and shreds of your very life.”

A similar sentiment was famously crooned by four lads from Liverpool: “There are places I’ll remember all my life,” the Beatles told us, bringing back “moments with lovers and friends I still can recall.” By contrast, losing the places that tell our story can be traumatic. “How will we know it’s us without our past?” John Steinbeck’s displaced families ask in The Grapes of Wrath.

Over the past year, we have been fortunate to have Tom Mayes, deputy general counsel at the National Trust for Historic Preservation and winner of the 2013 Rome Prize in Historic Preservation from the American Academy in Rome, delve deeply into questions about the significance of place—questions that are fundamental not just to our work as preservationists but to our basic understanding of ourselves and our communities.
After intensive research and many discussions with his colleagues in Rome and elsewhere, Tom composed a wonderful series of posts on “Why Do Old Places Matter?” for the Preservation Leadership Forum Blog. In these powerful, thought-provoking essays—which I encourage everyone to read—Tom reflects on continuity, memory, identity, beauty, sustainability, and other compelling reasons why old places continue to move us.

In this issue of *Forum Journal*, the same vital questions raised at the beginning of the series are now posed to others—scholars of other disciplines who have thought deeply about this nexus of issues, artists who have found continuing inspiration in the power of place, and social-change advocates deeply committed to the preservation ethos.

I hope these essays, like Tom’s, will spur conversation, and encourage you to ponder: Why do old places matter to you?

For my part, I think of the houses in Colorado I grew up in, the schools that helped make me who I am. And I think of an underground dugout on the Kansas prairie where my father’s ancestors lived more than a century ago. This is not a landmark or a monument—it is quite literally a hole in the ground! It is a place where, to escape from poverty, my great-great-grandparents and their eight children lived a hardscrabble existence so that they, and later generations, could live a better life.

My family’s American story begins in that Kansas dugout. That unremarkable hole—unlikely to be added to the National Register anytime soon!—nonetheless connects me across the generations to my great-grandmother, who left Norway with four children in search of a new start amid America’s Great Plains.

One of the most evocative chroniclers of that particular pioneer experience is the author Willa Cather, best remembered for her prairie trilogy—*O Pioneers*, *Song of the Lark* and *My Antonia*. In the second of these novels, Cather’s heroine, Thea Kronborg—a young aspiring artist from Colorado—visits ancient Native American dwellings above Flagstaff, Arizona, and imagines herself living among them, centuries earlier:

*Standing up in her lodge, Thea could with her thumb nail dislodge flakes of carbon from the rock roof—the cooking-smoke of the*
Ancient people. They were that near!...How often Thea remembered Ray Kennedy’s moralizing about the cliff cities. He used to say he never felt the hardness of the human struggle or the sadness of history as he felt it among those ruins. He used to say, too, that it made one feel an obligation to do one’s best.

On the first day that Thea climbed the water trail she began to have intuitions about the women who had worn the path, and who had spent so great a part of their lives going up and down it. She found herself trying to walk as they must have walked, with a feeling in her feet and knees and loins which she had never known before...She could feel the weight of an Indian baby hanging to her back as she climbed.

The empty houses, among which she wandered in the afternoon...were haunted by certain fears and desires; feelings about warmth and cold and water and physical strength. It seemed to Thea that a certain understanding of those old people came up to her out of the rock shelf on which she lay; that certain feelings were transmitted to her...They were not expressible in words, but seemed rather to translate into altitudes of body, into degrees of muscular tension or relaxation.
This potent sense of connection that Cather describes is the power of old places. It is what I feel when I think of that Kansas dugout where my ancestors made their home—just as visiting Drayton Hall or Montpelier connects us across the centuries to the Americans of the colonial era, or Stonehenge or Arizona’s Great Bend of the Gila to life thousands of years before, or an old haunt connects us to the people and memories of our own past—including even our younger selves. (As another daughter of the Kansas prairies well put it, “There’s no place like home!”)

In 1943 the psychologist Abraham Maslow came up with a theory of human motivation called the Hierarchy of Needs, which is now usually portrayed in the shape of a pyramid—the most fundamental needs of men and women form the base, and more prosaic concerns sit at the top. After physiological needs like air, food and water, and personal safety, Maslow argued, the most powerful need felt by us is belonging.

Old places, I would argue, speak to that need for belonging in a way that little else can. They give us the chance to feel a connection to the broad community of human experience, a community that exists across time. And they help us understand that the lives we lead are not insignificant—that what we do will have an impact on the future.

That is why our work saving America’s historic places is so important, not just for understanding our own history but for formulating our sense of ourselves. Historic places connect us to the striving and struggles of earlier generations, and generations to come. They tell us who we are. And they help us understand that, though we ourselves may be mortal, our actions will echo on after we’re gone, just as those of previous generations inform our world today.

All the more reason why we must continue working to save the places that matter to us, and to make sure they are playing a visible and valued role in the daily lives of our communities: so future generations can experience them, be enthralled by them, and feel that same powerful sense of connection to the great American past, and to those who inhabited it. FJ

STEPPANIE K. MEEKS is the president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
Introduction: Why Do Old Places Matter?

THOMPSON MAYES

Why do old places matter?

More than a year ago, I embarked on a journey both literal and figural. Thanks to support from the American Academy in Rome and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, I moved to Rome for six months so that I could investigate questions I had hoped to study for more than a decade: Why do old places matter? What difference does it make to people if we save, reuse or simply continue to use (or don’t) old places? Do old places make people’s lives better and, if so, how? While exploring Rome, and the many layers of history embedded in that astonishing palimpsest of an old city, I finally had the great gift of time to try to understand why old places matter.

Why did I embark on this journey? Aren’t the reasons obvious? As someone recently posted on Facebook in response to one of my essays, “kinda crazy that the question of why do old places matter even has to be asked.” I was motivated to explore this topic because of my sense (based on decades of teaching, training and working in preservation) that people like me who care about old places—many of whom may not even be conscious that they care until something is threatened or lost—didn’t have ready words to express why old places make a difference to them and to their communities, even though many of us feel the importance intuitively—and often very deeply. In addition, it seemed to me that the reasons we most frequently cite in our practice didn’t fully capture—or fulfill—that key idea from With Heritage So Rich and the National Historic Preservation Act that old places provide people with a “sense of orientation.” How could we more fully express this idea of a “sense of orientation?” What exactly is that “sense of orientation?”

As a result of this exploration, I wrote several essays, meant as conversation starters, on “Why Do Old Places Matter?” which were posted on the Preservation Leadership Forum blog of the National Trust. The purposes I wrote about—continuity, memory, individual
identity, civic identity, beauty, history, architecture, learning, sacredness, creativity, ancestry, sustainability, community and economics— are the purposes I heard most frequently as I talked to hundreds of people about old places, but other words could have been chosen as well—stability, belonging, commemoration or revitalization, for example.² I’m not sure that there are a finite number of reasons, nor are they universal. Reasons overlap. Many are present at some places but not at others. Some reasons resonate with some people at some places, but not with other people, nor at other places.

To set the context for this journal, here are quick one-line summaries of each of the reasons:

- **Continuity**: Old places create a sense of continuity that helps people feel more balanced, stable and healthy.
- **Memory**: Old places help us remember.
- **Individual Identity**: Old places embody our identity.
- **Civic Identity**: Old places embody our civic, state, national and universal identity.
- **Beauty**: Old places are beautiful, and beauty is profoundly beneficial.
- **History**: Old places give us an understanding of history no other evidence possibly can.
- **Architecture**: Old buildings are part of the history of civilization, and they place us on the continuum of time.
- **Learning**: Old places teach us about the past and give us perspective on the present in a way nothing else can do.
- **Sacredness**: Sacred old places provide deep spiritual and psychological benefits of peace, serenity and inspiration.
- **Creativity**: Old places inspire creativity and entrepreneurship.
- **Ancestors**: Old places connect us to our ancestors, giving us a sense of identity and belonging.
- **Sustainability**: Old places—through their embedded energy, the avoided impacts of demolition and new construction, use of traditional design features compatible with local climates, and locations close to existing infrastructure—are inherently “green.”
- **Community**: Old places give people a shared sense of community.
- **Economics**: Old places foster a sustainable and equitable economy.
In starting this conversation, I hope many people will read the blog essays and these journal articles, think about what needs further exploration and about what has been missed, and continue to explore these ideas. My goal is for everyone who cares about old places to have a source for words and language to help them express why old places matter, to be able to articulate in their own way what they think and feel about old places. I want to begin to make these reasons more openly and widely expressed in society at large. I’d like for these ideas to filter into all aspects of our society, from made-for-TV Hallmark movies to Boston Symphony performances to discussions in town councils and statehouses.

The articles in this issue of Forum Journal take a deeper look at some aspects of why old places matter. I’m particularly grateful to the contributors for their thoughtful essays. National Trust President Stephanie Meeks, in her foreword, explores the very personal meaning of a place where her ancestors homesteaded in Kansas, then concludes with something fundamentally important to everyone: the sense of belonging that old places can provide. Juhani Pallasmaa, the internationally known architect and architectural theorist, writes about time, place and architecture, noting how architecture not only enriches our individual experience of place but also strengthens “our sense of rootedness, belonging and
citizenship.” Max Page, Professor of Architecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, writes about the capacity of old places with difficult histories to serve as focal points for advocating for social justice. Ben Folds, the songwriter and performer, and Eric Nathan, the composer and performer, share thoughts about the way old places inspire creativity. Jeremy Wells, from Roger Williams University, reviews key social science studies relating to people and old places, and makes the case that conducting and applying more such empirical research would better equip preservationists to communicate with and engage stakeholders.

I’m thankful to Germonique Ulmer, the National Trust’s vice president for communications, and her team, who have developed a communications toolbox for how the “Why Do Old Places Matter?” essays can be used. As you read these Forum Journal articles, as well as the “Why Do Old Places Matter?” blog essays, I invite you to ask yourself: Why do old places matter to me? What words and phrases would I use to tell others why old places matter? These articles and interviews are united by the fact that each explores how old places fulfill human needs—that it is not the old places themselves that are important but their role in making people’s lives better.

I said at the beginning that this was a journey. Like all journeys, there were surprises along the way. I’d like to share with you some of the key things I learned in my journey to try to capture the reasons why old places matter to people.
One: Old places are even more fundamentally important to people—and for more reasons—than I’d thought, and more important than our preservation policies and practices might suggest.

Old places are fundamentally important to people. Old places support our psychological health by providing a sense of stability, continuity, belonging, memory and identity. Our sense of stability in our world is rooted in place, our memories are embedded in place, and our identity is defined by place. David Seamon wrote that place is “not a bit of space, nor another word for landscape or environment, it is not a figment of individual experience, nor a social construct....it is, instead, the foundation of being both human and nonhuman; experience, actions, and life itself begin and end with place.”

The overlapping senses of stability, continuity, belonging, memory and identity provided by old places form a network of information consciously, unconsciously and continuously received by people that reinforces their sense of who they are. This, I think, is the essence of the “sense of orientation” referred to in With Heritage So Rich. The bottom line is that old places matter much more than we give them credit for, and for more reasons. Preservation of old places is not just something “nice” to do; it provides profound psychological, sociological and spiritual benefits for people.
Two: Preservation is a much larger field than I had thought, and we should listen to both intentional and (to borrow a phrase from the Fitch Forum) “accidental” preservationists about why old places matter to them.

Once I began to talk to people about why old places matter, I was struck by how pervasive the topic is, throughout the United States and the world, even though people don’t always use the term “preservation.” Everyday people—mayors, brewers, philosophers, housing advocates, historians, planners, developers, architects, shop owners, politicians, environmentalists, sustainability experts, environmental psychologists, sociologists, neighborhood advocates, artists, writers, composers—all weigh in on why old places matter.

As preservation has become more professionalized we have developed our own language, practices, standards and professional organizations. While the professionalization is useful in many ways, it can also create an insularity that may impede our capacity to see what we have in common with others outside the field who also care about old places. And we may not recognize some of our own biases.

I came away from the project thinking that our field could become larger, more diverse, more influential and more responsive to the human needs that can be served by old places if we consistently listened to these other voices.

Three: The two primary reasons most often used by our field to justify the preservation of places—their architecture and their history—while important, only support some of the most fundamental reasons why old places matter to people.

Old places matter to people for a wide variety of reasons that overlap. Yet most of our preservation tools and policies primarily focus on just two of the reasons—history and architecture.

These reasons are important. Places that are significant because of history—history with a big H—present unparalleled opportunities for learning about the past in a vivid and irreplaceable way. These history places serve as commemorative sites, but also act as vortices for reinterpretation of history, for identification of difficult history, and for acknowledgement and, one hopes, (as Max Page explores in this journal) reconciliation and social justice. Old places that represent significant architecture are important
because of the primary role of architecture in our world—we all live and work in buildings every day—but also, as Juhani Pallasmaa explores in his article, because significant architecture positions us on the continuum of time.

But such places may be just as important to people because they provide a sense of continuity, memory, belonging and identity. And we may be failing to recognize countless other places that are not so architecturally or historically significant but that are also vitally important for people’s psychological and social well-being. As Adele Chatfield-Taylor, former president of the American Academy in Rome and staff for many years to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, told me, we hear at designation hearings how much people care about places, how the places ground their stories and memories. Yet the stories and memories—encapsulating this sense of identity—aren’t necessarily relevant to the criteria that we use to designate and protect places. As a result, some of the key purposes of preservation are left unfulfilled, and the places people care about remain unprotected.

I urge the field to explore ways to preserve places for stability, continuity, memory and identity in a continuing effort to fulfill the broader and more inclusive promise embedded in the notion of a “sense of orientation.”

**Four: Places may become “old” in only one generation.**

It’s important to recognize that people can develop relationships with places—place attachment and place identity—within only a generation. That’s why we’re now starting to see people lament the passing of the malls that they knew growing up, the doctors’ offices, strip malls and other resources that we may not yet think have architectural or historical significance.

Old places can enable people to experience beauty. These two very different sites in Rome—the stairway at Casa della Gioventu, a rationalist building designed by Luigi Moretti in 1933, and Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza, a baroque church by Francesco Borromini built in the 1640s—are both considered beautiful.
If we begin to think of how our field of preservation can support a sense of continuity, stability and memory, it may change the way we view the National Register’s so-called 50-year rule (limiting eligibility to properties that are at least 50 years old unless they are of “exceptional importance”)⁶ as well as the period of significance concept, and the idea of integrity. It may also suggest that we should be creative about coming up with other recognition tools.

**Five: Some of the reasons listed below for why old places matter to people aren’t talked about as much as they used to be (perhaps because we feel forced to justify saving places for economic reasons), yet they remain important and deeply meaningful to people.**

**Beauty.** Preservation regulation is sometimes referred to as aesthetic regulation, although rarely today do we justify our work by talking about beauty. Yet encountering beauty remains a fundamental and positive experience for people, an idea that is supported by social science studies.

**Sacredness.** Similarly, the idea of saving an old place because of its spiritual qualities and associations tends to be limited to certain situations in American preservation practice, such as the recognition of sites sacred to Native Americans. Yet the experience of sacredness found in old places is fundamentally positive for people.

**Ancestry.** At one time the preservation movement openly advocated for the saving of places because we could find ties to our ancestors (or at least some people’s ancestors). More recently, conducting genealogy research has become widely popular across a broad spectrum of the population, and people are interested in visiting places where their ancestors lived, worked, fought, worshiped and were buried. In visiting these places, they find ties to identity and belonging that are important to their sense of who they are.

**Six: Other purposes that we haven’t fully developed, such as the way old places spur creativity, may have great capacity to further preservation in the future.**

We’ve known for decades that there was a connection between old places and entrepreneurial activity. Jane Jacobs wrote about the need for cities to have smaller, older buildings.⁷ Richard Florida
wrote about the way drivers of the creative economy are drawn to older places.\textsuperscript{8} Now the work of the Preservation Green Lab supports this idea with studies of the important role that older, smaller buildings play in bolstering the creative economy.\textsuperscript{9} At the same time, we see example after example of the way old places provide inspiration for creativity. The interviews with Ben Folds and Eric Nathan in this journal explore ideas of inspiration provided by old places. We may need to more actively promote as a rationale for saving, using and reusing old places their role in fostering creativity.

**Seven: The sustainability rationale for retaining old buildings is likely to grow in importance, and has the capacity to fundamentally change historic preservation practice.**

One of the reasons old places matter is because reusing old places is good for the planet. The increasing recognition that the reuse of old buildings, cities and communities is green has the greatest potential, in my view, to change the paradigm of preservation policy and practice in the United States in a positive way. If our society increasingly recognizes the inherent environmental benefits of reusing existing buildings and communities, we are likely to save many more buildings than our current tools have the capacity to do. Yet that may also challenge us to embrace more broadly conceived reuse plans than those allowed by current preservation standards.
CONCLUSION

These seven thoughts are my reactions, and others will surely react differently. I hope the articles in this journal and the blog essays on “Why Do Old Places Matter?” will spur others to think about why old places matter and the implications of these ideas for preservation policy and practice.

Now, why do old places matter to you? FJ

THOMPSON MAYES is the deputy general counsel for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

2 These essays were read by two preservation theory classes—Jo Ramsay Leinenstoll’s Historic Preservation: Principles and Practice offered at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro in Fall 2014 and Randall Mason’s Theories of Historic Preservation, University of Pennsylvania, Fall 2014—and the students suggested additional topics that should be considered, or urged deeper explorations of the listed topics.
9 National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Green Lab, Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality, May 2014.
Dwelling in Time

JUHANI PALLASMAA

It is generally understood that architecture tames natural space for purposes of human dwelling and activities. Buildings, villages and cities give spaces experiential and existential meanings by turning them into specific places of human use that resonate with and choreograph our actions and mental reactions. In fact, architecture is a functional extension of both our physical and mental faculties. Most importantly, it is also an extension and externalization of memory. Mediating between the world and ourselves, architecture provides distinct horizons and frames of experience, cognition and meaning. The prevailing view of architecture as producing structures and objects of merely aesthetic interest is thus crucially misguided.

Architecture is about the world, life and existential meanings rather than just aesthetics. “We come to see not the work of art, but the world according to the work;” French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty remarks.¹ It is a fundamentally different experience to encounter a space or landscape “in the wild” than with the mediation of architectural structures; they frame, scale, relate and tune our physical reality prior to our conscious awareness of it. Altogether, architecture operates fundamentally in the preconscious and embodied realm of consciousness. According to some distinguished philosophers today, such as Alva Noë, human consciousness is not located in the brain at all, but it is out there in our relationships with the world, in “the joint operation of brain, body, and the world.”² The logical consequence of this view is that environments and architecture constitute our consciousness.

ARCHITECTURE IN TIME

But, in addition to living in space, we also dwell in time, and architecture mediates equally our relation with the course of time, and it gives endless time its human measure. In the physical reality of time there are dramatically different time scales that exceed our capacities of perception and understanding, from cosmic and...
geological time to the time scales of evolutionary, organic and atomic processes—time scales that range from millennia to milliseconds. Architecture helps to scale this terrifyingly vast expanse of time. An essential mental task of human constructions, structures and artifacts is to create a scale of time. “Architecture is not only about domesticating space,” philosopher Karsten Harries argues, “it is also a deep defense against the terror of time. The language of beauty is essentially the language of timeless reality.” Space and time are not objective and independent dimensions outside of our consciousness; we are intertwined with the world, in the way of the Moebius strip, which has two sides but only one surface. The world and the self are “chiasmatically” (crosswise) bound together, to use a notion of Merleau-Ponty. “The world is wholly inside, and I am wholly outside myself,” the philosopher argues enigmatically.

Postmodern philosophers, such as David Harvey and Fredric Jameson, have pointed out the dramatic change in our relationship with reality that has taken place in less than two centuries. Notions and experiences of time have become suppressed and replaced by those of space. At the same time, the two physical dimensions have
mingled. Today we can speak of spatialization of time and temporalization of space. Harvey has identified a distinct “space-time compression,” which has fundamentally altered our relationship with these dimensions.6

This development, theorized by philosophers, is clearly evident in literature. Nineteenth-century novels are predominantly about time, whereas modern literature revolves around the notion and experience of space. In fact, experiential time has accelerated dramatically from the slow and patient time (“the womb of time,” to use a notion of Shakespeare in Othello) in the novels of the great European writers of the 19th century, all the way to Marcel Proust’s great novel about time and memory.7 Italo Calvino points out the disappearance of time in modern literature: “Long novels written today are perhaps a contradiction: the dimension of time has been shattered, we cannot live or think except in fragments of time, each of which goes off along its own trajectory and immediately disappears. We can rediscover the continuity of time only in the novels of that period, when time no longer seemed stopped and did not yet seem to have exploded, a period that lasted no more than a hundred years.”8

The disappearance of experiential time is equally evident in the evolution of architecture. Whereas buildings and settings built before the modern era are documents of benevolently slow time, architecture seems to have become ever faster, hurried and impatient through modernity. Just think of the century-spanning and boundless sense of time experienced in Romanesque monasteries or Gothic cathedrals in comparison with the neurotically rushed time of Deconstructivist buildings, for example. The urbanist philosopher Paul Virilio argues that Western culture began a massive acceleration of speed in the mid-19th century, to the point that the most important product of postindustrial societies today is speed.9 Whoever achieves the greatest speed possesses the greatest power in circumstances of both war and peace—besides, these circumstances have lost their differences due to speed, he argues. Speed has also shattered public life and space. “As the consequence of the annihilation of time, the public space is replaced by the public image,” Virilio suggests.10
ARCHITECTURE AND THE CULTURAL CONTINUUM

In addition to creating the experience of distinct and unique places, the seminal task of architecture is to preserve and concretize, or make real, a sense of cultural continuum and to safeguard our experience of the past, or more precisely, the continuum of culture and life. Yet another crucial task of the art of building is to defend the silence and slowness of our experiential world. Architecture possesses the capacity to restructure and alter our temporal experience; it can slow down, halt, speed up or reverse the flow of experiential time. It is mainly through the temporal layers of our built settings that we grasp the past and the flow of cultural time. The mere image of an Egyptian pyramid in our memory concretizes the temporal distance of nearly 5,000 years.

We are biological and cultural beings. Instead of isolating us in a shallow present and alienating artificiality, architecture needs to mediate our relationship with our biocultural past. Why do we enjoy being in old settings, such as the historic towns of Europe? Isn’t it because these environments, with their rich historical layers, tell us epic narratives of human culture and of the desire for order and beauty? Natural erosion and traces of use by people “humanize” buildings and built landscapes by making their epic story of time palpable. Old buildings embody in material form historical and social institutions and make cultural evolution understandable. We experience a thick and haptic (tactile) time that roots us comfortably in the continuum of culture and time. We experience layered signs and traces of life, and this physical embodiment of time gives us confidence in the future. Architecture issues invitations and promises, and authentic historic buildings and settings offer us reliable

The mere image of an Egyptian pyramid concretizes the temporal distance of nearly 5,000 years.

PHOTO BY JAY-JERRY VIA FLICKR UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE
messages of continuity. We are mentally incapable of living in chaos, or in a condition devoid of time. According to geographer Edward Relph, alienation from place results in “existential outsideness” (“existential outsideness involves a self-conscious and reflective uninvolvment, an alienation from people and places, a homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging ”),\textsuperscript{11} and it is evident that alienation from the experience of time results in an equally severe mental condition. Yet today’s experientially one-dimensional cityscapes and buildings convey a flattened present tense that weakens our sense of time and impoverishes our sensory participation and imagination. The task of architecture is not only to provide physical shelter or to house our fragile bodies; our buildings also need to house our memories, fantasies, dreams and desires. Buildings and structures from different eras enrich our experiences of places, but they also strengthen our sense of rootedness, belonging and citizenship.

Cultural identity—a sense of rootedness and belonging—is an irreplaceable foundation of our very humanity. Identities are not only in dialogue with physical and architectural settings. In fact, we grow to be members of countless contexts and cultural, social, linguistic as well as architectural and aesthetic identities. Identities are not attached to isolated things but to the continuum of culture and life. True identities are not mere momentary attachments, but rather they have their historicities and continuities. Instead of being just occasional background aspects, all these experiences, and surely dozens of other features, are constituents of our very personality. Identity is not a given fact or closed entity. It is an exchange. As I settle in a place, the place settles in me.

**CARRYING ON TRADITION THROUGH REINVENTION**

It is evident that artistic meanings cannot be invented as they are fundamentally unconscious and prereflective existential re-encounters with primal human experiences, emotions and myths. As architect Alvaro Siza argues, “Architects don’t invent anything, they transform reality.”\textsuperscript{12} Architectural meaning is always contextual, relational and time-bound. Great works achieve their density and depth from an echo of the past, whereas the voice of the products of superficial
novelty remain feeble, incomprehensible and meaningless. Great works possess a timeless freshness and they present their embodied enigma always anew, as if we were encountering the work for the first time. The greater a work is, the stronger is its resistance to time. “An artist is worth a thousand centuries,” French poet and essayist Paul Valéry suggests.\(^{13}\)

An interest in the significance of tradition is today usually seen as nostalgia and conservatism; in our age, obsessed with uncritical views of progress, our eyes are fixated on the present and the future. During the past few decades, uniqueness and newness have become the prevailing criteria for quality in architecture, design and art. The coherence and harmony of landscapes and cityscapes, and their rich historical layering, are not any more seen as essential objectives of architecture. Artistic uniqueness and formal invention have replaced the quest for existential meaning and emotive impact, not to speak of the desire for a spiritual dimension or beauty.

The most eloquent and convincing defense of tradition is surely T.S. Eliot’s essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1929),\(^{14}\) but its wisdom has been sadly forgotten today. The poet states that tradition is not a static “thing” to be inherited, preserved or possessed, as true tradition has to

We enjoy old settings such as European towns because their rich historical layers relate the stories of human culture and reflect a desire for order and beauty. Shown here: St. Emilion, France.

PHOTO BY MARIUSZ KLUZNIAK, VIA FLICKR UNDER CREATIVE COMMONS
be reinvented and re-created by each new generation. Instead of valuing mere factual history, the poet argues for the significance of “a historical sense,” an internalized mental dimension. It is this historical sense that ties the artist and the architect to the continuum of culture and provides the backbone of his or her language and its comprehensibility. Exploring fundamental issues of identity—asking the questions “Who are we?” and “What is our relationship with the world?”—is an innately human quest. This historical sense also brings about collective cultural meanings as well as societal purposefulness. It is this historical sense that gives profound works their combined humility, patience and calm authority, whereas works that desperately aspire for novelty and uniqueness always appear arrogant, strained and impatient.

Artists and architects have always understood the benevolent power of beauty in the settings of our lives. Today neuroscience offers empirical evidence that the character and quality of the environment have a measurable and dramatic impact on our lives. It has been shown that environments not only change behavior but also change the brain, which thus leads to behavioral changes. Fred Gage, professor of genetics, explains: “While the brain controls our behaviour and genes control the blueprint for the design and structure of the brain, the environment can modulate the function of genes and, ultimately, the structure of our brain. In planning the environment in which we live, architectural design changes our brain and our behaviour.”

It has also been convincingly established that sensorially impoverished or one-dimensional environments lead to equivalent negative developments in the mind.

Why do old places matter? They matter crucially because they structure and modify our experiences of the world, and eventually of ourselves. In addition to enriching our sensory and experiential world, they root us in the course of time and give us a sense of security and safety. “Be like me” is the implicit command of every poem, according to poet Joseph Brodsky. No doubt, every great piece of architecture possesses the same authority. A cultured setting with its historical authority and depth conditions us to
sense and understand qualities in both culture and human character. Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings. FJ

JUHANI PALLASMAA is an architect and professor emeritus at the Helsinki University of Technology.

6 David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 240.
8 Italo Calvino, If on a winter’s night a traveller (Orlando: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1979), 8.
10 Paul Virilio, as quoted by Mika Väättänen in Katoamisen estetiikka, 127.
13 Paul Valéry, Dialogues (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), XIII.
Why We Need Bad Places

Max Page

My job is to bring you down, and then up again. This issue of Forum Journal is justifiably uplifting, filled with ruminations about why old places matter for the good of our individual and collective lives—for our sense of history and beauty, for knowledge of our identity, to connect us to community and root us in a continuum of family and nation. Old places matter because they raise us up—spiritually, culturally, personally. These reasons for saving our old places are all true and right, and doing this benefits all of us.

But I’d like to introduce another part of the equation: the importance of preserving and interpreting difficult places, the places of pain, of violence, of failure, and controversy. The places we might normally want to avoid. I’d like to suggest, with some urgency, that our preservation movement—and it must be a movement and not simply a profession—must bend in the direction of justice. Part of that calling is to help our society confront its difficult places and difficult pasts.

My hope is that we will continue to bend historic preservation policy and practice so that the movement contributes, through the overlapping and intersecting of these two activities concerned with physical places, to the fundamental, dual human requirements of preserving memory and pursuing justice. Simply put, old places matter in part because of their capacity to force us to confront painful pasts, which must be the first step in healing wounds and building a more just world.

I will intentionally talk about places besides our own home, the United States. In an article for Preservation magazine next fall, I’ll look closely at some fascinating efforts to confront the difficult past here, in places such as Shockoe Bottom and Manzanar. But I’d like to survey three places abroad where I have spent time, because they suggest different approaches to confronting the difficult pasts that reside in the urban landscape. I’ll take us quickly from Rome to Berlin and Buenos Aires and then back to Rome, a city that writer Anthony Doerr has called “The City of Always.”
ROME

From atop the Janiculum, a hill where Giuseppe Garibaldi fought unsuccessfully for Rome’s independence in 1849, visitors can look out at centuries of ambitious visions for the city. Squint a little and you can make out the monuments of Roman emperors: the Baths of Diocletian, the Pantheon, Palatine Hill. Later the planners were popes, usually scions of wealthy Roman families, who gave rise to the city so recognizable today, of palazzi and church domes and grand squares anchored by obelisks.

With virtually no modern buildings added to the city’s historic center since the 1950s, one might easily get the sense that Rome has been largely unchanged for centuries. There was, however, one last great builder. Benito Mussolini and his stable of architects and planners built post offices, sports facilities for youth, apartments, schools and public markets. They remade the road system, not only with the massive Via dei Fori Imperiale but also the Via della Conciliazione, the equally famous boulevard leading to St. Peter’s Square. They built entire new towns in agricultural lands south of Rome, made possible by massive draining and reclaiming of the Pontine marshes.

Some of the most surreal sights in modern Rome are Mussolini’s surviving spectacles of propaganda. To the south of the city is the EUR, a virtual necropolis of white neoclassical monuments, including an abstracted, cube-like homage to the Colosseum, all part of an unfinished plan for a 1942 world’s fair—the Esposizione Universale Roma—that would celebrate 20 years of Fascism.

The Foro Italico, a large sports facility in Rome, features a mosaic plaza with crumbling but still visible repetitions of the favorite roar at Fascist rallies: “Il Duce.”

PHOTO BY MAX PAGE
The Foro Mussolini (now Foro Italico), a large sports facility north of the Vatican, features a mosaic plaza—the largest built here since the fall of Rome—celebrating the colonial conquest of Ethiopia in 1936. The mosaic includes 248 crumbling but still-visible repetitions of the favorite roar at Fascist rallies: “Il Duce.”

Though Mussolini came from the north and had once disdained the Eternal City, after his 1922 coup he remade the urban landscape as only a few before him had. Today he might be surprised, and pleased, by how little of his legacy has been erased, or even discussed. Public reckonings are a big part of how other nations have moved forward from morally repugnant pasts. Not so in Italy. Today a handful of people are trying, openly, to confront Mussolini’s architectural imprint on Rome, but they’re a small minority. In an Italy and Europe rumbling with the newfound power of the right wing, the more typical response is a deafening—and troubling—silence.
GERMANY

Silence is the one word one cannot apply to Berlin.

For me as an individual and, I believe, for countless others, the art of remembering the awful begins in Berlin. My father grew up in this city, the capital of Europe in the 1920s, and his family fled in 1937 after seeing the writing on the wall. I have a long and troubled relationship with this city.

Berlin, the center of the apparatus of the Nazis and the Holocaust, conveniently pushed aside its memory in the aftermath of World War II. But under pressure from the next generation and its politically engaged artists, Berlin’s government and citizens have taken on the task of building a memorial landscape unlike that of any other city. This has defined an obsession with history and memory that is one of the hallmarks of our age. It has also defined a nation—at least the capital city—that is firmly committed to “never forgetting.” With each visit to Berlin, I find new memorials, new efforts to interpret sites related to Hitler and his regime. If the clutter of memorials is an annoyance to some, it is a far better failing than silence.

German artists and memorial-makers have, for two generations, been committed to resist building *Kranzwerfstellen*. This German word, which translates as “wreath-throwing place,” captures perfectly the failure of so many memorials, even ones that so consciously try to avoid being forgotten. The Austrian writer Robert Musil famously said that there is nothing as invisible as a monument. The man on the horse, the obelisk, the stone marker—all are eager to seem permanent, but quickly become forgotten. Desperate to make memory last, and deeply suspicious of the history of jingoist “man-on-horse” monuments, German artists and architects of the postwar period went about the job of remembering the Holocaust and its Nazi propagators by building non-monuments—interventions at historic sites that could not be brushed aside, that would not have one-line summaries, that would not allow for viewers to rest easy with a simple tear or shake of the head. And so in Berlin, we stumble over *stolpersteine*—“stumble stones,” bronze cobblestones with names of Nazi victims in front of the homes where they lived; we visit a Jewish Museum building that looks to be shattered; we climb to the top of a transparent dome and look
down into the Parliament hall Hitler burned, and where now a
democratic government works.

In Berlin, to ignore the Nazi past, one would have to willfully
look the other way.

BUENOS AIRES
While Germany’s memorial efforts have been in the service of
never forgetting, Buenos Aires’s efforts have sought to use memory
to bring the perpetrators of state terror from the 1970s to justice.
The “bad” places are seen as crime scenes, with the culprits yet to
be punished.

From 1976 to 1983, Buenos Aires, Argentina, was at the center
of a state-sponsored, U.S.-supported internal war of repression,
torture, and murder of those belonging to or perceived to be part
of a left-wing revolutionary movement. The Dirty War was an
everyday system of repression. The torture centers of the Dirty War
in Argentina, which were found in neighborhoods across the city,
have a rarefied elegance to them, inspired by the Parisian model
that seemed to dictate all design decisions in the city. Old military
schools, rusticated neoclassical police stations, Gothic churches and
French-inspired mansions, rural estancias: the Dirty War took place
in the genteel splendor of the Paris of South America.

A Fulbright Fellowship in 2009 took me to Buenos Aires and
into the middle of a long-delayed national reckoning with the Dirty
War. I visited the clandestine detention centers as well as official
and neighborhood memorials to the “disappeared” and interviewed
human rights activists, museum officials, memorial designers and
artists obsessed with creatively keeping the legacy of the Dirty
War in the public eye.

Human rights groups grew in reaction to the efforts of conser-
vative regimes of the 1980s and 1990s to “put the past in the past.”
The regime of Carlos Menem, president beginning in 1989, put an
end to persecution of those involved in torture and insisted on
closure through erasure. Indeed, he proposed that sites related to
the dictatorship—such as the ESMA detention center—be leveled as
acts of “national reconciliation.” The election of Néstor Kirchner as
president of Argentina in 2003 reopened the debate over the Dirty
War and how it should be remembered. Kirchner (who was followed in the presidency by his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, now serving her final year in office), was much more sympathetic to the victims and the memory of the Dirty War and built political support on the left in part by demanding new accountability of the perpetrators, and new respect for the victims and their families.

Today Argentina is also at the vanguard in wrestling with how to preserve sites, remember that time, and honor the victims. Thirty-five years after it was founded, the main building at ESMA is slowly being opened to the public while the debate over the future of the larger site continues, seemingly endlessly. Just a mile east is the vast Parque de la Memoria (Memory Park), the national memorial to the desaparecidos (the disappeared). Finally, everywhere are popular grassroots memorials and public art installations, flourishing on the sidewalks and walls across this sprawling city.

The goals of this activist preservation movement have begun to be met: at the very end of 2009, 26 years after the end of the dictatorship, and continuing to this day, some of the key leaders of the military dictatorship have finally been forced before a judge, or brought before a court again after having been pardoned decades before. In part because of the work of preservationists who are human rights activists, Argentineans are confronting their past and finding some closure through the justice system.

Stolperstein—“stumble stones”—embedded into sidewalks in Rome and Berlin make remembrance of Nazi atrocities part of daily life by listing the names of victims in front of their former homes.

PHOTO BY MAX PAGE
To confront, of course, does not mean to erase. What countries such as Argentina and Germany, not to mention South Africa and even the United States, have done is to make public interpretation at historic sites—monuments, memorials, innovative public art—an ongoing commitment, as if to say: We have to keep talking about our difficult pasts, here, where the past took place, where it was built. We will preserve not to salve wounds but to pursue a better country.

**ROME**

Italy’s engagement with its Fascist past in Rome might best be called a policy of organized forgetting. While much has been written by Italian scholars about the rise of Fascism, there has been little effort by the city and nation to confront the physical propagandistic legacy that Mussolini left one of the world’s great cities.

But perhaps even here things are changing.

Nearly two years after Mayor Marino’s proposal to eliminate the Via dei Fori Imperiale, his plan has gotten little traction, though he has managed to close off the street on weekends and holidays. Others are busy trying to deal more explicitly with the legacy of Mussolini, with a nervous intensity borne of concern about the rise of right-wing movements across Europe.

Siblings Adachiara and Luca Zevi, children of the Jewish modern architectural historian and critic Bruno Zevi, have separately taken on projects to remind Romans of the dark side of Fascism. Adachiara and her Arte in Memoria Foundation have brought German activist Gunter Demnig to install some of his *stolpersteine* in front of the homes of Romans (largely Jews, but not exclusively) who were persecuted and then, starting in October of 1943, deported to Nazi death camps.
Luca has designed a Holocaust memorial museum which will be built, starting in 2015, in a park adjacent to Villa Torlonia, an 18th-century country estate just a mile beyond the walls of ancient Rome. The new museum glosses over the site’s many layers, especially the one involving Mussolini. The villa, where he lived (often with his mistress) during much of the 1920s and 1930s, sits atop his personal bunker and a Roman-era Jewish catacomb system; nearby is the private English school that now educates Mussolini’s great grandson, son of his granddaughter, Alessandra Mussolini, a senator from Silvia Berlusconi’s conservative People of Freedom party.

Finally, the South African artist William Kentridge was recently in town to advance his project for drawing 90 huge figures of “victory and lament” in Roman history along the high walls that channel the Tiber river near the Vatican. One of those will be an image drawn from a Naples mural that still stands, shot through with World War II bullet holes, of Mussolini on a horse, like so many previous Roman leaders, giving his infamous salute.

Who knows? In a few years, the thousands who walk along the Lungotevere, on their way to work, or on their way to a soccer game at the Foro Italico, might pause for a moment to take in a dramatic public art installation, and start to consider again Mussolini, Italian Fascism, the danger of empires, and regimes—then and now—that traffic in brutality. Inch by inch, project by project, perhaps the arc of memory in the Eternal City can be bent.

**CONCLUSION**

When I first arrived in Rome in January of 2014, I saw an image in an exhibition at the American Academy that immediately captured my imagination. It was a photograph by Italian artist Mimmo Jodice entitled *Demetra Opera 1* (1992). In the photograph, an ancient bust is lacking much of the right side of its face. But a hand holds in place a reconstruction of the lost piece.

In a way, it is a metaphor for what we traditionally try to do as preservationists—save the object, perhaps restore it, bring it back to life. But I read it differently. It seems more of a metaphor for our elusive desire to repair a shattered human world. The hand
gently holds a repaired piece up to the original, trying to make it fit. But, of course, it does not. Only an approximation of wholeness can be made. And it requires the gentle hand to hold it there, a continuous effort.

We cannot heal, once and for all, injuries of the past. But it seems to me a central—I may even say sacred—duty of historic preservation to lead our fellow citizens to historic buildings and landscapes that represent our very worst histories, or capture our most fundamental disagreements, and, like the hand in this image, hold us there with creativity and compassion, and make us think again about who we are. FJ

MAX PAGE is professor of architecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and director of the Historic Preservation Program. He is also author of The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, The City’s End, Rethinking Jane Jacobs and Giving Preservation a History. In 2014, he was a Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome. Parts of this essay appeared first in the Boston Globe on July 13, 2014, as “The Roman Architecture of Mussolini, Still Standing.”

VIDEO
To watch a video of “Why Do Old Places Matter?” with presenters Tom Mayes, Max Page and Jeremy Wells at the 2014 Past Forward conference in Savannah, Georgia, click here.
Musicians Ben Folds and Eric Nathan Discuss Old Places and Creativity

Compiled by Thompson Mayes and Elizabeth Byrd Wood

Why are creative people drawn to old places? Richard Florida, in his writing on the creative economy, notes the relationship between people who do creative work and old places that have a sense of authenticity. Jeremy Wells, in this journal, explores the way the presence of patina in old places evokes the spontaneous appearance of vignettes about the past in the mind’s eye. These ideas suggest that old places somehow foster imagination and creativity. In his August 2014 post on the Preservation Leadership Forum Blog and in his article in this journal, Tom Mayes encourages preservationists to explore more fully the idea that old places foster creativity, particularly as the United States looks to a future economy that is based more on creative work.

To further this conversation, the editors of this issue of Forum Journal asked two musicians from different genres to share their thoughts on how old places inspire them. Recording artist Ben Folds was interviewed in January 2015 for the July issue of Preservation magazine about his efforts to save Studio A, and agreed to further discuss how old places, like Studio A, foster creativity. Classical composer Eric Nathan, who titled a recently commissioned piece “Why Old Places Matter,” responded to written questions from the editors about how old places have influenced his work.

He is also the subject of a PreservationNational blog that appeared March 4, 2015 on the PreservationNation website.

**BEN FOLDS**

Ben Folds is an American singer-songwriter and record producer who lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

Ben Folds
PHOTO BY RICK SMITH
For more than a decade, he has operated the historic RCA Studio A in Nashville—a site that has been in the news over the past year because of its threatened demolition. Constructed in 1965, Studio A has welcomed a host of musicians over the years ranging from Elvis Presley to Dolly Parton to Perry Como. With its unique acoustic environment, the studio is an essential part of Nashville’s music legacy. In 2014 a new owner announced plans to demolish the Studio A building and build 80 condominium units in its place. Folds posted an impassioned plea on his Facebook page to save the building. In his post he said, “there is no space like [Studio A] anywhere on the planet. These studio walls were born to ring with music.” Late last year, fortunately, three preservation-minded buyers purchased the building and plan to work with Folds to continue running it as a recording studio.

We asked Folds about why Studio A is so important to creating music. Is it the space and the acoustics, themselves? And do old places like that have distinctive sounds?

Folds explains that every place has a distinctive sound and that the sound of Studio A has made its way “pretty soundly into country music history.” He notes that when he is in the studio, he can take his time and that the studio provides a sanctuary for making music. “[The space] is not particularly technologically intimidating,” he says. “For some people, personally, it puts them in the mood. I think the studio has a peace that I really like, and I’ve noticed a lot of other musicians like it too.”

He goes on to say, “With creativity, it’s not just you. Circumstances, the environment, your company are all equal parts in this. And [some of that can come from] being in a place where you’ve had incredibly solid creative input in terms of the curve of your sound, the way the space feels, how much space there is over your
head, the colors, the wood, all these things.”

When asked if he thought people’s imaginations are spurred by old places and their history, Folds recalled his first performance at the Fillmore, a historic music venue in San Francisco, remembered for showcasing such talents as the Grateful Dead, Santana, Jimi Hendrix, Otis Redding, Cream, and countless others. He says that initially he found the history of the Fillmore to be intimidating because he thought he could never live up the earlier performers. “I would have preferred to play in the parking lot,” he admits. Yet he says that now he “definitely gets a charge from performing in an old space, because I like the feeling of knowing that you’re in the continuum.”

Folds wants very much to save Studio A. It’s worth saving, he says, because “if a place works for 40 years, through all those changes—social and musical changes—and it’s still there, and it’s still making relevant records…and if artists are still coming to the studio and making [music that earns] Grammys…then there is something really working about this [space].”

Folds notes that some people think that it is the people, the musicians, that made the studio what it was. They feel that maybe today’s musicians should find their own building and start fresh with no associations. “I just don’t agree with that,” he says. “One, I think what they did [at Studio A] was very special and should be preserved. And I also think that, if it wasn’t important, they wouldn’t have built it as a space to make that kind of music. And it’s a very enlightened space.”

He goes on to say, “I’ve never heard of anyone feeling overwhelmed or intimidated by [the studio]. There’s something about the place that once you come inside, you just feel like making music. I think that’s what makes it such a special space, and why it’s been so successful for almost 50 years now. I know when I tell my friends you should record there, I know the phone call I’m going to get the next week, which is, ‘I could not believe how wonderful that was. We made our best record.’ I mean, that happens over and over again. So there’s something to it.”

When asked if he’s ever been inspired by an old place to write music, Folds comments that he is more inspired by old places than
new. He reports, “I'm going to record in Dublin soon, because I like the feel. It's not the oldest city in the world, or Europe at all, but I like the feeling of it, I like the cobblestone and the history there. I feel really good making music in those places. I think some of it is pace. I think it's built by people with a different perspective. And if it lasts this long, the perspective has sustained, you know. It's kind of a test of time.”

Folds likes being part of the continuum that is found in old places: “There's something comforting about doing what your father, and your father's father, and your father's father's father did, to some extent, and being in the same places. If we can keep this alive, it's something that ought to be represented. There are some places that we all decide, this is an important reminder of where we came from. It's humbling. And it makes you feel larger, as well, for being part of it.”

In his open letter to save Studio A, Folds talks about the stories and tales of people making music there, such as this one:

*When an old guy comes in and tells you that he was part of the crew that was waiting around for Elvis to show up, and they got out roller skates and roller skated around the room, it just connects you to it. You can completely imagine that. And it sounds so human. [Elvis] recorded after they took the skates off and got to work and became history. You can see the space that they did those things. Maybe someone will come in and walk into the studio and tell some young kid, you know, I was in here, and this old guy came in—and it makes it, well, the whole thing has inspired me.*

**ERIC NATHAN**

Eric Nathan is an award-winning composer who has garnered international acclaim for performances of his work at the New York Philharmonic’s 2014 Biennial, Carnegie Hall, Aldeburgh Music Festival, Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music, Aspen Music Festival, and other prestigious events and venues.

Nathan, like Mayes, was a Rome Prize Fellow in 2013. Following his time in Rome, Nathan wrote a trio for the Boston Symphony Chambers Players, which premiered at Jordan Hall at the New
England Conservatory of Music on January 11, 2015. The piece is called “Why Old Places Matters” and in the program notes, Nathan comments that this work “is a personal expression of the feelings and emotions I have experienced in ‘old places.’” He explains, “‘Why Old Places Matter’ is structured in two movements. The second movement returns to places encountered in the first movement, as we might in recalling a memory, trying to live in a space again and for longer, the memory becoming a new ‘old place’ of its own.”

**How are you inspired by old places? What is it about them that inspires you?**

When I experience an old place I feel I am engaging with how it puts my experience of the present into a larger perspective, connecting me with the history and lives of those who came before me. My experiences in old places have inspired my music both emotionally and philosophically. It is in part the atmosphere that inspires me—in Basilica Santa Sabina it was the enveloping sense of tranquility, solitude and sheer beauty that fills its dark, cavernous space—but I am also inspired by imagining a window into the lives of those who shared a similar sensory experience of this space in very different times from my own.

**Your work has been performed in historic places, including Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory of Music, Carnegie Hall, the Villa Aurelia at the American Academy in Rome, and other old places. Do old places like that have distinctive sounds? Is it the space and the acoustics, themselves?**

Every space has its own unique “sound” acoustically and also atmospherically. While I was at the American Academy in Rome I met and spoke with the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, who is writing a book on the sense of atmosphere in architecture and the other arts, such as visual art and music. Pallasmaa spoke about
experiencing the specific atmosphere of a place immediately upon entering it, an experience that arises in large part from one’s peripheral vision.* I agree that there is a special atmosphere in these great historic spaces that enhances our sensory perception of music through multiple senses but also intellectually and philosophically—being able to take part in a sense of historical continuity with all who have shared in experiencing this unique sensory world. A place such as Carnegie Hall has such a history to it that when performing there or listening to music there as an audience member, one cannot help but imagine all the musical greats who have shared their music in that hall. While the atmosphere of New York City outside Carnegie Hall, or Rome around the Villa Aurelia, has changed so much over the years, the sense of these interior spaces has for the large part remained the same, and I find this emotionally powerful and inspiring.

Specifically, each of these historic spaces, from Carnegie Hall to Jordan Hall, has a very personal acoustic. When I had my orchestral piece “Glimpse” performed in Carnegie Hall’s Stern Auditorium I was struck with how the space transformed my piece—it took on an additional sense of polish—the acoustic tapered each phrase so beautifully, only the way Carnegie Hall can do. So, too, was the experience of hearing the horn solo in my “Why Old Places Matter” reverberate in Jordan Hall’s warmly hallowed space. The experience of hearing the piece in this hall is unlike any other, and it makes the performance unique. As a composer, I find that the acoustic of a specific hall gives me different lenses with which to engage with my music. I sometimes feel as if I meet the characters in my pieces anew in different spaces—not only for how the music sounds acoustically, but for how the performers react to and build off the atmosphere of a space through the subtleties in how they phrase and infuse musical lines with feeling. And so I’m very excited to be able to hear the Boston Symphony Chamber Players perform my piece again this summer, but this time in Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood, so I can experience it in a different space. This hall is relatively new but it feels like a personal

* For more by Julian Pallasmaa, see his article “Dwelling in Time: Reflections on Experiencing Architecture” in this issue of Forum Journal.
“old place” to me, as some of my most formative experiences as a musician took place performing trumpet on that stage as a student at the Boston University Tanglewood Institute. I am looking forward to how my experience of engaging with my own work changes and evolves through hearing it in this special place, an “old place” with added personal significance to me.

You perform as well as compose. Are you often conscious of the history of a place when you’re performing in it? Do you think about other performances or performers who have gone before you?

In a space such as Carnegie Hall I cannot help but think of all the musical greats who have walked out onto that stage and experienced a similar thrill of performing in that hall. There are definitely spaces that are uninspiring—ones where as a performer I have to work much harder to imbue the music with the emotion required. However, I feel that any “great” hall definitely gives an intangible charge to the performer that enhances the performance. This differs from hall to hall and also night to night—how the atmosphere of the hall changes with the energy of the audience and chemistry of the other performers on stage. When I performed trumpet in Carnegie Hall as a member of the New York Symphony, and in Jordan Hall on the radio show From the Top, the atmosphere of these spaces made it so easy for me to perform, and I was able to build off the charge the space and the audience to find new places in my musical expression that I would not have discovered in the practice room or in another space.

Similarly, when I compose, I sometimes bring my pencil and paper to different spaces for inspiration. Sometimes I will try composing in a concert hall, or an old church, or by finding a spacious place outdoors to find different creative lenses which I can use to experience my musical material and to see what music, turns of phrase and ideas come from engaging with my music in a different atmosphere. In composing “Why Old Places Matter,” I would sit in old places around the Williams College campus—in Chapin Hall and Thompson Memorial Chapel—for inspiration. I both composed and performed excerpts of my piece in these spaces to be inspired not only by the atmosphere but by the acoustic of a large, reverberant
space. I was trying to get closer to the sense of being in the cavernous space of Basilica Santa Sabina (which was an ocean away at the time I was composing the piece), but I think the experience of using other old spaces in my process piece helped give it a broader influence so that it is not tied to just one space, and led it in directions that I couldn’t have foreseen when I started. However, I would love to hear it performed in all three spaces. I have imagined the results but it would be thrilling to experience.

**Do you have any theories about why old places and creativity seem to go together? Do you think people’s imaginations are spurred by old places and their history?**

I can’t speak for others, but for myself, I am incredibly inspired by this sense of a shared past and present. As a composer, realizing that I was experiencing a similar sense of space in Basilica Santa Sabina in Rome to those who experienced the space in the 5th century inspired me to compose my piece “Why Old Places Matter.” It made a powerful emotional impression on me and I felt as if I had a window into life in the year 400 and that I had a shared sense of experience with those who lived then. By writing the piece it was a way for me to express and catalog how I felt experiencing the place in my own “present” and could allow me to be part of this unspoken dialogue of experience across the centuries.

**What other thoughts do you have about the relationship between music, creativity and old places? What are we missing in the preservation world that we should pay attention to?**

I found that not only have old places been inspiring to me creatively by allowing me to take part in an imagined shared experience with those from a very different time, but they have spurred me to create as a way of capturing the experience in trying to better understand it. In my experiences visiting places that affect me so strongly, I sometimes have an all-encompassing and almost overwhelming experience, such that I feel I can’t take it all in at once and that I need time to unpack the experience. I find that memories tend to distill such experiences and that in a memory I can get even closer to what was at the heart of my experience. I also find that I can never completely relive the special sense of
space I feel in a place with a photograph or a video, but that music gets me the closest to reliving or understanding that experience emotionally. And while the emotions of my experience are unique to my own memories I hope that they can speak powerfully enough to others to share in that experience or create new experiences for them of their own. So, in composing “Why Old Places Matter,” it also serves on a personal level too, allowing me to find a way to keep returning to these old places that I have found inspiring.

However, I wonder how my engagement with a specific old place (such as Basilica Santa Sabina) will change as I grow older, if I were to experience it again many years later. Would I feel the same sense of place (assuming nothing about the space has changed) or will my perception of it be different because it was influenced by memories of the experience that have become distilled into something new? And, how will the experience of being able to “relive” the experience I had at age 30 in the Basilica by listening to my piece performed live 30 years from now impact how I will experience revisiting this place? Or even right now, after having composed the piece and having engaged with it on such a deep emotional level? I do feel that there was a different sense of awe that I experienced when I visited Basilica Santa Sabina for the first time than I did after visiting it often over the course of one year—after which it became a personal “old place.” The experience deepened with time, but also continually changed.

Perhaps I should compose a new piece about Basilica Santa Sabina every 10 years or so, to see how my emotional engagement with it changes—perhaps it won’t, but I guess only time will tell.
How do our experiences with old places change over time? How do we engage differently with historic old places versus personal “old places” (such as a childhood home)—and how does our engagement change when a historic old place then becomes a personal “old place” to us?

How do you—how could anyone—listen for inspiration at an old place?

I try to allow myself to be open to the unique sensory experience of each place—to let the place envelope me in its atmosphere and history. Sometimes it is not until much later, months perhaps, that the inspiration comes—or it may not come at all. Upon visiting Basilica Santa Sabina I knew that I felt a special connection to the place—it became one of my favorite places in Rome. But it wasn’t until I returned from Rome that I was able to write a piece about it, to understand where in my memories of it to listen for the inspiration, and that the lens that would help open it up for me would be a literary source, Tom Mayes’ essays on “Why Do Old Places Matter?” So, I would recommend to others to be open and keep listening—to the space and your memories of a place. It may not be the place itself that directly inspires you—it may be how the place asks you to see yourself differently. In composing “Why Old Places Matter,” all of the musical material and emotions that I tried to recreate came from inside me—but Basilica Santa Sabina helped me unlock them. FJ

To hear Ben Folds talk about RCA Studio A on MSNBC and why this place of creativity is so important to him, click here.

Making a Case for Historic Place Conservation Based on People’s Values

JEREMY C. WELLS, PH.D.

Imagine that you have arranged to meet an old friend that you haven’t seen for many years at a downtown coffee shop. After a few minutes of catching up, she hears that you now work as a “historic preservationist” and becomes intrigued. “Why do you like old buildings?” she asks. You respond, “Because saving old buildings is environmentally responsible and gives people a sense of identity.” “No,” she replies, “why do you like old buildings?” You pause, and think back to when you were a child and how you felt about old places and the times you visited historic sites. You remember standing in a building from 1818 that was so intact your mind spontaneously filled with images from the past, which made your spine tingle. Feeling a bit unfocused and flustered, you blurt out, “Um, I guess I just like the way these places feel. I like being there.” Your friend immediately perks up and says, “Yes, I know what you mean. I feel the same way. It’s the reason why I bought my 1920s house, because it makes me imagine living in the Jazz Age, like I bought a time machine or something.”

While this conversation is hypothetical, it expresses the disconnect between the way we (that is, professionals who work with old or historic buildings, places and landscapes) make an objective case for conserving historic places and the emotional way in which most people actually talk about places with cultural value. Each side tends to talk past each other, which may help to explain why most people support conserving old or historic places but don’t view themselves as historic preservationists, and therefore fail to support organizations that advocate for historic place conservation. In other words, we aren’t communicating effectively with most stakeholders in their own language and its familiar meanings. We are operating as if we expect most people to adopt our language, perspective and objective descriptions, which is an improbable outcome.
While a large body of literature addresses the disconnect between most stakeholders and experts,\textsuperscript{1} for brevity’s sake I will reduce this information to a succinct list that describes a layperson’s perspective on the historic environment (that is, historic buildings, structures, places and landscapes):\textsuperscript{2}\textsuperscript{*}

- Heritage can be found everywhere, not just in special buildings or districts.
- Everyone is a heritage expert.
- Natural heritage and cultural heritage exist as a continuum and not as discrete entities.
- Historical significance is multidimensional and consists of cultural practices, person-place relationships, and emotional bonds with place.
- Significance lies in the present, not the past.
- Authenticity is pluralistic, not controlled by any one entity; is defined by social, cultural or personal values; and may have no direct relationship to physical fabric. Ideas can be “authentic.”
- Heritage must be experienced to feel real.
- Heritage values constantly change.

It is easy to see that the ideas on this list conflict with the way professionals conserve the historic environment today, largely because the use of heritage conservation doctrine—such as the National Register of Historic Places criteria and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation—are legally mandated by

\textsuperscript{*} In this article, I have specifically stayed away from using the increasingly archaic phrase “historic preservation.” Rather than describe what we do using a grammatically and epistemologically challenged term, I much prefer to call it conservation of the “historic environment,” which is commonly used in the United Kingdom because it describes where we do our work using language that is more congruent with human experience. This terminology also brings heritage conservation closer to natural resource conservation in terms of a common “place” of practice—the environment.
federal, state and local statutes, administrative law, and ordinances. Even if a professional wanted to apply an alternative definition of heritage in his/her work, in many cases, doing so would actually be inconsistent with their legal standards. But making arguments to the public based on conservation doctrine is almost certainly doomed to failure. So how can we make a better case for historic place conservation? The answer is to make a better effort to understand how the public values, perceives and behaves in historic environments.

**UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVE OF MOST STAKEHOLDERS**

It’s not as if organizations that conserve the historic environment haven’t tried to understand the public. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has, for many years, contracted with marketing firms to conduct surveys of the public. Other built heritage organizations have made similar efforts. Surveys are a great tool if generalization is the goal; in other words, if you want to know if a certain percentage of a population answers a question in a certain way, you obtain a random sample of that population and then, based on the results of the survey, generalize back to the larger population through a statistical inference. For instance, you could determine how many people in the United States agree with the statement “I like historic buildings” by taking a random sample of 384 people from the general US population of 316 million. If the result was that 72.2 percent of the people polled agreed with the statement, then you would know, with a 95 percent level of confidence,\(^3\) that somewhere between 67.2 percent and 77.2 percent of the general US population also agrees that they like historic buildings.

But what does this result actually tell us? We don’t know if the word “historic” means the same thing to everyone. What does “like” mean in this context? What if we want to understand the degree of “liking”? Maybe some people really, really love old places while others think they’re just kind of neat or maybe just OK. The strength of surveys is generalizing to a larger population, but they
are especially poor tools for understanding people because they produce exceedingly thin depths of meaning. As with any tool, surveys can be quite useful and effective in the right context, but they are a poor choice for trying to discern the reasons for people’s values, perceptions and behavior.

Because exploring the sociocultural issues involved in the conservation of historic places relies on understanding people’s behaviors and perceptions, depth of meaning is essential, which means that other methods ought to be considered. The validity of surveys can be dramatically improved, for instance, when paired with other methodologies. Going back to the question about historic buildings, what if we were to understand how stakeholders actually perceive what “historic” means and then write the survey questions from this perspective? Then the quantitative results could be better interpreted. These mixed-method approaches can be very powerful because they offer both generalization and understanding.4

An example of this mixed-method approach is a comparative case study in which I was trying to understand the nature of age value from the perspective of residents living in a “new” and an “old” area that shared extremely similar urban design characteristics. In the qualitative interviews that I did with residents, they shared the fact that the most important elements of a landscape were trees; buildings; gardens; walls, fences, or gates; the sidewalk; the road; and fountains. I then used these categories in the wording of a survey question to determine which landscape elements people favored more than others. (In other words, I wished to generalize from my sample that a certain percentage of people thought that fountains were the most important part of a landscape.) Had I undertaken the wording of this question using categories that I, rather than my informants, thought were important, I may have not been measuring anything particularly meaningful from the population I was trying to understand. In another case, I created whole categories of questions based on the meanings that came from interviews, including understanding the layering of the landscape, mystery, and a term my informants repeatedly used, “unseen effort.”

The combination of legally mandated conservation doctrine and the over-reliance on surveys leaves the false impression that
we actually understand how most stakeholders value the historic environment; we have, as the historian Daniel J. Boorstin warns, “the illusion of knowledge” and operate from that principle with a false sense of confidence. And the heritage conservation field is awash in many unsupported claims as to its value, especially in terms of “squishy” statements such as “historic places have a unique sense of place,” “historic places foster community identity” and “historic places enrich our lives.” While all of these statements may indeed be true on some level, we lack sufficient evidence to understand, much less support them.

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE
There are a limited number of research studies on human/historic environment interactions and practice, but before reviewing this research, it is important to differentiate anecdotal evidence from empirical evidence and define what is meant by “research.” Anecdotal evidence is a claim, based on a small number of observations or a single case, derived from personal experience. Most claims that we make in daily life are of this nature, but can be of dubious reliability. Just because, in my personal experience, I find that people named “Joe” prefer Swiss cheese over cheddar does not mean that all people named Joe prefer Swiss cheese, yet these kinds of claims are rife in built heritage conservation practice. For instance, Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards is based on the anecdotal claim that people are unable to distinguish “real” historic architecture from “fake.”

Empirical evidence, by contrast, relies on many reproducible or verifiable observations to produce data and is associated with the scientific method. As used in this article, the term “research”
means a process that produces empirical evidence by gathering data, using a rigorous research methodology, to answer a research question. The data are then interpreted to answer the question. Research methodologies include surveys, ethnographies, visual preference studies, and content analysis. These methods can be used to gather both quantitative data and also qualitative information regarding respondents’ perceptions, feelings and meanings. The purpose of historic environment research is to generate evidence to substantiate, support, disprove, refute or explore a particular element of practice that affects the environment and/or to understand person-historic environment interactions and valuations.

Most articles published on the historic environment do not fall into this category of research, including examples from academic journals. Most of these articles are theoretical or descriptive in nature (such as case studies) and are not the result of gathering and interpreting data through observations to produce evidence. As a result, research that addresses the historic environment is a rather rare topic among the social sciences (such as psychology, anthropology, sociology). A plausible reason for this is that it is difficult to find funding for social science research specifically on the historic environment; in fact, I’m fairly confident that there has never been a funding source of this exact nature from any granting foundation or governmental entity. Anecdotally, I’ve found that most social scientists consider historic preservation/built heritage conservation to be mainly guided by aesthetic considerations (the presumed realms of art, interior design, and architecture) or only the domain of historians, and so have never considered the unique influences that historic environments have on people’s behaviors and perceptions.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PEOPLE, BEHAVIOR, VALUES AND THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT?

Most research that explores people’s interactions with the historic environment is based on anthropological (ethnographic) methods, visual preference studies used in environmental psychology, or survey research. These studies broadly address aesthetics, building age preference, place attachment, sociocultural aspects of practice and place, and authenticity. Research that looks at how people
perceive the aesthetic qualities of old versus new buildings indicates that people clearly tend to favor traditional design characteristics that predate Modernism. From this work we know that people seem to prefer neotraditional architectural styles over Modernist styles and designs that feature more ornamentation (for example, shingles, cornices, decorative door and window trim), gabled roofs instead of flat, and the presence of iron balcony rails and fences. Similar studies regarding urban landscapes suggest people prefer landscapes that have mature trees (especially those with a spreading canopy), lots of vegetation, evidence of upkeep/maintenance, and many layered elements. This latter characteristic adds to a sense of mystery and discovery in the landscape and entices people to want to explore their environment; it tends to be present in greater abundance in older environments.

In studies that have tried to determine if people have preferences about building age, the conclusions are mixed. Some research suggests that people are actually favoring design complexity, which tends to be more common in older buildings, but that they are not necessarily concerned about the physical age of a building. Other studies indicate that when building maintenance is equal, there is a clear preference for older buildings; otherwise, new buildings are favored. In terms of places and landscape, people tend to prefer the historic cores of cities to suburban areas. My own research supports these conclusions, especially the desire for neotraditional design elements in new construction; but when given a choice, people prefer authentically old buildings provided that they have a very specific degree and quality of patina.

In fact, I’ve found that the presence of patina seems to be essential not only for enabling people to determine the authentic age of a place but also for evoking an emotional attachment to historic places. For those who perceive this patina, the result is the spontaneous appearance of fantasies (or vignettes) about the past in the mind’s eye; because the experience is emotional, it results in an increased attachment to historic places. This “spontaneous fantasy” is not premeditated and happens unselfconsciously. Moreover, the experienced fantasy is not necessarily related to known historical facts. This phenomenon might be related to the
way owners of historic houses anthropomorphize their homes into living entities that have the ability to “think” and “feel,” as Melinda Milligan, a sociologist from Sonoma State University, has revealed. From a cultural perspective, we know that “heritage” has many meanings that are different, depending on the association that groups of people have with particular historic places. For instance, ethnographic case studies from Lisa Breglia, an anthropologist at George Mason University, of archeological sites in the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico describe how a traditional Mayan culture is disassociated and dispossessed from its own cultural heritage by the dominant cultural group; while an ethnography by Setha Low, an anthropologist at the City University of New York, of traditional plazas in Latin America helps us understand how attachment to historic places happen from a cultural perspective. In addition, I’ve discovered that the research done to establish Main Street programs provides a rich source for understanding a community’s heritage values—values that are then applied in revitalization planning. These values can reveal much about sociocultural definitions of authenticity that drive those design decisions that experts lament create a “false sense of history.”

A significant stream of anthropological work associated with heritage studies addresses the split between “orthodox” (associated with conservation doctrine and experts) and “heterodox” approaches (associated with most stakeholders) to heritage. Laurajane Smith, an anthropologist and heritage studies researcher at Australian National University, describes the orthodox half of
this dichotomy as the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD) in which “the proper care of heritage, and its associated values, lies with the experts, as it is only they who have the abilities, knowledge and understanding to identify the innate value and knowledge contained at and within historically important sites and places.”

Emma Waterton, a heritage studies researcher at the University of Western Sydney, Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, a heritage studies researcher at the University of York, provide the additional nuance of cultural relativism to the AHD, claiming that the “conservation values of experts might be just another set of cultural values,” further deprecating the overall importance of experts in the decision-making process of caring for heritage.

Lastly, there are a few studies that address the “realness” or historical authenticity of various aspects of the historic environment. A study by Daniel Levi, an environmental psychologist at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, stands out for its conclusion that people do actually have the ability to differentiate “fake” (that is, neotraditional) historic architecture from the real thing, which could lead to some interesting reinterpretations of Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. Authenticity is also related to experiences; the ability of visitors to historic sites to engage in “performances” of the past may increase the overall sense of historical authenticity.

Reinforcing the relationship between patina and place attachment, Dydia DeLyser, a geographer at Louisiana State University, found that the patina of ghost towns is very much related to their perceived authenticity. And finally, a study of the facades of older buildings in urban areas in Malaysia concludes that the addition of “non-standardized advertisement boards” impairs the perception of historical authenticity, which would certainly help substantiate the regulations against them found in a number of design guidelines.

I should also mention the theses of students whom I have advised or served as a reader that use social science methods to address questions related to the historic environment. The historic preservation program in which I teach at Roger Williams University is unique in that it stresses the pragmatic application of social science research methods in planning practice, giving these students opportunities to explore novel research questions that have the
potential to influence built heritage conservation practice. These students have used social science methods to research users’ perceptions of the visual harmony between historic buildings and the natural environment, the ineffectiveness of aspects of Section 106 review, policies related to the abandonment of historic schools, how design professionals interpret the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, and attitudes people have toward historic preservation and new and old buildings.25

HOW TO ADDRESS WHAT WE DON’T KNOW

Unfortunately, even with some of the research that has already been conducted, there is much that is unknown about the human/historic environment relationship and its sociocultural manifestations. Many questions remain unanswered, especially in terms of ways to more effectively communicate using stakeholders’ own meanings. Some of the larger questions include:

- What makes a place “historic” to most stakeholders?
- How do everyday people perceive and value historic places?
- How does the historic environment affect people psychologically and physically?
- How do most stakeholders describe historic places and why they are important?
- What should/can we do with a wider range of values from stakeholders?
- Can/should community values be used in regulatory processes?
- How can conflicting values be addressed? Whose values are more important?

The obvious solution to this gap in knowledge is to conduct additional research, but academic studies alone can’t change or influence historic environment practice nor help us to more effectively communicate with the public. We aren’t alone in considering these kinds of problems, however, as others have already devised ways to bridge the academic/policy divide.

CONSERVATION SOCIAL SCIENCE

In the past 10 years, environmental conservation advocates have been having similar discussions about how to influence natural
resource conservation practice and policies, but have been more proactive in using the results of social science research to influence these areas. The Social Science Working Group at the Society for Conservation Biology, which was created in 2003, has played a leading role in “strengthening conservation social science and its application to conservation practice.” Largely due to the efforts of members of this group, “Conservation Social Science” (CSS) is now recognized as a field of study and increasingly used to understand the complicated relationship between humans and their natural environment. Advocacy organizations are now using CSS studies to influence policy and change people’s behavior.

The primary focus of CSS is to understand people’s behavior, attitudes and beliefs using a wide range of empirical qualitative and quantitative social science research methodologies from anthropology, economics, human geography, political science, and psychology. These studies help to open “policy windows” for conservation action in order to improve the overall effectiveness of environmental conservation strategies. The need for CSS research is driven, in part, by the recognition that “conservation interventions are the product of human decision-making processes and require changes in human behavior to succeed,” as Michael B. Mascia, who is one of the originators of the CSS movement in the Society for Conservation Biology, observes. Mascia’s characterization of the environmental conservation field assumes that “conservation policies and practices are inherently social phenomena,” which means that CSS research can also be used to understand how conservation policies positively and negatively affect people. Conservation advocacy organizations can then use this information to influence how policies are made and administered in order to improve human well-being while achieving conservation goals.

As with built heritage conservation, regulations and financial incentives play an important role in environmental conservation policy. The effectiveness of these measures is limited, however, because they are not linked to how people are intrinsically motivated in their behaviors and decision-making processes. One line of CSS research focuses on how people make decisions, which can therefore help in understanding these intrinsic motivations so that “soft
“Policy” approaches can be more effective in changing people’s behavior.\(^{30}\)

Many environmental conservation advocacy organizations create and/or utilize the results of CSS. The Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International employ social scientists in house or contract their labor and then use the resulting studies to influence policy and advocacy. Other organizations, such as Rare, focus more on using the results of existing CSS studies in the implementation of their mission rather than conducting new CSS research. The USDA National Forest Service uses CSS in its efforts to promote “place-based conservation,” with an emphasis on understanding people’s emotional connection with place.

The Nature Conservancy’s “People and Conservation” program uses a “human-rights approach to conservation [that] incorporates traditional knowledge and cultural values.” An example of applied CSS is the Nature Conservancy’s effort to help the Pumé, an indigenous group, conserve their natural and intangible heritage, which consists of the Llanos (tropical grass plains) in Venezuela and cultural relationships with this land. This work, largely led by anthropologists Eduardo Ariza and Gabriela Croes, has resulted in the designation of 1.2 million acres of land as an ecological and cultural conservation zone. What makes this effort unique is that it was a bottom-up, grassroots effort rather than the typical, government dominated top-down approach. The Nature Conservancy has also used social science methods to help create a permit banking system for fishermen in Maine and to help farmers in Georgia use less water.\(^{31}\)
The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has used CSS to understand the performance of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). An example is a study on the social impact of MPAs in the Bird’s Head Seascape of Papua, Indonesia. Social indicators of MPA users that were analyzed included economic well-being, health, political empowerment, education, and culture. A key finding, which was particularly relevant to understanding how place is valued, is that the people who actively used the Bird’s Head Seascape had a higher level of emotional attachment to the MPA, which was then used to inform the management of the resource. The WWF developed several social science research protocols for these MPA studies in order to better assess social impacts, including a key informant interview protocol, focus group instrument, and survey instrument.

Rare, which proclaims “conservation is about people,” has a mission that “empowers local communities … to shift from being resource users to environmental stewards.” The organization relies on the premise that “conservationists must become as skilled in social change as in science” and therefore uses CSS studies to implement its “theory of change,” which comprises the following six elements:

1. **Knowledge:** Increase people’s awareness of the nature around them and how their behavior affects it.
2. **Attitude:** Speak to people on an emotional level about the personal, cultural and economic benefits of protecting nature.
3. **Interpersonal communications:** Get people talking to each other about the issues. Research correlates community dialog with increased likelihood of change.
4. **Barrier removal:** Identify barriers—social, economic, political or technological—that are prohibiting the behavior change. Provide alternatives or solutions.
5. **Behavior change:** Promote sustainable alternatives or solutions to key target audiences through the Pride campaign.
6. **Threat reduction:** Measure the reduction in human-created threats to biodiversity, such as overfishing or illegal logging.

Rare’s “Pride” campaign then uses this theory to “[inspire] people to take pride in the species and habitats that make their communities unique” by focusing on:
Determining human behaviors causing threats to biodiversity, such as overfishing, illegal logging or unsustainable agriculture

Conducting an ongoing search for innovative community-based, conservation solutions proven to change these behaviors

Launching Pride campaigns to increase adoption of the most effective solutions in the world’s highest priority areas for conservation

As of 2014, Rare has launched 205 Pride campaigns in 57 countries to reach an audience of 10 million people. At the USDA National Forest Service, research social scientists Daniel Williams, Linda Kruger and Jennifer Farnum have been leading efforts on “place-based conservation,” in which “place meanings and place values...guide planning processes” to change “largely top-down, expert-driven decision-making structures [into] polycentric governance emphasizing inclusiveness and collaboration.” The goal of place-based conservation is the incorporation of local knowledge and understanding of the cultural and symbolic significance that people have for places, including how emotionally attached people are to their environments. The planning efforts for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is an example of a place-based planning effort that “prioritized people’s relationships to the land by determining the public’s ideas of what constitutes ‘place’ and defining management areas accordingly.” The study’s authors concluded that the overall process resulted in better communication and the ability of the public to make more informed decisions, but resulted in increased conflicts between the differing values of experts and the public resulting in a lack of “buy-in” from all participants.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND BEHAVIOR RESEARCH

The environmental design and behavior research (EDBR) movement, which architects and psychologists began in the early 1970s, has long been using social science research methods to understand person-place interactions and shares values that are similar to CSS. Its use is most widely known through “evidence based design,” which employs social science research to influence how buildings, landscapes and places are designed, such as with hospital design
to increase efficiency and reduce patient recovery times. EDBR assumes that “designers [should] address real human needs and create designs that are socially and culturally relevant [using] research to back up what designers then propose.” The vast majority of EDBR studies, with the exception of a few that I have discussed previously, address new construction—either buildings or landscapes—and not existing or older buildings, landscapes or places. The general principles employed in these studies, however, can be adapted to a wide variety of environments, including historic environments. EDBR principles are used by a number of place-based advocacy organizations, including Project for Public Spaces (PPS), whose mission is to create better urban design that can “[facilitate] creative patterns of activities and connections (cultural, economic, social, ecological) that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.” In addition to design and planning professionals, PPS’s staff includes experts in environmental design and environmental psychology.

The Environmental Design Research Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering EDBR, which is why I created the Historic Environment Network there in 2008. In 2011 this Network held a special symposium and created “Principles for Integrating Environmental Design and Behavior Research into Built Heritage Conservation Practice,” which is a guide for how social science research can be integrated into practice. Areas of built heritage conservation practice in which EDBR principles can be applied include:

- The embodied relationship between the physical age of place and an individual’s experience and attachment.
- Multicultural and extra-Western perspectives on the conservation of the historic environment.
- An understanding of significance that incorporates stakeholders’ values.
- Informing intervention frameworks from a more holistic perspective.
- Empirically based design review standards.
- Providing better arguments for built heritage conservation based on quality of life and sense of place.
Before these areas of research can be addressed, however, it is necessary to make the following philosophical assumptions in terms of how EDBR should affect practice:

- Built heritage conservation should primarily benefit people.
- Existing legal and doctrinal frameworks make it very difficult to change built heritage conservation practice in order to focus more on people’s social, cultural and experiential value of heritage.
- Built heritage conservation should focus on the conservation of the spirit of place, sense of place, and place attachment and the relationship of these concepts to authenticity.
- Social science research, as embodied by EDBR, has an important role to play in helping understand how the historic environment should be valued and conserved in order to maximize benefits to people while retaining historical authenticity.
- EDBR can help to seek a better balance between expert/objective values and the values of the stakeholders of historic environments.

One possibility for integrating CSS and EDBR approaches into the conservation of the historic environment is to create a forum to encourage increased cross-disciplinary discussions, which could be hosted by an existing organization or through some other vehicle. In my research on these topics, there seems to be very little awareness of what other disciplines are doing, especially in terms of community engagement and social science methods. In addition, no organization has ever attempted to bring the perspectives of heritage conservation, natural resource conservation, and environmental design under one roof. This is a potentially lost opportunity as heritage conservation professionals and academics interested in better understanding the values of stakeholders share many similarities with their colleagues who participate in CSS and EDBR.

CONCLUSION
The social sciences have much to offer built heritage conservation practice, especially in terms of better understanding stakeholders and measuring the overall performance of conservation. To date, historic environment practitioners have not been particularly
effective in communicating using the language of most stakeholders because we don’t really understand how everyday people perceive and value the historic environment. Similarly, there have been few, if any, efforts to measure or assess the overall performance of built heritage conservation efforts. We therefore need to be more aware of these issues and open to potential solutions, including using existing frameworks from conservation social science and environment design and behavior research.

The goals we share with the conservation and environmental design movements are a recognition that conservation needs to have a social solution, which includes changing people’s behavior, and that the physical characteristics of the environment—broadly construed as cultural and natural—affect people’s behavior, perception and values. While social science research that addresses the historic environment is represented through the field of heritage studies, a challenge will be to overcome the academic/policy divide that separates this area of study from practice. It will be interesting to see, in the coming years, if built heritage conservation advocacy organizations will adopt social science research to influence their policy and advocacy efforts. The promise in this endeavor is to make built heritage conservation more relevant and meaningful to a wider array of stakeholders by focusing on reinforcing and influencing people’s intrinsic behaviors.

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To watch a video of “Why Do Old Places Matter?” with presenters Tom Mayes, Max Page and Jeremy Wells at the 2014 Past Forward conference in Savannah, Georgia, click here.


I am indebted to Lucas Lixinski for inspiring me to create a list of orthodox and heterodox approaches to heritage, upon which this particular list is based.

A 95 percent level of confidence means that 5 percent of the time your results are not actually correctly representing the population.


The author readily acknowledges the postmodern turn in the break with positivism in the social sciences, but this article lacks sufficient space to explore this history in depth here.

Indeed, here is a research question that begs to be answered with empirical evidence!


Herzog and Shier, “Complexity, Age, and Building Preference.”


Wells and Baldwin, “Historic Preservation, Significance, and Age Value.”

Ibid.


Wells, “Our History Is Not False: Perspectives from the Revitalisation Culture.”

Smith, Uses of Heritage, 29, 30.


26 See http://www.conbio.org/groups/working-groups/social-science.


29 Ibid.


33 See http://mpamystery.org/.

34 http://www.rare.org/.


40 The “Principles for Integrating Environmental Design and Behavior Research into Built Heritage Conservation Practice” can be found at http://heritagestudies.org/EDRA.shtml.

The Power of Uniqueness

ED MCMAHON

Ed McMahon, a National Trust Advisor and Senior Resident Fellow at the Urban Land Institute, is nationally known as an inspiring and thought-provoking speaker on historic preservation and land use policies and trends. In November 2014 he participated in a TEDx event in Jacksonville, Florida. In the spirit of “ideas worth spreading,” TEDx events are independently organized forums that bring people together to share an experience similar to that offered at the annual, national TED conference. McMahon’s talk on “The Power of Uniqueness” is directly related to this Forum Journal’s focus on “Why Do Old Places Matter?” McMahon sets forth a compelling argument for the economic, psychological and social value of preserving community uniqueness, including historic buildings, neighborhoods and landscapes. We encourage you to watch this short talk. FJ

VIDEO
To watch “The Power of Uniqueness,” click here.
Crafting the Message about Why Old Places Matter

Everyone has a place that matters to them, but sometimes it is difficult to articulate why that place is so important. Just saying that it is “old” or “historic” doesn’t begin to encapsulate what that old place means.

To make it easier for preservation advocates to clearly express why old places matter, the National Trust has developed a toolkit to help preservation organizations and community activists explain why old places matter in their communities. Key messages in the toolkit grew out of the “Why Do Old Places Matter?” blog post series, written by Tom Mayes and based on his recent research exploring why old places are beneficial for people. Preservation advocates can adapt the key messages from the toolkit to promote the reuse of a neighborhood school, encourage the revitalization of a downtown block, protest the proposed demolition of an old courthouse, or enlist support for a new historic district. In short, this toolkit is to help people who like old places put into words why these places are so important and why they should be preserved.

TAKEAWAY
To access the toolkit on “Why Do Old Places Matter?” click here.