Beyond the 1964 Venice Charter: cultural heritage as regeneration (ever changing never less than whole)

Para além da Carta de Veneza de 1964: património cultural como regeneração (em constante mudança, mas sempre completo)

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Abstract

In the age of climate change, even cultural heritage and the meaning of the past must be rethought to meet contemporary and future needs. This task is already being addressed encompassing studies of cultural heritage in relation to the Anthropocene, people-centred approaches, and post-human perspectives, which I build on here. From an archaeological perspective, I ask what it means to imagine a framework for cultural heritage that is inspired by the notion of regeneration embracing continuous change and transformation in relation to both natural and cultural heritage. In this perspective, what matters is not safeguarding authentic remains of the past such as monuments and sites, but to ensure the preconditions for the wellbeing of fellow human and non-human beings living under changing circumstances in the present and the future. I conclude with discussion of some implications of what such a life-centred perspective may mean for future practices of heritage management beyond central principles of the 1964 Venice Charter.

KEYWORDS

Anthropocene
Climate change
Cultural heritage management
Heritage futures
People-centred approaches
Post-human perspectives

Resumo

Na era das alterações climáticas, até mesmo o património cultural e o significado do passado devem ser repensados para atender às necessidades contemporâneas e futuras. Essa tarefa já está a ser abordada, com estudos sobre o património cultural em relação ao Antropoceno, abordagens centradas nas pessoas e perspetivas pós-humanas, nas quais me baseio. De uma perspetiva arqueológica, questiono o que significa imaginar um quadro para o património cultural inspirado na noção de regeneração, que abrange a mudança e a transformação contínuas em relação ao património natural e cultural. Nesta perspetiva, o importante não é salvaguardar vestígios autênticos do passado (monumentos e sítios), mas garantir as condições prévias para o bem-estar dos seres humanos e não humanos que vivem em circunstâncias variáveis, no presente e no futuro. Concluo, discutindo algumas implicações do que essa perspetiva centrada na vida pode significar para as práticas futuras de gestão do património, além dos princípios centrais da Carta de Veneza de 1964.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Antropoceno
Alterações climáticas
Gestão do património cultural
Futuro do património
Abordagens centradas nas pessoas
Perspetivas pós-humanas

Beyond Venice

The 1964 Venice Charter (ICOMOS 1965) focuses on the conservation and restoration of historic monuments, i.e. a subsection of what today would be called tangible cultural heritage. It states that it considers historic monuments as "living witnesses of their age-old traditions" (Preamble) and that the underlying intention is to safeguard them "as historical evidence" (Art. 3). As a consequence, the Charter established an approach to conservation characterised by minimal intervention, a strong emphasis on preserving the authenticity and original fabric of monuments, and respect for the accumulated contributions of all historical periods. It advocated that any restorative work should be distinguishable from the original, refrain from conjecture, and be fully documented. The Charter further stressed the importance of maintaining historic monuments in the distinct "setting in which it occurs" (Art. 7). Although these principles were occasionally challenged [1-3] as well as further developed [4], they remain the baseline for modern conservation and restoration of tangible cultural heritage, among others affecting the care for historic buildings and museum collections.

Today, six decades later, experts in heritage and conservation are increasingly inspired by new concepts like the Anthropocene, people-centred approaches, post-human thinking, and the climate crisis [5-11]. These perspectives, partly resulting from an appreciation of new futures that are radically different from anything humanity has ever witnessed, have led to an interesting challenge: it is no longer self-evident that the past still matters at all [12]. By implication, safeguarding sites and monuments as historical evidence may have lost its significance too.

What, then, matters instead? In the contemporary world, scholars and practitioners in the cultural heritage sector are increasingly attentive to the socio-cultural and environmental contexts that shape, and indeed define, tangible cultural heritage [13-14]. Consequently, the setting is not merely the historical and aesthetic frame within which a monument or site "occurs," but it is the very condition that brings it into being, imparts specific meanings, and determines its significance.

In the present paper, I am asking what that recent change in perspective exactly consists of and what it implies for conservation and restoration and thus for the future significance of the canonical 1964 Venice Charter. I will introduce a concept of regeneration for cultural heritage management that extends common meanings of the term established in relation to derelict urban contexts. Conservation as regeneration takes us beyond concepts such as preservation and material authenticity which have been central to the conservation discourse represented by the Venice Charter. This approach offers a new perspective on how cultural heritage can actively contribute to the well-being of both human and non-human beings on our planet.

Heritage changes

If indeed the wider significance of the past and of cultural heritage is rapidly changing in the present for the future, this has some wide-ranging implications for conservation and restoration of historical monuments and sites. Elsewhere I have been identifying in this context a "Climate Heritage Paradox" which consists of two contradictions that cannot be resolved in current practice and demand a re-conceptualization of the very notion of cultural heritage and how we manage it [11]. Here I extend my discussion of one of them.

It is deeply paradoxical that cultural heritage often inspires stakeholders and audiences to value continuities rather than transformations and to take comfort and gain resilience from looking backward rather than forward [15] – precisely as humanity is facing change, including a climate crisis, and increasingly becomes aware of a need for transformation of existing ways of life. Taking a global picture, continuities are increasingly negatively valued and the future lies in change [16]. But cultural heritage remains deeply immersed in a paradigm of sameness

and identity, exemplified by the principles of the Venice Charter governing the conservation and restoration of historic monuments and sites "as living witnesses" of the past, "in the full richness of their authenticity" (Preamble). Given the climate crisis and other challenges ahead, the focus needs to shift from safeguarding evidence of people's origins in distinct cultural contexts deriving from the past to improving the prospects of human beings as a lifeform on Earth through distinct transformations for the future. Cultural heritage, after all, includes not only what we happen to inherit from the past but also what we are knowingly leaving behind for the future.

There is a risk that "culturalist understandings and frameworks", combined with "a general understanding of heritage as a fixed and inherently conservative category", result in heritage acting "as a potential barrier to change and adaptation, manifesting a kind of cultural drag" [17, p. 49]. When cultural heritage hinders necessary transformations, slows down adaptive change and promotes backward-looking attitudes it creates a barrier to constructive conversations about change and acts as an obstacle for climate adaptation [18].

It is indicative that the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), which considers the Venice Charter as its foundational text, chose the theme "Heritage Changes" for the Scientific Symposium held during the twenty-first Triennial General Assembly in 2023 in Sydney, Australia. Similarly revealing is the title of the former Assistant Director General for Culture of UNESCO, Francesco Bandarin's [19], authoritative account of heritage in the contemporary world: "Changing Heritage". I agree with those experts who have recently been acknowledging the need for "a fundamental rethink and transformation of cultural heritage management and policy" [20] and who have been advocating for "transformative continuity" [21], "transformative change" [22], "curating transformation" [23], "managed retreat" [24], "curated decay" [25], "adaptive release" [18], "decay without mourning" [26], and "averting loss aversion" [27-28]. At this point, cultural heritage management is rethinking its emphasis on preservation and shifts priorities from preventing or minimizing change, as is evident in the Venice Charter, to embracing and actively managing change and transformation [7, 29-34]. Change has, of course, long been at the very core of conservation and restoration. What distinguished various approaches in past and present conservation theory and practice is the extent to which change should be prevented, camouflaged or reversible [35]. Maybe the big question to be asked today is why any original conditions should have a special significance in the first place [1, 29].

Acknowledging these emerging changes of perspective in the cultural heritage sector, I suggest adopting the concept of regeneration in cultural heritage management. This paper is intended as one contribution to exploring further what it might mean to imagine a cultural heritage that is predominantly about change, embracing and facilitating adaptive transformation and recreating our cultural waypoints for a new reality. – In doing so, I need to clarify at the outset that my understanding of regeneration goes beyond established meanings of the term in relation to the built environment, cultural heritage, or conservation [31], not the least the revitalization or environmental rehabilitation of derelict urban areas and adaptive reuses of preserved historic buildings [36]. When relating to historic monuments and sites, such initiatives often involve the conservation or restoration of cultural heritage in line with the principles of the Venice Charter. My own focus here is different: I care about life not about loss.

Regenerating cultural heritage

Many times, in the summer in Sweden, where I live and work, the natural vegetation around archaeological sites can be so dense and abundant that it takes considerable concentration or advanced technologies like Lidar scanning to filter out nearly all you see so that the faint remains of historic monuments and other features that form "the archaeology" will emerge. It strikes me that one important skill of the Swedish archaeologists, both in their research and in

public outreach, is to try and "unsee" what are perhaps the most prominent aspects of the sites they are working on: whether that is the rich growth of vegetation, the manifold micro creatures, or other natural features and associated ecosystems that dominate the site. Only after unseeing everything else will the slight elevations of the ground or the barely discernible patterns of some stones emerge for the observer, indicating an archaeological site. When excavating, archaeologists can find that the overwhelming vegetation on the surface of the site continues below the surface. There may be plants and roots of various strengths, from tree stumps to dense rhizomes of tiny roots, providing habitats for a variety of small creatures and mirroring the abundance and variety of life above the surface. Often, Swedish archaeologists are excavating with secateurs as much as with trowels. They consider these thriving life forms as disturbing: not only disturbing the proper view of archaeological sites but also the proper progress of archaeological excavations [37].

Archaeologists share with many other historical researchers that they set out to recover and represent the past from its preserved remains. But in the environment containing archaeological sites different processes are at work. Ecosystems of many lifeforms are renewed in a process of continuous recreation, effectively regenerating life at the site all the time. Archaeological sites are part of these processes.

This is reaffirmed by Robert Irwin's Central Garden at the Getty Centre in Los Angeles, USA. First opened in 1997 and as an artwork included in the collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum, the garden is never complete but an ongoing process of organic growth and transformation (Figure 1). It cannot be conserved without embracing change. Besides the impact of natural rhythms of day and night, there are seasonal changes that are actively managed by a team of gardeners and involve extensive replanting. In addition, Getty chief horticulturalist Jackie Flor also acknowledges that there are long-term transformations gradually emerging: she notes that she can only follow Irwin's intentions if accepting that the garden "is ever changing," not the least responding to climate change [38]. She follows the same approach as Irwin did, who said that "we're playing it as we go" [39, p. 46], stating that "I spend a lot of time looking, and then the garden eventually tells you what it wants" [38]. Wild animals, including a few ducks that make their way into the garden's pond, were not intended by Irwin but are tolerated now to thrive in this habitat, too.

Although Irwin established some specific rules and structures that will persist, he accepted that the world is about surprise and change. His garden, he said, is "real" and "better than what you can plan" in the sense that it is "living in the world," "has the strength to survive being lived in" and "make its way in the world", wondering "who knows what it will be fifty years from now?" [39, pp. 58, 132-133]. This attitude extends even to the not-living materials Irwin used in the garden: stones, teak, rails of bronze – which all "improve with age" [39, p. 70]. Irwin's dedication to his daughter Anna-Grace in the garden makes the time fifty years in the future very explicit [39, p. 133]. The plants, of course, also build on processes of gardening and breeding that go back many years in the past [39, p. 46] That is why the garden is "ever changing never less than whole" and "ever present never twice the same", as Irwin put it [39, p. 83]. It might be said that the garden is sustainable to the extent that it continues to change and keeps regenerating life. Something similar could be said about food art that may involve transformations of the artwork as a result of ongoing ecological processes [40]. I am arguing that such processes are also applicable to many other forms of cultural heritage.

Figure 1. Robert Irwin's Central Garden at the Getty Centre in Los Angeles, USA (1997-). This mixed media sculpture in the form of a garden is about feelings and about perceptions of colour, texture, structures, contrasts, and processes of change over time. Robert Irwin, Central Garden, 1997 (Photo: Jackie Flor).

Regeneration means "create again" and involves processes of remaking [41]. Continuous regeneration results in comprehensive transformation. The concept is used widely and may be applied to ecosystems, populations, and communities; genomes, cells, and organisms of any species; a building or an urban area (as noted earlier); a human's spirit; any kind of system. In my view, the central point about regeneration in relation to cultural heritage is not "how" a monument or site has changed or will change, but the recognition "that" it is subject to transformation at all times. This aspect is shared by natural and cultural heritage even though it is often overlooked in cultural contexts. In other words, focusing on regeneration makes us see monuments and sites, like trees and other lifeforms, as processes in contemporary landscapes realizing repeatedly their changing potential over time, not as outcomes of distinctive acts of creation and living witnesses of the past now threatened by loss and damage [26, 31, 34, 42-43]. Similarly, the social anthropologist Tim Ingold [44, p. 3] points to the significance in appreciating all life of the distinction between succeeding "generations", one after another, and continuous "generation" (or here regeneration) involving development and change, seemingly extending into eternity.

In the present context, we can therefore contrast two ways of describing tangible cultural heritage and its management (Table 1). According to the spirit of the 1964 Venice Charter on conservation and restoration, monuments and sites are authentic remains of the past in a given setting, to be safeguarded against threats of loss or damage, with a minimum of intervention. They are considered valuable as historical evidence and living witnesses of the past, to be appreciated as works of art and researched to represent the past. But taking the perspective of the living ecosystems, of which heritage sites form a part, we see manifold life-forms in continuous processes of change and transformation, regenerating life and realizing their potentials in specific environments. Archaeologists are often blind to these processes, although their work directly affects the ecosystem of the sites, e.g. by cutting roots, sieving soil, and leaving behind apple cores.

Table 1. Two ways of describing some principles of cultural heritage management.

Conservation	Regeneration
Doctrines of cultural heritage management, e.g. Venice Charter	Processes in living ecosystems, e.g. at natural and cultural heritage sites
Authentic remains preserved from the past, e.g. monuments and sites	Environment containing manifold lifeforms
Living witnesses of the past, minimum of intervention	Ever present, ever changing eco-systems
Safeguarding what is threatened by loss or damage	Allowing transformation and the realisation of existing potential
Acts of research recovering the past and representing what is gone	Continuous processes of renewal and recreation, regenerating life

As an addendum to the Venice Charter, ICOMOS adopted in 1982 the Florence Charter on historic gardens. Although the latter reaffirms the former, it also acknowledges in Article 2 that gardens are "primarily vegetal and therefore living, which means that they are perishable and renewable" and that their authenticity must embrace "the cycle of seasons" and "the growth and decay of nature." If monuments, too, are "living" entities, as the Venice Charter has it, they are probably best governed in line with natural processes as well [45]. After all, even culture and its monuments are renewable and eventually perishing [36, p. 147].

While immersed in continuous processes of natural regeneration, plants are commonly rooted in soil. There are intimate connections also between our lives as humans – past, present, and future – and the soil below us, which contains numerous remains of objects created in the past or lasting into the future. Although the soil is recognized as an archive of scientific data about life in the past and an agent in ongoing archaeological formation processes, these wider relations are commonly ignored by archaeologists who are digging in the soil but suffering from "plant" and "soil blindness", disregarding the significance of the soil as a living and multi-temporal heritage [6, 46-47]. As Fredengren [6, p. 275] put it, "[s]oils are multispecies historical archives, constantly on the move to become something else", being affected by erosion, decay and regeneration emerging from ecological relations with human and non-human entities. Related ideas are expressed in Fabrice Hyber's art installation *Homme de terre*, the Man of Earth (Figure 2).

Botanist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer [48] wrote from a very personal perspective what may be said about the Man of Earth: "The happy truth is that when I am an ancestor. I will be soil. Human become humus. I view that as a wonderful outcome, to mingle with roots and translucent springtails, become entangled in mycorrhizal networks and commune with bits of ancient mountains. This is company I relish for eternity!".

In this sense, humans are part of the processes of regeneration that are going on all around, and underneath them (Figure 1). Similarly, a much-cited but unprovenanced meme on the internet has it that in reality, plants are actually farming us humans by giving us oxygen daily until we eventually decompose so they can consume us. Wall Kimmerer's confession evokes eternity while also appreciating that the seemingly timeless processes and principles of regeneration are about experiencing the very moment when the past, the future, and maybe time altogether disappear: "If there is meaning in the past and in the (…) future, it is captured in the moment. When you have all the time in the world, you can spend it, not on going somewhere, but on being where you are. So I stretch out, close my eyes, and listen to the rain" [49, p. 296].

This sentiment may be shared, in certain moments, by the archaeologist who is working in the soil of a site, engaging with its many living beings, and exposed to the rain that keeps sustaining life. I mean that quite literally, thinking of thriving ecosystems, not of the soil and roots as metaphors for the autochthonous growth of a people and nation from time immemorial, i.e. the nationalistic framework from which the concern with cultural heritage emerged two centuries ago [47].

Figure 2. Human becoming humus. Fabrice Hyber, Homme de terre, 2010/2022, as displayed in the exhibition La Vallée, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (2023). Charcoal, oil paint, pastel on canvas, plastic, bones, metal, wood, dirt (Photo: Cornelius Holtorf).

A people-centred approach

If regeneration makes us focus on the moment, exploring tangible cultural heritage in terms of regeneration can sever the links of cultural heritage to past times that according to Zoltán Simon [12] are increasingly redundant and may no longer matter. Incidentally, Simon's important paper misses an important aspect concerning cultural heritage which could strengthen his point further. In a discussion of the contemporary significance of various kinds of past, he covered "the present past" (the legacy of the past refusing to go away), "the associated past" (identity claims made with reference to the past), and "the inherited past" (the past received from past generations and preserved for future ones). But he ignored that cultural heritage, despite the term, has already some time ago come to replace the past in significance in contemporary society [50]. Heritage is not what has been inherited from the past at all, but a present-day manifestation of what is collectively remembered about the past in a given contemporary context.

In other words, monuments and sites are primarily not significant, as the Venice Charter has it, as historical evidence and witnesses of the past. Instead, they are living, yet in another sense as implied in the Charter. Laurajane Smith [51, p. 2] emphasized that cultural heritage is not so much "a thing", but "a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present". In such a framework, the link of historic monuments and sites, as tangible cultural heritage, to the past cannot be established through dating and is not about appreciating its age: therefore, cultural heritage is not linked to "age-old traditions," to refer to another phrase occurring in the Venice Charter. Instead, cultural heritage possesses what may be called pastness, i. e. the quality of a

given object to be "of the past" in a given social and cultural context [52, p. 500]. Accordingly, the values and uses of cultural heritage are not inherent and timeless (as historical evidence witnessing the past) but they change over time according to their varying social and cultural contexts in which pastness is regularly re-framed. These contexts are the actual settings of cultural heritage that first give meaning to cultural heritage and define its significance.

Taking this perspective means taking a people-centred view of cultural heritage which is increasingly prevalent in the cultural heritage sector and means a shift away from principles on conservation, reconstruction and restoration such as those enshrined in the Venice Charter. As Rebecca Madgin and James Lesh stated plainly at the start of their introduction to a volume entitled *People-Centred Methodologies for Heritage Conservation*, "The field of Critical Heritage Studies has largely moved away from seeing the value of heritage as objective and material-centric and only capable of being evaluated by experts" [53, p. 1].

In the past few decades, we have been seeing a major shift from object-centred to people-centred approaches: from conserving the inherent properties of cultural heritage to managing its attributed values, from acknowledging the special responsibility of experts for taking care of cultural heritage to recognizing the ethical duty to listen to and involve the people affected by heritage, and from the need to protect monuments and sites to the opportunity to use them for people's benefit. If anything ought to be conserved or restored through cultural heritage it is people's lives. In a nutshell, cultural heritage and the past are today definitely not what they used to be.

The title of a chapter by Thompson and Wijesuriya [14] sums up this shift nicely: from "sustaining heritage" to "heritage sustaining broader societal wellbeing and benefits". The changes between these two perspectives are part of a larger shift of priorities and approaches in the cultural heritage sector. Whereas the 1964 Venice Charter builds on conservation principles that are expert driven and aim at ensuring care for the survival and wellbeing of monuments and sites, the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity [4] introduced a new paradigm foregrounding cultural diversity and principles of managing continuity and change that are society driven and aim at the care of heritage to enhance the wellbeing of people and society. Other policy documents such as the 2013 Hangzhou Declaration [54] added further dimensions to this significant change of culture and heritage increasingly serving the needs of humanity.

This shift towards people-centred approaches meant that cultural heritage is about serving the lives of living people not about dead people. It has been of great importance in supranational and transnational discussions on cultural heritage management in recent decades, e.g. those facilitated by UNESCO, the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and the World Bank [8, 19]. Related strategies are also found in the 2000 Council of Europe Landscape Convention and in the 2005 Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention).

Three decades after Nara [4], today it may be time to rethink some principles of conservation and restoration once again. In an age called the Anthropocene by some, when human thriving is questioned by a fast-accelerating climate crisis, it is hardly surprising that post-human sensibilities abound that reframe the nature-culture nexus. This is where regeneration comes in.

Towards a life-centred perspective

Human beings are part of larger environments subsuming what we are used to be calling nature and culture but what is in fact impossible to divide into such categories [33]. For one, humans contain entire ecosystems within their very bodies. An average human mouth contains about one thousand times more bacteria than the number of people alive today [55, p. 255]. There are no strict boundaries between species, including the human species. The human body may be

called "transcorporeal", blurring the boundary between the body and its surroundings, merging people, places, and various substances, which are all regenerating together [56, p. 59]. These substances may be organic, such as bacteria and fungi, or inorganic, as in the case of tattooing ink and of stable isotopes that biomolecular archaeology can identify in human bone samples. Such isotopes originate from human diet, entangling nature and culture in meshwork, and literally pointing to the fact that "you are what you eat" [56, pp. 59-60; 57, p. 802]. The human body also contains DNA from a variety of species. Humans, as holobionts, can be seen as multispecies ecosystems and we all are bodies of continuously evolving beings. In a certain way, the excavating archaeologists are themselves, as embodied beings, descendants of many of the creatures that were co-inhabiting the site during prehistory as well as bodily ancestors of many creatures who are going to live around the site in the future.

By the same token, human bodies, including human DNA, become distributed in the surrounding landscape, e.g. through faeces, decomposing bodies or body parts, or various bodily fluids [56, pp. 61-62; 47]. In a way, the prehistoric inhabitants of archaeological sites may therefore still be very present in the immediate vicinity of the excavation area. By the same token, a part of the archaeologist never leaves the site. Moreover, some of the ancestors of the flora and fauna that occur today at an archaeological site may already have existed there in prehistory. Given environmental and cultural changes over time, it is likely that a continuous process of growth and regeneration led to a gradual change of species. The point is that the contemporary ecosystems at an archaeological site are the outcome of a long history of continuous development, with species changing according to varying conditions. The species present today relate to those that inhabited the area in prehistory, much as the site links human occupation across different periods, even in the absence of evidence for direct continuity of settlement or human ancestry.

In a paper significantly titled "Growing Concerns: Plants and Their Roots in the Past", the archaeologist Stein Farstadvoll [43] argued that plants at historic sites are not recolonizing or rewilding an originally sterile site, but they may lie dormant for long whiles and at certain points reappear, haunting sites like vegetarian ghosts. Consequently, ruins are not overgrowing but just growing; they are fulfilling astonishing potentials that have been present even before any historic building ever was constructed in the same location [43, p. 183]. In that sense, from the plants' perspective, ancient sites are not gradually decaying and disintegrating but embodying what Farstadvoll [43, pp. 184-185] calls "negative entropy": a vibrant ecology where the vegetation is continuously "developing, emerging and persisting, often in bewilderingly[!] different ways". Elsewhere, Farstadvoll [42, pp. 328, 331] took this approach further to reflect more on how heritage "affects and is affected by non-humans such as plants, animals, minerals and fungi", emerging "through a wide array of organisms and things". Looking closer at "the ecological complexity of heritage environments that sometimes get left behind in the hunt for a pristine past", led him to appreciating that this "is not a heritage that asserts comforting histories about who we were or are, but rather one that makes visible the inheritance of an uncertain future" [42, p. 345].

What is more, gardens, features in the landscape, tangible cultural heritage such as buildings, and human beings share more characteristics with each other than we commonly realize. Tim Ingold [58] proposed once that people and buildings, like mountains, clouds, and waves in the ocean, are persistent, continuously re-born and constantly growing, going through ever new transformations and regenerations. This is also true for fungi which, according to Robert Macfarlane [59, p. 102] "do strange things to time, because it is not easy to say where a fungus ends or begins, when it is born or when it dies". In this view, all these entities' modes of existence have no beginning or end but are punctuated by various events and persistent processes of transformation and regeneration continuously carrying on. They all continually evolve and grow, not the least in meaning and significance. The very practices of managing cultural heritage and conducting cultural heritage studies, exemplify such regenerative transformations too, not the least when concrete changes result from

designations as historical monument or cultural heritage. To understand these transformations, we need to ask at any specific point in time: what is being maintained and used? What is adapted to new purposes and how? And what is abandoned or substituted? As Ingold [44, pp. 41-42] put it, we should care more about what is underway in a world that keeps turning than what might be extracted from a stack of (re-)sources piled up underneath the surface.

Tangible cultural heritage should cease to be considered and treated as physical objects that are created at one point in the past and then lost, or instead preserved, at another, more recent point in time. Ancient monuments and sites, like gardens, people and trees, are not objects but processes. It is revealing that many of the archaeologists' soil samples dissected from the site's historical layers contain viable seeds that start growing without much delay… (Figure 3). Tangible cultural heritage is not something completed which lasts for a certain period of time, but they are continuously being reappreciated and recreated, transforming their character and significance, from their first imagined existence to the most recent appreciation of what they have become. That is why change is so important to appreciate in cultural heritage studies and management. As in natural ecosystems, even an act of destruction means change and can involve creation and change, sometimes enhancing value rather than reducing it [27-28].

In sum, an ancient site and its human and non-human occupants, past, present, and future, cannot be strictly divided but they conjoin with each other – not in the sense of replacement and succession of generations but in the sense of continuous regeneration: renewal, growth, and development of life [44]. Natural and cultural environments are intertwined in fluid processes of creative transformation and regeneration. It seems unwarranted to separate them, whether in academic analysis, in heritage management, or in biological categories such as species, when they are, in fact, interconnected processes of life.

Figure 3. An archaeological site in a process of adaptive change in new circumstances, blurring boundaries between nature and culture (photo: Joakim Palmqvist 2022).

My life-centred perspective in this paper thus points to the pertinence, and some implications, of such post-human and cross-temporal thinking in the Anthropocene. Historical evidence in the human environment, also known as the archaeological record, is a more-than-human record that is always already truly mixed and contains all sorts of entities and processes: human and non-human, living and material [13, p. 193].

Concluding discussion: the life we long for

I argued in this paper that managing cultural heritage, as shown in Robert Irwin's Central Garden at the Getty Centre, needs to facilitate regular updating in a creative process of continuous regeneration and adaptation to changing circumstances. Change and transformation, as it occurs in living ecosystems – even when it involves conflicts of interest, as it often does – ought to be embraced and promoted in heritage too, especially when it is situated within them. It might be said that cultural heritage is a motor and manifestation of change and regeneration over time, not their victim.

Monuments and sites, whether above or below the surface, mirror people's changing circumstances, aspirations and ways of life over time. They may at times stand in opposition to one another, yet they are always embedded in processes of continuous transformation. Such places represent the full complexity and richness arising from the human capacity to cope with and care for the world, as well as from the resilience of non-human lifeforms within evolving ecosystems [60, p. 40]. Cultural heritage offers one arena for appreciating the mutability and resilience of life on Earth. The values of cultural heritage are not necessarily best enhanced or maintained by conservation of its fabric, but often through enabling timely change and transformation [30]. Indeed, an aspiration to contain change can readily turn into compulsive loss aversion [27].

These insights highlight the need to reassess former certainties in cultural heritage management, such as the preference for preserving authentic fabric as a witness to the past, which is enshrined in the 1964 Venice Charter. Recent scholarship in Heritage Studies emphasizes new, emerging priorities, including the responsibility to manage heritage in ways that contribute to creating desirable futures, not the least inspired by intergenerational fairness [8, 15, 19, 28, 34]. In this spirit, it might be said that "What matters is not so much preventing or minimizing loss and damage of the human legacy inherited from the past but to ensure the preconditions for the wellbeing of fellow human and indeed non-human beings living under changing circumstances in the present and the future" [11, p. 274].

A focus on growth and regeneration challenges rigid separations between past, present, and future. Historicist attempts to interpret the present and future primarily through insights about the past have been questioned, even within debates among historians [12, pp. 49-50]. These shifts open the way for new perceptions, uses, and ways of caring for cultural heritage. Prioritizing regeneration of human and non-human life may mean putting modernist attitudes to one side. As Ingold [44, pp. 124-125] suggested, "The future is not, after all, a problem to be solved. It is, rather, the life we long for…".

At a time when the future of humanity is challenged by the consequences of climate change as well as other major challenges and when the nations of the world have agreed on an ambitious *Pact for the Futures* [16], more might be done for culture and cultural heritage to be considered as part of the solution rather than another casualty. Embracing change in relation to tangible cultural heritage can help make people more resilient and societies more sustainable [15].

Monuments and sites, when understood more as living ecosystems than as "historical evidence" or "living witnesses" of the past situated within a fixed "setting," can serve as reminders of the potential that comes from embracing uncertainty and trusting in the remarkable regenerative capacities of living beings to adapt to changing circumstances and co-shape the world to come. This perspective entails a temporality of continuous renewal,

recreation, and regeneration which is very different from the temporality structured around the opposition between conservation and loss implied in the Venice Charter. It also implies not only a people-centred approach, now widely accepted, but also a broader life-centred perspective, which remains relatively new. From this standpoint, what ought to be conserved, and where necessary restored, is not the monument or site itself, but the well-being of people in their societies and the sustainable relationships between human and non-human life forms under changing conditions.

In sum, cultural heritage embodies change and development of human and non-human life in processes of continuous regeneration. These processes are fluid and shifting – like people change with age, trees change as they grow, and clouds change as they are driven along by the wind. As Robert Irwin put it so succinctly, monuments and sites, like gardens, are ever present, never twice the same. Lets manage them accordingly, enabling and celebrating organic change and the life it generates, timelessly.

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