Talking Heritage: Africa at the Crossroads of Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract

This paper address the question: given the ethical imperatives of today's world, could traditional building heritage realistically make any fresh contributions to an alternative development model? The above questions are explored via a dialectics between the traditional earth building methods and modernity as widely understood in Uganda. Heritage is conceptualised as constitutive of interactions between processes, products and people, and the environment The paper tests the conjecture that, claims to culture and its preservation, constitute a multi-layered veil which advertently or inadvertently obstructs Ugandans from comprehending and making the deep structural changes required to re/produce their desired architecture and lifestyles.

Key words: *Heritage, modern architecture, critical regionalism, museology, Uganda, sustainability*

Résumé

Ce document traite de la question : compte tenu des impératifs éthiques du monde d' aujourd'hui , patrimoine de construction traditionnelle pourrait faire réaliste des nouvelles contributions à un modèle de développement alternatif ?
Les questions ci-dessus sont explorées par une dialectique entre les méthodes de construction en terre traditionnelles et la modernité aussi largement compris en Ouganda . Patrimoine est conceptualisée comme constitutive d'interactions entre les processus, les produits et les personnes et l'environnement Le papier teste l' hypothèse selon laquelle , prétend à la culture et à sa préservation , constituer un voile multicouche qui entrave délibérément ou par inadvertance Ougandais de comprendre et de faire la structure profonde changements nécessaires pour re / produire leur architecture et leur mode de vie souhaité .
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Introduction

This paper is an analysis of building heritage. The term "building" is used in three senses: as the physical artefact (the *building*), as the *building processes* (the construction processes), and as the process of construing (or building) the heritage of things in society. This equivocal stance is reflected throughout the paper – be it in the dialectical analytics of the tension between tradition and modernity or in the normative arguments for hybridisation. This broad conception facilitates a deep engagement with building heritage in a modern context, especially because, as Berman (1983) argues, any modern condition is quintessentially pregnant with its contradiction. Modernity has generally enhanced people's living standard. Yet, most in the developing world remain, by modern measures, at a miserable standard of living.

The paper starts with an analytical overview of the evolution of heritage conception. A link is then made to the architectural theory of Critical Regionalism to leverage arguments for a more explicitly ethical approach to building heritage in Uganda, in Africa and in general. The arguments are empirically grounded in insights from three focus discussions on the building material earth. Through these means, the paper investigates the relationship between building heritage and development, a possibility that the author believes has remained sub-altern and marginal.

Changing Heritage Conception

Heritage had traditionally been defined in relation to objects (see UNESCO 1972). However, by the 1960s, there were growing objections to this object-oriented focus which gradually resulted in changing conception of what heritage is and can be; who can define it, and the processes that can be used for its validation. This gathered momentum in the 1990s. The defining difference was a shift from an object focus to a process focus (Bortolotto 2006). Where UNESCO's 1972 definition of heritage was limited to tangible objects, the emerging conception, which was formalised in the Yamato Declaration (UNESCO 2004), expanded the definition to include the processes that underpin the production and maintenance of the objects. The shift manifested changes at deeper paradigmatic level. Initially a Western paradigm with a linear view of history predominated, but the emergent approach was underpinned by a Japanese non-linear paradigm (Bortolotto 2006).

There are apparent intersections of the emerging conception of heritage with Critical Theory perspectives. This is evidenced by a remarkable shift from what is an elitist heritage conception to approaches more encompassing of popular viewpoints. Now, it is not just monuments which are to qualify as heritage, but all sorts of objects – even the very ordinary ones. Previously, the only methods considered legitimate for

heritage authentication were those elitist of the scholarly and scientific communities such as museology, philology, archaeology and ethnography. But by problematising the notion of "authenticity", these were now expanded to encompass non-elitist and non-academic methods such folklore and implicit knowledge of indigenous communities. The new conception of heritage was constructivist, had a higher level of relativism, and was accommodative to participatory, bottom-up, decentralised approaches (UNESCO 2004, Gonzalez-Perez and Parcero-Oubina 2011).

UNESCO called for a reappraisal of heritage perspectives to facilitate recognition of the vernacular, the oral, and the profane instead of just the monumental, classical, the literate, and the sacred.

Simultaneously, there was a shift from a retrospective heritage reference-frame to a progressive outlook. Where previously the main concern of heritage was with that which may disappear, the new conception was accommodative to that which may appear; where heritage was before conceived as fixed and static, it was now seen to be more dynamic; where conservation was seen as a struggle against degradation, disappearance, destruction and change, the new approach vouches for focusing on processes as devices for continuous identity and cultural re/production, and creation. The new perspectives gradually evolved to encompass in heritage all the values of culture as expressed in everyday life, including attaching greater importance to the activities calculated to sustain the ways of life and forms of expression by which such values were conveyed (UNESCO 2004; Bortolotto 2006). With regard to museum policies, this brought as a consequence the need to change from the model of the traditional museum, which is supposed to preserve collections of authentic objects, to that of a cultural centre and forum, which is supposed to support the making of culture through innovation and elaboration following the French model of the ecomusée (Bortolotto 2006).

The above developments in the conception of heritage are encapsulated in two documents, which are 30 years apart: the UNESCO Convention declaration (UNESCO 1972) defined heritage on the basis of "outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science" and the "outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view". In contrast, the Yamato Declaration (UNESCO 2004) emphasises the tangible and intangible elements "that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage".

Critical Regionalism

Critical Regionalism is a dialectical theory that prudently hybridises the positive aspects of regionalism and universality while simultaneously remaining critical to the negative content of each. Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivres are credited with invention of the architectural theory of "Critical Regionalism". (Frampton 1983; Tzonis and Lefaivres 1990).

The conundrum resulting in the dialectical conception of Critical Regionalism is captured by Paul Ricouer:

> … universalization, while being advancement of mankind, at the same constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures … but also of [the ethical and mythical creative nucleus of great civilizations and great cultures]. Thus we come to the problem confronting nations just arising from underdevelopment. In order to get on the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the cultural past which has been the raison d'etre of the nation? … There is the paradox: how to become modern and return to sources? (qtd in Frampton 1983).

Modernism has opened unprecedented technological and expressive possibilities to, literally and figuratively, raise architecture to previously unimaginable heights. But this has often been at a high cost to the natural environment and societies. Buildings contribute more than proportionately to source-side and sink-side environmental problems (UNEP 2009). Furthermore, buildings and settlements are evolving as a conspicuous embodiment of today's socio-economic problems of poverty and inequality. Moreover, as newer building methods spread, traditional methods and solutions are being forgotten along with their positive attributes. Critical Regionalism emerged with the optimistic intention to advance tradition by mixing it with a tamed modernity. Critical Regionalism embodies dialectical conceptions at several levels. As remarked by Frampton (1983), Critical Regionalism is a fine balancing act between modernism and tradition in building processes and product; it embraces the progressive aspects of Modern Architecture but rejects increasing fascination with the image of modernism at expense of its performative and social roles. Modernisms formative functional and social roles are apparent, for instance, in the mantra of *form follows function*, in the revolutionary fervour of Architect Le Corbusiers's "Architecture or Revolution" and in such movements as the *Neue Sachlikeit* in Germany. Critical regionalism aims to refocus modernism from growing fascination with architectural imagery per se back to these

Critical Regionalism later evolved to stand in opposition to the regionalism of consumerism exemplified by kitsch, pastiche buildings in resort architecture and in the 1980s post-modern style ironic evocations of the vernacular. Critical Regional is therefore also conceived in opposition to image-driven architecture or the problem of architecture as fashion. In its place, Critical Regionalism aims for an architecture that is spatial and experiential. Architect Aalva Alto's pelting down of the cheap

neon bank advertisement sign that had been brazenly been placed on the modern but location-specific Saynatsalo Town Hall is emblematic of the opposition between cheap commercialism and architecture of civic virtue.

Critical Regionalism circumvents image-fascination by basing on building tectonics and the specificity of place to produce an architecture whose essence is derived from construction processes, locally available materials and sensitivity to the environment. This approach to architecture resonates with architectural phenomenology and to the return to "thingness" as expounded by Scandinavian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz (1986, 1984) and others such as Thiis-Svendness (1987). If the building is comprised of a boundary that separates outside space from the indoors, the making of that boundary (the tectonics) and the specificity of the place that determine the qualities of the outside become key aspects of the architecture. The boundary is (a) a tectonic element – constructed through processes that consume environmental , social and economic resources with attendant negative and/or positive consequences (b) a definer of spatial qualities in the interior and of building form on the exterior (b)a sieve between the outside the indoors which tampers how sunshine, heat, light, air, views flow in and out – with this having implication for the comfort and welfare of the occupants, and impacting on the building's operational requirements (it is significant that buildings consume 30% of global energy with the bulk of this going towards operation of buildings). Already by the 1920s, Lewis Mumford was theorising urban ideas were to become the seed of Critical Regionalism and sustainable design. Noteworthy here is his approach of organicism – where the urban was to be reconceptualised for co-existence between man as a mythical spiritual individual existing as part of a mutualistic community, nature and topography in a holistic ecosystem (Luccarelli 1995).

In tectonics, Critical Regionalism finds overlaps between local craftsmanship and Modern Architecture's tenet of construction as a driver of aesthetics as propagated for instance by architect Mies van der Rohe in the aphorism *God is in the Detail*. While cross-fertilising with influences from outside, Critical Regionalism's aesthetic is differentiated depending on locale because of variations in available resources, skills, and artistic sensibilities. Thus, Critical Regionalism provides a set of common rules whose interpretation in different contexts results in differentiated architecture. It has an overt ethical basis. It is driven by a generosity of spirit captured in the dialectical phrase of a *regionalism of a shared humanity* (Frampton 1983). By basing on regional customs and resources and being responsive to site-specific circumstances, Critical Regionalism produces an architecture that is both ecologically benign and cost-effective in contradistinction to the mechanical approach of violating nature through brute force to control environmental conditions. Instead of modernism's approach of bulldozing of a site to provide a tabula rasa for new construction, Critical Regionalism responds to the possibilities of the site through sensitive layering and building positioning; where the mechanical order solely depends on air-conditioning, Critical Regionalism aims to maximise comfort using passive means resulting from a nuanced understanding of context.

Critiquing some Prevailing Heritage Conceptions via Critical Regionalism

In reviewing the literature, one finds that there is veracity in arguing that what sets Critical Regionalism apart from some conceptions of heritage is a non-equivocal ethical basis. In fact, a basis in ethics is the raison d'etre of Critical Regionalism. Critical Regionalism makes apparent some unacknowledged ambiguities, contradictions and limitations in new museology discourse and practice. In this paper it is argued that reference to Critical Regionalism can make a significant contribution to formation of a logically consistent but versatile heritage conceptual framework in line with the expressed intentions of the Yamato Declaration (2004) and as argued by Bortolotto (2006).

New museology discourse and practice suggests certain unifying themes in this emergent field: heritage gets to be fragmented and distributed into a cultural landscape; culture and values are embraced as integral, if sometimes intangible, elements; and the everyday man is included in its definition and interpretation. But further analysis of these basic predications reveals two models that exhibit different, sometimes contrasting, characteristics. This paper henceforth refers to these models as the *static model* and the *dynamic mode*l. In actuality, no model exists in pure form but there is almost always a predominance of one over the other.

The Static Model

In the static model, an area comprising of the major ecological and cultural elements, the people and their (productive) lifestyles as well as the interactions between all these are preserved for visitors to experience in situ. The local population is involved in definition of what qualifies as heritage and in its curation and/or interpretation to visitors. This by far seems to be the model adopted by most ecomuseums in the world today.

The static model gets to be successful in areas with a combination of factors:

- a strong tangible heritage past,
- a sympathetic population with relatively esoteric skills who stand to benefit from ecomuseum tourist
- a unique cultural landscape with a strong sense of place.

Started in France in the 1960s, ecomuseums have spread across Europe and other parts of the world – mainly in the global North. Examples include Seixal Ecomuseum in Portugal, Switzerland, ecomuseums based on the *Heimartsmuseum* model in Germany and many others in Europe, the Americas and the rest of the world. With the right combination of factors and management (and good marketing) a static ecomuseum can become a self-sustaining source of income for the local community. For this reason

it can be a tool for development *for that particular region*. The efficacy of the static model for sustainably balancing the needs of development and conservation using a sustainable approach is demonstrated in the Ha Long Ecomuseum in Vietnam. The Ha Long Ecomuseum was formed to preserve an area of immense natural beauty (including a unique fishing culture, rare flora and fauna, and special caves, grottoes and islands) which was under threat from exploitative development. In 1994, UNESCO listed the Ecomuseum as a World Heritage Site. A ground-breaking project in this ecomuseum is the Cua Van Floating Cultural Centre, the world's first floating museum (UNESCO 2013 - website).

In Africa, Ecomusée de people Lebou, Yoff in Senegal is the only one in the Ecomuseum Observatory Database (Davis 2011). However, many ecomuseums in Africa also display strong characteristics of the static model. These include: Tanje Village Museum in Togo (www.tanjevillagemuseum.com/), Abasuba Community Peace Museum opened in 2008 in Kenya (http://www.abasuba.museum/), and Sikasso museum, the failed Zimbabwe culture house model (Davis 2011), and National Cultural Centre Kumasi.

The Dynamic Model

In contrast to the static model, the dynamic model is an evolving one which privileges proactive creation of the new over preservation of the old. The dynamic model recognises that place-based heritage conservation is important for nurturing identity, self-worth, purpose and belonging. But beyond that, it reacts to present societal circumstances to constantly work towards uplifting the well-being of the local community through sustainable development. This is a creative model in which heritage evolves with changing societal needs and circumstances. And because societal evolution is precipitated by both local and extraneous forces, the dynamic model is by definition an open system. This is the model that seems to be suggested by the Yamato Declaration (UNESCO 2004) Bortolotto (2006).

The Ecopole, Dakar in Senegal provides a good example of the dynamic approach. The museum was developed by a partnership between Senegalese and Canadians. Experts and local people worked together in its conception and realisation. It is based on two contemporary problems: garbage recycling and poverty reduction. It weaves into informal business networks to enhance their crafting skills and business acumen, to increase the value of their outputs and to expose their products to larger markets. By partnering with other organisations, the Ecopole acquired a factory in Dakar centre which has become ecomuseum's administrative and gathering centre. It was opened in 1996 with Senegalese and Malian presidents present. People gather to network, exchange knowledge, display and sell products, hold workshops and seminars, engage in debates, and set up fairs and competitions. Other roles of the Ecopole include raising

literacy, and improving health and hygiene levels. The Ecopole has begotten seven related satellite centres. The satellites are based on the same dynamic model but with different activity foci (see Davis 2011)

The Ecopole was preceded by a proposal for the Ecomuseum of Ziguinchor, also in Senegal. The theoretical framework aimed at mobilising an ethnically mixed area to counter the effects of climate change and provide an educational role. The objectives of the Ecomuseum of Ziguinchor were mostly teleological and ethically underpinned. The objectives included illustration of traditional methods of soil conservation and animal husbandry, education about the dangers of pollution, deforestation and overfishing, informing the community about their geography, history and culture, promotion of local crafts and exploration of ways to conserve genetic diversity. This museum was unfortunately never realised (Davis 2011).

Is the Static Model Ecomuseum Good for Sustainable Development?

Corsane and Holleman argue that because ecomuseums focus on regions that are relatively mono-cultural and stable, their contribution to new museology remains limited. If this argument is extended to include the afferent disposition of many ecomuseum, it becomes apparent that the static model could potentially result in uncritical perpetuation of a myopic status quo. Depending on the prevailing local circumstances, this can work to unfair advantage or disadvantage of the ecomuseum community.

Scenography

By sticking to an uncritical sense of their cultural heritage, communities are wont to develop the ecomuseum as a kind of stage-set of the past to stoically resist change and maintain a cultural landscape as a theme park. Such an ecomuseum becomes a kind of cultural Disneyland in the service of nostalgic contemplation and narcissistic tourist consumerism. The result, as Bigell argues (in Denes 2013), is a "packaged and marketed" living culture which ironically falls short of the ecomuseum ideal.

While acknowledging that through static-model ecomuseums tourism sustainable livelihoods for some small communities have been realised, it is imperative to point out that these are mostly located in the global North. In a global ethical framework, it is arguable that this reflects and contributes to global laissez-fair economic and consumption patterns in which only 80% of global income is focused in 20% of the global population (Milanovic 2011). A critical attitude to cultural heritage would therefore scrutinise the relevance of such a model for, not just local, but global sustainable development.

Perpetuation of Insular Backwardness

The flipside to the above argument is that static model ecomuseums in a developing country context can (be used to) uncritically preserve perspectives that perpetuate a community's underdevelopment. By diversifying the arbiters of cultural heritage from experts to include the everyday man, new museology approaches could degenerate into self-absorbed populist smugness. Alternatively, in their aspirations for modernity, communities may ignore or fail to see the value in their history and culture:

> … [a] problematic aspect of identity-building work that must be guarded against is the encouragement of uncritical self-adulation. … [Additionally] target groups [may] often have a distorted or decidedly negative sense of their own identity … (thesis …).

Therefore, whereas the *horizontal social capital* (in the form of positive identity, self-worth and belonging) that results from an ecomuseum is welcome, it would be self-defeating if it is not attenuated with *vertical social capital* pulses that critically link the local into a broader ethical development framework to challenge the conditions of regional and universal socio-economic inequalities[1]. Given that, by and large, Africa is economically underdeveloped, and because many ecomuseums in Africa tend towards the static model, it is not surprising that the income they generate for the community is at best paltry – barely sufficient to keep the locals on the margins of existence. By constantly evoking the need to preserve "our culture" such ecomuseums wittingly or unwittingly keep the community unaware of the meta-structures that maintain their underdevelopment.

Confining indigenous people to execution of a limited role at the service of footloose tourists perpetuates the status quo in patterns of production, income distribution and consumption. Far from Critical Regionalism's freedom, such repetitiveness results in restriction. The restrictions keep indigenous people occupied with taradiddle at the opportunity cost of engaging in empowering, beneficial and productive activities for direct fulfilment of their needs.

Process is not Necessarily Creative

There is an unexplored undercurrent in Bortolotto's (2006) argument to the effect that just because it shifts in conception of heritage from object to process, new museology gets to be capitulated from a static to a dynamic creative realm. However, not all processes necessarily qualify to be any different from kitsch surface effects. Rote repetition of process, as evident in many ecomuseums, is closer to enactment of surface effects than to true creativity. It precludes emergence of the new, the unexpected. Arguably, such processes themselves ossify into some kind of museum "relics" to be anachronistically

1 *See World Bank 2013 for the concept of social capital*

perpetuated in the exhibition of a supposedly unchanging past unblemished by contemporaneity. They preclude the genuine creativity that has the capacity to re/produce lifestyles and identity in a dynamic evolution of sustainable cultural heritage development required by as encapsulated in the Yamato Declaration (UNESCO 2004).

Taking an example from the Ha Long, a successful ecomuseum by most measures, a young couple sings a song which was traditionally sung when a young man proposed to a woman. This song should be an obvious source of amusement to tourists. But if the singing is all the young couple does as they desperately await another opportunity to sing the same song, the set-up degenerates into a jaded replication of culture – a replication unconnected to the original nuptial intentions. It becomes but a mere simulacrum.

Conclusions on New Museology

This section compares and contrasts Critical Regionalism with new museology discourse. It simultaneously argues that, apart from the two sharing several characteristics, Critical Regionalism is more comprehensive and offers avenues for conceptual enrichment of new museology.

Commonalities

According to Corsane et al (2008), An Ecomuseum was defined by the *Declaration of Intent of the Long Net Workshop*, Trento (Italy) in 2004)as: a dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for sustainable development. Sustainable development requires:

- place-based development
- ecomuseums to play a key role as catalysts of social capital development

There is a lot in common between new museology and Critical Regionalism. First, both new museology and Critical Regionalism are conceived as vehicles for sustainable development. Second, as argued above, place-rootedness is central to Critical Regionalism. It has also been argued that ecomuseums embody a locales "spirit of place" (Davis 2011; Corsane et al 2008). Therefore, phenomenology is as integral to ecomuseums as it is to Critical Regionalism.

In the search for sustainable development, both new museology and Critical Regionalism encounter apparently irreconcilable forces: conservation and societal development. The consequence of this is an inevitable dialectical conception of each. Thus ecomuseums aim at sustainable "*heritage development* "as Critical Regionalism aims for a *hybridised local* architecture. The phrases "heritage development" and "hybridised local" are oxymorons. But they capture the complex and nuanced responses demanded by the societal dilemmas sustainable development must engage with.

Bigell (Denes 2012) proposed that the ecomuseum represents one of the last bastions of the commons that hasn't been commodified or privatized. As a collectively managed space encompassing tangible and intangible social and natural assets, the ecomuseum represents a space of resistance to capitalist domination and the logic of private property. Similarly, Critical Regionalism is arrayed as architecture of resistance against debilitating laissez capitalism (Frampton 1983.)

Prospects from Critical Regionalism

Despite the above commonalities, interrogation of new museology discourse and practice reveals certain shortcomings that do not exist in Critical Regionalism. Ecomuseum discourse reveals concepts that are beneficial for global sustainable development. However, these concepts remain scattered and, to this author's knowledge, have not been encapsulated in a single comprehensive conceptual framework. Perhaps this is because ecomuseums and new museology are relatively recent notions (the inaugural ecomuseum conference was only in 2012 in Seixal, Portugal).

In this section, it is argued that Critical Regionalism provides pointers to a single conceptual framework to bring together the currently scattered ideas of the new museology; as well as circumvent some the pitfalls that ecomuseums are prone to falling into.

Bigell (in Denes 2013) recognises that "the opposite of the ecomuseum is the theme park". Yet, as argued above, static ecomuseums can easily degenerate into scenographic stage-sets and uncritical, insular perpetuation of an undesirable status quo. Critical Regionalism, counters such by mixing the local and the universal while interrogating each. In Critical Regionalism, it is recognised that any attempt to circumvent the dialectics of the creative process through unceasing repetition can only result in consumerist iconography masquerading as culture.

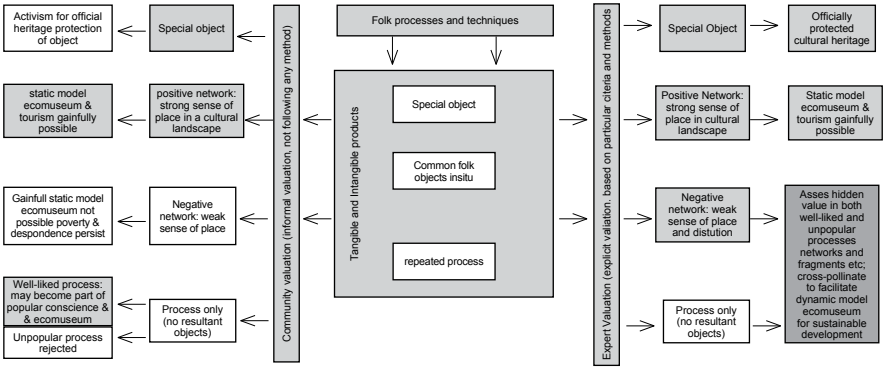
De Varine and Dutta (in Denes 2013) provide a rejoinder that ecomuseums should not be focused on preservation of the past but should be used to solve the problems of the present and planning for the future. Simultaneous mixing of pulses from the past, and the present for an improved future are intrinsic in Critical conceptualisation.

Ecomuseums as widely conceived are only suited to relatively homogeneous and stable regions (Corsane and Holleman 1993). In contrast, Critical Regionalism challenges every locality to continuously cross-pollinate its rooted culture with universal influences.

In short, where the new museology easily succumbs to insular perpetuation of debilitating parochialism, Critical Regionalism, while reaffirming the local, simultaneously interrogates prevailing circumstances by stimulating communities into a meta-criticism of the limitations of their worldviews (Frampton 1983). By so doing, Critical Regionalism continually reaffirms but transcends the local. In a context of globally generated lifestyle aspirations, it is arguable that sustainable cultural heritage

in underdeveloped Uganda and Africa can only result from cross-pollution between local and universal. Arguably, this necessitates adaptation of the dynamic model of building heritage to facilitate interrogation of the local and universal status quo and the shattering of the boundaries of closed systems for the effective fragmentation of in situ heritage into constantly evolving cultural landscapes (see Figure 1 below).

Fig 1: Ways of Construing Heritage: experts may see value where others don't



this model borrows from but enriches Gonzales-Perez and Parcerov-Oubina (2011). The heritage value given by experts are not always coincidental with heritage value given by local communities - in fact, the two are sometimes contradictory. Because of their esoteric knowledge, experts are able to see heritage (e.g. in process, networks or fragments) where the community may not. In this paper, the value in earth building processes is not readily apparent. but experts can see it, in a dynamic ecomuseum model, use this value in working with the community towards sustainable development (also see figure 2). Network = tangible products (objects) + people + culture + landscape + environment.

Linking to Focus Group Insights

UNESCO recognises the heritage value of earth architecture by listing buildings constructed of the material. According to UNESCO (2013), 10 percent of World Heritage Sites incorporate earthen structures. UNESCO is has also instituted extensive efforts to safeguard and improve building earth methods specifically under the World Heritage Earthen Architecture Programme (WHEAP). The author shares UNESCO's heritage valuation of earth building but studies in Uganda reveal that the general populace remains largely oblivious to earth building heritage (Sanya 2007). The expert (UNESCO) and non-expert (ordinary Ugandans) perception of the cultural heritage value of earth building are apparently at variance. By executing an analysis of three focus group results, the ramifications of this variance for building heritage are discussed in reference to new museology and Critical Regionalism.

The focus group discussions were undertaken in 2006 as part of a PhD study. However, the results were found to be incompatible with the PhD. This paper therefore provides an opportunity to use the results for the first time.

The objectives of the discussions were first, to get an understanding what people value in a residential house; second, to analyse whether these could be fulfilled by earth building techniques; and third, to enter into a discussion with the participants on how they perceive the building material earth's technical and expressive capabilities.

Linking the above objectives to the static and dynamic models of heritage conception, and their relationship to Critical Regionalism as discussed above, ramifications of the focus group results for building heritage in Uganda will be presented.

Three focus group discussions were undertaken. One was in an urban area – Kampala – and was comprised of young urban professionals (Yuppies). The second was in a provincial town – Bugiri – a district-level administrative and commercial capital. The final one was in Banda, a rural area in Uganda.

Question 1: Describe the kind of house you would like to have for yourself and explain your answer

This question was aimed at understanding whether people's expectations of a good house are strongly linked to building materials. From the proceedings in regard to this question, the following emerged as key themes: spaciousness; strong relationship with nature; prestige; quiet/serene; cosiness.

Evidently, most of these answers do not have much to do with building techniques but are dependent on architectural design. That is, any competent architect would be able to, through a creative design process, realise these qualities in a building regardless of the material used. The exception is the prestige theme: the building material earth is generally considered socially unacceptable in Uganda. On the other hand, strong relationship with nature is arguably favoured by the innate properties of earth (earth as a building material requires little or no processing and it offers a warm "earthy" colour pallet).

Question 2: What are the main factors you would put into consideration when planning to build a new house?

This question was aimed at assessing whether the factors of consideration in building a new house were explicitly linked to building materials. From the proceedings in regard to this question, the following emerged as key themes: suitability for family living, access to city centre, security, planned area and finance. These are again mostly not affected by building technique per se and, in fact, all but one belong to the realm of urban design. The exception here is finance, which is actually favoured by earth since, in Uganda, it is cheaper than the common alternative (brick) (see Sanya 2007).

Question 3: Would you live in house built with un-burnt soil blocks? Explain your answer

This question was aimed at getting an idea of the participants' attitude towards earth as a building material. It aroused intense debate. In all three groups, it generally started off as antipathy towards the material. The following emerged as key themes: technical performance; demonstration effect; interior space environment; cost effectiveness and value; and relevance to culture.

One participant mentioned that she would consider living in an earth building because she has experienced them as having a more favourable internal living conditions but this did not arouse much discussion. Similarly, the material's strong associations with local building traditions did not inspire much discussion.

The technical performance arguments were mostly given against the material. They came down to two main factors: fragility of the building material earth when exposed to moisture and its susceptibility to termite attack.

In regard to cost effectiveness and value, some participants believed that because the material is inherently weak, a lot of expenditure is required to use it to attain acceptable technical performance. But some participants countered that earth buildings are actually cheap since they are mostly occupied by the poor; whereupon an animated discussion arose about the relationship between value and price; with participants being divided on the subject. Further on in the animated discussions on this question, there was a gradual shift from overwhelming antipathy toward the material to a vacillation of opinions in individual participants and within the groups. This change was initiated by a combination of fragments of positive perceptions and a few participants who convincingly vouched for the good examples of earth buildings in Uganda they had come across. Eventually, the prevailing (but not sole) conclusion was that participants would be more receptive to earth buildings *if* exposed to positive demonstration.

Concerning demonstration effect, the overwhelming sentiment expressed was that exposure to earth building has largely had negative demonstration effect in terms of technical and expressive capacity of the material as well as because of the material's associations with poor people's abodes, vis: the rural hut which houses most Ugandans in rural areas and the urban shanty houses. It was also raised that there is dearth of positive demonstration. The overwhelming negative demonstration of the material can only be counteracted by positive demonstration. The urban participants came across as being more accommodative to the idea of earth buildings in the rural areas but not in the urban.

Emerging Insights

The biggest problem of earth is one of perception as opposed to the actual capabilities of the material that can be attained with good design and construction. It emerges that this is down to poor demonstration and outright misconceptions.

What is needed for a good house is within the scope of a competent architect to achieve with earth but there is a gap created by negative demonstration which can be counteracted by deliberate positive demonstration. The negative demonstration is due to misconceptions about the technical, spatial and expressive possibilities of the material based on (i) earth is coupled to the traditional hut which is limited to a circular single-cell form, and which is mostly limited in both spatial variation and formal-aesthetic possibilities. Ugandans aspire for rectangular multi-room houses and many have only seen brick houses of this kind. Furthermore, earth as building material is coupled to the problems of grass thatch – specifically susceptibility to fire and the need for periodic thatch replacement. These problems are transplanted to earth by association (ii) there are misconceptions about the technical performance of earth whereby the fragility of the material is conflated with fragility of earth buildings. Yet, it is standard construction practice that any building material only functions as part of a construction system with the material being used in specific ways according to its inherent properties and in combination with others (it is not often that one finds a building made of one material only). As part of a skilfully executed building system, the susceptibility of earth building materials to water and termite attack need not be feared (because it is prevented by design and detailing). There are at least twelve examples of earth construction systems proven by buildings that have lasted over centuries. There are also contemporary examples to fit all sorts of aesthetic tastes (Houben 1989, Minke 2000).

From the provincial town and the rural area, even as the people expressed their desire to live in brick buildings, they resignedly expressed a forlornness arising out of an awareness of their limited financial circumstances. Such dejection, characterised by a rejection of what tradition offers, and incapacity to achieve what modernism brings is common amongst poor. It seems for them the only way to getting a house that speaks to their modern aspirations is by jettisoning old techniques and anything associated them.

A new insight from the FGDs is the interconnectedness of the problems and their ultimate expression as low social acceptability. All the problems of earth revolve around low social acceptability which in turn results from the perceived poor technical and aesthetic possibilities of the building material. This can be modelled as a positive feedback mechanism whereby low social acceptability makes the material as only a poor man's choice thereby perpetuating the low investment of knowledge and resources, and hence resulting in even more socially unacceptable buildings for the poor. The obvious allusions of this to the fate of other traditional ways of sustenance and creation need not be reiterated.

Because they do not discern the material's value, local communities are unwilling to preserve its heritage and they would probably be unwilling to preserve it as part of a static model ecomuseum. Moreover, by failing to recognise the material's value in reference to their current building needs, the community remains disempowered and despondent in their belief that their traditional methods have nothing to contribute in the modern world. The optimistic angle is that the social unacceptability is not strongly engrained as suggested by the vacillation of opinions among the participants who were opposed to earth building and by strong support from those who have seen earth perform. This is a crack that can be capitalised on by the experts to weaken the general antipathy towards the material. But this can only be by placing the material in a dynamic building heritage model as investigated below.

The Participants Concerns about Sustainability Criteria

Sanya (2007), through rigorous analysis of various literature sources, identified a number of sustainability criteria for the comparison of building techniques. The nature of questions 2 & 3 above offered a chance for the sustainability criteria to be mentioned by those who wanted to. The table below now presents whether and how strongly each sustainability criterion featured during the discussions. Strength was judged qualitatively based on the number of people giving the same viewpoint, the conviction with which it was said and how much reaction it spurred.

Table 1: Participants Concerns about Sustainability Criteria (Source: Tom Sanya 2007)

SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA		
Criteria	**Sub-Criteria**	
1. Social	(1a) Enhancement of community/social relationships	*
	(1b) Decentralizing skills and power	0
	(1c) Social/political acceptability	***
	(1d) Relevance to local culture	*
2. Environmental	(2a) Building interior (comfort and health)	*
	(2b) Effect on wider flora, fauna and habitats	0
	(2c) Contribution to pollution (of air, water and land)	0
	(2d) Resource depletion	0
	(2e) Recyclability of materials and nature of demolition debris	0
3. Economic	(3a) Job creation for locals	0
	(3b) Reduction of money/ forex outflow	0
	(3c) Affordability	**
	(3d) Durability	***

Key to Table

0 Not featured * Weakly featured ** Featured * Strongly featured**

From the table, it is clear that while making decisions about a house, the participants do not consider most sustainability criteria at all or as being important. Many of the above sustainability criteria are very generous in time-scale and societal scope. But participants were mainly concerned about criteria of immediate concern to them as individuals. This is actually not surprising, since most people's perspectives are limited to themselves and their closest relations over the short term (see Meadows et al 1972).

Acceptability featured strongly and was debated at length during question 3. This was mainly in regard to the negative social connotations that earth architecture evokes in Uganda. *Relevance to local culture* featured briefly – mainly during the discussion of question 3 – but did not stimulate much debate in support or opposition. *Building interior* was mentioned by only one participant (in Kampala) in a passing comment during question 3 and even that did not arouse much debate. Affordability was mentioned in both questions 2 and 3. It especially aroused much debate around questions of value during question 3. *Durability* is an issue that occurred again and again during the discussion of question 3 – largely linked to the perceptions of the material's technical capabilities.

All the sustainability criteria that were not mentioned during the discussion are those without any obvious immediate impact on the individual. These are criteria that occur at a wider level in terms of society, environment and economy. These are: decentralising skills and power, effect on wider flora, fauna and habitats, contribution to pollution, resource depletion, recyclability of materials & nature of demolition debris, job creation for locals, reduction of money/forex outflow.

Most sustainability criteria are of wider social, temporal and spatial scale – ostensibly without immediate impact on most people. For people to accept a building material purely on sustainability grounds, they must be appreciative of the magnanimity in sustainability outlook. And it may take intervention from by people who are aware of the bigger picture to promote a sustainable approach to building heritage. This points to a need for experts and administrative bodies to recognise and promote such heritage. It also requires continuous dialogue to facilitate simultaneous fulfilment of local individual needs and that broader sustainability (see Figure 2 below).

Learning from the Focus Group Discussions: Communication in Building Heritage

Gonzalez-Perez and Parcero-Oubina's (2011) distinguish between primary heritage and value heritage. Primary heritage is discernible intuitively and in a straightforward manner without any need for explanation or interpretation. Each element of primary heritage is discrete and usually tangible. Value heritage on the other hand can only be discerned after an explicit valuation processes based on a set of criteria and following a particular method. To discern this heritage, someone must know the criteria and the methods applied. And as these are discipline-specific, knowledge of such heritage is normally the preserve of experts. Value heritage consists of a system of interconnected

elements, fragments, processes and cultural attributes. It is much more difficult to discern. In Uganda, earth buildings (predominantly the traditional hut) are not appreciated by most people as primary heritage but are viewed in negative light. That is, there is no apparent primary heritage value of earth building in Uganda for most people. Arguably, for the Ugandan relegated to living in a mud hut, formation of a static model ecomuseum would not offer much hope in this case.

But the above analysis demonstrates that there is inherent heritage value in earth building which has been recognised by UNESCO (2013) and others (e.g. Houben 1996; Minke 2000…) This value can be exposed by considering, not just the material or the predominant buildings associated with the material in Uganda (the hut and the shack), but by contextualising the material as part of a broader system of local and international techniques and examples that demonstrate the material's technical and expressive capacity. The sustainability value of the material is also not yet part of the popular conscience but, as Sanya (2007) and UNESCO (2013) propose, earth has strong sustainability characteristics. In the present circumstances, the kind of valuation needed to identify such value can best be speared-headed and disseminated by the experts who see that earth building can fulfil individual people's short-term needs under a broader sustainable development ethical framework. This is the case for involving experts in heritage valuation today. It must be appreciated that social acceptability is a prerequisite for construing cultural heritage value (Gonzalez-Perez and Parcero-Oubina 2011). Therefore, even more important, is the need for professionals to engage in an interface zone with society – an area for dialogue where top-down and bottom-up views iteratively intermesh and hybridise in the quest for creative crystallisation of a dynamic cultural heritage in tune with local aspirations and means. The focus group discussions pointed to participants' openness to positive demonstration in changing prevalent conceptions about the material. Therefore, erecting good demonstration buildings through creative cross-fertilisation between the traditional and the universal would increase earth building heritage value. The interface zone between the experts and society would gradually broaden to include skills training, legislation, financial instruments (credit, grants and subsidies/taxes) to build earth buildings and their heritage value in Uganda and Africa (see Figure 2 below).

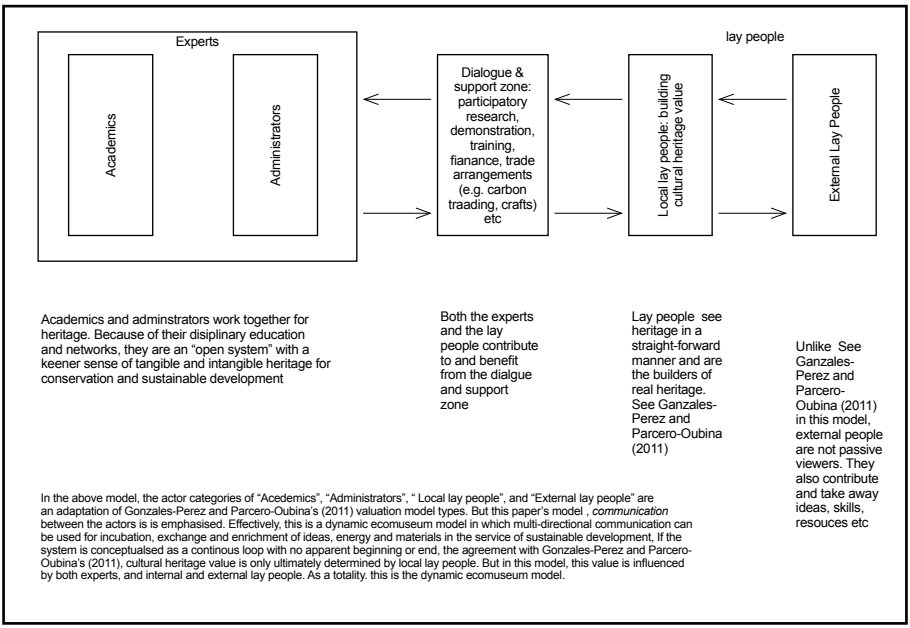


Fig 2: A Dynamic Model for Building Cultural Heritage [in this model, the possibilities of earth for sustainable heritage building can be realised)

Conclusion

In just a few centuries of modernism and industrialisation, the world has experienced vast improvements in quality of life, health, and nutrition and consumption choice. But this has been at a high cost to the environment and society. The scientific-mechanical paradigm is based on the belief that it can control nature and has little, if anything, to learn from tradition. In the face of modernism, heritage started off as a way of preserving historical artefacts but has evolved to also be about the present and the future, re/creation, re/production and sustainable development. Simultaneously, development models are evolving to be more appreciative of the lessons traditions the world over can offer in facing contemporary global predicaments. This paper has identified two models of heritage in new museology discourse: the static model and dynamic model. The static model is demonstrably uncritical and prone to pitfalls that new museology aimed to circumvent. The dynamic model is more in line with the new museology as encapsulated in the Yamato Declaration (UNESCO 2004) and as contended by Bortolotto (2006). The static and dynamic models are terms uses in this paper to capture the diverse, scattered, and usually contradictory concepts in the discourse and practice of the new

museology. The paper argues that the architectural theory of Critical Regionalism can bring together these ideas in a comprehensive and versatile heritage framework in consonance with the Yamato Declaration and more relevant to Uganda's and Africa's contemporary needs. In fact, the analysis suggests that given our development state, there is a strong case for adaptation of the dynamic model, which shares a lot with Critical Regionalism. By linking the arguments to results of three focus discussions, the assertion that new museology can result in despondence or populist shunning of cultural heritage is substantiated and illustrated with a visual model. The papers argues that dialectical conception of the material's heritage bringing together expert and popular conceptions in a constructivist framework and cross-pollinating the local and the universal would result in dynamic evolution of earth building heritage. Such a dialectical conception is only possible under a dynamic ecomuseum model conceptual frame that takes a leaf from Critical Regionalism as a comprehensive theory allowing both reaffirmation and transcendence of the local.

Perhaps the most potent pulse in such a dynamic heritage conception is its scope for ethical meta-criticism whereby communities are spurred into interrogating broader frameworks that impact on their circumstances. Such meta-criticism would awaken indigenous societies the world over to the realisation that resources, knowledge, power , wealth and heritage are not centralised in a few places but can, true to a Foucault's (Rouse 1994) assertion, potentially permeate everywhere, in everybody, every day, in all actions. Using local earth resources under a dynamic and critical heritage conception, the condition of global sustainability is feasible based on the dialectical proposition that free development of each will be a precondition for free development for all) (Berman 1983). Dynamic heritage building would facilitate people to critically utilise local resources to produce for their needs and thus provide numerous points of resistance to counter the spread of a tantalising but debilitating image of seductive modern homogeneity.

Like the megalomaniac Faust who killed the old couple and razed their house down for the last construction site (Berman 1983), burgeoning modernism is killing off indigenous cultures, leaving poor people with nothing but a menial job (if they are lucky to find one) and in shackles of elusive consumerist imagery. By empowering themselves with the awareness that the resources and skills they have available can prudently be used for local development, emasculated people everywhere can make realignments at local level to subvert and overcome the spread of a mediocre development informed by a mean worldview. Thus empowered, people shall realise that clay is not the material of which our feet are made but alludes to the local ground and resources on which we shall found in a dynamic process of building heritage value for present and future generations. Whether in the sands of the Sahara, the laterites of the Savannah, the volcanic soils of Java or the clays of Amazon, humans will set up locally compatible units of development and resistance as they build heritage in pursuit of their own wellbeing and happiness within a global ethical framework.

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