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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of the Venice Charter and the Nara Document on Authenticity in professional heritage practice, focusing on the UK historic environment. Charters serve to unify and clarify standards within the profession, relying on professional consensus rather than strict mandates for implementation. The Venice Charter was widely embraced in the UK for its clear principles and commitment to preserving heritage for future generations. In contrast, the Nara Document expanded the concept of authenticity to include intangible aspects, challenging the Eurocentric focus of the Venice Charter. However, Nara's broader and less tangible approach has seen more limited application. The paper gives an historical overview of the development of the UK heritage sector, exploring why the Venice Charter has been more readily accepted by UK practitioners, suggesting that its familiarity and clear guidelines resonate more within the professional community. It also addresses the social and cultural barriers that have hindered the adoption of the Nara Document. The discussion highlights the ongoing challenges in heritage conservation, particularly the balance between professional judgement and adherence to evolving charters. The authors conclude by questioning whether the differential impact of these charters reflects the inherent value of their principles or a professional reluctance to embrace complexity and uncertainty in heritage conservation.

Keywords

Venice Charter, Nara Document on Authenticity, Professional Standards, Heritage Practice, Historic Environment, United Kingdom

1 Introduction

Charters are important to professional practice because they provide clear guidance and attempt to streamline understanding between multiple parties. As with standards they attempt to unify and clarify, unlike formal standards they are enforced less by mandate and

more by agreement: they rely on relevant professionals recognising their value and integrating them into their conduct. The Venice Charter [1] brought together many dominant and emerging ideas to a framework that professionals generally welcomed and implemented in the UK. The charter identified that it is essential that common principles be agreed and implemented with a common responsibility to future generations. The Nara Document on Authenticity [2] broadened conceptions of authenticity and stretched the boundaries of what would be considered in conservation decision making. The shift from Venice to Nara is described by some as the integration of non-western or eastern values. While this description successfully highlights the European centrism of Venice the extension of authenticity to non-material aspects is no more an Eastern concern than it is a Western one and as such this terminology is unhelpful. Nonetheless, the Nara Document's shift away from the certainties of the tangible has been less actively implemented. Thus this article pulls on two threads throughout, the recognisability of the Venice Charter to practitioners in the UK and through that familiarity, its acceptance and adoption, and the social and cultural factors that have impeded the implementation of Nara.

1.1 The Venice Charter

Adopted in 1964, The Venice Charter, established initial principles for the conservation and restoration of historic monuments and sites. Coupled with theoretical traditions popularised by the British art historian and philosopher John Ruskin in the 19th century, the Venice Charter's emphasis on respecting the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage has had a lasting impact on conservation practices in the UK [3]. Promoting principles such as reversibility, minimum intervention, and compatibility in conservation interventions, the Charter provided a basis for heritage professionals to safeguard what is described as authenticity within the historic environment [4]. This has contributed to the development of robust and comprehensible conservation standards and guidelines, reinforcing the principle that interventions are carried out with sensitivity to the original fabric and design of heritage assets.

1.2 The Nara Document on Authenticity

Adopted in 1994, The Nara Document on Authenticity, expanded the notion of authenticity to encompass broader cultural, social, and intangible dimensions of heritage. Its emphasis on community engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and ethical considerations has enriched the approach to heritage conservation in the UK [5]. By recognizing the importance of intangible heritage elements and promoting sustainable development principles, the Nara Document has encouraged holistic conservation efforts that embrace the diverse cultural values of the historic environment. This has led to initiatives that prioritise community involvement, promote cultural diversity, and integrate heritage conservation with wider socio-economic goals.

2 Heritage Protection in the UK

People in Britain have had a long withstanding fascination with relics of the past. As far back as 1560 Queen Elizabeth I gave a proclamation which forbade "the defacing or breaking of monuments of Antiquity, and repairing as much of the repair as conveniently may be" [6]. Further records extending back into the 19th century show they sought to preserve the past and interact with concepts of authenticity. Pre-20th century heritage guidance in the UK relied on a combination of local initiatives, scholarly works, and the influence of organisations such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), founded in

1877 by William Morris. SPAB was established in response to an extensive approach to restoration popular among other amenity societies at the time. SPAB's guidance and principles played a significant role in shaping heritage conservation. The original SPAB manifesto centred on the idea that a building's life was best protected through basic maintenance and conservative repair to safeguard them as practical [7].

The SPAB Manifesto was followed by the Ancient Monuments Protection Act (1882) aimed at protecting ancient monuments in the UK by providing legal protection to certain ancient monuments and archaeological sites [8] [9]. The following decade saw the establishment of the UK's National Trust founded to preserve historic places and green spaces for the express public benefit of 'enjoyment, refreshment and rest' [10]. Later in 1908, Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments recommend measures for the preservation of historical buildings and monuments. It is worth reflecting on the influence of these documents, as well as those from other nations, on the Venice Charter. As a result, the Charter can be regarded as the culmination of ideas developed up to that time on the best practice management of monuments [11], rather than something that was developed and imposed on participating nations.

2.1 Development of UK Heritage policy and guidance from 1940 to 1990

The end of World War II can be seen as a significant turning point for British culture. The post-war period saw a rise in legislative measures for the protection of built heritage. This included key measures including:

- Town and Country Planning Act (1947): This legislation laid the groundwork for subsequent heritage protection measures [12]. It introduced the concept of listing buildings of special architectural or historic interest and provided for the designation of conservation areas. This Act was later extended in 1968 and required historic building owners to obtain Listed Building Consent from the local planning authority for works which would alter the building's character, and in cases of total demolition or buildings owned by local authorities to be referred to the Secretary of State [6].
- The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949): This act was significant for establishing the framework for protecting and managing designated national parks in England and Wales [13].

This period saw the foundations of the organisations, laws and principles that were to shape heritage policy in the UK for the remainder of the century. Most of the critical players were established in this period although bodies with specific mandates for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were formed much later. The Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act (1953): established the principle of listing buildings of architectural and historic interest, marking a significant step towards formalising heritage protection in the UK [14]. As part of this act, three separate historic buildings councils were created, one for each of England (currently Historic England in 1983), Wales (currently Cadw in 1984), and Scotland (currently Historic Environment Scotland in 2014). These councils play a key role in listing buildings (a formal recognition and protection scheme), advising on conservation, and promoting heritage awareness. In tandem with legislative changes, this period of British history also saw the expansion and formal formation of highly influential heritage advisory bodies. This included:

- The National Trust Act 1953: This act granted the National Trust, founded in 1895, greater powers to acquire and manage historic buildings, landscapes, and natural

areas of outstanding beauty for the benefit of the public. It expanded the Trust's role in conserving Britain's heritage [15].

- The Churches Preservation Trust (1953): Founded in 1953, the Churches Preservation Trust (currently the Churches Conservation Trust) is a charity dedicated to preserving historic churches in the UK. It acquires, cares for, and opens historic churches to the public, ensuring their survival for future generations [16].

Then in 1962, the World Monuments Fund released its first list of 100 endangered sites around the world, including several in the UK. This drew attention to the need for greater efforts in heritage preservation and sparked renewed interest in conservation initiatives. Adoption of the Venice Charter provided further momentum for heritage protection in the UK. During this period, conservation principles evolved, moving away from strict restoration towards an approach that emphasised the preservation of historic fabric and significance. This shift reflected a growing understanding of the value of authenticity in heritage conservation. As a result, government funding for heritage conservation and restoration projects saw significant increases during the 1970s, reflecting a growing recognition of the economic, cultural, and social benefits of investing in heritage preservation. These measures took the form of:

- Civic Amenities Act (1967): This legislation strengthened protection for historic areas by enabling local authorities to designate conservation areas and regulate development within them. It aimed to preserve the character and architectural heritage of towns and cities [17].
- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979): This legislation provided for the protection and preservation of ancient monuments and archaeological sites in England and Wales. It empowered the government to schedule monuments of national importance and regulate their excavation and maintenance [18].
- National Heritage Memorial Act (1980) and the National Heritage Act (1983): Established the National Heritage Memorial Fund providing funding for the acquisition and preservation of items of outstanding national importance, including works of art, historic buildings, and land [19]. Later becoming the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1994, (currently the National Lottery Heritage Fund), was established to distribute funds raised through the National Lottery for heritage projects across the UK. It provided grants for a wide range of initiatives, including the restoration of historic buildings, conservation of landscapes, and community heritage projects. As the UK's biggest source of grant aid for heritage conservation the policies and guidelines from the National Lottery Heritage Fund are pivotal in determining conservation practice in the UK. The National Heritage Act Established English Heritage as the government's lead advisor on the built historic environment in England [20].
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990): Strengthened protections for listed buildings and conservation areas, providing local authorities with greater powers to regulate development within designated heritage zones [21].
- Town and Country Planning Act (1990): Consolidated and amended previous planning laws, forming the basis of the modern planning system. It covers the control of development, the protection of trees, and the preservation of buildings and conservation areas [22].

This was a period of strengthening and consolidating legislation. In a sense, it represented the more detailed and considered implications of the work of the first half of the century. Of particular note was the establishment of the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This quickly became the UK's most significant non-governmental source of grant aid for heritage conservation. As a consequence, the policies and guidelines from the National Lottery Heritage Fund are currently pivotal in determining conservation practice in the UK.

2.2 Development of UK Heritage policy and guidance from 1990 to the present

Following the signing of the Nara Document on authenticity, the UK saw the development and modification of several pieces of key legislation for the historic environment. While this corpus of works legislation collectively shapes the framework for the protection and management of the UK's historic environment, the rate of growth of legal measures notably slowed from the previous boom seen in the previous four decades. During this time there is a growing paradigm shift in the approach to heritage moving away from an exclusive focus on the preservation of tangible things to be more people centric in line with the spirit of Nara. Scholars such as Gao and Jones [23] have highlighted the shift away from material centric approaches to heritage to more of an emphasis on human connection. This trend is particularly highlighted in the heritage initiatives undertaken by Historic Environment Scotland [24]. During this time, there is focus towards updating of existing legislature with a few new measures being put into place:

- National Heritage Act (1997): Amended earlier heritage legislation to provide additional protections and extended the powers of English Heritage, Historic Scotland, and other heritage bodies, outlining the process of acquiring financial assistance for national heritage [25].
- Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act (2013): Sections of this act streamlined the heritage protection system in England by introducing a Certificate of Immunity from Listing and allowing for heritage partnership agreements to manage change to listed buildings more effectively [26].
- Legal Safeguards for Historic Monuments (2021): Introduced significant protections for historic monuments, requiring full planning permission for their removal. This policy ensures that historic statues and monuments are "retained and explained" rather than removed, promoting public consultation and oversight by Historic England [27].

This period represented a time of consolidation and refinement of the UK's approach to heritage conservation. Greater devolution of powers to the home nations and improvements in process were trends that ran alongside mainstream political life in the UK. For this period the commitment to high quality heritage conservation was entrenched and being refined as part of mainstream British social values of this time. Some change has been slow, such as the 20 year process for the UK to ratify UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [28]. Though in some ways this can be seen as a reflection of the divide between political decision makers relative to changes in practice being driven from within the sector as discussed in the rest of this article.

3 Influences of Venice and Nara within the contemporary UK historic environment

In the UK, aspects of the The Venice Charter and the Nara Document on Authenticity can be seen to influence the sector embracing standards and tackling with the intangible, shaping conservation principles and practices. The Venice Charter emphasises the importance of

preserving the historical integrity of cultural heritage, advocating for careful restoration that respects the original materials and context. This approach is evident in the UK's meticulous restoration projects, such as those undertaken by English Heritage and the National Trust, which prioritise historical accuracy and the use of traditional methods and materials. The Nara Document on Authenticity extends these principles by recognizing the cultural diversity and the need for context-specific conservation approaches. It acknowledges that authenticity goes beyond physical attributes to include intangible aspects like traditions, uses, and cultural significance. This has challenged UK conservation policies to be more inclusive and holistic, considering the values and meanings ascribed to heritage by different communities. The Nara Document introduced the importance of living heritage values to a western conservation mainstream audience. Together, the paradigms embedded in these documents are working towards a more nuanced and respectful approach to heritage conservation in the UK, supporting the preservation of both tangible and intangible elements of historical sites. This has enhanced the UK's ability to maintain the authenticity and cultural significance of its historic environment amidst modern development pressures.

3.1 Standards

The Venice Charter introduced principles of conservation philosophy that emphasise the importance of respecting the historical authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage sites. A powerful chain of influence has been the connection between the Venice and Burra [29] Charters. Through shaping policy and the success of the concept of conservation management plans initially in Australia but subsequently influential in the UK from the 1990's several heritage bodies increasingly recommended the production of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) as a necessary planning tool for conservation work [30]. By 2002 the Heritage Lottery Fund had produced a guide and by 2007 so had the Church of England's Buildings Council. Directly influenced by Burra [31] and from there indirectly by Venice these guides evolved from policy to funding criteria becoming an essential feature of funding or approval in the first decade of the 2000s. Encouraging interventions to be carried out with sensitivity to the original fabric and design of historic structures. The Venice Charter has served as a basis for the development of influential conservation standards in the UK, such as BS 7913:2013, Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings. This standard also contains reference to decisions being justified on social and cultural grounds which references the spirit of Nara. From the British Standard implementation is delivered through organisational guides, local policies and training [32]. These standards provide technical recommendations and best practices for aspects of conservation, such as materials conservation, structural stabilisation, and site management [33].

3.2 Documentation

Both Venice and Nara emphasised the importance of documenting and recording heritage sites before, during, and after conservation interventions. In the UK, the Venice Charter has placed emphasis on documentation leading to the development of comprehensive recording methods and techniques, ensuring that detailed records are kept of heritage sites for future reference and research [34]. Similarly to the Venice Charter, the Nara Document underscores the importance of documentation and recording in heritage conservation processes. In the UK, this emphasis has led to the development of comprehensive recording methods and techniques to document the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage sites [35].

3.3 Ethics

The Venice Charter established ethical principles for the conservation of cultural heritage, including the idea that interventions should be reversible and based on thorough research and understanding of the site's history and significance [36]. These ethics have been integrated into the practices of heritage professionals in the UK, guiding decision-making processes related to conservation projects. Whilst Venice codified a view of the desirability of reversibility, there is a significant body of practitioners who have questioned this from both ethical and pragmatic perspectives [38]. The Nara Document highlights ethical considerations in heritage conservation, emphasising the importance of respect for cultural diversity, human rights, and sustainable development. In the UK, these ethical principles have informed conservation policies and practices, ensuring that heritage interventions are carried out in a socially responsible manner [39].

3.4 Education and Engagement

The Venice Charter has influenced the curriculum of heritage conservation programs and training initiatives in the UK, especially in teaching the conservation of built heritage [40]. By emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and practical skills in conservation practice, the Charter has contributed to the development of educational resources and professional development opportunities for heritage practitioners [36]. The principles of the Venice Charter have contributed to raising public awareness about the value of cultural heritage and the importance of its conservation. In the UK, heritage organisations and advocacy groups have used these principles to engage communities in discussions about the significance of historic sites and the need for their protection [41]. The Nara Document underscores the significance of community involvement and engagement in heritage conservation processes. In the UK, this emphasis on community participation has led to initiatives that involve local residents, stakeholders, and heritage enthusiasts in decision-making processes related to the management and protection of heritage sites. Examples include Archaeology Scotlands 'Adopt a Monument' [42], SPAB's Maintenance Co-operatives [43] and MOLA's Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network (CITiZAN) [44].

3.5 Heritage Tourism

The Venice Charter's emphasis on the preservation of authenticity and integrity has influenced heritage tourism practices in the UK. By promoting sustainable tourism approaches that respect the cultural significance of heritage sites, the Charter has helped to ensure that tourism activities contribute to the conservation and management of historic places [45]. The Nara Document emphasises the need for responsible tourism management practices that balance visitor access with heritage conservation objectives [46]. In the UK, this has led to the development of strategies to manage tourism impacts on heritage sites, including visitor management plans, interpretation programs, and sustainable tourism initiatives.

3.6 Definition of Authenticity and the Intangible

The Venice Charter mentions authenticity only in passing, noting that monuments must be preserved 'in the full richness of their authenticity' [1], while the text of the World Heritage Convention itself does not mention the word even once [47]. The meaning of the word did not acquire great importance until UNESCO's publishing of the Operational Guidelines in 1977, which stated that World Heritage sites 'should meet the test of authenticity in design,

materials, workmanship and setting' [48] [49]. By contrast, The Nara Document tied authenticity to values expressed that 'the test of authenticity' must respect 'the social and cultural values of all societies' and legitimised the addition of values such as 'spirit and feeling' to those that should be 'tested' by authenticity [2]. In his paper at the conference, David Lowenthal made a compelling case for accepting that 'authenticity is in practice always relative, never absolute'; arguing that this was widely recognised among heritage managers, yet rarely admitted [50]. In a UK context, ethnographic research by Siân Jones and colleagues in Scotland with heritage practitioners and local communities have since widely documented these relative and negotiated perspectives on authenticity [51], challenging prevailing narratives of Eastern/Western dichotomies [23]. The Nara Document recognizes the importance of intangible heritage elements, such as traditions, rituals, and oral histories, in contributing to the authenticity of cultural heritage [5]. In the UK, this recognition has led to efforts to safeguard and promote intangible cultural practices alongside physical heritage assets [52].

3.7 Significance and social values

While the Venice Charter emphasised expert-led identifications of historic and artistic value, the Nara Document on Authenticity, like the Burra Charter, introduced a wider range of values and recognises that values are 'attributed to heritage.' Crucially, the Nara Document also recognises that 'responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it' [2]. Historic England's much loved 'Conservation Principles', included 'communal' and 'social' values in their guidelines for understanding heritage significance as the basis for heritage management, although there have also been criticisms of values-based approaches [53]. High profile attempts to capture communities' social values in heritage databases include Historic England's 'Enriching the List' and Bristol City Council's 'Know Your Place' initiatives. [These projects aim to share and enhance knowledge of heritage assets by providing web access to information and enabling the public to augment that list.](#) Meanwhile, community heritage [54], social values [55] [56] and the different values of heritage communities and 'experts' [57] [58] have been important areas of research for UK-based heritage researchers, often conducted in collaboration with heritage practitioners and communities.

3.8 Adaptive Reuse

The Nara Document advocates for adaptive reuse strategies that integrate heritage conservation with sustainable development goals. In the UK, this approach has influenced urban planning and development policies, encouraging the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and sites to promote environmental sustainability and cultural continuity [59]. The Nara Document promotes capacity building initiatives aimed at strengthening the skills and expertise of heritage professionals and practitioners. In the UK, capacity building programs have been developed to provide training and education opportunities for individuals involved in heritage conservation, ensuring the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts. The document encourages interdisciplinary collaboration among professionals from various fields, including architecture, archaeology, anthropology, and sociology, in the conservation and management of heritage sites. In the UK, this interdisciplinary approach has facilitated holistic conservation efforts that consider the multifaceted aspects of cultural heritage.

3.9 Sustainable Development

The challenges of a non-statutory approach to the implementation of charters can be seen within current and past controversies surrounding the development of historic sites. In 2021 'Liverpool - Maritime Mercantile city' was removed from its World Heritage status [60] following development around the heritage site. In response the mayor of Liverpool argued that the decision was creating a 'binary choice between maintaining heritage status or regenerating left-behind communities' [61]. In this case the interpretation of the appropriate sustainable development was contested - an inevitable byproduct of including nuance and judgement within a charter. This debate continues regarding traffic infrastructure developments at the site of Stonehenge, one of the most famous groups of megaliths in the world [62]. Within its listing UNESCO identified the challenges of the existing roads impacting the integrity of the site and required careful management of development. Yet a proposal for a 3.3 km tunnel to improve journey times remains hotly contested in the UK. Both those in favour and opposed to proposals for the tunnel proposal claim that it will either diminish or enhance the integrity of the site and authenticity of the experience of visiting it [63] [64]. Ultimately the UK courts will make a ruling, demonstrating the limitations of charters and professional expertise as statutory powers will make what may be one of the most significant rulings for British heritage in this century.

4 Themes and issues arising from the implementation of the Charters in the UK

The implementation of charters is affected by the operating climate within a county. It is therefore useful to investigate issues that arise in implementing the Charters as these may be specific or more relevant within the UK than in other operating contexts. The relationship of state and non-state bodies, the enforcement of practice and the space to innovate are all relevant concerns to help understand how Venice and Nara have become implemented, or not in the UK.

4.1 Regulation and Non-state Actors

Although the UK has considerable heritage legislation as identified above, heritage conservation practice is not heavily regulated in comparison with other European countries. For example, only some practitioner groups have the status of formally recognised professionals. This occurs when professionals work together to seek Chartered Institute status. Unlike several other European countries there is no government recognition scheme for conservation professionals in the UK [31]. Thus titles such as 'conservator' are not protected in the way that operates in much of Europe where; clearly specified educational requirements; time served in practice; and professional development are stipulated and enforced before the title can be used. Therefore those standards for practice that exist tend to have been instigated by professional bodies or independent heritage organisations. There is government influence on such work but it will often be at arm's length. For example, government employees will regularly participate in standards development fora, or on developing professional body recognition schemes such as the Icon, Institute of Conservation accreditation scheme [65]. This leads to what could be described as a mixed economy for professional standards: they are driven from within professions and are often coordinated by independent heritage agencies or government arm's length bodies. On the ground, because the government does not always lead on complex professional decisions, practice will be informed by regulation, charters and standards but often determined by the degree to which professionals align with the content of those guidelines documents. This gives great power to the professional bodies to determine the impact of a charter but also

minimises the opportunity for changes to happen by dictate - instead relying on consensus and normative behaviour. Within Nara the requirements to listen to multiple perspectives and values makes it clear that non-state actors are essential to conservation decision making. It might be expected that at least part of that mandate of setting aside fixed criteria and utilising respect of all cultures informed decisions might sit more comfortably within the UKs mixed economy of heritage management. Indeed active participation in heritage care, interpretation and use is a common feature of most heritage conservation projects. An example of an award winning project that embodies these values is the Caer Heritage community led archaeology and heritage development project contributing to the regeneration the west of Cardiff, UK (Figure 1) [66].

<Figure 1 approximately here>

4.2 Mandating action and enforcement

Both Venice and Nara Charters attempt to mandate improvements in practice. As these charters are created by professional groupings seeking to identify that which is universal in an approach to conservation, they may lack an enforcement mechanism beyond voluntary compliance. In many cases, the impetus to compliance may originate in the requirements of funding bodies who draw attention to specific charters, guides and standards. The Venice Charter is notably striking for its normative or instructive tone: even though there is no enforcement strategy, the Charter repeatedly states that things must be done. Whilst the authors and probably the readers of this chapter would aspire to offer special care to the sites of monuments (Article 14), the requirement that whole sites and ruins must be saved (Article 15) is a little at odds with the tools available to implement their preservation. Perhaps this gap represents the confidence of the status of the participants in the conference which drew up the charters but perhaps it may also represent a confidence that is born from not knowing or not recognising alternative approaches and techniques.

4.3 Science and innovation

Both Charters are authored by respected practitioners although with a heavy emphasis on European traditions. In the Venice Charter the importance of scientific techniques is central to Article 2. The Charter requires the preservation of the original and the avoidance of conjecture (Article 9) but also mandates the possibility for the replacement of traditional techniques with a modern technique where its efficacy has been shown by scientific data and proved by experience (Article 10). The contrast between a traditional technique which has proven inadequate and a modern one that has proven successful through experience is an interesting challenge for practitioners. Until such time as modern techniques are implemented and tested in natural environmental conditions they must remain at least in part experimental and conjectural which appears not to be approved of. However once a modern technique has been tested it can succeed an original one that is failing. How within the structures of the Venice Charter can professionals innovate with techniques? The assumption must be that innovations are tested by practitioners working within the implication and that this is allowed by a common sense reading of the charter. In an operating environment of enforcement by agreement it creates a relaxation about setting aside Venice in order to innovate. Nara makes significant additional attempts to define authenticity, also identifying the role of scientific studies in understanding authenticity. Indeed Nara notes that values may differ from culture to culture and that heritage priorities must be judged within the cultural context to which they belong. It is not resolved whether

scientific studies are considered to be derived from cultural context or whether they sit above and aside from the discussion about cultural values.

4.4 Permanence v entropy

Venice calls for the maintenance of monuments on a permanent basis (Article 4) which, put in context of another mandate to preserve monuments within their setting, (Article 6) creates an immediate tension. With no new constructions or modifications to be allowed and the mandate not to move monuments this raises interesting questions for those with an understanding of physics and chemistry. The possibility of preserving permanently is impossible even within an abstract black box storage. Quite clearly, preservation in-situ requires a compromise between monuments and environments, between evidential history and human interaction. While future generations can be offered their share of World Heritage it is unlikely that they can be offered it all. Nara offers the space to hear voices that may not centre permanence but not a clear steer on de prioritising it.

4.5 Making the past harmonious

Venice requires the harmonious integration of missing or replacement parts but rules out reconstruction work (Article 15). In this article material for integration should be recognisable but harmonious. Such sentiment, which reflects an aspiration of conservators to soothe and heal past damage can neutralise and harmonise that which has been changed in the past. Some practitioners question the neutrality and the possibility of neutrality of such work [67].

4.6 Universal heritage Multiple voices

Both charters wrestle with the concept of universal heritage values. Indeed, such a concept is essential to much of the practice deriving from cultural heritage protection. Venice, with its characteristic self-confidence, expects that historic monuments will be recognised as a common social responsibility and accordingly for monuments to be preserved for future generations. It notes that significance can extend from great works of art to more modest works and that that either can be preserved both for their aesthetic and evidential values. Nara is clear that outstanding universal value can exist, however, it contains within it a significant discord: it encourages us to recognise the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties while simultaneously describing aggressive nationalistic suppression of the culture of minorities. Once again, the aspirations placed upon cultural heritage practitioners are greater than are conceptually possible. Where suppression exists, where conflict between national and cultural groups exist, we know from history that World Heritage becomes part of that conflict. In choosing what history to preserve, or reconstruct, or act to save, heritage practitioners may indeed have to choose between cultural values of societies. The mandate to recognise all societies must be considered somewhere between naive and implicitly biased towards the priorities of those with power. Perhaps the default best represents the values of those who author the charters and rather than representing all perspectives, in practice, they lean to some values more than others, whilst maintaining the discourse of neutrality.

4.7 Future-generations or Multi-generational

Venice offers the benefit of a common responsibility to preserve squarely to future generations. Nara offers a more multigenerational perspective, identifying responsibility in the present time to creators or their cultural community and then passing that responsibility to those that care (Article 8). There is a call for a balance between communities (not stated

but perhaps including present and future communities), the careful evaluation of the values that monuments represent in Nara contrasts with the simpler construction of Venice that work is done now for future generations.

5 Contentions and Critiques of Venice and Nara

As the decades carry on principles and assumptions in the Venice Charter and the Nara Document have been challenged as perceptions of heritage change and evolve. Social, economic, technological, and cultural changes prompt reconsideration of the inherited tenets of heritage conservation as codified in the Venice Charter, especially given current challenges in not only defining what heritage is, but how it has been used and abused [68].

5.1 Authorship

Both charters have been criticised for their Eurocentric perspectives, which may not fully capture the diverse cultural values and heritage practices present in the UK and other non-Western contexts. The Venice Charter, developed primarily within the European conservation tradition, may not adequately address the unique challenges faced by heritage sites inside and outside of Europe, leading to potential mismatches between conservation principles and local cultural contexts, particularly sites with an emphasis on use and regeneration. Similarly, while the Nara Document acknowledges the importance of intangible heritage, its framing and implementation have been criticised for prioritising tangible authenticity criteria, potentially marginalising non-material aspects of heritage that are crucial to diverse communities in the UK.

5.2 Continued Relevance

One potential detrimental aspect is the rigid application of conservation principles outlined in these documents, which may sometimes hinder innovation and adaptation to evolving conservation challenges. The Venice Charter, with its emphasis on minimum intervention and reversibility, has been criticised for promoting a conservative approach that prioritises the preservation of historic fabric at the expense of accommodating contemporary needs and uses. Similarly, the Nara Document's focus on authenticity has sometimes led to overly technical and specific debates over the interpretation and application of authenticity criteria, potentially limiting the scope for creative reinterpretation and adaptation of heritage sites. The prescriptive nature of these charters may sometimes limit the flexibility of conservation approaches, particularly in response to rapid urbanisation, climate change, and other contemporary challenges. The non statutory nature may also diminish their influence when heritage is at threat.

Siân Jones, one of the most influential scholars of authenticity in the UK, argues that the Nara Document ultimately upholds the Venice Charter, expanding the modernist criteria for authenticity rather than embracing a more constructivist definition [51]. Already in 2006, she went on to question whether we should:

“be preserving particular points in the life of monuments or artefacts and thus inevitably arresting further developments? Or should they be allowed to grow, change, rejuvenate, collapse, and decay if these processes are integral to the ongoing meanings and values surrounding them?” [69].

These ideas around transformations of heritage intertwined with natural and climatic processes have been developed further by cultural geographer, Caitlin DeSilvey in her work on Curated Decay [70] and 'adaptive reuse' [71], where she and colleagues, including staff at the National Trust and Historic England, reflect on the ways in which new values can be realised in some cases where natural processes are allowed to alter heritage assets. Other arguments for embracing the risk of changes to heritage have been made in the name of facilitating access by UK-based conservators [72][73][74][75].

The Venice Charter's emphasis on preserving historic fabric in its original form may conflict with the need for adaptive reuse and sustainable development of heritage sites in the face of changing climatic and socio-economic conditions. Similarly, the Nara Document's focus on authenticity may prioritise static notions of heritage over dynamic processes of cultural change and adaptation, potentially impeding efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity within the historic environment. While the Venice Charter and the Nara Document have provided valuable frameworks for heritage conservation, their implementation in the UK historic environment has raised concerns regarding their applicability, cultural relevance, and flexibility in addressing contemporary conservation challenges. Balancing the preservation of authenticity with the need for innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability remains a complex and ongoing endeavour within the field of heritage conservation in the UK.

6 Conclusion

Each of those issues discussed raises the possibility for nuance and professional interpretation. Given the less strict enforcement regime within the UK, and the heavy reliance on leadership from within the sector, this professional judgement and decision making is in many ways subjective, reinforcing the familiar and the comfortable. Whilst this benign or beneficial approach may seem harmonious, it stands in conflict with telling of difficult histories. In looking to the future, professionals must accept either that implementation of charters is a matter of professional judgement with nuance and interpretation, or that it is a mandated programme determined by common ontologies. Where a charter agreed by many to speak universal truths does not become implemented within a cultural context we must examine both factors which are intrinsic to the charter and those which are intrinsic to the practitioners. Is the greater impact recorded by Venice related to it offering more telling and relevant truths? Or is the lesser implementation of Nara on the ground an indication that the profession is reluctant to deal in uncertainty and complexity and to move from a comfortable, if culturally biased sense of a universal truth?

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