

ABSTRACT - 3. UNIVERSALISM AND DIVERSITY: REREADING THE DOCTRINAL DOCUMENTS FROM DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES - A DISCUSSION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VENICE CHARTER (AND OTHER RELATED DOCTRINAL DOCUMENTS) THROUGH DIVERSE EPISTEMOLOGIES AND PERSPECTIVES, ACKNOWLEDGING THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF HERITAGE AND EXPLORING CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH.

DOCUMENTATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE BEYOND THE SINGULAR HERITAGE SITE

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The monumental approach to heritage conservation put forward in the Venice charter treats each historic site, and each building or architectural fragment within it, as a unique product of its time and context. In this framework, an implicit precondition for a historic site to be recognized is that the cultural values it embodies are distinct from any other site as well as from contemporary architecture. It is a truism that every product of human material culture is unique. However, this conceptual framework raises the value of uniqueness above that of serial repetition. The latter, however, is a major aspect of vernacular traditions, predicated as they are on typological processes. Such

processes are, paradoxically, key to the formal coherence of historic sites that is prized by the monumental approach of the Venice charter.

This framework that gives disproportionate weight to the unique values of a site, to the detriment of character features the site shares with a broader cultural area, falls short of addressing contemporary problems of cultural and environmental sustainability, which are closely linked with heritage conservation. Liminal challenges these problems pose to the conventional methods of conservation include post-disaster recovery as well as the subtler regeneration of communities at risk of losing their cultural identity to economic, political, or demographic upheavals. In such situations, the monumental approach that addresses the cultural character of a heritage site strictly within the bounds of its spatial boundaries and “period of significance” fails to provide the necessary toolkit for a full regeneration of cultural identities.

Therefore, this paper highlights the importance of broader surveys of vernacular architecture in understanding and acting upon singular sites. The analysis of individual heritage sites, especially urban and landscape complexes, as parts of a broader culture area and of a longer time scale helps fill in blanks caused by sudden destruction or slow degradation of these sites’ built fabric. Rather than defaulting to the infamous “contemporary stamp” to fill in these blanks, the contextual approach upholds living traditions and affective memories as legitimate sources of material to recompose parts of the lost uniqueness of a site.

To this effect, we present our ongoing effort at compiling an extensive documentation of traditional architecture in Brazil. This documentation aims to offer researchers and practitioners a visual thesaurus of vernacular house types, urban patterns, and civic buildings. It follows from a number of precedents in Portugal and Brazil, most notably the Integrated System of Knowledge and Management (SICG) currently used by Brazil’s National Heritage Institute (IPHAN), the work of the Culturas Constructivas foundation, and up to the Popular Architecture in Portugal survey coordinated by Keil do Amaral in the 1940s and 50s. In between the extremes of the detailed, single site studies and the broad generalizations of global atlases, we highlight the

range of formal and technical variations within regions and time periods. This ability to understand the gamut of a cultural tradition is key to crafting sensitive additions and reconstructions in damaged or threatened sites.

Palavras-chave: documentation; traditional building; vernacular architecture; brazil; regenerative conservation.