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## Priceless or Bankrupt: Problems and Prospects from a Built Heritage Conservation Perceptive

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Published: 01/01/2018

*Document Version:*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Bond University research repository.](#)

*Recommended citation(APA):*

Armitage, L. (2018). *Priceless or Bankrupt: Problems and Prospects from a Built Heritage Conservation Perceptive*. 3rd Annual International Symposium on Culture and Civilization, Athens, Greece.

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The background features a pressed leaf on aged, yellowish paper. The leaf is dark brown and elongated, with a thin stem extending across the bottom of the page. The paper has a mottled, aged appearance with some discoloration and faint lines.

# **Priceless or Bankrupt ?**

**Problems and Prospects  
from a  
Built Heritage Conservation Perspective**

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# Content Layout

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- An overview of the paper
- Methodology
- Literature review of priceless and sustainability
- Findings: pricelessness of built heritage
- Conclusion



# Introduction

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- Built heritage conservation is the study of understanding the nature and management of historic buildings, monuments and sites using *heritage science*
- According to Kennedy (2015), heritage science synthesises the knowledge of sustainable development with building conservation philosophy and practice – which have developed through the centuries (Amar, 2017) and evolved with the changing built environment



# Introduction

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- Today, cultural heritage conservation encompasses different approaches to mitigate the impacts associated with transformation of the authenticity and integrity attached to built heritage values, and its relevance to both current and future generations
- One example of the ways in which this is already occurring, as detailed by Mason (2008), is the integration of economic discourses with built heritage conservation



# Introduction

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- It describes the protection of historic environments from the two perspectives of public good and private good
- Jokilehto (1999) nominates different conservation philosophies - preservation, restoration, reconstruction, rehabilitation

## Public good

- Social expression of historic fabric in terms of diversity, identity and individuality

## Private good

- Construction jobs, returning under-utilised buildings to the tax rolls, attracting heritage tourists and maximising the use of [its] existing infrastructure

(Source: Allen, 2012; Mason, 2008)





159-year-old heritage listed Corkman Irish Pub in inner Melbourne demolished this historic property overnight in February 2017 to allow a new development of a 12-storey apartment block project

The local council response was penalty of AU\$ 200,000 to the owner after strong back lash from community

# Introduction

- Amar (2017) argues that historic buildings, monuments and sites still suffer deterioration and demolition by way of conscious neglect



# Introduction

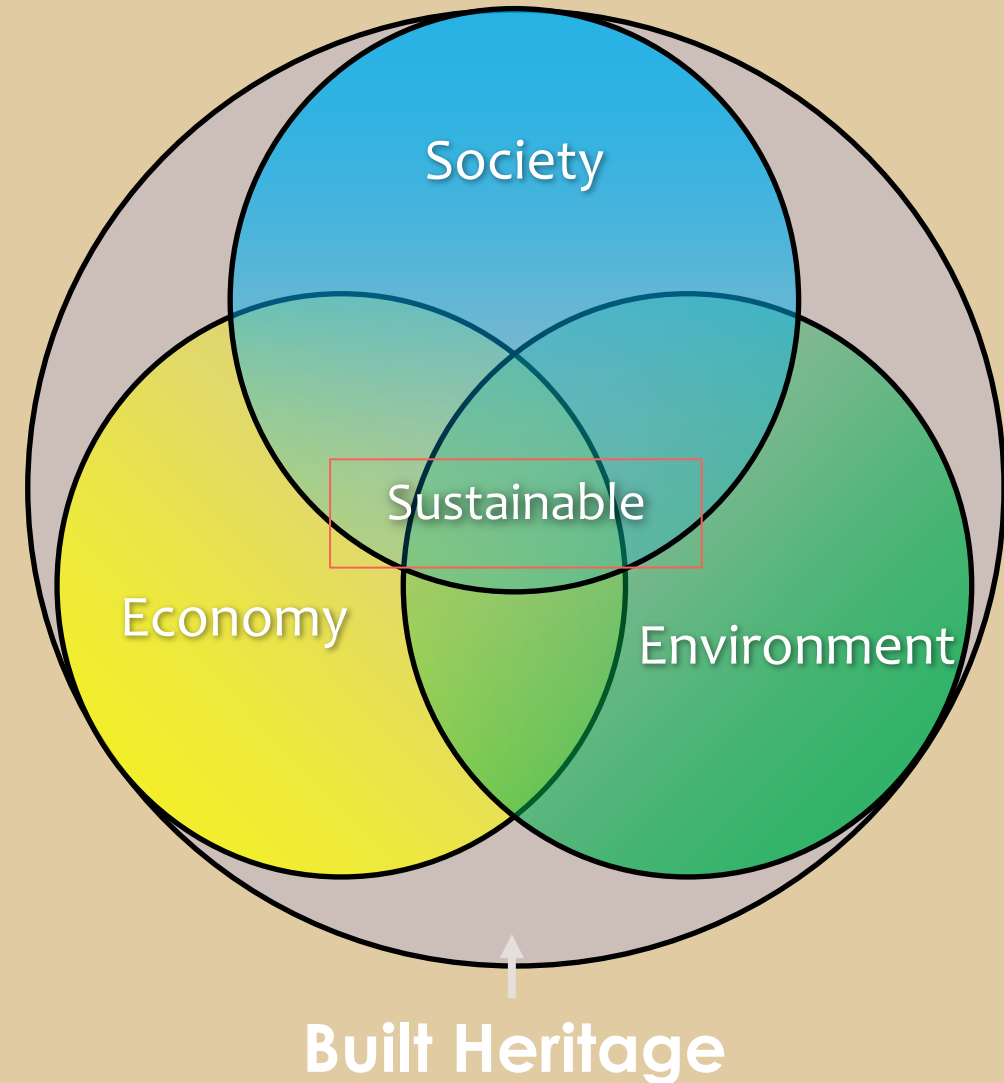
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- Despite strong heritage legislation, charters and recommendations implemented at the local, state or territory, national and international levels (Amar, 2017)
- Demolition by way of neglect has been fuelled by
  - Some heritage actors often abandon their built heritage if it does not provide sufficient economic or financial return (Mason, 2008)
  - Protection only happens when the community feels that, as noted by Jokilehto (1999:14), *'there is a serious risk of being deprived of it'*
- This shifted the discussion from built heritage being a private and public good to a discourse of *'heritage is priceless'*



# Methodology

- Literature review of built heritage as priceless
  - More focussed on environmental, economic and social sustainability
  - Less in relation to principles for the assessment of the integrity and authenticity of cultural built heritage
- Fieldwork
  - Series of four focus group studies undertaken during June 2015 and 2016 in Australia and Tanzania



# Pricelessness of Built Heritage

## Priceless The Origin

1

share over two millennia lineage with Latin name *Antinous* with unknown etymology, meaning *inaestimabilis* (not estimable) in Latin (Osborne, 1999)

However, it was not until the 16th century that the Latin *inaestimabilis* took on its modern meaning of 'too precious' to set value on (Waite, 2012)

2

In 1733, a compiler of antiquity collection, sculptor Agostino Cornicchini, referred Cardinal Albany's priceless and worthy inventory as *Antinous* (Haskell and Penny, 1998)

- Today, its narration is greatly shaping contemporary institutional arrangements – public, private and community - impacting the many aspects of sustainable development outcomes
  - Bartelmus (2008) observes *priceless* as a necessary tool to account for the externalities caused by built environment activities
  - It is endorsed by the WCED central tenet, 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987:44)



# Pricelessness of Built Heritage

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- When discussing cultural built heritage, Amar (2017) indicates most heritage stakeholders find it difficult to define this significant concept when assessing heritage values with the questions
  - what is 'price' and 'what is priceless'
  - In the study 'Priceless: The myth of fair value', Poundstone (2010) holds that value of an object needs to be translated numerically and then communicated to others so as to ascertain an emotional response based on the cost-benefit analysis
  - Zelizer (1994:08) puts it - 'priceless itself surrenders to price'
- Zancheti (2016) proposes that appreciation and protection of built heritage assets will increase if value assessment moves from the moral principle of priceless and includes price

# Pricelessness of Built Heritage

- Whilst the heritage sector finds cost-benefit analysis useful, Bandarin and van Oers (2012) discuss that its applicability is lacking in terms of what is included and what is left out in the conservation of cultural built heritage



**Economics of Built Heritage**  
Consideration is on its use and non-use values



**Built heritage - Environmentalism**  
Cannot be substituted by any other function



**Built Heritage - Society**  
Support social sustainability of people in its community



# Priceless: Economics of Built Heritage

- Priceless heritage tends to be overused or vandalised and destroyed
- Need for economic valuation in which cost-benefit incentives are set to reduce damages
- This implies weighing up a plan for preservation and use of a heritage asset against the willingness to pay or accept its management costs — cultural built heritage costs the society funds to manage it
- Giannakopoulou et al. (2017: 157) on the other hand, suggests ‘all these values embodied in cultural heritage need to be translated into monetary values’
- Zancheti (2016) concludes heritage stakeholders prefer to be persuaded by knowledge of the monetary value at which heritage assets are priced, rather than just appreciating its priceless socio-cultural values



The House of Wonders (Beit-Al-Ajaib) built in 1896. A landmark building celebrated for being the first modern house with mixed European and Middle Eastern architecture, installed with electricity in Zanzibar and an electric lift in East Africa



# Priceless: Environmentalism of Built Heritage

- Albert (2015) considers this perspective lies at the heart of UNESCO's 1992 recognition of the concept historic urban landscape
- Embodied energy of historic fabric reduces the amount of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere which, if not controlled, results in climate change, natural disaster and land use changes - making built heritage priceless
- The failing of its environmental benefits in a monetary metric makes internalisation of trade-offs and allocating of resources efficiently difficult
- The antecedent of infinite (a synonym of priceless) and zero efforts is meant to ensure zero efforts are made to alter or adapt the original fabric which makes effective and efficient conservation impossible. Take for example, the current condition of the historic Zanzibar Stone Town



100-year-old Unley Villa in Adelaide, Australia. The renovate/extend scenario was estimated to save 26% of future life cycle emissions with an average saving on costs of 10% compared to the demolish/re-build scenario. It was concluded 10% is not a sufficient incentive to engage historic conservation however conservation can be viable, if the 26% life cycle emission savings is supported by energy use concession (Pullen and Bennetts, 2011)

# Priceless: Built Heritage and Society

- Heritage stakeholders are now using social sustainability to strike a balance between historic and contemporary built environment
- Social sustainability refers to values in which the wellbeing of the current and future generations are safeguarded by 'recognising every person's right to belong to and participate in as a valued member of his or her community'
- Social sustainability is the least quantifiable and most complex pillar of sustainability in the built heritage context
- Underpinned by the idea that social sustainability is bound by the past, present and future memories of individuals and groups who share common experiences and wellbeing of a built environment
- Hence, built heritage can be categorised as both of 'priceless' and 'no value'



For example, colonial urban development was led by 'master slave' design dividing European colonies into three settlements of white, Indigenous and others. Indigenous people in Australia today find it difficult to belong to a historic and modern built environment with its representation of painful memories relating to racism, oppression and segregation. However, those adhering to white supremacy and Neo-Nazi ideology hail such places as a tribute and of invaluable heritage

# Findings: Pricelessness of Built Heritage

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## ✓ **Fluidity, built heritage, sustainable conservation**

The phrase 'heritage is priceless' may have a slight different meaning as a result of cultural diversity and changing built environment of the community it is facing. What is considered priceless in one community may not necessary be considered as priceless in another



## ✓ **Power, economic sustainability, built heritage conservation**

Perceiving built heritage as a good is an attempt to quantify its *pricelessness*, albeit in a different discourse and assessment process, and with different conservation outcomes, often to the disadvantage of losing the authenticity and integrity of built heritage values



## ✓ **Core, environmental sustainability and built heritage conservation**

Stakeholders are not fazed by this sustainability pillar unless its framework somehow estimates its monetary value or facilitating a fundamental shift of stakeholder perceptions of ecological values attached to the authenticity and integrity of built heritage



## ✓ **Attachment, social sustainability and built heritage conservation**

Stakeholders recognise the need to actually inherit the truth rather than a made-up version; it is important to maintain the integrity and authenticity of a place even though the history of a place may hurt people's memories





# Conclusion

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- The notion of *priceless* is commonly discussed in relation to abstract heritage values, where the heritage sector assumes that stakeholders from different generations and diverse cultural groups are to share a belief of its meaning
- The underlying meaning of built heritage pricelessness is influenced by, and is a response to, stakeholder perceptions constructed from their knowledge and experience
- The heritage sectors are only at the beginning of accepting the term 'priceless' in order to advance an understanding of sustainability and conservation of cultural built heritage in combination with the profound transformation now taking place in the built environment

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