

Heritage planning in reverse: No heritage without users

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Abstract

The success of a development location lies in the hands of its future users. They opt or do not opt for a new location. For this reason, for a location to be developed successfully, it is dependant on anticipating and starting at the end: the users of the location.

Current upgrading and globalization mean that the unique identity of the surroundings has become an important subject for the users of the location. Once again, people want to belong to a location and be inspired by it. For this reason, it is necessary to make the unique characteristics of a place apparent: emphasizing the '*genius loci*' or rather the specific historical atmosphere of the place. The history and identity of a place provide the starting point for its future development.

Authenticity, however, cannot be forced, which is why such a strategy should be linked to the history and specific characteristics of the location. So, on the basis of a coordinated idea, the location will acquire its added value through making strategic choices in advance for the target group segmentation, the urban program, interpretation in terms of urban development and, last but not least, the marketing. The devise is to begin at the end (the final image).

1 Introduction

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In this paper, this approach will be analysed and illustrated using the Dutch case 'Schuytgraaf'. At this location the city of Arnhem will be expanded upon with 6.000 homes in the years to come. The obligatory archaeological research conducted on location resulted in more than 11 archaeological sites. Due to its special nature one site was declared to be a

national archaeological monument. The archaeological valuables will be protected in the ground (also referred to as 'remain in situ'). This asks for specific spatial arrangement. This location is, moreover, the place where annually the landing of Polish parachutists in September 1944 is remembered. The inheritance of the place will thus be a prominent theme for its special design.

The paper is constructed as follows. Section two explores the role of heritage in the postmodern world. In the third section the concept 'heritage in reverse' is being introduced. This concept is based upon lessons from the practice of the visitor management, as described in section four. The question why it is so important to start with the user of heritage is answered. Section five describes and analyses the Dutch case Schuytgraaf as a project of heritage planning in reverse. Finally, some concluding remarks are made about the difference this new approach makes.

2 Heritage sites in the postmodern world

An area of production has changed into an area of reproduction. For this reason locations and sites lose their unique character more and more. Walsh speaks about '*the erosion of place*', meaning that social processes and developments, like mass communication, mass culture and an internationally orientated economy have led to the situation that locations resemble each other more and more in several respects. By this '*Macdonaldisation*' the typical character of locations and sites is increasingly disconnected from the geographic and local reality. This process is also called '*placelessness*'. Functions and services have no local tie anymore, they have been disconnected from the surroundings. The strong tendency in the direction of standardization and conformity of locations has also another side. In the same monoculture the value of originality is strongly emphasized. A high price must be paid for possessing or visiting a small piece of originality, a painting, a glimpse of the past, an historical building or a small piece of the Berlin Wall. Apart from a growing worldwide culture there is also a growing interest in local and regional culture. This paradox, also known as the 'global-local paradox' or 'glocalisation', indicates that globalization makes it necessary and desirable that locations and sites distinguish themselves from other locations and sites. In Dutch national policy the memorandum Belvedere is the first memorandum in which a plea is made for a more important place for the cultural values of regions, within the design and the layout of locations. Within the layout of the Netherlands the specific character of regions must be taken into account more in order to prevent uniformity. Cities, provinces and property developers are stimulated to give more attention to the heritage as a source of inspiration for new developments, creating a counterbalance against worldwide forces.

Current postmodernism is no reaction to modernism which distances itself from its predecessors. This would be an extreme modernistic method. Postmodernism adds something to modernism. In fact it means that there is not only one truth and one reality, but that various realities are being respected and exist besides each other. In the area of reproduction the new reality is what is being reproduced.

A striking example can be found in Lelystad, the shopping outlet centre 'Bataviastad'. This outlet centre is called after Batavia, a replica of an old vessel from the 17th century, which is situated not far from this outlet centre. It has been designed as a fortress city, complete with a heavy city wall, three city gates, car free clinker streets and a number of individual small wooden shops, with a quasi authentic aura, partly inspired by Marken, partly by West Indies colonies, where the 'Batavia' once got its merchandise from (fig. 1). Often visitors experience such replica-surroundings as very authentic. The 'original' reality disappears to the background when a new reality is created or simulated. Another example of 'simulated realities' is for example the increasing number of theme parks, where the visitor becomes an inhabitant of Disneyworld, the fairy tale of Robin Hood, or where visitors can

experience themselves how life was during the holocaust in Auschwitz. More and more it is the experience that is considered to be important, so that a building, a painting or a poem can be interpreted and experienced in many different, equally matched ways. The existing reality is nothing more or less than just that experience. Such a fragmented character of a postmodern society leads also to many questions about the current players, activities and objectives of the city, that have to be asked again. All this means that the unique characteristics of a site must be made visible; they offer the starting point for the future development of the destination.



Fig. 1 Outletshoppingcentre Batavia Stad, The Netherlands (photograph: www.bataviastad.nl).

3 Integrating heritage and development

In the Netherlands a policy has been formulated on government level that aims to make the cultural history more directive in spatial planning. This policy was approved by several departments and consequently it was applied integrally. It concerns no law or legislation, but it is a source of inspiration for policy on provincial and local level, for concrete design tasks and special projects. The execution program of this policy will be ending this year. Until now initiatives that were used as a foundation for the special project, were stimulated by a matching governmental subsidy. This resulted into several example projects, but unfortunately it does not lead to a change in the behaviour of professionals. Developers consider cultural history still always as the cherry on the cake, and especially in the current economic situation, they refuse to integrate cultural values into their plans. Simply because they think that this only leads to higher costs and does not yield anything in the end. This paper shows otherwise. If one starts at the end (the user), cultural values can mean an additional value for development.

When not only spatial quality is aimed for, but when the ambition is based upon the historical identity and returns in the marketing strategy, the value of the location will increase considerably. The case which is discussed in the following paragraph shows that a design that is appealing to the target group and based upon regional identity, yields faster economic output, also for project developers (see fig. 2). A location is popular when the user feels that he is part of the site. In that case houses on this site will be sold a lot faster. Especially this short term increase is important for developers, because the long term price increase does not land in their pockets. Until today cultural historical identity as a sales argument and return on investment is not yet put in structurally.

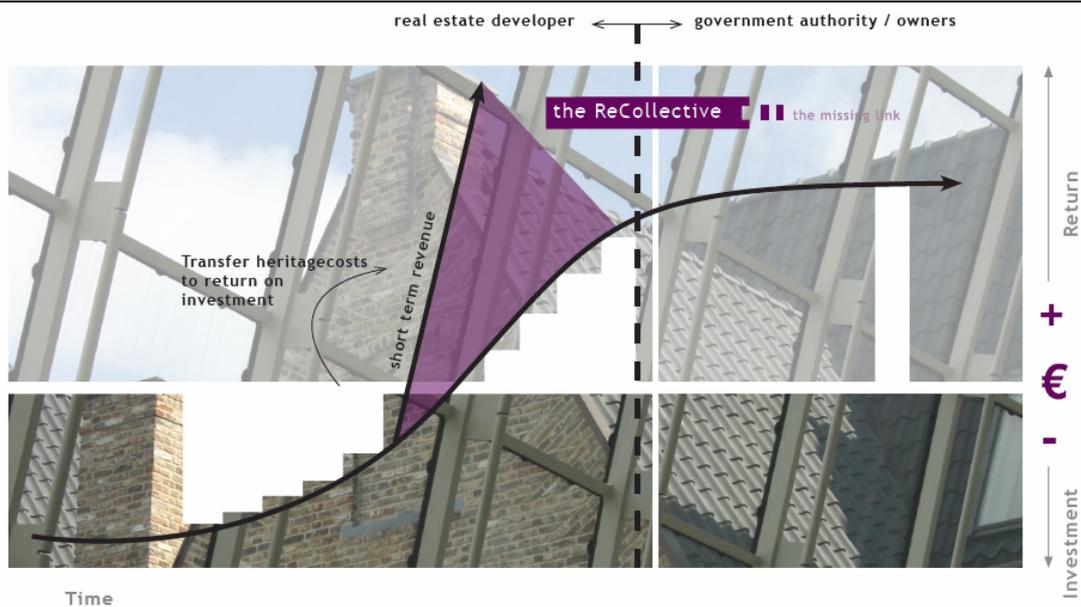


Fig. 2 Increase of output as a result of putting in cultural values.

However, in case a location profiles itself with the historical DNA, it distinguishes itself from other locations. This increases the mutual competition between regions. With development from identity the dimensions with which the regions distinguish themselves from each other are larger than meaningless characteristics, like buildings densities. No one will ever choose his place of business here. In order to develop a successful location, the possibilities of the region must be made use of. One should aim at finding a connection with the real market demand of inhabitants and consumers. Then the circle is complete, because as stated in paragraph 2, this postmodern world asks for identity.

The many histories and events, the memories and the stories, the values inhabitants and consumers attach to a site, the desires and perspectives, in short the cultural significances are strongly connected to the physical landscape. But this cultural identity has many meanings and it is changeable. Often project processes that integrate cultural history are based upon the 'intrinsic value of cultural historical objects'. However, the value of heritage is very subjective and is only brought about by the way it is experienced by the spectator. By emphasizing the role of this spectator -also called the final user of the location-, in the project process, cultural values can be successfully integrated into the design of the project. This shift forces to make the significance that the user gives to the heritage, the most important factor. Therefore the visualization of the heritage will be connected to his or her experience. Until now especially these layers of significance play a marginal part in spatial planning. The project developer will only integrate heritage into his plans, when it leads to return on investment. In order to integrate the cultural identity of a site into the spatial project process, the various layers of significance of the heritage must be recognized. When the product is connected to the world of experience of the consumer, he will be willing to pay for it. The practice of visitor management shows that the users analysis is very important in the development of a location.

4 Lessons from visitor management for location development of spaces

Whatever the development project: a residential area, a theme park, an airport or a shopping centre, they all generate user and visitor flows for various purposes. Users encompass residents as well as other parties involved, such as entrepreneurs, government bodies, institutions and organisations. The extent to which balance is achieved determines the quality

of the destination. (figure 3). In order to develop a location successfully with input of heritage, lessons can be learned from the approach of the visitor management.

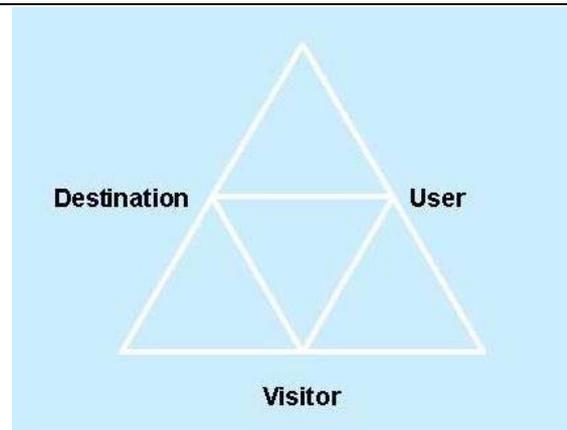


Fig. 3 Visitor management

Visitors flow to heritage sites can be analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively (see figure 4). In terms of quantity, one might think of a solution where a destination has (too) many, enough, or (too) few visitors. When the destination has enough visitors, there are hardly any or no problems at all; there is even reason for jubilation. However, when there are too many or too few visitors, problems may indeed occur. A historic site with too many visitors may be attractive from an economic point of view; the downside, however, is the negative effects that may arise, such as traffic inconvenience or damage to heritage sites and objects. On the other hand, when historic sites attract too few visitors, the commercial viability or even the long-term survival of the site may be at risk.

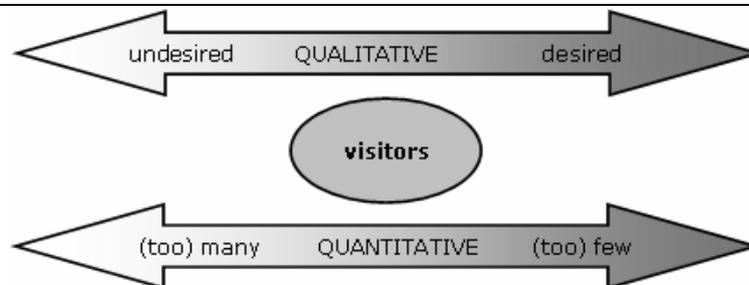


Fig. 4 Visitors: quantitative and qualitative approach

Quality, on the other hand, may involve desired and/or undesired effects resulting from visitor flows. Visitors may be wanted, for their positive attitude towards objects or the money they spend at the site and the economic spin-off benefits in the surrounding area. Visitors may also be unwanted, however, because they seek experiences other than the ones the sites offer.

However, it is rather difficult to identify the ‘desired’ or ‘undesired’ status and it largely depends on the aims one wishes to achieve with the heritage destination. Making use of the opportunities, from the demand of the consumers, to a recognizable and cohesive region identity, only shows up well when this identity appeals to the desired user. The users are different as far as character, lifestyle and view on life are concerned. Using and visualizing historic identity is only possible, when the desired user is approached directly. Therefore getting new users and inhabitants involved in the research of cultural identity is an important aspect. On the one hand because the inhabitants and the users form an indispensable source, on the other hand because visualizing the identity enlarges the users

involvement with the site, and consequently his involvement with the future spatial transformation.

The ‘heritage in reverse’ approach, as advocated in this article, in fact explores the possibilities of using visitor management as a strategy for successful spatial development. The core in this respect is to integrate cultural values as early as in the plan formulation stage by taking the users as a point of departure. The case below describes the possible benefits of this strategy.

5 Schuytgraaf: heritage planning in reverse

The southwest of Arnhem a city in the Netherlands (Europe) is the location of a new residential development comprising 6,250 new houses, called Schuytgraaf. Before the building work could start, the site needed to be investigated – in compliance with the ‘*Monumentenwet*’ (Dutch Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act) – for any archaeological remains.

In Holland starting point is ‘the disturber pays’ and in case of construction-projects an inventory research is obligatory. This research is paid by the developer. Though the heritage costs money in this stage, it is not to be taken for granted that one thinks also of what should be done with the results of the research in order to give the construction project an additional value. Often a research for heritage is considered to be a burden. When the inventory is completed and construction can start without damaging the heritage, the process often stops there. Strange, because the knowledge resulting from the research can also be applied to improve the quality of the construction project by providing and visualizing the identity of the site. This case shows how this can be set about.

The archaeological investigation was carried out in 1995-1996, and it uncovered eleven archaeological sites. Remains from the Roman period and the Middle Ages were found. ‘Site 10’ even bore traces from the Stone Age, dating back some 7,000 years. This site is now an national archaeological monument. Any activities that may damage the archaeological resource are not allowed. The site has been consolidated, conserved and reserved for research in the future.

In addition to archaeological traces, remains were found from the Battle of Arnhem, which was fought in the Second World War. When explosives from this war were found and had to be removed, the story of Arnhem’s Polish history cropped up. Busloads of people came to the site to commemorate their relatives. There was no need to look for something to confirm the importance of this place, because the visitors did just so. This touched everyone; people experienced this reference to the past as positive. The story became a link between the past and the present, smoothing the path further into history.

Apparently, the place, referred to as ‘Site 10’, has an ambiguous cultural identity. Because of its status as archaeological monument, the place cannot be built on. A setback for the developer of the estate, as the site is situated right in the centre of the estate and this expensive land can no longer be sold. The question was whether it was possible for this setback to be transformed into an opportunity for the development and whether the cultural importance could represent an added value.

Land development company Schuytgraaf organised a design contest, for which four firms were invited. These firms were challenged to come up with a plan of use for ‘Site 10’. The guiding principle in this process was that the design would earn itself back over time. It was precisely this guiding principle that made the process stand out from other spatial plans in which cultural values are integrated into the design.

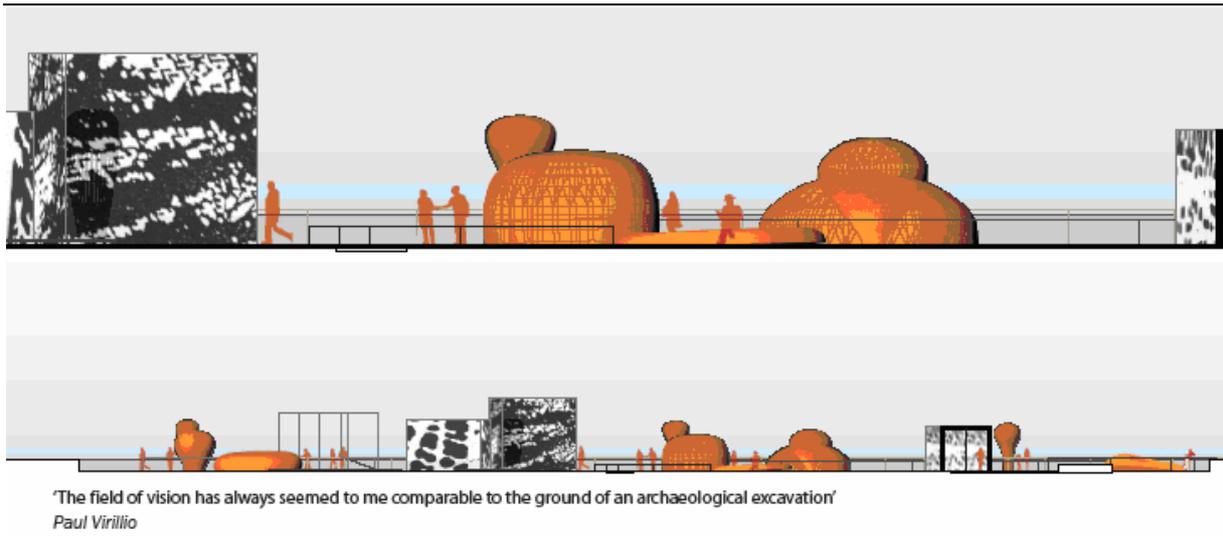


Fig. 5: Design CHORA for Schuytgraaf, Arnhem

The winning design by CHORA, *'De Landing'* in Schuytgraaf, has two archaeological identities: that of the earth and that of the air. The earth contains traces of prehistoric people, of the Roman Empire, and of life in the Middle Ages. The air holds the memory of the Battle of Arnhem, the landing of the Polish parachute brigade. A virtual memory. The heart of Schuytgraaf, in the eyes of the designers, is a symbolic landing strip, where the story of the Polish parachutists is told. A story that is not given the credit that it is due, being overshadowed by other stories of the Second World War. A tribute to the people who waged the battle. The landing strip is marked by parachutes which are displayed in various stages of opening, and which are given a different function. The parachutes are not only objects of memory, they also give the field a playful, magical character. But the heart of Schuytgraaf is more: it is the window to other, larger spaces: the prehistoric era, the geological development of the delta area, and the skies over the city.

The plan consists of four layers, taking into account the future users. The bottom layer takes the shape of a variety of planted beds, and texts explaining what archaeological treasures are hidden under the ground surface have been set into the railings. The story of operation Market Garden, the landing of the Polish parachutists in the Second World War, has been visualised by means of the parachutes, which also serve as a pavilion. The pavilions transport the past into the here and now, focusing on play, recreation and meetings for future users.

6 The difference a user can make ...

What initially was considered to be a heavy burden, was adjusted in Schuytgraaf to a chance to come up with a creative solution. The essential part of Schuytgraaf's success is the determination what the user wants with the past and with the eventual present cultural values. Preferably in the beginning of the project process, therefore 'heritage in reverse'. Only in this way heritage can generate an added economic value. Schuytgraaf shows that the existing cultural values give the future inhabitants a sense of connection with the new location. The developer uses the cultural identity of the new area as a marketing tool in order to sell the houses.

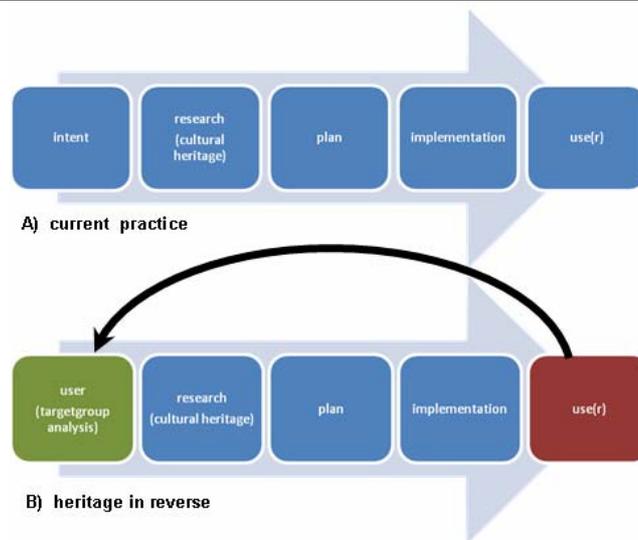


Fig. 6 Heritage in reverse

Success stories like that of Schuytgraaf are exceptions rather than the rule in everyday practice. The economic, social, and therefore explicit public meaning of cultural identity is not yet recognised by everyone. Let alone the necessity of translating this identity in such a way that the user feels drawn to the place and develops a connection with it.

In the meantime cultural research before building has become routine in the Netherlands and in case of archaeology it is even obligatory. It is obvious that this leads to financial consequences. However, the knowledge gathered herewith is rarely converted into economic return for the project. If the economic and public value of cultural history is considered at all, it is done so at a surprisingly late stage. Currently, it is academic discourse that determines the use and necessity of cultural-historical research.

This paper has used the case Schuytgraaf in The Netherlands to illustrate heritage planning in reverse. Heritage in reverse argues that cultural values should not be regarded as an end in themselves, but as a means to create an appealing living environment. By definition, giving priority to the essential questions – for whom and with what aim – leads to a different approach to and also a different outcome of the handling of heritage for all parties involved. Investments in the field of cultural-historical research can be much better explained in this way, more distinctly even: they have become return on investment. Nowadays it is customary to establish the use and added value only after research has been carried out. According to the heritage in reverse perspective, the desired use, exploitation and experience are determined before deciding how to deal with the cultural values present. Doing things in this order is much more sympathetic to the local community: the quality of the living environment is increased, and residents are made aware of the ‘canon of their history’.

Creating an appealing living environment requires knowledge about the future user and his or her wishes with regard to this new environment. The user experience is a central issue in this respect. A translation of cultural values to the user’s experience world may produce a marketing strategy for the sales of real estate. In addition, it produces, for instance, input for social cohesion in a new neighbourhood. If the public use of cultural-historical research cannot be demonstrated, and the research results are not used as input in the formation of identities and agreeable living environments, then why spend so much money on it? The knowledge about our past has a lot more to offer than academic knowledge.

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