

Introduction

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A transdisciplinary approach to critical heritage

The aim of this book is to expand the field of critical heritage studies in the urban domain, by examining the role of civic institutions – in this case urban universities – in the construction of urban heritage discourses, and in the influence those discourses have on urban planning decisions or how they become instrumentalised as mechanisms for urban change and regeneration (Pendlebury and Porfyriou, 2017). It proposes that universities engage in these processes in a number of ways: as institutional producers of academic *urban knowledge*, through research, teaching and curriculum design, which directly shapes heritage and planning expertise in development contexts; as producers of ‘heritage practices’ that are implemented in heritage management and development contexts in the urban realm; and as ‘developers engaged in campus construction’ projects that both reference heritage discourses as a mechanism for promoting support and approval by planners and the public, and capitalise on heritage assets as a resource.

The book presents multiple examples of universities engaging with participatory processes that position them as significant institutions in the development of urban heritage narratives, while also, through its collection of contributions by academics from different institutions, demonstrating the critical role that universities have as observers and critics of the processes in which they are implicated. The case studies included in the volume investigate how many universities, as mixed and heterogenous communities of interest dispersed across urban sites in diverse city contexts, are adopting strategies of engagement with local



people and city neighbourhoods linked to conceptualisations of shared urban heritage, and ask how these are contributing to a re-shaping of ideas, narratives and lived experience of urban heritage that are distinctively linked to university input, as well as to the re-shaping of universities themselves and their own institutional heritage, embedded in evolving urban contexts. The contributions cross disciplinary and cultural boundaries, and bridge academia and practice.

The collection was born out of an Anglo-Swedish research collaboration, *Curating the City*, a research cluster within the UCL–University of Gothenburg Centre for Critical Heritage Studies, and a corresponding focus on two specific case study sites: University of Gothenburg’s Näckrosen Campus (Gothenburg) and UCL East (London), both under development at the time the collaboration was initiated in 2016, with funding from the University of Gothenburg. This initial focus allowed us to examine questions of scale, vision, pedagogical intent and heritage context within a directly comparative framework through two transdisciplinary workshops hosted in London and Gothenburg, which drew together a wide range of speakers from different disciplinary backgrounds and practices, including most of the contributors to this volume. We subsequently expanded the scope of the investigation beyond the core cities, to include university developments in Lund, Rome, Beirut and São Paulo, in order to demonstrate the circulation of ideas and practices linking universities, heritage and urban policy and development within an extended geographical and socio-political framework.

Curating the City was formed to develop transdisciplinary, academic research perspectives on our future cities that, through engagement with participatory practice, can help to transform the regulated places that characterise our urban centres into spaces open to a multitude of co-existing initiatives, ranging from bottom-up to institutional, and allowing for a temporally rich and heterogeneous fabric of urban material and social life. Within this framing, it takes a view, counter to the prevailing status quo, of heritage conservation and management as innovation rather than as a regulatory constraint on the development of our cities, and calls for a rethinking and reconsideration of the inbuilt tension between innovative systems and restrictive institutions. It recognises creative activities as being key to challenging and un-making the ways in which certain places, such as heritage places, have become legitimised sites for permissible behaviour, and argues that a reformulation of established heritage practice can support the relevant and resilient development of historic cities. Furthermore, it recognises universities as laboratories of creative, critical and experimental thought

and practice that depends on effective translation across academic boundaries into the world beyond, through partnerships, collaborations, participation and the formation of new generations of professionals, in order to make a contribution to such processes of resilient development, healthy change and urban wellbeing.

Led by researchers from UCL Urban Laboratory and Institute of Archaeology (Melhuish and Sully), and University of Gothenburg Academy of Design and Craft and Department of Conservation (Benesch and Holmberg), Curating the City's transdisciplinary research lens is a triangulation between the overlapping research fields of architecture, urban studies, conservation, craft, design, literature, cultural studies, planning and archaeology, supported by the educational platforms at University of Gothenburg and UCL. The idea of curating and the curatorial in relation to the urban condition as heritage has established the overall framework for the research agenda from 2016–21, enabling cross-cutting and experimental perspectives on urban heritage in a globalised, post-industrial and postcolonial world, ranging across a number of themes – including a critical inquiry into the relationship between universities as actors in discourses around urban heritage, both as producers of knowledge and as civic institutions and developers in urban neighbourhoods. The transdisciplinary collaborative participatory process of assembly (selecting, organising and presenting) is presented as a valid response to uncertainty and defunct ideas of deterministic management of outcomes.

The university theme was shaped in part through an initial process of mapping the common interests of the cluster leaders, which became layered in the problems faced by universities today, resulting largely from the marketisation and internationalisation of higher education. At UCL, Clare Melhuish and Dean Sully were involved in curriculum and spatial planning dimensions of UCL East's development plans, and Melhuish had previously undertaken research on universities as actors in urban regeneration for UCL Urban Laboratory, which linked to the major development projects underway at UCL and University of Gothenburg. In addition, both University of Gothenburg researchers, Ingrid Martins Holmberg and Henric Benesch, had previously worked in the role of the university as knowledge broker in relation to the city. There was a shared interest in understanding universities not only as mechanisms within larger financial, political and regional systems, but as actual sites entangled in all sorts of temporalities, materialities and socialities. The consolidation of research interests within the cluster opened up the possibility of critical discussion detached from actual projects.

The university as urban heritage, or more so a critical take on university heritage beyond the somewhat canonical lament with regard to the decline of universities, emerged as an important but also somewhat forgotten question to pick up. The transdisciplinary setting of the centre offered a real possibility to address this question, not only from one, but multiple disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. In fact, this particular unruliness is something that we have always embraced. Moreover, it is something that we recognise as being not only welcome among many scholars and practitioners across our field who have grown weary of their institutional and disciplinary confinements, but also quite urgent since the question that we address does not sit within one discipline alone and demands a more holistic approach.

Many urban universities are engaged in processes of expanding and opening their physical and institutional borders to facilitate greater engagement with the cities in which they are situated, for a variety of reasons that are described in *University and community-led urban regeneration* (Melhuish, 2016) and chapter 1 of this volume (Melhuish). University cities in turn are home to increasingly mixed, multicultural populations striving to redefine identities and cultural heritage in the context of shifting physical locations. We set out to produce a volume from our transdisciplinary conversations and analyses that would provide insights, grounded in comparative case studies, into how local and global bodies of knowledge, embodied in different but interconnected university and urban communities and initiatives, intersect to shape new understandings of urban heritage as a framework for diverse urban lives. Structured by critical understandings of co-curated, decolonising heritage, it examines the local, diasporic and global dimensions of heritage-making through the lens of the university as urban institution and university development implicated in urban and social renewal, exploring how universities and citizens participate in a shared urban heritage.

The two workshops organised by Curating the City in 2016 and 2017 utilised the prism of 'curating' to assemble research and researchers to address the affordance of urban heritage as a resource at the crossroads of different lived experiences and expert knowledges (inhabitants, stakeholders, practices, subject-matters, audiences and/or conceptualisations). The research theme, 'Universities, heritage institutions and communities shaping postcolonial urban heritage narratives and lived experience for the future', was developed via two site-based, invitation-only workshops focused on the two university campus development initiatives led by UCL and University of Gothenburg.

which have actively sought to engage with local people and neighbourhoods, and participate in a re-shaping of ideas, narratives and lived experience of urban heritage for the future. The workshops explored how universities, as mixed communities of interest dispersed across urban sites, were re-evaluating and re-constructing their institutional identities and heritage in the context of place-based spatial development, and at the same time, through their interventions, participating in shaping the heritage of local populations in contrasting cosmopolitan city contexts. They further considered the close parallels between universities and museums (such as London's Victoria and Albert East) as civic institutions engaged in the development of new urban imaginaries in postcolonial cities through collaborative processes of co-production with local populations.

The disciplinary structures of universities, and the way they are actualised, spatialised, socialised and economised (see chapters 3, 5, 6, 9 and 12), can be thought of as strategies of entanglement and/or disentanglement in relation to other sites and contexts of knowledge production that have profound implications for the urban contexts and histories in which they are embedded. This poses some fundamental questions – what kind of place is the university?; where is it?; and who is it for?; or perhaps, *where* is it for? – that emphasise the situated, multimodal and intersectional character of knowledge production, and engages with the university as host as well as neighbour and guest. It addresses the little-explored role of universities in urban neighbourhoods in co-constructing ideas and practices of heritage as a fusion of places/things, memories/narratives, local knowledge/global expertise.

Building understanding from comparative case studies

The chapters generated by the workshop discussions address a series of key and cross-cutting questions, starting in London and Gothenburg, and spreading out across Lund, Rome, Beirut and São Paulo, drawing in the work and insights of our international collaborators across those sites and conditions. How does the university define its own heritage, and how is that played out both within the site of the university institution itself, and within the wider urban location in which it is embedded; how are the traces of the city embedded, in turn, in the university? What does heritage mean to urban dwellers in adjacent neighbourhoods, and how is it defined in different city/university contexts and embodied in the layers of the city through time, and through processes of urban development? How can