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Jeremy C. Wells^a

^a Heritage consultant, Denver, Colorado, United States

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Our history is not false: perspectives from the revitalisation culture

Jeremy C. Wells*

Heritage consultant, Denver, Colorado, United States

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Two dominant themes in architectural conservation doctrine are to (1) avoid the fabrication of ‘false’ histories through the clear differentiation of ‘new’ from ‘old’ building fabric; and (2) the deprecation of subjective ways in which the perception of building fabric engenders sense of place. This study explores the cultural values of a group of citizens engaged in revitalising their historic downtown through the ‘Main Street’ program in Anderson, South Carolina, United States. This ‘revitalisation culture’ values and promotes treatments to its historic environment that emphasise the conjectural fabrication of ‘historic’ elements to existing buildings and the use of historicised design for new, infill construction. Whilst these values go against the grain of conservation doctrine, the revitalisation culture is preserving a kind of authenticity that stems from socially and culturally constructed values in an effort to maintain the ability of the historic environment to engender ‘spontaneous fantasies’, which serve to emotionally attach the revitalisation culture with its historic downtown. Ultimately, the revitalisation culture is engaging in ‘unethical’ behaviour from the perspective of conservation professionals, which begs the question of whose values deserve attention and if the field of heritage conservation is able and willing to accept pluralistic concepts of how the authenticity of historic places can and should be conserved.

Keywords: doctrine; authorised; discourse; truth; treatment; fabric; revitalisation; main; street

Introduction

The dominant concept of historical significance rests in a century-old empiricist-positivist paradigm that emphasises objectivity, ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ whilst deprecating subjective cultural, social and experiential meanings. A critique by Tainter and Lucas (1983, p. 715) labelled this framework for significance ‘illogical, unworkable, and [unable to] suit the purpose for which it was intended’. In the twenty-first century, this epistemologically challenged framework remains in use by the majority of heritage conservation practitioners in the Western world. The essential problems with this view of significance, such as assumptions that objects have innate value independent of cultural interpretation, tautological definitions and hegemonic control by professional elites have been well explored elsewhere (see Green 1998, King 2003, Mason 2003, Smith 2006, Wells 2007, Worthing & Bond 2008). Laurajane Smith (2006) refers to this phenomenon of the subjective meanings of heritage being overwhelmed by the expert/objective values of professionals as the ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (AHD).

*Email: jeremy@heritagestudies.org

In part underpinning this discourse is the professional conservation ethic that stresses the need for the 'truthful' treatment of the fabric of buildings and place and which derives from nineteenth-century European building conservation debates (see Ruskin 1849/1989, Viollet-le-Duc 1854/1990, Boito 1884, Philippot 1972/1996, Jokilehto 1999, Smith 2006). This paper compares this professional conservation ethic with the ethnographic meanings of a group of citizens from Anderson, South Carolina, United States, who are dedicated to conserving and revitalising their downtown through the principles of the 'Main Street' program.

The Main Street program arose out of a concern for the incipient death of downtowns in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. By the mid-1970s, many traditional downtowns had become virtual ghost towns due to urban renewal programs and the mass exodus of retail to the suburbs. The United States-based National Trust for Historic Preservation created the Main Street program in the late 1970s in response to this economic decline of small-town urban centres. These places correspondingly had some of the oldest and most historic landscapes in the country, which is why the National Trust initially became interested in starting the program. From three pilot communities in 1976, there are now over 2,000 Main Street programs across the United States (Dono & Glisson 2009, pp. 7–10). The program was inspired, in part, by the 'Magdalen Street experiment', in which the British Civic Trust restored the storefronts of Magdalen Street in Norwich, England in the late 1950s (Civic Trust 1967). Whilst the revitalisation efforts in Norwich were only narrowly focused design principles and as such had limited success (Dalibard 1985, p. 59, Banks 1988, p. 15), the Trust would emphasise that more than design should be addressed in the revitalisation process. Issues of organisation, promotions and economics also needed to be solved through a comprehensive 'Main Street Approach'.

The National Trust describes the Main Street Approach as a holistic process that engages stakeholders, such as residents, municipalities and allied community organisations, in an effort to revitalise distressed downtowns. It is overt in its aim to use heritage as a tool for economic growth (Dono & Glisson 2009, p. 11, Bull & Girard-Ruel 2009, p. 3). The Approach is founded on the core ethic of historic preservation/heritage conservation and these four points which must be addressed concurrently:

- Organisation: Coordinating the efforts of all stakeholders toward a common goal and forming and sustaining the organisational structure and funding to support the program (Dono & Glisson 2009, pp. 15–68).
- Promotion: Marketing and tourism efforts directed at 'selling a positive image' of the downtown. Special or regular events are particularly encouraged along with traditional marketing efforts (Dono & Glisson 2009, pp. 195–220).
- Design: This is a multifaceted approach to improving the appearance of the downtown, starting with saving historic buildings from demolition, removing later layers of change, and then rehabilitating them. Design also focuses on the appearance of window displays, store interiors, and landscape features such as sidewalks, lighting and streets (Dono & Glisson 2009, pp. 103–194).
- Economic restructuring: Conducting market surveys to determine the economic and physical assets of the downtown and then using these assets to encourage the growth of economic activity in order to attract a wider customer base (Dono & Glisson 2009, pp. 69–102).

There are also 'Eight Guiding Principles' that direct Main Street programs to, among other directives, implement these four points with equal emphasis, be prepared for slow change, develop partnerships and use existing resources as much as possible (Dono & Glisson 2009, p. 11). Each year in the United States, the National Trust and many state-wide coordinating agencies certify programs that adhere to the Main Street Approach. Most Main Street programs are non-profit organisations and as such, can solicit funding from members as well as through grants. Paid staff are usually limited to one full-time 'Main Street manager', with the majority of activities being done by volunteers from the community. A few Main Street organisations, such as the one in Anderson, are affiliated with a municipality or a chamber of commerce.

Other countries have adopted aspects of the Main Street approach to a limited extent; Canada is perhaps the most prominent example. The Heritage Canada Foundation started its own Main Street program in 1979; at its demise in 1994 due to a lack of funding, there were 70 Main Street communities across Canada (Bull & Girard-Ruel 2009, pp. 3, 4). Main Street Quebec and the Alberta Main Street program continued the work of the national program and both remain active to this day. More recently, Main Street Middlesex began a pilot program in 2005 and Main Street Ontario launched its program in April 2009 (Bull & Girard-Ruel 2009, pp. 6, 7). Main Street in Australia is represented by Mainstreet Australia, formed in 1996 and New South Wales Main Street/Small Towns Program, formed in 1994 (Walker 1997). In the United Kingdom the Civic Trust and the New Economics Foundation have partnered to create a pilot program in Great Malvern based on the Main Street Approach called 'High Street UK' with the goal of creating a national Main Street centre akin to what currently exists in the United States (Civic Trust 2007).

Whilst there are a number of ethnographic studies that address the links between heritage and memory (for example, Low 1992, Cheung 2003, Campbell 2005, Daher 2005, Stanton 2005), examples that specifically address the culturally desirable treatment of the historic fabric of place are rather rare (Breglia 2006, p. 13) resulting in a lack of understanding of the links between cultural values, heritage and the physical elements of historic places (Basso 1996, p. 54). A few notable exceptions include Lisa Breglia's (2006) exploration of cultural values related to Indigenous peoples in Mexico and their pre-Columbian monuments. Extant research on the Main Street Approach and the ways in which Main Street programs operate is even more rarefied. An extensive literature search by Kent Robertson (2004) failed to uncover any independent empirical research on the actual use of the Main Street Approach, instead finding all publications purely descriptive in nature; since the publication of Robertson's article, the situation does not appear to have changed substantially. In addition, I could not locate any ethnographic studies – regardless of their domain in heritage studies or not – that addressed Main Street programs. There are, however, relevant studies that address tourism and economic development in historic areas, such as Boniface's (2000) work that focused on the 'periphery' of heritage tourism areas and how they relate to primary tourist areas. The urban cores in many Main Street communities resemble the descriptions of these periphery areas, especially in regard to the retention of authenticity (p. 135) that tends to be denigrated in areas with major tourist attractions. Loulanski (2006) and Mason (2008) expose the sometimes difficult aspects of trying to combine cultural heritage with economic revitalisation that often have contradictory aims; too much emphasis on the use of heritage for economic gain may lead to the unethical fabrication of history (Loulanski 2006, p. 209) – a charge that is sometimes levelled at Main Street programs (for example see Francaviglia 1995, p. 74).

There is an extensive body of literature on rationally based design principles in architectural conservation that supports the AHD and associated conservation ethic that seeks to differentiate new construction from the old in order to avoid creating historical fabrications (for example, Brolin 1980, Beasley 1988, Weeks & Grimmer 1995, Warren *et al.* 1998, Alderson 2006, Ames & Wagner 2009). These works are typically written from the perspective of the architect/designer without any call to empirical evidence to substantiate the stated claims for ‘compatibility’ and ‘sensitivity’ to the historic environment, which has led to charges by critics that such principles have in fact been responsible for spreading ‘bad’ design across the Western world. Léon Krier (1998, p. 81), for instance, attacks the conservation ethic because it ‘advocates the destruction of the organic unity of ancient buildings’ and results in ‘a degradation of the concept of conservation itself’. An entire conference in 2006 revolved around the theme that item nine in the Venice Charter, which directs the architect to differentiate the ‘new’ from the ‘old’ in designing interventions, has engendered bad design and should, therefore, be changed (see Hardy 2008).

Conservation doctrine and the treatment of fabric and place

Treatment precepts in architectural conservation are based in an empiricist-positivist paradigm where phenomena exist only if they can be directly perceived by the senses (Tainter & Lucas 1983). Thus, social, cultural and experiential meanings are not considered because an interpretive paradigm is required to assess and understand these values. In this sense, the traditional practice of architectural conservation shares the same epistemological foundations as the modernist design movement of the early twentieth century – a situation that is perhaps not coincidental given the chronologically parallel rise of both movements. Pendlebury (2009, p. 22) points out that the conservation and modernist movements share the same highly moralistic underpinning based on ‘a stress on authenticity and honesty of expression, and truth to structure and materials’. Ultimately, both movements seek a kind of ‘truth’ embodied in the built environment; for modernism, truth is ‘transposed into being simultaneously an aesthetic quality. Within the term of the construction and appearance of objects, truth mean[s] the avoidance of contrivances which created an illusion or false impression’ (Greenhalgh 1990, p. 9). Perhaps, not surprisingly, this essential definition also holds true for the ethical aims of architectural conservation: the avoidance of ‘illusion’ (Huxtable 1997) and a ‘false sense of history’ (Weeks & Jandl 1996, p. 19).

Thus, architectural conservation doctrine has traditionally dealt with assuring the true authenticity of the past through the ethical principle of making sure all new construction is ‘of its time’ so that the ‘new’ can be clearly differentiated from the ‘old’ to avoid misleading a supposedly naive public. Implicit in all these directives is that the expert/professional is protecting the public from the ills of an untruthful built environment. Critics of this approach, however, point out that contemporary design practice now makes it legitimate to design buildings to ‘deceive’ (Pendlebury 2009, p. 167). Paradoxically, in 2009, the directive to differentiate old from new in historic preservation may actually be engendering design that is not of its time. A summary of the important Western conservation ethic that discusses the ‘honest’ and ‘truthful’ treatment of building fabric is presented in Table 1.

With very few exceptions, such as the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS 1994), heritage conservation doctrines do not address the historic environment in a holistic way by explicating the importance of the person/place interaction. There are

Table 1. Conservation doctrines directing the differentiation of ‘old’ from ‘new’.

Doctrine	Domain	Directive
Venice Charter (ICOMOS 1964)	International	Article 9: ‘The process of restoration ... must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp’. Article 12: ‘Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence’.
Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1999)	Initially Australia, but now adopted internationally	Article 19: ‘Reconstruction is limited to the reproduction of fabric, the form of which is known from physical and/or documentary evidence. It should be identifiable on close inspection as being new work’.
Guiding Principles (SPAB)	UK	‘New work should express modern needs in a modern language. ... [W]ork concealed deliberately or artificially aged, even with the best intentions, is bound to mislead’.
Principles of Repair (English Heritage 1993)	UK	‘Repairs should be made honestly, with no attempt at disguise or artificial ageing’.
Guide to the Principles of the Conservation of Historic Buildings (British Standards Institution 1998)	UK	Section 7.4.4: ‘Additions should neither dominate, mask or challenge the authority of the old nor detract architecturally or visually from it’.
Secretary of the Interior’s Standards (NPS 1995)	US	Item 9: ‘The new work shall be differentiated from the old’.
Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (Parks Canada 2003)	Canada	Item 11: ‘Make the new work physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic place’.

essentially three different, but related concepts of the affective bond and valuation of place: ‘spirit of place’, ‘sense of place’ and ‘place attachment’ in order of their advancement from qualitative to more quantitative meanings. Of the first two, spirit of place – also known as *genius loci* – is the most ancient, with origins in Roman beliefs that different spirit entities inhabited particular places – a concept known more discretely as *panpsychism* (Brook 2000, p. 141). It is the definition that UNESCO chose as one criterion for a World Heritage nomination. In more modern terms, spirit of place takes on a figurative meaning of the feeling that one has for a place, which links the term with sense of place. Sense of place is the affective experience of being in certain environments and as such is highly subjective and therefore can vary greatly between individuals as well as cultures. It can be best described as the experience of the lifeworld that is accessed through the process of a phenomenological reduction – a concept that the humanistic geographers of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) and David Seamon (1979), borrowed in their investigations of place from the

work of earlier phenomenologists, such as Husserl. Lastly, place attachment has more discrete and often quantitative, as opposed to qualitative, meanings. Originally coined by environmental psychologists in the 1970s, place attachment has many dimensions including place dependence (Brown & Perkins 1992), place identity (Proshansky *et al.* 1995) and rootedness (Rowles 1980). Place attachment can be best thought of as defining particular meanings and experiences that occur in the interaction of people with places.

An emphasis on a more holistic conservation of place is related to the conservation of sense of place. Conservation doctrine has not yet addressed the discrete ramifications of how places should be treated in order to conserve sense of place, but the 2008 ICOMOS meeting in Montreal, Québec, attempted to tackle the importance of intangible heritage when planning interventions. The outcome of the meeting, the 'Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place', declared that:

intangible cultural heritage gives a richer and more complete meaning to heritage as a whole and it must be taken into account in all legislation concerning cultural heritage, and in all conservation and restoration projects for monuments, sites, landscapes, routes and collections of objects. (ICOMOS 2008)

Methodology

Anderson provides a representative case for a typical Main Street program and was certified by the state coordinating agency as meeting the standards for the Main Street Approach. Data was derived from confidential interviews of members of Anderson's Main Street program and participant observation of these individuals and of other people present in the downtown from February to April 2007. Demographics for this group were supplied from participant observation data (including my attendance at regular Main Street meetings) and indicate that the members in the Main Street program are predominately white and middle class; approximately half of these individuals are male and the other half are female, with a median age of 40 to 50 years. Approximately half of the volunteers are proprietors of downtown establishments, with the remainder consisting of residents who live in or close to the downtown, or who consider themselves to be stakeholders in the downtown.

Four women and seven men, which roughly matched the demographic characteristics of this group, were interviewed. The interviews averaged from 45 minutes to one hour. Most interviews took place in the informant's business, in a private setting. One interview took place in a downtown coffee shop, two in relatively private outdoor locations and a third in the Main Street program's meeting room. These informants were contacted in three different ways: (1) I asked for participation during regularly scheduled Main Street volunteer meetings; (2) I approached people in public places in downtown Anderson; and (3) I asked informants for recommendations of other people who could be contacted for interviews.

In addition to the interviews and attending Main Street meetings for four months, I conducted approximately 16 hours of outdoor and 120 hours of indoor participant observation for this study. I made these observations at the following locations: (1) near three different street corners in the downtown; (2) in the coffee shop in the Sullivan's Building; (3) in various downtown stores; (4) Main Street meetings; and (5) evening Main Street events. Data consisted of audio recordings and handwritten notes. The audio files were transcribed, arranged into domains based on semantic relationships

(Spradley 1979) and then analysed for patterns and themes that could provide reasons for the revitalisation culture's motivations, norms, values, intentions and symbols of meaning.

The revitalisation culture

Anderson is an old community (from a New World perspective) with roots as a mill town in the nineteenth century. Its inhabitants are especially proud of their early history from the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War and the city's technological prowess of the early twentieth century. The informants' perspectives coupled with participant observations indicate that the downtown proper consists of eight linear blocks along Main Street, an area that contains the community's oldest commercial buildings and serves as a city and regional government centre (Figures 1 and 2). There are several monumental buildings: the eight-story Calhoun Hotel to the north (the tallest building downtown, dating from the early twentieth century), an old courthouse from the late nineteenth century (Figure 3) and a rather large and new courthouse building (Figure 4). The city hall stands out both for its size and its modern design. A great number of buildings are in poor condition (Figure 5).

This study falls within similar studies of work-related cultures where 'the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organisation, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed' define a particular bounded group (Kunda 1992, p. 8). For instance, for Edgar Schein (1985) an organisation's culture is largely defined by a common set of shared beliefs by employees that are reproduced



Figure 1. Downtown Anderson, South Carolina, USA. (All photographs © J.C. Wells).



Figure 2. Downtown Anderson.



Figure 3. The old courthouse.



Figure 4. The new courthouse.

throughout the organisation as a normal course of work. Within particularly strong organisations, Rosabeth Kanter (1983, p. 203) explains that employees have the 'experience of "community" or total commitment for many workers, a dramatic, exciting, and almost communal process brought to the corporation'. Generally speaking, a culture has shared values, learned behaviour that is transmitted to others and a way of defining the internal members ('us') from external individuals ('others') (Williams 1958, Geertz 1973, Bodley 1994). Like many cultures, the revitalisation culture has its own stories and myths and relies on organisation-specific ceremonies and rituals to influence behaviour and communicate shared values (Boje *et al.* 1982, Deal & Kennedy 1982, Tommerup 1988).

The idea of a 'revitalisation culture' came out of my own *emic* experience over five years as a Main Street volunteer and later as a paid Main Street manager. Typically, the basic values of this culture are transmitted directly from the National Trust for Historic Preservation or a state-wide coordinating organisation. These values are (1) historic preservation is a foundational element for revitalisation; (2) the recruitment and training of volunteers in the 'Four-Point Approach' is essential for success; and (3) regular community meetings and celebrations help to reinforce the culture's belief systems and communicate these values to non-believers. A non-believer, therefore, may enter the revitalisation culture after accepting and promulgating its views and demonstrating acceptable behaviours. Beyond this basic description of a revitalisation culture, each community will have subtle variations, as does Anderson, largely influenced by the local material culture of the downtown (for example, historic buildings and places) and political systems. These location-specific characteristics introduce new meanings and behaviour that help to shape a specific revitalisation culture.



Figure 5. General condition of many of the downtown buildings.

The members of the revitalisation culture view themselves as highly motivated and vocal champions of the downtown and have, in a sense, given up their individual property rights in exchange for a common sense of purpose. Members state that they are 'dedicated to promoting, preserving and revitalising the historic downtown'. Downtown Anderson is 'endangered' and the revitalisation culture must 'breathe life into it'. This defence of place is a defining characteristic of community (Bauman

2001, p. 112) and for the revitalisation culture, their role is to defend and protect the downtown from outsiders who wish ill will to this cherished place.

Regular meetings are an essential part of the revitalisation culture and form the primary means under which formal interaction takes place between its members. Typically, there is at least one meeting per month for each committee in addition to board meetings; many of the informants attend more than one of these meetings. Several informants admitted that one of the reasons they like to attend these meetings is for the social interaction and to feel like they are part of a larger movement to help the downtown. An important function of these meetings was to help define solidarity between members as the boundary between those who wanted to save the downtown – the people of the revitalisation culture – and those who did not – the outsiders – was clearly defined by descriptions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Regular Main Street events, such as an antique car show, musical performances, or Christmas activities, are held in the middle of the downtown and draw a large number of people. Typically, this involves street closures that anger a number of local merchants who are perceived as ‘naysaying’ outsiders. During these events, the members of the revitalisation culture seek each other out and group together, often discussing issues that are important to them in relation to their revitalisation program. When encountering new people for the first time, the discussion invariably starts with why the downtown is important and then turns into a recruitment effort to solicit interest in becoming involved in the Main Street program. These events are the way in which the revitalisation culture can show a collective face to outsiders in order to justify their activities and to proactively express what is meaningful and thus brand their culture with a unique identity.

The treatment of built heritage to conserve spontaneous fantasy

The revitalisation culture conspicuously breaks with the conservation ethic, discussed above, and which is an integral part of the AHD. This ethic directs such changes to be ‘truthful’ in the manner in which the new should be differentiated from the old. Historicised design, or new design that attempts to copy in detail past construction and design details, is therefore considered to be unethical. For the revitalisation culture, however, the desire is for the new to blend as inconspicuously as possible with the old; contemporary design is not welcome. According to the informants, the most appropriate treatment for an old building is to reify its ‘oldness’ and ‘be aesthetically correct’ in order to avoid a ‘dichotomy ... that doesn’t feel right’; in other words, to make the building appear as it did the first day it was built through extensive restoration, even if such restoration is hypothetical. By far, the best way to avoid contemporary design issues is to not demolish old buildings in the first place. Certainly this latter value fits quite well with the ethical prerogative to save the irreplaceable, but whilst for the conservation ethic the mantra is driven by the preservation of objective informational values, for the informants this value is driven by an effort to preserve the ‘sense of place’ and artificial memories created by old buildings.

Indeed, the informants’ shared valuation of historicised design is consistently maligned by conservation and design professionals as a nostalgic, ‘romantic vision’ of the past (Cliver 1992, p. 177) that leads to ‘unreal’ or ‘fake’ architecture (Huxtable 1997) and as such, is ethically flawed. These words conjure pejorative images of the

'Disneyfication' of landscape and the ills of nostalgia that designers should avoid at all costs. Certainly historicised design strikes at the heart of the conservation ethic's insistence on 'being truthful' by differentiating the 'old' from the 'new' and is an affront to modernist sensibilities that view the past as 'gangrenous' and 'poisonous' to contemporary design (Marinetti 1998, p. 252). This hegemonic discourse that emphasises avoiding a 'false sense of history' does not, however, negate that historicised design is an important value of the revitalisation culture. Counter to the assertions of heritage professionals, there is a growing body of empirical evidence that many people really do prefer historicised design to contemporary design. Daniel Levi's (2005) work, for instance, indicates that people not only enjoy 'fake' architecture, but also view it as a positive complement of historic architecture rather than as a alien object in a false state of existence – contrary to the AHD. Additional research by Herzog and Shier (2000), Freewald (1989) and Galindo and Hidalgo (2005) substantiates these claims.

It would be fallacious to conclude that the informants believe that they are committing unethical acts akin to making the built environment of their downtown 'lie' to its users. On the contrary, they are particularly proud of their value system that emphasises the importance of historicised design in retaining their downtown's sense of place. Historicised design, therefore, provides a specific function for the revitalisation culture: it helps catalyse a creative act of the imagination that I will refer to as 'spontaneous fantasy'. This phenomenon, which is quite pleasurable for the informants, is closely related to what Robert Riley (1997, p. 207) refers to as the 'vicarious experience ... in which the real, observed landscape leads to an internally experienced landscape that is far richer and more personal than the "real" landscape'. Lukacs (1994, p. 238) reminds us that 'the most perfectly preserved building or document becomes evocative, indeed, "historical", only through our *imagination*' (this author's emphasis). According to Rodney Harrison (2004, p. 204), places imbued with the physical patina and decay of the past foster a 'creative space within which new memories can be evoked and created'.

The process through which spontaneous fantasy occurs is 'involuntary' and 'haunts' our 'foreground experiences of memory', as Edensor (2005, p. 18) elucidates. It is not pre-meditated, nor is it necessarily logical. Any attempt to rationally analyse the meanings of these spontaneous fantasies is typically met with failure because they are often not real, truthful or accurate (Ibid, p. 18). They are, by definition, artificial memories that may be entirely divorced from factual historical events. So why do the informants persist in cherishing these artificial memories, even if experts attempt to will them from existence through exercising the AHD? Edensor explains that we value spontaneous fantasy because it offers the transcendent experience of discovery, magic, novelty and mystery catalysed by 'ruined space':

[T]he promise of extraordinary sights and mysterious experiences is built into the popular culture of children with its myriad tales of adventures in secret gardens, magical labyrinths and dense, enchanted forests. ... Since the original uses of ruined buildings have passed, there are limitless possibilities for encounters with the weird, with inscrutable legends inscribed on notice boards and signs, and with peculiar things and curious spaces which allow wide scope for imaginative interpretation, unencumbered by the assumptions which weigh heavily on highly encoded, regulated space. Bereft of these codings of the normative – the arrangement of things in place, the performance of regulated actions, the display of good lines up as commodities or for show – ruined space is ripe with transgressive and transcendent possibilities. (Ednesor 2005, pp. 3, 4)

Curiously, knowing the objective, 'real' history of a place and whether the buildings contain the genuine fabric of the past can destroy the sense of discovering historic places for the first time and in the process prevent feelings of magic and mystery from developing (Bell 1999, p. 93). In a similar sense, David Lowenthal (1985) points out that 'the past is a foreign country' with its attendant exotic experiences, and it is these experiences that people desire. After all, why would all of the informants constantly use the word 'charming', with its magical etymology, to describe their downtown?

Spontaneous fantasy is especially prevalent for relatively recent arrivals to downtown that have no personal, affective history with which to build a bond between the past and present. To satisfy this need for rootedness and attachment to the history of Anderson, their experience is filled with imaginary scenes from the past, sometimes partly based on what they have read and have been told or simply created from random meanings over which they appear to have little control. An informant presents a good example of this 'magical' phenomenon when he describes how the history of Anderson has affected him:

Downtown has a tradition, it's got sort of an Old World charm that says, hey a hundred years ago this was the epicentre of business in this part of the state. ... And there is some little magical thing that goes on in my mind that as I see these old pictures of what Anderson was with all the buggies and carriages and the boom and the buzz and then they brought in the electricity, and it was just ... everything of this part of the state. ... And so here I sit in the same place, in this building that has been here since 1870, and it allows me to kind of somehow feel in touch with the historical significance. ... It's more emotional than anything else.

This account is not entirely based in historical fact, but rather relies on the creation of a past that feels good to the informant and catalyses an emotional bond with place. It is through this process that the informants come to value and be attached to the place known as downtown Anderson.

'Ghosts' are a particularly poignant reminder of the subjective experience of downtown Anderson and, to outside observers, a rather controversial manifestation of spontaneous fantasy. Whilst there is little, if any, empirical evidence to substantiate the supposed presence of phantoms, many of the informants are convinced that such apparitions haunt the downtown. These ghosts – which are always associated with particular downtown buildings – foster a lively and dynamic heritage (Howard 2003, p. 153), and are part of the cultural process of bonding to the downtown through the creation of group memory. Long-term residents of Anderson often share ghost stories with newcomers as a sort of initiation ceremony; to partake in this sharing is part of the process of being accepted into the revitalisation culture, regardless of whether or not one accepts such apparitions exist. For example, a long-time resident of downtown Anderson affectionately talks about the cigar-smoking ghost that lives in her building: 'There's times that you come in here, you'll be walking around and all the sudden you get this really strong smell of a cigar and there's no one around. There's no one on the street smoking a cigar. And it's happened probably a dozen times in the past five or six years'. Another ghost is known to have taken up residence in the Calhoun Hotel. The story is that a nun lived in the hotel whilst she made plans to start a convent. She died in the hotel before her plans came to fruition. Her ghost now wanders the halls and rooms of the building, occasionally making her presence known to hapless visitors. Whilst these experiences may seem frivolous to an outside observer, they are part of a cultural process that dynamically sustains the revitalisation culture's heritage and serves as a common platform to share meanings.

There is, therefore, a connection between the preferred treatment of the downtown buildings and spontaneous fantasy. Only when the environment has enough 'historical' cues can it catalyse this effect. For the informants, contemporary design interrupts this process and destroys the illusion of the past. Tourists also key into this phenomenon, which is capitalised upon by many Main Street communities in the use of their built heritage to create what Frenkel and Walton (2000, p 576) call a 'fantasy shopping landscape'. Tourists wish to create their own fantasy, however, and not have it delivered to them in a pre-packaged format, *à la* Disneyland (Judd & Fainstein 1999, p. 299). Downtown Anderson presents a more creative venue in which to engage in spontaneous fantasy because its perceived authenticity is greater due to the large number of genuinely old buildings with their patina of age that is altogether absent in the plastic quality of contemporary reproductions. It is worth nothing that the informants commented on the value of pleasing decay in the materials of buildings and the essential quality it lends to the experience of downtown Anderson. In this sense, the downtown presents the opportunity for a visitor to create his or her own, unique vicarious trip to the past, much in the same way native Andersonians experience.

Defining Anderson's sense of place

At the ICOMOS meeting in Quebec, Canada on 4 October 2008, the participants declared the importance of safeguarding the 'spirit of place' in order to understand and conserve the 'living character' of monuments, sites and cultural landscapes. Whilst still focused on material heritage, this declaration marked a fairly new emphasis in the AHD to begin to view heritage as a process focused on people's subjective perception and experience of their environment (ICOMOS 2008). Proponents of the historic preservation/heritage conservation movement have long used 'sense of place' in an uncritical way to justify their activities whilst ignoring the larger question of exactly which cultural, social and physical elements of an environment comprise sense of place and how this discrete information should affect management plans (for example see Watson 1982, p. 173, Fairclough 1999, p. 34, Tyler 2000, p. 68, Pond & Pomeroy 2007, p. 43). Conserving environments based on their sense of place is problematic in that there are no standard assessment tools – qualitative or quantitative – with which to assess the sense of place in the historic environment. There are, however, some efforts being made in this direction, especially in regard to assessing the 'spirit of place' as defined in World Heritage nominations (UNESCO 2008). The integrated urban conservation movement in Europe and Brazil may also provide a useful template on which to build these ideas (Zancheti *et al.* 2004). Ethnographies, such as the example presented here, offer one way of better defining what sense of place means to people that experience and use the historic environment.

A sense of place has a number of levels from the cursory experience of the tourist to the 'cultural level, in which people experience the place as an integral part of their entire society' (Hay 1998, p. 76). The process of understanding and knowing a place is not passive but requires active participation 'through witness, through appreciation, in the ongoing creation of that place, of its different interpretations and articulations' (Powell 2007, p. 35). Such is the process the informants have undergone in describing how their downtown has a unique sense of place defined by its historic qualities in opposition to its suburban surroundings. The downtown is important to the informants because it has 'heart, soul and meaning' as opposed to a placeless suburban development filled with inauthentic 'standardised landscapes'.

Sense of place is predicated on the presence of pre-World War II elements of buildings, such as design and pedestrian-oriented qualities, and is linked with a desire to conserve the ability of this environment to produce spontaneous fantasy (spontaneous fantasy is therefore part of the experience of sense of place). This emphasis on conserving the 'historical' qualities of the buildings helps to prevent the downtown from becoming a generic place that the informants describe as 'too modern, too homogenised, or too much like a shopping mall'. Downtown's sense of place also helps to provide an identity and roots for modern Americans that are now largely defined by their transient nature and lack of rootedness. 'We need places for people to experience a sense of place when they become transplanted', says an older man with deep ties to the community: 'People can't flourish without some roots'. One informant who grew up in Wisconsin and only much later moved to downtown Anderson is an example of this phenomenon. He now considers the downtown to be his real home to such a degree that he wishes to be buried in the cemetery that is closest to the downtown, near the south end of Main Street.

For the revitalisation culture, a building's socially constructed meaning is part of the sense of place. This phenomenon has been addressed by a number of researchers including Lefebvre (1991) and Setha Low (1996, p. 862) who indicate that 'the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space-through people's social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting-into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning'. Buildings that cannot be used by the revitalisation culture, therefore, have little direct meaning. A couple of relevant examples are the old Calhoun Hotel and the Chiquola Building (Figure 6) that were



Figure 6. Chiquola Building.

being rehabilitated for condominiums as this study was conducted. Whilst these high-style buildings are certainly visually pleasing, they are primarily valued for what they promise: bringing new residents to the area, which will improve the evening and weekend social atmosphere of downtown. Another example is the Sullivan's Building that serves as a popular meeting place because of its function as a restaurant and coffee shop.

One building without a social function that the informants never mentioned is the old courthouse. Most new visitors to the downtown, myself included, cannot help but notice the ornate, late nineteenth century edifice with its huge tower. For all intents and purposes, however, this building does not exist for the revitalisation culture. An informant opined that the old courthouse doesn't offer any 'fond memories' or 'sentiment' and therefore has no value. Whilst this building is iconic, people no longer use it and thus the old courthouse has no purpose, becoming a backdrop in the minds of the informants.

Discussion

The results presented here indicate that in regard to how the historic environment should be treated, the informants' values differ dramatically from accepted conservation doctrine. From the perspective of the values embedded in the conservation ethic and the AHD, the revitalisation culture is engaging in unethical and inappropriate behaviour, akin to 'lying' and creating an 'untruthful' environment. From a broader perspective, however, these cultural values have a purpose in conserving the ability of the historic environment to engender spontaneous fantasy. These values are quite different from the objective values of conservation doctrine; ultimately, for the revitalisation culture, authenticity is not centred so much on the material fabric of place as it is on the socially and culturally constructed meanings that come from the experience of being in the historic downtown. Fabric, therefore, is not nearly as important to the revitalisation culture as it is to conservation professionals, where the material presence of the past reigns supreme over all other meanings (Smith 2006, p. 54).

Is the way the revitalisation culture treats its own heritage unhealthy for itself and stifling the growth and evolution of cultural meanings and values as some, such as Hewison (1987), have argued? Or, is it equally possible that the revitalisation culture's treatment of heritage contributes to a dynamic, inventive culture replete with meanings and attachments centred in spontaneous fantasy? The latter stance is supported by a number of authors who discuss the importance of engagement in heritage through 'performance' or being an active player in experiencing its meanings. Gaynor Bagnall (2003, p. 96), for instance, describes how visitors to museums used their own memories – factual or not – to construct their own reality in which the emotional element was central to their experience. In a similar sense, Laurajane Smith (2006, p. 71) discusses the importance of 'emotional authenticity' based on 'emotional experiences of "being"' that have roots in the experience of the lifeworld, and which can be revealed through a phenomenological reduction. Edward Casey (1987, p. 54) describes how memory, even when based on actual events, is often recalled by placing facts into hypothetical situations that never actually occurred; it is as if the valid elements of life are sprinkled into a creative milieu so that cold objectivity can be replaced with emotion to heighten the tangibility of the memory. After all, it is through emotion that memory is perfected (Jensen 1998, p. 79).

As Low and Altman (1992) indicate, 'affect, emotion and feeling' are essential to the development of attachment to place. It is the '*act* of being at a heritage place and experiencing that place [that] is fundamentally significant' in creating a sense of place (Smith 2006, p. 77, original emphasis). Attachment to place, therefore, is not a literal attachment to the physical environment, but rather a dynamic relationship between the memories and emotions catalysed by place; the 'bond' is to these generated memories and can occur independently of the actual existence of a bona fide locale. Thus, there is a relationship between spontaneous fantasy and sense of place. Spontaneous fantasy describes the emotional experience catalysed by a real or imaginary historic environment and through this phenomenon, attachment to place is facilitated. Knowing or revealing an objective or 'true' history of a place does not necessarily correspond to an increase in the overall affective experience, nor does it necessarily relate to how important the place is to an individual or groups of people. This subjective perception and valuation of the historic built environment is fundamentally at odds with the AHD and the conservation ethic's directive to avoid creating a 'false' sense of history and keep the experience ethically pure and therefore objective (Weeks & Jandl 1996, p. 19). Moreover, the ethic's insistence on 'truth' is logically flawed. For instance, Salvador Muñoz Viñas (2005, p. 93) explains that for an object to have a 'false' history, its existence must also therefore be false, but this cannot be as 'objects cannot exist in a state of falsehood, nor can they have a false nature. If they really exist, they are inherently real'.

The revitalisation culture does not separate the historic environment into dichotomous boxes of 'real' and 'fake' history in an effort to preserve the fabric-based authenticity of the downtown. Rather, it seeks to conserve a kind of authenticity constructed from social and cultural meanings. The revitalisation culture, therefore, seeks to conserve the authenticity of the ideas and meanings associated with its historic environment, a concept explored by Jamal and Hill (2002) and related to Chung's (2005) explication of how non-Western cultures value heritage. Authenticity is not a universal concept, as is recognised in the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS 1994), and therefore has different meanings based on cultural, social and professional standing. The ethical, tautological arguments upon which fabric-based authenticity depends do not necessarily trump other ways in which authenticity can be defined and valued, as has been revealed in this study.

Conclusion

Main Street programs present an interesting and largely unexplored opportunity to understand the kinds of cultures that conspicuously employ heritage conservation as a tool to reverse urban decline and blight. Most of the time heritage professionals enact or advise for change in the historic built environment as proxies for the local population. What is unique about Main Street programs, however, is that novice volunteers, not necessarily versed in the AHD, are instead empowered to directly effect change in their downtowns. Thus, there is a rare opportunity to understand how the everyday people who use the historic environment go about enacting change to that environment based on their values rather than the values of the AHD.

Clearly, this study revealed a disconnect between what the revitalisation culture views as acceptable treatments for their historic environment and the types of treatments proscribed by traditional conservation's ethical concepts of 'truth' and 'honesty'. Whilst there has been rising call for greater inclusion of social and cultural

values in conservation practice, Pendlebury (2009, p. 13) laments that its implementation has 'been patchy across different academic heritage-related sub-disciplines and, thus far, has had limited impact on practice'. The AHD is a difficult barrier to dissolve for a number of reasons including the way in which conservation doctrine is intended to codify, fixate and prevent the evolution of alternate meanings (Wells 2007), and the failure of higher education programs that train conservation professionals to challenge the status quo. Frits Pannekoek (1998) characterises heritage conservation professionals as part of a 'heritage priesthood' that in demanding fealty to the traditional conservation ethic are engaging in the 'misguided' psychological manipulation of people's value systems. We need to ask: do heritage professionals working with the frameworks supplied by the conservation ethic and the AHD more generally have the moral right to impose their values associated with heritage? Surely, we can move beyond this epistemologically archaic and challenged paradigm to consider pluralistic ways of valuing the historic environment and use this information to challenge existing conservation ethics and the AHD of which they are part.

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Notes on contributor

Jeremy C. Wells has a PhD in Environmental Design and Planning from Clemson University, an MS in Historic Preservation and an Advanced Certificate in Architectural Conservation from the University of Pennsylvania and a BS in Historic Preservation from Southeast Missouri State University. His research focuses on the use of social science methodologies to improve the understanding of how people value the older built environment with an emphasis on the intersection of place attachment and the physical age of place. Wells' background includes work in the National Trust's Main Street program, architectural materials conservation and preservation planning. His research has been published in the *APT Bulletin*, the *Journal of Construction History* and *City and Time*.

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