

# The Future of the Past

Neil May

## Foreword

This essay has been written for the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (STBA) and paid for by Historic Environment Scotland, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the National Trust and The Church of England. It arose out of a desire among STBA member organisations, and particularly those of the Heritage sector, to be part of the sustainability discourse in a positive way, rather than being seen as part of the problem. It was felt that old buildings have a lot to offer to the sustainability of our country and planet both practically and culturally: practically, in terms of how buildings made of low energy and local materials can be built or maintained and kept efficient by traditional passive technologies and appropriate life styles - and in this way can contribute to mainstream sustainability targets in energy and carbon, as well as regards economic value and occupant health; and culturally in terms of how heritage thinking and practice, as well as the presence of old buildings, can (re-)connect people with nature, beauty and both the past and the future in a way which is essential for the long term survival and flourishing of humankind.

In the process of undertaking this work, two things became obvious to me, which have to a large extent made the work more complex than envisaged and possibly more confrontational. The first is that mainstream sustainability, as found in international and national charters and policies, is largely the same as mainstream politics and economics, and as such is dominated by what I describe as a positivist (materialist), neo-liberal and individual rights agenda underpinned by an almost utopian belief in technological progress and the power of the market. As such, heritage thinking, practice and what is left of the past in our old buildings is not only regarded as irrelevant but regressive, and cannot be part of the sustainability discourse as currently constituted. The challenge was therefore not how to become part of the sustainability discourse, but how to confront and challenge it so that it was possible for non-mainstream ideas and beliefs to be heard and valued.

The second issue which complicated my task was the lack of self-awareness and philosophical engagement in heritage thinking. I have been hoping to be corrected on this point, but it seems to me from my reading that there is a real need for a re-thinking of heritage and conservation philosophy in the light of new thinking elsewhere (particularly in philosophy and anthropology) and in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century politics. I have therefore had to consider how what I consider core heritage values and practice might be encompassed in a wider philosophical and practical framework which addresses these omissions.

Consequently this essay does not focus much on the way that Heritage and Building Conservation can practically help the current sustainability agenda to achieve its aims. I am not saying that these aims (such as reducing carbon emissions) are not good, but only that they are incomplete and that sadly they are now part of a wider technocratic and political agenda (of economic growth, loss of local cultural difference, and aggression towards nature) which is part of the problem not the solution to planetary and human issues. Instead I have focused on the cultural and philosophical contribution which heritage (as part of the wider field of cultural diversity) can and should make in the debate about the future. This contribution is not only something that will enable the Heritage sector to defend and promote its values and practices more robustly, but is something that will open heritage to many other ways of thinking, acting and collaborating. More importantly, it can be part of a wider change in the public discourse of sustainability, a change away from the dominant political and economic paradigm to one which is more open, fuller, more human and more natural, where our plans for the future are developed through a meaningful engagement with the past.

## Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	4
2. Defining Sustainability	7
3. Defining Heritage	11
4. Integrating heritage and sustainability	15
5. Why is heritage excluded from sustainability?	18
6. Paradigms	26
7. The end of the current paradigm	33
8. Heritage and modernity	43
9. Towards a new approach to old buildings	47
10. The importance of old buildings to sustainability and the future	54
11. Challenges for heritage, tradition and old buildings	60
12. A way forward	63
Appendix 1: Some suggestions	67
Appendix 2: Afterword	68

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to all members of the STBA steering group, and particularly to Nigel Griffiths and Jon Bootland for ideas, support and permission to undertake this work. I would also like to thank Ian Brocklebank for his helpful comments, even though he may not want to be associated with this paper. Also thanks especially to Richard Oxley, Bill Bordass and Adrian Leaman for their comments and support during different stages of the paper. I am also extremely grateful to Miriam Morris who partly wrote part of section 6 (on Paradigms) and has been for many years a collaborator and inspiration in my thinking.

Any errors, factual, intellectual or moral, are entirely my responsibility.

This paper was finally completed on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017

# 1. Introduction

In an age of progress, what value has the past?

In modernity, what relevance has tradition?

In an era of technological advancement, human rights and economic growth, how can past societies, practices and artefacts, based as they are upon superseded technologies, incomplete scientific understanding, hierarchical social structures and inefficient economies, contribute and be relevant?

In this time of perceived environmental, economic and social fragility, what use is the past and why should we make efforts to preserve our links to it?

This paper is an attempt to answer these questions in relation to old buildings.

The basic argument of this paper is that the way we think about and plan for the future in mainstream political culture is no longer adequate or desirable. In this context, we consider that the past has a lot to offer and that heritage philosophy, traditional practices and the physical presence of old buildings could have an important role to play in providing perspective, inspiration and examples of different ways of living, all of which can help to develop a sustainable culture which addresses our real needs and aspirations for the future.

One way in which we can more clearly understand the ideas and the assumptions behind political culture (what may be called the paradigm) is through the concept of Sustainability, which is perhaps the primary way in which the future is discussed in public discourse. Indeed the Rio+20 Outcome Document in 2012 was entitled The Future We Want and was signed by representatives of 189 countries.

However, there is little space currently within this paradigm for the past to be heard. This is because, within this modern way of thinking, the past and its manifestation as heritage (as a value system), tradition (as continuity of practice) and remnants (as what remains materially), is not only of no relevance, but is regressive and, in many ways, opposed to the present.

To establish why heritage has been absent from the debate This paper first examines the core assumptions and values in sustainability, by considering the development of sustainability concepts, charters and programmes (section 2). It then examines the core assumptions and values in heritage philosophy and practice (section 3), considers the integration of sustainability and heritage, and asks why in the end, heritage values are not accepted within political culture as exemplified by the sustainability agenda (section 5).

In simple terms we find that this is because the ideas about progress in main stream discourse (as exemplified in sustainability agendas and charters) are based upon a particular notion of valid knowledge (based upon 18th Century Enlightenment ideas about rationality and measurement), a particular concept of what a person is (ie rational individuals with rights), a particular notion of the world (as atomised material in which the “laws” of nature operate, and where society is just the sum of individuals), and a particular notion of causality or change (atomistic interactions in physics, evolution through the survival of the fittest in biology, and through competition within markets in economics). This is what we identify as the mainstream “Sustainability” Paradigm. The purpose of people and politics in such a paradigm seems to be reducible to economic growth, material

prosperity, technological advancement, human rights, the elimination of disease and longevity of life. These are the echoed for all the Millennium Goals (2000) and Sustainable Development Goals (2016).

In examining heritage philosophy we find in contrast that notions of knowledge, person, world, causality and purpose are all quite different. Heritage philosophy has much in common with the philosophy of cultural diversity and uses the same expressions in many cases to justify the significance of cultural and historical difference and preservation. For example knowledge within such philosophy is not just about what is measurable, but also about what is felt and done. It requires an epistemology which includes the value of beauty, sense of place, connection, spirit. Such an epistemology implies a different kind of person, a different world, and different purposes. It also implies, but is often not articulated, that there are different causalities operating in the world, an idea which is extremely challenging to policy makers and western rationalism and science.

The main reason why heritage values (and those of cultural diversity) do not and cannot appear in sustainability charters and policies therefore is because of what might be called paradigm incompatibility. However this incompatibility is not just a logical one, but is also based upon deeper fears and anxieties, such as fear of the irrational (particularly in regard to communal expressions of culture and the prejudices these often encompass), and dislike of traditional hierarchical social structures (particularly in regard to the position of women). The past is perceived not just as irrelevant but also as dangerous. Indeed mocking it is a way of reinforcing the modernity of the commentator.

As a result of this, the issue of the sustainability of old buildings in most policies and programmes ignores cultural values and the meaning of the past, and focuses almost entirely on the measurable physical factors of energy and carbon. The STBA have been successful in introducing both health and some aspects of heritage value into the discussion in the UK, but until the STBA started its work such factors were almost entirely excluded from policy discourse. However the deeper and more profound values found in heritage thinking and practice, such as the importance of craft, beauty, spirit of place, memory, connection to nature, and the relation of the part (such as building, person, community, activity or feeling) to the whole (in many forms, but including the whole of creation and that beyond), which relationship is radically different in traditional society compared with modernity, are still largely missing and unexamined within sustainability discourse, because of the reasons given earlier (ie paradigm incompatibility and fear).

Furthermore the use of the past as a way of gaining perspective on the present in a truthful, rather than in a caricatured way, as well as the examples from the past of how different societies operated under different constraints - constraints which we will almost certainly face in the future (ie the necessity of bio-regional societies and societies based upon steady state rather than growth economies because of energy scarcity and loss of basic resources) - are important gifts to the present and the future. However these are also missing from our current sustainability discourse.

However rather than primarily trying to prove the truth or usefulness of such ideas which may in some arenas be difficult or contentious, this paper argues rather that the current dominant paradigm, which is embedded in much of the current sustainability agenda, is itself indefensible (section 7). It is not only inadequate but is to some extent the cause of our un-sustainability and the many different crises we now face as a world. It fails practically, philosophically and ethically. This is not to say that materialist science doesn't work, or that economic liberalism or human rights are wrong. But they are incomplete and illogical in their claims for completeness and priority over other some ways of knowing, living and being, some of which are thousands of years old. Their incompleteness and intolerance are now serious impediments and stumbling blocks to a sustainable

future. The failure of many policies in sustainability and particularly in regard to the built environment, even on their own terms, is a clear indication that we need to find new ways of thinking and acting.

However before being able to assert the importance of heritage, we first have to be aware of our own shortcomings. This is particularly important in the context of the challenge of modernity itself, which is based primarily on the idea that tradition cannot be continued because of the primacy of “reflexivity” and reason (section 8). Heritage has to grapple more actively with modernity.

There are many challenges in this endeavour, not least our own understanding of heritage and old buildings, which is largely inadequate for the task. This paper argues that a new approach is necessary, based on both anthropological and modernist understandings of buildings, an approach which is neither reductionist nor idealist, but which incorporates both in a pluralist and cohesive framework (section 9). Heritage has largely become an isolated and even reductionist activity, treating buildings as though they are objects made up of parts or even activities, rather than as also a set of relationships and meanings which reflect and open up their context. A pluralist framework which has both carbon and context, both dates and relationships, both history and relevance to the present, is proposed.

In this context of the failure of current sustainability thinking and of a relevant and engaged heritage agenda, it is argued that the values, assumptions and the physical reality of heritage, built tradition and old buildings has a significant role to play (section 10). The ideas and inspiration of the past as well as the perspective and contrast with the present and the examples of different ways of living and being which can be found in our heritage could be important to the way in which we consider visions and policies of the future and in turn, to the way we act corporately as well as in our own lives.

We then identify some of the other challenges to heritage when confronted with the sustainability paradigm, which include resisting the temptation to hide away from the debate altogether, giving in to the sustainability agenda or becoming angry and confrontational and therefore isolating heritage by appearing as the binary opposite to sustainability (section 11).

However the biggest challenge to the heritage sector really is in terms of its own convictions and beliefs. One might say that there is a challenge to the soul of the sector. How far do those of us who profess the importance of heritage values, really believe in them? What are the consequences of such belief for our work and for selves? What are we going to do about it? When? And how?

The last section of this paper suggests a way forward for the debate about the future where heritage values, tradition and old buildings can play the role which they should (section 12). These suggestions are not particularly aimed at those working in the heritage sector, because they affect the whole of our society, and require leadership and participation by all concerned with the future. They are suggestions about how we clear a space for a debate which includes ideas which currently cannot enter the debate. This space has to be intellectually pluralist and holistic.

What is required above all is paradigm change. We cannot conclude otherwise. How we move towards this change is the primary responsibility and task of heritage for the future.

## 2. Defining Sustainability

One of the first uses of the word “sustainable” in public discourse came in the Limits to Growth report of the Club of Rome, authored by systems analysts Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William W. Behrens III of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1972. This considered the issues of rising population, economic growth, food, resource use and pollution through various scenarios and under two of these (including business as usual) predicted global environmental and social collapse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concern about environmental collapse followed work by people like Rachel Carson in her book *Silent Spring* (1962) and Paul R. Ehrlich in *The Population Bomb* (1968), and was linked to a Malthusian concern about population and resources, but also economic growth. There was a strong input from ecologists and nature conservationists in these early debates, who largely took the view that economic development was undesirable, and a sustainable world meant one which to some extents rejected industrialisation.

Sustainability has to a large degree now been overtaken in public discourse by the concept of sustainable development. The term was first used in 1980 in the World Conservation Strategy, produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, with the support of the United Nations Environmental Programme, WWF and FAO. Reports about the development of this document show how the proponents of nature conservation and human development had to be brought together and overcome opposition to each other.

The World Conservation Strategy is subtitled *Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*. The first paragraph of the foreword states:

“Human beings, in their quest for economic development and enjoyment of the riches of nature, must come to terms with the reality of resource limitation and the carrying capacities of ecosystems, and must take account of the needs of future generations. This is the message of conservation. For if the object of development is to provide for social and economic welfare, the object of conservation is to ensure Earth's capacity to sustain development and to support all life.”<sup>1</sup>

In the resolution of the conflict between nature conservation and socio-economic development (at a political level, though not necessarily at an ideological or practical level) we can identify the roots of the modern sustainability paradigm. We see in this period and since then, what Prof James Steele calls “the subtle but significant shift that has taken place since 1970” to “an emphasis on sustainability rather than ecology”.<sup>2</sup> The Brundtland definition of 1987, which built on the World Conservation strategy, defined sustainable development as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition reveals a more human-centred perspective than that of the World Conservation Strategy, which was much more concerned with wild life survival and biological diversity.

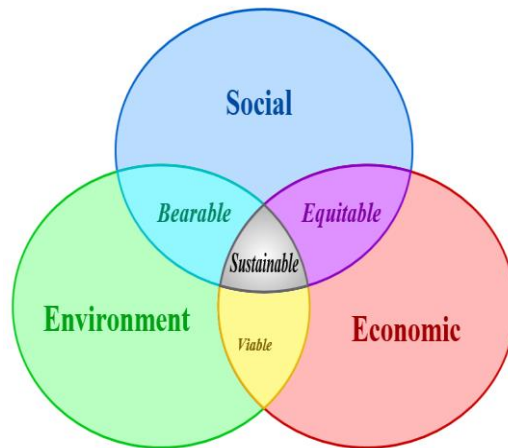
At the same time the idea of the 3 pillars of sustainability were introduced in what is called “the triple bottom line” of Economic, Social and Environmental development. This is often represented as a diagram and these three terms re-occur at the start of nearly every sustainability document produced in the last 20 years.

An example of a diagrammatic representation of the three pillars of sustainable development is as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup>World Conservation Strategy; IUCN-UNEP-WWF 1980

<sup>2</sup> See the essay *Tradition and Innovation in Green Architecture and Urbanism* by Prof James Steele pp58-73 in *Tradition and Sustainability 2010 Compendium Publishing Ltd*



From this point on, sustainable development and the many international charters and programmes has been fundamentally about human development. The natural environment must be preserved for human purposes, not because of its inherent value. As shown in the diagram above, the pillar of the environment must be maintained as viable and bearable for economic and social progress, not as flourishing for its own sake. Furthermore the human development agenda has become increasingly utopian and prescriptive over time. At Rio in 1992 the 6 key subject areas of Agenda 21 were

1. Quality of life on earth
2. Efficient use of the earth's resources
3. Protection of the global commons
4. Management of human settlements
5. Management of chemicals and waste
6. Sustainable economic growth<sup>3</sup>

However as we move to the Millenium Goals, and then Rio +20 (in 2012) and more recently the UN meeting in 2015 which proposed the new Sustainable Development Goals, the aims become more and more human centred, more ambitious and more prescriptive. There are now 17 goals including

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy life and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

There are 3 goals (goals 13, 14 and 15) about the environment, one to "combat climate change" (as though it were an alien invasion, rather than a result of our activities), one to preserve the oceans and rivers and one for terrestrial ecosystems. However it is the human dimension that entirely

---

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly at this summit both traditional farming and traditional building were considered important resources. The international policy document "recommends the use of local materials and indigenous building sources" and promotes the use of labour rather than energy intensive technologies. This approach has now been largely abandoned in sustainability charters and policies.



dominates the document. The language of the whole document is evangelical and almost desperate. In paragraph 2 it is declared that

“On behalf of the peoples we serve, we have adopted a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets.”

But how is this to be achieved? This becomes clear when one examines the means identified in the sustainability charters. It is evident that this agenda is dominated by very modern notions of economic development and human rights. In the Rio +20 document, telling titled “The Future We Want” and signed by representatives of 187 countries, the last section of the outcome document is entitled Means of Implementation. There are five sections being

- Finance
- Technology
- Capacity Building
- Trade
- Registry of Commitments

These means promote financial liberalisation and free trade, technology transfer and innovation as the main means of implementation. In addition, everything should be measured. Elsewhere in the document, human rights and democratic institutions are proposed as the essential governance and legal framework for sustainable development, being both a means as well as an aim.

### The sustainability paradigm

There are some repeating underlying themes which occur in sustainability charters and policies (in both aims and means) particularly at global level but also in the sustainability policies of western governments. In order to reveal the underlying assumptions behind these themes it is helpful to ask some basic questions of the sustainability policies and their means of implementation. These are

- What is the concept of a person in these charters and policies?
- What is the world (particularly nature)?
- What is the relationship of people to each other and to the world?
- How do we know?
- What causes change?
- What is the purpose of human beings/ the world?

The sustainability charters and policies give the following answers to these questions:

Question	Answer
What is a person?	An individual with rights
What is the world, nature?	Non-human nature and inert matter. Resources.
What is the relationship of people and world?	Individuals interact with other individuals on what should be an equitable basis. People use nature and the world as a resource for their benefit
How do we know?	Measurement. By reducing things to their basic units and adding them together.
What causes change?	In nature: physical causality and evolution. In society: the actions of individuals in politics and economics. In economics: primarily self-interest, competition which works best in a free market, and technological innovation.

What is the purpose of people/ the world?	Survival. Values such as equality and personal freedom. Progress
---	--

These are the main answers one gets from examining sustainability charters and policies. These in turn could be seen to relate to ideologies which dominate public thinking and also relate to the triple bottom line:

- Society: Human Rights (based on individual rights)
- Economy: Utilitarianism and neo-liberalism (based on the utility-maximising self-interested individual within a competitive global economy, where the good emerges through the “invisible hand” of the market, and barriers to trade are therefore bad)
- Environment: Positivism (only what is material and measurable exists – qualitative values do not exist in reality) and evolution (all nature is in competition for survival)

What unites all of these and all the elements in the paradigm analysis is reductionism (reducing humans and nature to basic units/ elements) and an almost millennial belief in material progress towards an earthly utopia.

This is what has been described by many commentators and critics, including most recently Pope Francis<sup>4</sup>, as the dominant paradigm in the modern world. It does not just apply to sustainability, but to most aims and means in policies in mainstream governments and organisations across the planet. What is missing from this paradigm is social fabric, culture, a sense of the whole, values and feelings which cannot be measured and given scientifically verifiable numbers, and relationships of reciprocity or collaboration. All of these are present to some extent in heritage values and thinking, to which we must now turn.

Before doing so, however, it should be stated again that what is being analysed here is “sustainability” as it appears in international and governmental charters and policies in the main. There are exceptions at both international and national levels, and there are of course many non-governmental organisations with very different approaches. However it is the contention of this paper that the context of the discourse about sustainability is largely framed by the paradigm identified above, and those who challenge any of the assumptions will inevitably face opposition in various ways, including being side-lined, ignored or, in some cases, ridiculed or vilified.

---

<sup>4</sup> In the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* 2014

### 3. Defining Heritage

Once we start to consider the issue of sustainability in the writings about building conservation and traditional architecture, we suddenly find ourselves in a different world, with very different assumptions and values. However this world feels somewhat fragile and threatened. Nonetheless there are some enduring constants in the literature about Building Conservation philosophy and these include the concepts of beauty, spirit of place, connection with history and nature, cultural diversity and craft.

One of the first things that must be pointed out, as Paul Drury does in his article on the Building Conservation website (in 2012) is that 'The concept of building conservation to sustain cultural heritage values, normally alongside utility value, has been evolving in the UK for more than three centuries. The past half-century has seen the most rapid developments, in scope, in thought about purpose and aims, and in technical skills...' As with concepts of sustainability we find ourselves in a rapidly changing world with changing ideas and language in regard to heritage and the historic built environment. As Drury points out, and as is evident from a survey of writings about conservation, there has been a significant shift from an emphasis on preservation and minimum intervention (as exemplified in Morris's Manifesto for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) to a definition of conservation (as found in both English Heritage's Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance and in the National Trust's Conservation Principles) which includes the need to embrace change and wider values. The English Heritage document says:

'Our definition of conservation includes the objective of sustaining heritage values. In managing significant places, 'to preserve', even accepting its established legal definition of 'to do no harm', is only one aspect of what is needed to sustain heritage values. The concept of conservation area designation, with its requirement 'to preserve or enhance', also recognises the potential for beneficial change to significant places, to reveal and reinforce value. 'To sustain' embraces both preservation and enhancement to the extent that the values of a place allow.'<sup>5</sup>

It is notable that the full title of the English Heritage document is Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance *for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* [my italics]. Sustainability is directly and indirectly defined and addressed. How well it is addressed now and in the future by such organisations is a key question in all heritage and conservation thinking.

#### Heritage Values

Since the time that the idea of Building Conservation arose, thinkers and writers have been attempting to provide clear arguments for why certain buildings should be conserved and how they might be conserved or altered. Oldness in itself is not a sufficient reason, and would anyway need definition. There is a suspicion of quantifiable metrics, both because they can be used against you as well as in support, and also because they do not and cannot capture the essence of why people care for old buildings (just as they cannot capture why people care for wildlife or natural environments, or even their own homes and gardens).

The literature on Building Conservation Philosophy has therefore attempted to identify important *qualitative* values and devise processes of assessment which use them. The key term in much of this writing is "significance". This has been emphasised in many international as well as national

---

<sup>5</sup> Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment by Paul Drury and Anna McPherson for English Heritage p 15; published by English Heritage 2008

documents. The Burra Charter, for example, which has been very important in heritage thinking, is almost entirely dependent upon the notion and definition of “cultural significance”.

Significance is revealed and determined by a number of criteria which can then be used in assessment. For example English Heritage in The Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance lists four values or criteria for assessing significance. These are

- Evidential
- Historical
- Aesthetic
- Communal

All of these imply value judgements, particularly in regard to aesthetic and communal criteria. However all charters and guidance in this area struggle to find clear boundaries for definitions and to avoid reductionism, because the guidance has to be practically usable, and the values have to be comparable in some way for assessment to be possible. This is a logical problem for all of those promoting programmes or methods based in some degree on qualities rather than quantities.

In all major conservation writings we therefore find a further level of attention being given to the value of significance. How to define it more exactly, to give it some reality? For English Heritage, National Trust and others both nationally and internationally, this becomes an issue of Authenticity.

So important is the concept of authenticity that a convention was organised to discuss this subject at Nara in Japan, in 1993, (as part of the World Heritage Convention) by UNESCO, ICCROM and ICOMOS. The Nara Document on Authenticity is on the one hand extremely radical in its aims and values and on the other, quite narrow in its means. This is not dissimilar to the aims and means of Sustainability charters and policies and is a result of the same context.

The Document is short. In point 5 it provides an overarching justification for conservation and cultural diversity: “The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development.”

It states that authenticity is “the essential qualifying factor concerning values” that define this spiritual and intellectual richness. Understanding authenticity “depends, in part, on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful. Knowledge and understanding of these sources of information, in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning, is a requisite basis for assessing all aspects of authenticity.”

This rather circular argument places a lot of emphasis on information sources. Indeed the definitions of Conservation and Information Sources in the document are very practical and rational and these two points above seem to indicate that a “scientific” study of cultural heritage is possible in a coherent manner. However in the next paragraph (para 11) it is written that “All judgements about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong.” This means that our notion of scientific information and valid evidence are also subject to cultural difference.

There is a real conflict between attempting to find a universally applicable and objective method of assessment of authenticity and the context based pluralism implicit in the notion of cultural diversity and identity. The failure to sufficiently resolve this problem is a result of trying to deal with two different ways of valuing and assessing the world. We will return to this problem later.

The issue of authenticity in conservation thinking has become even more complex since the Nara Document. As pointed out by Dr. Jukka Jokilehto

“In 2004, another UNESCO expert meeting in Nara concerned the **integration of the approaches for safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage**. The declaration resulting from this second meeting recognised the importance of the 1994 Nara document in emphasising the specific cultural context of a heritage resource when interpreting its authenticity. Nevertheless the declaration also stated that this term could not be applied in the same way when assessing intangible cultural heritage even though the tangible and intangible heritages were often interdependent. In fact, in the debate, some people defending the intangible heritage openly refused to consider the idea of authenticity as it had been defined in the 1994 *Nara Document*: “as the essential qualifying factor concerning values”. The claims related to ‘intangible cultural heritage’ were justified on the basis that this was **constantly being recreated** and could therefore not be seen in the light of historical authenticity, which was understood as ‘static’. It looks evident that there should be some difference in judging authenticity of a physical structure compared with a traditional practice”<sup>6</sup>.

The issue of “intangible” heritage relates not only to qualitative material values (such as the beauty of a building), but to practices, languages and beliefs, which may have no material location. However while extending the boundaries of heritage to non-material considerations, the judgement of value (what place, tradition, or language is worthy of special protection because it has value for the future) remains problematic. Over the past few years the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic has become blurred by marketing and by a loss of real understanding of the past (as shown in David Lowenthal’s book *The Past is a Foreign Country*), while philosophically the question of authenticity is always disputed. Authenticity in heritage is understood to require some quality of integrity, of perspective and meaning. But how to judge this, and who can be the judge? This is one of the key questions of modernity.

A further concept which appears in Conservation principles in order to further assist in the assessment of authenticity is that of Integrity. This as stated in the English Heritage document means “literally ‘wholeness, honesty’”. However, this is often, as pointed out by Jokilehto, a “social-functional” integrity or as exemplified in the English Heritage Guidance, an *integration* of different values and aspects of a place or item, rather than a judgement starting with a sense of the *whole* and then looking at the context and specifics through that lens. It can end up, like many systems approaches to assessment as the sum of the parts rather than as a whole manifested in the diversity of its parts, which Bortoft<sup>7</sup> calls the difference between inauthentic and authentic concepts of the whole. We will return to the different ways of understanding the whole later.

#### Heritage principles and means

If you search in libraries or on the internet for Heritage Philosophy or Principles, it soon becomes apparent that most of what you find is not about philosophy or even principles, but is about practical advice for priorities in maintaining or restoring an old building or artefact. What has been considered above is indeed about principles, but all of the documents considered also have practical advice about the means to implement the general principles. As illustrated by the study of Sustainability

---

<sup>6</sup> Jokilehto J. 2006, Considerations on authenticity and integrity in world heritage context. *City & Time* 2 (1): 1. [online] URL:<http://www.ct.ceci-br.org>

<sup>7</sup> Bortoft H. *The Wholeness of Nature* 1996 Lindisfarne Books and Floris Press

Charters and actual policies, the consideration of the means of implementation of any principle can reveal a lot about the basic assumptions behind the principle.

In some ways the emphasis in conservation groups such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) on craft training and traditional understanding and use of old buildings is a practical attempt to uncover the meaning of significance and authenticity which is so hard to define in measurable quantities. You cannot measure beauty or spirit of place, but you can feel them and participate in them through physical engagement and presence. It seems often that conservation practitioners are rather inarticulate (or alternatively rather bombastic) about heritage values. But this is perhaps because such values perhaps cannot be expressed so easily in words and ultimately have to be experienced to be understood. This is both the disadvantage and the great merit of an embodied physical culture, of something beyond words but which can actually be seen, smelt and felt.

What is also clear however is that the means of heritage are not always the same as those promoted by mainstream charters and policies for the promotion of sustainable development. While the use of modern technologies (such as power tools and solar technologies) and the use of non-local resources (for example lime and oak from France) are common on many conservation building sites, the idea that building conservation work should be open to the whole construction market is only possible under severe constraints of specification and quality control. The training courses on building repair and craft skills are largely run by volunteers and enthusiasts and are not market mechanisms. The idea of craft guilds with apprenticeships is still promoted in certain areas. Local materials and resources are still prioritised on many jobs, particularly in poorer and less “developed” parts of the world.

The means used to implement heritage thinking are therefore a mixture of those values given priority in the assessment of heritage with those of the dominant modern culture. This is inevitable, but does not make the conflicts between the value systems less stark.

### The heritage paradigm

The assumptions in the heritage philosophy of building conservation are less clear than those in sustainability and sustainable development. It is proposed that the reason for this is two-fold. Firstly there is much less clarity of thought (as fewer resources have been put to it), and secondly there is an attempt to engage with the mainstream paradigm for political, economic and pragmatic reasons, which has further confused the philosophy of heritage. However some themes which have been identified in some of the aims and means are given in the table below

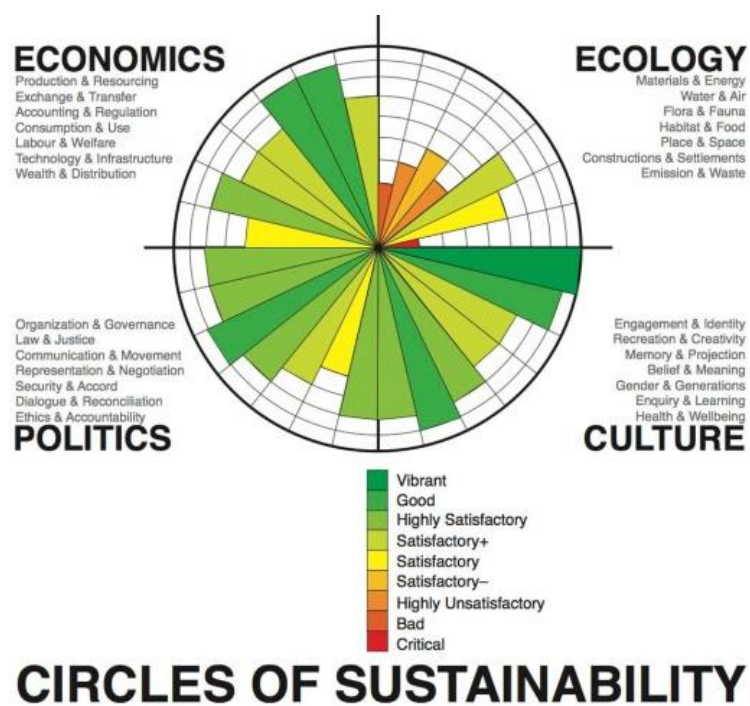
Question	Answer
What is a person?	A part of history and nature. A creator and ideally a craftsman and enjoyer of culture and nature.
What is the world, nature?	A place of history, beauty and diversity
What is the relationship of people and world?	People are stewards of culture (here buildings) and nature for future generations. People and nature interact. Buildings are the expression of this interaction.
How do we know?	By science and by feeling. (not properly defined)
What causes change?	No real theory of change. Conservation philosophy is about responding to change and preserving value.
What is the purpose of people/ the world?	Participation in society, culture and nature. Beauty.

## 4. Integrating heritage and sustainability

In both sustainability and heritage thinking there have been attempts for many years to integrate the values and methods of each into a more complete approach. As noted at the start of the last section, organisations representing indigenous peoples in particular have pressed for culture to be included as the fourth pillar of sustainability.

### Integrating culture into sustainability

The following diagram is a way of valuing these four aspects of sustainability together.



The problem with such a diagram is that the areas of sustainability are all distinct and do not overlap, and there is an assumption that the values of the different segments are comparable. There is also the question of how you measure culture and the categories that are assigned to it for measurement in the first place. In the diagram above (for Melbourne in Australia) the category of Belief and Meaning is judged to be “satisfactory +”. The metrics for such a judgement are obviously very different from those of Flora and Fauna or Wealth and Distribution. Moreover belief, as pointed out in the Nara document will affect how things are valued not only within areas of belief (such as religion) but in all aspects of life. So it is not about the quantity of belief, but its nature. What we believe, how we find meaning, will determine how we judge everything else in our world.

Nonetheless in this approach at least culture is acknowledged and is sitting at the same table as the other three pillars (of society, economy and environment). Unfortunately such an approach has not been taken up widely even after 30 years of discussion and campaigning. If anything it seems that it

<sup>8</sup> The circles of sustainability are used within various UN programmes such as the Global Compact Cities programme to assess the sustainability of different cities. The one represented here is Melbourne

is further from acceptance than ever as Western positivist, neo-liberal and humanist ideas and practice continue to dominate processes of development and international charters of sustainability.

### **Integrating sustainability into heritage and conservation**

In heritage and conservation charters and activity it should also be noted that there have been continual efforts to integrate traditional conservation thinking with mainstream sustainability concerns and methods. Much of this work is related to the specific policy agendas of carbon emission and energy use reduction, as is evident in the research programmes of all the national bodies including EH, HS, Cadw, SPAB and the National Trust. Renewable energy in buildings is also a major focus of the National Trust and the Church of England amongst others. There is also work being done, and arguments made in conservation writing about embodied energy and carbon, the re-usability of places and materials, the use of locally available resources, local skills and employment, community engagement. We see here a spectrum of views about sustainability which go from the hard quantifiable, somewhat alien assessment methods of scientific environmentalism to the softer more qualitative aspects of culture.

However there is also a broader attempt to enter the debate about sustainability in more general terms and more positively by many of these organisations. The motto of the National Trust “for ever, for everyone” is both a social and an intergenerational statement. The notion of stewardship is strong in all conservation bodies. The importance of access and the democratisation of history (so that the lives of the poor are considered as much as the high and mighty) are also in accord with much sustainability thinking. However there is perhaps more that could be offered in the discussion about our common future. The English Heritage Guidance has a very apt paragraph on these wider sustainability issues.

“Sustaining heritage values is likely to contribute to environmental sustainability, not least because much of the historic environment was designed for a comparatively low-energy economy. Many historic settlements and neighbourhoods, tending towards high density and mixed use, *provide a model of sustainable development* [my italics]. Traditional landscape management patterns have been sustained over centuries. Many traditional buildings and building materials are durable, and perform well in terms of the energy needed to make and use them. Their removal and replacement would require a major reinvestment of energy and resources.”<sup>9</sup>

The most interesting part of this paragraph is the idea, rather timidly put forth, that we can learn from the traditional environment about what sustainable development means. Our heritage might be important for the future. This is an argument put forward by Professor Steele in *Tradition and Sustainability*. He writes “Vernacular architecture around the world is nothing less than a key to future survival, holding countless valuable secrets that have been painstakingly accumulated over centuries in response to different global environmental conditions”<sup>10</sup>.

If we add to this the idea articulated in the Nara Document that “The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind” and that “The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development”, then we might wonder why heritage thinking is so shy about developing a counter narrative to that dominating the sustainability debate.

---

<sup>9</sup> Para 97 Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance

<sup>10</sup> Op cit. Of course we are talking here about vernacular buildings and agriculture, not all old buildings of any type.



## **The challenge of integration**

The experience of many conservation organisations in engaging with the mainstream sustainability agenda has been mixed. On the one hand the assessment of buildings in terms of energy and carbon has been extremely enlightening, and has led to new insights into traditional building materials and skills as well as how people lived in the past and their impact on the environment.

On the other hand the threat to traditional buildings and places from sustainability policies such as CESP, CERT, ECO and the Green Deal in the UK and in EU directives about energy efficiency, has been a major concern to most building conservation groups, and indeed the STBA was formed largely in response to this threat. The work of the STBA in introducing a more balanced approach into some of the policy thinking as well as flagging up technical risks, particularly to do with moisture levels in buildings, has helped to address some of the risks of the current policy agenda. Indeed government have been most open to the arguments not only about technical risks but also about risks to heritage and community.

Nonetheless, these successes have been defensive and very much confined within the terms of understanding set by the mainstream approach to sustainability. They are similar to the Circles of Sustainability approach above, with the attempt to introduce heritage and health as criteria alongside energy and economic growth. They are, however, mainly an addition to the existing agenda, not a new or transformed agenda. The danger is that this is not integration in a real sense, but a kind of co-option, a way of dealing with challenging ideas without actual confrontation.

This might be acceptable in some situations. But if the values of heritage are really important to the future then integration has to be much more about allowing these values to be part of the main discourse than to be just an additional factor to be considered. The values of heritage, as of cultural diversity, as shown in the previous section, are seriously challenging to the dominant themes of sustainability in every area. They are not compatible with the approach of mainstream sustainability as it stands.

## 5. Why is heritage excluded from sustainability?

There has been a long history of people attempting to introduce the concept of culture into mainstream sustainability thinking, alongside the concepts of economy, society and environment. As reported in Wikipedia

‘Indigenous peoples have argued, through various international forums such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Convention on Biological Diversity, that there are *four* pillars of sustainable development, the fourth being cultural. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity from 2001 states: "... cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature"; *it becomes* "one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence".’ This is almost identical to point 5 of the Nara Document on Authenticity. In this sense, the heritage of old buildings is an aspect of cultural diversity.

Indeed UNESCO has campaigned for 30 years to include Culture as one of the aims of mainstream sustainability policy. As it says on the UNESCO website:

“As demonstrated by the failure of certain projects underway since the 1970s, development is not synonymous with economic growth alone. It is a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. As such, development is inseparable from culture. Strengthening the contribution of culture to sustainable development is a goal that was launched in connection with the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1998). Ever since, progress has been made thanks to a corpus of standard-setting instruments and demonstration tools such as cultural statistics, inventories, regional and national mapping of cultural resources.”<sup>11</sup>

But it also says that “the major challenge” is still “to convince political decision-makers and local, national and international social actors” to integrate culture into their policies and actions and that in spite of some success at Rio+20 “there is still much work to be done on fully integrating culture into the international development policies”. It is perhaps significant that the first statement in the UN declaration following Rio+20 in September 2012 specifically mentions “ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations”<sup>12</sup>, but does not mention culture.<sup>13</sup>

What is notable in all this (and we will see this also in building conservation strategies for sustainability) is firstly that there is an attempt to quantify culture (establishing standards and metrics so that cultural factors can “compete” with other numbers in the economic, social and environmental realm), secondly that there is also an assumption that cultural values (particularly those of cultural diversity and religious and spiritual beliefs) are somehow compatible with economic, social and environmental sustainability as framed by mainstream politics, and based upon global economic development, universal human rights, modern scientific thinking and democratic

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/476/10/PDF/N1147610.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that cultural diversity and heritage is not mentioned in sustainability charters. It is often mentioned, but as an additional not essential value. In The Future We Want there is one short paragraph on cultural diversity in the 283 paragraph document. This states

‘41. We acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world, and recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to sustainable development.’

However there is no follow up in the means of implementation and the clash between many traditional cultures and the idea of universal human rights and other aims of the document, is conveniently passed over.

principles, and thirdly that in spite of this culture is still outside of mainstream assessment and in fact struggles to compete.

In order to clarify further the reasons for exclusion, which in turn can help us to understand how heritage might become part of the debate about the future, it is helpful to look at the reasons given in the literature and in debate for exclusion of culture and particularly of heritage. These may be usefully grouped under the core assumptions of Sustainability as identified above

Positivism (the philosophy that only what can be measured actually exists and has effect)

1. *Measurability*
2. *Fear of the irrational*

Neo liberalism

1. *The reduction of cultural values to economic value*
2. *The notion of society*

Human rights

3. *The challenge to human rights*
4. *Conservation thinking as “undemocratic”.*

Progress

*The idea of progress*

## **Positivism**

### Measurability

There are several reasons given in the relevant literature for the exclusion of heritage and culture from sustainability policies. The first and most obvious is that it is very hard to measure heritage value. This is not just a theoretical problem. It is also a really practical problem for policy makers and those deciding on funding and protection status. If you have only a limited amount of money to spend, on what basis do you make a decision which is supposedly rational and justifiable? The easiest way is numbers of some sort (although it may be noted that political decisions are often not based on rational or numerical criteria at all and that emotional issues often drive policy).

For a number to be useful it has to be “objective” and abstract enough to be useful for comparisons not only within heritage and culture but across the whole spectrum of policy activity. Units of energy, carbon or money are such useful numbers. Energy assessments are increasingly used in relation to all buildings and material aspects of our world, and are increasingly used to drive policies (such as ECO, Green Deal, and other recent government programmes in the built environment where the energy/ carbon rating of a building determines what should be done to it and what funding will be available). However very few people consider that energy or carbon entirely captures the value of a building of whatever type. Its use, condition, appearance, context and size are all considered important. However with appearance in particular, but also context and use, subjective qualities also emerge which cannot be brought under a physical metric. For this reason a more abstract type of measurement is better. Energy for example is still to some extent embodied whereas money is entirely abstract. Energy can be measured in money but not vice-versa. Money is to some extent the most abstract and therefore the most encompassing of all measurements, and is consequently the favoured metric for policy makers in most situations<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> A notable exception to this rule is when a country is engaged in warfare, where monetary considerations are secondary to the aims of the war.

Economists and policy makers are aware of the challenges of trying to quantify heritage value. In the Eftec report for English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Transport of 2005 entitled Valuation of the Historic Environment, it lays out clearly the attempts to introduce non-economic values into the assessment of historic “assets”. While the Eftec report rejects such attempts from an economic and scientific point of view (as will be shown below), it also makes clear that all such attempts, even if they could be formalised, are problematic, particularly to policy makers who have no choice but to choose between different priorities, since there are not infinite financial resources. Saying something is priceless or has intrinsic significance does not mean it has to be preserved or supported in a policy debate. Similar choices have to be made in health and the natural environment in regard to saving lives or species, as we do not live in a perfect world with infinite resources.

A leading economic thinker in this area, who has attempted to introduce non-economic values into some kind of measurable scheme, is Throsby. Writing in The World Bank publication The Economics of Uniqueness, he states

“The economic values [of heritage assets] discussed above are relatively easy to measure, at least in principle. Cultural value, by contrast, has no such unit of account. So how is it possible to express it?”<sup>15</sup>

Crosby goes on to attempt to measure cultural value by identifying Aesthetic, Symbolic, Spiritual, Social, Historic, Authenticity, and Scientific categories (which are similar to the assessment categories of much conservation theory). Throsby doesn’t duck the issues inherent in such a list. Under the spiritual values he makes the extraordinary statement that “Spiritual value may also be experienced as a sense of awe, delight, wonderment, religious recognition, or connection with the infinite.” One might respond: try measuring that! If such experiences are real, then they challenge not only measurement, but the paradigms on which value is being assessed.

Throsby, however, in spite of trying to provide a methodology, fails to provide any numbers for cultural values, and his attempts, like those of most conservation bodies, do not really lead anywhere more solid.

There is therefore both a practical problem and a theoretical problem. The practical problem is that unless we have abstract numbers things cannot be compared. Although this has not stopped policy makers from making judgements and policies previously in areas where there are no clear numbers or facts, it does put heritage at a significant disadvantage in comparison with more quantifiable areas and means that core heritage values are often omitted from assessment. The theoretical problem remains as to how we measure the unmeasurable.

### Fear of the Irrational

There may however be other reasons why non-quantifiable values are excluded from mainstream sustainability thinking and policies. One of these is the fear of the irrational or non-rational. It may well be, as pointed out by Bortoft<sup>16</sup> and others, that to a large extent scientific positivist thinking arises as a reaction to the irrational, since positivism can be seen to assert itself most strongly in times of uncertainty and when mass movements based on emotions or religiosity assert themselves

---

<sup>15</sup> P 54. Economics of uniqueness : investing in historic city cores and cultural heritage assets for sustainable development; Edited by Guido Licciardi and Rana Amirtahmasebi, 2012 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank

<sup>16</sup> See op cit The wholeness of nature, and also Taking Appearance Seriously: 2012, Floris Books

and seem to threaten the order of ordinary life. Numbers seem to give us control and they exclude non-rational and non-material characteristics. Rationalist thinkers from Descartes to Dawkins, seem to think that by providing rational philosophies based upon quantifiable evidence that somehow this will “defeat” the forces of irrationalism and emotion in society.

In cultural and particularly in heritage philosophy, the place of memory and tradition, along with spirit of place and community are considered important and to some extent self-evidential values. However for those who experience tradition and community as obsession with identity and often as hostility to other traditions or to modernity, the non-rational element in these values is neither beneficent nor desirable. The use of particular types of “heritage” philosophy to support nationalist or other political ideologies is well understood<sup>17</sup>. One only has to think of discussions about the Orange Marches in Northern Ireland, the Confederacy Flag in the USA, of the wearing of the burka by Muslim women (and indeed Islamic practice and belief generally) in France and across the western world, to realise that heritage and tradition can be viewed by many as both irrational and threatening. Building heritage can be equally emotive, as evidenced in India in the dispute over the Babri Masjid (a site disputed by Muslims and Hindus), or in the many religious sites in Jerusalem. Secular sites can also be used politically in many ways (for example the conservation of Auschwitz). All of these sites and traditions are far more than historical documents or places of aesthetic enjoyment. They have a visceral power and are often a symbol of an unresolved community dispute which still causes deep anger and resentment. These sentiments are readily exploitable.

To allow heritage into discussions about the future or to include it in policies about the future, would therefore be to open a can of worms. From this perspective positivist analysis supported by the free market and by universal human rights based on individuals not communities or cultures, are considered good because they eliminate the need for any discussion about contentious communal issues and can be used to justify the dismissal of local customs and beliefs in programmes of sustainable development.

## **Utilitarianism/ Neo-liberalism**

### Economic value

In spite of the philosophical difficulties, the challenge of measuring the unmeasurable does not daunt many economists, particularly utilitarians, who believe that everything of value not only can but should be reduced to a monetary figure. In this way heritage values are subsumed by economic values. There is not a dualism between the measurable and the unmeasurable, or a problem with unmeasurable values, but rather there *is* only the measurable. The unmeasurable has ceased to exist.

This is the position ultimately taken by the Eftec report (mentioned above) which rejects the idea of non-quantifiable values and methods and replaces them with the quantifiable method known as Willingness To Pay (WTP). Willingness To Pay is not the only way of measuring the economic value of a heritage building, but it is the only way which is currently accepted for measuring heritage *values* in distinction to the monetary value that heritage properties and the heritage industry might derive from sale or rental value, employment of staff, or even the contribution of the sector to craft skills and employment. Willingness To Pay is based on use and non-use values which reflect those who spend money on visiting (not only entrance fees, but travel and wear and tear), and those who do not necessarily visit but who either do or would pay to contribute to the upkeep of the site or object. So the non-material value of a place is quantified by trying to estimate how much people would pay

---

<sup>17</sup> See for example, Miles Glendinning’s book *The Conservation Movement*

to keep it open. If the argument about value and WTP is correct then the need for a separate category of culture in the discussion about sustainability is perhaps unnecessary, as it is entirely subsumed by this economic approach. Heritage can be treated as a commodity like any other.

Willingness to Pay, however, is full of assumptions which are both morally and theoretically questionable. For a start a person's Willingness to Pay will depend partly on the wealth or poverty of a person. It quickly becomes a way of the rich exerting their power. WTP also assumes perfect, or at least sufficient information and understanding of the significance of an issue or place. Mis-information and ignorance can unfairly influence peoples WTP; information put out by powerful organisations and media is therefore at an advantage (for example in the case of attempts to preserve an historic building against Developers or Supermarkets). Finally, the importance of heritage may change over time, and so it could be dangerous to rely on the WTP solely for how we value heritage, which may last for hundreds of years.

A further question which this attempt to quantify heritage "assets" in terms of monetary value raises is whether the values in Throsby's or other heritage lists exist at the same level as other values such as utility and exchange value, or whether they are in a different category altogether. Eftec discusses the ideas of uniqueness and irreplaceability, as well as "pricelessness", and rejects these as relevant "economic" factors on practical and political grounds. This may be acceptable. However this is not a reason to say all heritage and cultural values can be subsumed into utilitarian economic analysis. This is similar to the positivist idea that poetry and philosophy have no reality and are illusions or epiphenomena. Against this it may be said that something may not be measurable in itself, but it may still have material force and causality as well as meaning. The nature of the reality of heritage values such as beauty, craft and spirit of place, is a key issue in this debate. We address this directly in section 7.

### Society and the individual

Utilitarian and neo-liberal economists and politicians not only believe that all values can be quantified in monetary terms, but that everything can be reduced to the elementary unit of the individual. Margaret Thatcher's famous saying that "there is no such thing as society" can be taken not only as a political but also a scientific and economic observation, based on positivist and utilitarian ideas of causality.<sup>18</sup> Society for positivists and utilitarians is a metaphysical concept which has no reality, and is a mere cover for individuals operating as separate economic units. This is also a moral position for such people. Individuals should act as self-determining players in the market, competing to the best of their ability both so that they improve themselves through a sort of Darwinian evolutionary process, and also so they create wealth for others (ie individuals and families) and for future generations.

Traditional societies have never been based upon such thinking and heritage ideas of community and spiritual connection are based upon quite a different understanding both of individual and society. Traditional buildings and their methods of building reflected this. As noted in section 8 and

---

<sup>18</sup> Prime minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to Women's Own magazine, October 31 1987

"I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation."

Appendix 3, tribal and pre-industrial societies had communal or craft based methods of building and buildings in the main were part of a common plan for communities, they represent to some extent the “ideal” of a civilisation. In the “Vastu” tradition of India, the layout of houses as well as of villages and towns was prescribed according to astrological and local conditions as well as social status and hierarchy. While this level of prescription is a mark of a particular type of complex society, all pre-modern societies had clear traditions about building form and construction which expressed the ideas of community and gave priority to it over the individual or family.

However the failure of heritage values and traditional cultures to enter the debate in this area is not only due to the neo-liberal or utilitarian view of individual and society, but to the horror with which human rights proponents consider traditional social structures.

## **Human Rights**

### The challenge of Human Rights

It should be obvious to most people that traditional societies in the past, just as many non-western societies in the present day, are not based upon the modern Western notions of human rights as embodied in international law and treaties. In particular the rights of individual freedom and self-determination regardless of colour or creed, and in particular women’s rights, are viewed by many in the West as fundamental to any kind of civilised society. They are mentioned again and again in The Future We Want document from Rio +20 and are even more strongly promoted in the Sustainable Development Goals. As such hierarchical societies which have existed through most of history without even the notion of individual rights (which is a very recent idea), where instead duty and responsibility were the foundation of most social relationships, and where most people had more or less fixed roles determined by birth and gender (albeit that these were often inverted at times of festival and on other ritual occasions) are viewed as immoral, backward and as having no value for the future of this world.

It is with this mentality that David Cameron recently called ISIS “medieval”, although in reality they are an entirely modern phenomenon. Medieval is used here to describe a society which does not share our human rights values and is often associated with plagues, barbarism of all sorts, inequality and specifics like the burning of witches. In fact “medieval” in common language bears almost no relation to the historical period, but covers anything from the Stone Ages to the Game of Thrones. The buildings and heritage of the past, just as the literature, philosophy and art of such places are therefore tainted with this slur- that the houses, villages, towns, cathedrals and palaces were built upon an exploitative and unequal society, full of witch burning and ignorance, and as such cannot be useful unless their meaning and place in society is completely changed.

### Democracy and elitism

Another reason given by economists and political thinkers for ignoring cultural values is that they can be undemocratic. As the Eftec report makes clear “The view that only cultural values matter derives in the main from non-economists who (along with some economists) tend also to take the view that it is ‘wrong’ to determine the allocation of resources to heritage assets using the economic approach set out above (ie Willingness To Pay).” Eftec characterise these non-economists as “experts” who think they know more than “the man on the Clapham omnibus”. They consider this approach fundamentally undemocratic and elitist.

“It is partly this fear (that popular opinion might not favour the conservation or protection of assets that those ‘in the know’ might) that explains some of the suspicion about the notion of economic value. Sometimes this argument is summed up by saying that people are ‘not informed’ enough to express a valid or genuine preference. This is a potentially dangerous argument since it amounts to disenfranchising much of the populace, something that no democracy allows when it comes to political voting for example”

In the opinion of the Eftec report, willingness to pay is a much more democratic measure, even though some “heritage education” might also be necessary. This of course embodies the naïve view that the market is somehow neutral, can comprehend all values, both in the present and for the future, and is not influenced by commerce, media or addictions. Nonetheless the charge of cultural value as being undemocratic needs addressing. It is not enough just to say that “we know better”.

### **The idea of progress**

In contrast to the objections to the past as irrational, ignorant and inhuman, is the idea of the future as progress, a progress based particularly on rationalism and technology. The past, in the eyes of positivists and secular humanists, was full of superstition and ignorance and we are now moving beyond history to a utopia based on human rights, science and free trade. There are technophiles and futurists who take this even further, talking about humanity overcoming mortality with the help of medicine and artificial intelligence. There is a belief in a linear historical progress which manifests itself in a resignation to innovation and commercialisation, even when the merits of such changes are highly dubious.

What is perhaps worth noting at this point however is how so many building conservation writings (for example in Sustainability and Tradition), just like so many nature conservation writings have a view of history as loss rather than progress, and of erosion and degradation rather than improvement. In this the view of building conservation is set against the architectural movement of modernism. Pevsner describes the modernist architecture movement in 1957 as a “courageous break with the past... the machine age in all its implications: new materials, new processes, new forms, new problems”.

Building conservation and heritage is largely a lament for the loss of the past and as such is often seen as anti-progress, out of touch, and unscientific (because science is modern). Nature conservation has to some extent overcome the charge of being anti-progress by arguing that the natural environment is essential for human survival, and so remains in the sustainability discussion, the debate about the future. Heritage and more widely cultural diversity proponents are also attempting to make such an argument, but are on much weaker ground because the functional necessity of preserving cultural diversity and the heritage of the past is much harder or even impossible to prove. Consequently heritage in particular is seen as old, out of date, and of no functional value, but rather as opposed to the future and to our essential task to deal with climate change and other social, economic, and environmental challenges.

### Paradigm incompatibility

One of the main arguments of this paper is that the public debate about sustainability, as well as mainstream policies for sustainability are based upon assumptions which are part of a particular definable paradigm. This is not a new idea, but it is not commonly applied to sustainability in the public sphere, because of the importance and almost visceral belief in certain aspects of



sustainability. Any attack on sustainability seems to be an attack on choice, human rights, equality (particularly racial and gender equality of individuals), technological and economic “progress”, science and survival of the planet. As such culture and heritage values can end up being seen as the opposite of mainstream values, because in trying to open up the debate, they become seen as opposites rather than as complementary or enriching. Such an opposition might set out on the terms below

<b>Mainstream Sustainability</b>	<b>Culture and Heritage</b>
Quantification	Qualitative values
Scientific	Superstitious, irrelevant
Rational	Emotional/ irrational
Objective	Subjective
Democratic	Elitist
Individual choice	Communal coercion
Progressive	Reactionary
Clean	Dirty
Safe	Dangerous

This is to misrepresent the values of culture and heritage. It does, however, represent part of the truth and explain to a large extent the reason for exclusion of culture and heritage from the debate about the future.<sup>19</sup> The challenge of those who care about cultural diversity and about heritage in particular, is to find a way to overcome this misrepresentation and furthermore to be able to engage directly with mainstream sustainability without compromising values or losing power. But in order to do this, we have to understand a bit more about the context in which we are working. We have to understand better the power of paradigms.

---

<sup>19</sup> There are of course other reasons, not mentioned as yet, which are more sinister and are to do with the cynical use of sustainability across the globe to trample on indigenous peoples in order to steal their lands or their labour, or to destroy historic places for economic growth. This is a natural consequence of the mainstream paradigm’s belief in free markets, competition as the main driver as change (and particularly the notion of “the survival of the fittest”) and the invisible hand (the metaphysical belief of neo-liberals that the market will lead to the best outcomes overall).

## 6. Paradigms

### Understanding paradigms<sup>20</sup>

The word paradigm originally referred to an accepted model or pattern, and was used in grammar, for example, to refer to the rules that were used in conjugating verbs.

Thomas Kuhn adopted and extended the idea of a paradigm in his essay 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'. Rather than regarding a paradigm as a set of rules for replication, in science he saw a paradigm as 'an object for further articulation and specification'. A paradigm will form the basis of experimentation and invention over a period of time. The paradigm will determine the experiments, the questions asked, the information looked at within a discipline. It will also determine what is not included within that discipline.

Most scientific activity is about consolidating an existing paradigm. Without a paradigm there can be no joint enterprise. The richness of scientific discovery and invention is made possible by the shared assumptions, language, questions and aims provided by a paradigm. Revolutions happen in science when a paradigm can no longer explain important new evidence. When exceptions to the 'norm' become too frequent or troubling to ignore, then a new paradigm must be found. New scientific paradigms are revolutionary because they overturn the assumptions of the previous paradigm.

Paradigms are not restricted to science. Here we use the word paradigm to mean a shared set of assumptions which enables people to understand one another and work together. Any joint endeavour will require a shared set of assumptions.

Often these paradigms will be adopted unconsciously by participants through shared history, culture and tradition. New and innovative enterprises may need to overtly define their shared assumptions through schemas of core values and goals. And societies will adapt their shared assumptions through continually updating legislation and cultural norms. It is worth quoting Meadows about paradigms

"The shared idea in the minds of society, the great unstated assumptions, unstated because unnecessary to state...constitute that society's deepest set of beliefs about how the world works. There is a difference between nouns and verbs. People who are paid less are worth less. Growth is good. Nature is a stock of resources to be converted to human purposes. Evolution stopped with the emergence of Homo sapiens. One can "own" land. Those are just a few of the paradigmatic assumptions of our culture, all of which utterly dumbfound people of other cultures.

Paradigms are the sources of systems. From them come goals, information flows, feedbacks, stocks, flows.... People who manage to intervene in systems at the level of paradigm hit a leverage point that totally transforms systems."<sup>21</sup>

### Different orders of paradigms

There are different orders or levels of paradigms; those which underpin a scientific discipline, or an artistic movement, or a school of thought; those which underpin our organisations, public services

---

<sup>20</sup> This section is partly written by Miriam Morris

<sup>21</sup> Donella Meadows: Places to Intervene in a System 1997, Whole Earth Winter p 12

and businesses; those which underpin our manners, regulations and laws; and those which underpin our culture, traditions and religious practice. A plurality of paradigms, working differently in different spheres of our lives, is therefore normal. The same object or activity can be viewed differently in different disciplines. For example a chemist regards a single atom of helium as a molecule, and a physicist does not. Or the psychiatrist will see the psychopathic murderer as a sick patient, and the prosecutor will see the same person as evil.

However what concerns us in this essay is whether or not there is a paradigm which underpins either our whole belief system or the system of thinking which dominates political discourse.

### Paradigm analysis

Paradigms are world-views which are coherent and comprehensive. Where a paradigm is dominant, it is its coherence which gives it power to endure, co-opt and integrate.

For paradigms to be coherent and comprehensive they have to answer the following questions explicitly or implicitly in a way that is consistent:

What is a person?	Ontology
What is the world (total reality)?	Cosmology
How do we know/ what is knowable?	Epistemology
What causes change?	Causality
What is the purpose of all this?	Teleology

For example if a person is not just material but also spiritual, then it would be inconsistent to have an epistemology which is only material and a teleology which is only concerned with the spiritual.

As Uberoi has repeatedly said<sup>22</sup>, the West is not materialistic but dualistic. It is dominated by a materialist paradigm but also possesses a non-materialist aspect which is subordinate to the dominant paradigm. These are typically represented by function as opposed to value or science as opposed to art. The dominant paradigm may be defined by answering the questions given above in the following way:

What is a person?	Mainly physical, rational, autonomous
What is the world (total reality)?	Only physical, operating according to known laws
How do we know/ what is knowable?	Scientific method; that which can be measured
What causes change?	Single interactions of particles; evolution (based on self-interest/ survival of fittest); individual decisions, sometimes aggregated, as in democracy
What is the purpose of all this?	Survival or evolution including economic/ technological evolution (growth)- all of which are meaningful only within their own terms

In contrast the subordinate paradigm is

What is a person?	Soul/ self (particularly emotion, intellect, spirit); connected to others and nature
What is the world (total reality)?	A living whole, includes feelings, spirits
How do we know/ what is knowable?	Intuition, imagination

---

<sup>22</sup> JPS Uberoi in Science and Culture, The Other Mind of Europe and in other works.

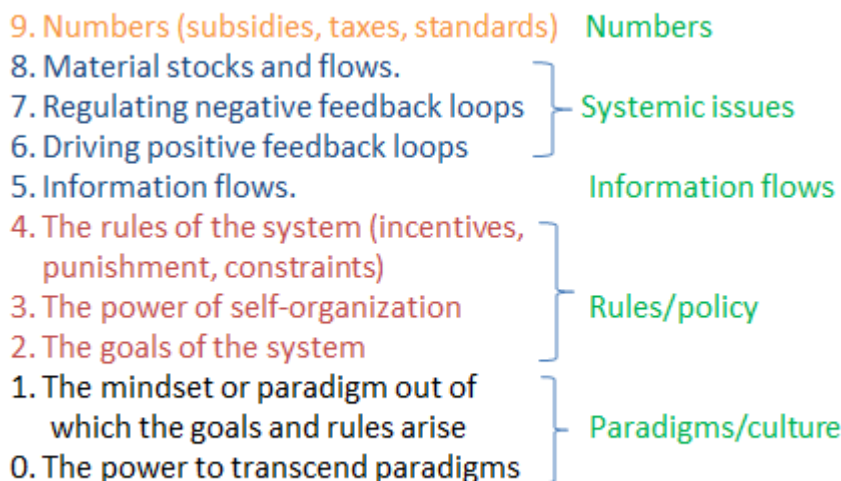
What causes change?  
What is the purpose of all this?

Feeling, passion, prayer  
Beauty, truth, love

The subordinate paradigm may not be a paradigm but a shadow or mirror image of the dominant paradigm. It is certainly not as coherent as the dominant paradigm, and hence has less power. This contrast has been well described by Iain McGilchrist in *The Master and His Emissary*<sup>23</sup> in terms of the Left Brain and Right Brain ways of being and knowing. Alternatively it is well described in Richard Bronk's *The Romantic Economist*<sup>24</sup> as the difference between Utilitarian and Romantic views of the world. Both McGilchrist and Bronk show how these different views compete through history but conclude that currently we seem to be overwhelmed by the Left Brain, Utilitarian view to the extent that the subordinate view has been co-opted and integrated in many ways, thereby rendering it even more powerless. McGilchrist talks about entering a hall of mirrors, and a self-fulfilling prophecy of Left Brain thinking. The materialist paradigm has extended its reach into the soul, claiming that love and altruism are merely physical actions of the brain determined by evolutionary forces. It has extended economics from the market place into our health, homes, art galleries, heritage and into nature as a whole by putting monetary value on everything. It has overtaken the discussion about purpose and the future of humankind, which is framed as a discussion about sustainability and sustainable development, by using positivist and reductionist measures and methods, based upon a technocratic and evolutionary view of progress – all the world should develop into good democratic consumers within a global free market.

### Paradigms and change

In Donella Meadows paper *Places to Intervene in a System*<sup>25</sup>, she lists 10 ways to bring about changes in a system such as the housing in a city or a country, or a manufacturing process. She calls these leverage points. The following slide lists these and groups them into 5 types of approach for simplicity.



In most discussions about policy we end up talking about numbers, how certain tax changes or new standards for example, can achieve improvements that we desire. Systemic issues and information flows tend to be ignored because too complex and longwinded for modern policy makers (and hence

<sup>23</sup> *The Master and his Emissary* by Iain McGilchrist, 2009 Yale University Press

<sup>24</sup> *The Romantic Economist: Imagination in Economics* by Richard Bronk 2009 Cambridge University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Op Cit

we have a multiplicity of unintended consequences) but rules (ie opening up markets through “liberalisation”) are a key part of international policies in the sustainability agenda, as are discussions about goals, within the accepted paradigmatic framework. However the paradigms which frame discussions about goals are rarely if ever discussed.

### **Sustainability and heritage paradigms**

The current approach to sustainability is one which is attempting to impose a single, monolithic and rationally coherent view upon the whole world. The positivist approach to knowledge and nature, the neo-liberal and utilitarian approach to economics and the individualist human rights approach to society are all absolutist approaches excluding all other possible views. In the next section we will show that in fact this view is not as coherent or rational as presumed, and has to a significant extent created the problems which it is now pretending to address.

In this section however I want to challenge the idea that logically coherent singular systems are in any way beneficial or desirable. The idea that there should only be one way of understanding the world or aspects of it neither fits with the way most societies have through history understood the world, nor with most people’s experience. For example at a discussion about telepathy at the RSA in 2004 between the sceptic Prof Lewis Wolpert and the proponent for a new science, Rupert Sheldrake, 80% of the audience said they had experienced telepathy in some way in their lives. Prof Wolpert admitted that he had not looked at Sheldrake’s extensive evidence for it, as he didn’t believe that telepathy could exist! The study of telepathy is considered “unscientific” by the establishment, as if it were shown to be true it would undermine the current positivist paradigm which is so strong particularly in biology and the social sciences (though not, significantly, in quantum physics). For this reason studies of telepathy and other psi phenomena are not fundable and cannot appear in mainstream scientific publications.

The point that is being made here is the same as that made by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Science needs paradigms in order to define the subject and method of study and to allow knowledge to be accumulated in a society. However the paradigm in defining the subject and method, also necessarily excludes other ways of thinking and other subjects and methods of study. Most paradigms are to some extent dualistic in this regard. They divide the world and knowledge into that which is valid and not valid.<sup>26</sup> Revolutions occur when the paradigm can no longer cope with the evidence of its own inconsistencies or when a new paradigm arises with greater strength. These occurred in the move from Aristotelian science to the science of the enlightenment, and in the change in a physics based upon Newtonian principles to that based on the work of Einstein.

However what may be missed out in such a discussion about paradigm change is that the dominance of science and of paradigms has dramatically increased since the enlightenment, particularly as the power of rational thought and technology has increased. The possibility of having several versions of “science” co-existing in the same society is more and more difficult, just as the possibility of having several different legal systems is considered “irrational” and disorganised. Yet in the middle ages in England and elsewhere common law, church law and civil law (the law of the king) all co-existed and represented not only different powers but different ways of understanding justice. Similarly in most eras there have been multiple systems of medicine, and indeed we still have such multiple systems today although conventional allopathic medicine is attempting to eliminate all other understandings

---

<sup>26</sup> We shall return to this point in the next section, when we consider the science of Galileo and the philosophy of Descartes.

of health and illness and it is more and more difficult to get mainstream acceptance of alternative or indigenous medicine, which is increasingly vilified as irrational, dangerous, and anti-progress.

The integration of heritage values and practice with mainstream sustainability is a similar paradigm problem. Heritage values represent different notions of knowledge and causality, which arise from different notions of the self, the world and of purpose. However it should be understood that this difference is not one of opposition but of the difference between singular notions (as in mainstream sustainability) and plural notions. It is not a question of this or that, but of this or that and this. Heritage is inherently pluralist and has, as such, been able to incorporate mainstream sustainability ideas and methods into thinking and practice. However this is not something that is reciprocated by mainstream sustainability, which, being dualistic, is not able to properly incorporate heritage values within its paradigm. To do this would be to undermine the paradigm and threaten its core values.

Heritage values therefore, theoretically and practically, can be seen to be pluralistic. They can encompass not only quality but also quantity, not only beauty and meaning but also the idea of efficiency and function, not only craft but also science. This could be seen as messy but it relates to the pluralist understanding of self, world and knowledge, in that we are not just rational animals living in a materialist universe, but also emotional, intuitive and spiritual beings living in a world of beauty and meanings as well as mere matter. We know this world and ourselves in many different ways.

This pluralism does not need to be and in fact cannot be logically coherent. Just as the first and second laws of thermodynamics (the preservation of energy and entropy) are both valid but in contradiction, so the notions of continuity and change, of meaning and meaninglessness, of wholeness and fragmentation can exist together in balance or perhaps paradox. Pluralism is fundamentally about balance, while dualistic beliefs tend to be about the elimination of opposite forces. For many people, as for example those 80% of the audience in the debate mentioned above about telepathy, the idea of balance and paradox relates strongly to their own experience. No one in that debate was saying conventional science is wrong, only that it is incomplete and as such prejudicial and narrow minded. Why then is the mainstream paradigm so strong?

### **The power of the current paradigm**

One of the reasons for the dominance of the mainstream paradigm is no doubt the power of the money markets since the de-regulation of banking and the introduction of digital finance throughout the world since the 1980s. The dominance of this system has become a self-fulfilling prophecy as de-regulation and monetisation of all parts of the economy and state have removed the space for alternative ways of thinking about money and value, which have a significant effect on everything in our culture. Increasingly everything, from homes to natural landscapes, to health and well being, has a monetary value ascribed to it. Of course this economic approach did not come from nowhere, and Bronk in *The Romantic Economist* traces its history back to the Utilitarianism of Bentham and the "Enlightenment". But whereas from that time until the 1980s there had been a pluralism of different economic approaches, after this time the economics of neo-liberalism became entirely dominant, thereby excluding dissenting opinion and alternative ideas of economics, which in turn, as Bronk shows, relate to different concepts of reality, humanity and meaning.

What is interesting is that as the monetisation of all values has proceeded at pace, the study of money and money creation has almost disappeared from economic theory and teaching. This is a good example of how a dominant assumption hides itself and so maintains its power. By being seen as merely an indicator or store of value, rather than being an actual creator of value and power in its

own right, money creation and exchange managed to escape notice of governments and the public. Only after the financial crash of 2007 did the issue of money creation finally reemerge, and along with it heterodox economics and moral questions about money and power.

The dominance of the monetisation of value is paralleled by the dominance of reductionist materialist science which attempts to give a physical reality and causality to all values and feelings, and excludes anything which cannot be so analysed as “unreal”. They are both positivist doctrines at heart, but their alliance extends not only to the reductionism and materialism inherent in both, but to the ideas of competition, natural selection and progress.

Another way of understanding the enduring power of this paradigm is explained by Iain McGilchrist in *The Master and His Emissary*, which relates the positivist and pluralist ways of thinking to the left and right hemispheres of the brain, as well as to changes in society throughout history. Left hemisphere thinking is to a considerable extent what is present in the mainstream paradigm, being about measurement, abstraction, control, progress, individuated parts and rationality (and as such is dualistic), whereas right hemisphere thinking is contextual, passive, and plural. In chapter 6 of his book (a chapter entitled *The Triumph of the Left Hemisphere*), he identifies the different strengths and strategies of pluralist and dualist world views. McGilchrist points out that even though the pluralist view of the right hemisphere is fuller and more real, the dualist view of the left hemisphere is far more powerful in terms of means, structure and function, because it builds coherent systems and can force these onto reality, seeing and working with only those factors it has decided have value in the first place. In other words it doesn't see the unintended consequences which are not part of its value systems. To give an example from the world of buildings, if an examination is undertaken on the effects of the retrofit of insulation upon traditional buildings by an organisation only interested in energy, then it will tend to only measure the energy impacts, and cannot see the effects on health of fabric, health of occupants, the beauty of the building, the local economy and so forth. So it is with left-hemisphere ways of thinking. In fact closed systems of all types, whether scientific, religious or cultural are self-reinforcing, but they are also dangerously unaware of anything that is not part of their system. As shown by Charles Perrow in *Normal Accidents*<sup>27</sup>, tightly coupled systems with clear boundaries while seemingly more efficient and effective, have less resilience and are much more prone to failures and shocks than loosely coupled systems, which have less tight boundaries and allow time and place for alternative views and solutions.

Furthermore closed systems are incestuous, engaging only with themselves. Levi Strauss, the renowned anthropologist wrote: “the prohibition of incest is a law of reciprocity”, by which he meant that by prohibiting people from marrying and having children with their immediate family, people are forced to have reciprocal relationships with those outside. This is good as it widens the gene pool and brings in new ways of doing and being. The results of incest on the other hand are either sterility or malformation. In terms of paradigms and all ways of life, if we only have intercourse with ourselves, with those in our close family, which in this case means with the ideas approved in a closed paradigm, then we will create sterile or malformed outcomes. Fundamentalism, which is a form of dualism, is, according to this understanding, a form of incest. It only has intercourse with its own ideas and its own people. Those with other ideas or values are not valid and are shunned. Its fruits will be bad or non-existent.

However until that collapse, closed paradigms remain much stronger than pluralist systems, and much more attractive to those who want to control the future, rather than allowing it to unfold. For McGilchrist, the balance between left and right hemispheres, between the dualist and pluralist, the utilitarian and the romantic ways of thinking about and being in the world, has been one which through history has tipped one way or the other. What has happened recently is the triumph of the

---

<sup>27</sup> *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* By Charles Perrow 1984 Basic Books

left hemisphere, with its iron clad logic and its ability to change not only the way we think but our reality as well. The imposition of grid patterns of habitation upon nature in urban design, as noted in Rapoport (in Appendix 3), in contrast to the formation of settlements in response to the local natural context (as well as to the social context), is one way in which this left brain approach is manifested in our modern built environment. But once everything has become dominated by an impersonal and rational way of building, it is hard for those living within it to imagine anything else. At a more general and global level, people now talk about the current geological era as the Anthropocene, meaning that the changes we see occurring, even in events such as hurricanes and earthquakes as well as loss of species, forests, coral reefs and ice caps are now influenced significantly by human activity. So when we look to nature, instead of seeing difference, we are starting to see the image of ourselves. As McGilchrist says, we end up living in a hall of mirrors.

McGilchrist, not surprisingly, considers this to be bad in many ways, because unreality, in an unfeeling, logical, technological and ultimately meaningless form, is triumphing over the plurality and meaning of reality. This can only end in tears. It is a tragedy which is occurring in an historical moment, at this very time, and which affects not only our way of living but our relationship with nature and the Other. It reduces everything to impersonal functional and selfish relationships and the consequence is environmental and cultural devastation.

As stated above, however, it would be entirely wrong to characterise all sustainability thinking as part of the mainstream paradigm. It is obvious from the charters of sustainability, and from many attempts to introduce values such as wellbeing and community into sustainability policies, that there is an understanding of the importance of things which fall outside of the positivist and utilitarian agenda. There should therefore be good grounds for a broader discussion about Heritage values within the Sustainability discourse. But this can only lead to significant policy changes and impacts if the mainstream paradigm is overcome, by-passed or transformed in some way.

However rather than straightaway trying to show the value of a pluralist view, incorporating heritage values, we should first look at the success or otherwise of the current dominant paradigm on its own terms. We will return to the pluralist heritage paradigm later.



## 7. The end of the current paradigm

### **The practical failure of sustainable development**

It may be an obvious point, but in spite of many optimistic government and international initiatives and pronouncements, over 25 years of sustainability policy and practice have not seen an improvement in the state of the planet's ecology, but rather have seen the threats to this increase considerably. While there have been some successes (such as the reduction of "holes" in the ozone layer), the extinction of species, the destruction of habitats and wildernesses and the warming of the planet, which is now perceived as the main threat to species survival, have all increased at an alarming rate. The WWF Living Planet report of 2014 states in its opening sentences: "The state of the world's biodiversity appears worse than ever. The Living Planet Index (LPI), which measures trends in thousands of vertebrate species populations, shows a decline of 52 per cent between 1970 and 2010", while the ecological footprint of humanity has constantly increased, and according to the report now exceeds the sustainable capacity of the planet by 50%. "This means we are eating into our natural capital, making it more difficult to sustain the needs of future generations". The biggest factor in our increased footprint is our carbon emissions, which have increased from 36% of our impact in 1961 to 53% in 2010.

In the UK, in spite of the claims by governments that their policies are leading to reduced carbon emissions and pollution, the Stockholm Institute at York University, has shown that our reduced emissions rating is a result of us reducing our manufacturing base in the UK and exporting much of our carbon emissions to other countries. If we take the actual emissions we are responsible for a nation, rather than as a geographical area, in fact our carbon emissions have increased over much of the past 2 decades and only decreased with the economic crisis of 2008. As it states in the Defra report of 2013, building on work by the Stockholm Institute, although "In 2013, emissions relating to the consumption of goods and services produced in the UK were 26 per cent lower than in 1997", "Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions relating to imports rose 41 per cent from 1997 (when this data series began) to a peak in 2007 and in 2013 were 10 per cent higher than 1997."<sup>28</sup>

In regard to economic and social "progress" towards a sustainable world over the past 25 years, it is also debatable how far, if at all, the world has moved forward. On most other metrics, such as number of poor, refugees, mental illness and "well-being", and certainly on the accumulated and long term debt of both individuals and governments, we could be said to be lot worse off economically and socially than previously. The future we want looks particularly bleak at the present time, with the utter misery of the war in Syria, an unstable and possibly doomed global economy, increasing environmental and cultural destruction not only in the middle east, but in the South generally, and increasing national and international inequality of wealth, health and opportunity. The Millennium Goals of ending hunger, conflict and environmental destruction by 2015 look particularly hollow at the moment.

There are two possible responses to such a situation: one is that the policy and practice of sustainability so far have not been sufficiently rigorous (either in terms of aims, methods or compliance); the other is that the current policy and practice are fundamentally flawed in some way. Mostly policy makers have to make the first response as the policy responses have to be based upon the accepted economic, social and cultural theory and practice of the day (the dominant paradigm). This is how we can understand the almost hysterical re-branding of the Millennium Goals of 2000 as the new even more ambitious and utopian Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. A radical shift in policy which lay outside of "business as usual" would be very difficult.

---

<sup>28</sup> UK's Carbon Footprint 1997 – 2013 DEFRA

So is the dominant paradigm able to deliver the sustainability programme defined by governments and the United Nations? Can the means of the free market (according to its current neo-liberal definition, allied as it is to economic growth) and scientific rationalism solve our problems? Or should we also perhaps question the efficacy of these foundational parts of our modern paradigm?

Mainstream thinkers such as Lord Stern believe that we can at least fix the environmental problem of climate change within the current economic system. The Stern Review of 2006 took absolutely seriously the threat of catastrophic climate change and the need to address this urgently and forcefully. Stern went so far as to say that “Climate change is a result of the greatest market failure the world has seen” (rather than a failure of culture or understanding), but argued that what we needed was a better regulated market and even a market in carbon. The planet could then be saved for an investment of only 1% of global GDP per year (which he later changed to 2%). There have been many other policy assessments and initiatives<sup>29</sup> since the Stern Review which use the same approach (and usually reference Stern).

In Dieter Helm’s analysis of the Stern Review, as recorded in Tim Jackson’s book, *Prosperity without Growth*, he argued that for this to work at all the EU and US would have to “lower their own consumption considerably – and quickly”, commenting that “the easy compatibility between economic growth and climate change, which lies at the heart of the Stern Review, is an illusion”<sup>30</sup>. Many other factors such as technological optimism, positive feedback mechanisms and high mitigation and adaptation costs were overlooked. In fact, Dieter Helm wrote “it is entirely fanciful to suggest that “deep” emissions and resource cuts can be achieved without confronting the structure of market economics”.

Tim Jackson spends much of his book showing why economic growth in any form is incompatible with environmental sustainability, particularly the stabilisation of carbon dioxide emissions. For Jackson there is no alternative but to move to a steady state or in some areas, a de-growth economy. This is also the conclusion reached by a study of environmental rebound effects by Timan Santarius, entitled “Green Growth Unravelling – How rebound effects baffle sustainability targets when the economy keeps growing”<sup>31</sup>. Having examined all the different kinds of rebound effect it is evident that

“There is no escaping the fact that real economic growth results in increased demand. If the goal of sustainability is taken seriously, it would seem that the only remaining option is to put an end to the vicious circle of the growth spiral.”

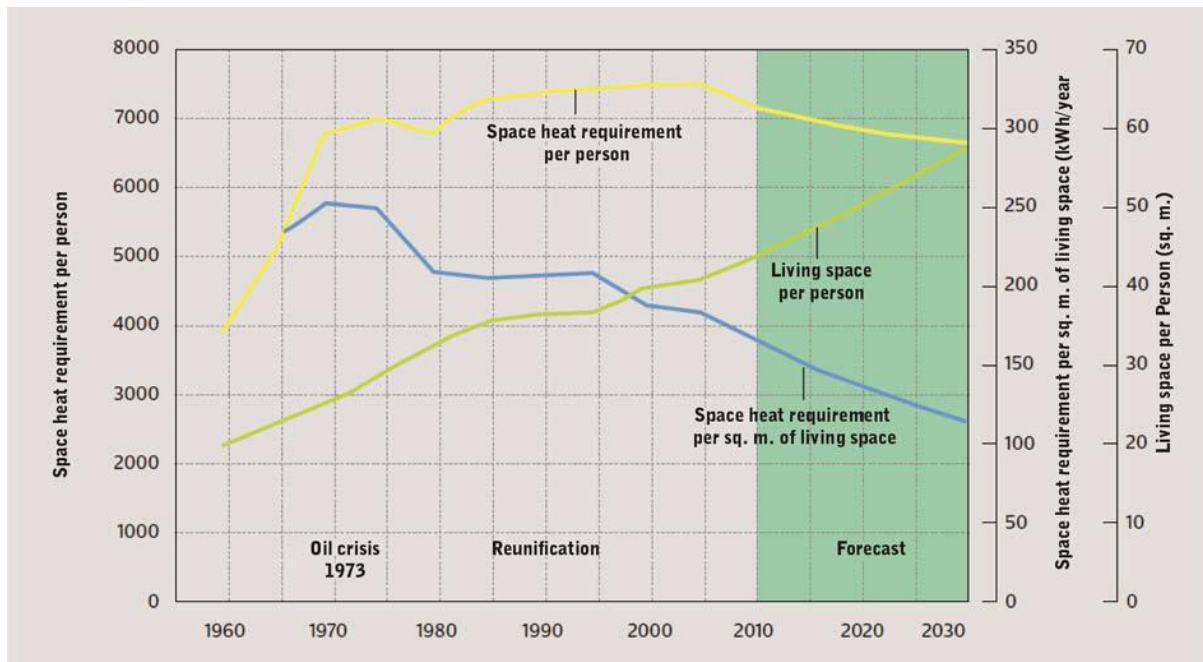
Santarius looks at several different industries including cars and housing. German housing is often held up as a model of how to build energy efficient, low carbon buildings. However even in regard to space heating in buildings (which is where people assume real gains can be made through good skills, improved design and the use of new materials and technologies), there has been almost no progress since 1970, and an increase in almost 100% since 1960. This is due to the increased living space per person in German homes, which has entirely taken up gains in building fabric efficiency.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ie Enabling the Transition to a Green Economy: Government and Business Working Together HM Government 2011. And PWC’s paper which estimates that 3% of GDP is necessary, phased over the next few decades.

<sup>30</sup> *Prosperity without Growth* by Tim Jackson p85: 2009 Earthscan

<sup>31</sup> *Green Growth Unravelling* by Timan Santarius for the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, October 2012



Much else could be said at another time about the failure of sustainability policies in the built environment not only in terms of direct failure but also the side effects and unintended consequences (such as building fabric failure, sick building syndrome etc) of ill-conceived policies. Not all of these failures are due to the inherent failure of the sustainability paradigm and much improvement can no doubt be made. However there are considerable doubts about whether a long term sustainability policy for buildings is possible within the current paradigm.<sup>32</sup>

In particular, Santarius attacks the “fallacy of green growth” as proposed by governments, bodies like WWF, and writers like Jonathan Porritt and Amory Lovins, and gives arguments for why even in a deep green growth economy, sustainability (in environmental terms) is not possible. If he, Tim Jackson, Herman Daly and many others (going back to both JM Keynes and JS Mill), are correct, then we have to rethink entirely our assumptions about economic growth and market economics if we want to achieve sustainability of our biological systems on this planet. And this means rethinking our social and cultural goals as well as our politics.

These goals are also being questioned in themselves, independently of their link to environmental requirements for a different social model. The wellbeing agenda is increasingly well established in policy and government at all levels, even if it is often side-lined or ignored when it comes to financial spending or other imperatives. One of the underlying messages from work in wellbeing is that, as most people instinctively understand, more money and material goods don’t actually make people happier<sup>33</sup>, whereas good relationships, satisfying work, membership of local and faith based groups and contact with nature, do significantly improve wellbeing. What is therefore of great concern is the increasing failure in these areas. One of the most startling reports of the past few years was the Sheffield University report in 2008 showing change since 1970s in community connection and loneliness<sup>34</sup>. Incomes have doubled, but the “loneliness index” shows increases in loneliness in every region. In fact the report states that ‘even the weakest communities in 1971 were stronger than any community now’

<sup>32</sup> This will be examined in much greater detail in my forthcoming paper on Unintended Consequences.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Jackson memorably sums this up as: “we are being persuaded to spend money we don’t have, on things we don’t need, to create impressions that don’t last, on people we don’t care about”

<sup>34</sup> Changing UK by D Dorling et al Dec 2008; for BBC see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7755641.stm>

It would also be interesting to be able to assess how far the agenda of human rights, women's rights and democratic rights has been successful in bringing about greater freedom for individuals across the world. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the consequent "decline" in the position of women in many Islamic countries might of course be set off against increasing numbers of female company directors, filmstars and athletes in other parts of the world (or not!) <sup>35</sup>. Similarly, the amount of people voting in elections might be counted across the world as evidence of the health of democracy. However, we should also be aware of the reality of how human and democratic rights (or the lack of them) have been used as an excuse to destabilise, invade and bomb foreign countries and tribal regions as part of capitalist or other programmes. I note here the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (and its sad history since then), which some commentators (such as John Gray) identify as a result of liberal humanism and an almost religious belief in western style progress.

There are many other examples of how human rights programmes, whether allied to economic and military ambitions or not, have created complex consequences. How we measure the success or otherwise should not just be in the terms of the policy but from multiple viewpoints. Often the rights of one group are not commensurable with the rights of other groups or with society as a whole (just as individual rights can never be fully harmonised). Changing the status of groups or individuals can disturb overall social solidarity, opening it up to divisive elements both internally and externally. This can be clearly shown in the introduction of village democracy (the Panchayat system) into parts of India which has to a large extent reinforced local power structures and corruption. Where this change has been resisted by tribal communities (who still work with hereditary male village headship), then opposition to external interests such as mining groups and national political groupings has been much stronger and more robust<sup>36</sup>. As Georges Sorel once wrote "Democracy is the paradise of which unscrupulous financiers dream." It is often only traditional societies and customs which can resist mass globalisation and exploitation through the twin efforts of human rights and capitalism.

We are to a large extent entering a period when the assumptions of the past few decades are being challenged on a number of levels. Practically it cannot be said, either in terms of environmental protection or in terms of social justice, or even in economic terms that sustainability policies have worked or seem to be able to work. There is therefore an important space and time for new considerations of both means and ends. However, before practical alternatives are considered, it is important to go further upstream into the assumptions which dominate mainstream sustainability, and which are also being questioned.

### **Philosophical failure**

As identified above one of the main assumptions in the mainstream paradigm is scientific positivism. This is not just a method based upon measurement however. It is a whole paradigm in itself. Wikipedia has a very clear definition

"Positivism is the philosophy of science that information derived from logical and mathematical treatments and reports of sensory experience is the exclusive source of all authoritative knowledge, and that there is valid knowledge (truth) only in this derived knowledge. Verified data received from the senses are known as empirical evidence. Positivism holds that society, like the physical world, operates according to general laws. Introspective and intuitive knowledge is rejected, as is metaphysics and theology."

---

<sup>35</sup> I am being ironic

<sup>36</sup> From personal research in this area, but also see works by F Padel, Arundhati Roy and others.

This division between objective and subjective, or between primary and secondary qualities is something that became a major theme of science and philosophy in the early Enlightenment period and particularly in the work of Galileo, who was perhaps the founder of modern positivist science. As pointed out by Bortoft<sup>37</sup> Galileo made a “fundamental division between those qualities of nature which can be quantified and those which cannot, such as colour”. This was not just a methodological division, but an ontological one. “Galileo takes those qualities which cannot be directly mathematicised out of nature altogether and relocates them entirely within the human being.” Anything that hasn’t got a number is subjective and “secondary” and doesn’t exist ontologically in the same way as those which can be counted. Galileo was in the tradition of atomists which goes back to the ancient Greeks and stretches forward to modern atomists such as Richard Dawkins.<sup>38</sup>

An unambiguous quotation from Peter Atkins, the distinguished chemist, in his essay *The Limitless Power of Science* (1995) may serve to illustrate how this attitude continues in some mainstream science today:

‘Although poets may aspire to understanding, their talents are more akin to entertaining self-deception. They may be able to emphasise delights in the world, but they are deluded if they and their admirers believe that their identification of the delights and their use of poignant language are enough for comprehension. Philosophers too, I am afraid, have contributed to the understanding of the universe little more than poets... They have not contributed much that is novel until novelty has been discovered by scientists....While poetry titillates and theology obfuscates, science liberates.’<sup>39</sup> Richard Dawkins puts this more succinctly when he wrote ‘Science is the only way we know to understand the real world’<sup>40</sup>.

Although positivism is now much discredited in sociological and philosophical thinking, it still dominates much of our scientific world<sup>41</sup> as well as policy making. It is a major reason for the emphasis on “evidence-based” policy, and lies behind the idea that Big Data is the way forward for problem solving.

There are several important assumptions which should be noted:

1. Reality is composed only of materiality
2. Material reality is made up of bits, which must be measurable to be real (this is what is called Reductionism)
3. Interactions happen between individual bits in precise and definable single causal connections, at distinct moments in time and space. There are no other effects and no other causal mechanisms.
4. The whole is the sum of the parts only interacting in singular causal connections. The whole does not exist as something in itself.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> H Bortoft, *Taking Appearance Seriously* p..

<sup>38</sup> Galileo’s “scientific” division of the world was taken up philosophically by Descartes as *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, but in doing so inverted the ontological priority, claiming that the human consciousness was active and more real than passive “nature” (which included the human body)

<sup>39</sup> From *Nature’s Imagination* ed John Cornwell, OUP 1995 p123, as quoted in *Mary Midgely Science and Poetry*, Routledge 2001 p21

<sup>40</sup> As quoted in *Midgely* p 9

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Hawking is a self proclaimed positivist, as are many of the strident neo-Darwinists such as Richard Dawkins. See *Mary Midgely: Science and Poetry* (2001); Routledge, for a very clear philosophical explanation and refutation of positivism. See also *Henri Bortoft: Taking Appearance Seriously*

<sup>42</sup> As Henri Bortoft remarks in his book *Taking Appearance Seriously*, this is not really a whole. It is what he describes as an “inauthentic whole”.

Under such a theory, the feelings we may have of beauty, love, anger, even free will are nothing more than neural impulses in our brains, set off by a series of other material sensations etc. These material reactions are governed by laws. So the challenge is to understand the bits and the laws. If we can do this we will know the truth (even though metaphysically it does not exist) and be able to take control of our world and lives for our own purposes (even though free will is an illusion, as it is not material).

It may seem absurd that such a doctrine can ever have been taken or is still being taken seriously. Indeed, positivism as a philosophy is long discredited and has been superseded by phenomenological and post modern theories, as discussed below. In sociology and anthropology it has also been superseded by many new and more fruitful approaches. Furthermore, positivist science based upon its materialist, deterministic and atomistic view of the world is also now much discredited in much modern physics, where the questions of subjectivity and consciousness are now important. Mary Midgely, the philosopher, writes in her book *Science and Poetry*:

‘Traditional materialism [ie positivism] . . . asks us to believe in a world of objects without subjects, and – since we ourselves are subjects, being asked to do the believing – that proposal makes no sense. This vision is no more plausible than the idealist alternative of subjects without objects, indeed it is actually less so. The trouble is quite simply that the Cartesian concept of matter, which was framed in the first place as contrast to mind, cannot be extended to take in its opposite without losing its meaning. In order to be stretched in that way it would need to be entirely reshaped. As it happens, theoretical physicists are actually not engaged in reshaping that concept for a number of reasons, two of which are sharply relevant to this topic. One of these is their rejection of traditional determinism. The other is a difficulty about the status of “observers” who are apparently subjects. Physicists, in fact, now find the seventeenth-century vision of matter unusable for their current purposes and they want to devise a new conceptual scheme to replace it. ....they tend now to reject terms such as materialism altogether.

‘Many biologists and social scientists, however, do not seem to have yet heard news of this change in physics. They still vigorously promote traditional mechanism, atomism and materialism along with the determinism which went with them’<sup>43</sup>

For Midgely and indeed for common sense, the idea that all that really exists is only material is belied by the most basic kind of reflection on our world and how we act. She identifies money, football and politics all as immaterial realities which have a very material effect on the material world. It is no good trying to analyse them in a positivist manner by looking at the molecules and atoms in pound coins or footballs, or the neural connections in the politician’s brain. These will tell us nothing about the power these things have in the world, a power which alters physical reality as well as consciousness on a huge scale. The attempts to assess social reality in a positivist manner, from Saint-Simon to Herbert Spencer and more recently EO Wilson and Richard Dawkins (with his idea of memes), are both self-contradictory and ridiculous. Dawkins proposes that memes (as cultural ideas or fashions) operate in a similar way to “selfish” genes, competing and seeking self-replication in human minds. But what are these memes? They do not have a material basis and furthermore ideas do not act in this way. This is another example of the misapplication of one way of thinking into another sphere where different criteria and categories are required. The attempt to reduce all of reality, including consciousness, to one system is a totalitarian fantasy which can never work.

---

<sup>43</sup> Midgely, op cit p12

Mary Midgely attributes the continuing power of positivism not to its scientific or philosophical validity but partly to the fact that it has a clear and easy-to-use theory of causality (based on singular interactions between elementary particles – something which is taken up by utilitarian economists using the individual as the basic unit), which can then be turned into a mathematical model. Policy makers in particular like models and numbers because they seem to give control. The fact that they don't bear much relation to reality or have missed whole areas of reality (which then return to bite them as "unintended consequences") is less important than their usability.

### **Moral and human failure**

If positivism and materialist science are now significantly questioned, then what about the concepts behind utilitarian and neo-liberal economics and indeed those which underlie the ideas of individual human rights?

In some ways these are all part of the same assumptions, as shown previously. They are based upon a reduction of society to its basic element (the individual) and a dismissal of anything which cannot be measured or quantified. This can be shown by a famous quotation from Bentham, the founder of utilitarian economics:

'prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure it is more valuable than either. Everybody can play at push-pin: poetry and music are relished by only a few. The game of push-pin is always innocent: it were well could the same be asserted of poetry. Indeed between poetry and truth there is a natural opposition: false morals and fictitious nature.'<sup>44</sup>

This short quotation is almost a summary of the prejudice of mainstream thinking nowadays against heritage as elitist, immoral (irrational and potentially dangerous), and of less truth than day to day economic behaviour and consumer choice. In the eyes of this paradigm "there is a natural opposition" between its values and those of poetry and heritage. Again there is a dualism between subjective feelings and the "hard" reality of economic activity, based upon individual choice (itself based upon utility maximising rational behaviour of the competing economic agent – something which we can model and mathematise because it works to logic not culture or feeling).

This double dualism (within science and economics) enters deeply into our attitude towards the natural world and our relationship to it. Nature is a resource which can and should be used for rational and economic human purposes. This is explicit in much mainstream sustainability policy. For example Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said this at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference at Nagoya, Japan in October 2010: 'Nature provides countless services for free, but we need to take steps now to protect and improve it before we lose these benefits for good. If we get it wrong, growth will be curtailed. That is why we must reach a new target to reduce the loss of species.'<sup>45</sup> Economic growth is portrayed as the most important reason for protecting biodiversity, or at least is seen as a necessary justification for any action on the environment.

This kind of "anthropocentric" logic is taken to its extreme in the writings and speeches of Dr Alan Knight, Sustainability Director for Arcelor Mital and formerly of Virgin and B&Q, also a member of the Sustainable Development Commission, who said at a conference recently "Sustainability is not about ethics, it's about logistics. It's about how we get nine billion people to a plasma screen

---

<sup>44</sup> J. Bentham 'The Rational of Reward' (1825) in The Works of Jeremy Bentham ed J Bowring 1838-43 vol 2 p 253 as quoted in The Master and His Emissary by I. McGilchrist, Yale University Press 2009 p 340.

<sup>45</sup> As reported in the Times newspaper at the time

lifestyle by 2050”<sup>46</sup>. This approach is repeated consistently on his website<sup>47</sup> which has the strap line “Rethinking Corporate Sustainability – If only we ran the planet like a shop!”

This statement (that sustainability is about logistics not ethics) assumes that the market is value neutral, that western notions of progress and consumerism are inevitable, and that environmental challenges are technical rather than moral. It means that traditional and alternative cultures are irrelevant and not part of the future of mankind, societies which in many cases have lived sustainably with their natural environment for many centuries in cultures based on a reciprocal understanding and reverence or respect.

This attitude of Dr Knight’s might be seen as extreme, but could also be seen to be the underlying assumptions of the political and economic structures and policies which have dominated our world for the past few decades. It is entirely present in the sustainability charters and policies which we examined in Section 2 of this paper. The belief that “the market will solve all our problems if only we can liberate it” is strongly embedded in much political thinking and increasingly in international law, for example in World Trade Agreements. It also lies behind the approach of Stern and others to dealing with Climate Change. It is also behind the Carbon War Room, set up by Richard Branson, which is completely dedicated to “solving climate change” through business.

But is this view really acceptable? Does anyone really agree with it, apart from a few extremists and neo-liberals? Do most people think about their pets or the birds which sing as “providing services for free”, or about the landscapes we inhabit as merely a resource to feed us and provide minerals for manufacturing, so that we can spend our time watching plasma screen television? And yet these ideas are embedded at the heart of science and economics in our culture. How did this happen?

Heidegger in his work *The Question of Technology* looks into the roots of these modern attitudes and traces them back to ancient Greek philosophy. They arise from the tendency to identify our world as made up of entities, and to forget that prior to entities is Being from which things arise and have their reality. However like many he sees the dominance of the idea of a world based upon things, a reductionist world, as coming to fruition with Descartes and modern science.

Heidegger defines “modern technology” as a “revealing” and a “representing”. What it reveals is a human mind-set or a set of values and attitudes towards the world, particularly nature. This is prior to science; it is the reason why science develops as it has. In this mind-set Nature is revealed as “a standing reserve”. He writes that “earth now reveals itself as a coal-mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit”. This revealing obscures the other meanings of earth, soil, nature, and inhibits us from being able to think about them in different ways unless we go against the dominant mind-set of Technology. The question is whether in our use of science to understand and explore the world we have revealed the truth about ourselves and nature or whether in fact we have moved as Heidegger would argue into an inauthentic understanding, one which diminishes our humanity and the world, and which misses essential Being, which is the foundation of all reality, all values and all truth.

Arne Naess, a philosopher in the Deep Ecology movement, characterises this difference between a technological approach and an authentic one, as a choice as between deep and shallow ecology: “Deep ecology may be said to have a religious component, fundamental intuitions that everyone must cultivate if he or she is to have a life based on values and not function like a computer. Shallow

---

<sup>46</sup> See his website for similar text.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.dralanknight.com/>



ecology, if taken to its logical extreme, is like a computerised, cost benefit analysis, designed only to benefit humans".<sup>48</sup>

However, this is not really to the benefit of humans. As Gary Snyder writes

"Human beings themselves are at risk – not just on some survival-of-civilisation level, but more basically on the level of heart and soul. We are ignorant of our own nature and confused about what it means to be a human being."<sup>49</sup>

The problem we face is that while very few people believe in the reductionist position of what I have called the dominant paradigm, our economics and politics are based upon this. It is as though we are living under foreign rule, being forced to harm our own society and land, against our will. And yet part of us not only submits to this alien authority, but encourages and supports it. Part of this is because the reductionist approach, this alien empire, also has attached to itself strong emotive values and rallying calls, which taken on their own seem to be good. These are values such as progress, individual human rights, personal freedom of choice, meritocracy and democracy.

At the heart of modern identity is not only the idea of the human being as consumer or "rational self-interested utility maximiser" but also the idea of someone with rights. It is difficult to criticise the notion of human rights without incurring almost universal disapprobation. As John Gray writes in the introduction to his book *Straw Dogs*: "Today liberal humanism has the pervasive power that was once possessed by revealed religion. Humanists like to think they have a rational view of the world; but their core belief in progress is a superstition, further from the truth about the human animal than any of the world's religions"<sup>50</sup>. People who question the tenets of liberal humanism are heretics.

However it can be argued that human rights, while important in defending the integrity of individuals in certain situations, are also the cause of significant conflict and confusion. John Gray makes this point in his book *The Two Faces of Liberalism*, where he shows in many examples how the concept of rights cannot be harmonised and inevitably leads to conflict. Indeed rights can be seen as a part of the same reductionism present in economics and science and just as incomplete and distorting in their effects. Just as what is lost in positivism and neo-liberalism is a sense of the whole, so with human rights, the idea of being part of the whole, of *being* part of one undivided humanity or creation, is absent. This I am arguing, is more natural and more true, and in a sense is prior to and more important than, the idea of the individual as a distinct and competing unit.

This is not to say that human rights are wrong, but only that they are incomplete and, without a sense of the whole, will inevitably lead to selfishness and conflict. A traditional view of the individual as part of the whole of society (and indeed of creation), with duties to others within society (and to nature) could offer a context in which human rights can flourish without the negativity that often arises from them. Just as importantly it would allow traditional societies, including many Muslim communities even within our own country, to be valued and accepted properly, and not to be seen as undeveloped or ignorant. We could then move to what John Gray describes as "value pluralism", a way of living with difference and diversity which is not dominated by a particular ideology. This is of course more complicated than the idea that there are universal rights which can be universally applied, but it is both more realistic and more reciprocal. Out of such reciprocity, a kinder and more creative understanding of different communities and cultures could arise.

---

<sup>48</sup> In *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* ed G Sessions; Shambhala Publications 1996

<sup>49</sup> Also in *Deep Ecology* op cit

<sup>50</sup> Foreword to the paperback edition: Page xi *Straw Dogs* by John Gray, publ. Granta 2002.

In everyday life of course, most people do have a sense of the whole, and furthermore act with love and compassion without making rational calculations about costs and benefits. The understanding of the human being in the dominant paradigm of political discourse is neither accepted intellectually or lived on a day to day basis by almost anyone on this planet, even those bound up in scientific fundamentalism, utilitarian economic models, or ideologies of rights. No one can live by reason, materialism or legalism alone. Believing in the truth and efficacy of non-material values and forces, such as love, beauty and spirit and using these as the basis for an alternative model of science, governance and economics is difficult because of the iron cage of positivist logic and the usefulness of such logic in ordering our society and its activities. However there is no solid basis in either experience or philosophy for the dominant view of the human. The time has come to ask questions about what it means to be human and how different understandings of ourselves would lead to very different sustainability policies, different economics, different science and different notions of human rights and responsibilities.

## 8. Heritage and modernity

### The challenge of modernity

It would be wrong to characterise modernity only by positivism and to place tradition in opposition to this rather impractical and flawed representative of modern thought. Positivism is still the driving force in much policy making, some areas of social and physical science (particularly biology), but in philosophy it has been superseded to a large extent by phenomenology and post modernism. The history of philosophy and science as well as economics, human rights and indeed current thinking about and within heritage thinking have to be seen in the context of what Hobsbawm calls “the greatest transformation in human history since remote times” which is the scientific and industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

To some extent modernity arises, as Giddens writes, when “the claims of reason replaced those of tradition”. This is an important point. Tradition means not old practices and prior technologies and beliefs, but a way of being in the world which was accepting and confident of the ultimate meaning and order of creation. Giddens makes the point that modernity is not so much constituted by the material, technical or even social changes of the past 200 years, but by what he calls “wholesale reflexivity”, which evolves from the prioritisation of reason over tradition and which ends up questioning everything, even its own basis. This means that “we can never be sure that any given element of ... knowledge will not be revised”. Indeed the whole buildings conservation movement, as pointed out by Miles Glendinning<sup>51</sup>, is a product of modernity, of an age when we feel cut adrift from the past and anxious about the future.

It is in this context that people search anxiously for some kind of certainty. But the ground keeps slipping from under their feet, even as regards science. Popper wrote “We cannot identify science with truth, for we think that both Newton’s and Einstein’s theories belong to science, but they cannot both be true, and they may well both be false”. In philosophy, the Logical Positivists searched for a defining language and reality in the attempt to re-establish order, but the world would not conform to their rationality.

The philosophical and anthropological context is therefore in one sense wide open to new non-positivist/ materialist understandings, but in another sense, it is still hostile to traditional understandings because of the continuing importance of reflexivity. We cannot go back to a place prior to modernity, where we had a generally accepted world view which was based on tradition. Indeed we should not want to go back from this position, both because actually we have a huge amount to learn from modernity and also because we cannot now forget our reflexivity. Those who do go back are all fundamentalists of one sort or another (either religious or scientific), because they have to create a world of certainty which excludes this reflexivity. Indeed, as has often been pointed out, fundamentalist religious groups in this current age are not throwbacks to past times, but are completely modern. They are part of the anxiety of modernity.

Are we then lost in a world of relativism or fundamentalism? What can we learn from the past which may assist us in moving to a position which meets our own understandings of what it means to be human in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is not either hopeless or deluded?

---

<sup>51</sup> Glendinning M 2013 The Conservation Movement

It is suggested here that the past in heritage, tradition and the embodied reality of old buildings could have a major part to play in our discovering or at least re-discovering such a position, which is one in which the sense of the whole is reasserted not as a totalising or logical construct, but as one in which all the variety of this world including our own subjectivity and physical reality is part of a pluralistic but unitary act of continuous creation. This is what might be called a third way, beyond and incorporating both reason and tradition. If tradition gave us identity in a profound sense, and reason gives us reflexivity and the tools for a new understanding of self and world, then the combination of both could provide a basis for a new paradigm or at least a new direction.

The idea of a new paradigm has been recently articulated very clearly and publicly by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. He specifically names the existing dominant paradigm as “the technocratic paradigm” based on reductionism, materialism and the power of the markets. He suggests that it is not possible to overturn it or do without it (in the short term), but at the same time is looking for a new paradigm based as he says upon “integral humanity”, a new or at least renewed relationship of human beings to each other and to nature (and of course, for the Pope, with God), a paradigm which combines modern science and understanding with a fuller understanding of the human self and purpose, which in a sense combines the best of modernity and tradition.

It is this integration of science and a holistic and mystical understanding of our world which was also so important to the Nobel prize winning physicist Schrodinger (discoverer of wave mechanics in quantum mechanics), who spent much of the later years of his career, as he wrote “clearing the way for a future assimilation of the doctrine of identity with our own scientific world view without having to pay for it by a loss of soberness and logical precision.” For Schrodinger reinstating our sense of the whole was not only essential for all morality and even for science, but was a return to a deeper truth about ourselves. “As inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you – and all other conscious beings as such – are all in all. Hence this life of yours... is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the *whole*”.

Or as Einstein wrote: “the most beautiful and profound emotion is the sensation of the mystical. Those to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, are as good as dead.”

### **Learning from modernity and other disciplines**

In order to understand how heritage can help create a new discourse about sustainability, some self-reflexivity is required within the conservation sector and in its thinking and practice. We have already seen how heritage thinking has evolved over the past 150 years, but we have not looked at criticism of this view from a wider modernist point of view, only in how heritage thinking and practice have been sidelined or rejected by the mainstream paradigm.

Victor Buchli in his book *An Anthropology of Architecture*<sup>52</sup> charts the development of the various different anthropological approaches to buildings over this period. Buchli identifies 7 different approaches which have very different perspectives. In some ways these correspond to the philosophical approaches discussed above, in particular phenomenology and post structuralism, with the positivist rationalist approach being seen as largely outdated or redundant. These result in looking at buildings from multiple viewpoints and being part of human society and life in multiple ways. We can see buildings as

- Historical objects

---

<sup>52</sup> An anthropology of architecture; V Buchli 2013, Bloomsbury Academic

- Evolutionary forms
- Objects of human use
- Places where power is developed, enforced and manifested (within and beyond the household)
- Places where conflict and unity within a community or culture are represented and resolved (this applies particularly to public buildings)
- Kinds of bodies which mirror and interact with human bodies
- Receptacles for culture and its transmission

If we compare these with the way heritage assesses buildings we can see how much more there is to consider about buildings. The understanding of the building as a person, or as animate in some ways exists strongly in anthropological literature both of non-western societies and in the west (particularly in times of crisis). This feeling which people have for even ordinary buildings is much more lived and involved than the pure feelings we might have about certain cultural monuments (the awe and sense of beauty beloved of heritage writers).

Throughout the book there is an underlying criticism of heritage thinking which Buchli rightly claims is still partly stuck in a narrow 19<sup>th</sup> century view of the world which bemoans modernity, but which is itself reductionist (in that the buildings as things are separated from their use or their inherent cultural complexity). Buchli writes: "A certain strain of the literature on vernacular form bemoans the loss of "authentic" traditions in the face of modernisation... New forms and practices are often marginalised... or briefly discussed against the increasingly threatened and diminishing forms of authentic traditions"

He also writes that "The fixity of the dwelling in terms of its formal characteristics and its normative institutions have tended to dominate understandings of architectural forms" and consequently many in heritage and other disciplines have overlooked not only changes to form but how building use can entirely change meaning and understanding. For example the way that building form and use together structure and reproduce gender roles and social hierarchy is one way in which understanding of use can change our view of a building, and also as to what buildings mean in relation to each other within a particular built environment.

Furthermore Buchli correctly points out that "Within archaeology, the issue of preservation and heritage has called into question restoration practices in terms of what these practices do to maintain certain narratives, primarily those surrounding nation-building practices, economic development and universalising notions of Euro-American values, as can be understood from within such concepts and institutions as UNESCO world heritage sites." A lack of reflexivity and self-criticism about the role of heritage and traditions can easily allow it to be co-opted by the dominant paradigm.

The way buildings are understood, built and used in different cultures across the world can contribute significantly to our own understandings of old buildings and practices in our own land. Too often we project our own ideas onto the past and use history as a way of reinforcing our current ways of thinking. By examining how living tribal, peasant and religious cultures understand, build and use buildings in the present day, we may find new insights into our built heritage. The work of anthropologist Tim Ingold<sup>53</sup> is particularly good at exposing how our modern "scientific" world view completely misses the meaning of many non-western cultures through material activities such as hunting, growing or building. Indeed he contrasts the idea of "building" cultures to those of "dwelling" cultures, distinguishing modern society which assumes that humans impose themselves

---

<sup>53</sup> See for example T. Ingold *The Perception of the Environment* 2000; Routledge

and their material culture (including buildings) on the objectified environment, from those in which both humans and their culture arise within an environment which both nurtures human culture and is also nurtured by humans. This fundamental difference is hard to understand from within our current culture but through anthropological examples could transform our understanding of our historic built environment.

What this very brief review of anthropological thinking demonstrates is that not only are there many valid ways of understanding buildings and the heritage of the past, but that heritage values are not either self-evidently good or in any way complete. In addition to the reasons given in section 3 above as to why Heritage and Culture are not part of Sustainability agendas, what Buchli sees as the rather simplistic chocolate box view of heritage and traditional buildings may well be another reason for heritage's failure to be taken seriously in debates about the future. Heritage thinking has to get to grips with reality, dirt, power, and feeling in a much broader and deeper way than perhaps it has till now, if it is to contribute to the debate about the future fully. It needs a new framework within which to operate and it needs to think deeply about what it really believes in. We will address this in the next section.

## 9. Towards a new approach to old buildings

If this paper is correct in its argument that the mainstream paradigm of which sustainable development is a part is both flawed and increasingly redundant, and that a new pluralist approach is necessary, what are the key questions and issues we need to be addressing, and what role can heritage thinking, traditional practice and old buildings play?

The further we have gone into this discussion the more it is obvious that the questions we need to ask in order to develop a new approach are very fundamental ones, such as what is a building? What are buildings for? And related to this, what are people for? As we have shown when considering paradigms the fundamental assumptions about humans, reality, purpose, knowledge, and causality are all connected and part of a single paradigm. If this paradigm is flawed and a new paradigm is needed, then it must be based on new assumptions, ones which meet our understanding of ourselves and reality more accurately and more meaningfully.

As Heidegger wisely put it “Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build”. At present I think we are confused as how to dwell in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in the sense of *being* and *belonging* in a building, place or society, and so we cannot build well or consider buildings in their fullness. We are to some extent lost in alien world full of bits which don’t seem to fit together. If we try to build without being capable of dwelling, we find that instead of building up, we are fragmenting our lives, alienating ourselves from nature and creating ugliness. How then can we start to understand what it means to dwell? This is the question which is central to the task of heritage now.

### A new understanding of old buildings

One of the important lessons from the anthropology of buildings is that buildings are not only things but are also ideas and relationships. This truth is expressed also in conservation debates about “intangible” values and the need to understand tradition as a continuity of practice, not of objects. However this understanding has not entered very deeply into actual conservation work, in the way heritage is promoted and understood in policy or in the public. If anything we have moved further away from understanding the practices and reality of the past and have made our notion of heritage a fantasy of our present. In a review of Lowenthal’s recent revision of his book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Professor Robert Tombs writes

‘ For Lowenthal these seemingly contrary responses are symptoms of the same problem: failure to understand the past, for which the first requirement is to realise that it was different from the present — a “foreign country”, in L P Hartley’s famous words, where “they do things differently”. It took human beings many centuries to comprehend this, and now we are forgetting it again in a culture obsessively focused on the present. We imagine our ancestors as merely ourselves “in fancy dress”. History has become an incoherent global costume drama without context or continuity.

Lowenthal argues that this is a huge intellectual and psychological loss, for we need “a realistic, liberating and self-respecting past”. He ends with a heartfelt call to accept collective responsibility for the past and its consequences: “The past is integral to our being ... live courageously with its totality.”

This idea of a realistic notion of the past which challenges our notions of the present, can only thrive within a pluralist as well as a self-aware present.

One way in which we avoid the reality of the past is by reducing it to its material content. There is of course nothing wrong with understanding a building in terms of its material components or its age

and history, but this is not as full as understanding how it fitted into and also structured the society of the past, how it established relationships between people, nature and spirit, how it was representative of a different kind of society based upon very different assumptions, as well as a different social and economic structure. Only in probing these areas can we defend our history from its falsification by present day fantasies or anxieties, and start to understand how old buildings might help us in understanding social and human possibilities for the future.

In particular the relationship of people, buildings and nature is central to much thinking about how a future sustainable society might be possible. Buildings use the most resources and energy of all human activities, and also provide the most important social, economic and cultural environment for us to live in and enjoy. Our current relationship with nature through buildings is primarily one of exploitation and resource use (or conservation); our economic view of buildings is almost entirely dominated by the idea of asset value and investment; and our social understanding of buildings has also been reduced in many cases to that of a step on the property ladder, or a building as purely functional and financial, unconnected to our social world. These attitudes are neither desirable nor sustainable in the true sense of the word. Neither have they been present for most of history and in most parts of the world.

In his seminal book, *House Form and Culture*, the geographer and ethnologist Amos Rapoport divides houses<sup>54</sup> into three types: “

1. *Primitive*. Very few building types, a model with few individual variations, *built by all*
2. *Preindustrial vernacular*. A greater, though still limited, number of building types, more individual variation of the model, *built by tradesmen*
3. *High style and modern*. Many specialized building types, each building being an original creation, designed and *built by teams of specialists*”<sup>55</sup>

Although it might be argued that Rapoport has missed out certain categories<sup>56</sup>, nonetheless, he is correct to identify one of the main features of the change between house types as “a process of differentiation in building types and spaces, the building process and the trades involved.” This process of differentiation is found in most areas of human activity through history from pottery making to agriculture and now in science and industry. In the history of buildings is most marked in the change between pre-industrial and industrial/modern buildings.

This process of differentiation is part of a changing relation not only between people, but also between people and nature. Rapoport also has three classifications relating roughly to his three categories above, where the relationships move from Thou-I to I-Thou to I-It between Man and Nature. “

1. *Religious and cosmological*. The environment is regarded as dominant and man is less than nature
2. *Symbiotic*. Here man and nature are in a state of balance and man regards himself as responsible to God for nature and the earth, and a steward and custodian of nature

---

<sup>54</sup> Here we are considering houses, but most of the arguments are relevant to all buildings.

<sup>55</sup> A Rapoport: *House Form and Culture* 1969; Prentice-Hall Inc. P 8

<sup>56</sup> He has clearly missed out what in the next paragraph he calls “modern vernacular” or in a later chapter “tract housing”, which refer to many self-built houses in the world in modern times, built without specialist architects or tradesmen. These can be trailer parks, urban slums or more individual buildings self-built to a common pattern. He has also missed out the most common form of housing in the UK, which is industrial modern housing, produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century across our industrial and commercial towns and up to the present day in suburbs and new towns by speculative housebuilders.



3. *Exploitative*. Man is the completer and modifier of nature, then creator, then finally destroyer of the environment

In the first two forms nature and the landscape are a *Thou*, the relationship is personal and nature is to be worked *with*, while in the third nature is an *It* to be worked *on*, exploited and used.”<sup>57</sup> These different attitudes have very different consequences for building design, form, layout and relationship to site and the wider environment and in Rapoport’s mind (in an examination of traditional African villages and modern industrial townships) are the reason why “the effects of primitive man on the landscape are minimal” and why there is a “charm and vitality of the traditional forms” whereas there is “drabness, dullness and monotony of the new ones”. This is more than just “the charm of the picturesque. The unity of plan, site and materials in traditional villages generates an enthusiastic response even in most lay observers. Much of this response is evoked by harmony with the landscape, as well as a feeling of fitness of purpose, directness, and forcefulness... The quality of these buildings is due as much to their being an expression of group consciousness as to the blending of building and land into a whole. .. In the new townships the grid destroys both the intimate scale and the link with the land.”<sup>58</sup> In fact generally “the de-sanctification of nature has led to the de-humanisation of our relationship with the land and the site.” It might also be added that the grid represents a very abstracted and mathematical view of buildings which is in accord with modern scientific understanding of the world and how it can and should be ordered. The de-sanctification of nature is a part of this abstraction and desire to control and impose rational ideas on nature and humankind.

This fundamental point is reiterated elsewhere in the literature about traditional and modern buildings. Jane Jacob’s writes that in regard to traditional cultures “It was assumed that there was a “natural” relationship between everyday, lived culture and geographical territory or place – a pre-given or natural order of things embedded in, or confirmed by, one’s locality... Modernity... delivers us away from this embedded mode of dwelling and injects us into a more dis-embedded and rationalized and individuated being in the world.... No longer subjects of fate, we are active agents of rational choice.”<sup>59</sup>

Rapoport makes clear that the ontology of primitive thought also determined the epistemology, just as a modern ontology determines our view of knowledge: “The primary world view is of harmony with nature rather than of conflict or conquest; the concept of man/ not man in primitive societies is above all one of mutuality – man is in nature and one cannot speak of man *and* nature”. Thus the cultural norms and understanding of primitive and traditional (and as we shall see, modern) societies were fundamental in shaping the form of the building, its relationship to site, nature and specific context. In fact Rapoport’s main thesis is exactly this, that “house form is not simply the result of physical forces or any single causal factor, but is the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors in their broadest terms. Form is in turn modified by climatic conditions.. and by methods of construction, materials available and the technology. I will call the socio-cultural forces primary and the others secondary or modifying.....

“A house is a *human* fact, and even with the most severe physical constraints and limited technology man has built in ways so diverse that they can be attributed only to choice, which involves cultural values... In discussing the reasons for the forms of houses and settlements, it may be useful to think of them as physical embodiments of an ideal environment.”<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> A Rapoport op cit page 75

<sup>58</sup> Op cit p77

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in J Steele in Tradition and Sustainability op cit

<sup>60</sup> A Rapoport op cit p47

Rapoport derives or supports this theory by an incredibly thorough analysis of House Form in primitive and pre-modern societies from a very wide range of sources. While material context (of physical environment, methods of construction, technology etc) modifies house form and indeed all building forms as well as settlement and site patterns, it is secondary to the force of culture in affecting material reality. Numerous examples of situations are given, right up to and including modern times, where the material context is similar but the building form and settlement patterns are different and can be related to the world view and values of the particular society involved. It is this marvellous interaction of the constraints and options of specific cultures and natural environments which gives traditional buildings (and to some extent all buildings) their meaning.

This is a very significant point when considering what buildings are, and how they relate to people and nature. In this understanding, buildings represent the ideal of a culture in a material form, within material and other constraints. They are not simply or even mainly a response to our physical needs, or to the physical conditions of the site. They are the manifestation of the relationship between humans, nature (and God), in an interaction with the material context which both reveals and shapes these relationships. However this can be a manifestation of something harmonious or something which to some is ugly, or disconnected. This ugliness is never a reflection of excessive physical or financial constraints but of a disconnected or absent ideal of the good life and the good society. Our buildings are a manifestation of our cultural life and ideals.

This evidence is important both in the way we define a building, as well as types of buildings. A recent paper by K Ellworth Krebs et al entitled 'Home-ing in on domestic energy research: "House", "Home" and the importance of ontology'<sup>61</sup> contrasts the "techno-economic approach" of those studying the "house" with the very different social and practical approach taken by those who study the "home". We shall return to this division later and its consequences. For now it is sufficient to note that, according to the evidence provided by Rapoport we cannot understand either the development, form or the use of houses (and to a large extent all buildings) without understanding them as social and cultural objects and processes. In any definition of buildings therefore we should not reduce this to a technical or economic definition as this will be not only partial but also incorrect. Unfortunately too many heritage sites, buildings, churches and so forth are represented in the literature and guide books as a collection of objects or a history of the material construction and alterations, without any attempt to understand the meaning of the building or place in regard to the society of the time, or how its meaning has changed over the years. As a result we have missed the opportunity to allow the building to speak to us fully and in some ways have reduced it to a narrow functionality.

In asking the question "what is an old building?" we should therefore perhaps move away from trying to divide up buildings by their age and rather consider their use and relationships as primary values and distinguishing features. The definition of a building can follow and extend Rapoport's divisions in the following way:

---

<sup>61</sup> E Ellsworth Krebs, L Reid, CJ Hunter Home -ing in on domestic energy research: "House," "home," and the importance of ontology Energy Research & Social Science 6 (2015) 100–108

Character/ value	Relationship to nature/ the Other	Built by	Relationship to market	Social relationships
Religious	I-I <sup>62</sup>	Any	None	Religious
Tribal	Thou -I	All	None	Tribal/communal
Pre industrial vernacular	I-Thou	Craftsmen	Constrained by guilds and tradition	Hierachical/ reciprocal
Industrial mass housing and buildings	I -It	Tradesmen and industrial processes	Market driven, or government funded	Class based, non-reciprocal

Self-build and designed and high style buildings in modern times are not significantly different from I-it Industrial mass housing, although they can in some cases escape this kind of relationship where the different relationship is explicitly integrated into the design and construction process. An example of this might be Ben Law’s famous house in Prickly Nut Wood which appeared on Grand Designs. He writes on his website “For twenty years I have lived and worked at Prickly Nut Wood. Our lives are symbiotically entwined”. The house is not just about the materials but about the relationship it establishes and represents between the builder/occupant and the natural context. However in this case it is an individual relationship, and not a social relationship. The house to some extent represents a fantasy of our modern society, not an ideal.

The classification above is about relationships. Building form both internally and in regard to other buildings and place reflects these relationships and how buildings and spaces between buildings are used. This does not exclude the dating of the building or site in any sense, as these can also tell us a lot about the context of the building and the changes it has undergone through history. But the date of the building is not so important in itself. It is what it tells us about the relationships and use, about the meaning that is important. So what an old building is depends not on its age, but on its meaning.

Some buildings/sites may well have more than one relationship or value, and these may well change over time. And there may be variations within a type which are highly significant. For example is all industrial mass housing/ buildings so similar? Are the values and usages embedded in Victorian brick terraces the same as those in modern mass built housing estates? Certainly there has been a change in the relationships established between buildings and the community, and there has been a change in build form and materials. But how much change is there compared with pre-industrial vernacular buildings and the relationships embedded there?<sup>63</sup> And what change do we really care about? Why are we desperate to preserve some old buildings and not others? We have to turn to the question of what old buildings are for, in order to be able to clarify further these issues.

---

<sup>62</sup> I-I signifies a relationship of identity with the other. However within religion, as in society generally, there are plural relationships, particular Thou-I and one where there is neither I nor Thou. This therefore a very simplified way of understand how different buildings and their use can signify and mediate different relationships, all of which respond to something in our selves and in our culture.

<sup>63</sup> There is strong historical evidence to show the significant changes to society at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain, which changes were reflected in the way houses and towns were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the way skills were valued and used. For example EP Thompson’s article The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century charts clearly how protest in this period reflected a change from a hierarchical to a class based society. The idea of the builders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century being great craftsmen not subject to modern pressures is dispelled by books such as The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist by Robert Tressell, written in the early 1900s.

### What are old buildings for?

The question of what old buildings are for cannot be answered in an objective way, and we should not pretend that it could or should be. These are questions of values not of facts. These values are much debated in conservation, philosophy and elsewhere. Our values depend on our assumptions about being and purpose. We have tried to answer the question about the being of an old building and of its purpose in history. But to answer the question about what old buildings are for in the future, we have to ask more basic questions of ourselves: what are human beings and what is our purpose? Only then can we address the question of what old buildings are for in the future.

If we return to the paradigm tables we proposed in the sections on sustainability and heritage in sections 2 and 3 we can combine them in the following way

Question	Sustainability Answer	Heritage Answer
What is a person?	An individual with rights	A part of history and nature. A creator and ideally a craftsman and enjoyer of culture and nature.
What is the purpose of people/ the world?	Survival. Values such as equality and personal freedom. Progress	Participation in society, culture and nature. Beauty.

It is obvious straight away that the purpose of old buildings and the policy programme for them under the sustainability assumptions will be quite different from those under the heritage assumptions. From the sustainability assumptions it would seem logical that a building's purpose is primarily functional and about individual choice and personal freedom. A building needs to give shelter, health and security, and enable the occupant to live a life of opportunity and progress. The building has no meaning in itself.

From the heritage assumptions (which are plural) it is logical that a building is about relationships with nature, history and community, as well as both functional survival (as we are part of nature and have natural needs) and beauty. There are therefore several answers to what a building is for in this regard. It is not just for shelter and survival, but also about the other aspects of a person. A building is a way of mediating our relationship with nature, both in the making and in the living. It is a way of mediating and expressing our relationship with fellow human beings. It is a way sometimes of mediating and exploring our relationship with the infinite, with the unknown and unbounded, in beauty and in faith. However all these aspects have to relate to something in a person's being. There is no point in making a building beautiful if there is not something in us which needs beauty and finds meaning in it. So our assumptions about what a person is and what human life and the world is for determine how we value and even see other things such as old buildings.

If we go further and consider the other values in the paradigms table, we can see also how these assumptions will influence what we do with old buildings, how we measure change and how we act to change things for the better, which means to assist in the purpose of people and the world.

Question	Sustainability Answer	Heritage Answer
What is the world, nature?	Non-human nature and inert matter	A place of history, beauty and diversity
What is the relationship of people and world?	Individuals interact with other individuals on what should be an equitable basis. People use nature and the world as a resource for their benefit	People are stewards of culture (here buildings) and nature for future generations. People and nature interact. Buildings are the expression of this interaction.
How do we know?	Measurement. By reducing things to their basic units and adding them together.	By science and by feeling. (not properly defined)
What causes change?	In nature: physical causality and evolution. In society: the actions of individuals in politics and economics. In economics: primarily self-interest, competition which works best in a free market, and technological innovation.	No real theory of change. Conservation philosophy is about responding to change and preserving value.

Sustainability has a very clear answer to the first question which is: what is the world or nature? It is the non-human physical reality. The relationship of people with this reality is one of consumers and resources. It is what Rapoport calls an I-It relationship, an exploitative or at least objectified relationship which is non-reciprocal.

For Heritage it is sometime not very clear what the world is or what our relationship with nature and the world is. We have suggested an ideal in the assumptions given, but in some parts of building conservation and heritage, buildings, nature and the world are no different from the sustainability paradigms' definition ie they are physical realities which are resources. As such they can be measured by numbers and given their meaning in numbers (not only energy numbers, or dates, but also monetary value through Willingness to Pay methodologies). This is an easy mistake to make if we look at buildings as old objects and not as embodiments of relationships. It is easy to make this mistake because the dominant way of assessing the world is reductionist and objectifying.

The idealised answer given in the table above is, however, in line with most conservation and heritage philosophy, as well as with the reality of buildings as explained in this chapter, based upon the actual use and the relationships embedded in the making and history of buildings. However as explained earlier in this section there are several possible relationships, not just one. An I-I relationship with nature is very different from an I-Thou or a Thou-I or an I-It relationship. But all can be present to some extent in a building or a site, and the relative importance of each will often change over time for the same place.

For now it is sufficient to note that for the world to be a place of "history, beauty and diversity" and for this to have meaning through our participation in it in some way, or perhaps in changing ways, there is an implicit assumption that a human being is more than just a physical being and as more than just an individual competing for his/her rights who ultimately only finds meaning in survival. Heritage values speak (or should speak) of different kinds of human being, of ones with different possible relationships with nature, the community and the Other, and consequently of people with heart, soul and spirit, with emotions, intellectual and aesthetic senses. They speak of different relationships to the world than that envisaged by the sustainability paradigm, and consequently a different way of acting in the world, and a different causality, a different way of bringing about change. They speak of different visions of the future and of sustainability.

## 10. The importance of old buildings to sustainability and the future

In the section above we tried to explain how old buildings can express a different notion of society, nature and relationships, all of which rely on a different notion of human being and purpose. The question in this section is: What practical use have old buildings and heritage values for the discussion about the future?

### Lessons for the future from heritage and old buildings

At present not many people in mainstream sustainability are listening to those speaking of cultural difference and heritage values as though they had something important to say. The future is modern, technological (including medical technology), rational and about human rights. It is also focused on “saving the planet” from disastrous climate change. So heritage and culture are a nice-to-have add-on, a show of colour from traditional dancers at the start of yet another international conference on climate change - but of no relevance to the conference.

However if we consider that the future is not just about economic and scientific progress based on individual rights, but is more plural, cultural and less frantic, and may even require us to re-think our assumptions about ourselves and our world, then heritage and old buildings, rather than being primarily objects or relics of outdated societies, can be useful in a profound way. They can help to tell us a broader truth about human beings, and their potential to interact differently with each other and nature, as well as improve and preserve our material world. They might even be important or essential in addressing the challenge of climate change. As such there could be many useful lessons for the future to be found in them. Some of these might be

- Contrast: providing a critique of the present and its paradigm, in particular
  - Societies based on a sense of wholeness not fragmentation, hierarchy and reciprocity not class and individual competition
  - Societies based on non-growth or steady state economics, which were about balance and harmony, not about disruptive progress and linear economic growth
  - Societies which were bioregional –living within the constraints of their local regions
- The value of meaningful work in construction and repair, connecting human beings with nature, as well as opening up the creative and revelatory aspects of man through the physical world and the body.
- The importance and power of non-quantitative values such as beauty, belonging, transcendence.
- The possibility and the importance of pluralism

It should be clear in this that we are not proposing an idealised and unrealistic view of heritage or the past. There was indeed exploitation, ugliness, stupidity, drudgery and superstition but this was not all that was present. Who can stand in York Minster and not wonder at the astounding vision of humanity, nature and God which this embodies, and also not wonder at the fact that such a building was built without computers and cranes, without a free market economy or a democracy? In fact, of course, we could not start to build such a building nowadays, not having the money, skills or time to do so, but more importantly not having a sense of the whole, of the importance of the Other, of the value of the invaluable. It is not just such magnificent buildings however which we can no longer build. We seem, on the whole, unable to build towns and villages with any real beauty or sense of place. It is this, and the questions that arise from it, which old buildings in different ways ask, that is important for our times and for the future.

This beauty and sense of wholeness is not just a nice addition to our world however. It can be argued and indeed has been shown by organisations such as Historic England that historic places can be beneficial for physical as well as mental health. In this sense they are comparable with natural spaces, which have been shown to have significant and measurable impacts on many conditions from high blood pressure to Attention Deficit Disorder and Alzheimer's.<sup>64</sup> Historic places are also often places which allow us space to reflect on our own lives or on other values, just as green spaces can. While the impact of beauty or a sense of wholeness or belonging should not be reduced to something purely functional, it is important to note that the effect of heritage is not only intellectual but also material and actual.

We should not however revert to a position where heritage values are in opposition or contrast to mainstream values, based particularly on scientific positivism, utilitarianism and human rights. This would be dualistic! So it is also essential to promote the value of old buildings on these terms as well. In particular the need for old buildings to be valued according to

- Energy/carbon/ resource/whole life efficiency
- Adaptability, durability and usability
- Technical and behavioural lessons from an energy scarce world

As with the other lessons for the future from old buildings, these characteristics apply more to some types of buildings than others. Old cathedrals are on the whole not very energy efficient (and don't need to be!), whereas cob cottages can be efficient, if maintained well and altered or adapted in some ways in accord with modern understandings of building efficiency and modern ways of living. We are not able to use either cathedrals or cob cottages as they were used in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or at any other time. So let us not pretend that most of us can live today as in the distant past.

However, it is possible to take some of the heritage principles of connection with nature, balance and harmony as well as the value of meaningful work and see how the more modern concerns of the resource efficiency and usability of old buildings are based upon similar core understandings. There is simplicity and integrity at the heart of functional sustainability as well as in the heritage and conservation of old buildings. The idea of repair and maintenance as primary conservation activities applies both as sustainability measures (preserving embodied energy, improving energy efficiency) and as culturally meaningful measures (preserving heritage, encouraging craft skills, increasing the understanding and feelings of people towards their homes etc). What is important is that these meanings should all be present, and that repair and maintenance should not only be seen as functional. When that happens not only is an opportunity lost, but it is likely that the quality of repair and maintenance will fall with bad consequences for property, nation and nature.

This leads to an important point which is that there is no natural opposition between heritage and sustainability, but only between a holistic view of heritage and what is currently mainstream sustainability. There can of course be an alliance between a narrow reductionist view of heritage and utilitarian reductionist versions of sustainability (an alliance which we warn against in section 9), but there is also a natural alliance between what we are proposing as pluralist and holistic heritage values and heterodox versions of sustainability based upon a fuller plural notion of humanity, nature and of purpose. It is implicit in the pluralist and holistic statements in the Nara and Burra documents.

Such a notion of sustainability has been proposed over the years by many people including Gandhi, EF Schumacher, Ivan Illich and the current Pope. In 1993 John Gray wrote a long piece on Green

---

<sup>64</sup> See work of Dr. William Bird, also R Ulrich.

Conservatism where he showed how traditional conservatism of the kind advocated by Burke and others could be easily aligned with ecological thinking through steady state economics and environmental protection. A similar alliance between built environment heritage thinking and a bio-regional type of sustainability (as advocated by Molly Scott Cato, for example, in her book on Bioregionalism), is an easy fit and could be highly creative and productive.

While these lessons for the future from heritage are important to the sustainability debate, they can also give further meaning to conservation principles themselves, both reinforcing their value and changing the way we understand them. For example

- Conservation integrity: the importance of preserving the past as it was so that it can provide contrast and critique for the present, presenting different options for social and economic development
- The value of historic and scientific research to properly illuminate this contrast but also to show the contribution (both good and bad) of old buildings to the environment and society today.
- Repair and maintenance as primary tasks: for many reasons, including conservation integrity, but also based on the idea of the need for less use of resources, improved performance, building of relationships between people and buildings through ongoing care and attention, and the option of a move towards a steady-state economy where activity is about balance, belonging and conservation not about increasing GDP and constant change.
- Craft skills as not just useful for building repair but meaningful for the discussion about the future of work, well-being etc
- Access for all people to buildings which embody different values – the physical presence of old buildings gives them a quite different potential than other forms of historical document in manifesting different values through physical sensations of many kinds, and emotional and spiritual responses. These values will be different in different buildings.
- Participation in the use, repair and maintenance of such buildings, as a way of learning about difference and of connection with nature, society and the Other through physical work.
- Interpretation, in order to bring out meaning (for example drawing on anthropological ideas), which is not always obvious or present in the current way old buildings are defined
- All the above as ways of establishing a new relationship between people, buildings and nature, a new understanding of what it means to dwell here, to belong. Only then, as Heidegger says, will we be capable of building.

#### Different building types and different uses for the future

Do the uses of old buildings for the future, given above, help us to distinguish what is worth preserving in old buildings and what may not be? For example, some industrial terraces may be of no real value in any of these matters, although they may still be worth preserving for other reasons (such as financial or community value).

Below is a table of how we might consider the values of old buildings to the future, considering some of the uses given above. This is not in any way comprehensive or accurate, but is offered as a way of thinking about old buildings, as a potential methodology or tool for assessment.



<b>Value for the future</b>	<b>Which old buildings</b>	<b>Conservation value</b>
Embodied energy/ carbon/ resources	All (including modern existing)	Scientific research Repair and maintenance
Adaptability, durability, flexibility	Most (ie most pre 1919 and probably most up to 1960s), but the best might be Georgian?	Historical research Repair and maintenance
Contrast with the present: A sense of the whole	Religious, tribal, and pre-industrial	Access Interpretation
Contrast with the present: Economics and progress	Tribal Pre-industrial	Craft skills Participation Interpretation
Contrast with the present: Bio-regionalism	Tribal Pre-industrial	Craft skills Participation Interpretation (Needs more?)
Meaningful work	All buildings eventually, but most easily in pre-industrial	Repair and maintenance Craft skills Participation
The importance of non-quantitative values: ie Beauty, spirit of place	Limited special buildings, or settlements	Conservation Integrity Access Interpretation
Pluralist understanding and possibility	All (including modern and new buildings). However at certain times and in certain places cultural and intellectual diversity was far greater than now	All conservation values (But not explicit)

As noted a couple of times in this table, the conservation values perhaps do not fully encompass the value for the future and may need more development, if this way of understanding building conservation and heritage is to be taken forward. What we have tried to do here is merely to suggest that the challenges and opportunities of old buildings and heritage in the discussion about the future, in the public discourse about sustainability, are largely represented in core conservation principles, albeit they require renewal and re-interpretation.

#### The special gift of physical presence

This paper has proposed that heritage is in some ways a sub-set of the category of Cultural Diversity, and stands alongside existing and past non-western cultures. The paper has also referred to the intellectual history of the past, which comes to us in many objects, such as books, paintings, clothing as well as non-material ways, including memories and oral traditions. The main concern of this paper however is old buildings, and they also have a special gift within this category of cultural diversity.

The difference between buildings and other artifacts, cultures, practices of cultural diversity, is that they have an embodied presence which encompasses us. It does this either physically, or in the case of ruins, in our imagination. Buildings are bigger than people, and have a life and reality of their own which is substantial and tangible. It is not only something we see, but which we can feel, smell, hear, and sense with our souls. The presence of the past in a building is both solid and fluid. It is

continually changing, as the building ages, is repaired, or adapted, and yet something of the essence remains, hopefully not too much obscured or traduced by the alterations.

As human beings with hearts, minds, souls and bodies, we can respond this physical presence with all aspects of ourselves. In some ways the lack of words in buildings gives us a freedom to experience them directly, without pre-conceptions and without constant intellectualising. In this way, they are similar to natural sites of beauty or significance, but the difference of course is that we are looking at a human construct in which nature has been transformed, rather than a natural place into which humans have been allowed. Of course there are many ugly buildings and buildings where nature has been wasted or abused. These also have their effect upon us.

For those working on and preserving old buildings, this special gift of physical presence, is something that should be treasured and enhanced. It can be a very powerful tool in opening up new understandings of our buildings, our selves and our future.

### Old buildings and the urgency of climate change

Before finishing this section, we should address an issue which is often raised when talking about the sustainability of old buildings, which is the over-riding need to address climate change before it gets out of control and wreaks havoc on our world. Campaigners talk of the moral imperative to address this issue above all others. There are calls for a Marshall Plan or for a “war effort” to fight climate change, in which all other aims and values are temporarily suspended or made secondary to the primary aim of carbon emission reduction.

There are four main points to consider in this regard. Firstly it is increasingly acknowledged and understood that carbon emissions reductions cannot be addressed as an isolated issue but only as part of a system. Even if a government had power to act in a totalitarian way in regard to carbon emissions reduction the links between carbon emissions, energy generation, energy use, human behaviour, economics, technology and culture are still relatively complex and would require measures which link all of these. Of course one radical solution would be just to prohibit the use of all fossil fuels by all people (except perhaps government and military). But then we would have social, economic and political breakdown such as no-one would willingly countenance. So within a political scenario of some kind of continuity of our current society, carbon emission reduction must rely on a variety of measures which include the way we use buildings and the way we live as social and economic beings. In this context, as argued, heritage could play a major role.

Secondly, it is by no means accepted by all people that climate change is the most considerable threat to humanity. Over the past few years, the rise of international terrorism has raised the possibility of other apocalyptic scenarios, particularly with the possible use of nuclear devices or biological warfare. There are also real threats from epidemics of many types, of catastrophic resource shortages (including water), and of economic and social collapse in many forms. Climate change may be a lesser threat than all of these. However, all can be addressed by taking a holistic (and pluralistic) approach as identified in this paper.

Thirdly, climate change may be considered as a symptom of humanity’s problems not as a cause. This is a common theme in much theological and philosophical commentary on climate change. It is a result of the reductionism and materialism inherent in the dominant paradigm - by treating nature as a resource for unlimited human progress we have created climate change. As such, the idea that we can “solve it” by more of the same is delusional. We have to find alternative paradigms, and as such heritage, tradition and old buildings have an important role to play, not only in terms of core

values, but also by teaching us about ways of living with and in buildings in times of energy scarcity and when society was environmentally and climatically stable.

Finally, it may also be argued that climate change cannot be “solved” by direct plans of action. The system is too complex (we don’t understand the physical system fully and the possible feedback loops and interactions, let alone the interactions with human activity), and even if we could comprehend the system, we do not have the capacity to address it. We therefore have to take an “oblique” path or paths. We have to try something different because it is pointless bashing our heads against a brick wall forever. We should head off in a different direction. We might find we are on the other side of the wall sooner than we imagine. This “way of obliquity” has been studied and promoted by the economist John Keay, amongst others. In regard to climate change, it could be suggested that the first thing we need to do is stop bashing our heads against the wall and look at the wall for its beauty, history and meaning. Heritage, tradition and the reality of old buildings have a lot to offer in addressing climate change in very practical ways. But they also have the added ability to inspire in us a sense of perspective and oblique imaginings. There are many paths to the future.

## 11. Challenges for heritage, tradition and old buildings

This essay has to some extent moved away from the issues of heritage, tradition and old buildings in an attempt to understand the roots of the objections to heritage thinking and the dismissal of the past in any form as redundant and often regressive. Having shown that the basis of these objections is in itself not only dubious but in many cases either discredited or unliveable, we can now see more clearly why the mainstream paradigm is no longer adequate, and consequently why there is a space and a need for a new discourse, particularly one based on a bringing together of traditional understandings and modern methods. We can also see that certain aspects of heritage, tradition and the reality of old buildings could be important in this new discourse – a form of corporate memory which can guide us with the wisdom of experience and different visions of how to live well.

However there are significant challenges which need to be addressed and tackled by heritage thinkers and practitioners if heritage is to be of real value to the future.

### **Hiding away until the storm has passed**

The importance of the role of building conservation organisations as well as conservation companies and informed private building owners in preserving old buildings with integrity and understanding should not be understated. As stated in the foreword, this paper is not about such work, but it must be acknowledged that without this work, much of our built heritage would have fallen into decay or disappeared. It is invaluable work not only for the buildings but for the craft skills and understanding which it preserves. Much of the best, most meaningful, heritage work actually occurs outside of mainstream construction and policy, particularly when daft amounts of money are absent.

However, while this work must carry on and even be enhanced it cannot pretend to exist outside of the flow of modern history. The temptation to hide away until the storm of sustainability legislation has passed is understandable but not sensible, and nearly all conservation bodies understand this. However, many take what might be called a minimalist approach to engagement. It is about holding on to listed building exemptions, making planners and policy makers aware of protections in planning, building regulations etc, raising petitions for the preservation of historic buildings under threat and raising the issue of risk and liability from interventions such as insulation of old buildings (which risks have now been clearly shown to be real). All of these are worthwhile activities, but there are downsides if this is the only or main activity of heritage bodies and concerned groups and individuals.

The downsides to this approach are

1. It can only limit damage to special buildings and places
2. It could be threatened by political changes or by lobbying from more powerful interests to remove protections (such as removal of restrictions on the Green Belt or Conservation Areas for new housebuilding)
3. It allows mainstream policy and practice to continue with the assumptions that much current practice in regard to historic buildings is adequate
4. It doesn't engage at all in the debate about our future.

### **Being co-opted as part of the mainstream sustainability agenda**

While all heritage bodies have learnt a considerable amount from examining carbon and energy in the use of old buildings (as well as in their embodied impact), as well as being able to understand to

a much greater extent the interactions between heat, moisture, ventilation, fabric and people in old buildings, it is important that heritage bodies do not come to see this as their sole way of engaging more actively with the sustainability discourse. There are considerable dangers in going along with this agenda without also promoting the more important values embedded in heritage philosophy. One obvious danger is that ultimately energy and carbon targets could become so demanding that all old buildings will have to be either made into zero carbon buildings or destroyed.

This approach has already been promoted and tried through some of the Pathfinder projects and by work of people such as Brenda Boardman in the report “40% House”<sup>65</sup>. She suggests in an article related to this, that if because of legal requirements, listed and conservation area buildings are exempted from the carbon requirements, that even so “about three-quarters of the pre- 1919 stock (3.75 million dwellings) could be demolished if it proves impossible to bring these properties up to an adequate standard of energy efficiency. This would leave the real architectural heritage, as identified by listing, intact.”<sup>66</sup>

This is both to misunderstand what is “real architectural heritage” as well as to put listed buildings into a category of “pretty but useless”. Moreover other carbon or energy focused campaigners will at some stage almost certainly demand that most listed and conservation area buildings should also be retrofitted or destroyed, if we get to such a desperate situation.<sup>67</sup>

It is essential therefore that heritage bodies collaborate and learn from the energy and carbon analysis, but maintain the importance of other values and uses of old buildings not as add-ons, but as fundamentally important in their own right, and equally part of sustainability.

### **Resisting becoming the opposite of modernism**

It is important that in opposing aspects of modernism, heritage does not become its mirror image, as identified at the end of section 4. This is very easy in an intellectual culture which relies on binary opposites. It is also easy to be drawn into a binary opposition when things of great emotional or even subconscious value are threatened.

However there are many aspects of modernism from which heritage has learnt and can still learn, and there is anyway no possible return to a pre-modern world. This requires an intellectual approach which is pluralistic and inclusive not dualistic and confrontational, as explained in section 8.

### **Heritage as fantasy**

A parallel danger is that heritage becomes part of the commercial Heritage Industry, a sort of fantasy which combines Robin Hood and Game of Thrones. History and heritage are increasingly undermined by television and film programmes of stories from the past, particularly the pre-modern past, which portray modern attitudes and relationships in fancy costumes and “primitive”

---

<sup>65</sup> Boardman, B., Darby, S., Hinnells, M., Killip, G., Layberry, R., Palmer, J. and Sinden, G. (2005) 40% House. ECI Research Report No. 31, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford.

<sup>66</sup> Brenda Boardman (2007) Examining the carbon agenda via the 40% House scenario, Building Research & Information, 35:4, 363-378, DOI: 10.1080/09613210701238276

<sup>67</sup> I was attacked in a public debate by a director of a leading Energy Campaign organisation for saying that heritage buildings had value. This director said that there is no difference between an old building and an oil slick and that both are toxic and should be cleaned up.

technologies. Much of this is laughable, but unfortunately it increases the misunderstanding of the past as well as the misunderstanding of the present, in contrast to the past.

The heritage sector needs to consider this very carefully, as to some extent this fake past is one of the main commercial drivers for the success of heritage sites and events. Perhaps the question is whether an alternative story, or stories, of the past, based upon a more authentic understanding, can be equally interesting to the general public, and can, in the end, replace this fantasy world in which we are increasingly enveloped. This is a challenge for heritage, which may involve them also with engagement with film making and television.

### **Not being confused or intimidated**

In the midst of multiple understandings of the meaning of old buildings, heritage has to be clear about what its core values are and develop these with determination. This is a task in which it has been involved for many years, but which I think will need further review as it opens itself up to other aspects of modernism, anthropology and archaeology in a fuller sense. Furthermore, it has to be strategic and clear about how it can promote its core values in an effective way. This requires determination, political awareness and resources.

It should not be intimidated by this task. The dominant paradigm is failing in many ways and in many areas has lost credibility<sup>68</sup>. The question for heritage is how can it contribute to the creation of a new paradigm, which both opens up meaning for the past and helps to guide the future?

---

<sup>68</sup> For example there are many articles at present about the end of Neo-liberalism and also the democratic consensus, as evidenced by the support for radical and anti-establishment politicians on both left and right.

## 12. A way forward

As stated in the foreword, this paper has not been able to address the more practical issues of how heritage improves its sustainability in every day work. It is the contention of this paper that in order to act sustainably we first need to understand what this means. As we examined what is promoted in charters and policies as sustainable, it became apparent that there is a real conflict between core heritage values and mainstream sustainability values, a conflict which makes dialogue between the two approaches difficult if not impossible. We examined why this was, and concluded that there was a paradigm incompatibility between the two approaches.

We then argued that this incompatibility is not of two entirely different views of the world, but of a singular closed notion, and a pluralist more open notion, which is excluded by the dominant notion from any meaningful integration. We argued that only a pluralist approach can allow the values of heritage to be heard fully and meaningfully.

We have then argued that the sustainability paradigm, which is part of the dominant political paradigm, is both flawed and dangerous. It is not that the science or ideas are wrong, but that they are narrow and incomplete, and as such confuse our understanding of reality, and distort our aims for the future and our relationship with the past. We have suggested that heritage has particular gifts which can and should make a major contribution to the way we think about ourselves, our world and our future, and as such, become a key part of the sustainability discourse. However, there remains the challenge as how to make these gifts available in a way that they will be accepted in mainstream discussion and debate.

### **A pluralist framework for thinking about the future**

We need to create a space in which alternative views can be heard in this debate. Part of the creation of such a space could be the articulation of a pluralist framework, within which different and often opposing ideas are accepted and discussed without the need for one to defeat the other. Such a framework and its articulation require strong and consistent academic and intellectual support.

A pluralist framework is essential in preventing heritage and sustainability becoming binary opposites. It is also the most effective defence against fundamentalism of any type (religious, atheistic, scientific) which is always dualistic (dividing the world into good and bad or true and false).

Pluralism means not simply allowing contradictory values to exist, but engaging with contradiction in a reciprocal manner. This brings self-understanding to both parties, and also, sometimes, new ideas and ways of being. Heritage and sustainability need to meet within a pluralistic framework in order to have meaningful engagement. Furthermore, certainly within Heritage, there are many contradictory views which again should be valued and explored. The past was in many ways much more varied than the present in its paradigms and cultures, and could, at certain times (such as the high Middle Ages in Europe, the early centuries of Islamic history, or much of Indian history) provide a good model for a pluralist approach to knowledge and culture.

### **Taking the intangible seriously**

Unless both non-material realities such as traditions and languages, as well as qualities such as beauty, sense of place and spirit have causality in the real world, they cannot be easily or

consistently incorporated into sustainability policies or into discussions about the future. Whilst, in section 4, we gave many reasons why such values are excluded, we showed in section 7 that the current paradigm (which is the reason for the exclusion), is itself incomplete and unrealistic in many ways. There is serious philosophy<sup>69</sup> and (alternative) science however which does give real value and causality to the intangible. These approaches in many ways draw on or have similarities with traditional ways of thinking and being.

Many of those who promote heritage values try to take them seriously in all aspects of their life. However many also find it difficult to integrate them with modern ways of thinking, particularly in science and medicine, where reductionism and materialism still dominate. It is suggested that we should all be more confident in our convictions and look for ways to develop our collaborations and activities more actively with similar minded sectors and organisations. For example if we believe that the revival of a craft based construction industry is essential to the future of not only our buildings but our society and planet, then we need to be involved in debates about education and economics as well as construction. The development of a bio-regional or steady state economy, is probably the only way that a craft based society can be possible. We need to collaborate with others working in this field and help to provide clear arguments and evidence to show that this is important and possible.

Alternatively if we say that there is a such a thing as spirit of place and that this is not just a metaphor, but has a material reality, then this means we need to start looking at how science and in this case, alternative science (such as the work of David Bohm or Rupert Sheldrake) might start to understand this. Only in this way can we begin to explore and show the causal effectiveness of the values we believe in.

If, as this paper argues, a new pluralist paradigm is required to replace the current dominant paradigm, then this is not just a matter of a new understanding of buildings, but of what it means to be human, what the world is, how we know this world and ourselves, what our purpose is and what causes change. All of these factors already exist in our world, but they are not part of the dominant political paradigm, and are not part of mainstream sustainability, the dominant discourse about the future of our world.

### **A sense of the whole**

Pluralism without mysticism is relativism. Or, to put this another way, unless we have an authentic sense of the whole, multiplicity and diversity will always fragment.

A sense of the whole is essential for heritage if it is to assert its core values. By a sense of the whole we mean not the sum of the parts but something prior to the parts. An example may be found in the way we know a person. If I meet someone for the first time, I do not have to ask a lot of questions about their age, blood group, family background, education history in order to have a sense of the person. I automatically know the person as a whole and the details which I learn about them in the course of conversation or joint activity fill out that picture. I can never know that person fully, because the whole is always beyond understanding and cannot be filled out by even an infinite amount of information. But I know them intrinsically.

It is the same with buildings. We do not have to find out a building's age, U values, history, ownership, material composition etc, in order to know it. When we enter it, we know it straight

---

<sup>69</sup> For example William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* gives excellent arguments for the material causality of religious experience.



away. Indeed we have a sense of it which includes not only physical attributes (including smell, sound, touch, temperature) but emotional, aesthetic, even psychic aspects. As we explore the building we learn more about it and this fills out, and sometimes alters our understanding. But we always know the building as a whole.

This sense of the whole has been well explained by Henri Bortoft in his two major books<sup>70</sup>, and he clearly shows how this authentic whole is very different from an inauthentic whole made up of atomised parts. In an authentic whole, every part is related to the whole and manifests some aspect of the whole. In an inauthentic whole, the parts can be quite disconnected from the whole and even when added up, do not achieve an authentic whole, because they entirely fail to comprehend the relationships or the total manifestation. Bortoft describes reductionist science as having an inauthentic sense of the whole, whereas it is possible to have a science (such as advocated by Goethe, and more recently by Schrodinger, Bohm, Sheldrake and others) which is non-reductionist and leads our understanding and activity in completely different ways.

This is not to say that there is no truth or merit in understanding the world as made up primarily or individuated parts, in the atomistic way that is used in positivist science and utilitarian economics. There is both truth and use in this approach. Indeed, at a philosophical level the idea of the world as meaningless, atomistic and disintegrating should be valued. But why should we accept this as the only way of knowing the world, when our experience, sometimes at least, is of integration, meaning and wholeness?

Unless we have such an authentic sense of the whole, heritage values of beauty, craft, sense of place, spirit, connection with nature and the past and so forth, cannot be properly valued or integrated in our understanding of heritage. Heritage will again be reduced to the sum of its parts and anything which is not measurable will be considered as an add-on, or as epiphenomena. We need to align heritage thinking with the kinds of philosophy and science that attributes real value and causality to aesthetic, cultural and spiritual values as well as thoughts and emotions.

Re-establishing the sense of the whole in heritage as in science, in an intellectually robust manner (albeit, alongside a contrasting reductionist approach), is essential to holistic and non-materialistic values being taken seriously in debate and policy. However, this cannot be solely an intellectual exercise. Unless the sense of the whole is sensed, that is unless we consciously as well as subconsciously understand what this unity of experience means and how it has value, we cannot speak about it. This calls for a return to a mystical understanding of our world, which in turn calls for contemplation in our hearts, souls and bodies.

### **A new role and new responsibility for heritage**

Many people will not agree with much that is written in this paper, and no doubt it will be dismissed by some as unscientific and delusional. However, it should be stated that I did not think I would come to such conclusions when I started this work 2 years ago. While, no doubt, the conclusions are part of how I understand the world generally, I thought that I would be able to find a less philosophical approach to the subject of heritage and sustainability, which led to more pragmatic recommendations.

However, the research has led me to certain unavoidable conclusions, which are that we cannot start to address the issues of sustainability and heritage without considering the assumptions on which they are based, and without confronting these openly and fully. While action at all levels and on all leverage points is necessary (and should not be scorned in any way) unless this action takes

---

<sup>70</sup> The Science of Nature; and Taking Appearance Seriously

place within an understanding of the current assumptions and their impact, it will not, and cannot address many of the core problems and aspirations of heritage, but will rather confuse the situation and create further unintended consequences.

We therefore have to be bold in addressing the paradigm issues which have been mentioned so often in this paper. It is not sufficient to note, as UNESCO do, that cultural diversity is excluded from sustainability charters and then to fill their website and programmes with activities which ignore (and thereby undermine) traditional and non-western value and knowledge systems.<sup>71</sup> It is not sensible for heritage bodies to shy away from the threats which sustainability poses to heritage, sheltering in a heritage corner somewhere, hoping for better policies in the future. It is not responsible for any of us working in this field to ignore the destruction of our planet and our diverse cultures as well as the increasing inequality, ugliness and desperation of much modern life and to hide the gifts of the past from the peoples of this world, gifts which not only provide comfort and meaning, but practical lessons and hope for the future.<sup>72</sup>

The future of the past is not about the past. It is about the future of the future.

---

<sup>71</sup> See for example the themes on the UNESCO website, including the promotion of western style science, education and technologies, but nothing about traditional or non-western knowledge systems

<sup>72</sup> Some examples of practical measures are in Appendix 1

## Appendix 1: Some suggestions

Some practical things heritage bodies could do in order to bring about the changes suggested in this paper to sustainability and heritage thinking:

1. Learning from traditional and alternative sciences, where non material causality is taken into account. For example work of the members of the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN - <https://explore.scimednet.org/>)
2. Alliance with heterodox economists and financial change organisations such as New Economics Foundation, Positive Money, Association for Heterodox Economics (<http://hetecon.net/>)
3. Alliance with cultural diversity and pluralist organisations
4. Philosophical and anthropological engagement. Set up a series of seminars on the philosophy and anthropology of buildings, craft skills, modernism and post modernism.
5. Support STBA programmes in this area, which actively engage with sustainability policy and thinking, as well as re-thinking the future of the past.

## Appendix 2: Afterword

### The last page from Donella Meadows' Place to Intervene in a System

"0. The power to transcend paradigms.

Sorry, but to be truthful and complete, I have to add this kicker.

The highest leverage of all is to keep oneself unattached in the arena of paradigms, to realize that NO paradigm is "true," that even the one that sweetly shapes one's comfortable worldview is a tremendously limited understanding of an immense and amazing universe.

It is to "get" at a gut level the paradigm that there are paradigms, and to see that that itself is a paradigm, and to regard that whole realization as devastatingly funny. It is to let go into Not Knowing.

People who cling to paradigms (just about all of us) take one look at the spacious possibility that everything we think is guaranteed to be nonsense and pedal rapidly in the opposite direction. Surely there is no power, no control, not even a reason for being, much less acting, in the experience that there is no certainty in any worldview. But everyone who has managed to entertain that idea, for a moment or for a lifetime, has found it a basis for radical empowerment. If no paradigm is right, you can choose one that will help achieve your purpose. If you have no idea where to get a purpose, you can listen to the universe (or put in the name of your favorite deity here) and do his, her, its will, which is a lot better informed than your will.

It is in the space of mastery over paradigms that people throw off addictions, live in constant joy, bring down empires, get locked up or burned at the stake or crucified or shot, and have impacts that last for millennia.

Back from the sublime to the ridiculous, from enlightenment to caveats. There is so much that has to be said to qualify this list. It is tentative and its order is slithery. There are exceptions to every item on it. Having the list percolating in my subconscious for years has not transformed me into a Superwoman. I seem to spend my time running up and down the list, trying out leverage points wherever I can find them. The higher the leverage point, the more the system resists changing it- that's why societies rub out truly enlightened beings.

I don't think there are cheap tickets to system change. You have to work at it, whether that means rigorously analyzing a system or rigorously casting off paradigms. In the end, it seems that leverage has less to do with pushing levers than it does with disciplined thinking combined with strategically, profoundly, madly letting go."