Hands-On Heritage! Establishing Soft Authority over Heritage through Architectural Experiment: A Case Study from Jordan

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Abstract
This study identifies ‘heritage as practice’ as an alternative to ‘authorized’ heritage engagement. Heritage, in this sense, is perceived as a source of inspiration and creativity rather than just an asset to be preserved. ‘Heritage as practice’ is informed by the conventional identification and evaluation of heritage, coupled with the architectural and artistic instincts, capacities, creativity, and commitment found in the field of architecture, to interpret heritage. We label the work produced out of this practice as ‘creative material’ that is subjected to further re-creation when it is used as a platform for community engagement. We examine the mechanisms of these engagements through an academic experiment in which architecture students were asked to analyze the representations of the local heritage site of Umm el-Jimal, Jordan. We argue that shifting from ‘authorized’ engagement to informed ‘instinctual’ one gives the students a soft authority over heritage. However, it is the capacity to creatively engage with and about heritage, and use this to continuously and creatively interpret heritage, that makes this authority valid and just.

keywords heritage as a practice, authorized heritage engagement, instinctual heritage engagement, heritage re-creation, community engagement