# The Roles of the Locals - and the Possible Reconstruction of the Destroyed Buddha Statues in the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanisatan


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**Abstract** This chapter discusses the classic heritage tensions and challenges that are linked to the proposed reconstruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues. Arguing that the most fundamental question is not how but *why* they should be reconstructed, the reasoning formulated around three core aspects are considered. The first is about authenticity. Classical examples of how reconstructions articulate with authenticity are outlined as a background to the recently softening up of the concept and to argue that understanding authenticity as a malleable and discursive quality could provide inspirational for the reconstruction of the Buddha statues. The second concern relates to political and socio-economic aspects arguing that the reconstruction efforts are essentially political as the destruction and reconstruction are conceptually interconnected with the latter lending support for competing national/regional historiographies. This calls for foresight and carefulness in decision making. As regards the third aspect, the role of the local residents, the chapter points to the tendency of systematic neglect of local residents in terms of meaningful engagement, and some of the ways this manifests itself. It also argues that it is not enough that all agree that this is regretful, we need to work on methods aiming at more meaningful and sustainable involvement.

**Keywords** Authenticity · Local residents · Politics · Socio-economic · Tourism · Heritage

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Discussions about the possible reconstruction of the destroyed Buddha statues[1] in the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan, reveal several classic challenges and tensions within contemporary heritage philosophies and policies, including the considerable challenges associated with meaningful involvement of local residents.[2] The seminal question as regards their reconstruction is, therefore, not how but *why*. Yes, there are technical challenges due to the character of the local stone, the honeycomb of caves affecting the nearby surfaces of the rock, and the totality of the destruction;[3] but these are relatively mechanical challenges that may be overcome if deemed so important that the right resources are made available. Much more complex and conflictual is the question of why it should be done. In the following I look at the reasoning that arises around the case from three points of views: the authenticity argument, political and socio-economic aspects, and, finally, the local residents, with the latter concern underwriting all the aspects brought out. Of course, these aspects are interrelated, but focussing on them separately nonetheless helps to reveal some of the fundamental challenges that the case raises and draws attention to their varied foundations ranging from issues of philosophy to matters of methodology. They also point to the tendency of systematic neglect, or at the most superficial incorporation, of the local residents, and the substantial challenges we face in terms of developing methods that will aid much more meaningful and sustainable involvement of local residents.

## 1 The Challenge of Authenticity

In terms of the future fate of the destroyed statues, authenticity is probably the one aspect where differences between official bodies, especially UNESCO, and various local residents are the clearest. In this, the possible reconstruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues raises a concern that has railed UNESCO's criteria for World Heritage nomination from its very beginning, but which also, of course, affects heritage nomination and care at other levels. We commonly identify the Venice Charter of 1964 as the point of consolidation (and internationalisation) of earlier views. This charter insists on the clear difference between the original and the copy, and the need to mark and maintain that difference in all restoration work. It also assumes that the values reside in the original alone. According to the philosophy behind that

[1] Although most of the discussions of reconstruction have focussed on just one of the two statues, the so-called "eastern Buddha", I generally refer to them in the plural as so far they have been conceptualised as a pair.

[2] Various terms, with various connotations, may be used to refer to local inhabitants, such as communities or merely locals; I shall throughout use the term local residents as it embraces everyone locally irrespective of their relationship to the place as they may all, but in various ways, be affected by the heritage work.

[3] For further discussion of these aspects see, for example, 'Report on the ICOMOS Commission' (2014).

charter, the restoration of the Bamiyan Buddha statues can only result in a fake, a lie. There is not an original to be patched up, but an entirely new statue may be built, even if fragments from the original are included (so-called *anastylosis*), It is, however, also well known that this interpretation of authenticity in various ways has been 'softened up'. Firstly, the concept of intangible heritage, introduced in 2003, was meant to move attention from the sole focus on the material and monumental to skills and crafts and living traditions. This was not meant to undermine the importance of authenticity, but it clearly made it somewhat more malleable and discursive—in principle, one person's authentic version may be considered as good as another's. It has also lead to some confusion and considerable debate about what then is authenticity (for further discussion see, for example, Jokilehto 2006; Silverman 2015). The further social implications, such as local views about what 'authenticity' is about, have not, however, been equally intensively pursued. Secondly, there have also been cases where the reconstructed heritage, or reconstructing the heritage, even where total reconstruction was involved, was seen to be of such significance that its status as heritage is not compromised despite the degree of reconstruction or even recreation. There are several such cases, but the examples of the reconstructed historic centre of Warsaw and the rebuilding of the Mostar Bridge (Stara Most), Bosnia, are particularly revealing of some of the changes that have taken place over the last 50 years, and they may hint at lessons to learn.

Modern wars in their dispersed impacts lead to considerable destruction that is not limited to battlefields but includes private housing, civic buildings, infrastructures, and cityscapes. This was clearly the case during World War Two, and in many regions, a mixture of organised and spontaneous reconstruction took place after the war. Such reconstructions commonly aimed at the rebuilding of homes and townscapes, and to recover the familiar rather than engage in innovations. For many towns,[4] this kind of reconstruction was largely a citizens-response or implemented at a low level of governmentality, such as local councils. Through this, the mainline principle of authenticity that was used by contemporary heritage management regimes came face to face with a different kind of reconstruction ethos in which it was the immediate heritage ('the word we have just lost') that was of concern rather than more detached notions of architectural styles and the integrity of the materials used. The reconstruction of the historic centre of Warsaw, Poland, which was extensively destroyed during World War Two, is often referred to as an example of this development. The UNESCO World Heritage List web page summarises the case as:

> During the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, more than 85% of Warsaw's historic centre was destroyed by Nazi troops. After the war, a five-year reconstruction campaign by *its citizens* resulted in today's meticulous restoration of the Old Town, with its churches, palaces and market-place. It is *an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction* of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century.[5] (my emphasis).

[4] In some cases, towns were selected for reconstruction by political elites to illustrate their new political ideology. Dacia Viejo Rose has investigated this phenomenon in terms of the reconstruction after the Spanish Civil war and Franco's adoption of towns like Gernika (2015).

[5] http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/30, consulted 16/09/2017.

What is of interest to the present case is the involvement of the citizens, namely the owners and the people for whom this mattered, but also that this point is becoming somewhat mythologized, and in the UNESCO description this appears as more of a spontaneous response than it actually was. A number of recent investigations into the reconstruction of Warsaw point to the central role of the National People's Council of Poland (representing Soviet-controlled communist government) and show how the whole process was centrally controlled (e.g. Kuznicki 2013). This, moreover, is not the only challenge to the notion of citizens as the rebuilders. In practice, reconstructions have often been more of political affairs than we tend to acknowledge. Lacking authenticity in the traditional sense, the granting of World Heritage Site status to the Historic City centre of Warsaw did, therefore, cause substantial debate and was not a straightforward decision (for details about the WHS nomination see Cameron 2008). Looking at the statement above it is striking that, in a slightly twisted manner, it is the very reconstruction that becomes the reasons for WHS accreditation; so it is not the historic qualities of the city that makes it unique, it is the human capacity to rebuild that is emphasized.

The case of the reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge is different in a number of ways. Firstly, its destruction was a deliberate act by the Croat military against the Bosniaks in 1993, and it is thus an explicit example of targeted heritage destruction within a context of civil war. It, moreover, was done with full awareness of the media coverage. It added the drama and impact of a media-event to the format of heritage destruction and through that created an involved public far beyond the immediate site and its local residents. Its reconstruction (2001–2004), moreover, did not involve the citizens but was largely conducted by international bodies. The entry in Wikipedia makes the scale of this international involvement clear:

> After the end of the war, plans were raised to reconstruct the bridge. *The World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture* and the *World Monuments Fund* formed a coalition to oversee the reconstruction … Additional funding was provided by *Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Croatia* and the *Council of Europe Development Bank,* as well as *the Bosnian government*. In October 1998, UNESCO established an international committee of experts to oversee the design and reconstruction work.[6] (my emphasis).

In addition, when it came to deciding how to plan the actual reconstruction, notions of architectural authenticity became important, and it was decided that the rebuilt bridge should be as similar as possible to the 'original'. In practice, this meant that the same technology and materials as the original should be used, and this, in turn, meant that rather than using local craftspeople, a Turkish company was appointed and with it 'Ottoman construction techniques'. In this case, in the conflicted situation arising from civil war, the reconstruction was not primarily used as an opportunity to create practical, and thus arguably 'real', connections between the communities, rather it was a symbolic expression of reconciliation that the funders sought. As a result, the reconstruction process was to some extent ethicised as it was

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stari_Most, consulted 12/09/2017.

done in a manner that could be interpreted as having taken side in the local conflict. Nonetheless, the reconstruction is internationally celebrated as an example of symbolic bridge building and reconciliation, as becomes obvious from the front page statement on the UNESCO WHS webpage for Mostar:

> … The Old Bridge was recently rebuilt and many of the edifices in the Old Town have been restored or rebuilt with the contribution of an *international scientific committee* established by UNESCO. The Old Bridge area, with its pre-Ottoman, eastern Ottoman, Mediterranean and western European architectural features, is an outstanding example of a multicultural urban settlement. The reconstructed Old Bridge and Old City of Mostar is a *symbol of reconciliation, international co-operation and of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious communities.*[7] (my emphasis).

There are, however, some discrepancies between this description and the reality on the ground. For instance, when in April 2010 we interviewed[8] some of the local people who had been involved with the reconstruction, they said that the whole town came to celebrate when the new bridge opened in 2004. When asked if they really meant the whole town, they qualified that, of course, it had only been people from their side who had participated. It has even been suggested that the rebuilt bridge became a symbol of the absence of peace and the possibility of further hostility in Bosnia (e.g. Greer 2010). In this case, it can be argued that the significance given to authenticity—which could only be in terms of crafts and materials—meant that the reconstruction did not aid reconciliation to the extent it might have, had it been done differently.

Several points arise from the two cases that may be helpful for reflecting on the decisions about the Bamiyan Buddha statues. Firstly, the concept of authenticity has become sufficiently flexible that different kinds of total reconstructions can be done without undermining the significance of a monument, although it will affect it, and authenticity and meaning may shift to very different dimensions of the monument. This should make it possible to open up for more in-depth and sustained involvement of local residents who in turn may play an interesting role in redefining authenticity as something beyond crafts and materials. Secondly, such cases warn about the motivations of international bodies, who, however well intended, may bring external agendas to the reconstruction project. Maybe scrutiny of our agendas should become of greater concern than staying loyal to the Venice Charter's version of authenticity?

As regards the Bamiyan statues, it is clear that it is not possible to recapture the original monuments, and therefore this cannot be the aim of the reconstruction; but what then are the reasons for reconstructing them now? In a recent volume of the online journal *Unesco courier*, Christina Cameron discussed the trend of changing attitudes to reconstruction; she stated, "Global destruction of cultural heritage, now occurring at an unprecedented scale, brings into focus the question of whether or not to reconstruct significant places as a means of *recovering their meaning*"

[7] http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/946 consulted 16/09/2017.

[8] Fieldtrip as part of the CRIC project http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/55191_en.html

(Cameron 2017, no page, my emphasis).[9] Cameron's discussion is timely including her call for further international guidance, but the expectation that a clear connection between a place and its meaning can be recovered through reconstruction is worth reflecting on. Just like the concept of authenticity, the idea of monuments having meaning is also complex and in some ways questionable. Firstly, monuments do not have just one meaning, they have layers of meanings accrued over time and by different interlocutors (for examples see Sørensen and Viejo Rose 2015). So if we hold that reconstruction should be about meaning, then we need to consider which meanings about the Bamiyan Buddha statues are the reasons for their reconstruction—is it the meanings in the sixth century CE around the time they were constructed, in the 1970s when they were restored, or is it about what they mean now during the post-2001 redevelopment period—and how do we establish such 'meaning'? Secondly, it is unclear how a reconstruction can ever 'recover' meaning, whereas clearly, it may create it.

At the same time, these concerns about authenticity are often strange and irrelevant to local residents as for them it is the recovering of a material presence or the act of political resistance that matter, rather than a monument's exact shape or original material. That this is the case among the residents in Bamiyan Valley is suggested by some of the statements that can be found within various online sources, such as "I have spoken to people who would like to see it go up in concrete."[10] Such realities challenge us to wonder whether the current 'softening up' of the authenticity ideology originally propelled by the Venice Charter is actually sufficient, if we want to genuinely respond to local residents' needs, or at least desire their involvement. We need to be wary of discussions about authenticity, especially when they are used to formulate decisions. At least we must learn to see authenticity as just one dimension of a complex reality, rather than the core arbitrator.

## 2 Political and Socio-Economic Aspects of Reconstruction

There are many political dimensions within the call for the reconstruction of the Buddha statues. The most significant is about how Afghanistan, or regions or groups within the country, wants to formulate its past, or in other words the nationalisation of its antiquities (Green 2017: 47), and which of competing historiographies is to be supported.

The targeted destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues is often emphasised as a new kind of iconoclasm, which takes place in front of the world media and which deliberately uses these to communicate its intent. Michael Falser argues that the destruction of the Bamiyan statues was "… the first, large scale live-act of performative iconoclasm against the physical and mental image of heritage in the age of

[9] http://en.unesco.org/courier/july-september-2017/reconstruction-changing-attitudes, consulted 15.09.2017.

[10] L. Morgan quoted by S. Hegarty (2012) for BBC World Service.

the internet" (2011: 157). Whereas such deliberate targeted destruction of heritage sites is not novel, it is important to realise that we still do not comprehend the range of motivations behind such acts very well, and we appear particularly unsure about whether the involvement of the media represents something new and different.

Within this ontological insecurity, I suggest that we need to accept that reconstruction will not, indeed cannot, ever just be about the monument and its meaning. It will always also be about the destruction and it will, whether intended or not, appear as a response or answer to it as the two acts are conceptually and politically interconnected. We must ask whether by reconstructing the statues we are reinstating them as a target. Are we replaying a media event, participated in the scripted course of retaliation and counter-events, playing into the hand of the iconoclasts as their acts gain even greater recognition through ours? Such concerns make a strong case for critical scrutiny of the motivations behind the call for reconstruction. Different reasons are clearly expressed at local, regional, national and international levels, and even by individuals, and analysis of the background to these and their possible repercussions need to be included in any decision-making. Moreover, in such complex situations, it is important to realise that neither top-down nor bottom-up approaches are sufficient and that *more fuzzy approaches need to be explored*.

The emerging emphasis on the use of culture for sustainable development is similarly political within the Afghan context. Various proposals under the slogan 'Concept of Culture for Development' have been forwarded with the aim of fuelling sustainable development in the Bamiyan Valley. An example is the creation of a Bamiyan Museum for Peace. Within such projects, there is a tendency for the local to be appropriated for wider agendas, and local development plans become extensions of Afghan national policies more generally. Within this context, the significance of the statues becomes their ability to contribute to a political program of development. The statements and reasons provided in support of their reconstruction reveal how these arguments are nested within larger-scale political strategies, such as:

> The development goal, in line with the UNDAF (United Nations Assistance Development Framework) and the ANDS (Afghan National Development Strategy), is to promote peace and sustainable development (sustainable livelihoods) for the people of Bamiyan with an appropriate use of the natural and cultural environment and for Afghanistan as a whole by reviving a rich history of intercultural exchanges and fostering cultural diversity.[11]

It is, however, difficult to assess whether sustainable development actually takes place and what may characterise it. This is not an issue distinct to the Bamiyan case, and there are ongoing, widespread discussions about the criteria and means of such developments in many parts of the world. It is, however, clear that due to their iconic status the statues will be prone to appropriation for various uses by different kinds of stakeholders, and their reconstruction will easily become interwoven with apparently unrelated concerns and objectives. An unavoidable link between the

[11] Safeguarding of the Bamiyan Site, Phase IV http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/717/ consulted 15.09.2017.

destruction/reconstruction and the ambitions for sustainable development has already emerged, placing both as significant political 'players' in future planning. In turn, this will impact local residents, as their landscape is subjected to change and experimentation in a manner that will influence how they will be able to act within, use, and relate to it, and how they will recognise it as their own.

This focus on reconstruction, as part of development policy, is used by some sectors as a strong reason for the reconstruction of the statues; they argue that this will benefit the local economy through tourism. There is, of course, a tourism potential linked to the place, but overall tourism will be more depending on security and general travel conditions within the country than whether there are statues to be seen. Moreover, it should be considered whether in their absence the Buddha statues have as much attraction as if they were reconstructed.

In terms of foreign visitors, the so-called 'dark tourism', which cater to a section of travellers who search for places of conflict and contestation, may be attracted by the absent Buddha statues, even mainstream tourists may be equally appealed to by the empty niche as by any kind of modern replacement. Absence and atmosphere have become distinct tropes within contemporary search for novel visitor experiences, as illustrated by the importance the faint traces of the Berlin wall have gained for visitors to that city. The reconstruction may thus make less of a difference to the local economy, than we tend to think. The destruction of the Buddha statues is already repeatedly referred to within promotional materials for the Bamiyan Valley, as a tourist attraction. For example, the website Gov.UK, when presenting the activities of 'The Afghan Rural Enterprise Development program' (which showcased products in Bamiyan), referred to the location as: "Famous for its ancient Buddhas which were tragically destroyed in 2001 and the Band-e-Amir National Park with its turquoise blue lakes."[12] The attention to Bamiyan is so distinct that it became the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's cultural capital for 2015, with its fame apparently largely due to the statues' destruction, as seen in the following excerpts: "Bamiyan, the Afghan town which shot into prominence when the Taliban blew up two ancient statues of the Buddha in 2001, has been selected to be the SAARC cultural capital for a year beginning April 2016–17" (Joshua 2014, no page), and "Bamiyan's suitability as a cultural capital might seem obvious. It is the site of the two massive Buddha statues … which were destroyed by the Taleban in 2001; although smashed … the site is still breath-taking and archeologically significant" (Suroush 2015, no page).

The economic potentials and the use of the reconstructed Buddha as a marketing device is, however, an area where local residents are entirely dependent on outsider advice and comprehensive market analyses, with the latter currently looking wholly speculative. In addition, different local residents might find they have different interests, and they may come to realise that tourism will not be a direct benefit for them all, but that it will force changes in their habitual relationship with the place.

[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/afghan-products-exhibition-in-cultural-capital-bamiyan consulted 17.09.2017.

## 3 Local Residents

There are numerous examples showing how essential it is to involve local residents in the reconstruction of deliberately destroyed heritage in order for reconstruction to be beneficial. We see this emphasis especially clearly in developing nations and through international projects. It is, for example, stressed in UNESCO's operational guidelines, which calls for projects that will give heritage a function for communities,[13] and it is clearly part of UNESCO's strategic objectives. The challenge is, therefore, not to convince anyone about the importance of involving local residents. Rather it seems that the challenge is methodological in terms of developing means that can help us to understand and involve the local residents more effectively and more meaningfully.

There are several typical problems, with some easier to resolve than others. Firstly, the character of people's attachment to and involvement with the heritage in their environment varies considerably. On the one extreme, we have so-called 'living heritage', where people have an active ongoing meaningful, and often emotional, relationship with parts of their heritage in a manner that is not managed or fabricated by some kind of management agency; in these cases, heritage has a dynamic presence and is affective. On the other extreme, we have dead heritage to which no one has an active emotional or cultural engagement, but which may be made meaningful through heritagisation and through interpretations, such heritage may be related to in a number of ways including objectified as history knowledge or explored through invented traditions or tourism. These wide differences are of significance because the success of any attempt at involving local residents is deeply dependent on what kind of heritage relations we engage with and whether there are pre-existing affective and/or symbolic relationships.

Secondly, we commonly refer to local residents as if they are a homogenous group. This is never the case. 'Local resident' is always constituted by people of different age and gender with different educational levels and economic abilities, as well as capacities, and they are tied together through family relations and other solidarities and dependencies, such as due to their ethnicity or occupation. Within heritage management projects, this diversity is often represented by just one or a few people, and we too often do not pay further attention to how the diversity within the

[13] The UNESCO operational guidelines state that: "World Heritage properties may support a variety of ongoing and proposed uses that are ecologically and culturally sustainable and which may contribute to the quality of life of communities concerned. The State Party and its partners must ensure that such sustainable use or any other change does not impact adversely on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property". (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (WHC,16/01–26 October 2016, Section IIF, paragraph 119). Section VI of the guidelines further states the objectives to be to: a) to enhance capacity-building and research; b) to raise the general public's awareness, understanding and appreciation of the need to preserve cultural and natural heritage; c) to enhance the function of World Heritage in the life of the community; and d) to increase the participation of local and national populations in the protection and presentation of heritage. (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention) (WHC,16/01 - 26 October 2016, Section VIA, paragraph 211). Consulted 21.10.2017.

local is present within this representation. The result is commonly a tokenism of local involvement. In many cases, subsequent interviews have revealed that most of the local people do not recognise that they were consulted or do not trust their views were being listened to (e.g. Brumann and Berliner 2016). This is a particularly complex matter when the socio-political and cultural traditions of the various partners differ widely. So, for instance, if the local residents in the Bamiyan valley are traditionally represented by council leaders, with what right can we ask to hear the women's voices or that of other ethnic minorities within the region? But, if we do not listen to the views of the poor, the young, the women, and the others, how can we think that the local perspective is being fully considered, and how can we subsequently expect such groups to not just respect but also care for the restored monument(s)? Local residents are never a homogenous block, and we must develop methods of inclusivity that recognise diversity.

Thirdly, there is often a wide gap between local ways of valorising and recognising heritage remains and how international experts and heritage managers evaluate them, or even how they see, or recognise, the same remains. In my own fieldwork in the WHS of Cidade Velha, Cape Verde, interviews with local residents revealed a disconnect between their oral appreciation of their past and their ability to recognise the upstanding remains as an expression of that past (Evans et al. 2011). Such differences become exaggerated through language use, not only unfamiliar terms and jargons but frequently also through the use of alienating language syntax. The result is often a lack of mutual comprehension or a 'lost in translation' gap. If there is not a mutual agreement about the subject of discussion, then agreed solutions and forward planning have a weak foundation. This means that the taken for granted cultural capital underwriting the rhetoric of international institutions and experts too often leaves the ones without the necessary language on the outside.

These challenges are well known, and ways of building-up shared understandings and better dialogues are being tested and experimented with. Yet, a certain awkwardness is still obvious in many of these attempts. There is, for instance, a tendency for programs to be, or appear, patronising of local understandings. Despite a focus on dialogue, top-down approaches still dominate. As regards the Bamiyan Valley, attention towards local residents has been stressed in the various UNESCO and Afghan government meetings and protocols, and there are clear expressions of a desire to make local residents beneficiaries of the reconstruction project and to involve them in some capacity. But the various texts nonetheless tend to present local residents in a manner that lacks nuances, and which tend to render them passive recipients of the benefits. Many of the projects seem to ignore existing awareness and divergent attitudes towards the heritage, and they rather aim at promoting cultural understanding and community awareness, as if neither pre-existed. So, although praiseworthy in their intentions, local voices are too often absent from such texts and enterprises. There is little sense of value granted to those who have lived in the valley, and with the Buddha statues, from before and during the conflict; there is no sense that the Buddha statues belong with them (notice the difference between with them and to them). There is a worrying taste of an attitude in which the local residents need to be educated about the historical significance of these

statues. Such an attitude is not in line with contemporary thinking within heritage policy and philosophy, but moving beyond this attitude cannot merely be done by deciding to talk more with local residents; we need better methodologies.

To advance the concern with local involvement, one necessary step is more robust reflections on the aims of local involvement; is it to reach an agreed meaning, to establish a range of supported and celebrated relationships with the heritage, or to channel existing practices and thoughts, or something else? It is not always entirely clear that we know what our aims are beyond 'involvement' and dialogue. As already stated, this is not due to lack of intentions, but rather because this is an extremely complex area. As regards the Bamiyan statues, there are people living in the caves, people farming the areas at the foot of the cliffs, people working in the small village, people further afield, and entrepreneurs who are trying to develop local resources for new markets, including tourism. There are many different scales and kinds of peoples. How will we recognise their diversity and decide who should be stakeholders? Practical and legal matters tend to provide the answers: people who own land have rights and community heads and spiritual leaders are given voices. In contrast, people living in the caves fluctuate between being seen as 'living cultural tradition' and illegal squatters. Ethnicity raises another challenge. The Hazaras, who constitute the largest ethnic group in the Bamiyan valley, have been suppressed since the foundation of modern Afghanistan and were especially persecuted by the Taliban (Chiovenda 2017). In numerous recent accounts of local traditional attachments to the statues, they are now the group who are singled out as having appropriated the Buddha statues into a local semi-religious traditional narrative (ibid.). But in this process, very little is made of how other ethnic groups within Bamiyan Valley might have related to the statues, and how the claim of attachment becomes part of a wider claim on identity and rights of belonging (for some of this complexity see Chiovenda 2017).

It is clear that such entangled complex issues around the involvement of local residents cannot be easily solved; but it is important to realise that we need much more extensive anthropological and sociological research, including qualitative analysis and studies of various modes of interaction with the heritage – for example, what factors influence notions of attachment. We also need to appreciate, both theoretically and practically, how such attachments may be changeable and constructed in responses to the developing situation within the local landscape. So, the challenge is not simple. We need to develop methods for more transparent and effective understandings of the local (age, gender, minorities, social-economic standing, capacities, etc.), including whether they have different, even contradictory, needs and interests as regards the local heritage. We need to find out what local residents conceptualise as heritage, rather than simply assuming what it is or wanting to teach it to them. To reach such entangled co-creation of heritage futures we also need better methods for the creation of local participation—participation that is truly co-owned by the local residents and which empowers them, for example by using different traditional collectives as a basis for cooperative action.

The case of the destroyed Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley raises classical heritage challenges while also revealing how these may gain a distinct local spin.

Thinking through the wide-ranging historical examples of reconstruction after violent deliberate destruction, it seems that we have not yet found the right mode of reaction. This should suggest caution about how we formulate responses – what are our reasons for the reconstruction? In terms of actual practice, a substantial challenge arises from the pull between authenticity and what people care about. This asks us to think about how we may simultaneously be guided by the Venice Charter and yet not be dictated by it. And how do we accommodate other wider concerns within society which often see heritage as a means of something else – be that political or economic? The wider heritage field is currently at a point of self-scrutiny and reflection; many of the issues brought up in this paper fall within central concerns about meanings and involvements. Solutions and inspirations are being sought through debates, amendments of conventions, and increased investment in case studies. It is, however, easy to underestimate the sense of need and urgency that various local groups in Afghan feel and express, as well as the force of their emotional and political desire for reaction. In some ways, the core challenge here, therefore, becomes how to balance short- and long-term desires and outcomes against each other. How important it is to set right the damage to heritage in its local setting and to help the various groups within Afghanistan, and the Bamiyan valley specifically, to reach solutions that are right for them rather than maintain international standards and follow global policies?

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