BUILDINGS & CITIES

Assessing the social values of historic shopping arcades: building biographies

SPECIAL COLLECTION: SOCIAL VALUE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Social value has a long academic tradition in the field of heritage studies, and while it has become part of heritage management, expert-driven intrinsic values still dominate the conservation policy and practice. This paper explores the use of building biographies as a way to assess, illustrate and record the social value of shopping arcades. A case study of the North Street Arcade in Belfast, Northern Ireland, is used to explore how building biographies can contribute bottom-up evidence to top-down value-based approaches of architectural conservation. The North Street Arcade is a listed shopping arcade that has been lying vacant and derelict for the last 30 years awaiting demolition and redevelopment. Archival documents, historic photographs, news reports and documentaries, interviews and anthropology were combined to compile the arcade's biography. Allowing the combination of positivist and interpretive approaches, as well as merging community and expert voices, building biographies can produce localised and inclusive heritage narratives that accentuate the many dimensions of social value that different publics ascribe to built heritage.

POLICY RELEVANCE

Although social value has become part of heritage management, expert-driven values still dominate the conservation policy and practice. The inclusion of social value in the statutory criteria for listing could afford heritage protection to places that are highly valued by local communities, thereby encompassing places that do not fulfil the architectural and historic criteria. This article explores the use of building biographies as a way to assess, illustrate and record the social value of shopping arcades. The building biography is an approach that combines qualitative methods deriving from anthropology and sociology with historical and architectural analysis, and can be used to highlight the link between people and places, as well as their ever-changing cultural context. This paper illustrates how building biographies can contribute bottom-up evidence to top-down value-based approaches of architectural conservation and highlight the social value of shopping arcades.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The protection of architectural heritage is largely determined by a value-based approach (Munoz-Vinas 2005; Avrami *et al.* 2000; Jokilehto 1986), according to which:

> any given heritage property will have multiple values and that these should be understood and assessed prior to any action carried out for the purposes of management and conservation.
>
> (Byrne 2008: 150)

Traditional top-down, value-based approaches to heritage assessment have been criticised that despite their efforts to be inclusive, they still favour the values of conservation professionals and managing authorities over those of local communities (Poulios 2010, 2014; Rudolff 2006). Wide participation in the valuation and assessment of heritage involving multiple stakeholders has the potential to strengthen the significance of heritage to local communities and groups that are under-represented (Yazıcıoğlu Halu & Gülçin Küçükkaya 2016; Nicholas & Smith 2020; Torrieri *et al.* 2021). The social value of heritage can be defined as:

> a collective attachment to place, that embodies the meanings and values that are important to a community or communities.
>
> (Jones 2017: 22)

Assessing and recording social value then can become a mechanism for bottom-up voices to be included in the management of heritage places (Smith 2009; Alonso Gonzalez 2014, Pastor Perez *et al.* 2021).

Shopping arcades around the world are celebrated architectural heritage. The development of the arcades' typology is linked to the rise of consumerism and the emergence of shopping as a leisure activity in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Pevsner 1976/78; Howard & Stobart 2018). Socio-economic changes over the last 50 years, however, have caused the closure or demolition of many arcades (Mackeith 1982; Geist 1983). Academic research on shopping arcades stressed how the spaces, atmosphere and variety of uses they offered should be considered part of their heritage (Spennemann 2006; Plevoets & Van Cleempoel 2011; Warnaby 2019). Studies also highlighted cases where interest groups fiercely campaigned against their demolition (Townshend & Pendlebury 1999; Plevoets & Sowinska-Heim 2018; Kratofil 2022).

The North Street Arcade is a listed shopping arcade in Belfast's city centre that has been lying vacant and inaccessible since 2004 after an arson attack. One of a handful of buildings exemplifying Belfast's built heritage at risk (Department for Communities NI 2005; Simpson 2019), it has received much public attention over the last 30 years. In recent development proposals for the area, the original internal fabric of the arcade is due to be demolished, despite many people's strong connection to the building (SaveCQ 2017; Preston 2022).

This paper explores the use of building biographies as a way to assess, illustrate and record the social value of shopping arcades.

The paper is structured as follows. It starts with a theoretical exploration of the concept of social value as a heritage process and a brief look at the role of social value in heritage policy and planning. The concept and practice of a building biography is then outlined before a case study is presented. The analysis of the North Street Arcade reveals how building biographies can contribute bottom-up evidence to top-down, value-based approaches of architectural conservation.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 SOCIAL VALUE AS A HERITAGE PROCESS

> Heritage is [...] not simply a thing or a place, or even intangible event, but rather [...] a cultural process involved in the performance and negotiation of cultural values, narratives, memories and meanings.
>
> (Smith *et al.* 2011: 4)

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Heritage is understood in this paper as a:

> process by which people use the past [...] according to their contemporary concerns and experiences.
>
> (Harvey 2008: 19)

The most prevalent heritage process is the designation and management of built heritage led by heritage experts and officials, a very top-down approach (Pendlebury 2015). Social value can be understood as another heritage process whereby communities, rather than experts, ascribe value to heritage places (Alonso Gonzalez 2014; Pastor Perez *et al.* 2021). In this way, social value can become a vehicle for people to claim their right to the heritage in the city (Harvey 2015; Lefebvre 1996; Lesh 2019).

Social value can be ascribed in many ways depending on the nature and context of the heritage asset in question. Three key ways to establish social value at heritage places can be applied to this case study:

- *Social memory*

  This is understood as 'dynamic collection of fragmented stories that revolve around family histories, events, and communal places' (Jones 2017: 25), and plays an important role in creating a sense of belonging in heritage places (Apaydin 2020; Dicks 2000; Hayden 1994; Smith & Campbell 2011). Social memory is often controlled through officially sanctioned narratives in connection to high-profile sites (Boyer 1996; Moore-Cherry & Bonnin 2018). However, social memory connected to everyday places and practices is less regulated and can foster a more bottom-up understanding of heritage (Atkinson 2008; Landzelius 2003; Schofield 2014).

- *Symbolic meanings*

  The attachment of symbolic meanings to heritage places is integral to the production of a 'sense of place' (Casey 1996; Johnston 1994; Waterton & Smith 2010). These meanings are often employed to support communal identities, or mobilise community action against regeneration and displacement (Low 1992; Waterton & Watson 2011).

- *Performative meanings*

  Stemming from the performative and embodied nature of place (Connerton 1989; Wylie 2007), heritage places are understood to gain meaning by the practices performed in them. Whether in the form of festivals and rituals (Bagnall 2003; Haldurp & Boerenholdt 2015) or through everyday practices and experiences (Robertson 2008; Madgin *et al.* 2018), communities reproduce and negotiate the meaning of heritage places often involving embodied and sensory experiences.

2.2 SOCIAL VALUE IN HERITAGE PLANNING AND POLICY

Across the UK, strategic policy documents feature the importance of social values and cultural significance (Cadw 2011; English Heritage 2008; Heritage Delivers 2020; Scottish Government 2014). However, there are very few examples of built heritage designations where social value, rather than architectural and historic values, is highlighted as the main reason for listing (Emerick 2014; Jones 2017; Pendlebury *et al.* 2009; Rutherford 2016). Indeed the dissociation between tangible and intangible heritage is still very present in the way existing buildings are considered for listing (see *Tables S1* and *S2* in the supplemental data online). Great attention is paid to their architectural style, age or ornamentation, but very little importance is granted to any of the social value processes outlined in Section 2.1.

Social value is not a statutory criterion for listed buildings in Northern Ireland. Instead, various forms of social value are included in some of the derived criteria under 'historic interest', such as 'social, cultural or economic importance' and 'historic associations' (see *Table S2* in the supplemental data online). Furthermore, the process of listing is heavily top-down leaving little

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room to explore how different communities ascribe values to heritage sites (see *Table S3* online). This situation has contributed to the loss of places that failed to qualify for heritage protection, while being highly valued by local groups and communities (Martire & Skoura 2022).

In order to democratise the way architectural heritage is designated and managed, bottom-up processes need to be incorporated in the identification of locally significant heritage places (Harrison 2010; Schofield 2014). Giving prominence to social value in heritage designation and management can help incorporate bottom-up processes to current top-down approaches and offer different publics a platform for articulating and negotiating what heritage means to them (Diaz-Andreu & Ruiz 2017; Wang & Aoki 2019).

3. METHODS

Attributed originally to cultural anthropologist Igor Kopytoff (Kopytoff 1986), the building (or cultural) biography is a:

> chronological approach that positions a site within changing contexts and fields of relations [and which] can help show how it can touch simultaneously on the heritages of different communities and carry multiple (and at times contradictory) values for those groups.
>
> (University of Stirling 2021: 52)

Building biographies combine qualitative methods deriving from anthropology and sociology, with historical and architectural analysis. This approach has been often used in archaeology, particularly regarding artefacts (Gosden & Marshall 1999; Hamilakis 1999). The most notable biographies of structures concern internationally celebrated monuments such as Hadrian's Wall (Hingley *et al.* 2012), the Parthenon (Beard 2002) and Stonehenge (Bender 1998). However, there are also biographies of less permanent or younger structures such as prehistoric houses (Gerritsen 1999), war memorials (Stephens 2013) and entire streets (Hupperetz 2015).

Similar approaches in the sphere of architecture and conservation include the term 'life history' by Holtorf (2012). Walter (2020) proposed the 'building as a narrative' approach to highlight the active role a building can play in community formation. He suggested that the approach is best suited to living buildings, defined as those 'still in use for the intended purposes for which they were built' (Walter 2020: 130), exemplified by religious buildings. Finally, Seamon proposed the idea of the building as a 'lifeworld', explaining that:

> a building can be understood as a constellation of actions, events, situations and experiences associated with individuals and groups that use the building.
>
> (Seamon 2017: 247)

Of the aforementioned approaches, the authors decided that the building biography would be best suited to help understand the social value of the arcade within its context at different times in the past, as this approach is recommended for buildings whose cultural significance has shifted over time and are part of diverse heritage narratives (Stephens 2013). By placing importance in the cultural context, on a building throughout its 'life' or 'temporal arc' (Griffiths 2015), it is possible to better illustrate the dynamic relationship between people and place. Documenting the meaningful ways people engage with buildings can draw attention to the social value of heritage (Jones & Leech 2015).

To compile the biography of the North Street Arcade, an array of methods was used, both primary and secondary sources (see Table 1 and *Tables S4–S6* in the supplemental data online). Architectural drawings, photographs, archival documents and planning applications helped document the changes of its built form, from the initial design to its current state as a ruin. A longitudinal study of its retail occupancy pieced together its changing character. Studies, news reports and documentaries along with semi-structured interviews were combined to understand the viewpoints of different stakeholders and communities.

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Graphic anthropology is loosely connected to visual anthropology, but instead of lens-based media, it uses inscriptive practices both as part of fieldwork and analysis to understand and represent dense social interaction (Lucas 2020; Skoura 2021). We used graphic anthropology as part of fieldwork and as a way to synthesise different types of data from diverse sources. The data collection took place between 2016 and 2019.

Table 1: Methods used to compile the building biography of the North Street Arcade

METHOD	TO WHOM? WHERE?	EXPECTED RESULT
Archive work and literature review	• Public archives • Historic maps • Planning applications	• To build the timeline of the building and understand the history and changes in the area
Documentation	• Academic and grey literature (local press, documentaries and blogs as well as social media, formal academic sources, 14 interviews with stakeholders)	• To understand the viewpoints of different stakeholders, their motivations and connection to the building
Fieldwork and semi-structured interviews	• Activists • Heritage experts • Users	• To understand the viewpoints of the main communities of interest, their motivations and connection to the building in a more intimate environment
Graphic anthropology	• Fieldwork • Users • Combining sources	• To record and synthesise data from different sources

These methods were originally used to explore how changes in use in the arcade over time affected the building's heritage value. After preliminary analysis of the data, it became apparent that the relevance of social value to the case study should be further explored. As part of this analysis, additional analytical categories were generated to assess the social value ascribed to the arcade by the different communities of interest.

4. CASE STUDY: THE NORTH STREET ARCADE

Deeply affected by planning policy and the political climate, Belfast's city centre has high levels of vacancy and dereliction, with historic buildings replaced by on-street car parks and large office blocks (Gaffikin *et al.* 1991; McCarthy 2006). The continuous loss of the city's architectural heritage has caused much anxiety among concerned citizens and heritage officials, especially over the last 30 years (McClelland 2014; McEldowney *et al.* 2001; Patton 2015). The inadequate legislation and lack of enforcement afforded to heritage protection are the main reasons behind this situation, manifested in the low priority placed on heritage by decision-makers (Hodson 2019; Martire & Skoura 2022; Ramsey 2013).

North Street, where the arcade is located, can serve as an extreme example of the historic fabric's vulnerability against increasing homogenisation and comprehensive redevelopment (Martire & Skoura 2022). The planning decisions taken between the 1970s and 1990s transformed both the fabric and the everyday life of the street (Skoura 2021). North Street saw a significant reduction in its activity and lost its traditional connection to the neighbouring inner-city protestant working-class public (Department of the Environment NI 1983). Furthermore, many of its plots, including that of the arcade, have been part of successive proposals for a large retail scheme for over 20 years (Figure 1). The street has simultaneously been forced into steady decline through systematic lack of maintenance, arson attacks and apparent obsolescence (Black 2019; McDonald 2004; *Belfast Telegraph* 2016). The endless demolitions of North Street's historic architecture have attracted the interest of the artist, academic and conservation communities, while grassroots organisations have repeatedly campaigned against the proposed redevelopments (Martire 2017; Skoura 2022; Northern Visions NvTV 2011; SaveCQ n.d.).

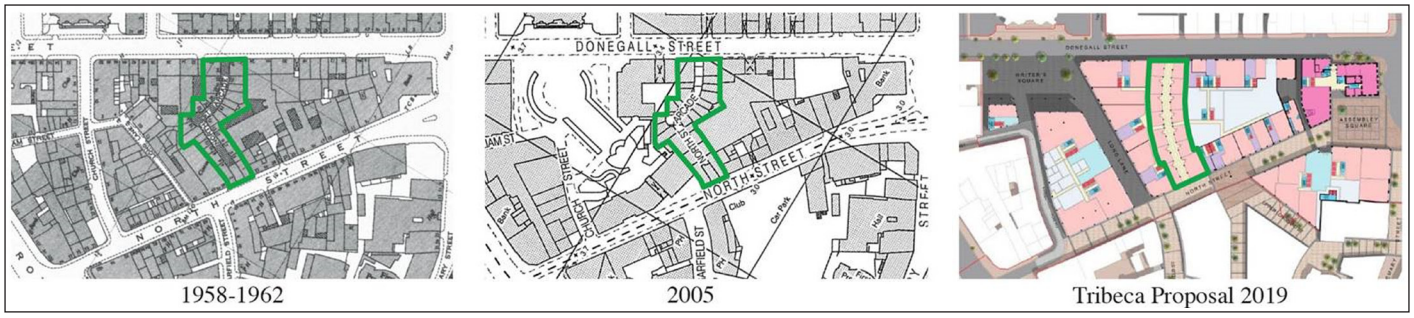


Figure 1: Past and proposed changes in the urban form of the area around the North Street Arcade, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Note: The plot of the arcade is outlined in green.

Sources: (left to right) Ordnance Survey 25-inch Irish grid 1st edition 1958–62; Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland (OSNI) 2005; 'Context of North Street Arcade within wider Outline Application NTS)' in Consarc Conservation (2019), available at the Northern Ireland Planning portal, application reference LA04/2019/2049/LBC.



Figure 2: North Street Arcade: aerial view, 2021.

Source: © 2021 Google and Map Data.

The North Street Arcade (Figure 2) was built in 1936 to designs by the Belfast-based architecture company Cowser & Smyth (Larmour 1987). One of the very few remaining shopping arcades in Belfast, it is the only example of a 1930s arcade in Northern Ireland, while its unusual curved-plan and Art Deco architecture make it a rare example in the UK (C20 Society 2005; Holgate 2017: 136–145). The arcade consists of a four-storey building facing North Street and a three-storey building facing Donegall Street, connected with a two-storey arcade flanked by shop units (Figure 3). The arcade was listed in 1990 as Grade B2 under the following criteria: 'Style', 'Proportion', 'Ornamentation' and 'Plan Form' under Architectural Interest, and 'Local Interest' and 'Authorship' under Historic Interest (Department for Communities NI 2013). Among the detailed architectural and historical information in the database, there is no implicit or explicit mentioning of social value.

The North Street Arcade was a popular place from its early days until well into the 1970s (Simpson 2014). It is difficult to refer to Belfast's recent history without mentioning Northern Ireland's ethno-national conflict. Although it goes beyond the subject of this paper, the height of the conflict (1968–98), colloquially known as 'the Troubles', affected Belfast and its city centre in many ways (Boal 1996; Komarova & Bryan 2014). Similar to other city centre premises, the arcade's occupancy fell during the Troubles and the condition of the building deteriorated in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the arcade was one of few places where alternative lifestyles could flourish amidst a city in conflict. Figure 4 shows the occupancy and types of shops in the arcade at different periods, as well as being an attempt to represent the atmosphere in the arcade. This is an attempt at graphic anthropology informed by archival information and historic photographs.

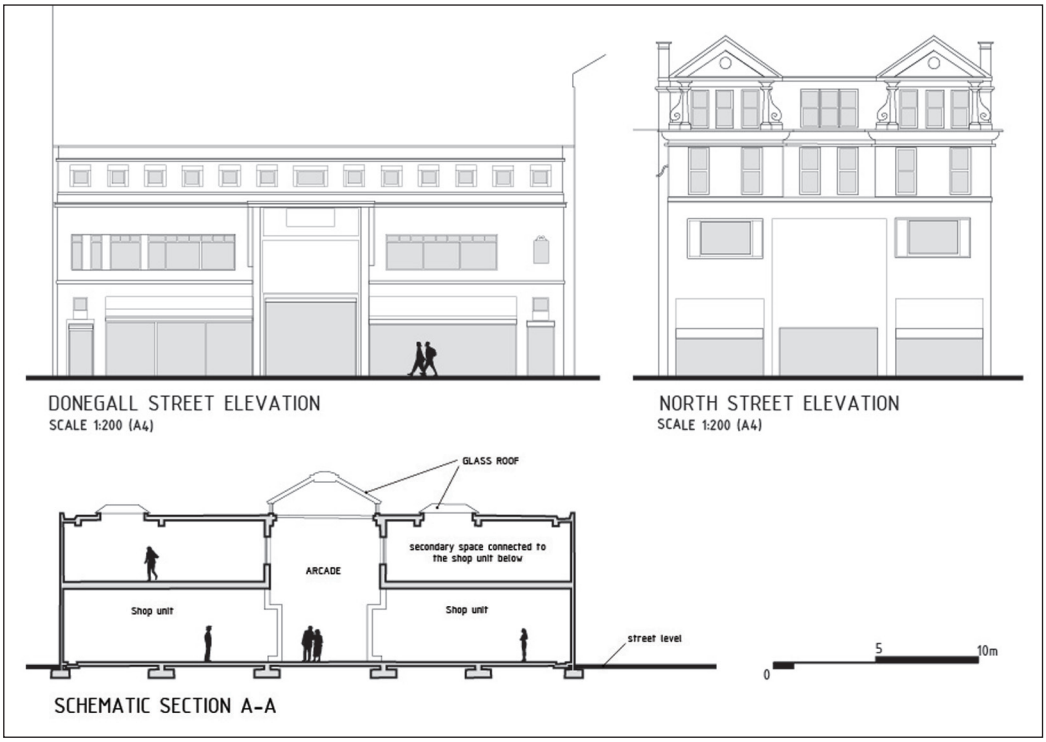


Figure 3: Architectural drawings of the North Street Arcade: elevations and section.

Sources: Drawing by Anna Skoura based on Chapman Taylor Architects & Consarc Conservation from the Northern Ireland Planning portal, application reference LA04/2019/2049/LBC.



Figure 4: North Street Arcade at different times.

Note: Graphic anthropology in the form of sketches showing the character and atmosphere of the arcade in different periods. The drawings were informed by archival information and historic photographs.

Source: Drawings by Aisling Madden.

In the 1990s, as the Troubles were gradually coming to an end, city centre regeneration became a priority. Two strains of that trend were very relevant to the arcade: the renewed interest in urban conservation and the development of the neighbouring Cathedral Quarter as a cultural quarter (Galway & McEldowney 2006; Grounds & Murtagh 2015). Amidst this climate, different groups became interested in the arcade: heritage professionals had the North Street Arcade listed (Northern Visions NvTV 2011), creative organisations took up premises there (Simpson 2014), while developers sought to demolish it as part of a comprehensive redevelopment (Multi-Million Makeover 1997). Figure 5 combines information from archives, architectural drawings, historic photographs and interviews to recreate the arcade in that period.

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In 2004, an arson attack caused extensive damage to the building and businesses, forcing the arcade to close (Northern Visions NvTV 2004b). Since then, the arcade has been part of successive development schemes, and while vacant and inaccessible, it remains at the forefront of discussions about urban conservation, redevelopment and the 'right to the city' (BBC News 2015; McAleer 2019; SaveCQ 2017).

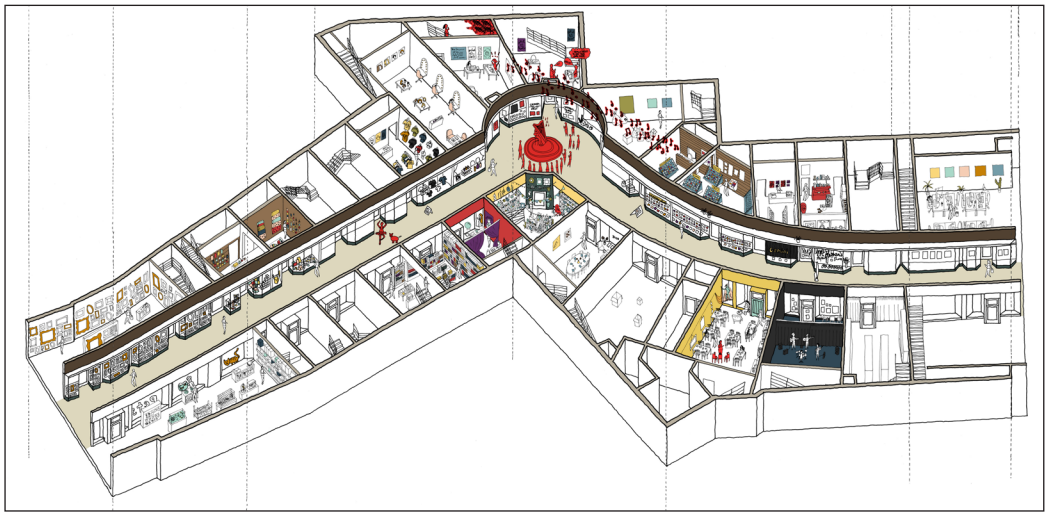


Figure 5: North Street Arcade, 1990s.

Note: An example of graphic anthropology aiming to recreate the interior and atmosphere of the arcade in that period. The drawing was informed by archival information, historic photographs and semi-structured interviews.

Source: Drawing by Aisling Madden.

4.1 FORMS OF SOCIAL VALUE

The authors' fieldwork coincided with a period of consecutive planning applications in the North Street area amidst intense public debate (O'Neil 2017; RSUA 2018; Baker 2020). After an almost five-year hiatus, a new project was submitted in 2016 and approved a year later. The project aimed to replace most of the built fabric and restore (partially or entirely) the three listed buildings in the urban block site. The elevations of the North Street Arcade would be restored, but its interior would be demolished as part of a new housing block. A later iteration of the project (Figure 6) conceded to public pressure to build a 'reconfigured arcade' amidst the housing development (Consarc Conservation 2019). During the fieldwork stage, the authors followed the response of different stakeholders and communities attending relevant events, conducting 14 semi-structured interviews and analysing the local press (see *Tables S4–S6* in the supplemental data online).

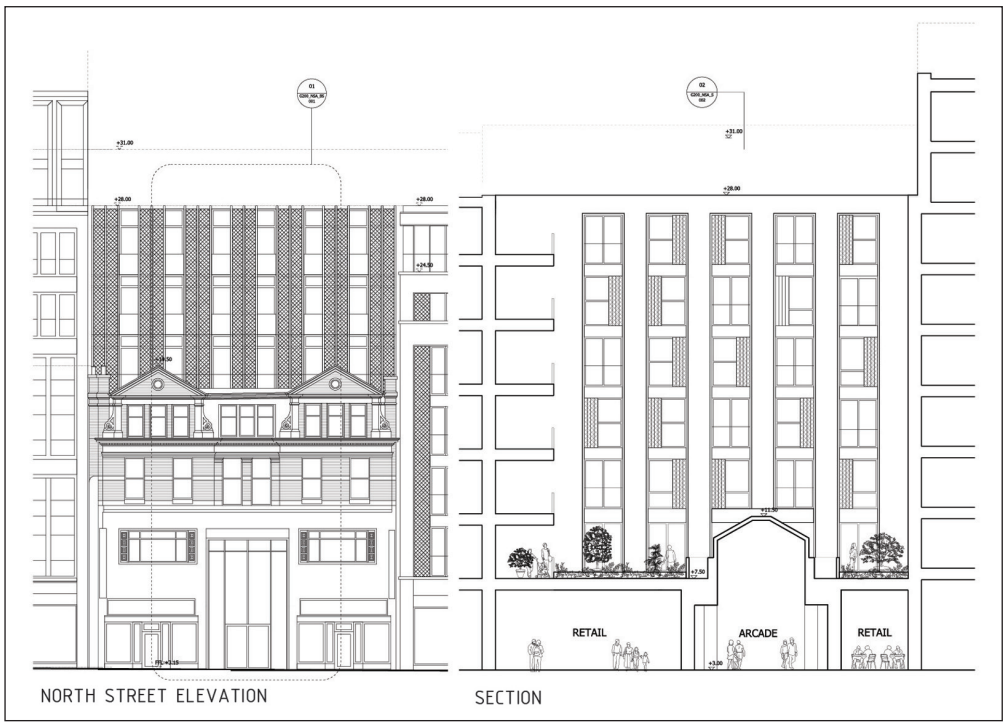


Figure 6: North Street Arcade as part of the proposed redevelopment: North Street elevation and section.

Source: Drawn by Anna Skoura based on the architectural drawings submitted by Chapman Taylor Architects & Consarc Conservation from the Northern Ireland Planning portal, application reference LA04/2019/2049/LBC.

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First, the way different stakeholders and interest groups responded to the proposed redevelopment was mapped (Figure 7). Although the separation into different groups underestimates people's more nuanced affinities, it highlights the ways the arcade was perceived. Business leaders and councillors applauded the regeneration of the area in general, without specifically mentioning the arcade. The fact that the scheme would include some restoration was seen as a bonus rather than a prerequisite (Planning Committee 2019). Heritage organisations and local activist groups were very critical (Campbell 2020; McAleer 2020; O'Kane 2020; SaveCQ 2020). The former were decidedly opposed to what they saw as a form of facadism, instead of a full restoration of the arcade (RSUA 2018; UAH 2019). The latter focused more on the types of premises this reimagined arcade would offer, concerned that the scheme would promote the area's gentrification (SaveCQ 2017; interview 4). Local traders appeared more divided, appreciating the economic regeneration but anxious about whether they could continue operating in the area (event 4). Finally, there were the people who had used the arcade in the past and lamented its loss (Northern Ireland Historical Photographical Society 2021), but were less active in the debate about the area's redevelopment.

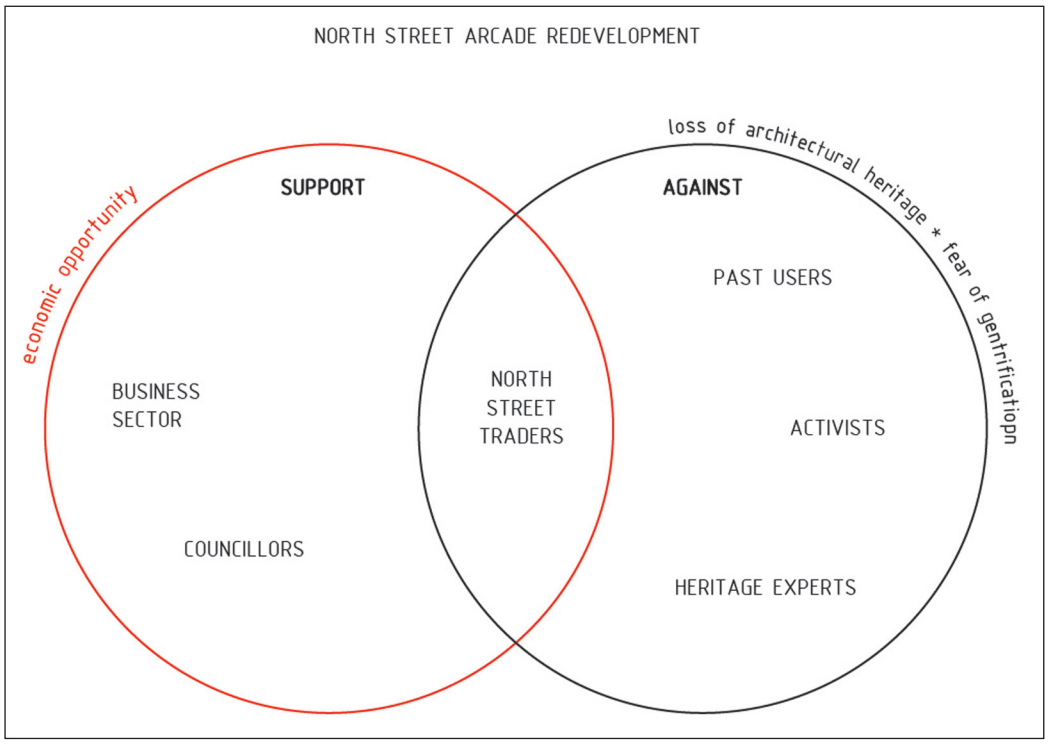


Figure 7: Mapping the responses to the North Street Arcade's redevelopment by different stakeholders and interest groups.

Source: Anna Skoura.

The authors' focus then shifted to the groups that opposed the demolition of the arcade and mapped the heritage values, if any, that they ascribed to the building. Codes were assigned for architectural, historical and social values, with social value further divided into social memory, symbolism, and cultural and everyday practice (Table 2).

HERITAGE VALUES		EXPERTS	ARTISTS	PAST USERS
Historical		*		
Architectural		*	*	
Social	Social memory		*	*
	Symbolic meanings	*	*	*
	Cultural practice (everyday life and artistic practices)		*	*

Table 2: Mapping heritage values ascribed to the North Street Arcade by different stakeholders and interest groups

The historical and architectural values of the arcade were predominantly raised by the 'experts' group that included officials dealing with heritage designation and management as well as organisations and individuals passionate about the conservation of architectural heritage.

They stressed how it was a 'rare example' of a curved arcade (interview 2), and how 'the loss of its original footprint would be a loss to the city' (Historic Environment Division's response in Planning Committee 2019). The experts supported the restoration of its elevations and accurate reconstruction of its severely damaged interior (UAH 2019; Planning Committee 2019; interview 2).

Artists and activists groups, including arts organisations and shopkeepers who were based in the arcade before the fire, appreciated the building mostly for the types of spaces and atmosphere it provided for the creative sector and small businesses. Described as:

> a mecca of newly established arts organisations and signature shops supporting the creative and cultural community
>
> (SaveCQ 2017)

their concerns were less about the preservation of the built fabric and more about the demolitions and displacement of the people and activities in the area in favour of new buildings and publics (interviews 1, 4, 7 and 13).

All groups ascribed some form of social value to the arcade, employing one or all three ways outlined in Section 2.1.

4.1.1 Social value and social memory

For past users, the arcade served as a tangible link to their memories. They recalled the shops they visited, the cultural performances and activities they witnessed, the time they spent there and the people they met (interviews 1 and 5; Belfast History Project 2020). Many expressed a sense of awe, remembering the arcade as 'a place of wonder' where they experienced meaningful moments in their life (Belfast History Project 2020; Simpson 2014). Furthermore, many of those who operated a business in the arcade recalled a 'spirit of camaraderie' (interview 8; Northern Visions NvTV 2004b) as the arcade became a place 'for anyone who had an alternative viewpoint on the world to congregate in' (Madden, in Simpson 2014: n.p.). The expert group also acknowledged the importance of the arcade as a place of social memory (interviews 2 and 12).

Social memories based on shared everyday experience formed a crucial part of the arcade's social value, contributing to the sense of belonging of past of users.

4.1.2 Symbolic meanings

For the group of past users, the North Street Arcade also became a symbol of a Belfast that was disappearing (interview 5; Simpson 2014; Northern Visions NvTV 2004a). For the expert group, the North Street Arcade stood as a prime example of Built Heritage at Risk and the need for more effective protection of historic buildings (interviews 2 and 12; UAH 2019).

For the artist and activist group, the arcade represented one of the places where the essence of the cultural Cathedral Quarter was conceived (interview 8):

> if the building hadn't burnt down it would be exactly what we would need now [...] full of funky little shops and tying together the Cathedral Quarter, which now has two halves.
>
> (interview 7)

There seemed to be an overwhelming feeling among this group of the arcade's lost potential, seeing it as 'a gateway to what could be possible' for Belfast after the Troubles (interviews 8 and 13; Simpson 2014).

In the 20 years since the arson attack, rather than being forgotten, the symbolic meanings attached to the arcade persisted, adding another layer to its social value and cultural significance.

4.1.3 Establishing social value through cultural practices

The arcade was in many ways defined by the practices performed in it. While operating, everyday practices such as shopping, strolling and socialising dominated. Artistic practices were also present. After the arson attack and its closure, a different set of practices became associated with

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the building. Jones (2017) stressed how recording practices, such as photography, video, drawing or survey, alongside historical investigation can contribute to the production and transformation of meanings, identities and values of heritage places. Largely fuelled by the arcade's symbolic meanings mentioned above, a variety of cultural practices started taking place, conceived as a form of social action aimed at drawing attention to the building's neglect as well as wider social issues (interviews 1 and 7; event 3).

Heritage experts conducted research and advocated for the building's restoration through academic-led workshops and guided walks (interview 12 and events 1, 3 and 10). A series of different spatialised art practices were employed by local artists, with street art being perhaps the most visible. Murals cover both elevations of the North Street Arcade, and while these changed periodically (Extramural Activity 2020), the one commemorating 10 years after the fire remained on site at the time of writing this paper. Along with other guerrilla art practices, street art that is place specific can draw attention to heritage places and enrich their meaning (Harris 2011; Mulchany & Flessas 2018; Nomeikaite 2019). Indeed, depicting a phoenix rising from its ashes, the mural represents some of the symbolic meanings artists and activists ascribed to the arcade (Figure 8).

These practices were used intentionally to draw attention to the arcade, ascribing meaning, value and sense of place, ultimately highlighting the building's social value (Frederick 2009; Garrett 2011; Silva & Mota Santos 2012).



Figure 8: Andy Council, *The Belfast of Phoenix*, 2014, a mural on the facade of the North Street Arcade.

Source: David @imagesNI.

4.1.4 Temporal framings of social value

Northern Ireland's listed building criteria place great importance on a building's original form and design. Later alterations are in most cases considered of lesser value and the deterioration of the building's fabric is seen as undermining its architectural and historic value (Northern Ireland Environment Agency 2013). Certainly in the case of the North Street Arcade, its damaged interior structure released the owner of any obligation to try to restore or reconstruct the interior (Department of the Environment NI 1999).

The analysis showed that arcade's social value was not directly linked to the condition of its fabric. Indeed, symbolic meanings intensified after the arson attack and a new set of cultural practices became associated with the building in its ruinous state. This suggests that while the architectural and historical heritage values of the arcade diminished, the building still retains much of its overall cultural significance. Table 3 illustrates this point, associating the different forms of heritage values and the periods in the arcade's life with which they were associated.

	1936	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2004[a]	2010	2020
Use	Construction	In use						Vacant	
Building condition	New	Fair			Declining			Arson and decaying	
1. Experts	A&H	Social memory						Symbolism Cultural practice	
2. Artists		Social memory					Everyday and cultural practice	Symbolism Cultural practice	
3. Past users		Everyday practices and social memory						Symbolism	

Table 3: Heritage values associated with different periods of the North Street Arcade's life by the main interest groups

Note: [a]Arson attack.

A&H = architectural and historic value.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As Madgin *et al.* (2018: 596) pointed out:

> considering the lived experience of [...] and emotional attachments to, historic places alongside traditional assessment of physical fabric, could help to open up a constructive dialogue concerning why certain groups resist changes to the urban environment by providing a 'deeper understanding' of the meaning of historic places.

Looking at shopping arcades, this paper argues that social value can encompass an array of meanings and provide this 'deeper understanding', offering a way to include bottom-up voices in an otherwise very top-down and expert-led heritage assessment and management.

With the system of heritage protection in Northern Ireland so inextricably linked to the physical fabric of heritage places, emotional attachments, symbolic meanings, and lived experience of local communities and other stakeholders are completely missed. What is worse, the destruction of the fabric compromises the place's architectural and historic values. This paper demonstrates that despite the destruction of much of the arcade's fabric, its social value may not disappear and is taking new forms. The paper also reveals the different forms of social value that can be associated with shopping arcades, including their connection to social memory and everyday practices as well as symbolic meanings.

On a policy level, including social value in the statutory criteria for listing could afford heritage protection to places that are highly valued by local communities. It would encompass places that do not fulfil the architectural and historic criteria. This could emphasise the importance of social value within heritage assessment, and hopefully result with less loss of buildings with strong links to local communities.

The paper also provides empirical evidence to suggest that building biographies are a very useful methodology to assess the social value of historic shopping arcades. Combining positivist with interpretive approaches, as well as merging community and expert voices, the building biography of the North Street Arcade drew attention to the meaningful ways different groups of people engaged with the building and the forms of social value they ascribed to it.

The building biography of the arcade also suggested that different stakeholders can associate forms of social value to different periods in a historic building's life. This can have implications for both policy and practice, and inform the assessment interventions and alterations to original fabric of shopping arcades. While later additions are usually dismissed as having a negative impact on the architectural and historic values of a historic building (Northern Ireland Environment Agency 2013), interventions associated with periods highly valued by different stakeholders could be seen as adding rather than detracting from the building's cultural significance.

Further research would be needed to determine the suitability of the building biography approach to assess the social value other types of heritage places. Applications within history listed above suggest that there is great potential for social spaces.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AS conceived and designed the analysis. AS and AM collected the data. AS performed the analysis. AS and AM wrote the paper.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The authors confirm that all data generated or analysed during this study are included in this article. Primary and secondary sources and data supporting the findings of this study were all publicly available at the time of submission, apart from interviews and notes from events as the participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly.

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