

EXPERTISE UNDER QUESTION: THE SHIFTING AUTHORITY OF HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS IN THE CONTEXT OF HERITAGE DEVELOPMENTS IN PAKISTAN

SHAH Ayesha Agha ¹

¹ Ayesha Agha Shah, University of Bahrain
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5378-3606>

ABSTRACT: In recent years, the authority of heritage professionals has come under growing scrutiny, especially where heritage is instrumentalized for national identity, development, or tourism. In Pakistan, traditional conservation values often take a back seat to broader heritage goals. This paper examines how the authority of heritage experts is being reshaped and contested in such settings.

Although ICOMOS charters promote value-based, expert-led conservation, the realities in developing countries like Pakistan reveal a more complex landscape. Heritage decisions are often driven by political actors, private agendas, and institutional interests, sidelining professional ethics and established principles. These conditions raise critical questions: Who defines heritage value, and how do professionals respond when ethics are compromised by economic imperatives?

This study focuses on adaptive reuse and urban redevelopment projects in Karachi. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining semi-structured interviews with architects, developers, and officials, alongside field surveys and a critical review of doctrinal texts such as ICOMOS charters and relevant literature. Three types of cases are examined: façadism and symbolic preservation, politically driven restoration without expert consultation, and public-private regeneration projects prioritizing economic gains.

Findings reveal a fragmented context where professional authority is often negotiated, bypassed, or reshaped to suit development-led heritage agendas. International standards are frequently cited but inconsistently applied, often to justify visibility, political narratives, or economic outcomes. The research concludes that heritage professionals in Pakistan operate under constrained agency, with their expertise contingent on adapting to competing demands. This signals the need to rethink how global conservation principles can be locally grounded and how professional authority might be reasserted or reimagined.

KEY WORDS: Adaptive Reuse, Heritage Expertise, Conservation Ethics, Development Pressures

Introduction

Heritage conservation in the Global South is facing profound theoretical and practical challenges. Central among these is the question of how international conservation theories and philosophical principles articulated through key charters and documents, can meaningfully shape national legislation and local practice. In Pakistan, this challenge is especially acute. Heritage is no longer viewed solely as a cultural legacy to be safeguarded, but increasingly as a strategic asset for economic development, tourism, and nation-building. As the focus shifts from “conservation” to “heritage development,” the authority of heritage professionals is being contested and redefined.

While international frameworks such as ICOMOS charters advocate expert-led conservation grounded in universal principles, their application in countries like Pakistan reveals complex negotiations between professional authority and competing interests. Despite the growing recognition of these issues in global heritage discourse, scholarship from the Global South remains limited. This paper addresses that gap by critically examining how heritage professionals in Pakistan navigate these tensions, arguing that traditional conservation paradigms must evolve toward a more inclusive and participatory model of heritage governance. Such a model acknowledges socio-political pressures while safeguarding the ethical principles of the discipline, offering insights into the redefinition of professional roles in postcolonial, development-driven contexts.

Literature Review and Conceptual Background

The field of heritage conservation has been shaped by a succession of international charters that articulate universal principles of preservation, authenticity, and professional authority. The Venice Charter (1964) established the primacy of material authenticity, emphasizing that interventions must safeguard the historic fabric of monuments and avoid falsifying their history, as stated in Articles 9 and 10. These articles stress that restoration should respect original material and authentic evidence, while any additions must be clearly distinguishable from the historical fabric. It positioned conservation as a scientific and expert-driven practice, grounded in objective standards of integrity and material truth.

The Burra Charter¹ expanded this focus by stressing the importance of cultural significance and advocating a values-based approach, including community engagement and recognition of social, spiritual, and associative meanings alongside material fabric, as outlined in Article 1.2 and 5. The Nara Document on Authenticity² similarly acknowledged that authenticity is culturally constructed and must be understood in diverse contexts, with Article 9 and 11 emphasizing the need to consider cultural diversity and heritage in judgment of authenticity. More recently, the ICOMOS Ethical Principles³ reaffirmed professional responsibilities, emphasizing integrity, independence, and accountability in conservation practice as reflected in Principles 1 and 4.

¹ Australia ICOMOS. (2013). *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS charter for places of cultural significance*. Australia ICOMOS.

² ICOMOS. (1994). *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. UNESCO/ICOMOS/ICCROM.

³ ICOMOS. (2014). *Ethical principles for the conservation of cultural heritage sites*. ICOMOS.

These frameworks illustrate the gradual broadening of conservation thought: from universalist, expert-driven principles centered on monuments and fabric, toward inclusive, culturally sensitive, and participatory models. Yet, scholars have highlighted the unevenness of this evolution. Françoise Choay⁴ critiqued international charters for their universalizing tendencies, warning that abstract frameworks risk detaching heritage from lived social realities. Claudine Houbart⁵ demonstrated how the Venice Charter's technical prescriptions are often selectively applied, privileging fabric preservation while sidelining questions of use, meaning, and social value. Jukka Jokilehto⁶ traced the doctrinal history of ICOMOS to highlight a gradual but incomplete shift toward inclusivity, while Laurajane Smith⁷ argued that an "Authorized Heritage Discourse" continues to dominate, privileging professional and institutional voices over community perspectives.

Together, these reflections underscore a central tension in global heritage discourse: while international frameworks increasingly acknowledge cultural diversity and community participation, their authority is still mediated through professional expertise and institutional structures. This tension becomes particularly pronounced in Pakistan, where heritage is simultaneously a repository of cultural memory and a resource for political, economic, and urban development agendas⁸.

It is within this conceptual and scholarly landscape that this paper situates its inquiry. Drawing on international charters and critical scholarship, it examines how heritage professionals in Pakistan navigate contested authority, balancing ethical obligations against political, economic, and social pressures. The following methodology and case studies demonstrate how these theoretical debates manifest in practice, revealing the shifting authority of heritage professionals in Karachi's rapidly transforming urban heritage environment.

⁴ Choay, F. (1992). *L'allégorie du patrimoine*. Éditions du Seuil.

⁵ Houbart, C. (2019). Conservation doctrines and their discontents: Revisiting the Venice Charter. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2018-0082>; Houbart, C. (2019). Rethinking the Venice Charter: Conservation principles in a global age. *Built Heritage*, 3(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-019-0007-0>; Houbart, C. (2020). The symbolic uses of the Venice Charter: Heritage doctrines in practice. *Future Anterior*, 17(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.17.1.0001>

⁶ Jokilehto, J. (1999). *A history of architectural conservation*. Butterworth-Heinemann.

⁷ Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.

⁸ Lari, Y. (2011). *Conservation of heritage in Pakistan: Policies and practice*. Karachi, Pakistan: Heritage Foundation; Khan, Noman. A. (2014). Heritage conservation and urban development in Karachi: A policy perspective. *Journal of Urban Management*, 3(2), 45–58; Akhtar, N., Moatasim, F. (2019). The political life of urban heritage in Lahore. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25(9), 901–917.

Linking Theory and Practice in Pakistan

The literature highlights a persistent tension between international conservation principles and their application in local contexts, particularly in the Global South⁹. To systematically examine this gap in Pakistan, Table 1 maps the selected case studies to relevant theoretical perspectives and ICOMOS charters. This table illustrates how concepts such as authenticity, integrity, and professional authority are interpreted in practice and how these interpretations align or conflict with global standards.

Case Study Theme	Relevant Theories & Authors	ICOMOS Charters / Documents	Pakistani Examples
Façadism & Symbolic Heritage	Claudine Houbart (2019, 2020): Symbolic readings of Venice Charter; critique of façade-only conservation. Jukka Jokilehto (1999): Emphasis on authenticity and integrity. Ashworth et al. (2007): Commodification and dissonant heritage.	Venice Charter (1964): Integrity of monuments. Nara Document on Authenticity (1994): Context-based authenticity.	Silk Bank Building-colonial façade retention (contested proposal). Hatim Bhai Building (Market Quarter, Karachi) façade demolished/reconstructed without conservation architect.
Politically Driven Restoration	Randall Mason (2002, 2008): Heritage values and negotiation. Houbart (2019): Professional authority in politically influenced projects.	Burra Charter (2013): Continuous professional involvement. ICOMOS Ethical Principles (2014): Professional independence.	Gul Shaker Building-approved conservation design ignored; façade demolished; lack of accountability.

⁹ Choay, F. (1992). *L'allégorie du patrimoine*. Éditions du Seuil; Houbart, C. (2019). Conservation doctrines and their discontents: Revisiting the Venice Charter. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2018-0082>; Houbart, C. (2019). Rethinking the Venice Charter: Conservation principles in a global age. *Built Heritage*, 3(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-019-0007-0>; Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.

<p>Public-Private Development & Economic Priorities</p>	<p>Ashworth et al. (2007): Heritage as economic/ cultural resource. Mason (2008): Balancing conservation and development.</p>	<p>Burra Charter (2013): Compatible use principle. International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999): Balance economic use and heritage values.</p>	<p>NED University City Campus- positive involvement of conservation architect. People's Square Urban Regeneration – revitalized historic area but limited public access.</p>
--	---	---	--

Tab. 1. Linking Theory, ICOMOS Charters, and Pakistani Case Studies (Source: Author)

This mapping reveals that while international charters establish clear expectations for professional involvement and ethical conservation, local projects frequently adapt, reinterpret, or bypass these standards due to political, economic, or practical considerations. The table underscores the importance of examining not only procedural compliance but also the substantive exercise of expert authority in heritage development.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine how the authority of heritage professionals is reshaped within the dynamics of heritage development in Karachi. A mixed-methods strategy was employed to capture both discursive and material dimensions of practice.

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with conservation architects, practicing architects, developers, and government officials directly involved in heritage-related projects. These conversations explored their perceptions of conservation principles, the challenges of implementation, and the extent to which professional authority could be exercised in decision-making processes.

Second, field surveys and site observations were undertaken across selected adaptive reuse and redevelopment projects. These provided direct evidence of interventions, including material treatments, design decisions, and deviations from approved conservation plans.

Third, a doctrinal and literature review was conducted, drawing on key international conservation charters¹⁰ and relevant academic debates¹¹. This framework allowed for a critical assessment of alignment or divergence between local practices and global standards.

¹⁰ ICOMOS. (1964). *The Venice Charter: International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites*. ICOMOS; Australia ICOMOS. (2013). *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS charter for places of cultural significance*. Australia ICOMOS; ICOMOS. (1994). *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. UNESCO/ICOMOS/ICCROM; ICOMOS. (2014). *Ethical principles for the conservation of cultural heritage sites*. ICOMOS.

¹¹ Choay, F. (1992). *L'allégorie du patrimoine*. Éditions du Seuil; Houbart, C. (2019). Conservation doctrines and their discontents: Revisiting the Venice Charter. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2018-0082>; Houbart, C. (2019). Rethinking the Venice Charter: Conservation principles in a global age. *Built Heritage*, 3(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-019-0007-0>; Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.

The data were subjected to thematic analysis, enabling triangulation of insights from interviews, field surveys, and doctrinal texts. This approach highlighted recurring patterns in the negotiation of authority and authenticity, particularly the tensions between expert knowledge, political imperatives, and development pressures.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Façadism and Symbolic Heritage

Façadism, the retention of only the front of a building while demolishing the interior, represents one of the most contested practices in conservation. Literature critiques this approach as a superficial gesture that reduces heritage to image-making, undermining the holistic values outlined in the Venice Charter's Articles 7 and 9¹². Houbart¹³ argues that façade retention reflects a symbolic rather than substantive respect for heritage, allowing neoliberal development logics to appropriate cultural symbols while erasing spatial and social meanings.

In Karachi, several colonial-era buildings have undergone such treatment. The Silk Bank building (formerly Lloyds Bank, 1932), for instance, was stalled after heritage advocates opposed an unauthentic façade-retention proposal that included inserting a 32-storey tower within the structure (Fig.1). A more drastic case is the Hatim Bhai Building in the Market Quarter, a ground-plus-three colonial structure with elaborate ornamentation. Although a restoration proposal was prepared by private owners without the involvement of conservation architects, the building was illegally demolished at night, and only a reconstructed façade was later presented as heritage testimony. Such practices commodify heritage as decorative branding for new developments, echoing Smith's¹⁴ critique of heritage as an "authorized discourse" serving elite economic agendas.



Fig. 1. Silk Bank Building (formerly Lloyds Bank, 1932) with proposed 32-storey tower, I. I. Chundrigar Road, Karachi. (Source: Figure 1,4 & 7 © HC-DAPNED Archives and Figure 2,3,5 & 6 © Marvi Mazhar & Associates)

¹² ICOMOS. (1964). *The Venice Charter: International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites*. ICOMOS.

¹³ Houbart, C. (2020). The symbolic uses of the Venice Charter: Heritage doctrines in practice. *Future Anterior*, 17(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.17.1.0001>

¹⁴ Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.

Tables 1 and 2 link this case to relevant charters and theoretical perspectives, showing the intended principle of holistic conservation and the observed breaches.

Case Study 2: Politically Driven Restoration Without Expert Consultation

Another recurring theme in heritage literature is the sidelining of conservation professionals when political or ideological interests dominate. The Burra Charter¹⁵ emphasizes continuous, multidisciplinary expert involvement, while the Nara Document¹⁶ stresses authenticity grounded in credible and ongoing evaluations. Yet, as Avrami¹⁷ and Stubbs¹⁸ note, political leaders frequently exploit heritage projects as tools for nation-building or image-making, often to the detriment of professional standards and the cultural and historical value of the heritage asset.

In Pakistan, this dynamic is exemplified by the Gul Shaker Building, where the approved conservation design was disregarded during execution. Despite regulations requiring architects to oversee works and submit progress reports, the project was largely directed by client-appointed staff, bypassing conservation experts. The façade was demolished during construction, undermining both authenticity and professional oversight.

Tables 1 and 2 highlight the repeated gaps between international principles and actual practice, demonstrating how professional authority is overridden in politically charged projects.



Fig. 2. Gul Shaker Building, Front and Back elevation. © DAP Heritage Cell, Department of Architecture and Planning, NED University (HC-DAPNED) Archives 2024

¹⁵ Australia ICOMOS. (2013). *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS charter for places of cultural significance*. Australia ICOMOS.

¹⁶ ICOMOS. (1994). *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. UNESCO/ICOMOS/ICCROM.

¹⁷ Avrami, E. (2009). Heritage, values, and sustainability. In A. Richmond, A. Bracker (Eds.), *Conservation: Principles, dilemmas, and uncomfortable truths* (pp. 177–183). Routledge.

¹⁸ Stubbs, J. (2009). *Time honored: A global view of architectural conservation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Case Study 3: Public-Private Development Projects Prioritizing Economic Gains

Public-private partnerships in heritage redevelopment can provide resources and visibility, but they also raise questions of authority and authenticity. While ICOMOS frameworks recognize economic viability, both the *International Cultural Tourism Charter* (1999) and the *Principles for the Analysis, Conservation and Structural Restoration* (2003) emphasize that economic use must not compromise heritage values¹⁹.

In such contexts, the principle of liberation, the selective removal of later additions to achieve stylistic unity, illustrates the delicate balance between heritage integrity and functional adaptation. This approach, traditionally associated with valorisation efforts, aims to reveal a building's original form by eliminating incongruous elements. For instance, in the NED University City Campus restoration in Karachi (Fig.3), conservation architect applied this principle by removing modern interventions that disrupted the building's historic character, thereby preserving its architectural coherence while accommodating contemporary educational use²⁰.

However, the application of liberation must be approached with caution. The People's Square urban regeneration project (Fig.4) demonstrates both gains and limitations. The image depicts the post-intervention view of the neighborhood, where former vehicular streets have been transformed into a pedestrian piazza. The adaptive reuse of surrounding heritage buildings, improved landscaping, and vibrant night-time activities have revived the area's social life and strengthened the community's emotional connection to the old neighborhood. Yet, despite this revitalization and enhancement of urban identity, restricted entry and regulated access continue to limit the inclusivity of the space.

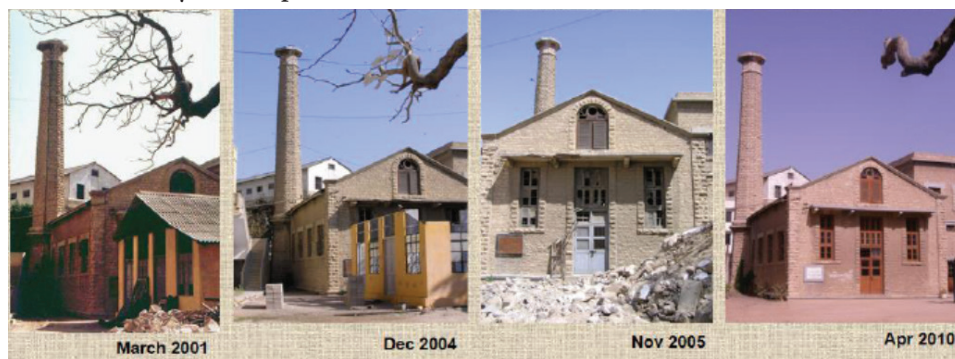


Fig. 3. Restoration phases of NED University City Campus © HC-DAPNED Archives

¹⁹ Pendlebury, J. (2013). Conservation values, the authorised heritage discourse and the conservation-planning assemblage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19(7), 709–727. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2012.700282>; Logan, W. (2002). *The disappearing “Asian” city: Protecting Asia’s urban heritage in a globalizing world*. Oxford University Press.

²⁰ Fiorino, D. R. (2015). *Liberation as a Method for Monument Valorisation: The Case of the Defence Heritage Restoration*. Retrieved from <https://re.public.polimi.it/retrieve/e0c31c0b-b2ce-4599-e053-1705fe0aef77/Liberation-as-a-Method-for-Monument-Valorisation-The-Case-of-the-Defence-Heritage-Restoration.pdf>



Fig. 4. People's Square recent picture 30 Oct. 2025- Night view of the redeveloped People's Square showing the pedestrian piazza and surrounding heritage buildings. © x.com

Tables 1 and 2 again provide a framework to link these projects to international charters, showing where “compatible use” principles were either upheld or exploited as a loophole for commercialization.

Observed Breaches of ICOMOS Principles

The case studies illustrate recurring patterns of divergence from international conservation norms, particularly regarding expert involvement, holistic preservation, and the prioritization of cultural significance over economic or political agendas. For the purpose of this study, authenticity is understood as the perceived integrity and genuine character of heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible dimensions, as assessed and interpreted by heritage professionals and local communities. This definition acknowledges that authenticity is not fixed but constructed through cultural values, professional expertise, and social expectations. Understanding how authenticity is defined and interpreted is crucial for examining the shifting authority of heritage professionals in Pakistan, where conservation decisions are influenced by cultural norms, political priorities, and development pressures.

Table 2 synthesizes these observations, highlighting specific breaches of ICOMOS charters and the resulting distortions of intended conservation principles.

Case Study	Relevant ICOMOS Charter / Article	Intended Principle	Observed Breach / Distortion
Façadism & Symbolic Heritage	Venice Charter (1964), Arts. 7 & 9, integrity of the whole monument. ICOMOS Guidelines on Education & Training (1993) decisions must be based on full understanding of heritage significance.	Conservation should respect the entire structure and context; decisions should be guided by holistic value assessments from trained experts.	Only the façade retained for visual branding; deeper structural, historical, and functional values lost. Heritage becomes decorative rather than substantive.
Politically Driven Restoration	Burra Charter (1979, rev.), Arts. 4–6 multidisciplinary, continuous expert involvement. Nara Document (1994) authenticity grounded in credible, ongoing evaluation. ICOMOS Ethical Principles (2014), Art. 5 professional independence from political interference.	Authenticity and conservation quality should come from rigorous professional assessment throughout design and execution.	Architects engaged only in design and approval phase; conservation architects rarely involved. In Gul Shaker Building, façade demolished during execution despite approved plan; systemic lack of oversight.
Public-Private Development & Economic Priorities	ICOMOS Principles for the Analysis, Conservation and Structural Restoration (2003), Arts. 3–5 interventions must not compromise heritage values. International Cultural Tourism Charter (1999), Principle 4 economic development balanced with conservation. Burra Charter, Arts. 7–8 “compatible use” must not erode cultural significance.	Development and adaptive reuse should sustain cultural significance; economic use must be secondary to conservation ethics though important for conservation of historic sites.	Developer priorities reshape “significance” to permit intrusive changes; professionals reduced to compliance roles instead of guiding decisions.

Tab. 2. Observed Breaches of ICOMOS Principles in Pakistani Case Studies

By juxtaposing intended principles with observed practices, Table 2 demonstrates how the authority of heritage professionals is routinely challenged in Pakistan. Façadism, politically driven restoration, and public–private development projects each reveal different modes through which expert guidance is marginalized, commodified, or overridden. This synthesis lays the groundwork for the discussion section, where broader implications for professional authority, governance, and policy are examined.

Discussion

The Karachi case studies highlight the disjuncture between international conservation principles and local realities of heritage management. They illustrate how approaches such as façadism, politically influenced restorations, and public–private regeneration projects negotiate authenticity, authority, and community engagement.

Façadism, often defended as a compromise between development and preservation, undermines the holistic conservation principles emphasized in the Venice Charter and subsequent ICOMOS guidelines²¹. In Karachi, colonial-era façades have been retained while entire structures are demolished and rebuilt, reducing authenticity to a superficial layer. Scholars such as Nadiem²² and Khan²³ have noted similar practices across Pakistan, where private ownership and weak enforcement mechanisms encourage tokenistic preservation rather than genuine conservation. These patterns are corroborated by Marvi Mazhar²⁴, an architect and heritage advocate, who notes that Karachi’s heritage demolitions are “not by time but by design,” emphasizing how weak oversight and developer practices systematically erode historic fabric.

A striking illustration is the Kanji Building in Pakistan Chowk, Karachi. Illegal demolition of its interior was first highlighted on social media, prompting the archaeology department to take action and seal the edifice²⁵. Despite its protected status under the Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act, 1994, the interior of this British-era building had already been removed, leaving only the façade intact. By May 2025, the building was completely demolished after the adjacent supporting structure was dismantled, despite repeated warnings from advocacy groups like Heritage Walk Karachi. Photographs documenting the demolished interior and remaining façade (Fig. 5) demonstrate how weak enforcement and commercial pressures led to the loss of one of Karachi’s significant colonial-era heritage assets.

²¹ Houbart, C. (2019). Conservation doctrines and their discontents: Revisiting the Venice Charter. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2018-0082>; Houbart, C. (2019). Rethinking the Venice Charter: Conservation principles in a global age. *Built Heritage*, 3(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-019-0007-0>; Jokilehto, J. (1999). *A history of architectural conservation*. Butterworth-Heinemann.

²² Nadiem, I. H. (2006). *Cultural heritage of Pakistan*. Sang-e-Meel Publications.

²³ Khan, F. A. (2018). Conservation challenges in Pakistan: Negotiating between global frameworks and local practices. *Pakistan Journal of Architecture and Planning*, 2(1), 45–61.

²⁴ Mazhar, M. (2024, May 8). *The heritage we are losing: Karachi’s colonial buildings under threat*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1863555>

²⁵ Siddiqui, T. (2023, July 2). *Illegal demolition leaves Kanji Building reduced to façade*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1762436>

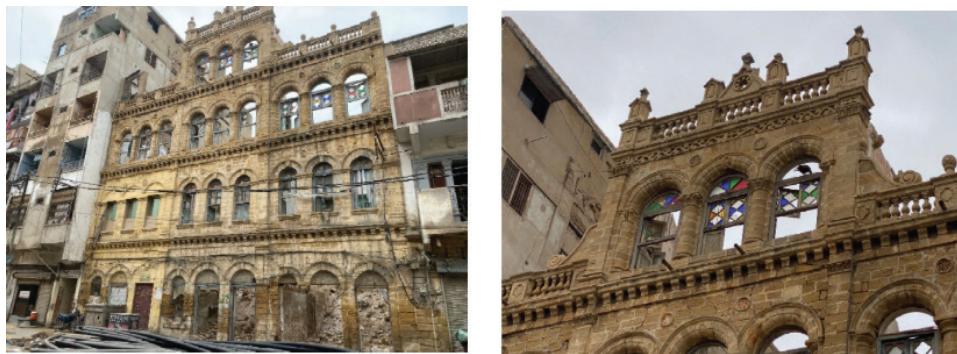


Fig. 5. Kanji Building, Pakistan Chowk, Karachi: interior structure demolished, with debris visible inside, while the façade remained prior to complete demolition © Author, July 2023

Politically driven restorations, as observed in Karachi, echo Mason's²⁶ argument that heritage is often instrumentalized to serve political narratives rather than cultural continuity. Pakistani scholars have similarly criticized how state-led initiatives prioritize spectacle and symbolism over professional conservation²⁷. These interventions stand in contrast to the Nara Document on Authenticity, which emphasizes locally grounded, participatory approaches, and raise critical questions about the displacement of professional authority in favor of political agendas.

Public-private initiatives, while offering resources and visibility, generate ambivalent outcomes. Positive examples where conservation architects guided interventions align with international best practices, ensuring both material and conceptual integrity. At the same time, projects that restrict public access highlight concerns raised by Bandarin and van Oers²⁸ regarding the commodification of historic districts. In the Pakistani context, Ahmed²⁹ argues that while urban regeneration can enhance liveability, it often excludes everyday users, leading to "sanitized heritage landscapes" detached from local social realities.

Taken together, these examples including the Kanji Building and commentary by Marvi Mazhar illustrate the tension between global conservation ideals and Karachi's socio-political dynamics. They reveal how authenticity is negotiated not only in material and aesthetic terms but also in governance structures, community participation, and professional authority, demonstrating the critical consequences of weak enforcement and political or commercial pressures on heritage preservation.

²⁶ Mason, R. (2002). Assessing values in conservation planning: Methodological issues and choices. In M. de la Torre (Ed.), *Assessing the values of cultural heritage* (pp. 5–30). Getty Conservation Institute.

²⁷ Khan, F. A., Pirzada, F. (2019). Politics of heritage conservation in Pakistan: Between symbolism and sustainability. *Journal of the Pakistan Institute of Architects*, 8(1), 11–22.

²⁸ Bandarin, F., van Oers, R. (2012). *The historic urban landscape: Managing heritage in an urban century*. Wiley-Blackwell.

²⁹ Ahmed, N. (2016). Heritage, urban space and social exclusion in Pakistan: A study of urban regeneration in Lahore and Karachi. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31(2), 205–223.

Linking Back to Research Questions

This discussion directly responds to the research questions guiding this study. First, it shows that challenges in managing cultural heritage in Karachi stem not from a lack of international frameworks but from the limited translation of these frameworks into locally enforceable and socially inclusive practices. Second, it highlights how heritage professionals' authority is continuously contested by political actors, private developers, and economic imperatives, reshaping the dynamics of decision-making. Finally, it demonstrates that while adaptive reuse and conservation have the potential to sustain both tangible and intangible values, their success depends on context-sensitive, participatory approaches that balance authenticity with urban transformation.

In this way, the Karachi case studies contribute to broader international debates while offering a nuanced, locally grounded perspective. They underscore the need for flexible heritage frameworks that are attuned to Pakistan's realities yet aligned with evolving global conservation thought. This sets the stage for the conclusion, where the study's theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions are drawn together.

Conclusion

Building upon the preceding discussion, this study demonstrates that heritage conservation in Karachi is shaped by competing forces professional expertise, political influence, private ownership, and urban development pressures. While similar tensions exist in many countries, Karachi provides a particularly illustrative context due to its rapid urbanization, weak enforcement of heritage regulations, and the high density of colonial-era and post-partition heritage buildings. International charters such as the Venice Charter and the Nara Document on Authenticity provide a robust theoretical foundation, their implementation in Pakistan remains uneven, often resulting in fragmented or symbolic approaches to conservation. By examining cases of façadism, politically driven restoration, and public-private regeneration, the research underscores that authenticity cannot be safeguarded through technical guidelines alone but requires governance structures, participatory processes, and social legitimacy.

The findings of this research make three key contributions. Theoretically, they situate authenticity as a negotiated and context-specific construct, echoing recent scholarship that emphasizes its social, cultural, and experiential dimensions³⁰. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining literature review with case-based analysis, allowing international frameworks to be critically tested against local realities. Practically, it offers insights into how heritage

³⁰ Houbart, C. (2019). Conservation doctrines and their discontents: Revisiting the Venice Charter. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2018-0082>; Houbart, C. (2019). Rethinking the Venice Charter: Conservation principles in a global age. *Built Heritage*, 3(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-019-0007-0>; Jokilehto, J. (1999). *A history of architectural conservation*. Butterworth-Heinemann; Ahmed, N. (2016). Heritage, urban space and social exclusion in Pakistan: A study of urban regeneration in Lahore and Karachi. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31(2), 205–223.

professionals, policymakers, and communities can collaborate to achieve conservation outcomes that balance development imperatives with cultural continuity.

Importantly, the Karachi case studies reveal that the authority of heritage professionals in Pakistan is neither static nor uncontested. Conservation decisions are often swayed by political agendas or economic calculations, which risks reducing authenticity to a façade or spectacle. Similar challenges have been observed in other countries; for example, in Italy, post-war urban development pressures initially undermined conservation authority, but over time, stronger legislation, community participation, and professional oversight helped safeguard historic fabric³¹ (Avrami, 2009). In the UK, frameworks such as the Heritage Protection Reform and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act have strengthened the role of conservation professionals in balancing development and preservation. In Pakistan, examples such as the adaptive reuse of NED University's city campus show that professional involvement can meaningfully safeguard heritage values while enabling adaptive reuse, suggesting that lessons from international practice could inform local strategies.

This research thus contributes to the global conversation on heritage conservation by providing a nuanced, locally grounded perspective from Pakistan. It calls for flexible and inclusive frameworks that move beyond material preservation to encompass community voices, cultural practices, and social justice in urban heritage management. Future research could expand this inquiry by incorporating comparative studies across South Asia, exploring how different governance models negotiate the complex relationship between authenticity, authority, and development.

Acknowledgements

The author sincerely thanks the Heritage Cell, NED University of Engineering and Technology, for their support and for providing access to data.

³¹ Avrami, E. (2009). Heritage, values, and sustainability. In A. Richmond & A. Bracker (Eds.), *Conservation: Principles, dilemmas, and uncomfortable truths* (pp. 177–183). Routledge.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, N. (2016). Heritage, urban space and social exclusion in Pakistan: A study of urban regeneration in Lahore and Karachi. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31(2), 205–223.
- Akhtar, N., & Moatasim, F. (2019). The political life of urban heritage in Lahore. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25(9), 901–917
- Ashworth, G. J. (2008). The memorialization of violence and tragedy: Human trauma as heritage. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 3(3), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17438730802139094>
- Australia ICOMOS. (2013). *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS charter for places of cultural significance*. Australia ICOMOS.
- Avrami, E. (2009). Heritage, values, and sustainability. In A. Richmond & A. Bracker (Eds.), *Conservation: Principles, dilemmas, and uncomfortable truths* (pp. 177–183). Routledge.
- Bandarin, F., & van Oers, R. (2012). *The historic urban landscape: Managing heritage in an urban century*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Choay, F. (1992). *L'allégorie du patrimoine*. Éditions du Seuil.
- Fiorino, D. R. (2015). *Liberation as a Method for Monument Valorisation: The Case of the Defence Heritage Restoration*. Retrieved from <https://re.public.polimi.it/retrieve/e0c31c0b-b2ce-4599-e053-1705fe0aef77/Liberation-as-a-Method-for-Monument-Valorisation-The-Case-of-the-Defence-Heritage-Restoration.pdf>
- Houbart, C. (2019). Conservation doctrines and their discontents: Revisiting the Venice Charter. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 9(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-11-2018-0082>
- Houbart, C. (2019). Rethinking the Venice Charter: Conservation principles in a global age. *Built Heritage*, 3(2), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-019-0007-0>
- Houbart, C. (2020). The symbolic uses of the Venice Charter: Heritage doctrines in practice. *Future Anterior*, 17(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.17.1.0001>
- ICOMOS. (1964). *The Venice Charter: International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites*. ICOMOS.
- ICOMOS. (1994). *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. UNESCO/ICOMOS/ICCROM.
- ICOMOS. (1999). *International cultural tourism charter: Managing tourism at places of heritage significance*. ICOMOS.
- ICOMOS. (2003). *Principles for the analysis, conservation and structural restoration of architectural heritage*. ICOMOS.
- ICOMOS. (2014). *Ethical principles for the conservation of cultural heritage sites*. ICOMOS.
- Jokilehto, J. (1999). *A history of architectural conservation*. Butterworth-Heinemann.

- Khan, F. A. (2018). Conservation challenges in Pakistan: Negotiating between global frameworks and local practices. *Pakistan Journal of Architecture and Planning*, 2(1), 45–61.
- Khan, F. A., & Pirzada, F. (2019). Politics of heritage conservation in Pakistan: Between symbolism and sustainability. *Journal of the Pakistan Institute of Architects*, 8(1), 11–22.
- Khan, N. A. (2014). Heritage conservation and urban development in Karachi: A policy perspective. *Journal of Urban Management*, 3(2), 45–58.
- Lari, Y. (2011). *Conservation of heritage in Pakistan: Policies and practice*. Karachi, Pakistan: Heritage Foundation.
- Logan, W. (2002). *The disappearing “Asian” city: Protecting Asia’s urban heritage in a globalizing world*. Oxford University Press.
- Mason, R. (2002). Assessing values in conservation planning: Methodological issues and choices. In M. de la Torre (Ed.), *Assessing the values of cultural heritage* (pp. 5–30). Getty Conservation Institute.
- Mazhar, M. (2024, May 8). *The heritage we are losing: Karachi’s colonial buildings under threat*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1863555>
- Nadiem, I. H. (2006). *Cultural heritage of Pakistan*. Sang-e-Meel Publications.
- Pendlebury, J. (2013). Conservation values, the authorised heritage discourse and the conservation-planning assemblage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19(7), 709–727. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2012.700282>
- Siddiqui, T. (2023, July 2). *Illegal demolition leaves Kanji Building reduced to façade*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1762436>
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.
- Stubbs, J. (2009). *Time honored: A global view of architectural conservation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Appendix: Case Study Sources

- Hatim Bhai Building, Market Quarter, Karachi. Site visit observations and archival drawings. Author’s field documentation, August, 2023.
- Gul Shaker Building, Karachi. Site visit observations and historical photographs. HC-DAPNED Archives, 2024.
- NED University City Campus Restoration Project architectural documentation and design proposals records 2010.
- People’s Square, Karachi. Urban regeneration project documentation and site survey. Author’s field documentation, January, 2024.
- Kanji Building, Pakistan Chowk. Authors Field Documentation, July 2023, January 2024