

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: 13 – Architecture, Built Environment and Planning		
Title of case study: Diversifying the global conversation about Modernist history and architectural heritage: using research to achieve UNESCO World Heritage status for Asmara, Eritrea		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2015		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Edward Denison	Teaching fellow 2010-2016, Lecturer 2016-2018, Associate Professor 2018-2020, Professor 2020-Present	2010-present
Guang Yu Ren	Lecturer	2019-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Bartlett research into the history and theory of Modernism outside ‘The West’ has led to the inscription of Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, onto UNESCO’s World Heritage List. This is Eritrea’s first World Heritage Site and the first Modernist site in Africa to achieve this status. The research developed knowledge, changed attitudes, and raised international awareness about diversity in Modernism and architectural heritage. In addition to Asmara’s inscription, it led to the implementation of new building regulations, Eritrea’s first-ever heritage laws, as well as the validation and protection of sites, and played a role in the establishment of the Modern Cities Network (MCN) and Modern Heritage of Africa (MoHoA).</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The research is part of the reframing of the history and theory of architecture and associated practices in the heritage industry in the 21st century, away from western centrality that characterises 20th century architectural approaches. This transformation, which is more equitable and brings a global perspective, is commonly referred to as ‘decolonisation’ or ‘decentring’. Led by Edward Denison, at The Bartlett School of Architecture (BSA) since 2010, the research focuses on challenging Western values, assumptions and experiences in Modernism and the heritage sector. Denison and Ren’s body of work [a-c] uses theories and methods of architecture and history to deepen understanding of cities and places while enabling heritage to be engaged with, safeguarded and valued by diverse publics. Two important components of the research have been generating and disseminating new histories of Modernism outside the West. This has been achieved by exposing key figures, regions, experiences and approaches that have been previously overlooked or hidden from history, as well as critiquing existing heritage practices and advocating for new approaches to heritage practice, notably UNESCO’s recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL), as highlighted in Denison’s work in Asmara [d-e].</p> <p>Uncovering Modernism in China A formative example of underlying research is <i>Luke Him Sau, Architect: China’s Missing Modern</i> (Wiley, 2014) [a], by Denison and Ren. It is a major monograph on a significant but little-known Chinese architect trained in London from 1927-1930, who went on to have a prolific and episodic career working first as Chief Architect for the Bank of China and later independently in Hong Kong. <i>Luke Him Sau</i> explores transnational modernities through a biographical lens. Political turmoil largely erased Luke’s significant contributions from the historical record, both in Chinese and international architectural historiography. The research comprised extensive archival work in China and Britain, including professionally photographing all Luke’s extant buildings, and attracted funding equivalent to GBP60,000 from the Luke Him Sau Foundation in Hong Kong.</p>		

Similarly, *Ultra-Modernism: Architecture and Modernity in Manchuria* (HKUP: 2017) [b], also a Denison–Ren collaboration, was the first international publication to examine the encounter with architectural and urban modernity in northeast China, formerly Manchuria, which was occupied by Russia and then Japan before the Second World War. *Ultra-Modernism* exposes for the first time the complex intercontinental contestation of northeast China and Japan’s imperial programme of ultra-modernity. Underpinning this research was Denison’s monograph on China’s own complicated relationship with modernity, *Architecture and the Landscape of Modernity in China before 1949* (Routledge, 2017) [c].

Asmara’s bid for UNESCO World Heritage status

Utilising this expertise on decentralising architectural approaches, and in recognition of the concept of transnational modernities outside of the western sphere, Denison extended the above methods to research in Asmara, Eritrea to underpin its UNESCO World Heritage bid. Asmara was planned and designed by Italian architects during the colonial period ending in 1941; however, the Eritrean perspective is often overlooked, as is the fact that the city’s buildings and infrastructure were largely constructed by Eritreans. The African context of Asmara’s nomination was therefore fundamental yet challenging, not least because the World Heritage List embodies 20th-century Western values and norms. Following the establishment of the Asmara Heritage Project (AHP) in 2014 by the Eritrean government, Denison was commissioned to undertake the historical research and compile the 1,300-page UNESCO Nomination Dossier [d]. Eritrea’s Central Region Administration committed ERN12,000,000 (equivalent to GBP588,834) to cover anticipated local costs. Throughout the period of research and inscription, Denison successfully sought additional funding from The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (GBP10,000; December 2014), the Norwegian Foreign Ministry (GBP43,288, August 2015), and received annual donations from US-based Philip and Irene Toll Gage Foundation amounting to GBP7,287 to date. The Swiss Foreign Ministry also donated GBP44,221 (August 2017).

The research took more than four years and included: digitising over 80,000 architectural drawings, photographs and documents from the municipal archive; sourcing late 19th century maps and drawing new accurate maps for the AHP; surveying 4,346 buildings and 38 open spaces; interviewing all building owners, undertaking various forms of public engagement including exhibitions, competitions appeals and generating media exposure to raise public awareness; and photographing all key buildings, spaces and comparative sites throughout Eritrea. A 10,000-word summary of the Asmara UNESCO Nomination Dossier, co-authored with colleagues Medhanie Teklemariam and Dawit Abraha from the Asmara Heritage Project, was published in the *Journal of Architecture* [e].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a) Denison, E., Guang, Y., Luke Him Sau, *Architect: China’s Missing Modern* (Wiley: 2014). Available on Request.
- b) Denison, E., Guang, Y., *Ultra-Modernism: Architecture and Modernity in Manchuria*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 148pp., 50+ illustrations. Available on Request.
- c) Denison, E., *Architecture and the Landscape of Modernity in China before 1949*, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.340, 150+ illustrations. Available on Request.
- d) Denison, E., and the Asmara Heritage Project, *Asmara: Africa’s Modernist City –Nomination Dossier for UNESCO World Heritage Listing*, 2016, pp.1,300, 400+ illustrations. Available on Request.
- e) Denison, E., Teklemariam, M., Abraha, D., ‘Asmara: Africa’s Modernist City (UNESCO World Heritage Nomination)’, *Journal of Architecture*, Volume 22, Number 1, 2016, pp.11-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2016.1276093>

[b] won the RIBA President’s Medal for Research in 2017, [c] was shortlisted for the RIBA President’s Awards for Research in 2018.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**4.1 Inscription of Asmara as a UNESCO World Heritage Site**

Following submission of the Nomination Dossier, Asmara: A Modernist African City, on 8 July 2017, Asmara was successfully inscribed onto UNESCO's World Heritage List. Together with the AHP, Denison's research provided the required detail of Asmara's places, spaces and history, for it to become both Eritrea's first World Heritage Site and Africa's first Modernist World Heritage Site. Culturally, positive global recognition of Asmara has challenged and changed international perceptions of Eritrea, often misrepresented in the global media as secretive and perpetually in conflict. For Asmara's 500,000 residents, the planning documents and heritage laws created material improvement to the city's built environment, enhancing living conditions and the wellbeing of the population through the rehabilitation of buildings, spaces and infrastructure. The Turkish UNESCO Chair's response encapsulated the research's significance and intended impact: "What we would like to highlight by this inscription is the great contribution that Asmara's acceptance will make to the ongoing theoretical discussions about modernity and Modernism in the African continent and about the impacts of urbanisation since such discussions have always been limited to known examples mainly in the West and to some extent in the East. Following the inscription, the site will come to be known much more than before and therefore will serve as a school in itself in the field of urban planning" [1].

Producing the heritage laws and plans to rehabilitate Asmara, and procure international investment

Following Asmara's inscription, in late 2017 the EU pledged EUR300,000 for Capacity Building for safeguarding Asmara Historic Urban Environment, a programme of funding for staff training, the production of a Conservation Master Plan, and a programme of public engagement and awareness-raising, which included the publication of an Architectural Guide and Heritage Map. In providing the underpinning historical detail, Denison and Ren's research formed the basis for five key policies that will govern the long-term management of the city's built environment:

1. 1938 Building Regulations: Asmara's building regulations – unchanged since 1938 – have been updated to make them relevant in the 21st century. The updated 'Planning Norms and Technical Regulations' include data on the perimeters of the protected area, typological characteristics and the state of the conservation of buildings, roads and open spaces, and the condition of technological networks and public services. The new regulations also include guidance on the upgrading of public services, the protection of the environment, and the reorganisation of infrastructures. These regulations are currently awaiting ratification.

2. Conservation Master Plan: UNESCO mandates that all nominated properties have in place a Conservation Master Plan developed by Asmara Heritage Project and two external experts from Italy. This plan includes analysis of key features such as physical analysis (studies on the characteristics of building typology, current state of conservation of buildings and urban fabric), functional and socio-economic analysis (technical infrastructure, services and compatibility of use, current mobility). It also includes a plan for architectural assets and the townscape comprising five hundred blocks in the historic perimeter. The plan lays out policies on housing, services, mobility and traffic. This work is expected to be completed before UNESCO's deadline of the end of 2021 (deadline extended due to COVID-19).

3. Integrated Management Plan: The Integrated Management Plan (IMP, 2016-2021) specifies the vision, strategies and tools to be used for heritage protection, while responding to the needs of contemporary life. It contains the legal framework for the coordination the Conservation Master Plan, the Planning Norms and Technical Regulations, and the Disaster Risk Management Framework. The IMP also contains action plans spanning five years that establish a management institution, fund-raising initiatives, human capacity development schemes, and implementation of legal frameworks.

4. Disaster Risk Management Plan: The Disaster Risk Management Plan assesses the risk to the nominated property of all potential natural and man-made disasters. It was produced by an independent Eritrean consultant and approved in 2016.

5. Eritrea's first ever heritage laws: Heritage laws are a mandatory requirement of UNESCO when nominating a property. For Eritrea, this provided the impetus to create the nation's first ever heritage laws, which govern recovery, use, protection, and possession of elements of the physical or conceptual world produced culturally, which therefore cover both natural and cultural heritage. Combining both types of heritage was seen as positive and progressive, showing a firm commitment by the State Party to uphold the principles of the UNESCO Convention, to which Eritrea is a signatory, whether or not it has World Heritage Sites [2].

The long-term implementation of plans and policies emanating from the underlying research required investment in skills and training, which was supported by EUR96,000 from the EU. The first phase (late 2017) aimed to produce future conservators and managers of heritage sites. The second phase (2018) focused on producing technicians to participate in future restoration and conservation of cultural heritage sites. Participants (60 overall) were selected from various institutions (Department of Public Works Development, Ministry of Tourism, National Museum of Eritrea, Northern Red Sea Museum, Departments of Tourism of Northern Red Sea, Southern Red Sea and Maekel Region, Department of Social Services, Eritrea Mapping and Information Centre, Eritrea Institute of Technology, and Ministry of Public Works) and from relevant professions (architects, engineers, urban planners, surveyors, tourism managers, anthropologists, archaeologists and hydrologists). The Regional Advisor for Culture, Nairobi Office, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa highlights the importance of these developments and partnerships as a means of increasing support. They stated that "These different management and planning instruments are crucial to complementing existing legal protections of Asmara to ensure the preservation of the property's "Outstanding Universal Value" [3].

Changing public perceptions of Asmara

Through the inscription of Asmara, the research has contributed to challenging perceptions of the cultural and economic value of modern heritage among both domestic and international audiences. This was emphasised by the Head of the EU Delegation in Eritrea: "Cultural heritage is not only a means to understand the past, but also an initiative to ensure that Asmara's heritage is treasured and protected for future generations, while also benefiting local communities through increased visits and tourism" [4].

The impact on audiences within Eritrea is seen in an extensive programme of public engagement through exhibitions, workshops and conferences, such as the International Conference on Eritrean Studies in July 2016, and the annual Festival held in Asmara every August. From 2015 to 2018 Asmara's modern heritage featured prominently in the Festival, attracting approximately one million visitors annually (Eritrea's total population is less than five million). Former Deputy Director of the Asmara Heritage Project (AHP) said: "Prof Denison's underlying research was instrumental in providing the content for these exhibits [...] [making] it accessible to a very wide public audience (often non-literate) [...] [shifting] perception among Asmara residents from seeing the heritage negatively as old, neglected and rundown to more positively, as precious, antique, and a valued asset to be safeguarded: a source of pride. People have started to take responsibility to look after and care for their city" [5]. The Director of the AHP said: "The links [Denison] has established between UCL and AHP through student field trips and the public engagement activities, conceptual projects, and 3D scanning have also made a significant positive impact on the AHP's work and skills development" [6].

4.2 Asmara as a beacon of change for modern heritage cities

The international significance of Asmara's inscription can be seen in the growing demand for recognition of the value of modern heritage sites and other types of urban sites outside the West. The research has resulted in invitations to consult on future UNESCO inscriptions for: Ife Campus, Nigeria (March, 2019); Casablanca, Morocco, (Oct 2018); Beijing, China (Oct, 2018, 2019 and 2020); Gdynia, Poland, (May, 2018); and Kaunas, Lithuania (September, 2018). In 2018, Denison co-founded the Modern Cities Network, a professional collaborative group concerned with researching and safeguarding modern heritage. A preliminary meeting was held in June 2018 in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the White City of Tel Aviv, followed by the first official meeting

in the interwar Lithuanian capital and modernist city of Kaunas, in September 2019, funded by Kaunas Municipality. Kaunas is preparing its nomination for inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List, with Denison as advisor. The Head of Architecture and Urbanism at Kaunas University of Technology described the impact of the research: “The Bartlett School of Architecture is among our most important partners who share their knowledge about heritage as a potential resource for the future sustainable way of urban life. City of Asmara in this context has a particular interest for Kaunas” [7]. In February 2020 Denison was instrumental in forming MoHoA: Modern Heritage of Africa – Modern Heritage in the Anthropocene. This global collaboration with key partners including the African World Heritage Fund, University of Cape Town, Getty Conservation Institute and Modern Cities Network, aims to support the sustainable agenda in Africa by developing new professional and academic networks. Five cross-disciplinary regional workshops are planned for 2021, leading up to a conference hosted by Cape Town University in September 2021 and at UCL in 2022.

The Director of the Conservation Department, Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, who is another co-founder of the Modern Cities Network and was a member of the ICOMOS delegation to Asmara to review the city’s candidacy for world heritage status, described the ongoing collaboration and research as “an outstanding source of knowledge as well as a source of geo-cultural interpretation of local attributes” and that these new ideas “are having a wide-ranging impact, from influencing UNESCO’s policy to creating new global networking frameworks addressing the needs and challenges of Modern cities in the twenty-first century” [8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Ambassador Ahmet Altay Cengizer, Turkish Executive Board to UNESCO (presently occupying the Presidency, 40th Session of the UNESCO General Conference), Committee Member Comments, 41st World Heritage Committee (8 July 2017). <https://bit.ly/2QjuFfC> (51mins)
2. Proclamation No. 177/2015, *The Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation*. Gazette of Eritrean Laws Published by the Government of Eritrea
3. Testimonial: Regional Advisor for Culture, Nairobi Office, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa (19 February 2020)
4. Press Release from Head of the EU Delegation in Eritrea, Ambassador Christian Manahl: <https://bit.ly/3lqt6YP>
5. Testimonial: Former Deputy Director, Asmara Heritage Project (AHP), (2 December 2020)
6. Testimonial: Director, Asmara Heritage Project (10 October 2020)
7. Testimonial: Head of Architecture and Urbanism, Kaunas University of Technology (27 January 2020)
8. Testimonial: Director Conservation Department, Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality (2 February 2020)