TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
  Cultural Heritage Consumerism: Breaking the ‘Bucket List’

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  submit a written paper only (and not attend/present)

• Abstract (300 words):
  The precarious condition of significant heritage sites has been a world news headline and at the center of international political debates. Wars and unrest caused the loss of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and Palmyra, targeted for destruction by terrorist groups while hundreds of celebrated sites around the globe have been damaged by 21st century natural disasters. The UNESCO study of climate change and sea-level rise identified 720 universally significant sites in danger due to globalization, unyielding development, and the infiltration of tourism. Heritage sites and landscapes are visual and experiential signifiers of regional, cultural, and even collective histories. Yet, many of these sites that allow us to explore the past and learn lessons for the future are steadily slipping into decay because of human behavior and interaction, primarily the obsession with bucket list tourism that disregards questions of meaning, memory, and preservation, addressed by theorists such as Ruskin, Bevan, and Marston Fitch.
This paper will be largely informed by on-site research completed as the Society of Architectural Historians’ H. Allen Brooks Travelling Fellow, studying the impacts of rising tourism at historical sites and landscapes in the ‘bucket list’ destinations of Iceland, Cuba, and Japan during each region’s season-specific intersection of climatic and touristic extremes. Tourism is a primary economic generator for each of these island sites. However, there are critical issues related to the exploitation of cultural capital: sites can become overrun with tourists who put undue stress on fragile architectural fabric as well as extreme strains on local resources, ranging from basic infrastructure to energy demands to ecosystem services. Balancing UNWTO data with historic travel accounts, contemporary surveys, and experiential notes, this paper will address critical tensions introduced by mass tourism in urban historic districts, using a cross-cultural approach to analyze impacts and proactive politics from the past decade.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Danielle Willkens is an Assistant Professor of Architecture in the School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture. She is a practicing designer, researcher, and educator who is particularly interested in bringing architectural engagement to diverse audiences through interactive projects. Her practice and research experiences include design/build, public installations, and on-site investigations as well as extensive archival work in several countries. She was the Project Manager for the Learning Barge, the University of Virginia’s innovative floating classroom and sustainable field station on the Elizabeth River that was funded by grants from the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Vested in the cultivation of ‘early intervention’ architectural education, she has been working with Duke University’s Talent Identification Program (TIP) for several years and she will also be coordinating Auburn’s summer design camps both on-campus and at Birmingham’s Urban Studio. Most recently, she was the recipient of the Society of Architectural Historians’ H. Allen Brooks Travelling Fellowship. Between June 2016 and May 2017, she traveled to Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Cuba, and Japan to research the impact of tourism on cultural heritage sites.