



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

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Ruins and  
dissonant heritage:  
tourism in abandoned  
places from Japan to  
Bologna



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# Outline

## **Ruins and heritage**

**Politics of heritage**

**Japan's ruins:  
Hashima**

**Emilia Romagna,  
ruins and  
regeneration:  
Prati di Caprara**

# Heritage geographies

Heritage: historical, environmental, cultural, etc.

Heritage  $\neq$  history



Implies a use of the past as contemporary (political, social, economic) resource.

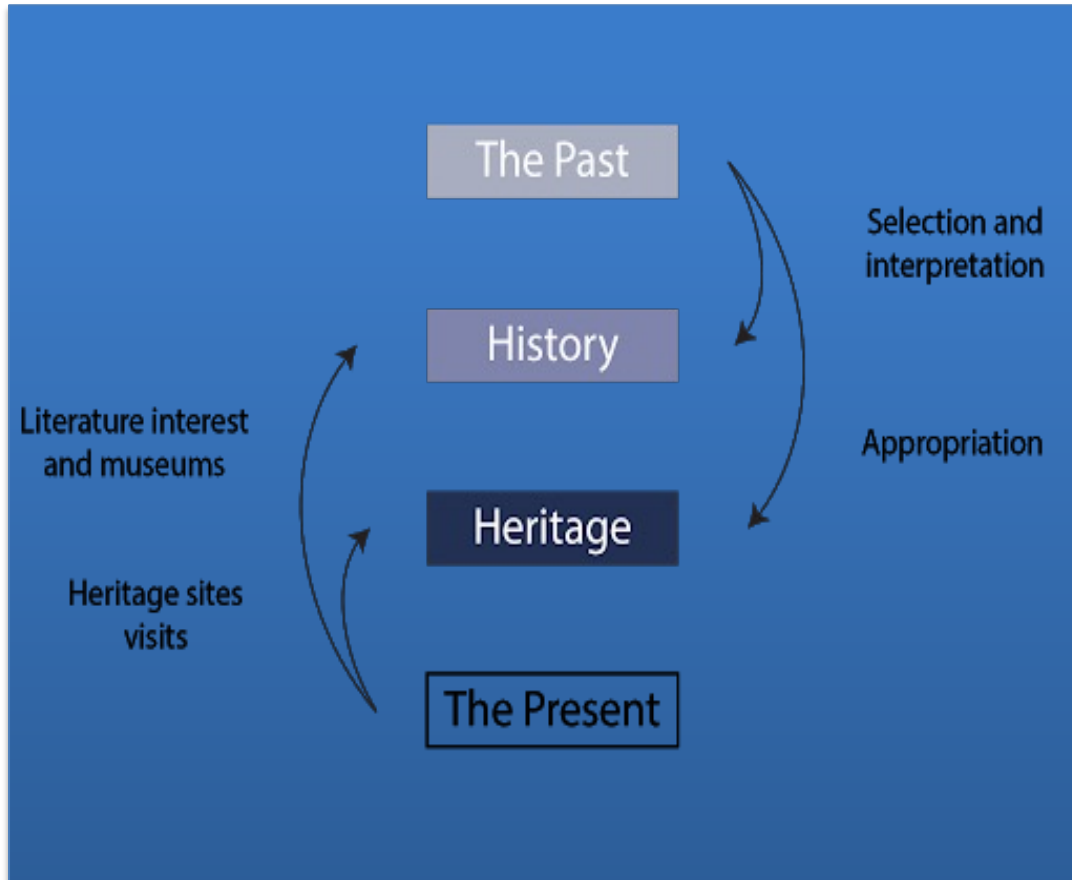
**Landmark + narrative/discourse + collective**

→ The focus of heritage is not on authenticity or intrinsic value, but on the socio-spatial-political-cultural purpose.

Heritage landmarks and discourses = Symbols “a part that has the power to suggest a whole... it calls to mind a succession of phenomena that are related analogically and metaphorically”  
(Tuan, 1974)



# Heritage and meaning



‘Culture is essentially concerned with the production and exchange of meaning and their real, practical effects. It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them - how we represent them - that we give them a meaning’ (Hall 1997, p. 3).

Cultural heritage denotes cultural landmarks and practices that are utilized and mobilized to line up with a group’s collective narratives, histories, and memories.



# Heritage and meaning



‘Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock . . . But it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.  
(Schama, 1995, p. 61)

When we market heritage landscapes, we need to know the meanings connected to them (**top-down, bottom-up, contested**).



# The political function of heritage

Heritage as discourse that legitimizes identities and collective narratives

Landmarks and monuments as manifestation of sociopolitical and ideological beliefs;

Creating heritage narratives: who has the authority to speak for the collectivity? Who remains silent/is silenced?

Creation of tradition and heritage forms through discourses and narratives around landscape, identity, community;



EUROPA  
NOSTRA  
FINLAND

**HERITAGE  
IS OURS**

**CITIZENS  
PARTICIPATING IN  
DECISION MAKING**

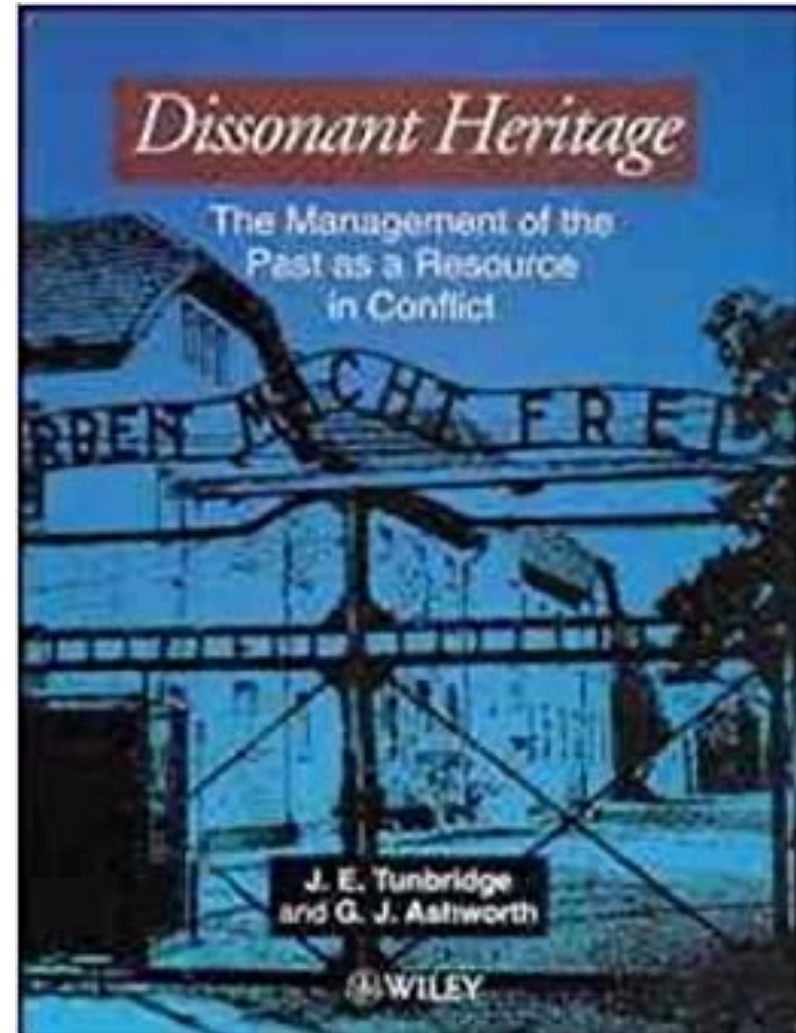
# Dissonant heritage

**Dissonant heritage** (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), *The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*.

‘Cultures cannot be seen as uniform but rather are constantly reproduced and contested.’ (Cosgrove, 1998, p. 6)

“The term ‘dissonance’ is often used in music theory, describing that two tones do not blend into one another harmonically, but create a certain tension.

The interpretation of heritage is considered dissonant when different groups attribute different stories to a certain object or landscape. **All these different interpretations are considered to be “true”.**



# Dissonant heritage

«Dissonant heritage» is the heritage «that hurts» or that recall past events not easy to be reconciled with visitors' values and everyday experience.

**Heritage is dissonant by its own nature**→ contestations and disagreement on the meaning and interpretation of heritage.

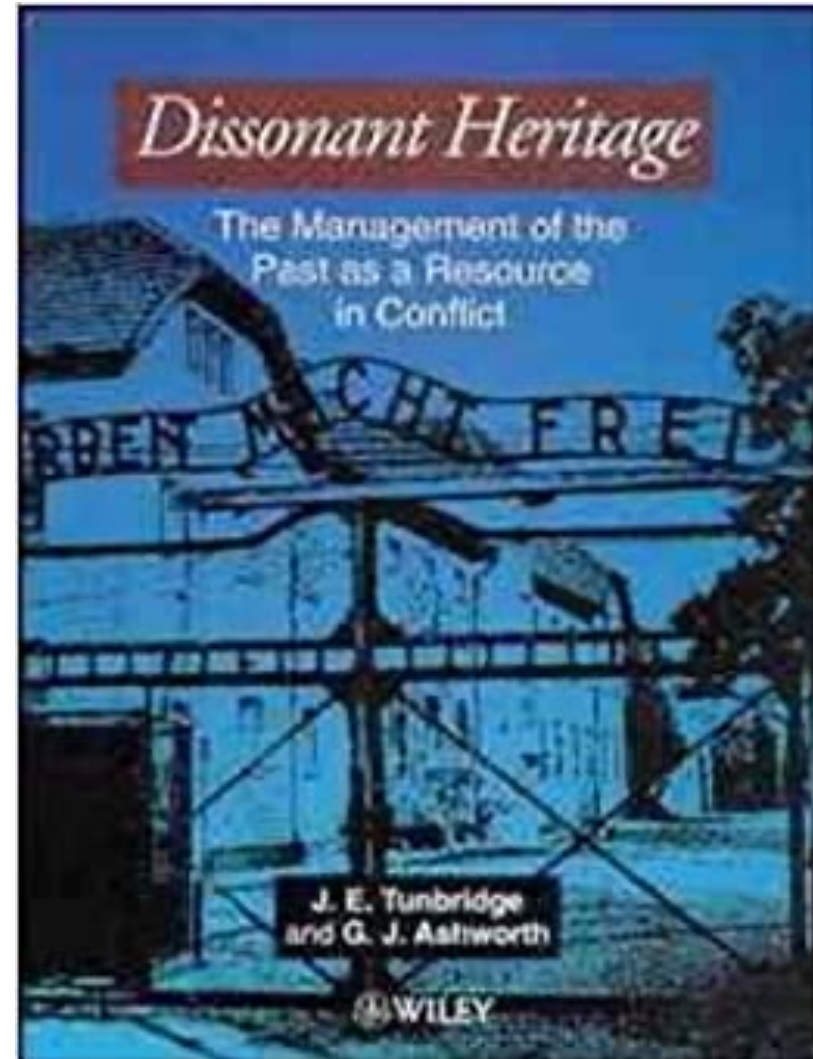
Heritage can be marketised to understand bottom-up, new societal needs and shifting ideologies to capture and attract a new niche of tourists.





# Dissonant heritage

‘This intrinsic dissonant quality of heritage is exacerbated because it is often implicated in the definitions of power and territoriality that attend the nation-state and its allegories of exclusivity. In this sense, dissonance can be regarded as destructive but, paradoxically, it is also a condition of the construction of pluralist, multicultural societies based on inclusiveness and variable sum conceptualizations of power.’  
(Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge, 2000)



# Dissonant heritage

‘We should not be deceived into thinking that...heritage is an acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies; rather it is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or underneath’.

(Foucault, 1969, cited in English in Matless 1992, p. 51)



# Ruin islands in Japan: Hashima and Tomogashima



# Hashima/Gunkanjima

Southwest of Nagasaki prefecture, in Japan;

The nickname of the island is Gunkanjima because of its shape;

Coal was discovered on the island in 1810→ in 1890 Mitsubishi starts full scale mining operations;

In 1960s, most densely inhabited place on Earth, with 5500 people living in 160x480 metres of the island;

In 1974 petrol substitutes coal, the island is abandoned;

It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015→ after that the number of tourists went from 500.000 a year to 1.3 millions;

Tours only last one hour and there is a specific path;

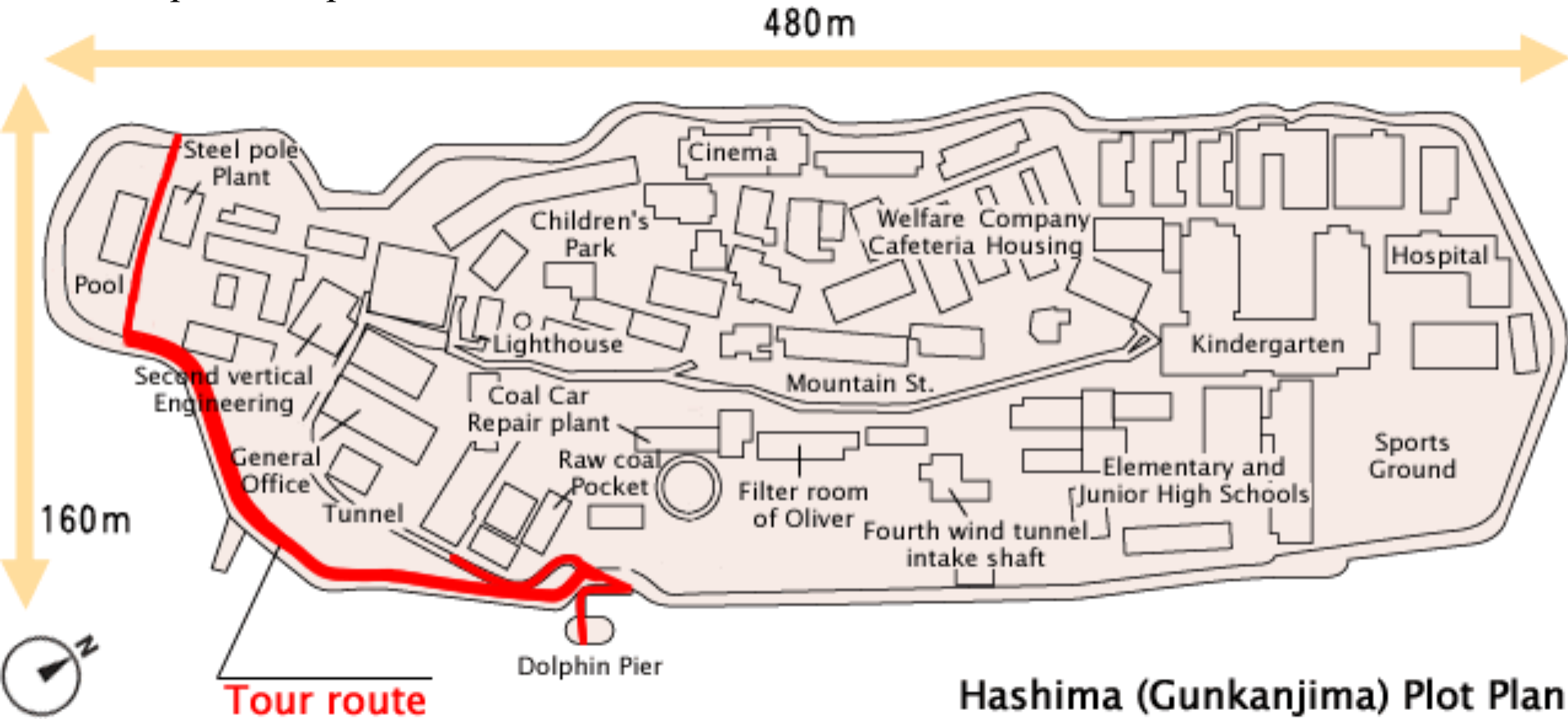




# Hashima Island as dissonant heritage

The historical power of ruins is inherently contentious and dissonant → Ruins can be strong connectors between multiple generations of people and places

Tours to Hashima → depiction of tightly-knit community, aimed at curious tourists as well as urban explorers and 007 movie fans



# Hashima's digital museum



Opened in 2016 in Nagasaki city;

Mixes traditional and digital exhibits;

Aerial shots of the island as well as simulation of coal mine experience;

Reproduction of interiors of the workers' apartments (10sqm for a family, with no bathroom or kitchen);

VR goggles that allow virtual exploration of parts of the island not included in the tour;

Museum is free if you book a ticket to Hashima island.



# Hell Island: dissonant heritage narratives

- Government controls narrative and representation
- Refuse to acknowledge Koreans and Chinese forced workers were “mobilized” and sent to Hashima to work in the mines (and cleaning up debris in WW II Nagasaki)
- Japan has been warned by UNESCO: state of decay of the island+ gross omissions in recognising past atrocities in the island
- Different layers: top-down narratives (not just government, but also private company Mitsubishi) and bottom-up (Korean and Chinese survivors)





# Ruins reclaimed by nature: Prati di Caprara



Green lung of Bologna  
+  
Military ruins



# Ruins reclaimed by nature: Prati di Caprara



Before 1861 → private property

1861 → after Italy is unified, they become a training base for the military, a site for horse racing events, and in 1901, the football field of the Bologna Soccer Team

1913 → a part of the Prati becomes a military airport for WW I

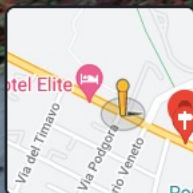
1955 – 1963 → the new Ospedale Maggiore is built, the Prati are abandoned



34 Via Aurelio Saffi  
Bologna, Emilia-Romagna

Google

Street View - Aug 2020

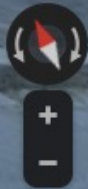


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Google



Macerie del 2 agosto 1980  
(posizione presunta)

Cedri e pioppi  
monumentali  
(vedi foto)

Area verde con alberi  
di prima categoria -  
PRG 1969

Ex magazzini  
militari (tutelati?)

Magazzino della  
Croce Rossa  
(In uso)



# Regeneration NO exploitation

- Today contestations about what future should the Prati have
- Plans to turn the Prati into School/Outlet/Students accommodations/etc...
- Desire of resident to keep the Prati as they are

## **RUINS OR REGENERATION?**

And even if we keep the ecology of the Prati intact, how much do we do that?

- Park or forest?
- What about the homeless living in the Prati?



# So... how do we work with the dissonant heritage of ruins?

Ruins are an inherent by-product of transformative processes, and can reflect an uneasy tension within the contemporary city.

Ruins erase history (abandonment and loss) and can be problematic in the ways in which they politicise the past but also teach about impermanence, adaptation, regeneration.

It is essential to situate ruins in the urban texture → remembrance, reconstruction, and/or contextualization can foster social recovery from the same traumatic events that gave rise to decay, ruination, and loss of built environments.

**We should ask ourselves: what do these specific ruins mean in this contemporary context in this place? what can they mean to a certain audience?**



# So... how do we work with the dissonant heritage of ruins?

Five inherently interrelated threads of “best practices:

1. **Multi-historical memory**→ Ruins can manifest the many histories that have produced them;
2. **Polyvocality**→ Responsibility to enable the diverse voices, vested interests, and perspectives on place;
3. **Holistic urban integration**→ Find new tools beyond conventional ones (plaques, visual and audio displays, and guides);
4. **Evolution, engagement and change**→ Communities and places are continually changing: How can communities use these spaces? How can these spaces adapt to community needs?
5. **Interplay between human and non or more-than-human**→ How can we give voice also to the non-human elements?

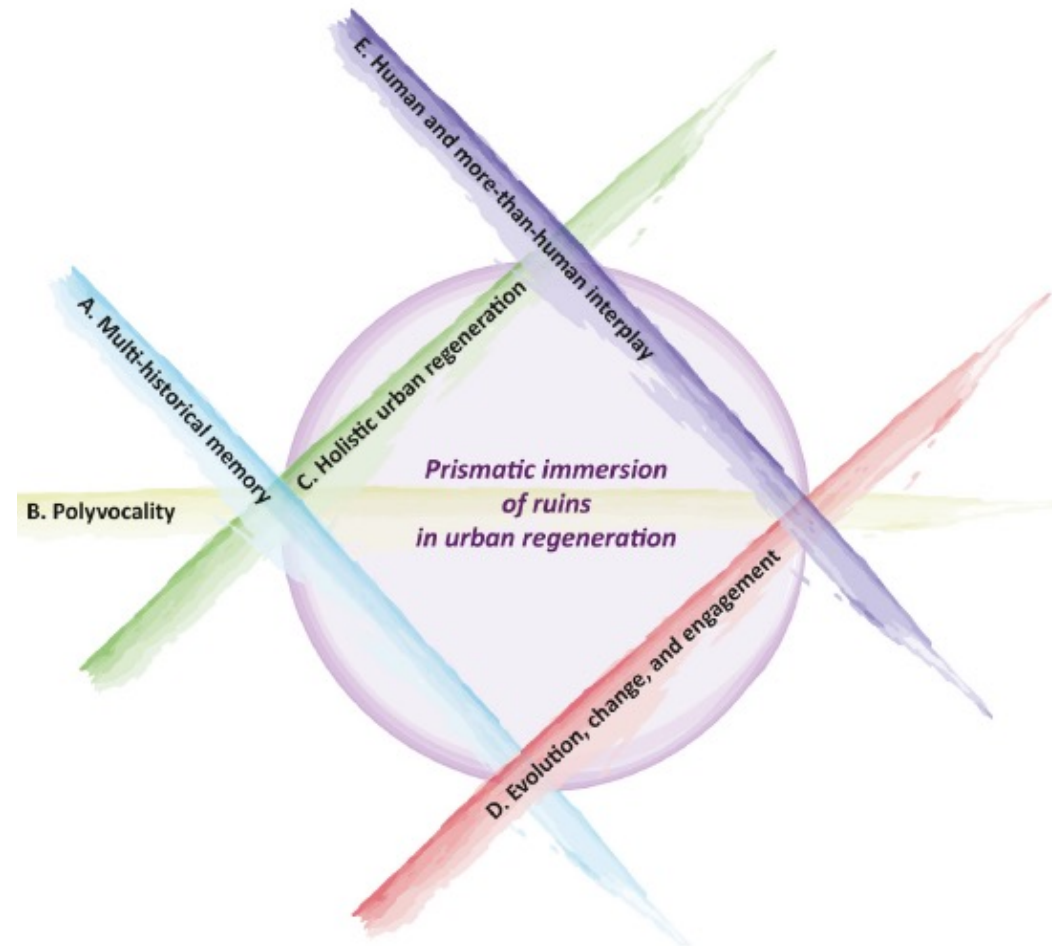


fig. 1. A multi-dimensional framework for the prismatic immersion of ruins in urban regeneration.





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Thank you!

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