

The role of fantasy in architectural heritage conservation – a systematic review

The role of
fantasy

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper has aimed to systematically review the existing literature regarding the role of fantasy in heritage conservation, establishing a research gap and investigating the different facets of fantasy that contribute to a conservation undertaking.

Design/methodology/approach – This systematic literature review adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model with literature from the SCOPUS-indexing database.

Findings – This review has indicated a lack of input from Eastern scholarship, the absence of quantitative research, the lack of discussion concerning fantasy within the architecture discipline and the lack of attention towards fantasy's role in architectural heritage conservation.

Practical implications – A better understanding of the role of fantasy within architectural heritage studies would improve conservation practice, specifically the existing cultural significance value evaluation framework and the management of stakeholders' expectations.

Originality/value – The present paper serves as a preliminary insight into the value of fantasy within the architecture discipline, allowing for more empirical-based research and knowledge to be added in this domain in the future.

Keywords Fantasy, Architecture, Conservation, Heritage, Review

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

The term “fantasy” originates from the Latin word “*phantasia*”, which has two meanings, the first refers to “*an idea, notion, fancy*” or “*a mere notion of fancy, the mere semblance of a man*”, and the latter connotes a “*phantom, apparition*” (Lewis and Short, 1891). According to the Cambridge Learner's dictionary, fantasy is a *pleasant situation or event you imagine that is not real or true*. One of the Oxford English Dictionary definitions is “*a fanciful mental image, typically one on which a person often dwells and which reflects their conscious or unconscious wishes*”. Fantasy is a fundamental aspect for a human to develop cognitive skills, wanting to explore, know and make-believe behaviours in governing one's growth, beliefs, interpretation, reasoning and decision-making (Britton, 1971; Waskul and Lust, 2004; Boerger, 2011).

The role of fantasy has been studied qualitatively in psychology, aimed at understanding the mentality of patients. In social science or tourism studies, fantasy has been aimed at understanding; traders, explorers, tourists and pilgrims regarding their behaviour (Timothy, 2019; Lovell and Thurgill, 2021). From a social science perspective, fantasy gives birth to a



primordial inspiration before an action, which later develops into great undertakings, such as urban planning and inventions (Kozak and Decrop, 2009; Yiğit-Turan, 2016). A thorough understanding of fantasy in tourism studies has helped manipulate the hospitality service industry to satisfy visitor fantasies (Timothy, 2019). The relationship between fantasy and city planning has also commonly been discussed in literary pieces related to urban planning or modern architecture, although it has never been explicitly mentioned as the core subject of any literature (Somhegyi, 2021).

Despite the explicit discussions regarding fantasy in heritage tourism literature, several short literary works have been written targeting fantasy's role in architectural heritage conservation. However, there have only been a few implicit mentions of fantasy as an important attribute in urban planning. Wells (2017) conducted some studies concerning the topic, where he discussed the spontaneous fantasies of visitors, ontologies and the dominance of professional stakeholders in shaping conservation undertakings via a case study research method. Wells' (2017) empirical data via interviews attested to the fantasies constantly formed by users when they encounter a heritage building or an ensemble of heritage structures. In other words, Wells (2017) described the interaction between a heritage subject, its context and its users and saw the presence of fantasy value. Values were formed and assigned to heritage subjects extrinsically by society via social processes that took place outside the object or subject itself (De la Torre, 2002).

Similarly to other constructs or cultural significance values (CSV), such as aesthetic and social values, a scenario where the collective emergence of fantasy from the public or users stumbles upon a heritage constitutes fantasy value. Thus, this paper disembarked from Wells' (2017) findings and attempted establishing fantasy value as a contemporary CSV. The present paper has systematically investigated fantasy's role and different facets in architectural heritage conservation via a review of existing literature.

2. Problem statement

The role of fantasy has been proven crucial in modern architecture. In existing literature concerning architecture, scholars have mentioned constructing modern buildings and urban landscapes to satisfy community fantasies. A meaningful piece of architecture or landscaping tends to have the ability to instantly create a different world from that surrounding it, comparing and juxtaposing itself with others that are seen as pragmatic and primitively functional. According to Friedman (1987), fantasy-generating or post-war Modernism buildings in the United States have enabled users to associate with the longing-virtues absent in their daily lives, carried by their favoured fictional characters who lived in fantasy worlds. Some have made people ponder momentarily, fantasising about one or more than one; subject, scenario or place where the act itself is sensational and pleasuring. The fantasising act immediately stops when one stumbles upon the dull daily architectural attributes commonly seen in daily life (Friedman, 1987). These fantasies are comforting, satisfying the longing and craving of the population for a self-conjectured Golden Age or a possible utopian future.

Architectural fulfilment towards people's fantasies does not stop at a user's spiritual and emotional satisfaction within the given context; it is moulded by contemporary social and economic reality. Local governments have also manipulated spatial fantasy to foster national identity or political gains, and vice-versa, as a testimony to reflect the internal and external influences received by the people (Moser, 2012; Lim, 2016; Mufti, 2021). One example is Malaysia's contemporary urban development. The construction of highly Islamic-styled-buildings in modern developments projects the fantasy of the Malay community to live in a Middle Eastern-like utopia or a holier, more superior and authentic Islamic realm (Tajuddin, 2007; Moser, 2012). Such fantasies are known to be imbued via the Malay community's upbringings, pan-Islamic movements, ethnocentrism and radical nationalism. The longing

for the actualisation of architectural fantasy implicitly counters the colonial orientalist fantasy associated with the Chinese Malaysian and Western colonialism that had long been entrusted upon the historic urban landscape in the country (Moser, 2012).

In the psychological sphere, scholars have discussed how collective emotion or fullness-fantasy can make way for the creation or adoption of modern architecture (Stein *et al.*, 2017). It is understood that newly introduced architecture can alter one's fantasies towards the security and warmth offered by existing or older architecture. As a result, fullness-fantasy's hold would either deter or promote architectural progression, such as; renovation using newer architectural language, technology or materials, or hinder any new technique or style to preserve the fantasy. When fullness-fantasy is propagated at a societal scale, it shapes the destiny of making progress in terms of pursuing newer architectural styles and developments in a region.

Studies regarding the power of fantasy in modern architecture have enabled new architectural languages to be developed, or at least the ability to predict architectural movements. Such discoveries have influenced architectural innovation without compromising the economy, allowing people to continue seeking comfort in their existing fantasies, and ensuring healthy urban development, expectations and relationships between designers and users. At present, research regarding the role of fantasy in architectural heritage studies has remained indifferent and rarely discussed. Therefore, a systematic literature review is essential to identify the research gap and provide preliminary insight into the topic. It will allow further empirical-based research and knowledge to be added in this research area, ultimately benefiting and improving conservation practices, specifically the existing cultural significance value evaluation framework and the management of stakeholders' expectations.

3. Aim and objectives

This systematic literature review has investigated fantasy's role in architectural heritage conservation. It has focused on two areas (1) the definition of fantasy value in a heritage context and (2) how fantasy affects the information interpretation of stakeholders in architectural conservation in creating perceptions and decision-making. The systematic literature review may also corroborate the presence of fantasy value in every heritage subject.

4. Methodology

The initial motivation to investigate this phenomenon was generated through afterthought upon reading David Lowenthal's work, "*The Past is a Foreign Country - Revisited (2015)*". Lowenthal's work demonstrated how fantasy changes the way scholars or laypeople perceive an environment, unconsciously affecting their actions and attitudes towards objects and subjects from the past (Lowenthal, 2015). The revelation towards *fantasy* in heritage tourism has, thus, led to a quest to understand the role of fantasy in architectural heritage conservation. There have only been a limited number of studies regarding the role of fantasy in heritage conservation; hence a research gap was established via a systematic literature review. The review was conducted to gain insight into fantasy's psychological and contextual role in heritage conservation. The systematic literature review adopted the PRISMA model with literature chosen from the SCOPUS-indexing database (Liberati *et al.*, 2009). The following disclosure has been written to fulfil the checklist of the PRISMA model.

The literature reviewed was generated via the SCOPUS database between 2010 and 15th June 2021. No specific sources and publishers in SCOPUS were targeted. Thus, all-around input was obtained concerning the different natures of the research topic. Only literature published in English was included, with no limits to the publication type. The eligibility

criteria yielded literature published over the past ten years that were still relevant in the present context. The review included all types of publications answering the scarcity of information and the indifferent attitude amongst scholars in heritage conservation towards this topic. The literature review focused on any mention of fantasy in heritage conservation. Keywords, such as; *fantasy*, *conservation*, *heritage* or *historic*, were used without including *architecture* to guide data collection. Such keyword variations allowed more relevant literature to emerge from the title and abstract search and encompassed literature with keywords, such as; *urban*, *building* or *construction* that may potentially contribute to the topic. Literature screening was based on its abstract, as deemed relevant to the topic by the author. Literature displaying “*fantastic*” instead of *fantasy* was excluded. Regardless of the core question of the full text, the literature containing keywords, such as; *architect* or *architecture* coupled with *heritage* and *fantasy*, were included in the review.

The literature was later screened based on its availability in electronic form. Three literature pieces were absent from the literature review due to this review’s author’s inability to retrieve the full text by the time this paper was written. The missing pieces were; <*A heritage of ruins: The ancient sites of Southeast Asia and their conservation*>, <*Proving ground: Expertise and Appalachian landscapes*> and <*A (very) open elite: Downton Abbey, historical fiction and America’s romance with the British aristocracy*>. The absence of these three pieces of literature in the review may have affected the precision of the meta-analysis but would not have made a drastic difference to the overall findings. However, it should be noted that this review only used the SCOPUS database. Including other databases in the review might have produced a different result in the meta-analysis, yet the findings based on the extracted data should remain similar.

This report comprises two sections; the first section discusses the; publishing location, subject area, research method and objectives of the studies via meta-analysis. The latter part discusses the data extracted, using thematic analysis to identify the role and influence of fantasy in information interpretation or other codes regarding the architectural heritage conservation domain. The literature screening process is illustrated in [Figure 1](#). The results comprised ten reviewed articles, four books and one conference proceeding. [Table 1](#) illustrates the publisher of each literature piece concerning abstract screening.

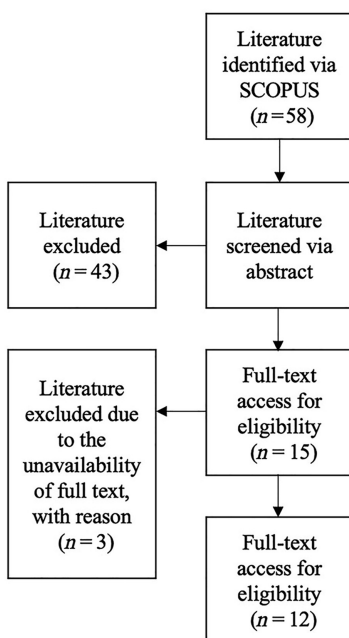
5. Meta-analysis

5.1 Publication’s location

[Table 2](#) shows the twelve literature pieces published in different countries. Five of the twelve works of literature were published in the United States, followed by two in the United Kingdom and two in Israel. [Figure 2](#) show that the English-speaking world dominates research relating to heritage fantasy studies. Hong Kong (China) and Malaysia were among the Asian countries publishing studies concerning heritage fantasy. Yet, unlike other publishing countries and Hong Kong, where the article <*Spectacular Macau: Visioning futures for a World Heritage City*> discusses the Hong Kong regional phenomenon, the book <*A post-exotic anthropology of Soqatra, volume II: Cultural and environmental annexation of an indigenous community*> published in Malaysia, discussed a phenomenon that took place in Yemen and did not represent heritage-fantasy that took place in Malaysia nor its immediate region. The small number of literary pieces and the lack of studies from the east or beyond the English-speaking world indicated a research gap in this topic.

5.2 Subject area

[Table 3](#) illustrates the different subject areas (SA) of twelve literature pieces. [Figure 3](#) shows that studies relevant to heritage fantasy were mostly categorised under the social



Source(s): Figure created by Author

Figure 1.
Literature screening
process

science domain. Although studies in heritage tourism and the modern architecture discipline have demonstrated the role of fantasy, the meta-analysis showed that the social science discipline dominated most studies depicting fantasy attributes and influences regarding architectural heritage. Based on Figure 3, SA1 and SA5 came after social science, with two pieces of literature published under each subject area. SA2 and SA3 served as the least popular subject areas for publishing literature related to heritage fantasy. A total of 3 pieces of literature were categorised under SA6 due to their absence in SCOPUS's "subject area" categorisation. The first article, by Fisher (2012), was published in *Exemplaria*, a peer-reviewed journal that focuses on medieval and early modern periods; The second article, by Chu (2015), was published in *Geoforum*, a peer-reviewed journal which focuses on interdisciplinary research and studies related to human geography. Yablon's (2014) article was published in the *History of Photography*, a peer-reviewed journal focussing on photographic research, encompassing its; theory, practice and history. The latter three works of literature were not directly related to architectural heritage discourse. The results showed a lack of relevant heritage-fantasy research in the architectural or engineering disciplines, even though other disciplines have already ventured into similar research topics.

5.3 Research method

Table 4 shows the five types of research methods (RM) that are adopted in the twelve literature pieces. Based on Figure 4, it appears that most of the literature was qualitative. Seventy-five per cent of the literature was qualitative research-based, where case studies and phenomenology made up half of the amount. The ethnography approach made up 17% of the literature with mesography, a new research approach established by Elie (2020), serving as the least popular research method adopted. Among the literature, RM2 made up a quarter as

Search variation	TITLE-ABS-KEY (fantas* AND conserv* AND (heritage OR histor*)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2011) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2010))
Search result	58
Relevant by topic via abstract screening	15

JOURNALS AND PUBLISHERS

1	<i>International Journal of Heritage Studies</i>
2	Exemplaria
3	<i>University of Hawai'i Press</i>
4	International Journal of Design and Nature and Ecodynamics
5	History of Photography
6	Thesis Eleven
7	International Journal of Intercultural Relations
8	Geoforum
9	<i>University of North Carolina Press</i>
10	International Journal of Heritage Studies
11	<i>John Hopkins University Press</i>
12	Utopian Studies
13	Journal of British Cinema and Television
14	<i>Springer Nature Switzerland AG</i>
15	<i>Springer Nature Switzerland AG</i>

Table 1.
List of publishers of literature screened via abstract

Source(s): Table created by Author

Code	Countries	No.	Reference studies
PL1.	United States	5	Wells (2010, 2017) , Rahmani (2013) , Yablon (2014) and Brown (2015)
PL2.	United Kingdom	2	Fisher (2012) and Bielik-Robson (2018)
PL3.	Australia	1	Browne (2014)
PL4.	Israel	2	Dabbagh et al. (2014)
PL5.	Hong Kong	1	Chu (2015)
PL6.	Malaysia	1	Elie (2020)

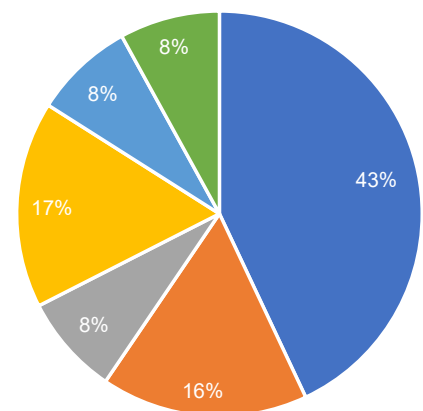
Table 2.
Publishing location of literature

Source(s): Table created by Author

fantasy-related topics were discussed merely as a commentary work of others. Albeit the findings have shown the dominance of qualitative research in fantasy-related topics, [Wells \(2017\)](#) emphasised the use of mixed methods in his research with the inclusion of surveys alongside phenomenology-framed interviews. In conclusion, the meta-analysis lacked quantitative research on heritage-fantasy subject matters.

5.4 Study objectives

According to [Table 5](#), most of the literature objectives or study objectives (SO) have direct discussion towards fantasy-related matters. Based on [Figure 5](#), SO1 took up 42% of the total included literature. Although five pieces of literature under SO1 were targeted at investigating fantasy-relevant subjects, they varied in disciplines. Two of the five works of literature had a candid discussion on architectural heritage fantasy that [Jeremy C.](#)



■ United States ■ United Kingdom ■ Australia
■ Israel ■ Hong Kong ■ Malaysia

Source(s): Figure created by Author

Figure 2.
Publishing location

Code	Subject area	No.	Reference studies
SA1.	Arts and humanities	2	Wells (2017) and Bielik-Robson (2018)
SA2.	Agriculture and biological science	1	Rahmani (2013)
SA3.	Computer science	1	Hazan (2020)
SA4.	Social science	3	Browne (2014), Chu (2015) and Elie (2020)
SA5.	Business, management and accounting	2	Wells (2010) and Dabbagh <i>et al.</i> (2014)
SA6.	Undefined	3	Fisher (2012), Yablon (2014) and Chu (2015)

Source(s): Table created by Author

Table 3.
Subject area of
literature

Wells made. The article *<Our history is not false: Perspectives from the revitalisation culture>* explored the cultural values between citizens and conservation professionals, the latter *<How are old places different from new places? A psychological investigation of the correlation between patina, spontaneous fantasies, and place attachment>* aimed to understand how evaluation and emotional attachment towards a cultural landscape are affected by the perception or experience shaped by physical age or age value provided. Both demonstrated direct discussion on fantasy's influence in the conservation industry. Brown's (2015) book was written to examine the collective memories of the public towards Confederate historical monuments. In Hazan's (2020) and Yablon's (2014) articles, the former investigated the role of curators and conservators in presenting heritage subjects, whereas the latter aimed to understand the association between photography and time travel. Although these three pieces of literature did not directly discuss architectural heritage fantasy, their cross-disciplinary discussion regarding fantasy strengthened the importance of fantasy-relevant research in architectural studies.

SO2 and SO3 both shared 25% of the total literature. SO2 comprised three works of literature deriving a statement via reviewing others' literary works. Fisher (2012) attempted to investigate how emerging aristocrats appropriated Breton culture by reviewing poems; Browne (2014)'s article was written to review *<The Collective Imagination – The Creative Spirit of Free Societies (2012)>* by Peter Murphy. In contrast, Bielik-Robson (2018) reviewed

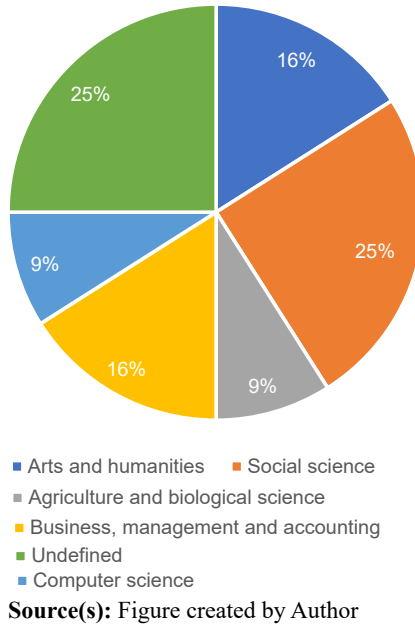


Figure 3.
Subject area

Code	Research method	No.	Reference studies
RM1.	Case study	3	Wells (2010, 2017) and Yablon (2014)
RM2.	Book review	3	Fisher (2012), Browne (2014) and Bielik-Robson (2018)
RM3.	Phenomenology	3	Rahmani (2013), Chu (2015) and Hazan (2020)
RM4.	Mesography	1	Elie (2020)
RM5.	Ethnography	2	Dabbagh <i>et al.</i> (2014) and Brown (2015)

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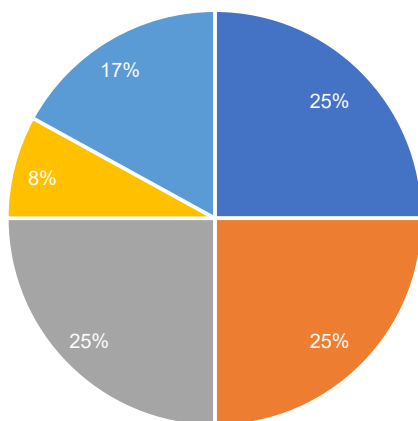
Table 4.
Research method of
the literature

messianic revival in societal order using both Ernst Bloch’s and Jacques Derrida’s works. SO2 was inclined to philosophical explorations, indirectly addressing the role of fantasy while looking into societal phenomena.

SO3 is a branch of studies focused on natural and urban landscape management. Regarding urban landscape management, Rahmani’s (2013) work investigated the ideal model of a sustainable city, while Chu’s (2015) study examined the conflicting sentiments generated by Macau’s recent developments. The only literature concerning natural landscape management was conducted by Elie (2020), which explores and discusses the cultural modernisation and environmental annexation of Soqotra, Yemen. Three works of literature under SO3 discussed the role and influence of fantasy whilst investigating the existing mechanism in managing landscapes.

SO4 encompassed the only literature that inadvertently discussed fantasy matters while discussing contemporary social issues. Dabbagh *et al.*’s (2014) work under SO4 attempted to address the gap in the literature by exploring the socialisation strategies of an uprooted group, namely Lebanese refugees. Although the literature did not focus on matters related to fantasy, the discussion inadvertently delivered the role of fantasy in changing one’s mind and action.

The role of fantasy



■ Case study ■ Book review
 ■ Phenomenology ■ Mesography
 ■ Ethnography

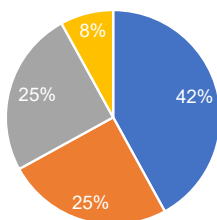
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Figure 4.
Research method

Code	Study objective	No.	Reference studies
SO1.	Investigation on fantasy-relevant topics, roles, influences or related matters	5	Wells (2010, 2017), Yablon (2014), Brown (2015) and Hazan (2020)
SO2.	Reviewing literary works	3	Fisher (2012), Browne (2014) and Bielik-Robson (2018)
SO3.	Studying natural or urban landscape management	3	Rahmani (2013), Chu (2015) and Elie (2020)
SO4.	Investigating contemporary social issues	1	Yablon (2014)

Source(s): Table created by Author

Table 5.
Objectives of the literature



■ Investigation on fantasy topic, roles, influences or related matters
 ■ Reviewing literary works
 ■ Studying on natural or urban landscape management
 ■ Investigating contemporary social issue

Source(s): Figure created by Author

Figure 5.
Study objectives

5.5 Thematic analysis of the content

Based on the examined literature, the contents relevant to fantasy were analysed using thematic analysis. Several themes and subthemes surfaced and were categorised, as shown in Figure 6. The following sub-themes were discussed in an attempt to analyse their influences on information interpretation.

5.6 Time travelling

Time travel was the most celebrated subtheme based on the number of literature pieces discussing it, aside from the sub-theme “foreign country”. According to Wells (2017), the simple mathematical difference in the age between old and new cities that look similar would affect an individual’s way of perceiving the physical characteristics of an environment, forming place attachments and developing spontaneous fantasies. The visually informed differences in a numeric label concerning a building or a city’s age would unconsciously affect an individual’s perception, disregarding any empirical evidence or landscape in front of their eyes.

... a pseudo-mathematical operation in which the meanings and experiences of the new environment are ‘subtracted’ from the meanings of the old environment. (Wells, 2017, p. 2)

The phenomenon where fascination and obsession towards the age of buildings, which are prioritised before the condition of the buildings, empirical data or facts, can be attributed to the time-travelling fantasies imbued to individuals from a young age. Lowenthal (2015) concluded that science fiction received during an individual’s youth, regardless of the medium or manner of receiving it, played an important role in shaping an individual’s obsession with time-travelling fantasies. Another factor leading to time-travelling fantasies is the static nature of what has already happened. Pleasurable events that have occurred in the past have been experienced and are non-fickle. Thus, individuals would resort to the past or “former glory” instead of newness. The phenomenon of instantly resorting to “former glory” was justified by Wells (2017). He claimed that “spontaneous fantasy” was created when a visually pleasant aged object was placed in an environmentally correct context, thus, evoking emotional experiences. He explained that people tended to imagine things that might not take place in the immediate environment or what might take place in the future based on

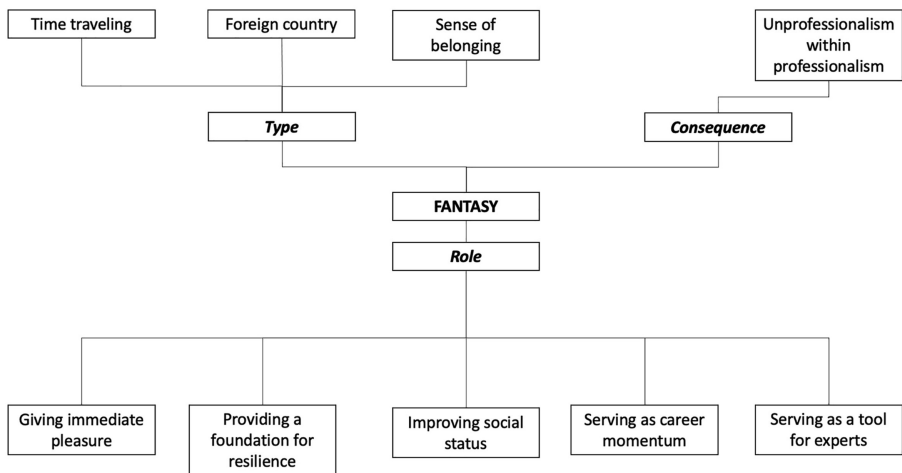


Figure 6. Themes coded via thematic analysis

Source(s): Figure created by Author

what they have experienced, read or seen. He concluded that older places made visitors or users fantasise.

A war commemoration is often more than a mourning event in the United States. For example, the Hunley Commemoration in South Carolina has been claimed to have been organised to satisfy participants' fantasies rather than having a commemorative purpose. Participants have been eager to re-enact the warfare that was part of the commemoration, as if they had travelled back in time, satisfying their craving to be witnesses of the monumental event.

Judged authentic by the community of Civil War reenactors, these dreamlike experiences were private fantasies made real. (Brown, 2015, p. 270)

Vice-versa, steampunk or other contemporary pieces of machinery invented during the American Civil War have served as a symbol of innovation instead of functionality, satisfying the fantasies of the public during that time, allowing them to have a glimpse of the future rather than going back to the past (Brown, 2015). The aesthetic innovation of these streamlined war machines was the designers' attempt to translate daydreams or futuristic fantasies into reality, satisfying the time-travelling fantasies of society and remaining hopeful. The fantasy influence of war machines did not end in a bygone era. It continues its influence even in modern society. Conservationists or curators have been able to restore artefacts in a manner where they can make visitors in museums imagine or fantasise, able to manipulate visitors' emotions, thus, attracting more visitors to generate revenue for research.

According to Yablon (2014), every human fantasises about time travel. The statement was based on humans' anticipation of the future. Hence photography has been celebrated for conserving the past or the present for future use. Humans tend to fantasise about having the ability to contact people in the future, thus, depositing their photos into safety boxes, fantasising that future viewers would contact them when technologies become much more advanced. He explained the act where humans tended to fantasise about travelling back in time, and it is seen as an act to postpone their present plight and uncertainties to overcome losses to seek comfort since the known past is already proven to be real and definite.

5.7 Foreign country

The subtheme "foreign country" has not been uncommon, as Lowenthal has previously discussed it. People tend to fantasise when entering a realm full of buildings from the past. Such encounters equate to visiting a different country. The statement was corroborated by Chu (2015). It has been said that the modern built landscape in Macau has satisfied the capitalist fantasies of regional consumers. Macau's neon-lit architectural structures have satisfied cravings for high-life fantasy and a "different country", successfully attracting tourists from mainland China. The high influx of regional tourists has contributed to Macau's economy via the gambling and prostitution industries. In Macau, the presence of heritage serves as a supplementary resource catering to visitors' fantasyland impressions. The foreignness brought by Macau's architectural realm contrasts with the ordinary cityscapes seen in mainland China and has satisfied the fantasy of mainland Chinese to visit a foreign country. The foreign-country fantasy embedded in any heritage subject or projected by them would change the perception behaviour of an individual, ranging from stakeholders in the architectural conservation industry to tourists, taking actions or making decisions based on their reciprocated fantasies.

5.8 Sense of belonging

Imagined past could be a very useful tool in forging identity. Based on Wells (2010), locals from historical towns enjoy "fake" or "artificial" oldness. They do not view revitalisation

culture or historicised design as a “lie” but as an effort to retain their culture or to promote a sense of place. The re-imagined architectural realms of experts make locals fantasise about belonging to a highly civilised social group or having a superior past that is unparalleled to others. Such superiority or fantasy has fostered their sense of belonging. Last but not least, [Wells \(2010\)](#) suggested that contemporary heritage evaluation should embrace multiple ways of valuing historic environments, which included the fantasies evoked by historic landscapes as users’ perceptions and experience matter in delivering sustainable conservation strategies.

5.9 Giving immediate pleasure

According to [Murphy \(2012\)](#), the difference between imagination and fantasy is that imagination is grounded by reality, encompassing the steps needed to achieve the imagined world. Fantasy, however, implicates the decline of creativity as people resort to an easy way out, mentally being in a desirable state or condition immediately without paying any effort or exchange ([Browne, 2014](#)). Hence, people would prefer to fantasise instead of imagining, as the former guarantees immediate pleasure, skipping the unpleasant effort or challenges of tagging along with the latter.

The revelation of immediate pleasure brought by fantasy has been exploited in museum curation. Museum curators have a role in surprising and impressing visitors. Artefacts are curated in ways that can stir up visitors’ feelings and provide some form of engagement rather than merely providing educational content that is orthodoxically perceived. The power of fantasy in bringing immediate pleasure has been a guide for curators to generate revenue to ensure the survival of museums, especially privately funded galleries.

5.10 Providing a foundation for resilience

Fantasy plays a larger role when it comes to communities. In many cases, an individual’s fantasy or collective fantasy can make affected communities resilient to changes and the core attribute of preserving their culture. In Israel, Lebanese refugees have been conserving their culture through personal fantasies, hoping to return to their native country one day.

... these uprooted mothers regard their exodus as temporary and fantasise about returning to Lebanon in the future. ([Dabbagh et al., 2014, p. 1](#))

This kind of fantasy shapes the unique lifestyle and upbringing of Israeli-Lebanese living in Israel. Refugee parents train new generations of Israeli-Lebanese to deny Israeli values while physically integrating into the dominant society. In the process of grooming refugees’ kids, they feed the children fantasies of their own, constantly highlighting ideal good memories of the past and their own culture, strengthening children’s fantasies towards their parents’ homeland. Refugees hold on to their fantasies, remaining hopeful and looking forward to the future by preserving the past ([Dabbagh et al., 2014](#)).

An average person who has never experienced a war-torn zone would still rely on fantasy to gain resilience during challenging times. According to [Bielik-Robson \(2018\)](#), fantasy provides resilience and is often sugar-coated under the name of religion. Society’s behaviour in gaining resilience can be explained in two ways: religion or innate fantasy, justified by its craving and will, using God or another religious medium. Religions are imaginary projections of humans demonstrating human skill in dreaming, an outcome that visualises human desires and fantasies. Vice-versa, religion has taught men to fantasise. Both manners influence bilaterally, fostering attempts to create a paradise they fantasised about in the world in which they lived. It is fair to reinstate that religion is a collective fantasy from a large group of community or society that shapes the perception of an individual.

Similarly to religion, fantasy or the act of fantasising is important in giving resilience to counter the challenges of reality. According to Ernst Bloch, fantasy opposes reality, as it

denotes the possibility of “not-yet”, the condition of possibility, signifying the presence of room to make things or undertakings possible. Also, fantasy must remain imaginary and not instantly dismiss ridiculously unreal things (Bielik-Robson, 2018). According to Jacques Derrida, fantasising is a form of paradoxical expectation of the unexpected, which disrupts ordinary events or courses, and eventually leads to inspiration. According to Bielik-Robson, inspiration can be seen as a haunting phantom, possibly coming from the past or future.

revenant et arrivant—specter that is either past or future but never present (Bielik-Robson, 2018, p. 152)

She proposed that inspiration was also attributed to fantasy. In her review paper regarding both Block and Derrida’s works, she concluded that *objective fantasy* was something people have been consciously dreaming about or lucky enough to experience for a short while as a break from societal roles or any form of designated bond. Such fantasy makes people feel life is worth living and remain resilient to life’s challenges.

5.11 Improving social status

According to Fisher (2012), fantasising and manipulating public fantasy has always been a tool for the emerging elites in consecrating their rights onto something or social class. Emerging elites’ obsession and fascination towards myth are exercised exponentially to indemnify its past, often attempting to a glorious past.

The Anglo-Norman aristocracy, thus, displays a fascination with origin myths as it seeks to compensate for its youth by rooting itself in a fabricated ancestral past. (Fisher, 2012, p. 200)

This situation was noticed when aristocrats tended to concoct historical facts and fantasies when reconstructing their ancestral heritage (Fisher, 2012). Their fantasies have shaped their effort in selecting myths, folklore or obscure tangible heritage remnants, then carefully organised and re-interpreted them to erase their commonality, forging their superiority. It is not a phenomenon exclusive to elites; residents who live in cities also tend to fantasise that they live glamorous, luxurious lives as if they are celebrities (Rahmani, 2013). The craving to attain high social status or improve living quality has driven people to fantasise, feeding off the existing architectural fantasy. Vice-versa, it creates or maintains a tangible heritage that satisfies their higher-social-status fantasy.

5.12 Serving as career momentum

Regarding career selection, it is assumed that fantasies of tangible heritage have driven professionals to pursue their undertakings. In Soqotra, Yemen, the natural heritage and legends attached to heritage have attracted people from different walks of life. The Middle Ages legends of Soqotra have served the fantasies of; scientists, travellers and historians in their pursuit of exotic subjects, fuelling their momentum in pursuing their undertakings, such as research and tangible conservation (Elie, 2020).

... for the merchants driven by their pecuniary imagination in search of tradable commodities; for the would-be conquerors seeking territorial expansion and possession; for the men of science (mainly naturalists doubling as ethnologists) groping for explanations as to the origin of man and the original location of the Garden of Eden. ... (Elie, 2020, p. xxiv)

Elie concluded that international conservation bodies have often initiated conservation attempts due to committee members’ fantasies shaped by their; upbringings, imperialism or religious beliefs. It is indisputable that fantasy has contributed to the perusal of a profession, especially conservationists. However, it should be acknowledged that fantasy has been shaped by many attributes, such as; imperialism, patriotism and other experiences in life.

5.13 *Serving as a tool for experts*

While experts have been strongly influenced by their fantasies without acknowledging them, they have taken fantasy as a tool to change the world, putting things into order and improving the urban landscape. According to [Rahmani \(2013\)](#), urbanists often contribute to urban planning to help users realise their responsibility to behave civilly. It is believed that civilians' behaviour contributes to stability and growth socially, politically and economically. Despite the acknowledgement and execution of manipulating civilians' behaviour in urban landscapes, urbanists have still struggled to justify the importance of visual interest or aesthetics and how they could benefit a place economically and physically.

... architects have not been able to do quite well in giving hard facts about the worth of aesthetics, a topic notoriously difficult to defend economically. . . ([Rahmani, 2013, p. 349](#))

This enigma was answered by [Browne \(2014\)](#), who stated, the collective imagination drives social progress, the actualisation of modern culture, and the creation of social creativity and civilisation. A cityscape known to be healthy often rhymes with the collective imagination of society, thus, benefiting it economically and showing positive progression. Aside from cultural and economic progression, social innovation could also be achieved if collective fantasy or imagination is well managed. [Browne \(2014\)](#) mentioned that communism, fascism and stalinism were socio-political utopias that were a product of collective imagination. Good management of collective fantasy by experts could contribute to a healthy society or new social order.

Besides manipulation by urbanists, other professionals, such as curators or conservators at museums, manipulate the fantasies of the public to gain benefits. According to [Hazan \(2020\)](#), some museums in The United States were established to satisfy the fantasies of the public whilst fulfilling their role in educating them ([Hazan, 2020](#)). The public tends not to check facts when the objects displayed or narratives from well-established institutions or professionals feed their fantasies. Museums should be truthful about the past. However, museum curators also seek to capture visitors' fantasies, even by including some fake or unjustified statements. Although the phenomenon has rarely been discussed in academia, the revelation of the abuse and power of manipulating public fantasy has grown. It is crucial to acknowledge the presence of fantasy value embedded in heritage subjects and establish ethics for experts in manipulating the fantasy value of a realm, a cityscape or a museum for positive growth and greater benefits for the public.

5.14 *Unprofessionalism within professionalism*

According to [Wells \(2010\)](#), experts have not entirely upheld their professionalism. Experts' opportunistic behaviour has often led many conservation projects to legitimately "deceive" the public, projecting their fantasy or illusion via conservation. One of the examples is the abuse of the Venice Charter, based on "*new construction can be differentiated from the old*", asserting their own fantasised architectural realm onto a conservation project whilst fulfilling established international conventions. The conservationists' stance or opportunistic behaviour was well-explained by Jeremy Wells. According to [Wells \(2017\)](#), a person who fantasises should have a positive valuation towards the patina and cognitively pay attention to the environment. Ironically, personal unconscious psychological fondness towards decay drives the individual to heritage conservation practices ([Wells, 2017](#)).

... it is the psychological impact of this decay on residents that has particular import for heritage conservation practice. ([Wells, 2017, p. 21](#))

As much as experts or conservationists claim to be professional and do it to serve the greater humankind, it could also be seen as a well-staged action to satisfy their unconscious personal fantasies.

5.15 Discussion

Fantasy has always motivated stakeholders to conserve the environment or heritage subjects. According to Peter Murphy, fantasy constitutes “acts of creation”. The presence of fantasy has served as a momentum to make assigned tasks surpass expectations (Browne, 2014). Although it has never been explicitly mentioned, the systematic literature review has brought the idea of how fantasy instilled among experts has led to the romantic vision of heritage conservation, leading to regular maintenance and thoughtful care in a modern context (Elie, 2020). The role of fantasy in architectural conservation can be discussed through the notions of what, how and why.

What is fantasy in the context of architecture? Jeremy Wells has explained the relationship between architectural heritage and the personal fantasies of stakeholders regarding how their fantasies were established (Wells, 2010, 2017). According to Wells, conservationists have fantasies too, and their fantasies have been shaped by their upbringings, careers’ training and congenital preferences towards the built environment. These personal fantasies have implicitly impacted their professional judgements, thus, playing an important variable in altering or “improving” heritage subjects. Subsequently, local communities have built attachments to the newly coated heritage subjects via authorised fantasies projected by conservationists. This situation has been true even though the subjects are no longer as “authentic” or “organic” as they used to be before conservationists’ intervention. The constructed fantasies by local communities towards altered landscapes are known as “spontaneous fantasy”, where elements or information before their eyes are placed coherently with one another, stimulating local communities’ senses within a short period. Such phenomena occur when conservationists’ authorised fantasy matches local communities’ fantasy shaped by their past experiences and desires. As a result, local communities have felt superior to their counterparts, attached to the historical landscape and sometimes entitled to give extra attention to preserving it (Fisher, 2012).

How to use fantasy as a tool to achieve sustainable conservation? Fantasy is nothing new when manipulating historic urban landscapes into a fantasyland. Conservationists have repeatedly orchestrated fantasies towards a glorious past in planning to mitigate harmful activities from locals. Specifically, this has been witnessed when consumerism encroaches upon heritage sites, potentially destroying the fantasy of the wider public or external communities. Even certain educational institutions like museums have been driven to satisfy the fantasies of visitors. This situation has been seen via the display of bizarre cultural heritage, sometimes with fake and controversial narratives, to satisfy visitors’ fantasies as if travelling back in time or to a different world instead of educating them (Hazan, 2020). Both architectural conservation and museum curation scenarios were caused by the collective fantasies of consumers and the public, which comprise the latent forces driving the conservation industry’s sustainability.

Why does fantasy matter in architectural conservation? In the heritage conservation industry, conservationists, experts or museum curators have to insert fantasy or create a fantasy that resonates with the public to make local communities build an attachment to the place and to secure funding to ensure the landscape or institutions’ survival (Brown, 2015; Hazan, 2020). This situation has inevitably given way to misleading information that impresses visitors and alters the historical facts of the heritage subject or building. On the contrary, despite the risk of falsifying history, locals’ reciprocated fantasy helps ensure its sustainability, effectively engaging them in building an attachment to the tangible heritage and indirectly preserving it. It was agreed by Brown (2015) and Wells (2017) that the infatuation of humans towards historical events in the past had orchestrated their actions in pursuing heritage conservation matters and commemorative activities. Wells (2017) demonstrated humans’ ability to fantasise about the past by looking at objects, ranging from a window to a flagstone, stirred by the ruts or pleasant patina on the surface. In other

words, fantasy value exists in every architectural attribute, with differences in the index regarding comparison. The higher the fantasy value embedded within an architectural attribute, the more likely the architectural fabric will be maintained well.

Nonetheless, it has been proven that individual or collective fantasy has a substantial role in driving the momentum of conservation. The presence of fantasy value embedded in a heritage subject, whether intangible or tangible, should be explored quantitatively. Thus, conservationists can systematically improve the fantasy value via their conservation work to preserve architectural heritage whilst promoting engagement from local communities without compromising or with minimal alteration of the authenticity.

6. Conclusion

This systematic literature review has provided insight into the role of fantasy in architectural conservation. Aside from establishing research gaps regarding fantasy-relevant topics on architectural heritage conservation, the meta-analysis has shown a lack of input from eastern scholarship, the absence of quantitative research, a lack of discussion within the architecture discipline and the lack of illustrated focus regarding the role of fantasy in architectural heritage conservation.

The thematic analysis and discussion have revealed fantasy's value in heritage subjects, such as; heritage landscapes, buildings, objects, language or cultural practices. Regardless of its tangibility, the fantasy value embodied in a heritage subject affects the attitude and engagement of stakeholders towards pre-conservation undertakings and the post-conservation phase. The attitude and engagement of stakeholders decide its sustainability and survival. Although contemporary cultural significance value evaluation does not encompass fantasy value as one of its attributes, it is crucial to study and make the most of fantasy value positively.

Contextually, the outcome of this systematic review will help improve the cultural significance value evaluation framework, adding another layer to consider while formulating a conservation strategy. The management of stakeholders' expectations will also be more viable and efficient as personal fantasies projected unconsciously by conservationists can be curated explicitly along with local communities' fantasies. As a result, heritage subjects could be rejuvenated or preserved with support from locals whilst achieving sustainable conservation and economic advancement. Theoretically, this systematic literature review has explained the correlation between fantasy and conservation and justified stakeholders' ontologies in pursuing conservation undertakings. The findings have challenged the conventional stance of conservationists, who have always been perceived as professionals who came into the practice with no bias and aimed to protect heritage and improve the livelihood of local communities. The review shows laypeople and experts fundamentally have shared no differences in taking fantasy as the momentum to perform an undertaking at the initial conservation phase. More quantitative studies are needed in future research. Hence fantasy value assessment and its impact on conservation strategy could be benchmarked and conducted systematically.

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Further reading

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