The Role of Historical Ethos in Public Debates on Cultural Heritage

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Abstract. Cultural heritage considers the legacy from our past that should be preserved in the present for future generations. The key place in this domain is occupied by *controversial cultural objects*, such as Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, associated with *historical figures*, in this case Joseph Stalin, which provoke heated public debates and dividing the society. This paper aims to introduce the new concept specific for this domain of *historical ethos* building upon the classic notion of the character of the speaker introduced by Aristotle. We show that the debates about whether to demolish a cultural object are in fact the debates about whether a historical figure associated with this object should still be revered by it.

Keywords. cultural heritage, controversial cultural objects, argument and ethos, argument analytics

Background: domain, resources and methods. The debates and decisions on the conservation or removal of controversial cultural objects associated with historical figures have become increasingly important in public debates. Such objects are an essential part of the management of cultural heritage by public administrations who have to make decisions about which of them should be preserved and which should not [1].

In order to analyse the debates in this domain, we adopt an empirically driven approach and select representative resources of radio programmes in Poland – regarding the Palace of Culture and Science built in Warsaw as a gift from Joseph Stalin, and in Spain – regarding the Valley of the Fallen built near Madrid by the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco as a war memorial. To annotate our data, we use OVA+ [2] and apply Inference Anchoring Theory (IAT) [3], a theoretical framework that allows for connecting the dialogical structures with argumentation structures.

Historical ethos in the domain of cultural heritage. The key component of debates on controversial cultural objects is that they are, in fact, most frequently discussions about the values of the historical figures associated with these objects, rather than about their physical or artistic properties. We call this phenomenon historical ethos, since the persona behind this notion becomes central in the debate.

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Historical ethos (HE) is inspired by the Aristotelian concept of ethos [4], i.e. the character of the speaker used to influence the audience through the speech. Yet unlike the classical ethos, HE is specific just to the domain of cultural heritage and is a topic as important as the cultural object, being constantly supported and attacked in the debate. In other words, HE does not play an active role in the discussion as Aristotelian ethos does, i.e. classical ethos is associated with speakers who participate in and speak during the debate. Still HE constitutes the essential element of this debate in this sense that it is the main topic of the discussion and the decision whether HE is 'bad' or 'good' influences the decision whether or not to demolish cultural object associated with this HE.

The dynamics of debates on cultural objects and historical ethos. We have developed the detailed guidelines for annotating ethotic structures [5,6] with an HE tag ("A person x has historical ethos") and its relation with argument structures. A statement addresses an entity as possessing historical ethos, if the speaker refers to a person who: (1) was famous and valued in the past; (2) is associated with a cultural object; and (3) his historical ethos is supported or attacked in parallel to supporting or attacking the cultural object with which it is associated.

The basic communication structures in public debates on controversial cultural objects are defined for support of HE, attack on HE and the lack of HE. In Example (1), a journalist, Michał Rachoń, supports his claim that the Palace of Culture and Science should be destroyed (in (1-a)) by using the argument that Stalin was a criminal (1-b). Yet, we should be able to capture and surface a parallel structure created by the argument (1-b) which not only supports the removal of the cultural object, but also implicitly attacks HE of a figure (Stalin) associated with this object. The structure of support of HE is analogous to the structure of attack on HE.

(1)   a.   Michał Rachoń: *Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw should be **demolished, blown up, dismantled** as you wish to call it.*

       b.   Michał Rachoń: *Palace of Culture and Science is the building that is being created here to demonstrate, to build a palace of Stalin, **the biggest criminal in the history of the mankind**.*

The arguments which refer to a cultural object itself without any reference to HE turned out to be extremely infrequent in our data. In Example (2), a journalist, Elisa Beni, supports her claim that the Valley of the Fallen should be destroyed (in (2-a)) by using an argument that the cultural object has no artistic value (in (2-b)). Notice that in this case HE of Franco is neither supported nor attacked.

(2)   a.   Elisa Beni: *The Valley of the Fallen is terrible, and as I said, it **must be dynamited**.*

       b.   Elisa Beni: *And above all, because it has **no artistic value**.*

Summary. In the public debates on cultural heritage, most often the decision about whether a figure associated with a cultural object has HE influences the decision about what to do with the cultural object itself. Being able to annotate the HE component in these debates allows us to surface the actual topic of the discussion, i.e. historical ethos, with the perspective of extending Argument Analytics tool [7] by adding HE metrics which will calculate the properties of the debate such as the number of supports of and attacks on HE which were given during the debate or the type of issues raised against a given historical ethos.

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