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Historic cities as model of sustainability

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper is an editorial to *JCHMSD*'s Volume 2 Issue 1. Its purpose is to introduce the selection of papers in the issue.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper discusses the increased focus of national and local authorities, as well as multilateral agencies, on historic cities in a search for a more sustainable process of urban development that integrates environmental, social and cultural concerns into the planning, design and implementation of urban management programmes and projects. The recent adoption of a new policy instrument by UNESCO, the 2011 *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*, is providing a set of general principles in support of sustainable urban heritage management and the paper further explains the first results of a field testing of the embedded Historic Urban Landscape approach in two different geo-cultural regions of the world (i.e. Central Asia and East Africa). It points to fields of further research, which are linked to the papers selected for this issue.

Findings – The Historic Urban Landscape approach, as promoted in the new UNESCO Recommendation on the subject, facilitates a structuring and priority setting of the manifold needs and wishes in the broader urban development and heritage management process, thereby creating clarity and understanding in an often very complex process with competing demands.

Originality/value – The new UNESCO Recommendation was adopted on 10 November 2011 and this research paper is the first to expound on an implementation of the approach embedded therein, explaining its merits and potential.

Keywords Cities, Heritage, Cultural heritage management, Sustainable development, Historic urban landscape approach, UNESCO recommendation, Urbanisation, Urban heritage management

Paper type Research paper



The way of the future

In his *Triumph of the City* Glaeser (2011) puts forward a wide range of compelling arguments why cities have become the dominant pattern of human settlement in the twenty-first century. Backed up by socio-economic data he clearly demonstrates that the phenomenon of urban living offers more to both society and individuals – the “citizens” – than its counterpart, rural living, also where it concerns sustainable solutions for our planet. With much smaller carbon footprints than suburban sprawl or countryside settlement, compact cities are the way of the future. Labelled as the Culture of Congestion by Koolhaas, (1994), the dense concentrations of people, often well educated and highly productive, ensure multiple interactions and sustained learning and so generate innovations in the economic, social and cultural spheres (Glaeser, 2011).

For these reasons the World Bank (2009) is promoting urbanisation in its new Urban Strategy as a force to be harnessed, not curbed.

Also UNESCO has focused attention on urbanisation and in particular on the positive roles that culture and heritage can play in the development process. For the last eight years the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation engaged in a policy process to elaborate updated international guidelines for urban conservation as part of strategies for urban regeneration and development. This process, almost completely supported through extra-budgetary funding from The Netherlands to UNESCO, was successfully concluded on 10 November 2011 with the adoption of the *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*, a non-binding “soft-law” (available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/cities>), by all of UNESCO’s Member States (currently numbering 195, including Palestine, after the controversial vote to grant it full membership at the same General Conference).

Glaeser, however, is critical towards preservation in general. In his view it hampers the necessary upgrading and development of the city to provide for high standard services and affordable housing for all, which echoes perhaps America’s love affair with the free market. And although he recognizes some benefit, proposing for instance to preserve architectural masterpieces – but only “a fixed number of buildings, perhaps five thousand” in the case of New York City (Glaeser, 2009, p. 162) – these views towards preservation unfortunately are hopelessly outdated. With the adoption of the *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* it is now commonly agreed that all cities, including historic, need upgrading and development to maintain and improve standards of living. But it is also recognized that this entails more than a simple numbers game and would require an informed and refined reading, and subsequent treatment, of the city to reveal the cultural-historic character and significance of its neighbourhoods and thereby unlock their potential for regeneration. Such an approach would respect and build upon the accumulated effort and wisdom of previous generations, as expressed in our cities, while at the same time offer a clear and less confrontational direction for investment and urban renewal – the city as celebration of continuity and change.

A new management tool

In 2003 the World Heritage Committee rang the alarm bells as the number of conflicts arising from urban development projects being executed in historic cities inscribed onto UNESCO’s World Heritage List was increasing significantly. It experienced how in practically all parts of the world, both developed and developing, local governments were struggling to adhere to the principles of urban conservation as put down in international Charters and Conventions, while aiming to secure the necessary funding for urban regeneration and further development. Recognizing that this dilemma involved historic cities in general, not only World Heritage cities, the World Heritage Committee relegated this issue to UNESCO so that this Organisation could muster the broadest international support towards finding a solution fit for all cities of heritage value, while affirming its leading role as standard-setting organisation (UNESCO, 2005).

Since the last decade of the previous century, throughout the world progressively measures of deregulation, decentralisation and privatization have been implemented, which have led to new dynamics in architecture and urban development (Bandarin and van Oers, 2012). Among others, a growing tension between globalization and local development has emerged, with incompatible new development in historic settings,

unsustainable tourism, and overall environmental degradation, which all bring about new challenges to urban heritage conservation and its management.

The *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* defines the historic urban landscape as the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “district” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting. This wider context includes notably the site’s topography, geomorphology and natural features, its built environment – both historic and contemporary – its open spaces, its land use patterns and spatial organization, as well as all other elements of the urban structure, next to social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage (UNESCO, 2011). All these contribute to the city’s singularity, its *genius loci*, and the specificity of the urban experience, which should guide any intervention as regards its function and fabric.

The Recommendation promotes the Historic Urban Landscape approach as a new way to include various aspects of conservation in an integrated framework, such as:

[...] how cultural diversity affects values and approaches to conservation; the awareness of the link between natural and cultural factors in the conservation of the built environment; the new challenges brought about by rapid social and economic changes; and the need to ensure a sustainable future to heritage conservation (Bandarin and van Oers, 2012, p. xvi).

The Historic Urban Landscape approach is not designed to replace existing doctrines or conservation approaches, but rather is envisaged as a tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment by defining operational principles able to ensure urban conservation models that respect the values, traditions and environments of different cultural contexts.

From adoption to implementation

The adoption of the new Recommendation by UNESCO’s General Conference affirms that the principles therein are recognized as being of global concern. However, for this tool to be of use to local governments in providing guidance to interventions in urban settings, it should be integrated into the legislative and institutional environment that determines the local context. Therefore, the General Conference resolution requested Member States to “identify within their specific contexts the critical steps to implement the Historic Urban Landscape approach, which may include the following:

- (a) to undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the city’s natural, cultural and human resources;
- (b) to reach consensus using participatory planning and stakeholder consultations on what values to protect for transmission to future generations and to determine the attributes that carry these values;
- (c) to assess the vulnerability of these attributes to socio-economic pressures and impacts of climate change;
- (d) to integrate urban heritage values and their vulnerability status into a wider framework of city development, which shall provide indications of areas of heritage sensitivity that require careful attention to planning, design and implementation of development projects;
- (e) to prioritize actions for conservation and development;
- (f) to establish the appropriate partnerships and local management frameworks for each of the identified projects for conservation and development, as well as to develop

mechanisms for the coordination of the various activities between different actors, both public and private” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 3).

The six-point action plan is considered to be the lowest common denominator, applicable in principle to the majority, if not all historic cities in the different geo-cultural regions of the world. In order to test the validity of this assumption, and thereby the robustness of the Historic Urban Landscape approach, the World Heritage Centre organized a series of workshops while the Final Draft of the Recommendation was being elaborated.

The first test workshop took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, in October 2010, at the request of, and financially supported by, the Administration of Icheri Sheher, the local authority responsible for the management of Baku’s World Heritage site. During the first decade of this century, Azerbaijan has become one of the world’s fastest-growing economies due to large oil and gas reserves. Revenues of these deposited USD 7 billion into its coffers in 2009 alone, and, in turn, brought an influx of foreign investment and visitors. Baku is aspiring to use this oil wealth to become one of the most interesting capitals of Europe and Central Asia. As part of major planning and design schemes for the capital city, the promenade along the Caspian Sea will be enlarged to twice its length and will feature luxury shopping malls, cinemas and arcades, to complement the city’s newly opened Museum of Modern Art, which has a collection of European masters, including Picasso and Dali, as well as more than 1,000 pieces by prominent Azeri artists. Architect Zaha Hadid has designed a new cultural pavilion, which should house a convention hall, library and several national museums as well. More than a dozen luxury hotels, including the Hilton and the first Four Seasons to be built in any of the former Soviet republics, are scheduled to open within the next years throughout the city. In addition, projects of public works have been undertaken, including the modernization of electrical grids, the laying of broadband cables and construction of highways. By 2012, a regional railway is expected to connect Baku to Tbilisi in Georgia to the north, and to Kars in Turkey to the west (Kingsbury, 2010).

Although Azerbaijan has known a long history, the country became independent from Soviet rule only in 1991. Azeri society has had just 20 years to adjust and adapt itself from a communist-style planned economy to a Western-style market economy with related institutional and social reforms – a process that is indeed still ongoing. The corresponding capacity, both at institutional and societal levels, that has been built up so far is of a very recent date and thus very fragile. As outlined by Kathleen Kingsbury (2010), Baku is being challenged by the pressures that come with abundant oil reserves and their associated wealth, creating an environment driven by entrepreneurial spirit and market thinking, and resulting in physical transformations on a grand scale – all directly or indirectly impacting on the city’s urban heritage, including the World Heritage site of Icheri Sheher.

In July and August 2011 another three workshops were implemented on the Swahili Coast in Eastern Africa, with the financial support of the Flemish Government, in the three historic towns of Lamu (Kenya), Stone Town, Zanzibar (Tanzania) and the Island of Mozambique. With capacity building and scientific research as main components of this project, a cooperation was established with three universities that have a longstanding cooperation with the World Heritage Centre, being Eindhoven University of Technology (The Netherlands), the University of Minnesota, USA, and the University of Pretoria (South Africa). These universities teamed up with local institutes and universities on the Swahili Coast in the implementation of identified follow-up activities.

The Historic Urban Landscape approach proved to be of critical importance in all four cases, as it facilitated putting the manifold conservation activities that had been undertaken recently, as well as in the more distant past, into a clear and hierarchical structure. This facilitated the identification of gaps and overlaps as part of an assessment into the various needs and wishes regarding the conservation, management and development of the historic cities, which could then be prioritized according to urgency and availability of resources (human, technical and financial).

For Baku this means primarily an integration, in institutional, socio-economic, and cultural terms, of the management of Icheri Sheher World Heritage site into the management of the wider metropolitan region. Currently there is a real risk that the cultural-historical area of the city is getting separated from the dynamics of the larger metropolis and thereby losing its function and meaning – which would be disastrous, as it would destroy the sustainable basis for its conservation. It probably would turn the now living site into an open-air museum, stagnant and dependant on outside funding and philanthropic largesse – and thereby provide fuel for the critics of preservation, such as Glaeser (Plate 1).

The overall dynamics in the three Swahili towns of Lamu, Zanzibar's Stone Town and the Island of Mozambique are quite similar, as initially expected. Among others, these comprise a heavy dependency on outside technical assistance and funding through international cooperation activities, much of it channelled through UN agencies, and a creeping gentrification, due to a conversion of historic buildings into boutique hotels or second (vacation) homes of foreigners. But the test workshops also revealed more subtle differences related in particular to the institutional context as part of the national inheritance from the colonial past, with some direct consequences for urban conservation and management.

Kenya, the former seat of British colonial power in Africa, is today East Africa's powerhouse and the National Museums of Kenya, although underfunded for its enormous task of taking care of the nation's heritage – tangible and intangible, movable and immovable – appears better equipped than their equivalent in Tanzania or Mozambique, at least where it concerns its human resources. Stone Town, however, is the socio-economic and cultural-historic heart of the city and semi-autonomous Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar within the Republic of Tanzania, as opposed to the other two Swahili towns, which are far removed from the seat of power – the Island of Mozambique being at the extreme end, some 2,000 km away from Mozambique's capital of Maputo. As a result of which Stone Town is literally at the centre of the decision making process, including all the urban policies that affect its heritage, some for better, others for worse. The test workshop pointed to reinforcing in particular the relationship between Stone Town Municipality and the Department of Urban and Rural Planning. Ilha and Lamu, on the contrary, have to holler for attention and resources – their World Heritage status helping to a degree to assist in this – as a result of which regional and strategic planning decisions tend to bypass these towns of international heritage significance.

The Lamu Port Project is a case in point. This USD 22 billion infrastructure plan, aiming to link Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan with new roads, railways and oil pipelines, includes the construction of a 20-berth deepwater port a few miles away from historic Lamu island (Gettleman, 2010). Despite the negative media publicity and the World Heritage Committee's discussion (34COM 7B.46) of this project, many of the participants took a careful position in stating that a significant spin-off could occur, which may benefit



Note: An abundance of oil revenues has facilitated the restoration of many monumental complexes and individual buildings, but creates challenges in maintaining the historic site's integrity

Plate 1.
View from inside Icheri
Sheher, the World
Heritage-designated area
of the city of Baku in
Azerbaijan

Lamu Old Town and its residents. In order to make an informed decision, it was agreed that an overall Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), including a specific Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), should be undertaken that would outline the pros and cons in the short, medium and longterm. Since no-one present at the workshop had recently been informed of the status of the Lamu Port Project, it was also agreed that a pro-active approach be adopted to actively seek funding and partnerships in order to have this EIA commissioned, so that the proper arguments could be gathered in favour of, or against this mega-development project (Plate 2).

Plate 2.

Traditional ways persist in Lamu, Kenya, where no motorised cars are allowed in the historic city and transport of trading goods and building materials takes place by donkeys and camels instead



Last but not least, the Island's remote location and long distance away from budget-spending authorities means that other ways need to be found to generate resources for conservation, possibly through a greater involvement of the private sector. Today this still constitutes a seriously under-utilised opportunity in the cultural heritage conservation sector (Van Oers, 2009). An important attempt and key project in this respect concerns a set of conservation activities initiated by the Island of Mozambique Community Foundation of Sheikh Hafiz Jamu with the assistance of João Viseu of TechnoServe. The Foundation has the participation of religious and community leaders, cultural associations, private sector associations of Ilha and surrounding area, and the Government. TechnoServe is a non-profit organisation supporting the development of tourism in the North of Mozambique, in particular on the Island of Mozambique. In previous years it has helped the building of capacity of workers related to tourism and is currently supporting the Foundation in its first operating years, with technical and management training and connection with investors. One of the Foundations main strategies is to acquire buildings on the Island, either through purchase or long-term concessions from public offices (current owners of various buildings), to attract national and foreign investors, tourism entrepreneurs, who have an interest in investing in the renovation of these buildings in exchange for a long term (at least ten to 20 years) lease to operate on the Island (Plate 3).

Despite the differences in institutional contexts, centrality in the decision-making process and management capabilities, however, the test workshops resulted for all three Swahili towns in a prioritization of information processing and communication technology. The local authorities in each World Heritage town expressed a need for the



Plate 3.

The former Portuguese settlement on the Island of Mozambique maintains levels of authenticity and integrity, largely due to an absence of outside investments, although this could change fast once this island is fully “discovered” by the tourism industry

gathering of all information as regards heritage conservation and urban management, available in the form of reports, surveys, inventories, maps and studies, which is currently dispersed over several departments and institutes, often without any knowledge of, or relation to, each other. This information should be digitized, centralized in databases and linked to each other, and made publicly available by electronic means (e.g. internet and phone apps). As a follow-up to the workshops, a first segment of this mid-term task was developed as part of a capacity building project, in which foreign and local universities worked together to gather the information and build the databases, also with funding provided by the Flemish Government.

A model of sustainability

As announced in the inaugural Editorial of this Journal (*JCHMSD* 1:1, 2011), the World Bank and UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding in July 2011 to formalise and further strengthen cooperation, in particular as regards the conservation and management of historic cities. The first operational activity under this agreement involves the integration of culture and heritage, by way of the Historic Urban Landscape approach, in a USD 2 billion urban development programme of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). This programme will be executed by the Government of India with the assistance of the World Bank and UNESCO. The first phase of this initiative is focused on the development of demonstration projects in two to three historic cities to be selected among the 15 historic cities already identified in the JNNURM. The demonstration program will be developed jointly with the World Bank and aims to define a set of planning, civic engagement and financial tools aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the conservation process, as well as the integration of conservation and development initiatives. If satisfactory, it would pave the way for a broader implementation throughout the Indian sub-continent. Further to this, the World Heritage Centre is currently in the process of discussing a similar programme with the

local Chinese authorities of Hangzhou for the conservation management of West Lake Cultural Landscape, which was put on the UNESCO World Heritage List in July 2011.

Increasingly, it appears, national and local authorities as well as multilateral agencies are seeking a more sustainable process of urban development, searching for an integration of environmental, social and cultural concerns into the planning, design and implementation phase. Historic cities are offering insights into how this process was managed previously and clues to how this may be achieved today, without having to re-invent the wheel. As Whitehand (1993, p. 6) has remarked, ignoring these experiences would be “a profligate waste of human endeavour”. The Historic Urban Landscape approach is an attempt to refocus urban development into a more inclusive process, taking into account intangible heritage, cultural diversity and local community values, among others, to increase the long-term sustainability of planning and design interventions.

Notwithstanding this great leap forward, there still is a need for further refinement. Important aspects concern the follow-up support process with the dissemination of theory and (best) practice to local authorities. And of course the organization of research and seminars on sub-themes concerning the Historic Urban Landscape approach and how these relate to different cultural contexts, such as Comprehensive Cultural Mapping in Urban Environments; Participatory Planning and Stakeholder Consultations on Urban Heritage Values and Attributes; Cultural Heritage as central component of Spatial Planning Strategies of Cities; or Climate Change Preparedness and Impact Mitigation for Cities, to name but a few. The distinguished readership of this Journal is cordially invited.

Selected papers

Prof. Dr Silvio Zancheti is well-known in the fields of education and research applied to cultural heritage management and sustainable development, notably through his Center for Advanced Studies in Integrated Conservation (CECI), and through his lectures at the Federal University of Pernambuco (Recife, Brazil). Prof. Dr Lúcia Tone Ferreira Hidaka is affiliated to both the Federal University of Alagoas and CECI. In the present article “Measuring urban heritage conservation: theory and structure – part 2”, the authors propose an innovation in applying an indicator for measuring the state of conservation of urban cultural heritage; it is the second article of two, which discloses the results on applying the theories and structure described in the first article published in the previous issue (*JCHMSD* 1:2). The defined indicator offers a non-biased method to evaluate the conservation process of cultural heritage assets in general, and of urban World Heritage sites in particular. Expressed in a function of the three key performance indicators (KPIs) of significance, integrity and authenticity, this indicator has proven a conformity between the resulting values of the weights of the opinion of the stakeholders and theory.

Roha W. Khalaf is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Montreal in Canada. Recently, Khalaf received the prestigious Martin Weaver Scholarship at the 2011 Association for Preservation Technology (APT) Annual Conference. Her doctoral research project correlates three areas of study: architecture, urbanism and heritage conservation. Her thesis, entitled “Policy guidance for the contextualization of infill buildings in historic urban environments: a case study in the Arabian Gulf,” explores an alternative approach to preservation rules with a view

to improving values-based decision-making when designing and assessing new infill buildings, particularly in Kuwait City. Her article “Traditional vs modern arabian morphologies” unveils a part of her research findings describing the component attributes of an Arabian city in relation to local climate and religion. Moreover, it demonstrates the impact of socio-economic change on urban morphology, through the comparison between Old Kuwait Town and Kuwait City with special emphasis on architecture. Khalaf finalizes by proposing few recommendations that aim to improve contemporary design and promote morphological unity in Kuwait City.

Dr Roberto Cervelló Royo, Prof. Baldomero Segura García del Río and Prof. Rubén Garrido Yserte are three scholars from Spain, the first two affiliated to the Polytechnic University of Valencia and the latter one affiliated to the University of Alcalá. Their background is in economics and they share interests within the fields of urban and regional economics and finances and cultural and natural heritage management. Entitled “An urban regeneration model in heritage areas in search of sustainable urban development and internal cohesion”, their article is a product of a long standing cooperation between the two universities under the research project “State Interventions in Historic Centers: Evolution of the Real Estate Market”, funded by the Valencian Autonomous Regional Government and the EC URBAN Plan (Interreg III-B, Sudoe). It provides an analysis and optimization model of the spatial impact of the externalities derived from urban regeneration and rehabilitation of degraded and segregated historic areas. The method succeeds to measure the urban regeneration and rehabilitation process and its impact by comparing the spatial distributions of impact indexes obtained in both situations. Besides facilitating the process of determining priority areas of intervention inside an urban heritage area, it also contributes to sustainable development by providing a more equitable and efficient management of resources.

Dr Phil Banfill is a Materials Scientist and has been Professor of Construction Materials at Heriot-Watt University (UK) since 1995. He was leader of the distance learning MSc in Building Conservation (Technology and Management) course 2002-2008. Barry Bridgwood is an Architectural Technologist, specialising in historic buildings, and is a graduate of the Heriot-Watt MSc in Building Conservation. Ingval Maxwell is an Architect and was Director, Technical Conservation, Research and Education, Historic Scotland, 1993-2008 and is now a Consultant in Architectural Conservation. The article “www.understandingconservation.org – Support for developing a practitioner portfolio in built environment conservation” illustrates the development of an internet-based educational support to assist practitioners in built environment conservation to evaluate and improve their competences. The work aimed to define the basis for the competences and to establish an educational framework for professional development in this area, which surpassed all expectations. With over 2,000 visits per month from all over the world, since 2007, this unique support system is currently supporting all the UK accreditation schemes in built environment conservation.

In “Is the World Heritage label used as a promotional argument for sustainable tourism?”, Prof. Dr Pascale Marcotte of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières and Dr Laurent Bourdeau of the Université Laval in Québec (Canada) the authors reveal if Destination Marketing Organizations in charge of promoting World Heritage sites use the World Heritage label in their electronic promotional tools, and if so, if the promotional argument includes considerations linked to sustainable development.

Their quantitative and qualitative study of the web site contents of local, regional and national marketing organizations for 120 World Heritage cities shows that the use the World Heritage label in promotional material is most widespread in Western Europe, which has a long tradition in the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, and more in particular that the cities that obtained their World Heritage label less than ten years ago use it more often to promote tourism. However, the advertising contains little information about the protection of the site or of any initiatives undertaken to promote a process of sustainable development, pointing to the need to better understand and explain to visitors and tourists the economic, cultural, social and environmental issues associated with the label, which would help a better appreciation of the site and their visit.

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