



Invited Opening Article

New Approaches and New Tools for Urban Conservation

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Urban conservation has evolved in the past fifty years from a practice limited to a small number of historic areas, mostly in the European context, to a universally recognized area of urban policy-making, encompassing not only the traditional 'old centres' of many large cities or the preserved examples of small historic towns, but a greater variety of situations, including modern cities of significant value.

Parallel to the expansion of the practice, the concept of historic city and the approach to its conservation has evolved, from a vision of the historic city as a monumental ensemble, to a more articulated vision that includes other value systems, linked to the archeological or geological layers, to the intangible dimensions of heritage and to the social composition of the city.

The 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) puts the analysis of the historical layering process at the core of urban heritage conservation practices.¹ In so doing, it reflects the most advanced positions of modern urban conservation theory and practice, starting with the Venice Charter (1964),² as well as other UNESCO and ICOMOS

¹ UNESCO (2011) Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape. Art. 8. *The historic urban landscape is 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 "ensemble" to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting.*

Art. 9. *This wider context includes notably the site's topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity.*

² International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964). Art. 11: *The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected,*

documents (UNESCO 1976; ICOMOS 1987).

Every city is the product of a gradual layering process that sometimes spans thousands of years in history, like for example in Damascus, Rome or Delhi, and sometimes lasts just a few decades, like for example in Brasilia, Chandigarh or Shenzhen. Each layer represents a moment in the history of the city, an expression of its culture, of its economic strength, of the ways it adapts to the physical environment, of its innovation capacities and its technological achievements (Bandarin and Van Oers, 2015). In spite of this, traditional urban planning has seldom considered the layering of cities as a tool for management and interpretation.

Today, there is little integration of professions dealing with the process of heritage conservation and urban development, leaving the field of urban heritage management seriously compartmentalized. With limited exchanges between the professional 'silos', this obviously reduces the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation efforts, as well as creates a vacuum that can be exploited by the forces that are not interested in heritage preservation.

If planners today need to respond to new challenges and listen to social needs in ways that were not practiced before, they need also to innovate their methods and look at urban heritage as a resource for the entire city and for its sustainable development. Not all cities are the same, and therefore the study of the layering process needs to be adapted to the specific contexts.

While it is difficult to list all the disciplines and professional practices concerned with urban conservation and management, it is possible to discuss some of the main ones, focusing on the issues that need to be analyzed and understood in a planning process respectful of the diversity of the cultural legacies and of the cultural expressions of the city.

The Physical Layers of the City

Geology and Hydrology

As much as cities are a layered built construct, they rest on another layered system, i.e. the geological strata formed during Earth's history. This rela-

since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration. When a building includes the superimposed work of different periods, the revealing of the underlying state can only be justified in exceptional circumstances and when what is removed is of little interest and the material which is brought to light is of great historical, archaeological or aesthetic value, and its state of preservation good enough to justify the action. Evaluation of the importance of the elements involved and the decision as to what may be destroyed cannot rest solely on the individual in charge of the work. ICOMOS 1964

tionship is a fundamental one, albeit often forgotten with dire consequences for urban conservation and for the protection of urban environments from natural hazards. The relationship of a city to its geological context is not only the basis of its resilience through time (or, of its collapse), but is also the main reason of the continuity of forms and types through millennia.

Environment and the City

The relationship between city and nature has been part of the planning tradition of the twentieth century, especially in the design of parks and open spaces. However, contemporary planning approaches have found their inspiration in the work of the landscape architect and planner Ian McHarg, whose seminal book *Design with Nature* (McHarg 1969) and research and teachings have helped to re-position the idea of nature in the city planning process. At the core of his approach lies an innovative methodology that brings together social and natural processes through a system of analysis and superposition of the layers of values existing in a given area.

The present financial and economic crisis affecting the industrialized countries, together with the upcoming grave climatic change perspectives, have shifted the attention of urban thinkers and managers to the future impact on cities, and therefore to urban ecology as a tool for sustainability and resilience.

Archaeology

Archaeology is a primary source of understanding of the formation of urban heritage. And yet, in most situations, it is still considered as a separate object that is difficult for management and interpretation, if not an outright nuisance to be buried or removed (Williams 2014).

A key element in the process of valuing the role of archaeological remains in the city is their legibility: without a clear understanding of the nature and form of the structures, the public will not get involved and it will not consider the areas worthy of conservation. It is important therefore, inside urban areas, to invest in interpretation and in an accurate restitution of the remains, in order to make them part of the life of the city, both as an element of identity and education, and as an attraction for heritage tourists.

Morphology

Urban morphology has developed in the past half century as a powerful tool for the study, interpretation, planning and rehabilitation of historic areas. It analyses the historic urban fabric as a complex cellular micro-system

that evolves organically. Because this discipline does not focus only on the outstanding monuments, but on the urban fabric as a whole, it can provide a basis for conservation planning and for renovation and adaptation processes that want to emphasize continuity of the urban form and of urban spaces.

This approach, which had its roots in the field of geography, was developed by the urban geographer Conzen in Great Britain (Conzen, 2004) and was then applied to different regions of the world.

The diffusion of this methodology in different parts of the world has allowed to adapt it to the changing urban contexts and traditions, and constitutes an important legacy that can be brought upfront in the context of application of the HUL Recommendation.

The Intangible Layers of the City

Intangible Values

One of the most innovative aspects of the HUL Recommendation is certainly the emphasis on the intangible dimension of the city, and on the importance of including them in the conservation process. Although these aspects are considered in the planning and conservation theories, and are certainly at the core of very important philosophical approaches developed in the past 50 years (Norberg-Schulz, 1980), they are seldom associated to the concrete making of urban conservation plans. On the contrary, as the HUL Recommendation recognises the construction of heritage values as a result of social and community practices, the intangible values become important guiding components of the interventions. These values include first of all the cultural expressions of societies and communities, but include also memory places and spaces associated to events and cultural developments of particular significance (Jigyasu, 2014).

Planning Processes

A fundamental intangible 'layer' of the city is certainly constituted by the planning and management structures that condition and orient its development. As a long experience and long history of planning failures has demonstrated, planning that is insensitive to the local cultural situation and structures (typically 'imported planning') can have a disruptive role on the physical and social environments. Sensitive planning must consider the overall social situation and not be limited to land-use or infrastructure issues, but analyze all aspects of the local situation, ranging from land owner-

ship and tenure to facilities, services, social structure and customs, as well as economic and financial aspects (Siravo, 2014).

Economic Activities

The development of economic life and production is one the main reasons of the very existence of cities. It is also the basis for its sustainable growth and conservation. In fact, the economic dimension is part of the urban landscape and reveals individual and collective connections inside the layering of values and between the attributes. This is why the HUL Recommendation suggests dealing with the economic forces of the city not as an antagonist, but as a partner in the effort of preserving values, as well as physical structures.

While in the past the economic actors of the city were essentially linked to internal production processes, today the openness of the markets and the effects of globalization have multiplied the number of economic actors and their characteristics. This makes it more difficult to define the relationships between economic actors and networks and the city, but it still remains a key dimension to take into consideration.

Conclusions

The inclusive, cross-cutting, integrative approach proposed by the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO, 2011) is certainly more complex than what has been summarized in the previous paragraphs. A better understanding of the context of intervention in fact compensates the additional effort, as much as a greater involvement of local communities provides a stronger support to public decision-making.

I am confident that this book will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the Historic Urban Landscape approach, enriching it with examples and analysis that are at the core of the current effort to develop practical and operational tools for its implementation.

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