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“Evolution and Preservation of Historic Urban Landscape”

Dennis Rodwell keynote presentation

Historic Cities in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities

Preface

Managing the processes of change in historic cities in order to safeguard their distinctive cultural identities has long proved an area of conflict between different interests – including those of heritage protection and economic development. Identifying individual components of the architectural heritage and selected historic districts for a variety of strengths of protection, from the benign to the interventionist, has generally proved to be the limit of ambition and achievement within the conservation community. It is rare to see the individual components related to each other at the urban scale, and not simply integrated but rendered as a determinant and driver of territorial planning policy.

At the same time, in our increasingly globalised and competitive world, historic cities start with one over-riding advantage: their unique inherited cultural identity, epitomised by their holistically understood *historic urban landscape*. It is this that allows them to stand out from their competitors. In marketing terms, whether to attract businesses, residents or visitors, it is their ‘unique selling point’: their key to long-term success. It is this common ground that offers opportunities for resolving perceived conflicts.

The values of Urban Heritage

The Conservation timeline

A publication in European Architectural Heritage Year 1975 includes a position statement of the times:

The starting point in a historic town must be its historic quality and visual character – not secondary social, economic or even ecological arguments.¹

‘Historic quality and visual character’ have little or no connection with today’s global agendas, which may be summarised as:

- Sustainable Development (1987 onwards):
 - 3 core pillars: environment, society, economy.
- Climate Change (1980s/90s onwards):
 - Focus on CO₂ in the atmosphere.
- United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000 + 2015)
 - Human rights, equality and the key societal concerns of our times.
- Community Engagement, Social Cohesion, Identity, Well-being, etc.

Within the conservation community, Jukka Jokilehto was one of the first to voice this serious disconnection. In 1999 he asked:

¹ Cantacuzino, Sherban (ed.), *Architectural Conservation in Europe*, Architectural Press, London, 1975.

... if the conservation movement, as it evolved from the eighteenth century, cannot be considered as concluded, and whether modern conservation should not be redefined in reference to the environmental sustainability of social and economic development within the overall cultural and ecological situation on earth.²

To which my 2007 book sought to respond to the challenge and articulate the opportunity.³

The Four Key Values of Urban Heritage

Today we should recognise four complementary values in Urban Heritage:

- *Resource* (environmental capital/embodied energy, financial, ...);
- *Usefulness* (ongoing + potential for creative reuse);
- *Community* (sense of place, belonging and well-being); and
- *Cultural* (in the broadest sense).

Of these, the *heritage construct* only addresses the last – and that only in part. As practised, *conservation* is simply a discrete, linear process of identification, intervention, completion. It is not part of a wider set of dynamic systems that secure recognition of the multiple inter-related, long-term values of resource, usefulness and community. Highly selective, conservation is massively under-achieving.

Jokilehto has more recently articulated that ‘Conservation is the Management of Continuity’,⁴ not the contrived mantra of ‘Management of Change’ that is favoured, for example, in the United Kingdom.

The Longevity of Urban Heritage (tangible)

The overall population in Europe today is static. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the buildings that will exist in 2050 have already been built; new construction represents less than a 1 per cent annual addition to the existing building stock.

Thus, the key issues for Europe’s urban heritage are repair, maintenance and creative re-use of the existing building stock; namely conservation in its widest sense – as a mainstream activity within the broadly defined historic environment, not a limited and specialist activity that is only applied to designated ‘heritage assets’.

In this it is important to recognise that conservation *is* development; it is not *opposed* to it. In short, conservation constitutes a massive untapped potential within national economies and for job creation, especially for the young and at local level.

Barriers to the Challenge

I will summarise a few:

- Short-termism, whether for intellectual, economic or political reasons.

² Jokilehto, Jukka, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 1999.

³ Rodwell, Dennis, *Conservation and Sustainability in Historic Cities*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2007.

⁴ Jukka Jokilehto speaking at the 2014 Annual School of the UK Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC), held in Edinburgh.

- The ‘Bilbao effect’ – iconic modern buildings by ‘signature architects’ who parachute into cities from afar.
- The ‘Dubai effect’ of ever-increasingly high-rise buildings – often also the work of ‘signature architects’ who parachute in.
- Globalisation and the ‘cloning’ of cities, in which cities in disparate parts of the world increasingly resemble each other and lose their individual identity.
- The negative effects of highly selective lists such as the UNESCO World Heritage List – which are increasingly critiqued as a vehicle for displacing indigenous/established populations in contradiction of the principles of sustainable development and in violation of human rights.
- Confused messages surrounding the word contemporary, whose duality of meaning – occurring at the present time and conforming to modern ideas in style and fashion – has been hijacked in favour of the latter, thereby acting as a recipe for conflict between historic cities and ‘signature architects’.
- Devaluing the embodied energy of existing buildings;⁵ and
- Failing to understand that existing buildings and cities are part of the solution to climate change and CO₂ emissions, not the problem.

As David Hunt wrote in 2006:

Never before has the world been so firmly in the grip of an establishment like the present architectural one, the most rigid in the history of art. All modern cities, as they are rebuilt, grow to resemble each other more. Rio and Hong Kong, to take two with rather similar settings, are clothing themselves more and more in the same style; London and Tokyo come closer each year; today a building in Sarajevo or Calcutta or Yokohama would probably share the same idiom.⁶

Urban Heritage and Cultural Tourism

In 2012, I wrote:

A historic city is at one and the same time a physical place and a human space. Its authenticity is a compound of manmade and associated natural elements coupled with a complex mix of human activities.

Revitalisation that focuses on the tangible heritage without simultaneously recognising the critical importance of the intangible – the social aspect – deprives a historic city of its *raison d’être* [reason for existence].

This unique, place-specific human heritage is as interesting and important to visitors as are the architecture of the buildings and landscape of the public spaces. Indeed, cultural tourism is at least as much about the distinctive human culture of a place as it is about its built heritage.⁷

Integrated Urban Conservation and Development: the theory

Integrated urban conservation

In 1975, the Council of Europe’s *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* asserted that conservation of the heritage should be one of the major objectives of urban and regional planning policy, integral with social, functional and economic factors.

⁵ See the EFFESUS project (Energy Efficiency for EU Historic Districts’ Sustainability): <http://www.affaires.eu/>

⁶ Hunt, David, *Memoirs: Military and Diplomatic*, Trigraph, London, 2006.

⁷ Rodwell, Dennis, ‘The social aspect of urban revitalisation’ in: *ICOMOS-Poland newsletter*, Autumn 2012.

Integrated urban development = sustainable urban development

In 2007, the European Union's *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities* advanced the debate on 'integrated urban development as a prerequisite for sustainable urban development'. It recognised the unique cultural and architectural qualities of European cities, their contribution to territorial cohesion, and the need for enhanced networking and exchange of experiences.

Integrated Urban Conservation and Development: holistic approaches in practice

Medium-sized cities

In Regensburg, Germany, from the 1970s onwards, the conservation of the historic core has been coordinated with modern development in the expanding city according to the 'Bamberg Model'.⁸ As a core part of this programme the historic centre has retained social balance as well as its traditional mix of small-scale independent artisan shops and workshops. The reinvigorated university in and adjacent to the historic centre has substantially contributed to this, as has the establishment of the large BMW motor plant on the urban periphery.

In Sibiu, Romania, from 2000 onwards, the step-by-step programme of housing rehabilitation in the historic centre has been paralleled by a broad programme of economic and cultural renaissance across the city. Sibiu has metamorphosed from a run-down provincial town into an important regional centre for administration, industry, financial services and higher education. One of the most prosperous cities in today's Romania, city-wide unemployment dropped from 20% to 4% between 2000 and 2010; technical and transport infrastructure has been substantially renewed; national and international transport links have been upgraded; and the city partnered Luxembourg as European Capital of Culture in 2007. A pioneer and exemplar of best practice in integrated top-down/ bottom-up regeneration of a historic city in Central and Eastern Europe, ICOMOS has characterised as 'outstanding' and 'faultless' the coherence of the integrated conservation efforts in the city and the resultant 'strong sense of integrity'.⁹ Klaus Johannis, Mayor since 2000, is the President-elect of Romania.

Metropolitan-sized cities

For Paris, the polycentric regional plan dates from 1950s: it distributes major redevelopment pressures away from a focus on the historic city centre and supports harmonious coexistence between the old and the new. The building height protection dates from 1930s; the protection of small-scale, mixed-use urban grain dates from the 1850s; and highly characteristic is the continuity of artisan businesses and traditions in the city centre. This protects the *genius loci*: the sense of place coupled with socio-economic and cultural continuity. If artisan workshops can survive in the heart of metropolitan Paris they can survive in any historic city.

Integrity is a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes. Examining the conditions of integrity, therefore requires assessing the extent to which the property ... includes all elements necessary to express its outstanding universal value.¹⁰

⁸ Dengler-Schreiber, Karin, *Vom Aschenputtel zum Welterbe: Das "Bamberger Modell" der städtischen Denkmalpflege*, Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 2011.

⁹ ICOMOS *Newsletter CIAV* (ICOMOS International Scientific Committee of Vernacular Architecture), 2009.

¹⁰ UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, Paris.

The strategic regional plan for Paris coupled with the detailed urban plan may be considered to offer an exemplar of good practice in the achievement of integrated visual *and* functional integrity at the scale of a metropolitan city. It constitutes a historical example of the implementation of the *Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL) approach.

Objectives for a co-ordinated inter-disciplinary approach

These may be summarised as follows:

- The relationship between the historic quarters of cities and their modern counterparts:
 - *harmonious coexistence*, through
 - *strategic planning* (two and three dimensional: ‘layering’ in the sense of HUL)
- Modern interventions: the achievement of
 - *harmonious integration*, through
 - *mutual respect* (in both scale and design)
- Scale and proximity of functions: within and neighbouring historic quarters, prioritise
 - *small scale mixed use*, through
 - *detailed planning* (including the protection of artisan activities)
- Housing, generally the dominant historical use (floorspace): within historic quarters
 - *protect the function*, as well as the
 - *social and cultural mix* (including the protection of established communities)
- Clarity of objectives and implementation in the policies and practice of:
 - *architectural and urban conservation*, and
 - *urban conservation*
- ... and *avoid domination by tourism* :

Tourism is a great modern industry. [...] We had lots of those during the Industrial Revolution and we have been cleaning up the mess ever since.¹¹

UNESCO ‘Historic Urban Landscape’ approach¹²

Extract definition in the 2011 UNESCO *Recommendation on the Historic Landscape*:

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.

The historic urban landscape approach aims at preserving the quality of the human environment, enhancing the productive and sustainable use of urban spaces while recognizing their dynamic character, and promoting social and functional diversity. It integrates the goals of urban heritage conservation and those of social and economic development. It is rooted in a balanced and sustainable relationship between the urban and natural environment, between the needs of present and future generations and the legacy from the past.

¹¹ Professor Alexander Youngson, economic historian, speaking at a conference in Edinburgh in 1990.

¹² Bandarin, Francesco & van Oers, Ron, *The Historic Urban Landscape: Managing Heritage in an Urban Century*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012; and Bandarin, Francesco & van Oers, Ron, *Reconnecting the City: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach and the Future of Urban Heritage*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

The historic urban landscape approach considers cultural diversity and creativity as key assets for human, social and economic development and provides tools to manage physical and social transformations and to ensure that contemporary interventions are harmoniously integrated with heritage in a historic setting and take into account regional contexts.¹³

Preparatory to the finalisation of the 2011 Recommendation a regional conference was held in Saint Petersburg. Referring to the city, a conclusion of the conference was that ...

One of the key characteristics of the city's urban landscape is its horizontality, and the relationship this reinforces between people and the city's streets, public spaces and parks, canals and riverbanks. The *historic urban landscape* approach is considered an essential working concept that enables historic cities to be managed effectively in the age of globalisation and at a time of increasing development pressures.¹⁴

European initiatives in 2011

In December 2011 the conference *The Heritage of the City – Europe's Future* was held in Berlin as a European project to re-assert and apply the messages of the 1975 European and 2007 Leipzig Charters:

Conservation should be at the heart of urban development and not just integrated into it: thus, integrated urban conservation and integrated urban development should be synonymous.

The tools to achieve this already exist, but they are not disseminated or applied coherently. We do not need new tools; rather, to reform the processes of calling upon those that we have.¹⁵

Linear Processes to Systems Thinking

There is an essential need to move from traditional linear approaches to problem-solving to systems thinking, which may be encapsulated as follows:

- The process of understanding how things influence one another within a whole.
- In nature, systems thinking examples include ecosystems in which various elements such as air, water, movement, plants, and animals work together to survive or perish.
- In organisations, systems consist of people, structures, and processes that work together to make an organisation 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'.
- Systems thinking has been defined as an approach to problem solving, by viewing 'problems' as parts of an overall system, rather than reacting to specific parts, outcomes or events and potentially contributing to further development of unintended consequences.
- Systems thinking is not one thing but a set of habits or practices within a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation.
- Systems thinking focuses on cyclical rather than linear cause and effect.

¹³ UNESCO, *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*, UNESCO, Paris, 2011.

¹⁴ Rodwell, Dennis & van Oers, Ron, 'Summary Report of the Regional Conference of Countries of Eastern and Central Europe on "Management and Preservation of Historic Centers of Cities inscribed on the World Heritage List' held in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, UNESCO, Paris, 2007.

¹⁵ Quoted in: Dennis Rodwell, 'The historic capital of our cities', *Context* 123, March 2012.

In short, what are the inputs, outputs and implications of everything we do viewed as parts of a whole, not in isolated ‘silos’.

Linkages to articulate through the Systems Approach

The three pillars of Sustainable Development

- *Environment*
- *Society*
- *Economy*

The multiple characteristics and facets of the Historic City

- *Strategic relationships between the Historic and Modern City.*
- *The Heritage City:* defined and undefined tangible and intangible heritage.
- *The Living City:* the complexity of functional relationships; beware of gentrification.
- *The Social City:* human interactions; identity and community belonging; as above.
- *The Vital City:* socio-economic vitality; including linkages between cultural heritage and creative industries.
- *The Cultural City:* including the anthropological vision of cultural continuity; fostering protection and conservation; dialogue and educational programmes with all age groups.
- *The Tourist City.*

Throughout, we need to define and articulate the unique qualities of each and every City.

Community engagement, Social Cohesion, ...

We have to ask ourselves at least three vital questions:

- *Whose heritage?*
- *Whose culture?*
- *Whose ownership and responsibility?*

Common ownership of heritage results from a process of mediation of top-down and bottom-up perceptions:

The unlisted buildings enshrine the human stories, the memories of the community. They are the real heritage. It is they that determine the sense of identity, of place, and of belonging. These are the places where the historic environment is at the heart of sustainable communities.¹⁶

We must engage proactively:

- Ask different sectors and age groups in a community what is important about their place to them ... and listen! ... children, youths, parents, the retired ...
- Do not pre-judge the outcome by using ‘loaded’ (and generally ‘exclusive’) words like *heritage* and *culture*.
- Anticipate that most of the responses will focus on friends, family, community and the familiar. These are the keys to establishing common ground.

¹⁶ Felicity Goodey CBE, Chair, Central Salford URC, speaking of the regeneration of Salford at the 2007 IHBC Annual School held in Liverpool.

- Implicit will be that *heritage* and *culture*, in the widest sense (but undefined as such) are an integral part of everyday life and valued primordially as such.
- Do not tell them your (essentially selected) understanding until much later.

Work from the common ground. Build from the bottom up

Thematically-targeted networking and exchanges

- Focus on core objectives rather than detailed practices.
- Implementation will vary according to each country's and city's legislative, fiscal and political specificity.
- Objectives are the 'first principles'; for example:
 - Do citizens want a living city or a tourist city?
 - Do they want to focus development pressures into the most sensitive historic quarters of their city, or balance then between the city centre and periphery?
 - ...
- The irony of 'globalisation' is that options are not understood: success under globalisation means competitive advantage through distinctiveness, *not* seeking to replicate another city.
 - There is nothing 'inevitable' about cloning and loss of individuality. It is a choice, and not a good one!

Focus on the objectives to sustain the individual characteristics of each and every city and promoting its 'USP'. Thereafter, tailor the means.

Conclusion

For historic cities to be economically successful in today's increasingly competitive world, they need to take full advantage of their individual, distinguishing qualities. It is no longer sufficient to copy one's competitors; it is essential to stand out from them. Historic cities start with one enormous advantage: their unique inherited qualities. Lose that and all is lost.¹⁷

Thank you

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¹⁷ Dennis Rodwell, 'Managing Historic Cities' in *Muinsuskaitseraamat 2010 (National Heritage Book 2010)*, National Heritage Board, Tallinn, 2011.