



2010-11-15

UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL); Comments and suggestions from ICOMOS SWEDEN

As a whole ICOMOS SWEDEN finds that the proposed recommendation is very good. It is kept on a general level, not being too detailed and long, but still specific enough. It is also written in a quite simple and clear language that runs well. This is very important for its possibilities to be widely spread, to be used and to influence on decision makers.

We agree that the meaning of urban conservation changes and needs to be reassessed. But we would rather say that it has never become fully assessed. Too few professionals in heritage sector care for more than the single buildings and their fabric. Current principles and practises are inadequate not only to define limit of acceptable change for the aspects mentioned in the draft recommendation. They are inadequate also when it is about to define limit of change on visual integrity and identity as skyline, relation between the built structure and topography etc

We appreciate the attempt to describe the heritage as a driving force for positive development from social, economical and sustainability point of view instead of something exclusively static and an obstacle. We also appreciate that the recommendation would not be specific to world heritage cities but broadened to all historic cities.

Still we find that the document can be improved regarding the following aspects.

Preamble

- We regard *identity and visual integrity* as key words in today's discussion about historic urban landscape. *Big fast growing cities* as well as towns, villages and their surroundings are involved. Special identity and visual integrity is of crucial importance for the attractiveness and also for economical success of a place. Strengthening the attractiveness is because of globalisation and global competition of greatest interest. *We think that it would be wise* to state the importance for attractiveness of preserved visual integrity and identity already in the preamble of the recommendation. It is also important to make clear that fast growing big cities are involved. They seldom regard themselves to be of historic interest.

- Also the *lack of tools* to counteract the global impact on the identity and visual integrity and on the living heritage of the place *deserve to be mentioned* in the preamble.
- We would prefer to talk about *'the protection of the value of natural and cultural heritage'* instead of *'the protection of natural and cultural heritage'* when we talk about historic urban landscape. We think that it is important for understanding from people in general. For most people it is still more difficult to understand that urban conservation or conservation of heritage includes something intangible or even the visible appearance of a setting as a whole. To use the term value in connection with urban conservation and protection of historic urban landscapes might help

Introduction

- *Oversized too high buildings* ought to be mentioned in point 2. Also *loss of flexibility* for today unknown needs and *loss of areas for support and maintenance* of the settlement is a problem especially because of today unknown needs because of climate. What will happen to heritage when new needs arise again?
- We miss the word *topography* as important factor and recognized expression for natural surroundings in point 5. The importance of *identity and visual integrity* ought to be mentioned there too.

Definition

- After *'visual relationship* at point 10 we would like to add *'including views, sight-lines, important viewing-points, skylines, pattern of built fabric etc'*
- The *'readability' of the physical environment* is a very important quality to be included in the document. The environment can be the best source of history. Therefore we would also like to add to the same point *'It is the possibility to perceive and understand the prerequisites of the location, the historic evolution, the inter-relationships, and so on, and how this has formed what is there today, the identity of the place.*

Opportunities and challenges

- Development. We are surprised that what we regard as the main challenge when we talk about pressure from global competition – *the large-scale, oversized interventions and high-rise buildings on the wrong place* – are not pointed out in a more direct and clear way. Also a high-rise building outside the protected zone can totally destroy the skyline, the identity and integrity of an valuable historic city. We think this should be added as a new point *'Large scale constructions, over-sized building volymes, high-rise buildings, large traffic complex and other constructions and the visual effect of this has to be avoided'*

The visual aspects, such as views, view cones, silhouettes and roof-scapes, etc, need also to be highlighted better under point 18

- The wording about sustainability and what it means in connection with the urban heritage could be strengthened under point 19 Environment. Considering that in a wider view *sustainable development means good housekeeping: taking care of and developing existing resources in the best*

way, which makes the heritage, in a broad sense, a starting point for planning and development in a sustainable society; at the heart of this is the question of non-renewable resources;

- As a challenge we also want to mention *the demand for appropriate competence in the heritage sector*, its agencies etc to meet the needs of the new situation. Today too few of its professionals are aware of the special needs of urban conservation.

To integrate urban conservation in a way worth the name into local strategies and planning demands special skills. The goal must be to take part in the planning process of equal merit. The need is huge also to create and use new tools for management of urban values, to define and protect integrity and identity of the urban fabric and the urban landscape, to define the value of a certain relation between topography and built structure, to identify the limits of acceptable change, to communicate the values etc

Fundamentally it is *a question of knowledge and attitude. But it is also a question about resources*. To define the fundamental values of a place You need overview in some cases internationally. Very seldom the conservation officers have that possibility in reality. Also to take part as integrated member in the planning process will take more time than what usually is available. To fulfill the responsibility of an urban conservationist You also have to be engaged in alternatives to ongoing densification of the historic city center. Just to mention one common issue of today.

Policies

- A strong statement about *the role of the topography* is needed at point 21 or elsewhere in the recommendation. Fundamental for the historic value of a town or city is that *the topography is fully understandable* and that the coherence between it, the development of the city and its function is possible to understand all over the place. It must be possible to see and experience the connection between the topography, the urban development and the function of the city and how all of it has worked together in the development. It must be possible to understand what the topography has meant to the localisation on the place. If the conjunction between these aspects is lost the historic value is seriously diminished. On the other hand if the two create a synthesis and the one refers to the existence to the other the historic value will become stronger.

Fundamental is also that overall changes in urban development and also specific changes in individual buildings are *integrated with the existing fabric* in such a way that the relation between topography and the built structure will become still more visible. Without such a principle of integration, urban and architectural developments run to risk of leading separately.

- To preserve flexibility is also important. What we know about future demands is that we don't know. Therefore flexibility for future unknown needs is very important and especially in the historic city centres. It must be very unwise to use all remaining areas for maintenance and support of the place for new development. What will be the next step if the direction of the development will change? We in heritage sector have the responsibility to see a little further. Therefore also *saved flexibility has to be stated in the document* as

important strategy. Also that we as professionals in heritage sector *have to take interest in and argue for alternatives* to ongoing change when needed

Tools

- We think that it is better to talk about *cultural and natural values instead of features* which involves the intangible aspects. Could identifying be a better word than mapping? Point 31
- As said before the need is huge to *create and use new tools* for management of urban values, to define and protect integrity and identity of the urban fabric and the urban landscape, to define value of a certain relation between topography and built structure, to identify the limits of acceptable change, to communicate the values etc

Capacity building

- The need of development of new competence in the heritage sector must be stated in the recommendation.

A shift from monument to social economic and cultural processes is mentioned concerning the recommendation. We think one should rather talk about *a widened concept, not 'transition' or 'shift'*. The monuments, sites and other physical expressions of the heritage are still very important. They can usually be seen as symbols for the situation of the time and tell many stories about what people thought or how they lived or about important achievements for mankind. The intangible heritage is usually connected to and dependant on the physical expressions of the heritage.

We really look forwards to the 'ratification' of this recommendation. We hope that it will help counteracting today's trend of devastated values in the name of false efficiency. Heritage is about people not about the material fabric. It is about their ideas, desires, hopes and also about their needs of both thrill and safety and continuity. The appearance of our urban landscape bear the witness of it all

Kerstin Westerlund Bjurström
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