

Using HUL to introduce a new heritage driven concept for city development: The Stockholm experience

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Abstract

The Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach may be used as a vehicle and lens of knowledge through which the character-defining qualities of cities may be read, formulated and transmitted to future generations. Drawing on the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation, this holistic approach to understanding values re-actualises the role of the heritage professional as an essential transmitter of knowledge in a much broader heritage-based context for sustainable development of cities. Stockholm is a useful illustration of how a strong tradition of regulative planning tools has, in spite of periods of extensive demolition, achieved a cityscape with readable distinctive features. However, after some twenty years of consensus-based conservation planning and a clear praxis with know-how, regulative tools and guiding principles, a changed societal context and shifting attitudes towards heritage values give reason for concern. This paper seeks to further understanding of the HUL concept by reviewing conservation praxis in Stockholm and discussing future requirements in the planning process and in the role of the heritage professional in guiding change for heritage protection and development of contemporary features that consolidate the significance of the historic urban landscape.

Key words: Historic urban landscape, Stockholm, skyline, heritage professional, urban identity.

Introduction

As recognized in the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), urbanization ‘is proceeding on an unprecedented scale in the history of humankind’ with effects on the historic urban landscape such as social and spatial fragmentation and a drastic deterioration of the quality of urban environments and their surrounding areas. This is frequently ‘due to excessive building density, standardized and monotonous buildings, loss of public space and amenities, inadequate infrastructure, debilitating poverty, social isolation,

and an increasing risk of climate-related disasters’ (UNESCO, 2011, para2). The recommendation addressed ‘the need to better integrate and frame urban heritage conservation strategies within the larger goals of overall sustainable development’, suggesting ‘a landscape approach for identifying, conserving and managing historic areas within their broader urban contexts, by considering the interrelationships of their physical forms, their spatial organization and connection, their natural features and settings, and their social, cultural and economic values’ (Ibid., para5).

This clearly indicates that the quality of the physical shape and silhouette of cities is important and that a significant part of the problem is loss of heritage values and the huge scale of the new buildings. Excessive building density, especially in central parts of cities, is a phenomenon that has not been given enough attention by heritage advocates. Current methods and the tools used together with competences and resources are often inadequate for communicating and advocating holistic values in today’s globalized world. The HUL Recommendation opened up new opportunities for proper weighing of holistic heritage values in the planning process, if matched with resolute and targeted implementation. If achieved, through proper HUL management, new development will bring added value to the historic urban landscape instead of profiting from existing values, which leads to loss of important values, including economic. Nevertheless, ‘failing to capture these opportunities leads to unsustainable and unviable cities, just as implementing them in an inadequate and inappropriate manner results in the destruction of heritage assets and irreplaceable losses for future generations’ (Ibid., para18).

Presented under Theme 2 ‘Landscape as Cultural Habitat’ of the 18th ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium on Heritage and Landscape as Human Values, this paper discusses the opportunity of the ‘HUL approach’ in safeguarding the holistic values of the historic urban landscape drawing on examples from Stockholm. It focuses on the treatment of the special characteristics that shape the experiential value of a place in new development, which for Stockholm includes the silhouette, the archipelago landscape and the interaction between land and water spaces. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity for enhanced knowledge and skills amongst the heritage professions as a precondition for well-informed actions by local communities as well as policy and decision makers. The heritage professional needs to be empowered to use the HUL approach as a tool to ‘guide change’ rather than to ‘manage change’ for full utilization of the approach in urban areas. This implies a more active role of the heritage professional as an integrated part of development projects, from beginning to end. It also demands knowledge and skills of advocating and communicating holistic

values at all levels of decision-making in a complex planning process determined by rapid development within a globalized context.

The HUL Approach – Towards a Paradigm Shift?

The HUL Recommendation stipulated a holistic approach to understanding urban conservation. It defined the historic urban landscape 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’ (UNESCO, 2011, para8). This includes ‘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’ (Ibid. para9).

The Recommendation offered and legitimised a holistic view of cities based on the recognition of their being dynamic places and provided opportunities for the development of an operational framework for managing change in cities through a HUL approach, aimed 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’ (Ibid., para11). Furthermore, as described by Banderin and van Oers (2012, pxvii) it is a way to ‘define operational principles able to ensure urban conservation models that respect the values, traditions and environments of different cultural contexts, as well as to help redefine urban heritage as the centre of the spatial development process’. This has been reinforced by more refined understanding of what makes cities sustainable. While early conceptualisations of sustainable development became interpreted based on a three-dimensional approach of economic, social and ecological sustainability, as endorsed by the first UN Earth Summit in 1992, culture is increasingly recognised as the ‘fourth pillar’ of sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001; United Cities and Local Governments, 2009). The integration of culture as a distinctive component of sustainable development is key to understanding holistic conservation and landscape perspectives in creating sustainable and resilient cities. Girard (2012, p60) defined city cultural resilience as ‘the internal energy, the

inner force (or vitality) that allows the city to react to external forces, adapt to them, and conserve its specific identity in the long run, in spite of turbulent transformation processes, and to design new win-win solutions.’ Furthermore, as stated in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001, art.3), and highlighted at the 17th ICOMOS General Assembly Scientific Symposium (ICOMOS, 2011), development must be seen ‘not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence’.

Whether the HUL Recommendation reflects a paradigm shift is debatable. Critically, it may be seen as an aggregate of attributes reflecting an evolved urban heritage concept. Furthermore, there is ambivalence as to what ‘development’ and ‘management of change’ imply. There are also unanswered questions as to how heritage professionals are to communicate their perspectives in ever so complex planning processes determined by rapid development within a globalized context. Nevertheless, what ICOMOS and the heritage community need to work towards is ultimately to enhance the opportunities of the HUL approach by advocating and safeguarding the values and creativity of past and contemporary generations of architects, builders, craftsmen, planners, local communities and individuals.

The Case of Stockholm

Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, is a fast growing historic city and a useful illustration of how a strong tradition of regulative planning tools has, in spite of periods of extensive demolition, achieved a cityscape with readable distinctive features. This includes its strategic location connecting routes on land and water, its situation on an archipelago of islands and large water spaces, its topography with dramatic variation of height, its layers of values from different stages of development since its foundation in 1280, distinguished geographically as well-preserved annual rings characterized by an architectural interplay of aesthetic, utilitarian, infrastructural, ideological and topographical considerations (Fig. 1).

With some twenty years of consensus-based conservation planning, which culminated towards the end of the millennium, a clear praxis was achieved with know-how, regulative tools and guiding principles. In Sweden, heritage legislation has a long tradition from 1666 when the first heritage law was established. In Stockholm, conservation activities developed since the 1950s from being predominantly voluntary-based to becoming a public-sector duty at all levels. Following the ‘Battle for the Elms’ (*Almstriden*) in 1971, which became a symbol for the changing attitudes towards conservation following public reaction and demand for a halt in the widespread destruction of historic buildings due to modern transformation, a

well-functioning management system was achieved. For example, the Stockholm City Museum (*Stockholms Stadsmuseum*) attained a clear role in heritage conservation as a specialized bank of expertise and knowledge and achieved a ‘cultural-historic classification’ of the city’s built environment. Furthermore, the *Stockholms Byggnadsordning* (1997), a settlement and landscape characterization by-law document attached to the General Plan (*Översiktsplan*), described the characterizing features of the city as a basis for future development: building qualities, typologies, topographical characteristics and the skyline. Preceding the current HUL debate it was unique and ahead of its time internationally in offering a holistic characterization of the city with potential for further development.

With processes of economic and societal restructuring during the 1990s, deregulation and privatization led to changes in the regulative and management system for conservation and in planning culture (Negussie, 2006). Furthermore, at present, the effects of globalization in terms of more aggressive national and international money together with the need for new residential developments to cater for a fast growing population gradually cause the loss of heritage values. Stockholm is expected to grow by 40 per cent in the next 15-20 years placing new demands on the city. A changed societal context and shifting attitudes towards heritage values give reason for concern. *Stockholms Byggnadsordning* has been superseded by the newly proposed architectural policy (*Arkitektur Stockholm*), which presents a comprehensive programme for shaping the city. However, closer scrutiny through the lens of the HUL approach reveals ambiguity and scope for unsound development. A new polarized context has emerged in which conservation motives are treated as anti-development, reflected in the YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard) movement and in planning decisions. Increased pressure on achieving higher densities in an already compact inner city, where living is considered the most attractive, with planned skyscrapers, building on roofs, green spaces and along the waterfronts are incrementally changing the character and views of the city and its skyline. To that comes the trend amongst the decision makers to show that they are modern, what often means too big buildings in too sensible locations.

New flagship architectural designs by internationally acclaimed architectural firms are being added to the skyline in extremely sensitive locations. As recently highlighted in relation to London, there is an over-belief in ‘starchitects’ who are commissioned ‘not just for vanity or marketing but because cities are flattered to have “world class” architects building in them. These big names can leverage planning permission in a way that small practices or big commercial ones could not’. However, ‘the secret of an enduring architecture might be the creation of a new kind of background, self-effacing architecture’ (Heathcote, 2014).

The recent winning design for the New Nobel Museum by David Chipperfield Architects was granted planning permission and is planned to be built on *Blaiseholmen*, a small central island and one of the most sensitive locations in terms of cultural significance (Fig. 2). The design was achieved by a skilful architect but with the wrong task (Westerlund Bjurström, 2014) as highlighted on Stockholm Skyline, a web-based conservation action forum lobbying against skyscrapers and advocating for sustainable development of the city as a whole. The heritage sector and media have tended to focus their critiques on the consequent demolition of the late 19th century Customs House and several port warehouses, which are indeed important testimonies of Stockholm's maritime culture (Fig. 3). However, more debate is required on visual relationships, the impact of the building's size and on the specific characteristics of the site. In a growing city, monumental buildings of this kind are more appropriate outside of the historic 'Stone City' for sound development of the city as a whole (Westerlund Bjurström, 2011). Furthermore, the characterising silhouette surrounding the Stockholm City Hall, the famous landmark building designed by Architect Ragnar Östberg, where the annual Nobel Prize celebrations are held, was compromised by the positioning of the Stockholm Waterfront Congress Centre, by White Architects, too close to a landmark of such visual significance (Fig. 4). The appropriateness of the design itself may be debated; while some have appreciated the steel exterior of the Congress Hall the black and white modernistic office blocks are relatively anonymous and dull considering its situation on such a prime waterfront site.

The building-on-roofs trend took off in Stockholm around the millennium and is, like in many other cities, incrementally changing the roofscape and city skyline. The added roofs are now common in the central city area that was heavily transformed during extensive urban renewal and demolition of historic buildings in the 1950s and 1960s, resulting in the gradual change in the city silhouette; a densified and flattened roofscape with diminished views of the church towers that are so characterising for Stockholm. Furthermore, a new office development opposite to the Central Station (*Kvarter Orgelpipan*), where earlier urban renewal led to significant loss in heritage and place identity, is densifying the area further and resulting in diminished views of *Klara Kyrka*, a church from the 16th century (Fig. 5). Nevertheless, of greatest impact is the planned demolition of Slussen, a modernistic monument and a world-renowned functionalist infrastructure solution which bridges dramatic height differences and where land and water transportation intersect harmoniously between the Old Town and Southern islands (*Gamla Stan* and *Södermalm*) (Fig. 6). The replacement and winning design of Foster+Partners will create a motorway-like bridge, altering the views

of the Old Town and the city's water inflow and with new buildings blocking views of the waterfront. The development has led to major public reaction and extensive debate. While nearly all involved agree that this modernistic space is in urgent need of rehabilitation, the alternative 'Plan b' has been suggested as a more sustainable solution in terms of cultural, visual, environmental, functional and economic dimensions.

The Role of the Heritage Professional in Guiding Change

The HUL approach and holistic integrated conservation place new demands on the heritage professional in promoting heritage values, whose role and competencies need to be enhanced and legitimised in order to achieve full engagement in the planning process; transmitting knowledge not only of traditional heritage values but also of those relating to landscape perspectives and to economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development. This involves defending economic arguments for conservation, reasoning around energy efficiency and heritage conservation, understanding the impacts of mass and size of large developments and so on. The heritage professional needs to be considered as an empowered actor guiding change rather than an obedient assistant managing change based on a holistic values-based approach to conservation from the beginning to the end of development projects. Guiding change, compared to 'management of change' (UNESCO, 2011, para24b) or 'controlling change' which consolidates a negative view of heritage professionals and on heritage itself, implies a more active role in the planning process and in using a values-based strategy for development. It also indicates that heritage advocates like representatives for other concerns of urban sustainability have to do their utmost to find proper planning solutions; that heritage values have equal weight and have to be handled in a strategic way. The Swedish 'Halland Model', which linked heritage conservation with goals of socio-economic development (Gustafsson, 2009), demonstrated the potential for a broad-based advocating role of the heritage officer.

The challenge and duty for heritage professionals are to analyse and bring forward knowledge about all heritage attributes and to advocate them in the different stages of the planning and decision-making processes. This is also an important part of the message of the HUL Recommendation, to improve competences to be able to fulfil the outlined landscape approach. An obstacle to overcome here is that decision-makers often have limited knowledge about what the advantage would be to involve heritage professionals as constant members of the planning or project team. The only way to gain access is to struggle for continuous participation in the planning process on equal terms as other specialists. Recent trends in

Stockholm show too many examples of the need for heritage professionals to be more deeply involved in planning process, to improve methods and competences and sometimes resources to define and implement fundamental values and attributes in the built environment, and to visualize plans for interventions in the existing townscape. Heavy protests against new developments often arise only after their completion, which proves that the heritage perspective and the impacts of planning schemes on the urban environment were not fully communicated to media or society in general. In contrary, the decision-makers and the developers of new developments are quite skilful in advocating their projects, using the best advertising agencies to convince people about them.

Conclusion

Unless the HUL Recommendation is taken seriously through the implementation of the HUL approach in the planning process, most growing cities will lose their identity and place distinctiveness. Recent developments in the Stockholm suggest that the HUL Recommendation has not yet been fully realised. However, if the Recommendation is taken seriously heritage professionals may take a lead in guiding change with increased weight placed on holistic heritage conservation in planning negotiations. From a landscape perspective, guiding change also implies the use of heritage knowledge in the development of new parts of the city in relation to the wider landscape, consolidating the characterizing features of the city as a whole.

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