

Assessing current state of urban management systems in World Heritage cities: toward an integrated approach to urban heritage conservation

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The conflict between heritage conservation and development has been a central argument in the international debate of the 21st century on urban heritage conservation. Existing heritage conservation tools (e.g. town planning instruments, special zoning, density regulation, intervention restrictions on buildings, etc.) proved to be inadequate or insufficient to regulate urban transformations and development in historic cities being too “weak and powerless” to handle contemporary challenges posed by on-going pressures. Revaluing the principle of harmonious development and integrated conservation conceived during the XX century, a “truly integrated view of urban management” has started to be considered a possible way for reconciling heritage preservation with urban and socio-economic development in historic cities.

The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, adopted by UNESCO in 2011, represents a turning point in the contemporary debate as it is the international recognition that a “new paradigm” for urban conservation and management has gradually taken shape. Its major contribution is the incorporation in a single document of three different perspectives, which have generally operated independently: heritage conservation, urban planning and development. It tries to overcome the persisting separation, encouraging a holistic and integrated approach to urban conservation that could be considered as an overall management framework for the entire city. In this sense, the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach suggests to move beyond existing regulatory and management frameworks, recommending a revision of local practices and tools. It suggests the integration of existing policies, sectors and disciplines, facilitated by national measures, or the creation of innovative tools.

This paper aims to show the limits of the early implementation of the HUL approach. It identifies a research gap in the existing literature and presents the relevance, design and methodology of the PhD research that is currently being conducted by the author. Moreover, the paper suggests that the assessment of current urban management strategies is a necessary knowledge tool to understand how existing systems currently operate in order to identify how they can be improved and the new approach implemented. It intends to present the assessment framework that is currently being developed by the author and tested on specific case studies. Although it does not show any specific research result yet, it shows its theoretical assumptions, expecting to stimulate a discussion on this theme and on the research methodology chosen.

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