

Researching the Historic Urban Landscape

The Challenges of the Secular, Religious and Historic Urban Environment

Durham, UK, 26–27 October 2012.

Expert Meeting organized by the World Heritage Centre and Durham University's Institute of Medieval and Renaissance Studies (IMRS) and the Centre for the Ethics of Cultural Heritage (CECH), in collaboration with the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS), as part of the 40th Anniversary of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, with sponsorship from the Durham World Heritage Site authorities and the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust at UNESCO.

Context

Both personal and community identities are formed through landscapes, tangible objects and intangible legacies, and they have become key elements in understanding our past and its associated environment. The key role of heritage and its potential to unite and create a sense of community may also result in conflict and divisions between communities. Tensions, for instance, may arise over who would control stewardship and the benefits of heritage, and how conflicts between different ethnic, religious and national stakeholders should be resolved. These disputes shape and inform the ethical and legal framework of heritage. The meeting focused on the World Heritage site of Durham Castle and Cathedral, which is acknowledged as the largest and finest example of Norman architecture in England, assessing the role of national and international bodies in the legislation, protection, stewardship and promotion of heritage. Given the strong combination of tangible and intangible values that Durham's site accommodates, the meeting appraised the ethical imperatives and difficulties of stewardship, as well as the benefits of cultural and natural heritage conservation. Durham WHS is an urban, religious site with both secular and religious historical importance. It remains active as a place of worship and has long been a centre of learning. Such a site presents particular challenges in terms of management, but also an opportunity to develop strategies for promoting active research that may have applications at similarly complex sites that share common attributes. Thus the event addressed as well the issues of collaborative stewardship shared between secular, religious and educational authorities and the unique opportunities this offers. Additionally, it assessed the need for collaborative understanding of heritage values in relation to Durham's Cathedral and local communities; something that was successfully pioneered in previous months via an English Heritage-funded public perceptions project at Wearmouth and Jarrow — sites of early ecclesiastical importance that lie within the heavily industrialized and urbanized landscape of Sunderland. Finally, at the heart of these discussions was the evaluation of the competing understandings of heritage sites, such as Durham Castle and Cathedral, and their commodification as assets for all communities who have been related to Durham's site. This meeting took place under the umbrella of UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation to develop a research agenda for its implementation at the local level.

Background and Rationale

The adoption of the new Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape by UNESCO's General Conference on 10 November 2011 affirmed that the principles therein are recognized as being of global concern. However, for this tool to be of use to local governments in providing guidance to interventions in urban settings, it should be integrated into the legislative and institutional environment that determines the local context. Therefore, the General Conference resolution requested Member States to identify within their specific contexts the critical steps to implement the Historic Urban Landscape approach, which may include the following:

- (1) To undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the city's natural, cultural and human resources (a full resource assessment);
- (2) To reach consensus using participatory planning and stakeholder consultations on what values to protect for transmission to future generations and to determine the attributes that carry these values, as part of good stewardship;
- (3) To assess the vulnerability of these attributes to socio-economic pressures and impacts of climate change;
- (4) To integrate urban heritage values and their vulnerability status into a wider framework of city development, which shall provide indications of areas of heritage sensitivity that require careful attention to planning, design and implementation of development projects;
- (5) To prioritize policies and actions for conservation and development, including good stewardship;
- (6) To establish the appropriate partnerships and local management frameworks for each of the identified projects for conservation and development, as well as to develop mechanisms for the coordination of the various activities between different actors, both public and private.

The six-point action plan is considered to be the lowest common denominator, applicable in principle to the majority, if not all historic cities in the different geo-cultural regions of the world. In order to test the validity of this assumption, and thereby the robustness of the Historic Urban Landscape approach, the World Heritage Centre is organizing a series of workshops in cooperation with local authorities. The Durham Expert Meeting constituted the fourth in this series (after Baku, Azerbaijan, Ilha de Moçambique, Lamu, Kenya, and Stonetown, Zanzibar).

Meeting Programme (Friday 26 October)

Representatives from research institutes and departments of universities, as well as implementing agencies working with the Historic Urban Landscape approach had been invited to Durham. These included the Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus (Germany), Eindhoven University of Technology (the Netherlands), Indiana University (United States), Washington University (United States), Lublin University of Technology (Poland), next to Durham University (United Kingdom), as well as the Ministry of Culture in France, the Department of Urban and Rural Planning in Zanzibar (Tanzania), and Durham World Heritage Site Authorities, Sunderland City Council and English Heritage in the United Kingdom. Reflecting on research topics and needs with regard to facilitating the implementation of the *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* at the local level, i.e. by Mayors and city councils, heritage corporations and protected area managers, including

World Heritage site authorities, the meeting programme was divided into three sessions.

Session One was chaired by **Mr. Seif al-Rashidi**, Durham World Heritage Site Coordinator, and addressed the challenge of religion and heritage in urban contexts. It started with a presentation on spirituality and the Durham World Heritage Site by **Canon Rosalind Brown** of Durham Cathedral, explaining the social capital embedded in “Britain’s Best-Loved Building” (according to a poll by The Guardian), which receives 600.000 visitors a year, and how to pass on the tradition of a living place of worship and Benedictine hospitality to the community and make it relevant to them. Durham University’s **Dr. Andreas Pantazatos** followed with a presentation on the ethical status of World Heritage and the role of collaborative stewardship through a comparison of the historical landscapes of Durham and Olympia, in which he expounded the relationship between heritage stewardship and sustainability, where good practice involves the consolidation and illumination of human relationships through time and space as can be interpreted via material and non-material attributes. The session was concluded by **Dr. Mark Manuel** of Durham University presenting his ongoing research at Lumbini, birth place of the Lord Buddha in Nepal, where archaeological excavations are revealing the earliest traces of human occupation to complement the primarily associative values of this World Heritage site.

Session Two was chaired by **Prof. Dr. Marie-Theres Albert** of the Brandenburgische Technische Universität in Cottbus and dealt with setting a research agenda for the Historic Urban Landscape. **Dr. Ana Pereira-Roders** of Eindhoven University of Technology presented her field research at Ilha de Moçambique, conducted between November 2011 and the end of January 2012, with extensive surveys and mapping of Ilha’s historic urban landscape of Portuguese colonial origin, which was put into an electronic database of the local authorities responsible for management of this World Heritage site. **Dr. Christopher Young** of English Heritage, the UK Government’s statutory advisor on the historic environment, presented the current challenges in the management of the historic urban landscape of several of the UK’s World Heritage sites, including those of Westminster Abbey and Palace, the Tower of London, Bath, and Liverpool (put on the World Heritage List in Danger by the World Heritage Committee in 2012). The third presentation in this session was delivered by **Dr. Laura Sole**, describing the travails of the development, and subsequent rejection by ICOMOS, of a World Heritage nomination dossier for Wearmouth and Jarrow in Sunderland (UK), which explored the complex interrelationships between tangible and intangible heritage values, and their physical and associative attributes, that exist in urban landscapes of historic, secular and religious significance.

Session Three on competing perceptions was chaired by **Prof. Alison Wylie** of Washington University and started off with a presentation by **Dr. David Petts** of Durham University, describing his ongoing archaeological research at Lindisfarne in the UK and the challenges of interpreting and valuing contemporary cultural expressions related to pilgrimage, next to the site’s historical heritage significance as a place of ancient worship. This was followed by a presentation by **Prof. Larry Zimmerman** of Indiana University, who critically examined homelessness and heritage through the prism of contemporary urban archaeology, recalling that “archaeology is about the present, not the past, and about stuff, not time”, and provoking questions about place, place making and our perceptions of what constitutes heritage, and for whom. **Mr. Max Polonovski** of the French Ministry of Culture closed the session with a presentation centred on claims to ownership of historical religious heritage, showing examples throughout Europe where over time different religious groups, including Jews, Muslims and Christians, had occupied the

same sites and buildings, but at times tried to claim these as their own heritage by virtue of their active religious practice, inappropriately, since “the past belongs to everybody”.

During the evening of the 26th a keynote lecture was given by **Dr. Ron van Oers** of the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for Asia and the Pacific (WHITRAP), in Shanghai (China), outlining a comprehensive research agenda for the Historic Urban Landscape comprising at least nine themes, including the ecological framework, the geological foundation, urban archaeology, urban morphology, climate change, intangible heritage values, socio-demographic change, cities as cultural landscapes, and economic development, which should increase our understanding and valuing of the complex layering, in time and meaning, of dynamic historic urban environments. To kick start the discussion, he put forward the following questions:

- What type of research is needed to increase the understanding of the complex layering of urban areas, embedded values and their meaning for local communities, which can inform management decisions when dealing with change?
- How to use new information and communication technologies to document and present data related to urban heritage conservation, in particular to communicate to other important constituencies in society, such as local communities, the private sector and youth?
- How can this then be used to develop updated methodologies for urban planning, conservation and development, which take the Historic Urban Landscape approach into account?

Topics of Discussion (Saturday 27 October)

A majority of the presentations focused on archaeology, classic or contemporary, but most of the time urban, which was related to Durham University’s strong position in this academic discipline, offering a convenient entry into the debate on setting a research agenda for the Historic Urban Landscape. All participants agreed that historic cities and urban sites are the result of a process of physical layering through time, which is however seldom properly valued, considered and embodied in the site’s management. Even if aware of history, protected area managers tend to treat the urban site as a uniform object, regardless of the ‘time zone’ of its parts. Exceptions exist when areas are designated under law for their historical and archaeological value. In these areas, special regulations apply and special administrations are in charge, but this concerns but fragments of the historic urban fabric. Attempts have been made both in research (e.g. Lindisfarne, UK; Ilha de Moçambique) and in management (e.g. Hadrian’s Wall, UK; Lumbini, Nepal) to give value to the time layering process, but to date these efforts have remained isolated and limited.

Arguments were put forward that a shift would be needed from a ‘caretaker’s approach’, where heritage conservation is perceived as preservation in a particular state, towards ‘stewardship’, with critical examination of and continuous dialogue on what is to be preserved, how and for whom. In urban environments, and in particular those with both secular and religious significance, recognition should be given to the existence of multiple viewpoints, which brings along a need to continuously question who the stakeholders are, what the proper means of communication are, including strategies for negotiation and conflict resolution, education and capacity building. It was agreed that in a dynamic urban context a need arises for ‘centrifugal and centripetal relationships’, i.e. inward and outward looking.

As concerns the communication of heritage values, the need was recognized to reach out to larger audiences, instead of a focus on peers only (e.g. exhibition of

fieldwork results to local inhabitants of Ilha de Moçambique). In this regard it was recalled, for instance, that the 20 seconds or so in which Hadrian's Wall was featured in the blockbuster movie Robin Hood had done more for promotion and publicity for the World Heritage site than all the earlier official attempts put together. This begs the question what means and techniques of communication are employed, and to what success? The participants agreed that in this regard also more use of local languages and vocabularies was needed (e.g. 'homefree' instead of 'homeless'; Buddhist prayer flags to fence off excavation areas in Lumbini), while in addition techniques had to be explored to transform one-way communication, from heritage authority to public, into two-way: creating exchanges, whereby the public can interact with and respond to what is on offer. Next to engaging the audience and thereby making their experience more meaningful, such feedback would also provide insights into what the audience wants and expects, thereby informing the further development and refinement of heritage communication strategies. Several of the larger museums in the world, including the British Museum in London and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam for instance, are already well underway in engaging with their public, much to their success (in terms of visitor numbers and revenues generated).

Extending from this, the participants argued for more research, with better information and communication, into the benefits of heritage preservation to be had for a variety of stakeholders, also as a counter argument against using historic places to build more high-end apartments, shopping malls and offices – such as is currently proposed in Liverpool, for instance.

The discussion, then, expanded into the realm of the private sector, which is still largely untapped for resources, ideas or methodologies. Preservation groups, it was argued, could explore this realm with the help of professional fundraisers, for instance, who can provide guidance into the ways and means of project preparation, presentation and communication. Another suggestion was to arrange specific meetings with city councillors and business people to hear their ideas and proposals with regard to heritage preservation, presentation and utilisation. Out of these encounters small-scale projects on the ground with the business community could be developed, which would help in creating broader support, increase mutual understanding and generate interest, product innovation and revenues. Examples of innovative heritage promotion projects that were put forward included the European Routes of Industrial Heritage, which comprises the development of trails around industrial World Heritage, which function as anchor sites, or the Cultural Trail of Indianapolis that connects neighbourhoods, art galleries, museums, etc. through coloured pavements and which is completely privately developed.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the participants agreed that there was a need to develop an updated methodological analysis of the urban environment based on the new paradigm of the historic urban landscape in order to move urban conservation to the next level. This should revolve around the following keywords: non-bounded (as opposed to strictly delineated conservation areas, with core and buffer zones), enhancement (next to protection), perceptions (plural), cultural pattern mapping (involving local communities), with multi-disciplinary input (from archaeologists, geologists, anthropologists, geographers, planners, sociologists, etc). Through this analysis and with the use of the multidisciplinary inputs from professionals a communication strategy should be devised, using multiple languages, choreographies and vocabularies, which is geared towards broadening the understanding of the multiple dimensions of the historic urban landscape, in order to make it relevant for a larger segment of society, including decision makers, entrepreneurs, youth, and local communities, to name but a few. With increasing

relevance, then, come opportunities for engagement, whether in the entertainment, professional, educational, commercial or other spheres.

To start with exploring what would be relevant, existing methodological analyses that could be updated to accommodate the new paradigm of the historic urban landscape, it was acknowledged that the archaeological methods in general comprised a principal source of knowledge and management practice, which could be useful as a point of departure. Then in subsequent phases, to give relevance to the 'time dimension' in the management of historic cities and urban sites, a landscape approach would integrate this dimension in the urban planning, conservation and development process.

Proposals for Collaboration

As part of the evaluation of the Historic Urban Landscape Action Plan for Durham World Heritage site and an integration of the meeting's findings into proposals for collaborative stewardship and local community participation, at the closure of the 2-day expert meeting several proposals were put forward, which could constitute the start of a collaborative, international and multi-disciplinary research programme, including:

1. Publication of the papers presented at the Durham Expert Meeting (lead taken by Durham, Eindhoven and Cottbus)
2. Investigation, using Durham as a basis, of suitable methodological analyses used for capturing data on living audiences and participants that could be applied within the new paradigm of the historic urban landscape (lead by Sarah, Ana, David and Larry?), which could be facilitated by plans for a fellowship bringing Ana to Durham.
3. Developing a training manual on the Historic Urban Landscape (lead by WHITRAP, Shanghai)
4. Striving to broaden the international team of experts, dubbed The Durham Group, to integrate other professional disciplines (including a professional fundraiser *cum* cultural industries consultant) and bring them together once a year to discuss progress, present ongoing projects and further develop implementation of the Historic Urban Landscape approach (lead by Ron).