

## VISIONING CONFERENCE OUTPUTS

With the collaboration of WHITRAP (World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO), the financial support of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands and the involvement of the Municipality of Cuenca among others local institutions like the National Institute of Cultural Heritage Ecuador (INPC), the University of Cuenca and the corresponding School of Architecture (FAUC), together with the Research Center of the School of Architecture and Urbanism (CINA) of the same university and the vIirCPM Project, are committed to apply of the Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL) as a mechanism for cultural heritage management.

It is around one year since the concept of Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) started to think about need adopt this notion as a management strategy in the city of Cuenca through the development of the research project "Reassessment of the cultural and natural heritage of the city of Cuenca departing from sustainable development strategies supported by the figure of the Historic Urban Landscape" (from now onwards called PUH\_C for its abbreviation in Spanish) in the framework of a research team working at the University of Cuenca, mostly part of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism. Project funding by the Research Department of the University of Cuenca (DIUC), has been a key factor in strengthening the work of the HUL research team in the city of Cuenca, thus, reinforce links with Municipality itself in this new notion on the heritage field.

Along this labour, amongst the most difficult issues has been to clearly convey the concept of HUL to the several concerned society areas (citizens, public administration and even academics). The figure of HUL -as such- is not only broadly unknown in the context, but also it is tough to understand its application from the practice point of view.

The HUL approach considers the city and its heritage as both natural and socio-cultural construction, while the environment provides the physical support, on which man has left its mark throughout time, generating a layered product that has to be read in all its complexity, to be read in all its complexity, and in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development, it should also include social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects, with the main objective the improvement of the quality of life of its inhabitants.

For the application of the Recommendation on HUL, social involvement in a wider conception of the HUL is essential, citizens, in addition to institutions and technicians who contribute from their experience and feel, in identifying those material and immaterial aspects of the environment to define the identity of the city and its parts. HUL vision arises from the idea of promoting and strengthening an inclusive process based on identified heritage values that uses the local heritage assets and culture to lead planning and design of

the contemporary city, always from a sustainable perspective.

In this context and thanks to strengthened relations with the WHITRAP, the international "Visionary Conference: Everyone Has Something To Say" event was organized and carried out on 7th and 8th May at the Museum of Modern Art in Cuenca-Ecuador. The first day of the event, the progress of the HUL\_Cuenca research project was presented, as well as the experience of several international cities in relation of the HUL figure. The first was open to all citizens, while the second was organized for series of workshops held with citizens from specific sectors and areas of the city.

The conferences held by three invited experts, Muhammad Juma, Susan Fayad and Adam Wilkinson, explained the case studies of the cities of Zanzibar (África), Ballarat (Australia), and Edinburgh (UK) respectively, showing in a practical and clear way the application of concept of HUL, specially focused on the implementation process related to community involvement. So far in Cuenca, the concept of heritage was exclusively limited to the building, a fact which can be also compared with all the existing heritage policies. Paradoxically, none of the three criteria by which Cuenca was included in the World Heritage List mention concretely its architecture. The nomination highlights the city's urban fabric, the successful mixture between the different cultures that have existed and its many manifestations, etc. For this reason, it is crucial to present the notion of HUL as a new way of heritage understanding as well as for the academia, public administration and mainly, among citizens.

In order to the advancement of Visionary Conference the first steps have already been taken. In order to encourage citizen's participation, the research team undertook a children's painting competition and a photography contest called "Visions of the City", the deadline for submission of photographs ended last April 29. A new approach to the perception of heritage is in process. This conference and side events aimed at improving the quality of management of urban heritage of the city of Cuenca and its valuable Urban Heritage. Thanks to the implementation of the HUL project and the research strength, Cuenca becomes part - together with Ballarat-Oceania, Edinburgh-Europe, Zanzibar-Africa and other cities in Asia - of a limited number of cities around the globe who developed and applied researches in this field. Apart from this, among other benefits are identified:

Direct benefits:

- The Visioning Conference has brought together in one event: citizens, public administration and academia. Everybody attended the exposition of the case studies of the mentioned cities, besides they were also part of the workshop on the second day.

- The Municipality and the Department of Historical Areas, has shown

great interest on incorporating Hul's concept to draft the Special Plan of Protection of the Historical Centre of Cuenca. This interest has resulted on the signing of an Agreement between the University of Cuenca, the WHITRAP and the Municipality of Cuenca with the following objectives:

- o Research
  - To develop joint research activities using the HUL approach to investigate, analyse, perform and evaluate the characteristics and values of Cuenca's heritage assets, both tangible and intangible.
- o Visioning Conference
  - To organize a Visioning Conference on Cuenca's Historic Urban Landscape to present research outcomes and to consult citizens on issues related to heritage conservation and future planning and design of the contemporary city.
- o Publication
  - To publish the results and outcomes of the research and symposium on international peer-reviewed journals, as well as in reports to UNESCO's Executive Board and General Conference, and thereby to expand knowledge, understanding, visibility and international influence of Cuenca's natural and historical-cultural heritage.

■ As a result of the Visionary Conference it is proposed to make an addendum to the Agreement in which the following points are incorporated:

- o Creation of a research team between the University of Cuenca and the Municipality of Cuenca, specifically, with the Department of Historical Areas. In June the drafting of the Special Plan of Protection of the Historical Centre begins, and the idea is to incorporate the PUH\_C team in order to coordinate the writing process.
- o Exchange between both institutions of those textual, graphical and planimetric information that has been developed about the city of Cuenca and is important for the development of projects.
- o Training by the WHITRAP / UNESCO to technicians of the Municipality of Cuenca and researchers of the PUH\_C project for the implementation of Hul's concept.
- o Implementation of a particular action coming from the application of the figure of HUL to the city of Cuenca.

■ A very mature awareness from the technicians of the Municipality

about the need to overcome the concept of heritage as isolated items and go towards an integrated vision of the heritage city. In addition, the high participation of students and community has added a new social stakeholder's network for heritage awareness.

The participation of experts coming from the disciplines such as geology, environment, anthropology, archaeology, economics or sociology allowed us to show the relevance of the multiple visions for understanding the city and depict it for all the attendees.

- The opportunity to present the work that has been done around HUL in Cuenca to international experts has allowed us to depict the uniqueness of this initiative at the Latin American level and at the same time the city is placed on an international context ready to be incorporated as another pilot city around the world. This fact will allow preparing future stages of the project and supporting on funding.

- Inclusion of the article "The construction of the Historic Urban Landscape and citizenship from an interdisciplinary perspective. The case of Cuenca, Ecuador "in the publication HUL applied approach, edited by Tongji University in Shanghai, China.

- Joint efforts, support and the direct contact with the WHITRAP has allowed the research team to readdress the development of the project according to the theoretical and scientific framework developed by the UNESCO regarding the application of the figure of HUL. The participation of Cuenca in the report on the state of implementation of HUL (to be published by the UNESCO in 2016), locates the city in a privileged position, while consolidates the developed work to date.

- The possibility to present the case of Cuenca and the implementation of HUL at the ONU-HABITAT conference, to be held in Quito-Ecuador in 2016.

- Doctoral thesis investigating the application of Recommendation on HUL in the city of Cuenca, that at the same time reinforce the HUL\_C own research project.

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## Organizers

An initiative of the School of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of Cuenca.



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