UNESCO

United Nations
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World
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Centre

WORLD HERITAGE CITY LAB

Summary Outcomes

2020

World Heritage Cities Programme

World Heritage City Lab

2020 summary outcomes

In June 2020, the first World Heritage City Lab (City Lab) was organised by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in consultation with ICOMOS, ICCROM and IUCN. The event brought together international experts and practitioners to conduct a series of online innovation laboratories to analyse the current situation through selected examples and discuss strategies for how heritage could be integrated into sustainable development and recovery from the impacts of the ongoing pandemic World Heritage Cities.

The City Lab was developed within the framework of the World Heritage Cities Programme, one of the six thematic programmes approved and monitored by the World Heritage Committee. It operates to reinforce messages and provide technical assistance regarding policies and processes of the 1972 UNESCO *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (World Heritage Convention). It operates in line with and encourages the implementation of the approach of the 2011 UNESCO *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL Recommendation), and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

On 17 June 2020, the World Heritage City Webinar gathered an international panel of World Heritage City mayors and experts to share their views and experiences. The webinar was broadcast live to an audience of over 400 people.

Between 17 and 26 June 2020, over 70 participants from the five global regions gathered in five online sessions of 2.5 hours each, held online in English and French (with simultaneous translation). During these exchanges, site managers, experts and heritage professionals from over 35 countries shared their latest experiences and challenges.

More than **35** countries	Over **70** specialist participants	More than **60%** women	Webinar audience **400** people

World Heritage (WH) properties are recognised for their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Nations, regions, cities and site managers are obligated to protect them as they make part of the heritage of humanity. At the same time, some of these properties are part of living cities. In consequence, the management of urban properties must also address the needs and aspirations of their residents and communities while protecting their OUV. In addition to balancing the conservation needs with demands for development in a manner aligned with the objectives of sustainable development, the WH properties also face several challenges in protecting their OUV including rapid urbanisation, inadequate or poorly planned infrastructures, climate change, ill-conceived and unsustainable tourism, unregulated commercialisation and land speculation, and gentrification among others. Nevertheless, a number of urban WH properties are actively working to integrate cultural heritage in local strategies and policies for sustainable development, advocating for effective national and regional legal frameworks, and demanding the cooperation of regional stakeholders. Now more than ever, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" and target 11.4 "Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage", and the New Urban Agenda (NUA), cities are becoming important agents of transformation. Increasingly, the heritage management strategies of urban WH properties must protect their OUV, while contributing to sustainable urban development. The HUL Recommendation is an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider context and put urban development processes in line with the broader goals of sustainable urban development (for more information consult https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul/).

The approach of the City Lab is to gather experts, those very experienced with World Heritage along with those seeking to engage with them, along with site managers and other specialists in a co-learning and co-creative environment to develop solutions and strategies for heritage management in a collective and collaborative way. By focusing sessions on site managers and case studies of specific sites, the discussions of the experts are grounded in real challenges and practical solutions rather than abstract or hypothetical proposals.

Added to general management challenges for World Heritage cities, one of the main focuses of the year has been the COVID-19 crisis and the challenges that it has brought to our cities. The ongoing global health crisis due to the COVID-19 has brought sharply into focus the fragility of our cities. We stand at the crossroads to consider pathways to recovery and enhancing the resilience of people everywhere. The City Lab offered an opportunity also to reflect on ways to recover the notion of heritage cities as thriving urban centres using heritage-based strategies to build back the cities to be stronger, more sustainable, more resilient, and more deeply connected to their histories and landscape.

All the participants lauded the approach of learning from case studies and the co-creative approach to developing strategies. They saw the need for a platform to share practical and innovative strategies, knowledge, and approaches. All the participants were unequivocal that heritage must play a key role in urban recovery plans and enhance resilience. They also agreed that urban conservation needed to move beyond 'historic urban ensembles' to a new perspective on heritage as an essential part of people's lives. The participants identified five principle pathways for recovery and resilience:

1. People-centred Recovery
2. Green Recovery
3. Equitable Economic Recovery
4. Recovering Space and Infrastructure
5. Digital-Powered Recovery

Watch the recordings of the sessions

Session 1

Re-thinking Urban Heritage for Recovery and Resilience

Session 2

Well-being and local communities

Session 3

Heritage at the core of local economic development strategies

Session 4

Re-thinking urban infrastructure in historic urban contexts

Session 5

Heritage-based recovery and resilience: Way forward

Urban Heritage Management for Recovery and Resilience

Key Conclusions:

1. *People-centred Recovery*

- **Community wellbeing is of central concern:**
  - Enhance ways that heritage contributes to community wellbeing;
  - Make heritage a part of the infrastructure for community wellbeing;
  - Re-use and temporarily re-purpose historical buildings, public buildings, markets, and open-spaces for emergency use as shelters for those without homes, food distribution, vaccination, nursing, testing, and other urgent uses;
  - As communities in historic areas of cities and settlements are often impoverished, multi-pronged efforts to heritage management and sustainable development are necessary.

- **Heritage is a 'public good':**
  - Heritage plays a vital role as a repository of knowledge and identity at the local, national and international levels. Hence, heritage is a public good, which must be conserved as such.

- **Sound governance of heritage is critical:**
  - An integrated approach to conservation which includes governance issues must ensure the community is in charge;
  - A major revamping in decision-making processes and institutional structures may be necessary to manage living heritage better;
  - At the same time, decision-makers must involve civil society to empower people on the street;
  - In response to the current global changes, new responsive and flexible approaches to management and planning are necessary;
  - Enhance connections between urban planning and urban development processes and site management/heritage conservation activities;
  - Harmonise different decision-making bodies to ensure coherence;

- o Lack of coordination and consensus at different levels.
- **Communities are crucial for heritage management**:
  - o Residents and local communities are essential in urban conservation processes. It is important to recognise community sub-cultures and the change of values and perceptions among them.
  - o Integrating communities in decision-making and governance leads to greater success of conservation and development initiatives.
- **Recognition of community festivals and celebrations**:
  - o Alternative design of key events is essential as community practices of festivals and celebration are key attributes of heritage identity and critical for local communities' wellbeing.
- **Inventory of associated intangible heritage:**
  - o Community-based inventory of intangible heritage elements is a systematic way to help sustain rituals and festivals – even those that cannot be continued during the pandemic.
  - o Turn the streets into cultural events.
- **Sustainable development must be integrated with heritage practices:**
  - o The policy framework of the 2030 Agenda and the HUL Recommendation should be used to promote sustainable heritage practices.
- **Shift the focus from cosmetic urban conservation interventions to the quality of life of local residents**.

2. *Green Recovery*
- **Integrate parks and green spaces:**
  - o Including parks and green spaces where ever possible in and around the historic areas of varying sizes and type, and at

varying locations from neighbourhood parks to forest zones provides 'lungs' for dense historic cities.

- **Enhance existing infrastructure:**
  - Provide public access to waterfronts;
  - Improve sanitation and waste management;
  - Use renewable energy.
- **Public spaces play a critical role in the life of communities in historic settlements**:
  - Adaptability of use;
  - Ability for local traditions and cultural identities to be expressed;
  - Adaptive re-use of some types of spaces can make them meaningful for local communities and even bring new positive connections to spaces that were once negative or disused.
- **Urban farming and food production:**
  - Traditional and innovative urban farming and food production practices could provide local economic alternatives as well as enhance food security.
- **The natural environment must be integrated into conservation efforts:**
  - Because of these new conceptions of urban conservation, we must rethink planning, to add public and green spaces and balance sustainable development and heritage as nature is part of culture. Urban nature can relieve many urban issues.

3. *Equitable Economic Recovery*
- **The local economy is a central element to protect heritage:**
  - We must reinvent economic models so that they support the community and protect heritage;

- o Balancing economic benefit with community social and wellbeing needs are essential;
  - o Identify and support traditional artisans and creatives;
  - o Integrate heritage restoration and local development interventions with local artisanal outputs;
  - o Promote local entrepreneurship;
  - o Building restoration can provide job opportunities and training.
- **Alternative financing:**
  - o Cooperative models that connect local production with local consumers and e-trade;
  - o Models for equitable profit-sharing.
- **Aid and tax exemption:**
  - o Subsidies for those in need;
  - o Stimulus packages.
- **Economic diversification:**
  - o Need for alternative and blended finance in tourism-centred cities;
  - o Need for alternative employment opportunities, especially in tourism-centred cities.

4. *Recovering Space and Infrastructure*
- **Rethinking Transport:**
  - o Emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle pathways;
  - o Reduction in automobiles and mass public transport.
- **Rethink land-use:**
  - o Increase mixed-use neighbourhoods;
  - o Promote most facilities and services to be within short distances;
  - o Reduce single-use zones.

- **Rethinking Urban Infrastructure:**
  - New infrastructure must primarily address the needs of the local communities identified with a participatory approach;
  - Upgrading or modifying existing infrastructure or proposing new infrastructure must continue to protect the OUV (if they are World Heritage properties) or urban heritage values;
  - Include infrastructure for community wellbeing such as homeless shelters and food pantries.

- **Support adaptive re-use:**
  - Adapt and re-use buildings and spaces to enhance the liveability of local communities;
  - Reclaim streets by local residents and families (rather than tourists) enhancing a sense of communities.

- **Use traditional materials and techniques in urban development:**
  - Using traditional materials and technique in urban development is a way to integrate heritage in development efforts and promote urban regeneration that is compatible with and protecting the heritage values and attributes of historic environments.

- **Implement the HUL Recommendation Approach**:
  - Importance of natural setting and environment for the World Heritage city;
  - Need to address management of heritage city at territorial scale;
  - Many heritage structures are privately owned and require a clear strategy;
  - Need to prepare management plans in alignment with the HUL Recommendation approach.

5. *Digital-powered recovery*

- **Create online public spaces that are local;**
- **Online markets to support local crafts;**
- **Establish digital tourism platforms:**
- **Knowledge and research play a crucial role on conservation:**
  - Architectural knowledge of the forms, typologies, and their; historical development are essential for heritage management;
  - For this research, teaching and sharing are necessary;
  - Use the opportunity of the pandemic to complete inventories and documentation of heritage properties.