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Theory and practice, two sides of the same coin

In the preamble of the UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL) is stated “urbanization and its effects on urban landscape is proceeding on an unprecedented scale in the history of mankind”. The recommendation analyses the effects of the very rapid globalization of today on social life, sustainability and on traditional historic values of the townscape and it suggests measures to take to minimize the negative consequences. It clearly indicates that the quality of the physical shape of the cities is important and that a big part of the problem is loss of common cultural heritage and the huge scale of the new buildings.

What in my opinion makes the HUL recommendation so important is its focus on the townscape of the fast growing big cities and on the need of improved practice, knowledge and tools to handle their growth. Excessive building density, especially in central parts of these cities, is a phenomenon which with few exceptions during a long time has not been enough paid attention to by heritage organizations and professionals. Current methods and the tools used today are not good enough to communicate and advocate values in the globalized world of today, nor are competence and recourses. The HUL recommendation is a possibility for all of us to give proper weight to heritage values in planning process given resolute and targeted implementation.

1. The importance of the townscape and need of focus

In the introduction is said “rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, however, may frequently result in social and spatial fragmentation and a drastic deterioration of the quality of urban environment and the surrounding areas” and “notably, this may be due to excessive building density, standardized and monotonous buildings, loss of public space, social isolation, and an increasing risk of climate-related disasters”.

The task to deal with big fast growing historic cities is enormous because of its considerable complexity and proportions and also because of urgent need to improve competence, practice, methods and tools in conservation planning, which are not sufficient to ensure nor their cultural significance nor social well-being or sustainability.. To succeed in making difference we definitely have to focus our attention on what is the most important in relation to its impact in number of people affected from it. We have to emphasize the townscape of the central parts of these cities, the growth of the city centers into the surrounding city and other important nodes as secondary centers.

2. New concepts of integrity needed

Current concepts of integrity used in heritage field are not capable to deal with the complexity of a fast growing city. I think that many, may be all of us, do agree about that. Most of us also agree about continuity as something worth aiming at. Fundamentally what has been very much discussed and which has caused a lot of disagreement is if it is possible or not to fix the attributes that express the meaning of a certain heritage area and its value, and if it is acceptable in our profession to do it. The wording “controlling change” has been suggested to be used instead. I find it defensive consolidating a negative view on heritage professionals and on heritage itself. I would rather say “to guide change”. I will add “using a value based strategy for development”. It indicates that we take an active part in the planning process. It also indicates that we like representatives for other aspects as economy and

sustainability has to do our utmost to find proper solutions, that heritage values has equal weight and have to be handled in a strategic way..

3. To guide change using a value based strategy for development

By definition it might be right that it is impossible to fix the attributes that express the meaning as a whole of a complex structure as the city center of a fast growing city over time. But in my opinion it is dangerous to polarize by being too consistent about it and to carry it to its very extreme. Priceless values for a majority of the population will run the risk to be lost forever if nobody will try to define them and their attributes. I am sure that in the complexity of values and meanings of a city there are always attributes that express such values that can be fixed also in a fast growing big city. In many cases competent contribution from heritage professionals will give from all aspects more favorable solutions.

This is important particularly regarding physical expressions of history that are essential for a specific quality or identity of a specific city/part of a city or tell a story which is of common or special interest. Also aesthetic cultural historic values often have the same dignity. It can be attributes necessary to understand the geographic location for the settlement, characteristics that tell about governance, social life and ideals, a special relation between the built structure and topography, a consistent pattern of property development over long time or visible historic layers of strategic importance. Of special importance are of course characteristics that make the place special compared to other places.

The challenge and duty for heritage professionals to analyse and bring forward knowledge about these values in society and to advocate them in planning process is my understanding of what the topic of the Firenze meeting “Reassessing the values of the past in the light of contemporary trends” is about. This is also an important part of the message of the HUL recommendation to improve competence to be able to fulfil what is stated in its introduction.: “It suggests 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”.

4. An example from Europe

Stockholm, capital of Sweden is a fast growing city. During centuries the planning instruments have been sufficient regarding their capacity to keep and develop the main characteristics of the city. Its strategic location, both from commercial and defence point of view, the significance for political power and economic power and the relation between settlement and topography are still clearly visible and readable. It tells about governance, social life and ideals. The main identity of the city, its beauty, the skyline, the islands and the wide water are still dominating.

But today the effects of globalisation in terms of more aggressive national and international money and need of new homes for a fast growing population gradually cause loss of values which are not replaced by equivalent values for the inhabitants. To that comes the trend among decision makers to show that they are modern what means too big buildings in too sensible locations. We cannot blame our legal instruments for what is happening. In Sweden heritage legislation has a long tradition from 1666 when the first heritage law including built heritage was instituted. The truth is that also if the legal instruments are excellent they do not help if the values that we advocate are not implemented or if the stakeholders and residents involved do not understand the effects of new plans.

Current development in Stockholm shows too many examples of the need of heritage professionals to be more deeply involved in planning process, to improve methods and competence and sometimes resources to define and implement fundamental values and their attributes in the built environment and to visualize plans for interventions in existing townscape. Very often the heavy protests against the new arise after the new buildings or the settlements are completed, which proves that the heritage professionals didn't succeed in describing what was planned nor to stakeholders, society or to media.

Contrary to that the decision-makers and the developers of new buildings and settlements are very clever on advocating the projects. They spend a lot of money using the best advertising agencies to convince people about them. I have reasons to believe that also part of that problem could be avoided if the HUL recommendation was taken seriously.

5. New competence and new tools needed

To develop, deepen and modulate the theory is of course important and necessary to make the recommendation respected and used. Still, in line with the HUL approach, theory has to be accompanied by hard work to improve practice. Contrary to the earlier existing documents concerning urban settlement the HUL recommendation, with clever insight, focus on the need of improved competence and resources, improved methods, improved tools and new knowledge. It would be a big mistake not to use the HUL recommendation to argue for that in all our contacts with decision-makers, stakeholder, representatives for civil society etc. We have to create strategies for that, implement them, establish goals and reach them in reality. If we don't take interest in and argue for that our skilled theory building will be useless.

For the credibility of heritage professionals the HUL recommendation describes that its ability to cover the following issues has to increase:

- to participate in planning process
- to facilitate civic participation
- to engage in sustainable development
- to advocate the importance of proper city development for economy and social well-fare

5.1 TO PARTICIPATE IN PLANNING PROCESS

In the HUL preamble is stated: "Considering; therefore, that in order to support the protection of natural and cultural heritage, *emphasis needs to be put on the integration of historic urban area conservation, management and planning strategies* into local development processes and urban planning, such as, contemporary architecture and infrastructure development, for which the application of a landscape approach would help maintain urban identity,"

Continuous participation of heritage professionals in planning process is fundamental to make that possible. I think that it is a common problem that this is very unusual today. To obtain more of continuous participation in planning process than today it is necessary to improve competence to be an active partner in development of planning strategies and their implementation. It is important to demand alternative solution, relevant analyse, relevant facts and visualisation before decision, to inform about research on different goods to society from heritage values and to be updated enough about international trends and examples to be able to convey the message. Basic skills about the special values of the city as a whole, its most important elements and pattern of expansion from historic and identity perspective is of course a must. Change to a more positive attitude to work as decision-maker or together with decision-makers would help.

An obstacle to overcome to be able to take the lead in guiding change using a value based strategy for development" is that decision-makers have very 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 planning process on equal terms as other specialists. Actually heritage perspective is useful also regarding to city development also in historically less important parts of the city.

5.2 TO FACILITATE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In HUL chapter IV Tools (a) is stated "Civic engagement tools should involve a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, and empower them to identify key values in their urban areas, develop visions that reflect their diversity, set goals, and agree on actions to safeguard their heritage and promote sustainable development."

To live up to that in the world of today the communication must be brief and effective. Few people will read long texts. To describe what we mean with the special value and identity of a city or part of it effectively is a challenge. Visualisation of plans from heritage perspective must be part of it. To understand the effect of a new building on the townscape or on neighbour buildings they have to be presented seen from many viewpoints. To make it give the real impression it has to be presented in a special way. Normal photos tend to minimize the effect. The presentation must include information from research on the effects from lost quality on relevant aspects as economy, social welfare and ecology. Nobody else will tell about that if it doesn't support their aspect or proposal. We have to realise that professionalism is needed also when it comes to communication. Few cities have strategies to handle this in line with the HUL recommendation.

5.3 TO ADVOCATE THE IMPORTANCE FOR ECONOMY AND SOCIAL WELL-FARE

In the HUL introduction 3 is stated: "Urban heritage, including its tangible and intangible components, constitutes a key resource in enhancing the liveability of urban areas, and fosters economic development and social cohesion in a changing global environment. As the future of humanity hinges on the effective planning and management of resources, conservation has become a strategy to achieve a balance between urban growth and quality of life on a sustainable basis".

Research about the relation between heritage and economy and also heritage and social well-fare has to be encouraged. Today the amount of reports is limited and doesn't cover the broad field of knowledge needed. Heritage professionals have to keep themselves informed about existing research, use it in their practise and demand new research..

5.4 TO ENGAGE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In HUL Preamble is stated; "*Also considering* that the principle of *sustainable development* provides for the preservation of existing resources, the active protection of urban heritage and its sustainable management is a condition sine qua non of development",

Personally I am sure that heritage could much more than today be used as a driving force for sustainability, considering that in a wider perspective it means good housekeeping in the sense of taking care of existing recourses. Built heritage may well function as a starting point for the work to limit use of non-renewable recourses both as visual illustration and as model for practice.

Unfortunately discussion about sustainability and heritage has been focused on bad insulation against cold climate of historic buildings and on other problems. Still if we look at the energy consumption in the whole chain of construction and management there are reasons to assume that saving heritage is more sustainable than replacing it with new buildings. Research about the relation between heritage and sustainability has to be encouraged. Today the amount of reports is limited and doesn't cover the broad field of knowledge needed. Heritage professionals have to keep themselves informed about existing research, use it in their practise and demand new research.

6. Conclusion

If heritage profession doesn't take the HUL recommendation seriously, improves its competence, methods and tools and uses HUL in argumentation most growing cities very soon will be metropolitan jungles like Atlanta and Beijing, just to mention some among a lot of similar examples.

If heritage profession does take the HUL recommendation seriously the possibility for heritage professionals to take the lead in guiding change and the possibilities to give increased weight to heritage aspects in negotiations will increase. These possibilities will increase still more if heritage profession succeeds in implementing the recommendation among decision-makers.