

Summary of the reflection meeting on the implementation of the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape two years after its adoption (HUL+2)

UNESCO Headquarters, 13 December 2013

Context

For several decades, the world has been witnessing an unprecedented level of urbanization. An increasing number of people have moved to cities which have become engines of global growth. More than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas and it is foreseen that, within one generation, two thirds of humans will reside in towns and cities. Consequently, these territories are under huge pressure and are hardly in a position to offer the quality of life to which the inhabitants aspire while preserving the cultural value of those areas in a context of unfettered urban development.

In terms of cultural heritage, urban areas now constitute the largest category of properties in the World Heritage List, with more than 200 sites inscribed. They are suffering from the consequences of pressures inherent to urban development and are facing real challenges in terms of conservation. In the best cases, they are viewed as isolated entities within the broader territory in which they are located and are, therefore, dissociated from their environment. These urban areas are the focus of occasional conservation operations which do not form part of an overall socio-economic and urban development policy encompassing the entire territory, though they constitute an important resource given the cultural and social values they convey.

This state of affairs is borne out each year by the increased number of urban areas inscribed on the World Heritage List which face serious problems in terms of conservation. These cases usually generate lively debates within the World Heritage Committee, which must examine them and decide on measures needed to address the issues raised.

Aware of this situation and of the difficulties encountered by the Member States, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) on 10 November 2011, based on research and consultations carried out since the 2005 Vienna Conference. This Recommendation has become the first normative instrument governing best practices and the approach that UNESCO invites its Member States to adopt for the conservation and enhancement of urban areas, whether inscribed on the World Heritage List or not. The Recommendation serves as a complementary tool to the World Heritage Convention, to address current urban conservation issues based on an integrated and multidisciplinary approach.

Reflection meeting on the implementation of the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape

Introduction by Mr Francesco Bandarin, Assistant Director-General for Culture

Two years after the adoption of the Recommendation and two years before the submission of a report to the UNESCO General Conference (October 2015), the World Heritage Centre decided to hold a reflection meeting on the progress of implementation of this normative instrument (agenda in Annex 1). The meeting brought together urban conservation experts and practitioners from around the world (see list of participants in Annex 2), many of whom contributed to the work that led to the drafting of the Recommendation. The aim of this meeting was to receive feedback on the Recommendation two years after its implementation, and to draw conclusions in order to prepare a possible action plan with a view to improving its implementation.

Mr. Bandarin, who chaired the meeting, recalled the context in which the Recommendation was adopted and reaffirmed UNESCO's commitment to its implementation. Among other points, he stressed the fact that, despite the short period of application of the approach set out in the Recommendation (two years), it was essential to evaluate the current situation in order to move forward on the best possible footing and study what measures to take in order to optimize the use of the normative instrument and to ensure that it become an integral part of development policies in the future.

Mr. Bandarin pointed out that the Recommendation had become a reference point for global organizations' debates on urban conservation. The text of the Recommendation was (and still is) not unanimously supported as the subject was still debated with many divergent viewpoints among experts around the world, but it did offer an integrative and multidisciplinary vision drawing on different models addressing heritage and urban conservation. The text was innovative in that it drew on the cultural diversity and the intangible aspects of cities and the urban landscape, thus building a bridge between those responsible for historic centres and the city planners in the broad sense.

Mr. Bandarin also recalled that the objectives of the approach fit into an overall strategy of UNESCO for culture and the role of culture in developing and improving communities' quality of life. He highlighted the importance of the theoretical concept and the statutory aspect of the Recommendation, which provide guidance for meticulous practical application of the historic urban landscape approach.

Mr. Bandarin also encouraged all participants to share their experiences of applying that approach and to enrich the meeting with proposals for input and recommendations that they would like to make. In particular, that concerned the statutory aspect of the Recommendation as well as its tools and the action plan to be prepared in order to improve future implementation. Furthermore, Mr Bandarin stressed the importance of new technologies and their role in promoting and supporting that kind of approach.

International World Heritage expert meeting on the mainstreaming of the methodological approach related to the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape in the Operational Guidelines, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 3-5 September 2013

The Secretariat presented the results of the international meeting which took place in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 5 September 2013, entitled "International World Heritage expert meeting on the mainstreaming of the methodological approach related to the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape in the Operational Guidelines". The meeting, organized by the World Heritage Centre and the Government of Brazil, was requested by the World Heritage Committee to study the mainstreaming of the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. During this meeting, several questions linked to the Recommendation and its application were addressed by the experts and representatives of the Advisory Bodies, most notably the role of the normative instrument in the different aspects of implementation of the Convention, with a particular focus on nominations and monitoring the state of conservation of the inscribed urban ensembles. Added to that was the question of communities, one of the key themes of the Convention (the fifth C), and the upstream work that should be conducted regarding an approach based on the use of specific tools to improve site management and conservation following sites' inscription. Moreover, this meeting was fruitful with regard to terminology in the Operational Guidelines, which could be revised and clarified in the future. Several concrete proposals were made in that respect, including the use of the term "site" rather than "group of buildings" in order to better express the stratification of the Historic Urban Landscape. All the experts who attended the Rio de Janeiro meeting underscored the importance of using the

Recommendation as an approach rather than as a new category of property, as perceived by some experts. Furthermore, Annex 3 of the Operational Guidelines was studied and several amendments proposed to revise the terminology, categories and sub-categories, with the aim of ensuring consistency with the text of the Recommendation. For example, the term “historic city” would be replaced by “urban heritage”. The importance of using an action plan with a partnership policy for the future was also mentioned, as was the need to update the tools in order to improve implementation of this approach. The outcomes and recommendations of the Rio de Janeiro meeting will be submitted to the World Heritage Committee in its next session in June 2014 and, depending on the decision of the Committee, may be incorporated into the Operational Guidelines in 2015.

The outcomes of the Rio de Janeiro meeting were welcomed by all the participants of the “HUL+2” meeting, who supported the process of reworking the main text of the Operational Guidelines and the text of Annex 3. They also emphasized the need to focus on the tools in order to update them and develop a roadmap for the international community concerning the Historic Urban Landscape approach. In fact, some experts found that the approach had been mainstreamed in several countries, despite its “young age”, and was starting to be taken into serious consideration. It was therefore essential to encourage the institutions concerned and the UNESCO Member States to extend application of the approach to all regions of the world. In order to achieve that, it was recommended to promote exchanges between countries and set up an action plan as quickly as possible.

All the participants raised the lack of guidelines governing best practices set out in the Recommendation. Accordingly, more complete guidelines were needed for implementation of the Historic Urban Landscape approach. Some examples were cited, such as Africa, and more particularly Zanzibar, where considerable resources had been put in place to provide documents related to the application of the approach. However, the diversity of those resources actually posed a problem for synthesizing and setting up actions that unified that information and complied with the strategy supported by the Historic Urban Landscape approach. Therefore, guidelines need to be defined to synthesize the resources and find the most appropriate way of bringing together all the information for optimal application.

According to some participants, guidelines should be provided for dealing with specific situations that might be similar to the case of Africa, as well as other complications that might be encountered in other regions. Therefore, it would be useful to set up a working group or a drafting group responsible for “sifting through” the work that had already been done elsewhere in the world and at previous meetings, with the aim of preparing a policy document taking into account all the dimensions of the approach and global diversity. According to some experts, the drafting of the guidelines could substitute the work on the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, taking what had been done for the Annex 3 text and incorporating it into the guidelines.

The mainstreaming of the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape in all regions of the world is a necessity in order to overcome the challenges of increasing pressure on urban areas and growing migration to cities.

The approach is not the result of novel practices, but it emerges from the study of several noteworthy and thoroughly documented examples of urban conservation. The project carried out by the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation - GIZ) in Aleppo, Syria and a project launched by the Inter-American Development Bank in Quito, Ecuador, are considered noteworthy and successful operations, because they were implemented in several stages to ensure the conservation of the historic urban ensemble. Hence, this Recommendation was prepared based on work that already

existed on the ground, similar to the two examples given above, in order to be certain of its effectiveness.

Implementation of the Recommendation in different regions of the world

During the two years following its adoption by the General Conference of UNESCO, the Recommendation has been implemented in different regions of the world and tested through several case studies. In Africa, this Historic Urban Landscape approach has been very productive on the Swahili Coast, in Kenya and Mozambique, where there is an urban conservation tradition which dissociates urban heritage from other sectors. This outcome was made possible by creating links and connections between all actors working on these sites, with a vision of the broader picture and a common platform to facilitate exchanges.

Several Asian countries have been particularly favourable towards this approach, carrying out numerous case studies and applying its principles. In Baku (Azerbaijan), a capital city which is developing rapidly and where a large amount of contemporary architecture is being built, ignoring the impact it might have on the historic centre which risks becoming an isolated museum. Several workshops have been organized to study the possibility of creating links between Baku's World Heritage site and the rest of the city. In India as well, where a whole urban renewal programme is under way, involving considerable infrastructure development, a pilot committee set up between three cities is integrating the different stages of the Historic Urban Landscape action plan to regenerate the urban fabric and improve the daily lives of the inhabitants.

The Chinese Government has welcomed this approach to study the most appropriate way of striking a balance between development and inhabitants' quality of life. Within approximately 15 years, 350 million people will have migrated to China's cities and the Government has recommended the construction of 50,000 skyscrapers to receive this inflow. The Historic Urban Landscape approach will then be applied in a number of projects that have been approved and are due to begin soon. These projects concern six very diverse sites, ranging from small, well-protected towns to much larger cities. These projects are based on several parameters according to the historic urban landscape approach and will draw inspiration from the local cultural context, especially to incorporate its values into future development projects and improve the inhabitants' living environment. Another project is currently under way in Australia, in Ballarat, not far from Melbourne. This project is structured around a strategic plan that is entirely based on the Historic Urban Landscape approach, with the aim of opening up the heritage sector to other stakeholders.

Activities related to the Historic Urban Landscape have also been taking place in Europe, such as a conference in Seville where UNESCO was invited in order to clarify certain aspects of the Recommendation concerning the development of contemporary architecture and its impact on the visual integrity of World Heritage sites. Another workshop, on the concept of the Historic Urban Landscape, took place in Madrid and revealed that some global experts are still reticent about fully adopting the Recommendation, due to certain reservations about its relevance, its philosophy and even its title or the terminology used in its text.

These experiences and activities show that it is still important to focus on raising awareness about the usefulness of the Recommendation and the need for constructive debate with experts who are not yet convinced of its relevance. Beyond its title and the differences which might exist in its translation into various languages, it is essential to understand its content based on the Historic Urban Landscape concept.

The reflection meeting was also an opportunity for the Secretariat to present the outcomes of two workshops concerning application of the approach in the Arab world. In Bahrain, the city of Muharraq was the first case study for application of the Recommendation in the Arab States region. For the past three decades, the old city, located on an island, has been under intense urban pressure, causing a rupture between the urban fabric and the sea. The inhabitants feel this rupture in their daily lives, as it is disrupting their age-old relationship with the sea. The workshop held in Muharraq in April 2013, to present the Historic Urban Landscape approach, brought together the various stakeholders to discuss the future of the city and its development. By advocating the Recommendation as a catalyst for the development of Muharraq, the workshop stimulated a debate which, if pursued, will lead respective authorities to reconsider the development model currently in place in the country. In December 2013, a regional meeting to present the Recommendation took place in Rabat (Morocco) with representatives of the Arab countries. During the meeting, the Historic Urban Landscape approach was presented and explained to the participants, who were very receptive and enriched the discussions by presenting case studies from their respective countries. The relevance of the approach was unanimously recognized and was considered to open up new perspectives. The participants proposed and adopted an action plan for the region as a whole, which consisted of implementing 19 pilot projects, one per country, as the field of application for the Recommendation. An emphasis on recognizing and safeguarding modern urban and architectural heritage was recommended, as it was considered the last cultural heritage common to all the Arab countries. A report on the progress of these projects will be incorporated into the report planned for the General Conference in 2015. Still in the Arab world, a meeting was held in Sfax (Tunisia) within the framework of the project to nominate the old city for inscription on the World Heritage List. For the first time in the region, the Historic Urban Landscape approach has been the basis of the discussion around the possible nomination of this urban area. This workshop brought together all the development, heritage and civil society actors of the city of Sfax, as well as representatives of other World Heritage sites in Tunisia and the Maghreb, and representatives of sites included in Tunisia's Tentative List. This upstreamwork has proven to be very useful for the future nomination of Sfax. It enabled local actors to maintain, throughout the discussions, a city-wide vision and thus address all the major parameters of the city's development and potential threats to the future nominated site.

Future actions

In the light of the two years of implementation of the Recommendation, the Secretariat recalled that the approach is a standard-setting tool intended to improve the conservation and management of historic cities, including at the institutional level. Therefore, it would be appropriate to prepare an action plan for the future, drawing on existing and future knowledge and initiatives in the different regions and, subsequently, defining priorities for each of them. For example, the Observatory for Historic Cities of the Arab world, soon to be set up by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), would offer an additional framework for application of the Recommendation in the region. All such advances in the implementation of this approach would be incorporated into the report that will be presented at the UNESCO General Conference in 2015.

Some participants recalled the importance of emphasizing that the Recommendation offers economic and social opportunities to local elected officials during election campaigns, which could, to an extent, make it a political tool in future. In some regions, that would also make it possible to engage the population in volunteering activities, which would include young people, as had been the case in the town of Urbino, Italy. However, the network of partners should also be expanded, including universities and financial institutions, such as the World Bank or the European Union. The "Medinas 2030" initiative was cited as an example during the meeting and the results of that experience tied in with the principles of the approach: a complex, multisectoral

project bringing together several partners and aiming to find answers to challenges linked to city development in relation to its historic centre.

However, some other contributions highlighted the importance of small, human-scale projects, that place people at the centre of the process. The argument here was that, ultimately, it was the communities that would make it possible to build and strengthen capacities. That also applies to post-conflict countries, particularly in the Arab States region, where there is a strong need to develop a closer link between the Recommendation, on one hand, and job creation and safeguarding commercial activities in historic centres, on the other. To achieve that, strong connections must be established between economic strategies and urban conservation in implementation of the Recommendation. Moreover, it was fundamental to also highlight the potential of the Historic Urban Landscape approach as a tool for the regeneration of a city and its economic and social system, in order to reduce fragmentation between the different layers of society.

The experts at the meeting agreed on the need to develop partnerships with other institutions interested in the subject and to draw on the works of other organizations, such as the European Landscape Convention, which stresses the importance of ordinary landscapes.

New technologies and their application when implementing the Recommendation were also discussed during the meeting. Participants had the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of computer tools to better explain certain concepts set out in the Recommendation (presentation by Mr Maurizio Forte, archaeologist and professor at Duke University). New drawing and mapping software made it possible to combine several parameters into a single presentation or file, in order to better express the stratification of Historic Urban Landscapes. In a single file, several layers and various data could be brought together to express that notion, as well as generating reconstructions and computer-generated images explaining how a given Historic Urban Landscape would look following application of the approach. However, it was also considered necessary to understand the inhabitants' views of the urban environment in which they lived and how the city existed in their cultural imagination. Some experts pointed out that new technologies should not be considered as an end in themselves, but more as a tool to be incorporated into the approach, emphasizing the need for the local communities and young generations to take advantage of them. It was also considered important to bear in mind that new technologies require a large financial investment, which is why they should be included in a series of tools making it possible to identify the strata which are most valued in a city, in order to be able to develop them as a priority and raise politicians' interest for them.

Concerning the action plan for the promotion and implementation of the Recommendation, the discussions were very fruitful and the participants agreed on the importance of the plan in developing a process which would make it possible to understand the complexity of the Recommendation, in order to make it more flexible and operational. Some experts proposed that guidelines be included in the action plan in order to clearly identify the partners and define the rights and obligations of the different stakeholders. Furthermore, it is important to capitalize on the work already carried out in the field and identify existing networks, including universities, which are an essential partner, for inclusion in a kind of global network that could be coordinated by UNESCO. With that in mind, the participants recommended dividing the action plan into two types of interventions. Initially, UNESCO could use a platform that would give the concerned countries and networks access to guidelines for setting up institutional structures to ensure the conservation of heritage according to the principles of the Recommendation. This does not require much financing and would be feasible in the short term. A second phase would concern actual implementation of the Recommendation, continuing the work on the case studies, which had proven to be very useful. Moreover, it would be necessary to work with

universities that conduct conservation research and to define a common methodology so that the results obtained were comparable.

The impact of climate change on historic cities must be taken into consideration in the future action plan and be presented to planners to draw their attention to that point. Concerning the documentation, the participants stressed the importance of having understandable and more accessible documents, in small formats, containing examples and case studies, which could be given to politicians and development decision-makers. Other simple documents and brochures with a more precise framework seeking a balance between conservation and development are also needed for future partners. The objective is to present the case studies to prove that the approach actually worked and show that economic development and heritage conservation could go hand in hand.

The Recommendation must be perceived as a catalyst for human development, a sound initiative with tried and tested results that meet the expectations of politicians in both the social and economic spheres. Demonstrating to investors and development decision-makers that the cultural values of the Recommendation related to economic values would also be necessary in order to convince them of its relevance and usefulness. Some participants considered that, in order to achieve that, it was essential to develop more financial tools and guidelines within the framework of the approach, making it possible to provide the necessary human and financial resources. Furthermore, civil society is an ally and partner that should not be overlooked when implementing this approach, with the aim of involving local communities through community associations in different countries and universities that would like to join the network created to that end.

With regard to guidelines, some experts recommended including guidance that would encourage the States Parties to mainstream the approach as an evaluation tool in draft nomination files. That would constitute upstream work that would avoid the site in question encountering future complications, particularly concerning management and conservation of the property.

The Historic Urban Landscape approach not only applies to urban areas and cities, but also to monuments in urban settings and to the relationships that exist between such monuments and the surrounding area. That is why the connections between urban landscapes and heritage should be strengthened. All the participants agreed that the most pressing need in the short term was to collate all the existing works on the subject of cities, including the programmes of UNESCO and other global organizations, and the work of research groups and universities. This task was especially important for the current period, as it would be an opportunity to set up the network that would subsequently distribute the documents and case study results required for the implementation of the Recommendation.

The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape constitutes a very diverse approach that concerns several disciplines and relates to the most highly represented category of properties in the World Heritage List, the urban ensembles. Although urban areas are not defined by the World Heritage Convention as a category of cultural property, the Recommendation offers a supplementary response to that of the Convention on the subject of heritage conservation. This complementary relationship should also be highlighted to resolve increasingly complex cases of conservation of properties, which are submitted each year to the World Heritage Committee.

The large number of stakeholders and actors this approach brings together offers huge potential in terms of knowledge and work opportunities. With that in mind, it is necessary to set up a framework that will enable all these actors to move forward in the same direction and that is

where UNESCO can provide support thanks to its universal mandate. Other international organizations can also contribute with financial support or through their networks, such as the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC).

Historic cities represent an important resource for development and for improving communities' quality of life; this must be taken into consideration in the action plan, and, the strengths of each region must be identified in order to adapt the strategic guidelines to different contexts.

Recommendations for the action plan:

- Develop partnerships with other institutions and organizations to promote the Recommendation at the global level and take advantage of existing networks linked to urban conservation so as to mainstream the Historic Urban Landscape approach;
- Build knowledge about the Historic Urban Landscape concept by involving universities and raising students' awareness of this approach. Universities are a strategic partner for conducting research and working with local communities;
- Raise awareness of public authorities and town and urban planners in all regions, supported by comprehensive and accessible documentation;
- Establish guidelines to improve implementation of the Recommendation in all regions of the world;
- Create alliances between cities through regional groupings and sub-groupings (e.g. Mediterranean cities) and benefit from work on this approach with UNESCO experts;
- Promote small, human-scale projects to increase the involvement of communities and capacity building, which will make it possible to obtain an overview that places people at the centre of these projects;
- Highlight the strong link within the Historic Urban Landscape approach between economic and social strategies, on the one hand, and urban conservation, on the other;
- Test new financial tools and seek added value from public-private partnerships;
- Incorporate new technologies for implementation of the Recommendation and establish guidelines to process the information and data gathered;
- Introduce a series of new tools, to complement those that already exist, for improving implementation;
- Set up a network of UNESCO Chairs to promote the Recommendation;
- Create a platform to distribute guidelines and enable exchanges and experience sharing;
- Continue the work on the case studies, focusing henceforth on problems linked to governance;
- Develop a common framework for the case studies in order to have comparable results.

Annexe 1: List of participant

Experts:

- Adam Wilkinson (United Kingdom)
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