



Historic Urban Landscape in the Caribbean and SIDS: Diversity, Scale and Inclusion

Reflections from an expert
Dr. Patricia Green, Jamaica

The Caribbean subregion, which consists mostly of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), must cope with issues of heightened vulnerability as it develops a sustainable relationship between its urban and natural environment. Certain of its port cities on coasts and river banks are being threatened by sea-level rise, requiring mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change.

Therefore, when applied to the Caribbean, the approach of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) needs to provide tools for human, social and economic development; help manage physical and social transformations; and identify cultural diversity and creativity brought about by development processes. I submit that in applying the HUL Approach in this geography, two Caribbean peculiarities demand to be included.

- The legacy of colonial pasts and plantation economies.
- The size of the populations of Caribbean capital cities.

Legacy of colonial pasts and plantation economies

Within the global region of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean subregion has a total of seventeen countries, representing 49% of UNESCO Member States in the region. In 2021, seven of the states in the Caribbean contained ten UNESCO World Heritage cities. The Outstanding Universal Value of eight of the properties is closely tied with their colonial past.



An example of the application of the HUL Approach in the Caribbean region can be found in the **city of Paramaribo, Suriname**, which has a population of 240,000 people. The city is also home to the World Heritage property “Historic Inner City of Paramaribo”, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2002.

In April 2019, Paramaribo became a case study for the implementation of the HUL Recommendation, with the central theme of ‘People -Architecture -Streets -Open Spaces -Waterways.’[1] The Suriname concept of ‘Alakondre’, introduced by Monique W. NouhChaia Sookdewsing, was adopted from the Sranantongo language, meaning a variety of colours or things [2]. The HUL-inspired process declared to all – especially the youth – that the city belongs to them and gave ownership to a culturally diverse population across generations of African, Asian, European, Indigenous, and ethnically mixed backgrounds. Comments from the initiative included the following: “We must relate the story of memory” and “Give the youth an opportunity and a voice as active participants in the story of Paramaribo city.”

[1]Green, Patricia E. “Paramaribo Historic Urban Landscape Case Study: Respecting values, traditions, and environments of different cultural contexts”. In *Urban Tropicality Proceedings of the 7th International Network of Tropical Architecture (iNTA)*, edited by Elizabeth Musgrave, Pedro Guedes, and Lara Rann, 139-157. Brisbane, Australia: The University of Queensland, 2020.09.0.

[2] Wilner, John, ed. *Wortubuku Ini Sranan Tongo* (Sranan Tongo — English Dictionary). Summer Institute of Linguistics Fourth Edition, Paramaribo, Suriname, 2003, April.

Historically, capital cities have been called “metropolis”. This word originates from the Greek root of “meter” meaning “mother” and “polis” meaning “city”. These mother cities as capitals are all varied in size and location globally. Today, however, the word metropolis is being applied to any city with population over one million.[3] Other terms have emerged for larger cities, including “megapolis”, “megalopolis”, and “technopolis”. In the HUL framework, do we refer to urban centres as large cities or small cities? If so, what distinctions exist inside the HUL approach for these capital cities in the different states? Within the Latin America and Caribbean region, what connects Bridgetown, Barbados (population 300,000) with Mexico City, Mexico (population 9.2 million)? Both cities include heritage properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

To conclude, the HUL approach for the Caribbean should include the range of its rich cultural diversity that extends beyond the current focus on colonial heritage, architecture and city planning. In commemorating its 10 years, this approach should establish an inclusive tool specifically for all capital cities.

Dr. Patricia E. Green is a Jamaican architect, specialist in Historic Urban Landscape, Spanish Settlements in Non-Hispanic Caribbean and Sustainable Urbanism

[3] Jokilehto, Jukka. *Reflection on historic urban landscapes as a tool for conservation*. In *Managing Historic Cities*, edited by Ron van Oers and Sachiko Haraguchi, 53-63. Paris, France: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010.