

# Urban Heritage Planning, Design and Development<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper we discuss ideas how heritage and planning and design can contribute to urban development. Urban heritage is understood as an infrastructure comparable with other infrastructures that provide an arena for urban planning and design and urban social and economic development. Moreover, the paper includes a short discussion about five contemporary urban planning and design ideals that dominate the contemporary planning and design discourse, and their different views of the past and urban heritage. The paper concludes that in any given situation and context, the dominating urban planning and design ideal define the specific urban heritage, and, thus, influence how we will understand the past – today and in the future.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Urban heritage is increasingly expected to contribute to future urban development, not least in declining cities that have experienced a harsh economic, social and spatial structural change. This increased interest can be regarded as a response to changing prerequisites for urban development during the last few decades, including economic and cultural globalization, de-industrialization, a diminishing public sector, increased mobility, and, above all, tough territorial competition. Consequently, the societal development challenge contemporary heritage management and traditional ways of working with heritage issues. Urban heritage has become an important measure in many branding and development strategies, aiming at attracting new

inhabitants, visitors and investors.

In the age of hyper social, cultural and economic globalization, the world is becoming predominantly urban. New Geographies are emerging bringing rapid rural migrations, new economic opportunities and enhanced global motilities, cities have spatially expanded dramatically resulting in urban transformations and structural changes as well as posing new challenges to their character and identity.

To address large-scale structural change a number of ideals have influenced the practice of urban planning and design. In particular, past urban design ideals are revisited put forward as a solution for contemporary social, economic and

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<sup>1</sup>The core of the idea for this article comes from the keynote speech of Haas and Olsson for International scientific conference on Cultural Heritage – Possibilities for Spatial and Economic Development in Zagreb in 2015 and then integrated into T. Haas and K. Olsson 2015. About Urban Heritage: Planning, Design and Development, IN Scitaroci, O. 2015. Heritage Possibilities for Spatial and Economic Development, HAZU and University of Zagreb; core ideas reproduced by permission from authors and conference proceedings. The paper is based on both authors previous writings (please see references [1] - [11])

environmental problems, where modern planning and design is believed to have failed. A stimulating question lies in the possibility of using urban heritage and planning and design measures to revive cities, communities and neighborhoods. Can urban heritage and urban planning and design be viewed as an effective measure for the reinvention of cities and towns that experience structural change? [1].

Our aim with this paper is to put forward some ideas that we have investigated and discussed in our research the last decade, or so. The paper is based on, and draws directly on the texts published in various contexts (see bibliography). In essence we will discuss ideas about urban heritage, urban planning and design, and how heritage and planning and design can contribute to urban development. The paper ends with some concluding remarks about the “designing of the past”, i.e. the role of the past for urban future development.

### **Another Twist on Urban Heritage**

The common method employed in urban heritage management is identification and protection of monuments, specific objects and well-defined areas that are especially valuable from a historical perspective. Hence, the management is based on expert values within academic fields traditionally concerned with urban heritage, i.e. art history, architecture and archaeology. However, as expert values they are decided upon independently of values held by other interests, the latter often having completely different perspectives concerning the urban environment, for example perspectives held by urban and regional planners, real estate owners and developers and, presumably, local citizens. In that sense, the role of current public heritage management in urban planning and design is ambiguous.

The urban environment or urban landscape is a complex system of recognized

monuments, modest buildings and other built structures. Consequently, a certain structure or object within the system is to a substantial part defined and characterized by the environmental context. Each object has an external impact on the surroundings, which can be negative or positive, and will indirectly impact the understanding and valuation of adjacent objects. In this way the surroundings, neighborhood, district or city add and compound the value of each object. A vast majority of the structures in the urban environment has not qualified for preservation activities in traditional heritage management, i.e. as monuments or well-defined conservation areas, and can be referred to as the general urban landscape, which includes a diverse set of artefacts that are spatially and/or socially linked together. From this point of departure, it seems reasonable to consider the urban landscape as a totality in heritage management, not only monuments and conservation areas but also modest buildings and the urban landscape as such, as urban heritage [2].

Thus, the view on urban heritage put forward here is a systems view, which means that it is the interplay between different parts of the system that characterize the urban landscape as heritage, rather than separate monuments and conservation areas, which have been identified by heritage experts. Consequently, the urban heritage seen as a system encompass not only defined conservation areas and heritage objects, but also tangible and intangible phenomenon that link various objects and areas together, and, thus, define their value in a broader setting.

Urban heritage, as the valued tangible and intangible legacy of the past but also resource for the present and capital of the future, should present a crucial asset for cities; not just in terms of place branding but much more of a systemic approach to

everyday life, tourism and investment. In order to attain and retain sustainable urban heritage cities and governments as well as local communities need to create and nurture buildings, objects, spaces, places, contexts and practices that have embedded meaning and value to them, filled with historical narratives, enriched with local cultures and social interfaces [3].

The systems view gives a foundation to define urban heritage as an infrastructure, and, hence, a public good, comparable with other infrastructures as a frame for people's daily activities and for business development. The concept of infrastructure is traditionally associated with technical systems, such as roads and railroads. However, a road, for example, is not in itself an infrastructure, but have the potential to function as an infrastructure. Hence, the actual use (in a broad sense) is significant for defining built structures as infrastructure. In sum, regarding urban heritage as an infrastructure, underlines its potential role for urban social and economic development, i.e. as a resource for people everyday activities, as well as for business development.

### **Urban Planning and Design and Heritage**

Urban design is not a straightforward concept, and there is no commonly accepted definition of urban design in academia or in practice. In its simplest interpretation, urban design can be described as architecture on a larger scale and within a broader context, or as a bridge between architectural design and urban planning. Urban design connects many disciplines: architecture, planning, landscape architecture and engineering [2].

Urban planning can be defined as a political, economic and social 'framework' that has direct and indirect consequences for technical and political processes. It is primarily concerned with the welfare of

the citizens; with water and land use management; with shaping and composing – designing – the urban environment, including transportation, (tele) communication networks; and with ecology, through the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Planning can be distinguished as a process-oriented activity and design as a product-oriented activity. Therefore, urban planning and design is a cross-border field specializing in static and dynamic urban conditions. Dynamic processes are characterized by flows of people and their interactions that give kinetic energy to the environment. The dynamic defines the way we look at our spatial landscapes and the manner in which we experience a particular urban condition and context. Static processes are defined by their permanence of assemblage, i.e. the creation of stable built forms and shapes – the streets, buildings, squares and open spaces that define the environment in order to provide a stable reference system and a structure of performance. One cannot exist without the other and both permeate space, place and time [3].

Throughout the last three decades, a number of ideals have influenced the practice of urban planning and design. In particular, five different ideals dominate today's urban planning and design discourse:

- Re-Urbanism, which could be described as being oriented towards constant urbanity, in particular addressing the repair of the urban fabric;
- Green Urbanism, which is focused on ecological sensibility;
- New Urbanism, which, among other things, is based on a neighborhood concept and walkability;
- Post Urbanism, which could be labelled as generic hybridity, with a focus on reinvention and restructuring;

- Everyday Urbanism, which could be described as vernacular spatiality with a bottom-up approach.

Ideas about contemporary and future society, and, hence, approaches to the past is expressed in different ways in these five urban planning and design ideals. For example, post urbanism connects to an idea that the past has no real relevance for future development. It is based in a rejection of, or a freedom from, traditional ideas about what characterize the urban environment and urban planning and design. Instead it emphasizes, in particular, architectural monuments and iconic buildings that claim to be innovative and to express a new era [4]. This reflects directly the heritage of the future – which is being created in cities and

towns by ‘starchitecture’ – new iconic flagship architecture. New urbanism, on the other hand, is based on ideals and qualities from the time before the modernist planning and is trying to re-create these qualities in contemporary urban planning and design. It includes ideas of mixed use and an emphasis of public space and environments suitable for pedestrians [5]. Moreover, in everyday urbanism emphasis is put on the present and, thus, ideas about the future and approaches to the past are not important at all. Everyday urbanism can in this way be connected to an idea that society is the unintended consequence of peoples’ actions, rather than urban planning and design efforts. In table 1, all five ideals are, in short, positioned vis-à-vis the past and urban heritage.

**Table 1.** *Urban heritage in different urbanisms – urban planning and design ideals.*

Urban planning and design ideals	Urban heritage	Grapheme	Hallmark
Reurbanism	Adaptation to the existing urban environments. Restoration and interpretation of historic and contemporary form of the city.	Buildings-fabric-people-context-time-density.	City based tourism and visitor economies of urban heritage re-creating present, past and future.
Green urbanism	Past and present is subdued to a healthy and sustainable future of biophilia and resilience. Focus on the Nature of Order and sustainability with innovative ecological approaches.	Nature-gradiency-connectivity-accessibility-preservation.	Revitalizing the city and nature; Innovative systems of protection and planning urban heritage.
New urbanism	(Re-)Creation of the past as a dynamic reference for the present. Physical structures and complete town making principles have more importance than objects.	History-human scale-density-accessibility-fabric-urbanity.	Heritage as city memory and sense of place; Urban heritage as a form of social capital and place making;
Post-urbanism	The past is irrelevant. Monuments have primacy as works of art. Objects more important than structure. Built environment used as a quasi-contextual backdrop.	Transformation-hybridity-time lapses-self formation-reconfiguration.	Global and mega-city competition; Cosmopolitan urban heritage and re-creating new identities
Everyday urbanism	Everyday culture more important than physical features. Focus on the present. Reproduction of existing urban environments through culture, place and identity.	Continuity-kineticism-grounded reality-hidden dimensionality.	Urban spaces, traditions and intangible heritage; Community approaches to and uses of, urban heritage and place

### How Can Heritage and Planning and Design Contribute to Urban Development?

In many cases, conservation projects focus on making contributions to a sense of place through the material conservation of monuments, objects and well-defined areas. Consideration of urban transformation in the larger sense of economic, social and/or physical change allows for a more

complex analysis. Shifts in the relationship between a sense of place and everyday activities that result from structural transformations can trigger destructive processes that affect long-established urban settlements [6].

As opposed to urban planning and design, architecture has a quite different role in heritage management. In the 2005 Vienna

Memorandum<sup>2</sup> the integration of contemporary architecture into historic context was addressed. It focused on the following 6 principles:

- (1) Concept of historic urban landscape.
- (2) Importance of understanding place.
- (3) Avoid pseudo-historical design.
- (4) New development should minimize direct impacts on historic elements.
- (5) Contemporary architecture should be complementary to the values of the historic urban landscape.
- (6) Cultural or visual impact assessment.

What is needed is something similar but at least a discussion about urban heritage in urban planning and design aiming at urban development, acknowledging the urban heritage as an infrastructure. Traditional methods in heritage management are based on expert values, which are assumed to correspond with values in society at large. On a general level it is reasonable to assume that there is a common view among various interests that conservation activities are worthwhile. However, this is not self-evident in a specific case, in which concrete values of different kind have to be weighed against each other. Furthermore, the traditional way of working, i.e. stressing historical monuments and well-defined conservation areas, imply that modest buildings and the general urban landscape will be neglected, and, thus, systems view on urban heritage not acknowledged [7].

In order to include a broader view on urban heritage in urban development it is necessary to first examine social and economic values, rather than historical values as defined by experts. Thus, the question is how to define the urban heritage as an infrastructure and a public good, based on how people and businesses

use and benefit from the urban environment. Also for heritage sites and ‘historic urban landscapes’ to develop into a more robust mechanism, as in the terms of an emerging urbanism it will inevitably have to be part of an universalizing approach to urban heritage [8].

### SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

In practice, the urban environment can be associated with different, and sometimes competing, value dimensions, for example real estate values and historical values. In general, these values are based on self-interests or expert perspectives, and, consequently, do not necessarily reflect a broader view on urban heritage defined as an infrastructure. However, what we need to see and understand, in the context of our short analysis, is that urban heritage – with its physical and social qualities – is situated in a spatial continuum. Urban heritage in our understanding, as the interplay between different features in the spatial continuum and their relational meanings, therefore becomes an important value category in contemporary urban planning and design aiming at urban development [9].

Profound and highly visible changes in city skylines and urban spatial boundaries, that are transforming the sheer notion of urban heritage as we know it, are often accompanied by more subtle transformations that aim at preserving the present but also promoting their pasts against competitive demands for space that cities compete for. As heritage managers, urban planners and designers we must be cognizant of the way that the urban landscapes and structures that we provide, and the built objects that we conserve or design, affect people and spaces directly and indirectly. Such interventions form habits and create ways of life; they give

<sup>2</sup>UNESCO (2005) Vienna Memorandum on “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape”. World Heritage Centre, Paris. p. 6. <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/48>>.



the user a chance to pursue individual happiness and to create relations to other people when embedded in space and time. However, we must equally recognize how forces of structural change contribute to shaping the urban landscape. The resulting urban heritage affects people's urban experience, either stimulating or limiting how people live their everyday lives as well as, provide opportunities, or restrictions, for business development. In the end, it is all about "designing the past". In any given situation and context, the dominating urban planning and design ideal will define the specific urban heritage, and, thus, influence how we will understand the past – today and in the future [10-11].

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