

Chapter 14

The Image of Historic Urban Landscapes: Representation Codes

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ABSTRACT

According to the UNESCO 2011 - Recommendations on the Historic Urban Landscapes, the historic urban landscape (HUL) is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending the “historic center” concept to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting. Representation of historical environments, documenting their typological components as a pattern book (landscape, architecture, textures, materials, and color), is devised to encourage a strategy of valorization. Explanation of landscapes’ values through its benchmarking, consists of several mapping actions and adoption of tools: 3D modelling, environmental mapping, places representation. The chapter presents a strategic process based on local character assessment through a place-visualizing toolkit from documentation and color representation to design coding: visualization of landscape’ values and multimedia survey pipelines implementing processes, methods and tools for the narration of tangible values and intangible assets.

INTRODUCTION

According to the UNESCO 2011 - Recommendations on the Historic Urban Landscapes, the historic urban landscape (HUL) is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending the “historic center” or “ensemble” concept to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting. This wider context includes notably the site’s topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity (Bandarin & van Oers, 2012).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9845-1.ch014

This paper presents a strategic process based on local character assessment through a place-visualizing toolkit that includes urban identity and pattern analysis, color representation and design codes; tools include the visualization of landscape parameters, the explanation of its qualities and, in particular, implementing processes, methods and tools of narration of tangible values and intangible assets.

This framework enhances the knowledge of places within the frame of its historical evolution, its identity and appearance pointing out their character and distinctiveness.

The contribution also aims to set a methodological model of reading, interpretation and narrative of the cultural heritage qualities; a visual catalogue that becomes meta-narrative on which to build subsequent pathways of activation and enhancement.

The process has been tested on the information and documentation systems of some historic urban landscapes in Italy. The ultimate goal is to develop the framework as a place-identity toolkit for communities and places and to generate design coding strategies providing an efficient pipeline from survey and documentation to design and field actions.

BACKGROUND

On 10 November 2011 UNESCO's General Conference adopted the new Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape by acclamation, the first such instrument on the historic environment issued by UNESCO in 35 years. The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape will not replace existing doctrines or conservation approaches; rather, it is an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development in respect of the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts. This tool, is a "soft-law" to be implemented by Member States on a voluntary basis.

In order to facilitate implementation, the UNESCO General Conference recommended that Member States take the appropriate steps to:

- Adapt this new instrument to their specific contexts;
- Disseminate it widely across their national territories;
- Facilitate implementation through formulation and adoption of supporting policies; and to
- Monitor its impact on the conservation and management of historic cities.

It further recommended that Member States and relevant local authorities identify within their specific contexts the critical steps to implement the Historic Urban Landscape approach, which may include the following:

- To undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the city's natural, cultural and human resources;
- To reach consensus using participatory planning and stakeholder consultations on what values to protect for transmission to future generations and to determine the attributes that carry these values;
- To assess vulnerability of these attributes to socio-economic stresses and impacts of climate change;

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