TOWNSCAPES IN THEIR SETTING

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Emboldened by the original success of the Venice Charter, ICOMOS and its scientific committees have devoted enormous efforts to the production of further charters, declarations and guidelines. Many of these are little more than motherhood statements, most are never put to any use, and some are forgotten almost as soon as they are written. It is reasonable to ask why any further generic document is required in relation to townscapes, but the answer is simple – the same problems keep arising, and resolving them is often a question of reinventing the wheel. The following proposals are not put forward as some abstract statement of principle, and it is not necessary that they be formally adopted. I do, however, suggest that they should be used.

My own experience relates to early attempts to conserve towns in Australia from the late 1960s; to my own work at Tianjin, China, and elsewhere; and the work of the Comité International d'Architecture Vernaculaire (CIAV) in places from Guatemala to Santorini. And it relates to issues including the timing of controls, the economic effect of controls, the interests of residents, the management of tourism, the control of traffic, the conservation and enhancement of streets and buildings, restoration, reconstruction, the planning of the surroundings; and the interpretation of sites. Because it relates especially to vernacular townscapes, which are very fragile, it has been particularly involved with the question of how to preserve the urban fabric with some degree of authenticity.

Timing

The question of timing is critical to the preservation of a town. A community which may be very anxious for recognition and for the resultant benefits, such as tourism, can become very hostile once it has achieved these benefits and finds itself subject to controls. Often the very people who move into the town to take advantage of its status, by opening shops, restaurants and tourist facilities, will be the very ones who resist controls. They are the ones who will have the strongest wish to put up new buildings, or to extend existing ones, in the interests of their business. They are the ones who will want large signs to attract the tourists, and car and bus parks to accommodate them. They are the ones

most likely to fight the controls and, if successful, destroy the town from which they benefit.

The principles of World Heritage listing recognise this problem, by requiring a management plan to be established before the listing is approved. This may not always be effective, but it is an excellent idea, and it should be applied to all conservation areas. The general principle is: do not grant the benefits until after the controls are in place. If possible do not even announce the town's status or listing, but certainly don't upgrade access to it, or permit any tourist development within it, until there is a thorough plan governing everything from traffic and parking through to detailed controls on matters like paint colours and signwriting

Economics

There is one major economic question in most conserved areas. How can we ensure that the town itself, and the conservation enterprises involved in it, get most or all of the economic benefits? So often the money goes elsewhere, leaving the town itself struggling to fund restoration and other necessary work. The International Cultural Tourism Charter states (s.5.3):

A significant proportion of the revenue specifically derived from tourism programmes to heritage places should be allotted to the protection, conservation and presentation of those places, including their natural and cultural contexts. Where possible, visitors should be advised of this revenue allocation.

It is no good preserving a town so that tourists stay ten kilometres down the road and spend most of their money at that location. It is no good if the tourist shops are owned by outsiders and sell goods manufactured elsewhere, so that no benefit flows to the residents. The ideal is to keep most tourist-related business in the heart of the conserved area, so that the tourist money is used to benefit the businesses in the tourist area, and hence to conserve and enhance the buildings. There will be conservation problems as a result on this, but they must be faced. An Australian

example of this was the township of Fremantle, which faced an influx of tourists when it became the site for the America's Cup.

The historic part of the town extended a block or two to either side of High Street [fig.A], and here many of the buildings had vacant upper floors. But it was far easier to build tourist facilities elsewhere, inland and to the east, where there was more land, easier access, and carparking. Because the site was a peninsula [fig.B] this meant a completely separate location, and that would leave the old buildings still unoccupied, and without the income needed for conservation work, while the tourists would be spending their time in an uninteresting modern environment.

On the other hand, there will be some facilities that cannot be accommodated within the conservation area. There may be a need for much more hotel accommodation than be provided in the area. Even so simple a thing as a supermarket may be impossible to accommodate, because of requirements for goods deliveries and carparking. It is important that sites be provided for these as close as convenient, but not so close as to detract from the site itself, and it is even more important that they are levied for funds so that they provide a financial benefit to the conservation area. How this can be done depends very much upon the system of government in the country and region, but it is usually a starting point to require that the tourist facilities be within the same local government unit as the conserved area.

Residents

Some conserved towns and areas have no residents, and are simply large open air museums. Others have residents who have come into area only for the purpose of working in tourism or related fields. Towns like Oia [fig.C], on the Greek island of Santorini, are good examples of this, because its population of Santorini had declined almost to zero in modern times, and now it is full of people who work in the tourist industry own their own holiday houses on the island. There is no natural population at all.

But most conserved towns have genuine residents who were present, or whose forbears were present, before conservation or tourism became important. These are the people who can be of the greatest benefit to the ongoing conservation and interpretation of the area, and they are the people who may gain most economically or who may suffer most unfairly. In some they are still going about their daily life, relatively unaffected by tourism, and are more or less unconscious tourist attractions [fig D]. In others they have become totally tourist-dependent [figs E,F].

The principles discussed above are especially relevant to these pre-existing residents. If they can be persuaded that they will benefit from conservation, and if they understand and accept in advance the controls and impacts which will result, much friction can be averted. If the economic benefits of conservation can be chanelled to existing residents and property owners, they will feel committed to the conservation process. If tourist guides and hosts can be drawn from the existing population the sense of authenticity will be enhanced. To have real inhabitants guiding the tourist will usually have more impact than, for example, actors in period costume.

At the same time, however, residents will, require convenient and modern facilities. Part of the planning process must be to provide the usual reticulated services such as water, power, drainage, television reception &c, without creating visual intrusions [fig.G]. It may not be possible to provide car parking at each dwelling [fig.H], but it should be possible to provide a communal carpark at as discrete location and within a reasonable distance. Public transport must also be reasonably accessible.

Tourism

All these remarks have been based upon the assumption that tourism will result from conservation, and that this tourism will generate income. Neither is necessarily true. Some towns and areas do not capture the public imagination, are not marketed well enough, or are inconveniently located. Some conservation areas are wealthy suburbs: though tourists visit, perhaps led by guides from outside, the residents themselves do not benefit from them but find them, if anything, a nuisance. Oak Park, Illinois, USA is a good example [figs.I,J]. It is a suburb of Chicago, famous for houses by Frank Lloyd Wright and other significant architects, but it is a wealthy residential area. Residents appreciate the importance of their buildings, and they tolerate tourists within reason, but they do not depend upon them. However, such places are the exception.

Tourism is of course a threat to conservation areas all over the world, and at various levels:
- the sheer volume of tourists can make the place unpleasant, impossible to appreciate, or impossible to get around
- the tourists can do physical damage, through sheer wear and tear, especially in landscaped areas, semi-innocent souveniring, or deliberate vandalism
- the facilities required by tourists – bus and car parks, toilets, shops and restaurants – can destroy the area
- the standards required by tourists – physical safety,

smooth and clean streets, &c – can damage the area or its authenticity. [figs KAA, KAB]

As there is an ICOMOS scientific committee on Tourism, and the *International Cultural Tourism Charter,* 1999, it is not appropriate for me to propose answers to these problems, beyond a few comments based on personal experience. This experience suggests:

- diverting to neighbouring locations those tourists who have no real cultural interest in the site
- identifying or creating destinations within the area – including replicas – [figs. JAC, JAD] which are not likely to suffer much from visitor impact (leaving others to be found by those who know what they are doing)
- cultivating and encouraging those tourists who are likely to spend time and money in the area, as distinct from those who are bussed in in quantity for a superficial visit
- cultivating and encouraging knowledgeable tourists who will appreciate and respect what they see.

Traffic

Traffic is another topic which has been well dealt by others, because it is one of the most pressing practical considerations at many sites. Of necessity, many sites already require tourists to walk in from a car or bus park. Not only does this free the streets of unnecessary vehicles, but it is an excellent way to weed out those tourists who have no genuine interest in the place, and to ensure that those who do come are likely to stay long enough to spend money.

Another well-established strategy, where the conserved town is relatively large, is to create a number of carpark/tourist sites within it, each reached by only a single route from outside, so that the length of the necessary walk from each is not too great. No through traffic is created, and they access routes can be chosen in accordance with conservation considerations.

Where it is necessary to take traffic routes into the conservation area it may be possible to underground them. Where pedestrian routes threaten it, they are sometimes confined to bridges and walkways, although this is far more commonly done in nature conservation.

Rubbish collection, street cleaning, and deliveries of goods to restaurants and shops, are often confined to night time, when few tourists are present.

Conservation

Conservation controls are the most important matter to be discussed here. There is always going to be some level of compromise between the ideal conservation solution and the practical requirements of managing the town. The people who live in the town have rights and expectations. The tourists have requirements, which may be ignored, but only at the risk of sending the tourists away and destroying the financial base of the town. Functional requirements, like providing access for street cleaning, and for emergency vehicles, impose their own demands.

Experience suggests the following:

- Where adverse changes are necessary they should not become cumulative, so that the town is not destroyed or ruined over time.
- Where a new structure or other physical change is required for a functional reasons, it should be designed to be removable or reversible, as appropriate.
- Necessary new construction should be contemporary but unobtrusive: no pseudo-historic construction should be permitted.
- Restoration work on buildings should be permitted (and usually encouraged) where and only where it is based upon documentary information of the former appearance.
- Generic restoration may be allowed, but only where documentary research is impossible and where comprehensive design guidelines have been issued for the purpose.
- Building surface materials and colours should be confined to those traditional in the town, except in individual cases where documentary evidence establishes something else.
- Signwriting should be confined the name of the building where relevant; the type of business; the name of the proprietor: it should not include the name or logo of any franchised business or manufactured product.
- Signs should be confined to those parts of buildings normally designed or used for the purpose. In the European tradition this generally means not attached above the roofline, cantilevered from the facade &c, but instead in a location such as a hoarding or parapet at the top of the facade, or a spandrel at the end of a verandah [fig. JAX].
- Signs should conform to the prescribed colours (see next) and should not be self-illuminated
- All paint colours should be prescribed (using Munsell values, not proprietary colours), based upon a conservative interpretation of past practice in the town or its neighbours.
- All pipes, wires &c should be underground or

otherwise concealed.

- Television signals should be relayed by wire from a distant shared aerial.
- Public paved surfaces should be so far as possible of the traditional form and material, or failing that of a neutral material such asphalt, but not of concrete pavers nor of stone setts in radiating designs [figs. JB, JC].

Restoration

Restoration should be permitted only where it can be based upon sound documentary evidence. The documentary evidence upon which any restoration is based should be held at the town at a place where visitors can inspect it.

Reconstruction

Reconstruction should be permitted only where necessary to re-establish a depleted entity (such as a row of shops). Reconstruction should likewise be permitted only where it can be based upon sound documentary evidence. The documentary evidence upon which any reconstruction is based should again be held at the town at a place where visitors can inspect it.

Infill building

Infill construction may be permissible where there are vacant sites upon which reconstruction is either undesirable or impracticable. It should be based upon the principle that the new work will be not impinge upon the genuine fabric. It should reflect the scale and forms of neighbouring buildings but not be in any way historic in character. It should be lower than its neighbours (at least at the front) and no closer to the street frontage than its neighbours.

Sometimes higher construction may be permitted on the rear of a site, and where this is the case a building envelope should be established such that a building within it will not normally be visible from the street or from any other sensitive location. A good principle is to adopt a notional eye height of 1.5 metres at the opposite side of the street. A line from that height, passing through the (prescribed) facade height and continuing back, will determine ther maximum height of construction within the site [fig.K].

At the street frontage the new building should be of simple design and muted colours, without deep modelling, glossy or unusually textured surfaces. The provisions for signwriting and colours, discussed above, should apply.

Surroundings

The conservation planning of a town should include its surroundings (a) so as to include its cultural context – those parts of the surrounding country with which it is aesthetically integrated or upon which it was historically depedent; (b) so as to include any facilities or activities which are economically relevant today (as discussed above), and (c) to provide a visual buffer zone to prevent intrusive constructions in the vicinity. A visual buffer zone will ideally extend to the ridge of any adjoining hills, and within it strict height limits and building envelope controls should apply.

As examples I would take first two which rely upon the surrounding hills. The Australian mining town of Yackandandah [figs. L, M], developed from the 1850s onwards, is a low sprawling settlement developed from the 1850s onwards, and much of its character derives from the landscape within which it nestles. The Turkish town of Sirince spreads over the upper slopes of the hills [figs. N, O], and it will be affected not only by what it looks up to, but also what it looks down upon. Still more dramatically Nevsehir, also in Turkey [fig. OA], dominates a great distance of surrounding countryside, which is essential to its conservation.

Similarly, the town of Khirbet Khalid in Syria [fig. P] relies upon the river Euphrates, not only aesthetically but economically. It would be absurd to ignore this in any plans for conservation. Similarly the Japanese port town of Tomo-no-Ura relies upon its harbour economically as well as aesthetically [figs. Q, R], and in this case it is currently threatened by a proposal to take road right across it [fig. S]. So the question of planning for the surroundings is not just a theoretical one, but a very current and urgent issue.

Interpretation

Interpretation is an important consideration in all conservation work, but it is particularly important in historic towns because it has to help the visitor understand and appreciate the place despite the inevitable problems and compromises discussed above. It should include:
- maps and other literature for distribution to tourists
- an interpretation centre where displays and further information are available
- identification markers on buildings or at other points within the town
- live guides and/or audio guides.

It may also include tableaux or demonstrations of lifestyles, crafts, &c; costumed inhabitants; livestock; audio

effects; and lighting effects at night. But these are less necessary and may even serve to cheapen rather than enhance the visitor experience The great risk is that they will be simplistic, and perpetuate historical stereotypes, rather than be a genuine evocation of specifically local characteristics.

The two most common problems in interpretation are the inadequacy of information held at the interpretation centre, and obtrusive makers within the town. By the first I mean that all specialised researches on the town, reconstruction drawings &c, should be held at the visitor centre, and any enquirer should be able to consult them and to by copies or to photocopy relevant portions. By the second I mean that signs and markers within the town are so obtrusive as to spoil the view or show up in photographs.

Authenticity

Authenticity is another major issue in all conservation work. It is to some extent culture-specific, in the sense that some cultures, like Japan, regularly replace and reconstruct buildings, and feel that they are still genuine. Some cultures have got into the habit of doing so for historical reasons, as with the reconstruction of bombed European cities after World War II.

But there is no more reason why a visitor or tourist should accept a replica town or building than he or she would accept a replica painting in an art gallery. However, in a garden it is of course understood that most or all of the original plant material will have been replaced over time, so that there can be little question of seeing the authentic place in any narrow sense. It can be argued that the same is true in many towns, or certainly in vernacular towns built with materials like mud brick, bamboo or lime plaster. Even in many more formal towns and buildings, made of essentially durable materials, decayed stone has been cut out and replaced, and other surfaces have been repainted, so that the visitor is, without realising it seeing fabric which is not original.

The *International Cultural Tourism Charter* (1999) states (s.2.4):

The retention of the authenticity of heritage places and collections is important. It is an essential element of their cultural significance, as expressed in the physical material, collected memory and intangible traditions that remain from the past. Programmes should present and interpret the authenticity of places and cultural experiences to enhance the appreciation and understanding of that cultural heritage.

The *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994) states:

9. Conservation of cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage. Our ability to understand these values depends, in part, on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful. Knowledge and understanding of these sources of information, in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning, is a requisite basis for assessing all aspects of authenticity.

10. Authenticity, considered in this way and affirmed in the Charter of Venice, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning, as well as within the inscription procedures used for the World Heritage Convention and other cultural heritage inventories.

Imaicho, Japan, is a fascinating and well preserved settlement. But walking along the main street [fig. T] the visitor would have no idea whether it consisted of authentic buildings or replicas. Only when you come to a more decayed building, with details of the construction exposed [figs. U, V], do you feel that you are seeing something real, not something designed by someone for you to see.

There is no easy answer to this question. But the visitor is entitled to know that they are seeing as authentic a place as it is possible to present. In part this means conservative conservation practices, replacing the minimum possible amount of material at any time. In part it means accepting a certain amount of visible decay (which in itself often reveals much technical detail which would not be visible in a well-finished structure). And in part it means careful recording and display of any material which is removed.

Conclusion

In the whole field of conservation, townscapes are less well conserved and presented than anything else. This is not necessarily anyone's fault. It happens because the more rigorous practices of museology and building restoration have never seemed applicable to general urban fabric. And it happens because even if those practices were applicable, they would have to be modified to meet the practical requirements of habitation and tourism. But that is not an excuse for us, the custodians, to be slack. We have to find ways to ensure that the visitor or tourist obtains, so far as practicable, a rewarding, authentic and informative experience.

Abstract

A town or village which is to be conserved as a living entity, and not transformed into a museum, must be handled with great care. It should remain lived in and used, and so far as possible it should remain lived in by its traditional inhabitants and used in the traditional ways. However it must also remain or become financially viable, and it must therefore be able to accommodate some change. The conservation planner must seek to manage this change by maintaining the visual integrity and aesthetic quality of the settlement, but without driving away economic activity.

The surroundings of such a town are important economically as well as visually. If the process of conservation drives out the major businesses and retailers, the town itself will die a slow death. To allow tourist business and accommodation to locate outside the area can be similarly damaging – the tourist money must be used to support the sites that the tourists come to see. But to keep tourist activity within the area may also create impossible pressures. Experience in Europe, Asia, the Americas and Australia has suggested the fundamental principles which are presented in this paper.