

ICOA1036: SIGNIFICANCE OF THREE-LAYERED COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION OF THE HISTORIC CENTER OF MEXICO CITY

Subtheme 01: Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management

Session 1: Sustainable Development and Community Engagement

Location: Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 13, 2017, 16:00 – 16:15

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Abstract: How can we balance conservation and sustainable development in a metropolis? Urban heritage has continued to thrive and evolve as demolishing older buildings and constructing new is a norm of the cities. Historic Centre of Mexico City, a World Heritage site, is a typical case of such a continuously changing cityscape, running through phases of the lacustrine Mexican-capital of Tenochtitlan, Spanish colonial city, to current mixture of modernity and history. As its population continues to grow, it suffers from balancing development and conservation of the cultural heritage.

Utilized for natural resources, sustainable development had evolved to include cultural heritage, but the question of how to apply culture in sustainability context is yet to be answered. When the two concepts merged in a hybrid unity, cultural heritage started to be redefined as “cultural resources” from the economic perspective. However, it created a gap between the economic characteristic of cultural heritage and the perception of experts in the field of conservation.

Historic Centre of Mexico City is a complex case study of such balance. It is a metropolis and the economic, political and social centre of the Republic of Mexico, and the involved actors of conservation and development are numerous. Each street and building has a distinct guardian and the city is full of vivacious communities of business, residents, and visitors. Current movement of the government aims to involve “quiet” citizens to take actions in conservation of their patrimony. And businesses seek opportunities to regenerate the degraded neighbourhood for their economic benefit. With involvement of governments and communities at international, national, and local level, Mexico City aims to sustainably develop and conserve its historic centre. This paper aims to analyse such complexity of the Historic Centre of Mexico City.

Key words: *sustainability, community, stakeholder, development*

Sustainable Development Context

Sustainable development is «a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development (,) and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations» (WCED, 1987: 43). Its objective is to eradicate poverty through development by focusing on economic, social and environmental dimensions, which surged from concerns on environmental degradation caused by development from the 1960s. International recognition has grown to a level that the United Nations has launched 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development under 17 goals (SDG) (United Nations, 2015). Sustainable development concept has now expanded to include culture, especially cultural diversity, as a significant factor for social development, parallel to the significance of biodiversity to enforce environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Cultural heritage conservation is entering the sustainable development scheme under target four of SDG eleven to «make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable» by protecting and safeguarding of the world's cultural and natural heritage (United Nations, 2017). Under the Culture for Sustainable Urban Development Initiative launched in 2015, UNESCO also applies the concept by stating that culture and urban heritage contribute to sustainable development by improving quality of livelihood and habitat, enabling inclusive development policies and plans for urban heritage, and making cities resilient and innovative by using traditional vernacular practices and technology (UNESCO, 2016; 2017). It is providing an approach for sustainable urban heritage conservation, which is different from using cultural heritage for sustainable development as “cultural resources” for economic growth, leading to unplanned urbanization and excessive tourism. Standing on the understanding that sustainable conservation aims to prolong the life of a cultural heritage, this paper analyses the movements of international to local actors in the Historic Centre of Mexico City.

Historic Centre of Mexico City

Historic Centre of Mexico City is inscribed as a World Cultural Heritage site in 1987 under criteria (ii), (iii), and (iv), along with Xochimilco located twenty-eight km to the south under criterion (v). Historic Centre is one of the most significant archaeological and historic testimonies of the country. It started as the capital of the Aztec Empire, or the *Mexicas*, called *Tenochtitlán* in 1325. The *Mexicas* expanded its terrain by constructing artificial islands that enabled multiple cultivation annually known as *chinampas*, which are floating agricultural plots in a shallow lake by filling portions of lake bed with stone, debris and earth. *Tenochtitlán* was a megacity of approximately 200,000 inhabitants at its height (Hamnett, 1999: 50). Upon arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century, the *Mexica* construction was razed to build a capital of New Spain on top. It has served as the economic, political and social centre ever since and is currently the Capital of the Republic of Mexico. Traditional *chinampa* agricultural practice survives in Xochimilco only and is currently protected by international designations of the Ramsar Convention, FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System, and Important Bird and Biodiversity Area by the Birdlife International (UNESCO, 2014; Pozo, 2016:25-30; AZP, 2017).

Historic Centre of Mexico City consists of perimeter A, a core zone of 297.35ha, and perimeter B, a buffer zone of 729.81ha (UNESCO, 2014). It was declared by the presidential decree as the Zone of Historic Monuments in 1980, after an accidental discovery of the *Templo Mayor* (Main Temple) of the *Mexicas* in 1978. Located at the heart of the Historic Centre, next to the Metropolitan Cathedral and the

National Palace, *Templo Mayor* is now an open-air museum that attracts more than 640,000 visitors annually (INAH, 2014). While archaeological discovery continues especially under Templo Mayor Project and Urban Archaeology Program, most of the protected monuments are constructed during the Spanish rule.

The City is full of life during the day where many historic edifices are converted to stores, restaurants, hotels, museums, governmental buildings, public spaces, residence, and storage. More than two million people use the metro station of Zocalo everyday for work or visit. However, the city is deserted at night because many buildings are abandoned, especially after the great earthquake in 1985. The Historic Centre faces issues of urbanization and development that affect conservation, such as residential problems, lack of sustainable transportation, heavy traffic, pollution, and insecurity. High cost of restoration led to lack of maintenance or abandonment of historic buildings, especially in areas further away from Zocalo. Narco traffics, people on the street, and illegal vendors occupy abandoned buildings and streets that cause insecurity and trash problems.

These problems have been pointed out by the World Heritage Committee in the State of Conservation reports and Mexico City Government has taken leadership in confronting the issues, by collaborating with different local actors. Some streets were converted to pedestal paths and car entries were restricted to eliminate heavy traffic within the Centre. Security cameras and lights were installed to increase vigilance to eliminate crimes, with the support of a private fund, the *Fundación Centro Histórico*. This project improved the sense of security, where many people started to visit the Historic Centre again. Garbage is collected by delegation and city governments. Regeneration of buildings is the primary aim of the local government and many historic buildings are being restored, especially the facades, with the governmental funding under the surveillance of the local authority.

Significance of local, national, and international actors

The World Heritage Convention is placed below the Political Constitution of Mexico as a binding law. In order to protect the OUV, the word “cultural heritage” is interpreted analogically to fit into the concept of archaeological, historical and artistic monuments protected under the Federal Law on Monuments and Archaeological, Artistic and Historic Zones of 1972. Under the federal conservation scheme, two decentralized institutes with juridical personality and its proper heritage of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) control the normativity of the conservation and restoration of national monuments. INAH, founded in 1939, is in charge of all archaeological and historical monuments that cover from pre-Columbian era to the end of the nineteenth century and INBA, created in 1946, overlooks artistic monuments that are created after the twentieth century. Actual conservation and development plans are authorized at the local governmental level. In case of Mexico City, they are the Mexico City Government and two delegations where the Historic Centre lies. An owner who wishes to do construction or modification on a nationally catalogued historic or artistic building needs to receive certification from INAH or INBA for normative recognition that it will not harm the value the heritage holds, from Secretary of Urban Development and Housing to assure the land usage, and from the delegation to receive authorization for the actual construction work.

What makes the case of Mexico City unique is its instalment of authorities that specifically overlook management plan and funding and execution for projects within the Historic Centre – the Authority of the Historic Centre of Mexico City and the Historic Centre Trust. The Authority was established in 2007 as an administrative arm to the Head of Mexico City Government to support activities in areas of urban development and housing, economic development, environment, social development, transport and road, tourism, public safety and others inherent to its attributions. The Trust on the other hand was established in 1990, initially as a private entity and became public in 2002, to articulate actions of government instances and private sectors for the preservation and conservation of the historic sites. Receiving fund

from the Secretary of Finances, the Trust serves as the “executor” to utilize the economic resources for rescue of the Historic Centre by operating projects in coordination with different actors. The Trust gives funding for restoration of buildings, facades, streets and public spaces. It also runs projects such as opening up archaeological windows, promoting urban art by painting walls to prevent graffiti, opening parks and cultural centres for the community, placing a bridge over *Templo Mayor* for ease of access, to name a few.

The most notable project of the Trust is School of Citizen Participation for the Rescue of the Historic Centre (Citizen School; translated by author) that started in 2009. It is open to public twice a week in the evening and is free of charge. Participants learn from the basics of the meaning of a cultural heritage means and the history of the Historic Centre to methods of participation for conservation; to name a few, they learn funding opportunities for heritage protection in the neighbourhood, registration process of historic or archaeological movable heritage, tips on preparing documents for technical support of INAH or government, and where to call to solve different types of problems that affect cultural heritage. Some of the graduates and participants (usually attending the School for several years) are becoming neighbourhood leaders that promote conservation projects and community gathering. They use different public funding such as “Participatory Budgeting (*Presupuesto Participativo*)” or “Neighbourhood and Community Improvement Program (*Programa Mejoramiento Barrial Y Comunitario*)” to protect their cultural heritage and improve the security of the neighborhood. Being the actual citizens living in the Historic Centre, they know specific issues in their neighbourhood that could be improved. Restoration project of historic buildings on the street of *República de Perú* is one of the successful cases that achieved its goal under a strong leadership of a participant of the School. By explaining the historic values the neighbourhood holds and the importance of conservation, the participant obtained consent from the residents of different buildings on *República de Perú* to compete in the Participatory Budgeting contest. Their proposal won first place by community votes and the facades and roofs were restored with the technical suggestion given by the INAH to maintain the heritage value. Looking at the difference, neighbours of other streets in the vicinity are becoming aware of the significance of restoring their buildings, of which the School participant is helping in preparing documents for the next governmental funding opportunity (personal interview 2017).

Residents are taking part in the process of creating the 2017-2022 Management Plan for the Historic Centre. The Authority is currently renewing the previous Management Plan, reflecting on the achievements and issues, with the experts from UNESCO Mexico office and the University Program of City Studies, UNAM. Residents of the Historic Centre were also invited to several workshops in the due course to discuss problems and proposals to be reflected in the new Plan. Some of the participants of the Citizen School also voluntarily participated in the discussion “to contribute ideas” or “to give solutions” (personal questionnaire 2017). Many of them are the same people who are now leaders for conservation or better security of their neighbourhood.

Conclusion

As a World Heritage site, the state of conservation of the Historic Centre of Mexico City has continuously been under the international surveillance. At the national level, it is inclined to the protection under the Federal Law. Local governments play significant roles to enable the actual conservation and development by setting the actual Management Plan or by giving authorization for the actual work. Those who will be in charge of regular maintenance are community members who live, work or visit the site everyday. Although each has different set of values and system for maintaining heritage, these three layers of agents are affecting each other’s decisions. Key actors that enable sustainable grassroots conservation and maintenance are local; while local authorities play an essential role to connect the local community with national and international values and concepts of cultural heritage, local community members that gained tools and knowledge start grassroots projects with the strong conviction to protect their neighbourhood.

The Citizen School is an instrument that connects all actors from local to international level by informing different sets of values and methods to the local community. It provides tools for the local community to protect their own heritage and grows community leaders that could be catalysts to influence other members of the community for long-term protection and maintenance of their heritage. While further study is needed to depict the roles of each actor, this preliminary analysis shows that local agents play key roles to start a sustainable grassroots conservation of their cultural heritage.

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ICOA1036: L'IMPORTANCE DE LA PARTICIPATION DE COMMUNAUTES « TROIS COUCHES » A LA CONSERVATION DURABLE DU CENTRE HISTORIQUE DE MEXICO

Sous-thème 01: Intégrer le patrimoine et le développement urbain durable en engageant Diverses communautés pour la gestion du patrimoine

Session 1: Développement durable et engagement communautaire

Lieu: Hall Gulmohur, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 13 Décembre, 2017, 16:00 – 16:15

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Résumé: Comment peut-on équilibrer la conservation et le développement durable dans une métropole? Le patrimoine urbain a continué à prospérer et à évoluer, la norme des villes étant de démolir les bâtiments anciens et d'en construire de nouveaux. Le centre historique de Mexico, inscrit au Patrimoine mondial, est un cas typique de paysage urbain en constante évolution, parcourant des phases successives, la capitale aztèque lacustre de Tenochtitlan, la ville coloniale espagnole, jusqu'au mélange actuel de modernité et d'histoire. Comme sa population continue de croître, elle souffre d'un déséquilibre entre développement et conservation du patrimoine.

Utilisé en référence aux ressources naturelles, le concept de développement durable a évolué en incluant le patrimoine culturel, mais la question de comment appliquer la culture dans le contexte de la durabilité reste encore à résoudre. Lorsque les deux concepts ont fusionné en une unité hybride, le patrimoine culturel a commencé à être pensé en tant que « *ressource culturelle* » suivant un point de vue économique. Cependant, un fossé s'est creusé entre cette conception économique du patrimoine culturel et la perception qu'en ont les experts du domaine de la conservation.

Le centre historique de Mexico est une étude de cas complexe d'un tel équilibre. C'est une métropole, le centre économique, politique et social de la république du Mexique et les acteurs impliqués, de la conservation et du développement, sont nombreux. Chaque rue, chaque bâtiment a son gardien et la ville regorge de communautés d'affaires, de résidents et de visiteurs. La volonté actuelle du gouvernement est de faire participer les citoyens « *tranquilles* » à la conservation de leur propre patrimoine. Les entreprises cherchent des opportunités de régénérer les quartiers dégradés à leur bénéfice. Avec la participation des gouvernements et des communautés au niveau international national et local Mexico a la volonté de développer son centre historique. Cet article a pour objectif d'analyser toute la complexité du centre historique de Mexico.

Mots-Clés: *Développement durable, communautés, dépositaires d'enjeux, développement*