

## **ICOMOS QUEBEC 2008**

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### **Abstract:**

Valued villages, towns and cities are legible, multi-sensory vessels for spirit of place that combine tangible and intangible heritage. The cultural landscape of urban areas comprises about half of the space and contributes significantly to the character of the place. Since 2005, intensive discussions grappling with the meaning, character and values residing in the historic urban landscape (HUL) have resulted in the Vienna Memorandum and in resolutions from international meetings. The public and private urban cultural landscape expresses traditions and values and forms a record of ongoing interactions between people and place. These interactions and the values they embody yield both tangible and intangible heritage, residing in the HUL. When adequately understood as an integrated matrix of cultural landscape values, the tangible expressions of place and people and the intangible values residing in those places can be understood, preserved and managed as the unique spirit of place. This paper discusses the cultural landscape as a vessel of spirit of place, using examples of urban landscape spirit and values and suggests analysis and preservation tools that apply to the Historic Urban Landscape. The overriding point is that as heritage professionals we must clearly identify, analyze and be able to present the heritage values of a place so that managing for them is feasible and defensible.

### **Introduction to Urban Cultural Landscapes & the Spirit of Place**

As a city traditionally developed, the landscape chosen for the site was incorporated into urban design and planning. This urban place, shaped over decades and centuries, expresses its altered heritage landscape, the interaction of nature and culture. The urban cultural landscape shapes the character of the city, town or village, a combined work of people, place and time, defining it as unique. For example, riverfront and sea harbor communities across the globe share common origins and some similarities as well as unique characteristics. Urban heritage areas are legible to both local citizens and the visitors.

Since 2005, intensive discussions grappling with the meaning, character and values residing in the historic urban landscape (HUL) have resulted in the Vienna Memorandum and in resolutions from international meetings. The historic urban landscape and the urban cultural landscape are interchangeable terms. In the preamble to a progress report in November 2006, Ron Van Oers noted that "During its 27th session in Paris in 2003, the World Heritage Committee called for the organization of a symposium to discuss how to properly regulate the needs for modernization of historic urban environments, while at the same time preserving the values embedded in inherited townscapes, in particular of cities inscribed on the World Heritage List." (Ron van Oers, Coordinator World Heritage Cities Programme, 25 November 2006) Succinctly stated, the

mission is to retain heritage values. Heritage values can, I believe, be directly linked to spirit of place in the landscape because it is from the landscape that the original canvas of urban form springs. The resulting human and landscape interaction evolves to communicate aspects of the unique urban landscape spirit. The historic urban landscape is embodied in this evolution of place and humanity.

Premises that serve as a conservation agenda for the urban historic landscapes of heritage cities are:

- The urban landscape has heritage values, comparable to urban architecture
- Urban historic landscapes are worthy of conservation as expressions of spirit of place
- Unique landscape identity and character of place expresses heritage and spirit
- Shaped through time, the spirit of the historic urban landscape is the combined work of humanity and nature
- Processes of continuity and change are present in the historic urban landscape, as they are in urban architecture
- Multiple tangible and intangible values are imbedded in historic urban landscapes
- Recognition, documentation and analysis of the complexity of the urban cultural landscape is a doorway to retention of values and spirit of place

Urban heritage thrives, endures and evolves in a complex and interrelated dynamic matrix. Uniqueness is a primary appeal and value for living in, visiting and celebrating cities. The urban landscape is frequently and incorrectly perceived in a superficial way. This surface perception is a pattern witnessed in the current international trend to latch onto the complex process of growth and vitality of Bilbao or the world positioning of Dubai in a simplistic way by seeking iconic “starchitecture” as a panacea. However, urban vitality is not achieved with a superficial quick fix, but rather is, I believe, rooted in the uniqueness of place, peoples and traditions. These combined expressions of value are at the root of vitality. This uniqueness is directly linked to the universal value of urban heritage with many outstanding heritage cities, towns and villages inscribed on the World Heritage List.

In considering the need for greater guidance in the ongoing management of the urban heritage and the historic urban landscape, the World Heritage Centre undertook a series of meetings, the first in Vienna, May 2005, to address growing concerns about change and degradation of heritage values. In a summary paper the primary issues were enumerated as:

- The landscape, as a stratification of previous and current urban dynamics, with an interplay between the natural and built environment (previously handled by ‘zoning’);
  - The role of contemporary architecture (previously ‘contextualisation of new buildings’);
  - The economics and changing role of cities, with an emphasis on the non-local processes such as tourism and urban development, with outside actors of change.
- (Excerpted from Van Oers, 2006 previously cited)

In consideration of these summary points an important aspect has arisen in recent discussions--the notion of the acceptable limits of change. The values of the cultural landscape as a vessel of spirit of place can be understood thoroughly through research, documentation, inventory, and

analysis. This process of developing a thorough understanding is a method for recognizing and cataloguing the unique spirit of place and, then translating this understanding to management strategies. While management systems and strategies often pay homage to economic value, they could be driven by the commitment to retain unique values and spirit of place. The overriding point is that as heritage professionals we must clearly identify, analyze and be able to present the heritage values of a place so that managing for them is feasible and defensible.

## **Tangible Values of the Urban Cultural Landscape**

Urban cultural landscapes are multi-sensory vessels for spirit of place that combine tangible and intangible heritage values. There is a challenge in oversimplifying the urban landscape and in attributing only the most obvious aspects. Those who live in or study an urban landscape perceive this complexity as a composite that in total represents the spirit of the place within the urban landscape. The cultural landscape of many urban areas comprises about half of the overall village, town or city landscape space and contributes significantly to the spirit and character of the place.

The tangible elements of the urban cultural landscape embody spirit of place. These physical aspects can be observed and documented. The historic character of the urban landscape, and the degree to which that character is evident today, guides the research and documentation of the inventory, and contributes to assessment and planning for the future. The geological, topographical and natural drainage elements of the urban landscape often remain legible in the modern city. In developing an inventory we seek to perceive and document the full range of resources that comprise the landscape. A useful approach is to follow a comprehensive landscape character-defining features checklist as a guide. This list directs attention to each aspect of the physical landscape serving as a topical guide for a study of the tangible heritage:

- Natural Systems
- Land Uses, Patterns, Clusters
- Spatial Organization
- Visual Relationships
- Topography, Surface Drainage
- Vegetation
- Circulation Systems
- Water Features, Natural and Constructed
- Non-Habitable Landscape Structures and Buildings
- Spatial Character, Form and Scale of Habitable Structures
- Vocabulary of Site Furnishings and Objects

These are the tangible forms, features and overall character of the urban cultural landscape that expresses spirit of place alongside the intangible values that are nested within place. These tangible, character-defining features of the landscape can be documented in archival research, historic period narratives, existing conditions fieldwork, and exploration and selection of preservation interventions. Urban landscape integrity is the degree to which the historical interactions of humanity and nature that formed the cultural landscape remain present and

observable today. Urban land uses shape the city with observable patterns that define specific zones and clusters. Rediscovering, documenting and assessing the historic urban landscape character provides a useful, informed basis for consideration of the future.



*Figure 1: A typical streetscape in Annapolis, Maryland, a colonial urban core area showing the axial layout and focus on iconic structures. (Courtesy J. Patrick Graham)*

A good example are the planning and zoning constructs for the City of Annapolis, Maryland, where a small colonial harbour area is the core of this city. The city core is a cohesive composition of narrow radial streets, three-story buildings with limited street front space, brick sidewalks and narrow roads that define the unique character of this urban landscape. The private spaces within the building lots are often enclosed gardens with large trees as well as ornamental features such as plantings, paths, ponds, sculptural objects, and so forth. The urban pattern of radial hubs with iconic structures, the Governor's Mansion and churches, shapes view lines and multi-sensory perceptions of this older town within a modern city. Zoning controls building heights, facade forms, and proportions to retain this unique streetscape scale and details. Interestingly, a recent planning project made a preliminary suggestion about adding street trees to the sidewalk area. Local citizens immediately responded that the tradition of this unique place was to not have street trees, that they would be intrusions within the colonial streetscape potentially obstructing views to public buildings. Instead, trees belonged in the private garden spaces in the interior of the residential lots and in the round points near the iconic structures.



Local knowledge and attention to the urban heritage scale, character, features and patterns redirected the planning efforts to retain and steward the unique urban landscape of Annapolis.



Figure 2: Viewshed mapping of Edinburgh from the highpoint and iconic elements of the urban heritage prepared for a planning study. (Courtesy Hal Moggridge.)

In terms of visual setting for the urban cultural landscape the notion of defining the sky has been coined by a talented colleague. (Hal Moggridge, 2006) In a recent study of Edinburgh, Scotland, a series of viewsheds have been mapped to provide public visual access to iconic urban elements now and into the future. This unique study is not being turned into a complex urban growth control system for zoning application. (Hal Moggridge, 2008)

## **Intangible Values in the Urban Cultural Landscape**

The public and private urban landscape expresses traditions, values and a record of ongoing interactions between people and place. The intangible values and meanings of a cultural landscape should also be documented and understood. Within the tangible landscape intangible expressions of lifeways, as seen in ceremonial and common uses can be observed in action or noted through features and traces of those actions. These landscape-rooted intangible values are expressed in places that are used for:

- Festivals
- Traditional music, dance, performance
- Pilgrimage
- Worship
- Ritual
- Commemoration of past events
- Traditional practices
- Gathering place for native plants
- Gathering place for craft materials
- Iconic shared community place of memory and present use

These use categories suggest the existing intangible values imbedded in the places where valued events of daily life and special occasions take place. The same listing may also clue the seeker of intangible values to look for remnants of prior traditions, now in relict form. For example, a lakefront swimming area may have been used for religious cleansing ceremonies in the past and particular elements of access may remain while today recreation is the dominant use. Places of pilgrimage are imbued with meaning and association. The issue of pilgrimage, unlike heritage tourism, is based in spiritual beliefs. The act of pilgrimage takes a corporeal form in the tangible world but the process of pilgrimage is intangible and contributes to salvation beyond this life. In a recent project, nascent urban and interurban historic pilgrimage routes in Ireland were researched, mapped and rehabilitated to serve modern pilgrims. The identification, demarcation, management, community engagement and sustainability of a network of medieval, Christian Pilgrim's routes in Ireland is a good example. (Tomas O'Caoimh. US/ICOMOS Symposium, 2004) These interactions and the values they embody yield both tangible and intangible heritage, residing in the urban cultural landscape and contributing to the spirit of the city. When adequately understood as an integrated matrix of cultural landscape values, the tangible expressions and intangible values of spirit of place can be preserved.

## **Addressing Spirit of Place & Limits of Change in Urban Cultural Landscapes**

A critically important aspect is addressing the concept of change in heritage cities. There are a range of transformational changes affecting cities. Heritage professionals must gain an understanding of the limits of acceptable change within a heritage city that preserve its unique character and qualities while allowing ongoing evolution. A balance of change and preservation should be established that guided by urban values. In terms of the stewardship and ongoing management of urban heritage, a useful approach to conservation is to envision the practice of

preservation within the construct of development. Preservation is one important aspect of the ongoing development of a city. Preservation is an inherently sustainable practice where the resources and carbon inputs already in place are retained, upgraded and made more vibrant and useful for today and tomorrow. The cultural landscape is imbued with these previous inputs from the minds and hands of people and the work of city building. Managing the city within the constructs of the historical shaping of the city respects the urban heritage we inherit and passes it on to the coming generations. Dramatic changes to urban character often disrupt traditional character and values, failing to recognize the unique spirit of place. Change can be accommodated within a framework of respect and understanding that incorporates rather than erases the past to construct a new vision for the future. Heritage cities are already designated as valued places that embody a unique spirit. Change should be conceived in harmony with the past rather than in opposition to it.

In managing urban heritage and ongoing change a series of tools can be applied. Ideally, multiple tools are used simultaneously to foster community engagement, to provide appropriate planning, to shape and enforce laws and to incorporate finance and the local economy. Tools that have been used in the author's work in the preservation of cultural landscapes are organized into four groups. These are listed here with the potential elements of the group. These are examples, rather than exhaustive list

**Educational & Community Involvement Tools, to include:**

- Publicity in Local Media
- Community Projects
- Oral History Recording
- Informational Meetings
- Key Person Interviews
- Exhibitions based on Heritage
- Community Preservation Standard Setting through Examples
- Influencing of Neighbors with Peer Discussion
- Volunteering at local Historic Places
- Skill Development Workshops
- Place-based Local Celebrations and Remembrances

**Financial Tools**

- Public Capital Improvements
- Ongoing Public Maintenance Funding
- Private Building and Property Maintenance
- Purchase and Resale with Conservation Restrictions
- Revolving Loan Fund
- Long-Term Lease of Heritage Properties
- Mutual Covenants
- Outright Purchase of Key Properties
- Conservation Easements
- Transfer of Development Rights
- Donations of Heritage Property to Reliable Stewards
- Funding for Urban Heritage Conservation Agencies

- Grant programs for urban intangible and tangible heritage actions
- Taxation laws favoring Preservation

### **Advisory Tools**

- Documentation of Tangible Community Heritage
- Documentation of Intangible Community Heritage
- Viewscape Mapping for Building Height and Placement
- Various types of plans for Conservation, Preservation and Management of Community Character and Individual Urban Features
- Plans that incorporate Heritage Values to address Parks and Open Space, Transportation, Public-Rights-of-Way, Streets, Street Trees, Public Facilities, etc.
- Planning for Conservation of Natural & Cultural Resources
- A Holistic Planning Process that incorporates Urban Heritage and Values

### **Regulatory Tools**

- Design Review
- Easement Law
- Zoning Ordinance
- Urban Viewscape Controls
- Historic Commission Law
- Tree Protection Ordinance
- Scenic and/or Historic Overlay District
- Legislation specifically addressing urban heritage stewardship and management

In summary, there are several closing points to present. First and foremost, our urban cultural landscape is a shared heritage resource. The urban landscape is one of the strongest communicators of the character of a village, town or city. This inherited urban landscape expresses both tangible and intangible values. Heritage documentation is at core of the work required to understand tangible and intangible and advocate for them effectively. Urban cultural landscape can be assessed by its character-defining features and form that basis change can be managed without loss of heritage values. Continuous community engagement is a cornerstone of heritage recognition, value and value-based conservation. The overriding goal is to manage urban continuity and change to retain tangible and intangible value. A diverse tool kit can be applied to these efforts and tested in the unique constructs of different places. Heritage and contemporary and future urban vitality are compatible through managed change that sustains heritage values. ICOMOS experts have relevant skills and should continue to engage in the dialogue and formation of guidance for urban heritage preservation, stewardship and management.