

GLOBALLY UNIQUE OR GLOBALLY UNIFORM?

Is cultural heritage as a driver of development resulting in the unique or the uniform?

Sharon Brown, Alan Oliver

The Oliver Brown Partnership Limited, Northern Ireland

sbrown260@aol.com

Abstract. Is cultural heritage as a driver of development resulting in the unique or the uniform? This Paper will consider trends towards uniformization in cultural heritage. How does this process affect tourism, cultural identity and diversity – locally and globally? Put simply, there are two main paths which heritage as a driver of development can take. The first path is towards uniqueness so reinforcing a sense of place and identity through protection and enhancement of heritage. The alternative path leads to uniformity – where everywhere around the world looks increasingly the same through the destruction/loss of heritage and its replacement with standardised forms. This Paper will use Northern Ireland’s cultural heritage, with reference to existing and potential UNESCO World Heritage Sites, to illustrate this concept. The ‘Giant’s Causeway’ is Northern Ireland’s only UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Malone and Stranmillis suburb and Historic Urban Landscape was amongst those sites proposed for inclusion on the UK’s 2011 Tentative List of potential World Heritage Sites. The harmonious visual character of the area, with its Victorian and Edwardian villas in their landscaped setting and the rhythm of the streetscapes, is under serious threat, including from increasing uniformization. Focusing on Northern Ireland’s future there is an incredible potential for a world of visitors to have a unique experience – not uniformity and monotony. Emerging from conflict there is a need to reassess the role of heritage as a driver of development in a constructive way. Development must reinforce and re-establish the Province’s unique cultural heritage and identity. This in turn will positively contribute globally. It is critical that cultural heritage drives global uniqueness, not global uniformity.

The overall topic for this 17th ICOMOS General Assembly and Scientific Symposium is “Heritage as a Driver of Development”. Under this umbrella, Theme 3 relates to “Tourism and Development”, dealing with the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism. The Symposium Guidelines state for Theme 3 that the intention is to demonstrate the circumstances under which cultural tourism can be sustainable and a tool for preserving the heritage. Having regard to this, this Paper will consider trends towards uniformization of development specifically in relation to cultural heritage, and its preservation. How does uniformization of development, affect tourism, cultural identity and diversity – locally and globally?

‘In the past decades, due to the sharp increase in the world’s urban population, the scale and speed of development and the changing economy, urban settlements and their historic areas have become centres and drivers of economic growth in many areas, and have taken on a new role in social and cultural life. As a result they have come under a large array of new pressures, including:...Urbanisation and Globalization; Development; and Environment.’ (UNESCO 2011).

Put simply, there are two main paths which heritage as a driver of development can take. The first path is towards uniqueness so reinforcing a sense of place



Figure 1. Uniformization pressure, London.

and identity through the protection and enhancement of heritage. The alternative path leads to uniformity – where everywhere around the world looks

increasingly the same through the destruction/loss of heritage and its replacement with standardised forms.

This Paper will use Northern Ireland's cultural heritage, with reference to existing and potential UNESCO World Heritage Sites, to illustrate this concept. Currently Northern Ireland has just one UNESCO World Heritage Site, the 'Giant's Causeway'. The Malone and Stranmillis Suburb and Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) was amongst those sites proposed for inclusion on the United Kingdom's (UK's) 2011 Tentative List of Potential World Heritage Sites. The harmonious visual character of the Malone and Stranmillis area, with its Victorian and Edwardian villas in their landscaped setting and the rhythm of the streetscapes, is under serious threat, in particular from demolitions and increasing uniformization.

Focusing on Northern Ireland's future there is an incredible potential for a world of visitors to have a unique experience – not uniformity and monotony. Emerging from conflict there is a need to reassess the role of heritage as a driver of development in a constructive way. It is essential that the existing cultural heritage of the Province is protected and that new development reinforces and re-establishes Northern Ireland's unique sense of place. This in turn will positively contribute to global uniqueness. It is critical that there are appropriate strategies and tools in place to achieve this.

The first of the two main paths which heritage as a driver of development can take is one towards uniqueness reinforcing a sense of place and identity through the protection and enhancement of heritage.

Sustaining a sense of place 'genius loci' is critical for cultural diversity, for the benefit of human kind, both current and future generations. The Guidelines provided



Figure 2. The Grand Stables, Domaine de Chantilly, France.

for the Papers for this Scientific Symposium highlight that for this sub-theme, Tourism and Development, the term 'development' "will be understood according to Article 3 of the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity entitled 'Cultural Diversity as a factor in development...Development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.'" (UNESCO 2001) This year is 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001-2011).

Figure 3 illustrates Valparaíso's uniqueness. The vernacular urban and architectural forms, many dating from the late c19th, which characterize its steep hillsides are served by numerous elevators. This contrasts with the more planned urban form by the port.

The retention of uniqueness reinforces cultural

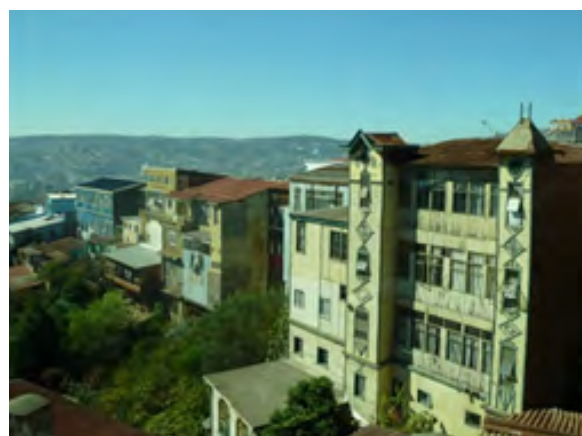


Figure 3. Valparaíso, Chile.

diversity and improves quality of life. Many places in the world retain an extremely strong sense of place. The retention of uniqueness is critical and can be achieved despite setbacks. "The majestic ruins of the ancient Khmer kingdom of Angkor have long suffered from vandalism, war and weather. The jungle around the site has been cleared and reconstruction is the order of the day." (Parker 2011, 74).

Cultural Diversity is influenced by other aspects of society as well as built cultural heritage, such as dance, costume, music, language, local crafts, traditions, food and drink. Taking France, for example, in addition to unique cultural identity created through the French language and built cultural heritage it is also reinforced through internationally renowned produce, having a unique association with place, such as Champagne. With Ireland for tourists Irish Dancing and Guinness

spring to mind. However, international food is now as, if not more, widely available as local traditional dishes. Speaking recently at the Savour Kilkenny Food Festival, Ireland, the USA based food writer Colman Andrews said *“the Celtic Tiger era had seen Ireland turn its back on its food heritage by ignoring traditional staples in favour of international cuisine. He claimed UK chefs had successfully revived traditional British foods, such as grouse and bubble and squeak... and that Irish chefs must return to traditional food and put dishes such as bacon and cabbage and Irish stew, back on Irish menus if Ireland is to raise its profile as a culinary destination.”* (Pope, 2011).

It is essential that cultural diversity is safeguarded and reinforced. This is especially so for cultural heritage, otherwise the result is following an alternative path that leads to uniformity – where everywhere around the world looks and feels increasingly the

same through the destruction/loss of heritage and its replacement with standardised forms. These standardised forms, often no more than blocks, boxes or angled shapes with no overall coherence or regard to context, are increasingly evident in many cities throughout the world including Belfast. The outcome of this is to achieve a less satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence and experience for both the resident and the tourist. Built heritage fosters an extremely strong sense of place. This can be seen in the case of towns and cities with very intact historic centres such as Compiègne in France, Seville in Spain and Québec in Canada.

Historic places are irreplaceable assets. Cultural heritage assets can generate holistic benefits for the well being of both resident and visitor. In addition to safeguarding heritage for its own intrinsic value, there are other environmental, education,



Figures 4-5. Compiègne, France.



Figure 6. Seville, Spain.



Figure 7. Old Québec, Canada.

economic, tourism, and social benefits arising from its preservation.

Northern Ireland (NI) is a post-conflict society. On 8 May 2007 a new devolved Administration, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, was established. At the end of March 2011 the power sharing NI Assembly completed its landmark first unbroken term of office. The Assembly is led by First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness. The appointed Minister with portfolio for Tourism is Arlene Foster. Tourism is growing in Northern Ireland as the Province is moving forward, and onwards, from its troubled past. There is considerable potential for the development of cultural tourism.

Existing and potential UNESCO World Heritage Sites can play a key role both in shaping the Province's identity and in attracting tourists. The 'Giant's

Causeway', Northern Ireland's only UNESCO World Heritage Site was inscribed in 1986. Emerging from intense volcanic activity in pre-history times, the site is famous for its 40,000, mainly hexagonal basalt columns.

The Giant's Causeway, as a natural site, plays a powerful role in establishing the Province's sense of place, with its hexagonal forms being immediately recognisable. A new £18.5 million visitor's centre is currently under construction for this location. In June 2010 the case was submitted for inclusion of the Malone and Stranmillis suburb and Historic Urban Landscape, South Belfast on the new UK Tentative List as a potential UNESCO World Heritage Site. Historic Urban Landscapes convey a unique cultural identity in their own right and they achieve this outside of purely protecting landscape within historic urban centres. Not one site was shortlisted from Northern



Figure 8. Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland.



Figure 9. Hué, Vietnam.

Ireland by the Panel for the new UK Tentative List as having OUV in its own right. The Panel however recommended that two NI sites whilst not worthy in their own right, should be considered further if firm proposals for transnational nominations were fully developed by the other countries involved, and if it was demonstrated that they could make a substantial contribution to the OUV of the series of sites as a whole. These two sites are Gracehill CA/Moravian Religious Community; and Navan Fort, a Royal Sites of Ireland. (DCMS 2011)

In the Malone and Stranmillis HUL, what is evident is a group of buildings from its 1850's - 1950's Golden Age inextricably connected to their place, their cultural landscaped setting. Malone and Stranmillis Historic Urban Landscape, has a most definite sense and spirit of place created by:

- individually designed villas yet coherent collectively- in their landscaped setting;
- materials including red brick, dressed stone, slate roofs and timber and terracotta detailing;
- the villas clearly display highly developed and artistic elements;
- the villas are each uniquely associated with planting and landscape features;
- the villas display the vision of the patrons and their architects – leading in the era;
- the villas are predominately in their original use - single residential use;
- the multi-cultural and cross-community make up of the area.

Larmour, P. (1991) in *The Architectural Heritage of Malone and Stranmillis* states “*The area contains a great wealth of buildings of special architectural interest*” and “*...there is no other suburb in this country with such a rich architectural heritage.*” The suburb's significance is as one having coherent identity. The harmonious visual character of the area, with its Victorian and Edwardian villas in their landscaped setting and the rhythm of the streetscapes is, however, under serious threat, including from increasing standardization of new development. The pressure for development is increasing and a number of planning applications for both demolition and harmful interventions have been both lodged and implemented. Large replacement blocks jar against the intricate detail of historic buildings and are of a typology that could be seen anywhere in the world.

At the same time historic villas which give the area its distinctive sense of place are being demolished. Recent examples of demolished historic buildings in the Malone and Stranmillis Historic Urban Landscape

include the listed building ‘Piney Ridge’ 166 Malone Road (ownership: private); the Methodist Church, Lisburn Road (ownership: church); no’s 2-4 Holyrood (ownership: university) and Mentmore Terrace, Lisburn Road (ownership:private). Many other historic villas are boarded up as a prelude to anticipated demolition. In the Conservation Area the pressure for demolition and damaging new development



Figure 10. Uniformization pressure, Malone HUL, Northern Ireland.

is most concentrated along the frontages of the Malone Road. This can be seen with standardised monotonous buildings, excessive densities and loss of landscaping/gardens and hedges. The Malone Road is key in retaining sense of place as it links all the avenues together. The adjacent Lisburn Road is under similar pressure. The erosion of character here will result in a less sustainable and attractive environment for the user/visitor. The Malone and Stranmillis Historic Urban Landscape is an irreplaceable asset, locally and internationally, critical to sense of place and unique cultural identity and tourism. It is at risk. Existing strategies and tools are failing in their entirety to safeguard its special uniqueness. There is planning policy in place which should be securing its preservation and enhancement but in practice this is not happening.

Adjoining the eastern boundary of the Malone and Stranmillis suburb is the River Lagan, an important recreational and tourist resource. Plans for the regeneration of the River Lagan as part of the Lagan Gateway Project offer scope to create enormous tourism benefits for Belfast as well as further afield. The River Lagan has the potential to provide navigation through to Northern Ireland’s and Ireland’s inland waterways network. It is considered that there could be potential for tourists travelling along the River Lagan by boat or walking and cycling along its banks to

stop, visit and appreciate the special historic character of the adjoining Malone and Stranmillis Historic Urban Landscape. There are opportunities in turn for the visitor to enjoy and experience the gourmet cafes, restaurants and boutique shops along the Stranmillis and Lisburn Roads, within the Malone and Stranmillis heritage site. The Malone and Stranmillis Historic Urban Landscape is potentially a key asset for tourism. In this way cultural tourism can be sustainable and a tool for preserving the heritage.

Whilst categorically different from Malone and Stranmillis Historic Urban Landscape in terms of the nature of its cultural heritage, Hillsborough Castle and Village is also considered to have the Outstanding Universal Value required for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hillsborough Castle and Village has OUV and a unique cultural identity. It is one of the finest settlements and Conservation Areas in Northern Ireland. Here a State Castle stands with gates opening onto the village square and onwards to the remainder of the historic village, with parklands and forest beyond. The Castle or grand house itself has formal gardens including a yew allee, a double line of clipped Irish yews, the outer focal point of which is Lady Alice's Temple, a small classical rotunda. Not only is Hillsborough Castle of architectural, social and historical significance, but it has had a key role in the Northern Ireland Peace Process with landmark political decisions made at the Castle. This includes the Hillsborough Agreement and most recently the (negotiations that led to) the realisation of the Devolution of Policing and Justice. Hillsborough Castle hosts the Royal Family when visiting Northern Ireland. It was in turn the residence of the Marquises of Downshire, the Governors of Northern Ireland and its Secretaries of State. The Secretary of State currently in residence is Owen Paterson. In addition to its esteemed residents and guests, Hillsborough attracts many other visitors. There are specialist cultural events such as the Annual Oyster Festival and the Annual Garden Show Ireland in the setting of the Castle's walled garden.

Hillsborough is vital for cultural tourism but could its special character, and attractiveness to tourists, be at risk from increasing uniformization? Both the loss of heritage and inappropriate new development threaten the uniqueness of Place, particularly if allowed to encroach closer into the historic centre of the village of Hillsborough. Significantly, in a prominent location in the village, and making a positive contribution to Place, historic former Council Offices sit vacant and at risk of demolition. Heritage tourism is a rapidly growing sector. (WHC 2011) For key cultural sites such as Hillsborough sustaining uniqueness and avoiding uniformization are parameters that are critical to

the promotion, preservation and enhancement of heritage as a resource for tourism in the long-run. Focusing on Northern Ireland's future there is an incredible potential for a world of visitors to have a unique experience – not uniformity and monotony. Emerging from conflict there is a need to reassess the role of heritage as a driver of development in a constructive way. There is the potential for Northern Ireland's unique cultural heritage to send out a different image to tourists than the legacy of its past – the bombs, murals and peace-walls. Regrettably many recent developments in the Province have not had regard to context or sense of place – there are standardised forms – 'the really could be anywhere buildings'. In order to preserve cultural identity existing cultural heritage must be safeguarded and new development must reinforce and re-establish the Province's unique cultural heritage and identity. Preserving Northern Ireland's cultural heritage will in turn positively contribute globally. It is critical that cultural heritage drives global uniqueness **not** global uniformity.

Will it really advantage residents or visitors, current and future generations if everywhere around the world ends up exactly the same? It is critical to sustain unique cultural identity.

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