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CONSERVATION OF HISTORICAL CENTRES

Introduction

The topic of my thesis is "New functional use of architectural heritage for services and small production facilities".

This paper explains the necessity of "living monuments", monuments that serve to community in everyday life. Historic towns were built to serve people in their work and rest, not to be museums of past.

The perception of cultural heritage was changed by increase of technologies, telecommunications, and global economy. Nowadays, more than before, people need to find their initial identity. Everyday perception of cultural heritage is a possibility, how to find it. Yet the meanings that assign worth to such concrete things and places come from the values that people attach to them.

There is a large amount of international documents about preservation of cultural heritage, but is it possible to preserve it, when the majority of society is totally uninterested in cultural heritage? The global trend is to increase density, modernize accommodations, and capitalize on investment. In times of fierce competition and intensive production, the conservation of historic centres may be considered as a privilege. But it is part of a collective debt to understand and preserve history, tradition, and cultural diversity in urban centres.

Terms

At the beginning it's important to focus to few important terms according to preservation of cultural heritage.

"Preservation: applying the measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property. Preservation work generally focuses on the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic fabric rather than extensive replacement or new construction.

Rehabilitation: adapting a property for continuing or new compatible use through repair, alteration, and additions, while preserving those portions or features that convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

Restoration: accurately depicting the form, materials, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time. Restoration retains as much of the historic period fabric as possible. Inconsistent features may need to be removed and missing features faithfully reconstructed in accordance with the restoration period.

Reconstruction: depicting by means of new construction the form, materials, features, and character of a historic property that no longer exists, as it appeared at a particular period of time, in its historic location. (American Institute of Architects, 2002, p. 2)
The European charter of the Architectural Heritage (1975)

explains protection of major monuments and states with people; it is interpreted as a vote of confidence, which carries the reference to their surrounding. This was in the end of last century developed and as new terms were defined: urban regeneration, image and historic preservation, gentrification etc...

"Urban regeneration: Couch (1990) describes urban regeneration as, seeking to bring back investment, employment and consumption, and enhance the quality of life within urban areas. Holcomb and Beauregard (1981) agree with Couch, but they add "growth" and "progress" to the definition and state that, like earlier labels (e.g. urban redevelopment, urban renewal and urban regeneration) urban revitalization implies growth, progress, and the infusion of new activities into stagnant or declining cities, which are no longer attractive to investors and middle-class households." (KORKMAZ, 1997, p. 1)

Image and historic preservation: Holcomb and Beauregard (1981) claim that, renovation, adaptive reuse, or historical reconstruction of architecturally interesting residential, industrial, and commercial buildings increase popular strategy as a new image of the city emerges. Paddison (1993) enhances the importance of urban-image campaign and states that urban-image campaigns should be more purposive campaigns seeking to reconstruct the image type of the city rather than to increase external visibility of the city. Griffiths (1993) shows art as an important issue to give as image to the city and states that with the problem of new roles for cities in an era of deindustrialisation and deep economic restructuring, city planners and administrators have turned to the arts and culture as tools for urban regeneration especially in city centres to give the district 'a cohesive identity and a public image of quality and excitement.' (KORKMAZ, 1997, p. 4)

"Gentrification: is an aspect of urban revitalization which has received considerable attention in both the popular and professional literature. Williams (1983) finds "gentrification" as a normal sign of a successful rehabilitation program and states that the principal purpose of the most urban renewal/rehabilitation operations is to revive a profitable estate market in the area; if this is successful, the usual result will be to increase the demand for houses there, thereby increasing property value and making it tempting for people to sell out, and of course increasing taxes on those who would like to remain. Environmental amenity is a major determinant in the location of revitalizing districts and indeed, heritage designation is commonly sought as an instrument for the preservation and status enhancement of gentrifying neighbourhoods as pointed out by Ley (1986). Ley (1986) also defines gentrification and revitalization as a change in household social status, independent of the housing stock involved, which might be either renovated or redeveloped units. According to Holcomb and Beauregard (1981), gentrification is a migration back to the city by middle- and upper class income



people; it is interpreted as a vote of confidence, which carries hope for urban renewal. But Smith (1979) opposes to this argument and states that; gentrification is a back to the city movement all right, but of capital rather than people. The people taking the advantage of this returning capital are still, as yet, from the city." (KORKMAZ, 1997, p. 6)

"Historical significance: How a historic property may be treated depends largely on its historical significance and surviving integrity. A property of major significance requires thorough historical research and knowledgeable attention. Such a property is worthy of preservation or restoration.

A property of less significance may offer greater flexibility in its use and require less stringent treatment. Rehabilitation for adaptive use may be an appropriate procedure for such properties. Factors that contribute to historical significance include:

- A property's integrity with location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.
- A building that is an excellent example of a style, period, or method of construction.
- A site where a major historical event occurred, or an important person lived or worked.
- A structure that represents a turning-point in architectural design, planning, or technology.
- A site that has yielded, or is likely to yield, important historical information."

(American Institute of Architects, 2002, p. 4)

Cultural heritage: ICOMOS (1987) explains methods and instruments of the conservation of heritage, also new function and activities that should be compatible with the character of the historic town and urban area, importance of heterogeneity, improvement of public services and installation.

Consideration

Today our perception of cultural heritage is changing. Before, to think of cultural heritage meant to think only of art objects, archaeological sites and historical monuments. Until recently, values of cultural heritage were discussed within the "circumcised walls" of cultural communities or nations, today these concrete things and places are available to be appreciated by a much wider spectrum of "international public". Due to new technologies new global cultural rules are being created. *"This new point of view is multicultural by definition, it is patchy in its interactions, it is like terra incognita in ancient maps. And people have stakes in it, and in the world cultural sites to which the new stakeholders of the commons may tie string of recognition."*

(Avrami, E.; et al., 2000, p. 35)

We also live in time when the term "cultural heritage" and "values" is being opened up and redefining by changing of our thinking of nature and reality. There are no political or cultural borders visible on our blue planet from the space. In May 18th 1998 a satellite system that circles the world was put in place and telecommunications and audiovisuals allow people to become

familiar with cultural heritage from distant land.

Strategies to protect and conserve cultural heritage internationally have been developed through UNESCO and nongovernmental organizations and foundations. People everywhere are concerned that their traditions are no longer being followed, that young people may be choosing cultural symbols from other cultures, they concern about they have found in continuing their local cultural production as foreign investments and cultural goods flow into national markets. In times of such cultural fluidity, as it is, archaeological sites, architectural and artistic masterpieces, the cultural commons of everyday life, such a gastronomy and "dress codes", become ymbols of historical belonging. On the one hand, governments may claim as national treasures ancient records created many years ago by cultures that were totally different from the existing culture, or cultures that are or were considered as cultural opponents. On the other hand, there is a claim to explain a problem of value. The creative process evolves by the slow direct or indirect accumulation of knowledge, skills, and techniques usually by exchanges with many other cultures.

In May 1995, the Executive Board of UNESCO held a meeting in Morocco, where was claimed, that historic city centres after restoration should stay places, where the bustle of people working, relating and trading is preserved. UNESCO's cultural program added a new focus on living cultures to its successful conservation projects for cultural heritage.

The young people are increasingly uninterested in the cultural heritage of the past while they pursued totally new cultural activities. In terms of economics, there is a question how much would you like to pay to conserve such heritage? This knowledge is urgently needed to solve the problem of costs to safeguarding actions. It may be thought that responsible are only rich people or nations, since a poor one are unable to give anything toward its safeguarding. New language of expression must be offered to these young people. It is about searching new possibilities of using historical monuments to achieve this effect. A new exciting experiences were successful, for example popular music concerts in World Heritage sites such as Nara, Japan and El Tajin, Mexico. There is necessity to motivate different artists and creators to renew the meaning and give life to the powerful records of past. This fostering creativity around cultural heritage is valuable not only to mobilize people but also to keep heritage alive, and this is a best way to save it by adding new creative outlooks to the web of their meanings.

Historic centres were built to serve people in their work and play. In San'a, Yemen, the decorative stone and mud-brick buildings form are a functional backdrop to an outside market. This is a meeting place, a buying place, and an open landmark for its citizens.

Urban conservation can take effect if it is a part of a people-oriented effort. Historic centres present buildings, monuments, and parks that resonate with memory and tradition. The scale of their elements is inviting to walking through them. One can



discover history in the smallest of details. They give us a vision of another time.

In museums is the past displayed behind glass cases or barriers. In the historic districts are places where life continues, where it is a part of a populated community making its living and generating sounds, scents, and scenes. Historic centres display the tempo of life in the community and express that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

European Charter of the Architectural Heritage, drafted over 20 years ago explains: "The past as embodied in the architectural heritage provides the sort of environment indispensable for a balanced and complete life". It is "a capital of irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, social, and economic value."

Historic centres may be a part of a city, for example: the core of Siena, Italy, or the heart of old Quito, Ecuador. Or it may be a settlement in its entirety, such as Baktapur, Nepal, or Banani, Mali. What typically sets a historic district or town apart from other settlements are qualities associated with architectural age, rarity, character, and authenticity. The social value of these places exists in the diversity of daily life and the traditions of its people.

A community inherits its heritage, and it could be the reason for community to protect it. Local landmarks are cultural and emotional reference points for a community, which may be small or large, man-made or naturally occurring. These are landmarks because they are held in people's memories as important. An emotional attachment on these landmarks of the community, which is proud of living in historic district, is important. When this exists, there is an interest to maintain and conserve historic districts.

The challenges go beyond the need to conserve buildings and objects. Conservation of historic centres and districts is about seeking ways to ensure that the full range of qualities that give a place its character is present. Its history, buildings, open spaces, traditions, culture, and social life are kept alive for the inhabitants and for future generations. Conservation is as much about people as it is about bricks and mortar.

When historic centres as we know them today were created, lifestyles and habits were different. The ways that people work, shop, travel, and play have changed. The population of urban centres may also have changed in size and structure. In the 20th century, the number of people living in cities has grown. This increase has been accompanied by the introduction of modern transportation and services such as electricity and plumbing. Cities today must accommodate an increasing number of cars. The density of buildings and number of services grows. In the case of historic districts, such changes are visible in a change of character. The demolition of historic buildings, and the reduction of open spaces are common.

One cannot "stop time" in urban places. A historic centre is a part of its surrounding, new or old. In balancing the present with the past, is necessary the active partnership of the community in the planning. Retaining only the façade of the building, typically reflects a compromise between complete demolition and the building's full conservation.

The architectural integrity of Prague in the Czech Republic contributes world heritage significance. The city represents a continuum of development over 500 years.

The city's modern growth has been set outside the historic centre. A 1837 scale model of the historic centre is still used by city planners to assess the impact of urban proposals and rehabilitation work. With protection of over 30 percent of the buildings in the centre of Prague, the conservation policies of the city provide useful precedents.

Urban conservation starts with the recognition that a district has both physical and social qualities worth safeguarding. In some places, respect for cultural heritage is centuries old. In other regions, the cultural value placed on historic districts may be on the more basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, and education. Just as memory is needed for one to learn from mistakes, understanding the past of a historic centre helps to considerate of future actions. How things have changed, why a district looks the way it does, and who and what have influenced its development are basic questions.

"At a preservation forum in 1988, Arthur Frommer, author of a series of travel guides, explained the relationship between historic preservation and tourism: "Among cities with no particular recreational appeal, those that have substantially preserved their past continue to enjoy tourism. Those that haven't, receive no tourism at all. It is as simple as that." (ANGLIN, 1997, p. 13)

Tourism, one of the world's largest industries, is often viewed as a cure for urban ills. The tourism increases in Asia in the past decade in 200 percent. There are needs to anticipate the potential impacts of mass tourism and to conserve the historical centres. Businesses engaged in tourism activities should financially support conservation efforts. The tourism industry profits from the attractions that a historic district or town provides. It stands to reason that tourism industry should be a donor to conservation and a preserver of the traditions that it benefits from. Successful tourism changes things. Tourism is big business and initiates activities that improve qualities that made a place popular. In the historic warehouse district of Bryggen, in Bergen, Norway, tourism and local lifestyles coexist. Souvenir shops line the street, but in the passages between these long wooden wharf structures, there are studios and craft workshops.

There can be tremendous local benefits if tourism opportunities are well managed. But, as with the use of any resource, there is a fine line between capitalization and exploitation. Historic communities can be destroyed by tourism. Full of pedestrians and buses, historic centres often look like trivialized commerce. Gradual redevelopment continues to the point, that the district loses its historical authenticity. In the worst cases, the loss of integrity leaves the visitor with only experience of what "used to be."

The appeal of historic centres is well demonstrated in Siena, Italy. The qualities of a medieval town are present here: remarkable architecture, civic landmarks, and continuing cultural traditions. Siena's proactive planning has developed a successful mix of uses in its historic heart, which is home to a variety of functions,



including a university, a residential community, local commercial services, tourist shops, and markets. Restrictions ensure that traffic is predominantly pedestrian.

Impressions of historic centres typically focus on the architecture of the heritage buildings. But the features of a landscape are also often significant to the character of a place. The topography, the plantings and the water.

Development of historic centres and districts cannot be stopped-nor should it be, particularly when it serves to improve the physical and social environment of a city's inhabitants. In the context of historic centres, conservation should not seek to halt change but, rather, to manage it, to shape development so that the culture and character of a city are retained. To manage change, a comprehensive plan is needed, one that includes the ideas and concerns of diverse interest groups in a community. When people collaborate to define the qualities they value in their community and then plan for the conservation of those values, the process of urban conservation is under way.

In Baktapur, Nepal, the need to repair roofs and brickwork may not appear to be a priority, but the restoration of these vernacular residences will bring the long-term benefit of continuous shelter and sustained architectural traditions. In the United States, an initiative for improving and economically restructuring historic districts has been operating for over 20 years. The Main Street Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is a grassroots, self-help approach to urban revitalization that has led to successful economic restructuring in over 1,200 towns in the United States. By basing building improvements on a district's original character and establishing local public-private partnerships, the program develops strategies for physical and economic improvements. This historic district in Pasadena, California, won a Great American Main Street Award in 1995. The success of the Main Street approach has inspired similarly successful initiatives in hundreds of towns in Canada and Australia.

Historic centres are cultural centres, not simply collections of structures. Their history and their people give these places meaning.

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