

2. Historic Urban Landscapes: A New Approach to Urban Conservation

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Modern theory on urban conservation, as defined at the beginning of the 20th century, focused on the concept of "historic centre" as the area of the town that deserved protection and conservation. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972, and the *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, tended to place urban properties in the category of "groups of buildings", fostering an approach that privileged architectural features. The evolution of the concept of heritage, which encompasses today a variety of tangible and intangible components, together with current requirements derived from economic and social pressures, make that some of the classical concepts and tools seem not be appropriate to handle the present situation.

The concept of *historic urban landscape* (HUL) was introduced in the international debate in 2005, during a meeting organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Vienna. It was recognized that current theoretical documents and technical tools in force were not sufficient to respond adequately to economic, social and cultural pressures on historic cities, especially those inscribed on the World Heritage List. One main issue was how to integrate contemporary architecture and development pressures in historic cities or urban areas. After the meeting in Vienna, several regional meetings on historic urban landscapes were held over the period 2005-2010. In its capacity of advisory body of the World Heritage Committee, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) fostered reflection and debates on the topic amongst its members. One of the main aspects discussed was whether HUL implied a new heritage category or a new approach to urban conservation and management. After five years of reflection and debate, a proposal of a UNESCO Recommendation on historic urban landscapes was drafted, to be addressed to UNESCO General Assembly in 2011.

Historic urban landscapes means an approach that considers the town as a complex system made up by tangible and intangible components that include historic areas and their natural or built surroundings, aiming to reconcile heritage conservation with economic and social development. Summing up, the concept of *historic urban landscapes* contributes to assess and understand the town or urban area as a process rather than as an object. In this framework, the aim of this paper is to summarize the debate of the last five years and to introduce the concept of *historic urban landscape* and its contribution to urban conservation and management.

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Alfredo Conti is an architect specialized in architectural and urban conservation (Buenos Aires University). He has worked especially on urban heritage and heritage of the 20th century. From 2000 onwards, he acted as ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) expert for the evaluation and monitoring of World Heritage properties in Latin America and the Caribbean and as UNESCO consultant on projects regarding cultural heritage. Mr. Conti represented ICOMOS throughout the elaboration

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