Cultural Heritage in Impact Assessment Tools:
challenges and opportunities

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Abstract:

This paper provides background to the research in progress and covers two major topics: the role of the cultural heritage in the sustainable development of cities and the challenges for consideration of cultural heritage in planning tools, such as EIA and SEA. The article concludes with a section on research need.

The role of Cultural Heritage in the Sustainable Development of cities:

Built cultural heritage plays an important role in the economic and social fabric of a city, in addition to its direct contribution to the bio-physical environment. The historic environment contributes to national and local community identity, which is important for sense of place and social cohesion (e.g. Draft PPS 15, 2009). Urban regeneration should therefore recognize local values, utilize local knowledge and expertise, and provide a sense of ownership to stakeholders, such as residents and other beneficiaries in the area; as Evans ascertains (2005, 959) "culture is a critical aspect of mediating and articulating community need, as development is planned and takes shape, through culture's potential to empower and animate" (see also Folke: 2006; Raymond *et al.:* 2009). The role of the historic built environment in promoting economic growth is now acknowledged. Heritage can boost the local and national economy and create jobs by attracting tourists and investment, and providing leisure, recreation, and educational facilities (PPS 15: 2009; Tweed: 2007, Nijkamp, Riganti: 2008; EH Guidance Note to Circular: 2009). Moreover its "indirect spin-offs can benefit the construction and service industries" (IAIA: 1994, 2), i.e. adding value to the area/property. Therefore, "Cultural heritage must be understood as part of the larger sphere of socio-cultural processes" (Avrami at al.: 2000, 11) and managed in such a way as to "be able to generate real economic and social benefits for their local host communities" (Hampton: 2004, 754).

Many authors agree that cultural heritage should be promoted as a vehicle for social and economic regeneration if we are to progress towards sustainable development (e.g. Rodwell: 2008; Lazrak *et al.*: 2009; Nijkamp, Riganti: 2008; Evans: 2005; Stubbs: 2004; Jones, Slinn: 2008 etc.). Lazrak *et al.* notes that cultural heritage is a "critical infrastructure" of modern cities, which provides "long-lasting and sustainable anchor points that may create stability in a permanently fluctuating and competitive environment" (2009, 2-3). The importance of cultural, artistic and innovative sectors for urban vitality and the creation of wealth is witnessed in many scholars' works (e.g. Lazrak et. al: 2009). As stated in Catterall (1998) (in Evans: 2005, 978): "The task is to develop an understanding (including methods of study) of the ways—cultural and ethical—in which even the 'worst estates' can take part in and help shape the relics of their city (and society) as well as their locality".

A recent issue of the Built Environment Journal (2009, Vol. 35#2) is dedicated to the topic of "Creative Knowledge City", which stresses the importance of both physical surroundings and the socio-cultural dimensions of cities to attract and retain qualified workers in creative industries. The factors identified as contributing to the overall quality of place, and therefore influencing peoples' choice of location, include diversity, tolerance and safety, environmental quality, aesthetics, amenities, opportunities for recreation, culture and an environment supportive of lifestyle choices (Brown, Meczynski: 2009). 'Multifaceted' cities have to address these issues if they want to be competitive in the 'knowledge-driven' economy (Ibid. 250). The role of cultural heritage should not be underestimated. The argument put forward is that a "more likely means of success is to build on what is already there, enhancing the distinctive and unique qualities of the existing urban environment" (Ibid.) rather than the 'iconic' architecture used as a flagship to attract tourists. Van Oers reinforces the statement (2007, 46): "more and more cities are pushed into the role of drivers of regional growth and development" and by trying to capture capital, historic cities have "leverage in being able to offer something unique" (Ibid.). Among the aspects which characterize the quality of place, authenticity and livability are particularly hard to construct or plan; therefore it is important to sustain or "create favorable conditions for them to develop" (Brown, Meczynski: 2009, 250).

There is an extensive body of literature on cultural economics, and specifically on economic methods for assessing cultural heritage values. There is considerable interest in the recent literature on urban redevelopment, which emphasizes connections between economic development decisions and the cultural aspects of cities. It is argued that "if planned carefully, cities can thrive economically and culturally, and these two types of value are closely connected" (Mason: 2009, 101). Mason further states that historic built environments and the values attached to them "comprise not just an amenity but an infrastructure supporting regeneration by providing flows of both cultural value and economic value" (Ibid., see also Throsby: 2001), which should be therefore regarded as opportunities and considered both as cultural and economic assets.

Cultural Heritage in Impact Assessment Tools:

Estimation of the social merits of cultural assets is challenging, and a better understanding of how people interact with their urban environment is required (Tweed: 2007, Nijkamp, Riganti: 2008). Transformation of the built environment through new development has an immediate positive or negative impact on the local population and therefore can potentially influence the overall results of projects (e.g. SUIT: 2004). Nijkamp and Riganti (2008, 36) argue that "The public's preferences for aesthetic and use attributes are rarely elicited, despite their potential importance in decision-making". Raymond (2009, 1301) supports this by saying that "whilst biophysical, and increasingly economic, values are often used to define high priority hotspots in planning for conservation and environmental management, community values are rarely considered". Moreover Tweed states that (2007, 62) "culture is not generally recognized in urban policy or environmental and quality of life indicators (such as health, education, employment, crime) and therefore is absent from regeneration measurement criteria".

There is a need to develop comprehensive approaches and methodologies for adequate consideration of cultural heritage in management and planning for cities sustainable development (Nijkamp, Riganti: 2008). Authors acknowledge that research efforts have insufficiently integrated to tackle the complex issues related to heritage conservation. The argument put forward is that valuation methods and assessment procedures should help to "better integrate conservation in the social agenda, enhancing social justice and equity in the provision and management of cultural heritage and therefore, play a part in the assessment of progress towards city sustainable development" (Nijkamp, Riganti: 2008, 35). For successful integration, 'culture' requires planning, investment, infrastructure, development and design decisions and it must not be considered in isolation from other urban planning decisions. Therefore, conservation should be an important part of urban planning policy and design; moreover, "conservation of the historic built environment (not just buildings, but landscapes and larger districts, too) is a key function of healthy cities" (Mason: 2009, 102).

The EU's Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directives both require consideration of cultural heritage although in practice its performance is still relatively weak. Different values cultural heritage has are usually only very narrowly presented in the assessments (e.g. Jones, Slinn: 2008). Better consideration of cultural heritage values, through assessment and appropriate actions, can help to minimize damage or loss caused by development projects (IAIA: 1994; IAIA 2008, Session 28th Annual Meeting). It is claimed that the framework, which EIA and SEA procedures impose for management of "sensitive decision-making processes in relation to cultural heritage values is important" (SUIT: 2004, 22) as it is "likely to help in establishing a constructive debate or dialogue between all the concerned actors" (Ibid.). Bond and Teller (2004, 102) also encourage more systematic application of the SEA procedure to the local plans "directly affecting sensitive urban historical areas". Furthermore, assessment procedures need to take place within a general framework of a decision-making process where consensus at one level must be reached before progressing to the next (Ibid. 26).

Literature review has revealed several challenges for better introduction of cultural heritage in Impact Assessment Tools: difficulties in identification and communication of cultural heritage values, need for wider and earlier stakeholder engagement (community and experts) and lack of specific guidance (Bond *et al.*: 2004). In addition the lack of knowledge of assessment processes among cultural experts (and the same situation with the assessment experts) as an obstacle to improved treatment of heritage is established (Ibid.). This leads to the connected problem of communication deficiencies, and inadequate identification of cultural values and their explicitness. There is a need for an introduction of more qualitative indicators, which better reflect intangible vales cultural heritage possess. Post-monitoring/evaluation procedures should be developed throughout the assessment process and should be participative (SUIT: 2004).

Research need:

The research is designed to respond to previously identified problem field. The research methodology includes both case studies and surveys' analysis. Understanding the context (e.g. planning practice, organizational structure, norms and values), where the Impact Assessment Tools are applied, will reveal barriers and opportunities for better communication process among the key stake holders, regarding cultural heritage values. It will also help to uncover the potential for improvements in their efficiency. The critical role of the context, including the "extent of the political commitment to sustainable development" (Wallington et al.: 2007) and "the relationship of the SEA [EIA] to the planning activity itself" (Stoeglehner et al.: 2009, abstract) have been identified by many scholars.

Chosen case studies will comprise World Heritage (WH) sites officially recognized as possessing Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). In particular, the research will focus on sites over which UNESCO has expressed concern regarding existing/potential negative impacts of developments on OUV. Statistics show that 40% of WH sites reported in 2007 potential negative impacts of urban development and regeneration projects on OUV (Van Oers: 2007). The research will therefore aim to improve understanding of the reasons underlying this negative development.

Analyses of the Cases will provide an understanding of:

- How are Impact Assessments (EIA, SEA) performed: who is involved in the assessment process and how?
- What are the challenges involved in performing of Impact Assessments, related to developments with the potential impact on urban historic areas?
- How cultural heritage values (OUV) are identified and communicated among planners, WH officers and developers?
- How are cultural heritage indicators chosen?

Examination of the chosen World Heritage sites will help to establish improved ways for considering cultural heritage values in planning for sustainable development. Data collected from case studies will help to identify commonalities, which represent barriers and opportunities for better communication of cultural heritage values among stake holders. Fundamentally, the research will contribute to an improved impact assessment framework that better addresses cultural heritage values.

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