World Heritage Impact Assessment: experience from the UK

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Abstract

Social and environmental impact assessment tools are used to assist decision-makers in their choice of a more sustainable alternative. European Directives, in particularly Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Impact Assessment refer to heritage in their assessment frameworks.

Although these represent appropriate participation-based tools for assessment of impact of development and infrastructure projects, based on interviews with urban planners working in conservation field in the UK, heritage remains inadequately addressed in general practice. The partial consideration of the complex heritage category may lead into inappropriate analyses of the impact on heritage and can be the cause for the loss of valuable resource.

The paper presents part of a doctoral research that aims at contributing to the impact assessment debate, first, by improving the understanding of heritage as a category, and, second, through application of this knowledge to the impact assessment framework, when applied in culturally significant urban areas.

The doctoral research methodology is comprised of an extensive literature review, focus-group seminars, case studies, and survey analyses. The case studies chosen are in living, culturally significant urban areas in the UK, namely World Heritage sites in Bath, Liverpool, and Edinburgh. By looking at the experiences in terms of heritage management practices and regulations in World Heritage sites, several conclusions for application in a general context are developed.

The paper provides analyses of the current understanding of heritage and how this is applied in the English planning context. It outlines several existing methodologies for heritage impact assessment and discusses areas for improvement.

Changing definition: from physical fabric to inhabited landscape

Conservation debate in the UK has recently begun to acknowledge built cultural heritage as a complex, multivalent social phenomenon. A number of conceptual revisions have occurred – "from 'monuments' to 'people', from 'objects' to 'functions' and from 'preservation' to 'sustainable use and development'" (Loulanski 2007, 0482; see also Loulanski 2006). Furthermore, the emphasis has moved from repair and protection of monuments towards social processes, which shape cultural landscape (Worthing and Bond 2008).

An historic urban area, as emphasized in the draft UNESCO Recommendations on Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) (par. 9), ought to be considered not any more as a "historic centre" or "ensemble" but rather as a "broader urban context and its geographical setting''. HUL is expected to be adopted by the UNESCO General Committee in October 2011. HUL approach

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to heritage takes into account (par. 10): site's topography (other natural features), built environments (above/below the ground), spatial organization, land use patterns, perceptions, visual relations, and social-cultural processes.

The HUL represents a great effort to manifest agreement between developed/developing countries on the way to approach historic urban areas. Even though its final version still has its weaknesses, such as lack of coherence in terminology used and absence of action plan, proposed at previous stages, with the remaining questions on temporary and spatial frames, potentially it should be a tool for better governance in a socially and environmentally strong institutional context. Though I would argue that if the country is not yet strong enough in its conservation tradition and appreciation of heritage, a wrong interpretation of messages in the HUL might be potentially damaging. In an ideal case, conservation will be considered at the level of urban planning strategies and the heritage values will guide strategic development.

The working definition[1] for "built cultural heritage" developed in the framework of this doctoral research project is as follows: a multivalent social phenomenon with tangible and intangible dimensions, which has spatial and temporal scales. This broader vision of built cultural heritage, as a culturally significant inhabited and changing landscape, adds to challenges but also provides opportunities for management, protection, and heritage impact assessment. This is also in line with the definition above, provided in HUL recommendations.

Cultural Heritage Significance and its application to the planning context in England

English Heritage (EH) introduces a framework with four broad categories referring to significance (collective term for values) of historic environment: evidential, historical, communal, and aesthetic (e.g. English Heritage Conservation Principles 2008)[2]. However, cultural heritage values can be structured in different ways (e.g. Worthing and Bond 2008); but what is crucial – to accept the changeability of values over time (e.g. The Burra Charter) and to introduce a platform to balance both – heritage and contemporary values (Mason 2006). Furthermore, "the first set represents those values, which are connected with the *legacy from the past* and contribute *to the sense of a place* (artistic, historical, scientific, archaeological values), and the second, "profit, recreational use, ecological integrity, and public health" (Mason 2006, 8)" (Ibid.).

The "values-based approach has emphasized and brought to the stage a broader and a more complex approach to cultural heritage, opening-up a way to a participatory-based decision-making conservation process" (Vakhitova, Guthrie 2010, 4; see also Mason 2006; Loulanski 2007; Worthing and Bond 2008). In addition, the diversity of heritage values provides a "common context for different disciplines" (Loulanski 2007, 48). Therefore, in a living and

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[1]   GreenBRIDGE Cambridge University Society Seminar presentation (24th Feb. 2011), (published on-line http://www.societies.cam.ac.uk/greenbr/docs/2011-02-24%20Tatiana%20Vakhitova.pdf).

[2]   **Evidential value**: the potential of a place to yield new evidence about past human activity.
Historical value: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.
Aesthetic value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place; and
Communal value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

changing place, such as a historic city, the values and needs of its communities and their contemporary culture have to be balanced with historic values. Moreover, the concept of values can be used to identify heritage significance for management and impact assessment practices.

Cultural heritage values can be interpreted through their tangible and intangible attributes (e.g. ICOMOS-UK, Workshop March 2011). Attributes subsequently can be physical or spatial entities: such as e.g. buildings' materials, their form and design, size, location and positioning (setting), skyline (topography & built context); or processes: social rituals (educational, religious, political, royal), and communities' traditional practices (e.g. land use). Significance or as in the Quebec Declaration (2008) 'Spirit of place' includes "sites, buildings, landscapes, routes, objects (…) [and subsequently] (…) memories, narratives, written documents, festivals, commemorations, rituals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.", emphasizing importance of both physical/spatial and intangible attributes. Thus, the identified state of conservation of those attributes can be taken as a baseline for impact assessment, management and monitoring exercises.

The concept of cultural heritage significance is now built into the planning policy in England. National guidance on protecting the Historic Environment in England (Planning Policy Statement 5, 2010) has secured the process of establishing significance of the historic environment as part of "plan-making or development management" (HE12.2) as "the evidence base for future planning" (*Ibid.*). PPS 5 acknowledges "local distinctiveness" (HE3.4), and in case of a "special significance to a particular community" (HE7.3) the former should be recognized and considered.

Moreover, local planning authorities should not give planning consent to applications with unclear impact on heritage significance. Seeing the History in the View (English Heritage 2011) offers a methodology to establish the baseline view. It also describes each view in its contribution to significance, applying an EH values framework, described earlier. EH consultation draft guidance on The Setting of Heritage Assets (2010) details the concept of setting[3] (established in PPS 5) the role for heritage significance and the implications of change.

In addition, important documents for management of World Heritage properties are Circular 07/2009 and English Heritage Guidance Note with the focus on protection of officially identified Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), authenticity, and integrity. Since the 2005 UNESCO Operational Guidelines, a World Heritage (WH) site should have in their Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), among others, criteria for inscription to the UNESCO list, integrity, and authenticity. Management and protection measures for each WH property are under remit of a local authority, where the property is located.

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[3] **Setting** – "surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral".

Overview of Heritage Impact Assessment Methodologies

Impact Assessment Tools are recognized as an important mechanism for mitigating and preventing impacts on cultural heritage (e.g. par. 25 (b), Draft HUL UNESCO). International guidelines, like World Bank's Operational Policy 4.11 - Physical Cultural Resources (July 2006) with its Guide Book and International Finance Corporation's Sustainability Framework Performance Standard 8 and its Guidance Note, facilitate borrowers in assessment of impact on heritage within an environmental and social impact assessment process. These guidelines are a useful source for reference of an impact assessment process in the case of large-scale infrastructure and development projects, particularly in relation to places occupied by indigenous communities; though the World Bank's Guidelines focus is predominantly on physical dimension of cultural heritage.

English Highways' Agency "Design Manual for Roads and Bridges" (DMRB) (2007) offers support for the decision-making process with focus on infrastructural projects. The document provides comprehensive guidance on the assessment of the impact that road projects may have on cultural heritage significance, and represents an example of guidance used in support of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. Its evaluation methodology has now been used several times for assessing the impact in the case of Stonehenge, where it went through the planning system and a public inquiry.

This methodological approach to cultural heritage assessment is described in a separate chapter of DMRB and is specified in the case of historic buildings, historic landscapes and archaeological remains. Its focus is predominantly on cultural heritage with a formally recognized designation based on a hierarchy of international, national, regional and local cultural heritage legislation (par. 5.28), although it acknowledges that there might exist other valuable assets that may not be designated "because they are newly discovered, or their significance only recently recognized, or because designation is not an appropriate response to their situation, or their value has not yet been formally assessed" (par. 5.29). The document further suggests that in this case the factors local authorities take into account should be considered.

This ICOMOS Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties (2010) has similarities with the DMRB methodology; an expert from the ICOMOS-UK was involved in its development. In particular, the Guidance offers analogous ways for structuring and analysing the impact on heritage values, conveyed in attributes. Further impact on these attributes is considered in terms of scale and severity of change from neutral to major, together with the final overall impact assessment.

However ICOMOS Guidance is much more specific about intangible dimensions of built heritage, introducing intangible cultural heritage or association in the classification of cultural World Heritage properties in terms of archeology, built heritage (historic urban landscape), and historic landscape. It underlines the importance of the meaning of <u>all</u> heritage values in full (4-5) and the "interrelationship/s between discrete heritage resources" (4-3). Moreover it emphasises existence of a "relationship between a material aspect and an intangible aspect which must be brought to the fore" (*Ibid.*).

Although ICOMOS guidance supports the view of heritage impact assessment as a special type of assessment, in interviews with experts and practitioners in urban planning and conservation fields, there was a common agreement that higher effectiveness would be achieved through focusing on improvement of existing Impact Assessment tools (e.g. Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment) compared to an ad-hoc heritage impact assessment exercise (from interviews with English Heritage and Historic Scotland urban planning experts, Manchester/London/Edinburgh 2010-2011).

This way, heritage-related issues can be better integrated into the existing decision-making process with the potential input in improved collaboration among experts and departments. Also existing institutional division in responsibilities between environmental and cultural (conservation) areas is one of the identified barriers to better address heritage in an impact assessment exercise. In this regard, private sector with more flexible multidisciplinary teams can potentially make deeper analysis of heritage-related projects (plans or programmes).

Conclusions

Despite existing regulations, guidelines and methodologies, heritage, in particular, if it is not under UNESCO remit, is being still mostly seen as "the dots on the map", so the heritage category is presented in the final report at best as a number of listed buildings and how many are "at risk".

The introduction of setting and significance concepts in new regulations on historic environment in England, discussed previously, is the step towards acknowledgment of heritage as a more complex phenomenon. However more attention should be drawn to undesignated heritage or 'heritage by appropriation'[4] rather than 'heritage by designation', as well as to local values and intangible dimensions.

Consensus about the future development of a place should be achieved through interdisciplinary participation informed by historic, scientific and social and other values of an area. Precedents in terms of management systems and regulations in World Heritage properties can provide appropriate solutions and knowledge for the general case of culturally significant living urban areas. For example, the concept of Outstanding Universal Value can provide a method for the interpretation of heritage values (or significance) in other, more general, cases.

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[4] **Heritage by designation:** "all cultural objects that are listed institutionalized and labeled by experts".
Heritage by appropriation: "the social or ethnologic heritage that includes landscapes, townscapes, living places and non-exceptional building ensembles". The concepts is adapted in SUIT (see reference) from Rautenberg M., 1998, "L'émergence patrimoniale de l'ethnologie: entre mémoire et politiques publiques", in Patrimoine et modernité, ed. D. Poulot, Paris L'Harmatan, 279-291.

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