Monitoring cultural significance and impact assessments

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Summary

A paper discussing the application of a framework to monitor cultural significance in historic urban landscapes; including the attributes and values defining cultural significance, and their relation in time.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last centuries the protection of cultural heritage has evolved in broadness of definitions and in intangibility of attributes. Today, the cultural significance conveyed by cultural heritage properties is gaining more prominence than the properties themselves. The stakeholders involved in the management of these properties are becoming more open to embrace this change. Though, they are still lacking the methods and tools for monitoring and consequently assessing the impacts of change on cultural significance more systematically.

Much literature is to be found on categories of values, less on categories of attributes and hardly any on their relation and evolution in time. Yet, ICOMOS alerts for the great dangers of neglecting accumulative changes in cultural significance. As such, this paper elaborates on Jokilehto's report on what is Outstanding Universal Value (Jokilehto, 2008) and discusses the application of a framework defined to monitor the cultural significance of historic urban landscapes; including the attributes conveying cultural significance, the layers of values defining cultural significance, and their relation in time.

To do so, this paper starts with the evolution of theory of cultural significance. After this, the definition of the assessment framework is presented, illustrated by its application to cultural heritage properties listed as World Heritage, followed by a discussion on its advantages and disadvantages. The paper concludes on the relevance of the framework to cultural heritage in general and World Heritage properties in particular; as well as, on its contribution to monitoring the cultural significance of historic urban landscapes.

From object- to values-based approach

The protection of cultural heritage properties has for long been primarily about the conservation or restoration of monuments, even in large scale properties such as urban ensembles (Jokilehto, 1998; Whitehand and Gu, 2010). This object-based approach focused on the tangible dimension of cultural heritage properties, often as a whole, which helped maintaining many historic buildings and sites. Though, it often neglected the intangible dimension of cultural heritage, the larger scale or the process or production (Veldpaus et al, 2013). As such, the object-based approach has contributed to patterns of musealisation (Albert, 2009), gentrification (Smith, 1998) and domestic migration (Marks, 1996), for depriving those properties and their context from development.

Latest advances in conservation explore a values-based approach, where conservation becomes a "dynamic process of change management" (ICOMOS Australia 1999), an integral part of the development process. Today, cultural heritage properties range from movable to immovable, from tangible to intangible, from single monuments to entire cultural landscapes. The values-based approach gives more prominence to the cultural significance conveyed by cultural heritage properties, than to the properties themselves. Meaning that, the property might be designated cultural heritage as a whole, but only part of it embodies cultural significance. Such approach is expected to provide more opportunities for development to occur on or including cultural heritage properties and their context, by transforming the less significant areas more and the more significant ones less. The stakeholders involved in the management of these properties are curious to embrace this approach, though, they are still lacking the methods and tools for monitoring and consequently assessing cultural significance more systematically.

Environmental impact assessments (EIA) and heritage impact assessments (HIA) tools seem suitable in aim. However, the greatest criticism is, while cultural significance and sustainability are multi-dimensional, current EIA tools are mostly single-dimensional (Ding, 2008). Cultural heritage is generally the weakest component in EIA studies (Bond et al., 2004; Fleming, 2008). There is a lack of objectivity and completeness in HIA, even when part of an EIA (Teller & Bond, 2002). EIA is also considered to neglect the interaction between attributes and "cumulative impacts and incremental changes" (ICOMOS, 2011). Thus, there is an unanimous plea for a more global and objective assessment approach to assist monitoring cultural heritage properties, directly linked to their cultural significance.

Cultural significance
The term *cultural significance* came to prominence with the *Burra Charter* (ICOMOS Australia, 1999), a doctrinal treaty aiming to explicitly codify conservation principles in the Australian context. Instead, it became influential worldwide. Accordingly, cultural significance "is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects" (ICOMOS Australia, 1999). The reasons for regarding a cultural heritage property as significant are often termed as *cultural values* (Pereira Roders and Hudson, 2011). The 'qualities and characteristics seen in things, in particular the positive characteristics (actual and potential)' (Mason, 2002: 5) embodying cultural values are termed as attributes (UNESCO, 2011).

Cultural Values
There is still no consensus on whether cultural significance can be intrinsic and objective (Hodder, 2000) and this is mostly due to the cultural values. They are considered subjective, influenced by the changes in time and particular cultural, intellectual, historical and psychological frames of reference held by specific groups (Darvill, 1995). Ashworth (1998) noted that different and often conflicting values can be attributed to the same cultural heritage property by different stakeholders. Much literature is to be found on categories of values. Since Riegl's (1903) distinction between memorial and present-day values, several typologies of cultural values have followed (Labadi, 2007), including in national and international heritage conservation guidelines (Battaini-Dragoni, 2005).

Attributes
There are two typologies of attributes: tangible and intangible. The tangible attributes regard the legacy of physical artifacts such as "form and design; materials and substance and other internal factors". Instead, the intangible attributes regard non-physical aspects related to the cultural heritage properties, such as "use and function; traditions, techniques and management systems; location and setting; language, and other forms of intangible heritage; spirit and feeling; and other external factors" (UNESCO,2011). In contrast to the categories of values, much less categories of attributes are found defined and hardly any on the relation between attributes and cultural values or on its evolution in time (Silva and Pereira Roders, 2012).

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 illustrates a cultural significance assessment framework, defined to monitor the cultural significance of protected areas; including the attributes conveying cultural significance, the layers of cultural values defining cultural significance, and the evolution of their relation in time. The chosen typology for the cultural values is composed by eight main values: social, economic, political, historic, aesthetical, scientific, age and ecological values (Pereira Roders, 2007; Tarrafa Silva and Pereira Roders, 2012). The attributes are divided into two typologies: tangible and intangible attributes. Depending on if the attributes and cultural values are found literally referenced or the categories are selected based on the assessors interpretation, these values are judged upon their reliability (real vs. assumed). This is expected to help raising understanding for the level of subjectivity in Statements of Significance or related assessments.
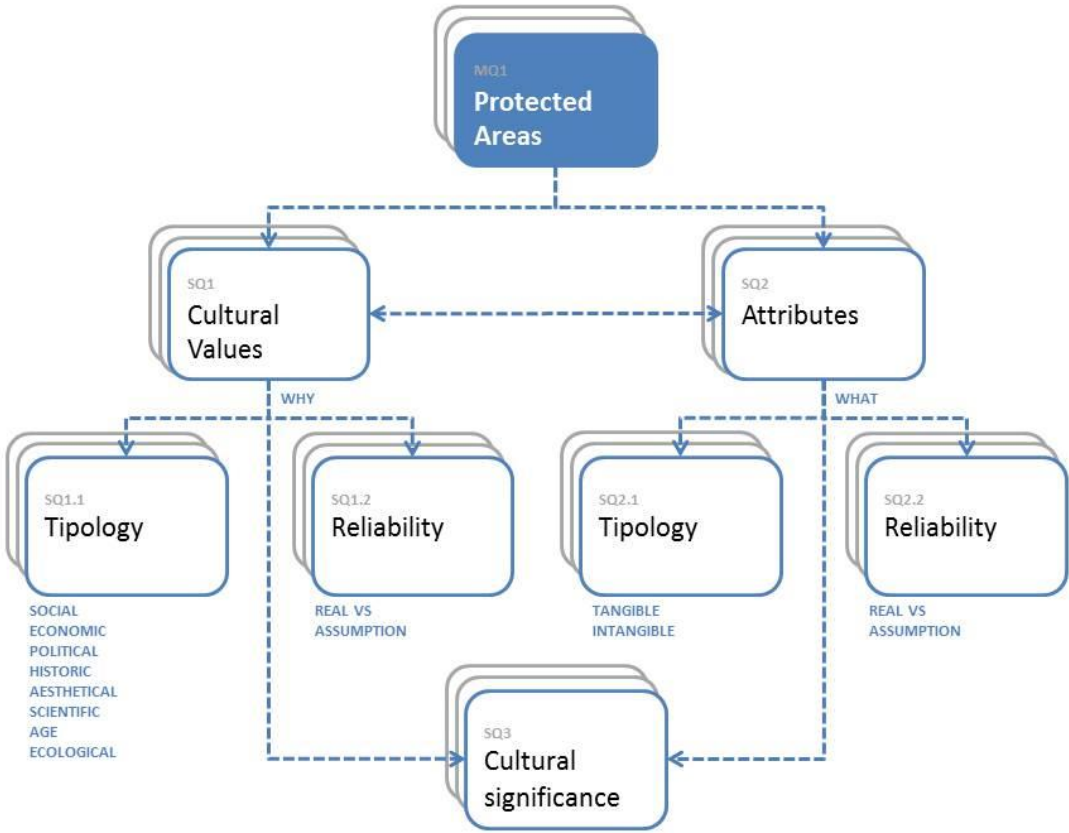

Figure 1: The cultural significance assessment framework

APPLICATION OF FRAMEWORK TO THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

In the publication *What is Outstanding Universal Value?,* Jokilehto (2008) distinguished a set of three cultural values considered to be referenced on the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972). Accordingly, there is the "the value 'from the point of view of history' (=historical value, "old age value", commemorative value); secondly, there is the value 'from the point of view of art' (= artistic value, aesthetic value); thirdly, one finds the value 'from the point of view of science' (= scientific value), and finally there are also values 'from the ethnological and anthropological point of view' (which can also be understood as scientific values)".

In his research, Jokilehto did not identify the attributes conveying the cultural values, nor their relation to the identified cultural values. For this paper Jokilehto's exercise is repeated, making use of the defined framework to compare and discuss results, in order to better understand the contributions of such a cultural significance assessment framework.

Attributes

The World Heritage Convention does not directly refer to the notion attributes, tangible or intangible. Several attributes, however, are to be found referenced in article 1 when defining the notion of cultural heritage (see Table 1). All identified attributes were classified as tangible attributes. They are most broad in scale, ranging from building elements such as sculptures and paintings, to combined works of nature and man such as cultural landscapes.

Cultural values

The World Heritage Convention does directly refer to the notion value, but exclusively as part of the notion outstanding universal value. A set of cultural values, however, is present in article 1 when defining the notion of cultural heritage. Accordingly, the outstanding universal value of cultural heritage would be recognized for monuments and groups of buildings "from the point of view of history, art or science" and for sites "from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view" (see Table 1). These cultural values have been classified in five of the eight main cultural values, earlier mentioned, which are respectively: historic, aesthetical, scientific, age and social values. Historic values for the "point of view of history"; aesthetical values for both "point of view of art" and "aesthetic point of view"; scientific values for the "point of view of science", age values for the "historical point of view"; and social values for both "ethnological or anthropological points of view". The three cultural values with assumed categorization were the historical, ethnological and anthropological values.

Cultural significance

The notion (cultural and natural) significance is mentioned only once in the WH Convention (UNESCO, 1972: article 11). It is mentioned as the focus on the documentation to include in the inventory, every State Party is required to submit to the World Heritage Committee, whenever proposing properties, situated in their territory, to the World Heritage list. The results, on relating both attributes and cultural values reveal that, aesthetical values are relevant for every category of cultural heritage. Instead, historic values are more relevant for attributes of monuments and groups of buildings. Age and social values are only highlighted for attributes of sites.

cultural heritage	attributes	values
monuments	- architectural works - works of monumental sculpture and painting - elements or structures of an archaeological nature - inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features	- history - art - science
groups of buildings	- groups of separate or connected buildings, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape	- history - art - science
sites	- works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites	- historical - aesthetic - ethnological - anthropological

Table 1: The cultural significance conveyed in the notion cultural heritage promoted by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention

Comparison of results

The cultural significance assessment framework identifies two more cultural values – age and social values - than the three identified by Jokilehto - historic, artistic/aesthetical and scientific values. This is mostly due to a difference in definitions, as it regards the only values which categorization had to be based on the assumption, rather than on the direct reference. Jokilehto considers historic, historical and age as one category of values. Instead, the cultural significance assessment framework distinguishes historic from age values. Jokilehto also considers ethnological and anthropological values are best categorized as scientific values. Instead, the cultural significance assessment framework has chosen to categorize them as social values. Ethnology is considered as a branch of anthropology focused on the origins, distribution, technology, religion, language, and social structure of the ethnic, racial, and/or national divisions of humanity (Garfield et al, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

The cultural significance assessment framework has proven to be easily applicable, with clear typologies and the ability to distinguish between and within varied categories of attributes and values, as well as, on the reliability of the results, when differencing real from assumed cultural values and attributes. Users, even without being familiarized with the context (outsiders), are able to apply the cultural significance assessment framework. The greatest disparities emerge on the assumed cultural values. Though, good guidance on their definitions has been decreasing the differences among results from different researchers. The framework also allows comparison (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005) between different documents or assets.

The application of the cultural significance assessment framework remains an interpretation. It is also based in qualitative text analysis. Thus, even if subjectivity is considerably reduced along the years, it remains and comparison is difficult. Most probably, this is never going to be fully mitigated as cultural significance will always remain naturally subjective and interpretative, as it regards no more than what society perceives as significant to be protected for future generations. It will keep on varying in time and per individual.

For this reason, the definitions are so important. Further research could explore the development of sub-categories of tangible and intangible attributes. It could also provide a word cloud for each cultural value, so that when placed in context, the classification could be made easier. For the specific case of the World Heritage convention, further research would be relevant in understanding the evolution on the cultural significance – attributes and values – promoted by the 10 selection criteria and how much it differs from ones promoted in the notion of cultural heritage.

This framework can help local governments on their tasks related to monitoring and assessing the impact of changes on the cultural heritage properties under their safeguard. On the long term, it is also expected to help them raise effectiveness in their management practices, such as the EIAs, in reaching the targeted goals.

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