

HISTORIC CITIES AND SETTLEMENTS INTEGRATED PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Historic cities and settlements in the Hellenic territory comprise considerable cultural values, formed over time and marking their character. Their natural and built environment, seen as an inseparable whole, constitutes their main cultural heritage, as well as an important financial resource. However, this heritage is often destroyed through a process of what is wrongly considered as 'development', usually materialized through the demolishing of historic shells, their unplanned expansion and the tendency to overuse properties, expressed through new constructions and interventions deforming the historic shells.

These practices, which are unfortunately common in Hellenic territory, are completely opposed to the principles of sustainable development, to the modern principles of the urban planning science, and to the principles of the protection of the city's cultural heritage, as expressed in the declarations and charters of the international organizations like ICOMOS, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. According to the aforementioned principles, the goals for development and for protecting the environment should be directly linked to spatial and urban design, which should propose a combined framework of rules and regulations for protection and development, as well as an overall implementation program and management plan for this development.

Key words: *Historical Cities, Traditional Settlements, Protection, Management, Development.*

A. General Principles and acknowledgements

It is clear that the notion of 'integrated protection', as defined in international treaties and texts, stands for the preservation and promotion of the totality of the tangible and intangible elements expressing the historic, social, functional and cultural identity of historic cities and settlements.

The city's tangible elements compose its general image: its landscape, natural environment, urban form as it ensued through its historic course, the traditional urban tissue, as well as all kinds of historic traces, monuments and historic buildings, archaeological sites, public space.

The need to jointly consider and preserve the Architectural and Natural heritage forming the special cultural identity and value system of every place has become common conscience. The natural environment surrounds the built environment and is interlinked to it. At the same time, the built environment as a whole, combined with the topographic and natural features of the city, has been acquiring particular importance over the past years, through the introduction of the new term 'historic urban landscape' (*Vienna Memorandum 2005*)

The city's **intangible elements** include its history and its cultural features, its collective memory, social content, diachronically acquired functions, residents' activities, the function of public space, usages and customs, and cultural practices.

The basic principles of integrated conservation as set for the first time in 1975 in the Amsterdam declaration and the strategy of sustainable development as formed through the pertinent texts from 1987 onward, have identical goals: preserving the environment, natural and built, reducing land 'consumption' with its exaggerated expansion, preserving cultural and natural resources and the variety in uses, preserving a healthy financial base (agricultural land, traditional craft professions) and improving the quality of living. Finally, both approaches mention the need for the local society's participation.

Historic towns and settlements constitute developing organisms and alive housing wholes. Consequently, designing their protection and sustainable development, basically presupposes managing the changes that are taking place within them. The main element of the more modern approaches concerning historic ensembles / urban landscapes, is accepting the modern reality for change and its management. The need for the wise management of 'change' in historic towns and settlements is stressed by the recent Icomos text (*Valetta Principles, 2011*)

B. Mutations and problems

The tangible elements constituting the cultural identity of historic housing ensembles, are facing destruction or alteration hazards, emanating from:

(a) the erroneous delimitations and exaggerated new expansions of settlements, altering the image of the historic ensemble and the relation between the natural and built space, and destroying the built space's cohesion. Ecosystems and landscapes of exceptional natural beauty are being destroyed, demand is rising for transportation and new infrastructure networks, thus resulting to larger energy consumption and the loss of financial resources.

(b) excessive land use and the rise in the percentage of coverage and of building coefficients, leading to the demolition of the old buildings and their replacement by new ones, but also to the alteration of the relationship between built and free space. Construction is taking place in areas that, due to their topographic and natural features, or the place they occupy in the residential tissue, should remain free, and they acquire the same density as all the settlement's areas, regardless of their special features.

(c) the lack of legislative delimitation of public and private areas and construction lines, a lack which leads to the violation of public or municipal areas and their transformation into 'building plots'.

(d) technical works for infrastructure or road construction, destroying the image of the settlement and the traditional paving of its public areas.

(e) erroneous interventions or inappropriate uses leading to the disfigurement of historic buildings and to the alteration of the public space's form and function.

(f) the lack of financial resources or of the will to rehabilitate historic buildings.

(g) the features of the new constructions, when these are not compatible to the historic environment. Large volumes are often caused due to the allowed building coefficients or because of arbitrariness, due to considerable interventions to the landscape through large-scale excavations, the destruction of agricultural constructions (terraces, yards, dry walls) and the use of materials which are incompatible to the landscape and the region.

The intangible elements of historic housing ensembles forming the region's cultural identity are facing extinction, alteration or degradation hazards, due to the socioeconomic change. These changes result either in the departure of the permanent residents and of the economically active population, or in the introduction of new, intensive uses, mainly of tourism and recreation, whose demands are catastrophic for the scale of the historic cities, and with the occupation of the public space, whose form as well as function are finally altered. The intensity of these functions and the

sole direction towards tourism and recreation are destroying the region's cultural identity, leading to a rampant rise in land prices, degrading the quality of living (noise, exhaust, visual pollution) and, consequently, chasing residents away.

C. Planning protection and development

In order to manage the aforementioned changes taking place in historic cities and settlements while maintaining their cultural features and their multiple functions, but also in order to invert their problems, it is necessary to introduce the goals of protection and sustainable development into the Urban and Spatial Planning. Urban-planning design should transcend the historic center's boundaries and expand into the analysis of needs and the examination of consequences for the entire town. Moreover, it must be accompanied by all supplementary legislative, financial and social measures. And of course it demands the elaboration of a special Protection plan and of a special Management plan.

The starting point for every planning and intervention in the town should be the in-depth acquaintance and understanding of its historic importance, its mutations and its current state. Seeking and recording each town's historic, cultural, archaeological and architectural values is particularly important in order to program its protection and management.

Given, finally, that urban protection is not only interested in the city's cultural and architectural values, it is necessary to study its social and financial identity, as well as the financial activity and dynamics that contributed to its formulation, in order to comprehend its possible mutations, but also for its controlled development and protection.

Designing protection and development of the historic city should include:

1. *An analysis and evaluation of its current state* (Swot analysis), which, combined with a clear expression of the intervention goals, could lead to alternative development scenarios. The Swot analysis includes (a) the documentation and evaluation of its values: tangible and intangible values, natural and built environment (strengths) (b) the evaluation and recording of its weaknesses and problems, like the reasons for the attenuation of its values, as well as functional, financial, social problems of development, etc. (weaknesses) (c) the diagnosis for development and promotion opportunities, thanks to its special character and historic features, but also thanks to its dynamics (opportunities) and (d) a prediction of future threats and dangers likely to arise, such as natural destructions, man-induced alterations, etc. (threats).

2. *An intervention plan with protection and development proposals that should include*

- (a) A precise definition of the parts and elements of the city needing protection and a definition of the volume and kind of transformation that the historic city can 'handle' without being led to a reduction of its values.

- (b) The expansions which are absolutely necessary for the development of living in towns and settlements, according to the demographic data and the development tendencies of the permanent population. Within this context, usually a buffer zone is set around the limits of the settlements, which is necessary in order to protect their character, taking into consideration the special man-made or natural elements in the immediate surroundings of the settlements needing protection (archaeological sites, mills, streams/natural boundaries, etc.). The possible areas for expansion are chosen very carefully in order to not alter the image of the historic settlement and its surrounding landscape, while their size must not exceed the scale of historic neighborhoods.

- (c) Buffer zones for all areas whose features are basic elements of the identity and the local character of the housing ensemble, a basic coefficient to the residents' quality of living and a natural resource. In these areas construction can be prohibited, or only small additions can be allowed to existing agricultural constructions or constructions of very limited volume, or construction can be allowed following specific building coefficients and special land uses. Buffer

zones are required for sites of archaeological interest, but also in regions of considerable natural beauty, or in agricultural lands. They also cover the landscape's man-made elements: agricultural residences, chapels and monasteries, mills or watermills, dovecotes, dry walls, yards, terraces, enclosures, steps, trails, quarries, and other countryside constructions.

(d) A special legislative framework including a street-layout plan, signaling the traditional urban tissue and defining special uses for buildings, communal spaces, streets and pedestrian zones, the declaration of listed buildings and elements, the general and specific building coefficients, the definition of land use, etc. *Special building conditions*, which need to define urban planning parameters defining the buildings' volumetric organization and scale, as well as their relationship with public space: preserving traditional sizes in plots, defining the maximum coverage, the size of the building coefficient and the volume coefficient, maximum height and manner of measuring that height, relation of the building with the edge of the building plot, disposition of open-air spaces, the relation to the ground, the formation of its fifth dimension, etc. These conditions must also mention the different features of the separate unities of the settlements, the connecting parts having a particular architectural importance and the important initial cores, aiming to form the most appropriate building coefficients per unity. *Special building conditions* must not be confused with the *special morphological restrictions* leading to the formation of the building's final architectural expression and, at times, leading to the repetition of morphological features of a specific order or architectural elements constituting prominent or unique features of the settlement.

(e) The appropriate means to implement the intervention plan, including: legislative measures for the protection and organization of the city's development, administrative measures, like traffic regulations, social measures, complementing the social equipment, improving infrastructure networks, offering special facilitations for residents and financial measures, such as loans, grants, tax exemptions, professional reinforcement, attraction of investments.

(f) Projects for upgrading and rehabilitation works for public spaces, for improving the function and the image of public space. Executing works to upgrade public spaces is particularly important for the promotion and protection of historic ensembles, in which the formed proprietary status as well as the social and financial structures do not allow for the execution of massive works for the rehabilitation and the improvement of private shells. These are works contributing, among others, to the region's financial activation and they activate private initiative towards the rehabilitation, improvement and reuse of old shells. They include the improvement of infrastructure networks, the formation of pedestrian networks in immediate relation to important public buildings and free spaces, the rehabilitation or reformation of façades, the reuse of important historic buildings for the city, the completion of gaps in the urban tissue, the completion of urban equipment, etc. Redesigning public space presupposes studying the form, function and importance of the intervention area, highlighting its character's special features and preserving it as an active and multifunctional space: a space of meeting, getting together, communicating.

3. *A timeframe for the materialization and organization of the implementation*, during which the delimitation of the protected ensemble, the institution of its legislative protection framework and the necessary administrative measures come first. Then follow the social and financial measures and rehabilitation works for public spaces. It is also necessary to ensure the administrative mechanism for monitoring these works, which will be based on the collaboration of the state, the local administration and local bodies, the avoidance of overlapping jurisdictions, stability in the rhythm of the progress of the implementation and the establishment of a communication system with users, whose consent is a presupposition to the program's success. In order to materialize this plan, it is needed to find ways to finance works and interventions.

4. *A constant monitoring the plan's results and improvements*, in order to operate any necessary changes and stability in the implementation's progress rhythm. New technologies

constitute an important tool for the documentation, the systematic updating of the monitoring mechanisms and for the promotion of cultural goods to the new generation.

D. The management plan

The Management Plan should ensure that the new uses be compatible to the character, the capacity and the volumes of the traditional environment and that they do not destroy nor endanger the traditional uses, or the uses which are necessary to the residents' everyday living. New uses must obey the principles of sustainable development, considering the historic ensemble as a unique and irreplaceable ecosystem. Activities and functions developed diachronically in the area, as well as traditional professions should be preserved as much as possible. The region must preserve its multifunctionality. The intensity and density of functions degrading the area should be controlled, and they should attract financial activities which are not detrimental to the environment.

More specifically, touristic development should be based on the respect and promotion of the identity of the local population, of its cultural features and its traditional occupations, as well as on the preservation of the features of the broader region and the natural environment. Touristic activity should respect and not derange the residents' everyday living.

Circulation of vehicles in traditional settlements should be limited to what is absolutely necessary for the residents' and uses' servicing; it should be 'mild' and prioritize pedestrian circulation. Parking areas should be organized at the edge of the settlement and should not destroy the urban tissue and the settlement's broader environment.

It is necessary to maintain the residential function. One should take into consideration the need to modernize the residence and the need to upgrade the technological infrastructure networks and the form and function of the public space, with particular care for issues of pedestrian circulation and control of circulation and car parking.

In order for residents to stay, it is imperative to improve technological infrastructure, ensure the necessary social and cultural services and intervene so as to upgrade Public space – these interventions are also contributing to the highlighting of the region's historic physiognomy.

Management strategy is based on

(a) the respect of the activities and functions diachronically developed in the city, and at the same time on the control of the density of degrading functions

(b) the combination of protection goals with other goals, like those ensuring the quality of living, reforming residences, aesthetically upgrading cities, reinforcing the weaker classes, complementing the necessary social and cultural equipment, creating social services and servicing, etc.

(c) adopting protection policies by all public bodies involved in matters of the city, given that the inflation of special services dealing with matters of the city's preservation and protection is not the only means to promote rehabilitation principles and applications.

(d) resolving eventually conflicting interests among different groups of residents (for instance, between residents and shop owners in touristic areas)

(e) maintaining the region's cultural tradition, reinforcing traditional professions and resisting to the introduction of foreign models imposed through the modern globalization procedures.

(f) preserving the urban tissue and its rational use, caring particularly for pedestrian circulation and control of vehicle circulation.

(g) doing the largest effort possible to ensure for residents the comforts of modern living (car circulation and parking, modern networks of technological infrastructure, protection from sound pollution often caused downtown, quality upgrading of residences, etc.)

(h) attracting environment-friendly investments.

Effective management requires the institution of the necessary legislative framework for protection and development, the administrative organization, putting to good use the experts and staffing the services which will be constantly monitoring the development of the city and the repercussions of the measures and works, aiming at structural interventions, finding financial resources to cover the cost of the necessary rehabilitation and reformation works and the institution of financial motives and financial support mechanisms, guaranteeing human resources who will be occupied directly or indirectly with the aforementioned issues and the existence of traditional materials and specialized craftsmen.

It is also necessary to create a special office for the design and monitoring of the works, also to avoid overlapping jurisdictions and to acquire stability in the rhythm of the progress of the implementation, to monitor post-implementation results and to continue feeding a plan.

Besides, during the materialization of the program, it is required to constantly monitor and control any changes which might be necessary, also to have stability in the progress rhythm of the implementation and to institute a communication system with users, whose consent is a prerequisite to the program's success.

E. Participative procedures

Following the sustainable development principles, the management strategy for historic towns is based on broad social consent, on education, information, on the understanding of the values of historic towns and on the sensitization of citizens, in order for them to participate in planning the town's protection. The plan's implementation is ensured solely through information, cooperation and the consent of residents. Participative procedures are necessary throughout the study, because (a) they enhance the scientific team's understanding of the local life, through the information given by the residents, and they assist residents to appreciate some aspects of their neighborhood that they had not realized or appreciated (b) they assist the resolving of eventual conflicts of interest among different groups of residents (for instance, between residents and shop owners in touristic areas) and (c) they enable the elected local representatives to acquire a political view and appreciation as to which transformations are acceptable and which are not in their neighborhood.

F. The reality in Greece

In the Hellenic milieu today there is a broad legislative framework for protection, but which is sometimes inappropriate and insufficient, not having emanated from specialized studies on the particular features of every area, and which, although correct at times, is being transgressed.

There is a large number of 'competent' bodies whose opinions are often contradictory and who share no cooperation. The need to combine the protection targets with other targets (developmental, upgrading of quality of life, etc) has not been realized. The Greek society is not conscious of its historic values and the confrontation of this situation by the state is not helpful in this direction. Very intense dispute among different groups of citizens (for example, between inhabitants and shop owners in tourist areas) – a representative example being once again the historical centre of Athens.

There is a complete lack of policy relating to the protection (commitments made with no motives) and inability to protect historic constructions from demolition, due to the lack of financial and/or urban incentives. There is also inability to control unacceptable uses and circulation which degrades public space (a representative example being the historical centre of Athens).

When existing, the protection policy exercised by the competent bodies moves, with slim exceptions, at a level of decisions forbidding the demolition of isolated monuments and historic

buildings and controlling with rather insufficient tools the new construction which will take place around the declared protected monuments. The protection of the relation between the natural and constructed space is virtually inexistent and the modern financial and functional transformations, being uncontrollable, alter the tangible and intangible values of the urban formations.

The aforementioned issues are covered in a great extent by numerous specialized studies in the Hellenic milieu, but these studies are not implemented, while reformation works are fragmentarily realized.

G. Conclusions

The need to draft management plans for the changes that historic cities undergo and the need to draw a particular strategy for their implementation has not been adequately realized yet in the Hellenic milieu. As a living entity with its tangible and intangible values, the historic city often becomes the object of specialized studies and research, but which almost never result in the implementation of the suggested measures and works.

In their majority, local authorities and the local population do not dispose the necessary knowledge and assistance, or perhaps do not have the necessary will to take initiative for the management of their city's development and for the protection of its architectural and urban heritage.

Given however that integrated protection presupposes responsibility from the part of the local administration bodies as well as the participation of citizens, we are obliged – also according to international conventions and declarations – to set informing, consultative and cooperative mechanisms between the state, the local administration and cultural foundations and associations.

Identifying and understanding the multiple and manifold values forming each location's character should be the main source behind its design and the active participation of the local community should be the driving force behind the materialization of the decisions made through this plannification.

Finally, the financial and developmental dimension of protection poses yet another serious issue. The need to form a developmental – financial policy, directly linked to the policy of integrated protection, and consequently the need to sensitize political authorities and set the cooperation between the ministries of finances in that direction.

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