

Sustainability and Urban Conservation: genealogies of the Historic Urban Landscape approach

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Abstract

Heritage systems are experiencing new and complex pressures that invite questions about their future. The proposals to better incorporate 'culture' in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are coupled with strengthened calls within heritage discourses for sustainable cities, community empowerment, bottom-up approaches and a democratization of what 'heritage' is and how it is constructed within contexts of globalization.

In many ways, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape or 'HUL' (2011) is an artefact of these trends and has become increasingly influential in recent years. Like many international instruments, the HUL provides a generalized set of statements, but has offered some new and potentially useful language and opened opportunities, particularly for city governments and citizens that want to rethink the challenging equation of sustainability and urban conservation. There are some emerging examples of the incorporation of the HUL approach in cities in the Asia-Pacific region in part due to the promulgation of the 'HUL' by the Shanghai-based World Heritage Institute for Training and Research in the Asia-Pacific Region (WHITR-AP).

However, the HUL remains under-theorised, particularly within contemporary humanities and social sciences interests in the role of non-visual senses and the emotions in people's experience of place. This paper charts the early conceptualisation of the HUL, its reception and implementation in pilot project cities, and its intersections with sustainability discourses. By focussing on the genealogies of the HUL and its institutional, conceptual, methodological and technological contexts, it explores the conditions through which the HUL has developed into an approach that has been adopted enthusiastically. Through a critical examination of these contexts, the paper explores the assumptions both implicit and explicit of the approach and offers some potential ways in which new understandings of place attachment can be incorporated into the HUL.