Assessing the cultural significance of world heritage cities: the historic centre of Galle as case study


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ASSESSING THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF WORLD HERITAGE CITIES: THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF GALLE AS CASE STUDY

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Abstract
This article presents the first results of a survey on the historic centre of Galle. Galle is one of the many World Heritage properties as acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO. The Historic centre of Galle is a case study that is part of a larger research program called: “Outstanding Universal Value, World Heritage cities and Sustainability: Surveying the relationship between the Outstanding Universal Value assessment practices and the sustainable development of World Heritage cities” lead by the Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands; and UNESCO World Heritage Centre, France.

The aim of the research is to determine the adequacy of the current strategies of the stakeholders involved with the policy and management regarding developments towards a sustainable development of the historic town of Galle. The main question therefore is: How can the historic centre of Galle develop sustainably, without damaging its Outstanding Universal Value? This paper however, will focus on the results of the literature study and the survey of official UNESCO documents undertaken to assess the cultural significance of the historic centre of Galle, by means of revealing the dimensions of its cultural significance in terms of cultural values. The paper will conclude with an illustrative test case where the study of documents and literature is complemented with the preliminary results of the field work.

Keywords: UNESCO, World Heritage cities, sustainable development, cultural significance assessment, cultural values, historic centre of Galle.
1. Introduction

This article presents the first results of a survey on the historic centre of Galle. Galle is one of the many World Heritage properties as acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee (WHC), UNESCO.

Galle as a case study is part of a research program called Outstanding Universal Value, World Heritage cities and Sustainability: Surveying the relationship between the Outstanding Universal Value assessment practices and the sustainable development of World Heritage cities” lead by the Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands; and UNESCO World Heritage Centre, France."1

The main question of the case study is: How can the historic centre of Galle develop sustainably, without damaging its Outstanding Universal Value? This paper however, will focus on the results of the literature study and the survey of official UNESCO documents undertaken to assess the cultural significance of the historic centre of Galle, by means of revealing the dimensions of its cultural significance in terms of cultural values. The paper will conclude with an illustrative test case where the study of documents and literature is complemented with the preliminary results of the field work.

As a case study the surveys become very site specific, however, at the same time it is part of a global comparative research. At the moment similar studies are being conducted in the Stone Town, Zanzibar Tanzania and Willemstad, Curacao.

2. World Heritage

Galle is a World Heritage city. World Heritage cities are urban settlements that include “cultural heritage with the broadest level of cultural significance, which is acknowledged by the World Heritage Committee (WHC), in UNESCO, as of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for the whole mankind. This cultural heritage is known worldwide as World Heritage (WH)”2. The World Heritage Committee defines Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as the “cultural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity”.3 A property then is considered as having OUV whenever it meets one or more of the ten selection criteria, as defined by the WHC.4

The OUV of World Heritage properties is expressed through a variety of attributes. These attributes “are a direct tangible expression of the outstanding universal value of the property”5, “and may include the relationships between physical elements, essence, meaning, and at times related processes, that need to be protected and managed in order

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5 See footnote 3, p. 26
to sustain OUV". Additionally, one has to assure that authenticity and integrity, as well as the implementation of an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding have been met. Authenticity is to be understood as the requirement to be genuine, i.e. the WH property should be truly what it is claimed to be and integrity is a "measure of the wholeness and intactness of the cultural heritage and its attributes".

3. World Heritage city of Galle

The historic centre of Galle, best known as Galle Fort, is situated on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka and is considered as being the best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in south and southeast Asia. It was listed as World Heritage in 1988, under criterion (iv), for being considered "an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history". However, by the time Galle was inscribed in the WH list most Decision Texts (DT) did not include a justification for the selection criteria. Thus, there is no Statement of Significance or of Outstanding Universal Value for Galle already adopted by the WH Committee. After the Decision Text, the second most important document for the understanding of the cultural significance of the historic centre of Galle is the Advisory Body Evaluation (ABE) by UNESCO’s Advisory Body ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), which was used to sustain the decision of listing the property as WH.

Figure 1. The Galle Fort

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7 See footnote 3, p. 20 - 29
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
11 See footnote 4
When recommending its inscription for the World Heritage list, ICOMOS stated that “Galle provides an outstanding example of an urban ensemble which illustrates the interaction of European architecture and South Asian traditions from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Among the characteristics which make this an urban group of exceptional value is the original sewer system from the 17th century, flushed with sea water controlled by a pumping station formerly activated by a windmill on the Triton bastion. However, the most salient fact is the use of European models adapted by local manpower to the geological, climatic, historic and cultural conditions of Sri Lanka. In the structure of the ramparts, coral is frequently used along with granite. In the ground layout all the measures of length, width and height conform to the regional metrology. The wide streets, planted with grass and shaded by suriyas, are lined with houses, each with its own garden and an open verandah supported by columns – another sign of the acculturation of an architecture which is European only in its basic design.” 12 The ICOMOS statement already shows it is indeed “an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history”, however, what does this mean in the reality of a living settlement?

4. Problem and aim

The main aim of the research is to determine the adequacy of the current strategies of the stakeholders involved with the policy and management regarding developments towards a sustainable development of the historic town of Galle.

By inscription of the historic centre of Galle on UNESCO’s World Heritage List (WHL), the States Party of Sri Lanka has agreed that “legislative and regulatory measures at national and local levels should assure the survival of the property and its protection against development and change that might negatively impact the outstanding universal value, or the integrity and/or authenticity of the property”. 13 In other words: international inscription comes with local responsibilities. Despite its international recognition as World Heritage the historic centre of Galle is also a living settlement, which needs to evolve in order to meet the needs of their citizens, preferably in a sustainable way and that may require development.

The lack of fine tuning between transformations due to development needs and maintaining OUV may result in irreversible damages to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, and consequently, raising the risk of having the historic centre of Galle removed from the WHL, as recently happened to Dresden, Germany. Eventually this could also be the case for Galle Fort, if development plans with negative impact on the OUV of Galle had been underestimated by the States Party of Sri Lanka (SP).

The need for development already jeopardizes the historic centre of Galle. As the society has changed over time, pressure for developments and upgrading within the fort is being felt, in order to address evolving needs of its inhabitants in their day-to-day

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12 See footnote 10
13 See footnote 3, p. 25
pursuits.\textsuperscript{14} The current problems are (i) the difficulty for stakeholders concerned with policies and management within the fort to remove existing unauthorized building activity; (ii) an inadequate sewage and solid waste management; (iii) noise pollution and fumes caused by increasing traffic and inadequate vehicle management within the fort; (iv) overhead wires, cables, TV antennae and water tanks marring the rooftops of the fort; (v) closing-in of verandas for domestic security reasons altering the streetscapes; and (vi) “unauthorized change of use” of houses.\textsuperscript{15} These developments to meet the needs of the local community living and working within the fort are threatening the OUV of the historic centre of Galle, and sustainable solutions are a necessity.

The development of a city seems to conflict with the protection of its cultural heritage. Although many development projects are today labeled as "sustainable", there is a substantial risk that these developments have an adverse impact on the cultural significance of WH cities. On the other hand, there is also the risk that the quality of OUV assessment practices influences the sustainable development of an urban settlement (Pereira Roders and Van Oers, 2009). Therefore, sustainable development in this research is defined as follows: sustainable developments should meet the social, economic and ecological needs of the present generations, “without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987) nor “adversely impact the Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and/or authenticity of the property” (UNESCO, 2008).

5. Approach and methods

The aim of the research is to assess the adequacy of the current strategies of the stakeholders involved with the policy and management regarding developments towards a sustainable development of the historic town of Galle, the above mentioned definition of sustainable development will be important and is therefore prominent in the main question of the research;

“How can the historic centre of Galle develop sustainably, without damaging its Outstanding Universal Value?”

In the research, first the first mentioned condition for sustainable development of the historic centre of Galle shall be considered; to not “adversely impact the Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and/or authenticity of the property” (UNESCO, 2008), or in other words; to protect the OUV of the property. To be able to assess the adequacy of strategies concerned with the protection of the OUV in a later stadium of the research, what exactly is the OUV of the historic centre of Galle shall be identified and what are the attributes found representing it. Then, the state of the OUV at the time of inscription and its current state are to be assessed, in order to be able to determine the current level of authenticity and integrity of the attributes which evidence the OUV. Sub question one will be the following:

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
“WHAT IS THE CURRENT LEVEL OF AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE OUV OF THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF GALLE?”

1 – “WHICH ARE THE ATTRIBUTES FOUND REPRESENTING THE OUV?”
2 – “HOW MUCH OF THESE ATTRIBUTES STILL REMAIN TODAY?”

Then, the second mentioned condition for sustainable development of the historic centre of Galle shall be considered; to meet the social, economic and ecological needs of the present generations, “without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987), or in other words; to meet the evolving needs of the local community within the historic centre.

Assessing these evolving needs of the local community living in the historic centre of Galle would require sociological, economical and/or anthropological surveys. However, the scope of this research being mainly architectural, only the development pressures on the built environment caused by these evolving needs of the local community shall be adequately assessed. Thus, these particular evolving needs of the local community causing development pressures can be considered as being the immediate threats to the OUV of Galle. To be able to assess the adequacy of strategies concerned with dealing with these threats later on, first the threats caused by the (evolving) needs of the local community of the historic centre of Galle in their day-to-day pursuits, causing pressure for development need to be identified. Moreover, the way in which these development threats affect the attributes evidencing the OUV will be inventoried. Sub question two will be:

“What are the development-related threats caused by the evolving needs of the local community found affecting the OUV of the historic centre of Galle?”
1 – “What are the development-related threats?”
2 – “How do they affect the attributes expressing OUV?”

In order to develop the historic centre sustainably and prevent development pressures from posing a threat to the OUV, the stakeholders concerned with the policy and management of the historic centre of Galle need to define adequate development strategies which take into account both protection of the OUV while dealing with the particular needs of the local community.

Next these stakeholders will be identified and categorized according to their role in the management process. It is interesting to understand their roles, but also the level of communication and cooperation between them, if existent. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand how these stakeholders manage developments within the historic centre of Galle with regard to both the conservation of the OUV as well as dealing with the threats to the OUV posed by development needs adequately. In other words, in how far their current development strategies can be considered sustainable. This leads us to sub-question 3:

“Who are the stakeholders involved in the policy and management regarding developments within the historic centre of Galle and what is their current strategy towards sustainable development?”
Based on the significance survey results\textsuperscript{16} conclusions can be taken concerning the adequacy of the current strategies of the stakeholders involved with the policies and management regarding developments, towards the simultaneous protection and sustainable development of the historic centre of Galle. In the following section the results of the significance survey will be presented.

\section*{6. Cultural significance survey}

Pereira Roders (2007) states that cultural significance is multidimensional and argues the co-existence of other cultural values than the traditional historic, aesthetical, scientific and social values to justify the nomination of a property as cultural heritage. In addition to the four traditional cultural values also economic, political, age and ecological values are being distinguished. These eight main values have been used to code the statements justifying the OUV of Galle found included in the varied official documents.\textsuperscript{17}

As an original contribution on its own, this literature survey allows stakeholders involved with the management of the historic centre and its cultural significance to understand its varied natures and determine the adequacy of their current strategies, as well as, to define further strategies towards a better protection. Moreover, when complemented with field surveys and interviews, this survey can also help determining where and/or by whom exactly the cultural significance is being kept alive, either in the city or by the community.

Besides the identification of the cultural values, the literature survey also allowed the identification and categorization of the attributes evidencing the OUV of the property. These attributes will also be complemented further with field work and interviews. Together, these results are expected to provide enough evidences to distinguish discrepancies and/or similarities between the official documents not only within this case study, but also among the other case studies, being carried out in the global research program.

\section*{7. Preliminary results of the literature study}

Since the nomination in 1988, several official documents have been produced, where the cultural significance of the historic centre of Galle is to be found addressed. The Advisory Body Evaluation by ICOMOS and the Nomination File (NF) by the SP have been used as data to carry out this literature survey. The NF was the original document of the SP of Sri Lanka to apply for inscription on the WHL with UNESCO. However, ICOMOS being the official Advisory Body of UNESCO, the ABE is the most important

\textsuperscript{16} Pereira Roders, A. (2007) RE-ARCHITECTURE: Lifespan rehabilitation of built heritage

\textsuperscript{17} Ibidem
document available when it comes to understanding the justifications behind the inscription of the historic centre of Galle on the WHL, in the absence of an official Decision Text. When analyzing these and other documents systematically, it is possible to conclude how far the original justification for inscription is to be found echoed along the subsequent documents; which are the respective progresses and/or eventual complementarities/conflict of arguments.

The WH Committee decided to inscribe the site on the basis of cultural criterion (iv), being “an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history”, which would mainly reflect historic values (Pereira Roders & Van Oers, 2011).

However, as can be seen in figure 1, besides the expected historic values a multitude of other cultural values have been identified in the Advisory Body Evaluation and Nomination File. All but the age value have been found expressing the OUV of the property as stated by ICOMOS and the SP, so inscription solely on the historic value of criterion (iv) seems to do injustice to the historic centre of Galle. One reason for this discrepancy could be the general character of the historic aspect of criterion (iv). As the nomination concerns the historic centre of Galle in the period of the 16th to the 19th century, it would make all its attributes of historic value, regardless of e.g. their aesthetical or economical nature. This could have left these other cultural values unjustly inferior in the process. In applying this insight, we can see that other cultural values become more prominent in both documents at the expense of the historic value; e.g. the aesthetical and political value in particular now seem to be highly represented in the documents.

When comparing the cultural values of the ABE with those of the Nomination File (NF), we can see in how far the original justification for inscription is to be found echoed along the subsequent documents and if similarities or discrepancies exist between them. The following preliminary conclusions can be made about the individual cultural values identified in these documents:

**Similarities:** Some small differences aside, both documents highly represent political and aesthetical values.

**Discrepancies:** The NF seems to give considerably more importance to the social and economic values than the ABE does, whereas it considers the historic, scientific and ecological values of far less importance than does the ABE.

![Figure 2. Cultural values identified in the Advisory Body Evaluation and the Nomination File.](image-url)
7.1 Attributes

Besides the ascription of cultural values in order to make different official documents comparable, by analyzing the ABE and NF systematically it is also possible to identify implicit and explicit descriptions of the attributes which are conveying the Outstanding Universal Value in the historic centre of Galle. For instance, the ABE states:

‘Galle provides an outstanding example of an urban ensemble which illustrates the interaction of European architecture and South Asian traditions from the 16th to the 19th centuries’

Those are rather vague and general descriptions, so further elaboration on the terms “European architecture” and “South Asian traditions” is needed to find the attributes in Galle Fort, expressing the interaction of the two terms stated above. Further in the ABE, there is given a bit more specific description of the interaction of the South Asian traditions:

‘… the use of European models adapted by local manpower to the geological, climatic, historic and cultural conditions of Sri Lanka’

However, this is still a general description, although it gives more insight in the ‘South Asian traditions’ being the adaptations to geological, climatic, historic and cultural conditions of its environment. To see how those adaptations are expressed in the attributes in Galle, further (documentary) inventory is needed, also in order to understand the varied nature of the attributes of Galle Fort.

In the book ‘The Architecture of an Island’ by Barbara Sansoni (1998), which is a very thorough and extensive study of the Sinhalese architecture and the emergence of the various (colonial) styles on the island, adaptations of the colonial buildings to the warm climate of Sri Lanka are mentioned:

‘The great hall, or rear living room, which runs across the back half of the house, has no ceiling, but extends in height up to the sloping underside of the tile roof. The loosely jointed tiles allow hot air to escape to cool the room on hot days. Very large windows and doors open alternately into the wide shaded veranda which fronts the rear courtyard… … the arrangement of the plan allows continuous cross ventilation through the centre of the house from the front to the back’

By analyzing such documents, one can find some of the elements which make visible the features of the European models adapted to the ‘climatic conditions of Sri Lanka’ in the attributes to be found in Galle Fort, and to specify the general descriptions found in the ABE and the NF. However, the ABE and NF give some explicit descriptions of attributes as well, the ABE states:

‘The wide streets, planted with grass and shaded by suriyas, are lined with houses, each with its own garden and an open verandah supported by columns’.

Therefore, one can consider a house with its own garden and an open verandah supported by columns as one of the attributes in Galle Fort, expressing its Outstanding Universal Value. This is confirmed by the Nomination File, as stating:
'Long rows of single-storied houses with terracotta roofs sloping down from the central ridge towards the streets supported by rounded brick or timber columns bordered the tree lined streets. These columns created a verandah which separated the house from the street. (…) The entrance door which is placed centrally in the façade is the main access into the house and the central courtyard.'

Thus, the Advisory Body Evaluation by ICOMOS and the Nomination File of the States Party (documentary inventory), includes several (implicit and explicit) attributes. One of the main attributes which is mentioned explicitly in both documents is the ‘open verandah supported by columns’ (figure 3), on which we will elaborate in the following test case.

7.2 Test case

Since it is mentioned explicitly in both the ABE and the NF, and because it is one of the main attributes which determines the streetscape in Galle Fort, the previously identified attribute “open verandah supported by columns” is used here as an example, in order to illustrate how fieldwork will complement the results found in the documents.
The amount of ‘open verandahs supported by columns’ existing at the time of inscription on the WHL, as well as the state in which they were at that time will be determined\(^{18}\) and mapped. This map will contain all buildings within the Fort, in which the attribute is highlighted.

By means of assessing its presence and its level of integrity and authenticity the amount of ‘open verandahs supported by columns’ still existing today, has also been inventoried. This physical inventory has been done by mapping, photography and sketching. This has resulted in another urban map in which the remaining amount of the attribute is highlighted.

When comparing both maps into a third map, the difference in the amount of ‘open verandahs supported by columns’ can be observed and conclusions can be drawn on their endanger level.

From the first exploratory oral inventories with the employees of the Department of Archaeology (DA) and the Galle Heritage Foundation (GHF), stakeholders concerned with the policy and management regarding developments within the fort, the preliminary conclusions can be drawn that a large percentage of these verandahs is purposely being shut by the private owners, in order to meet their social need of privacy.\(^{19}\) (figure 4)

\(^{18}\) Ancient Ceylon: The Conservation of the Galle Fort and its environs
\(^{19}\) Exploratory oral inventory with stakeholder DA & GHF, November 15\(^{th}\) 2010.
Besides that, the Periodic Report of 2003 by the State Party of Sri Lanka states as well that “an increase of unauthorized changes either in use or in its architectural appearance, [have been] altering the streetscapes within the Fort. This could very well be a reference to verandahs, although it is not made specific.

Further physical inventories shall sustain the conclusions on the authenticity and integrity of the attribute “open verandahs supported by columns”. For now, the preliminary statement is that so far these unauthorized changes, closing down the verandahs, seem to be resulting in a decrease of authenticity and integrity of the attribute, negatively affecting the ‘aesthetical value’ and thus, on the OUV of the historic centre of Galle.

Further research could also try to find out whether there are more reasons for private owners to close the verandah of their house, besides the social need for more privacy. And, to examine whether stakeholders concerned with the policy and management regarding developments within the fort, recognize this developments as a threat to the OUV of Galle Fort and whether they have nowadays sufficient and adequate regulations, to stop those unauthorized changes.

Based upon this research it is to be expected that in the future it will become possible to draw more conclusions on how policies and management could deal in a better and more efficient way with this problem in order to meet the evolving needs of the local community, as well as, not adversely impact the OUV; in other words, develop their World Heritage city sustainably.

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20 See footnote 13
References


Figures
Figure 1: http://wajiragalle.com/ (December 15, 2010)
Figure 2: Boxem and Fuhren, November 2010
Figure 3: Boxem and Fuhren, December 2010
Figure 4: Boxem and Fuhren, December 2010