

H@V - What's past is prologue

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What's past is prologue

Nov 04, 2014

What's past is prologue [1]

These days are sort of peculiar for me. Currently, I am writing up the last chapters of my PhD thesis on heritage management in historic urban landscapes; not at my home university, which is [Eindhoven University of Technology](#)(NL), but at [Durham University](#)(UK), where I am guest lecturing on the [MA programme on International Cultural Heritage Management](#).

I must say, Durham is a very nice place to be! [Durham Castle and Cathedral](#) has been inscribed in the World Heritage list since I was four years old (1986). This small city is as inspiring as it is beautiful. It is autumn, and while the leaves are turning red and yellow and the evenings get gloomier, the views on the cathedral and the walks along the riverbanks are just amazing if you ask me ([have a look at some of my pictures here](#)). Those walks help me focus and clear my head, but they're not what I am here for – I am here to write, write, write....! So here I am, at the “Bill Bryson Library”, trying not to get distracted by the amazing collection of books that surrounds me, writing – my PhD mostly, and this blog for now.

My PhD research finds its roots in an on-going paradox in urban management: how do we conserve and develop at the same time? Conservation policies and theories have changed over the past century. Naturally, heritage management is a cultural practice as much as anything we as humans undertake. Thus, as our ideas and values change, so does the practice of heritage management. The landscape-based approach is a recent attempt to reconcile conservation and development; by redefining conservation as ‘the management of change’, and integrating heritage management into the larger planning frameworks. Over the past decades, UNESCO has been developing guidelines for such an approach, which resulted in the [Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape](#) (HUL). The *historic urban landscape* is defined by UNESCO (2011) as “the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting”. The accompanying approach is then a “comprehensive and integrated approach for the identification, assessment, conservation and management of historic urban landscapes within an overall sustainable development framework”. This HUL approach is holistic; it aims at an urban scale, and considers all urban resources, tangible and intangible, as valuable. Based on the values ascribed to these, positive or negative, decisions can be made on what the acceptable amount of change is. The underlying idea is that heritage can foster development; it can be used as a driver to build sustainable and resilient cities while fully acknowledging that change is in the very nature of every living city. Change can have very different forms though — even conservation is a form of change. In our [research programme](#), we believe that as long as we as a society value the past, either for what it looks like or what it represents to us, we will make an effort to retain what reminds us of it in our lives. We do this because we believe it will make our lives better and it will provide the generations to come with a past as well.

Now, the main question in my research is very practical and applied: how do we know if a city manages change in an holistic way? Are they integrating heritage management and urban development frameworks? To reveal this, I developed an assessment framework, using a methodology derived from evaluation research (a multi-criteria evaluation matrix to be precise). I developed this framework using a standardised list of definitions based on the evolution of heritage concepts. I deduced these from international guidelines on urban heritage management by analysing them, asking: *what* is proposed as heritage, *why* can something be heritage, *who* is to be involved, *how* is it recommended to be managed. Without bothering you with further details ([there's papers for that if you're interested](#)) this is a tool to analyse policy, preferably in a workshop setting. We tested it in Amsterdam (NL), with a group of policy makers from both heritage and urban departments in 2014. The outcomes are both qualitative (discussion) and quantitative (the answers in the framework); combined they provide great input for further discussion on heritage management. Do the current approaches still match the current values? By using a standardised list, we can reveal changes in time or differences between cities. As our ideas and values continue to differ, change, and develop, so will this standardised list, and it should. It's a way to create more insights on why we are managing our heritage the way we are. We need to continue to reconsider and redirect the policies involved in (urban) heritage management, to make sure they continue to protect what we value, and reflect who we are.

With this in mind, I look forward to my future in the field of heritage studies and to discussing heritage values and the value of heritage with all of you, as we are doing in the H@V JPI project —but first I will stay in Durham for a bit, to enjoy the scenery and finish my thesis.

- Loes Veldpaus

[1] Quotation from *The Tempest*, a play by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written in 1610–11

One Response to “What’s past is prologue”



1. *masi* says:
November 5, 2014 at 9:11 am

Very nice blog, Loes!
Have fun in Durham, Masi

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