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Close to 300 cities, which illustrate the world's cultural achievements in their diversity are inscribed on the World Heritage List and protected under the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (commonly known as the World Heritage Convention). This international legal instrument, ratified by 172 States as at the end of June 2002, not only aims to protect the landmarks of the history of the world but to serve in exemplifying the importance of integrating the conservation of heritage as part of the development process. The objective of the Convention to safeguard cultural and natural heritage for future generations, to ensure that the achievements of the past will foster new creativity in the future, can be considered the essence of sustainability.

Any city's future must be anchored in its individual identity. Its "urban heritage" must be the starting point for the development of an urban policy. This heritage and its accumulation – the history of the city, its neighbourhoods and its residents must be understood to be the force for its future. But the relationship between heritage, the city and development is not yet fully taken into account in urban planning and development actions. In much of Europe the post-war reconstruction of the 1950s and into the 1960s was marked by considerations of functionality and hygiene, historic centres with their insalubrious housing were destroyed and the narrow streets widened to accommodate for increasing vehicular traffic in the name of modernity. Urban extensions met the new housing needs dictated by the demographic growth consuming more and more land hitherto used for agriculture or provided natural habitat for wildlife. Similar phenomena followed in Asia and Latin America, and in varying form also in parts of Africa.

The uncontrolled frenzy of construction, land speculation, massive rural to urban migration have provoked ecological, aesthetic and cultural disasters right to the historic heart of the cities. Small and medium size cities, organically developed in harmony with its natural environment based on human scale have been increasingly abandoned in the exodus of its inhabitants flowing into the megalopolis of anonymity.

Western Europe awakened in the 1960s to the need to save the historic urban fabric surrounding their monuments, leading to policies of conservation or safeguarding zones. But they remained exceptions becoming “museum districts” for official representation, despite a few cases where the social fabric was consciously maintained. Construction of new housing compounds, often within industrial zones through land conversion resulting in urban sprawls occurred at the expense of neglecting the existing city. This process, supported with force by the logic of economic growth not only led to the destruction of the historic urban identity but in the absence of creating new cultural references in the growing urban world.

Everywhere in the world, particularly in the cities of Asia, Latin America and Africa subjected to heavy demographic pressure, an urbanisation of a non-distinctive international model developed. In the city centres the historic urban pattern which recount the past are being destroyed one after another to fit the international norms for vehicular circulation. The historic centres of European cities and those of many Asian and Latin American countries are increasingly catering for office space and for up-market commerce. The historic centres thus “conserved” are no longer the centre of the traditional habitats, nor the place of encounter of the inhabitants, leading to the abandonment of local commerce, schools and other social infrastructure. The spirit of place, that gives the city its soul, is being replaced by artificial historicity as an enclave of historic buildings void of its inhabitants.

Is there an alternative to this form of modernism based purely on technical logic fed by property speculation? Ensuring salubrity, urban mobility, decent housing, neighbourhood commerce, local health care and education in the historic centre as well as in new settlements are possible by placing the cultural dimension of development in the forefront of an urban policy based on mixed-use and social equity.

UNESCO’s response to the Habitat Global Plan of Action to meet the challenges of providing “adequate shelter for all” and “sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world” has been to “**humanize the city**”. The ***Programme for the Safeguarding and Development of World Heritage Cities*** was launched in 1996 by UNESCO to focus on capacity-building of the local authorities in the management of public spaces and improvement of the housing stock in the historic centres. Based on the recognition of the ubiquitous role of culture in the quality of life, this Programme supports the local authorities of the internationally renown cultural cities of the world to promote social equity, through exchange and dialogue to strengthen the city’s identity grounded in its plurality and diversity. Hence for heritage to serve as a vector for sustainable development.

Pilot projects developed by UNESCO World Heritage Centre include the Revitalization of Fatih District of Istanbul (Turkey), the rehabilitation of privately-owned historic houses through social housing funding schemes, financed by the European Union. The project also foresees the rehabilitation of several historic buildings as neighbourhood social facilities such as a reading centre, women's centre, out-patient health centre and transformation of vacant lots into public squares and children's play ground. For the first time, the Turkish Government's social housing fund would be used to rehabilitate existing housing stock in the historic centre rather than for the construction of high-rise low-rent residential buildings in the urban periphery.

Likewise, in Hue (Vietnam), as part of the effort to promote adherence to conservation regulations, a subsidy and micro-credit scheme was developed with the support of the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (CDC) of France based on the reimbursement capacity of the inhabitants. This was part of a three-year partnership programme (1997-2000) between the French local authority Lille Métropole and the provincial authority of Thua Thien-Hue, established by UNESCO. The involvement of the schools of Architecture of Lille and of Hue have enabled the participation of some 150 students of Hue to work on the urban heritage inventory which served in the revision of urban regulations. The Italian city of Torino and the Torino Polytechnic University joined this partnership in 2000 contributing their expertise in urban management. Small-scale urban design projects to enhance understanding of the urban morphology of the citadel of Hue, designed in accordance with the principles of the Chinese imperial capital are also underway. The conservation and development of the beautiful town of Hue, planning for its new urban extensions as well as the enhancement of its natural setting along the Perfume River will continue to be a challenge in the years to come.

Luang Prabang, the former capital of Laos under the Kingdom of the Thousand Elephants, set along the banks of the forceful yet serene Mekong River, offered another pilot case – to demonstrate the importance of preserving the urban settlement pattern to maintain traditional community life. The World Heritage values of this town lies in the juxtaposition of the Lao village pattern and the late-19th century French colonial form in the lush vegetation marked by the urban wetlands, as well as in the harmonious merger of the Lao timber houses and the later colonial architecture. The atmosphere of this town imbued with the spirituality of the many neighbourhood temples is enriched by the living heritage of the many ethnic groups inhabiting the surrounding upland regions descending to market their arts and crafts. Financial support from the European Union and the French Development Agency, channelled through the decentralized cooperation programme established between

the French city of Chinon and Luang Prabang under the aegis of UNESCO World Heritage Centre has enabled the enactment of protective legislation on heritage, the creation of an inter-ministerial committee on heritage and a local heritage commission, as well as in the realisation of many urban infrastructure upgrading. The novelty of the project lies in the participation of the inhabitants in the protection of the cultural and natural resources of the town including its urban wetlands. The Heritage House (Maison du patrimoine), a community advisory service of the provincial authority, provides free consultations on housing renovation and sanitation facilities, as well as conservation expertise to public works departments to ensure that development projects do not undermine the cultural assets of the town. The integrated urban development strategy based on heritage protection has benefited from numerous partners which include the Francois Rabelais University of Tours, the Cites Unies-France and Hofheim (Germany).

Protection and development of the ethnic minority villages will soon be supported through the establishment of a regional natural park of Luang Prabang with technical support from the Regional Park of Loire, Anjou and Touraine. Working towards the recognition of the areas as a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB), the aim is to promote sustainable tourism for the socio-economic development of the local community by managing both heritage resources of the region through an equitable urban-rural exchange and linkages.

Transparency and accountability are being promoted in all pilot projects through training in open tender procedures in all public and private works carried out under the pilot projects, for example. Decision-making processes involving the local authorities and representatives of the civil society have aimed to inculcate the principles of participatory governance. The operational modalities of these and other pilot projects based on partnerships have drawn its strength from region-to-region, city-to-city, university-to-university, park-to-park alliances, and in some cases even on hospital-to-hospital linkages.

Other pilot projects are also underway. They include Vigan and Manila in the Philippines; Bhaktapur and Patan of Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), Bangkok (Thailand), Lahore (Pakistan), the Six Canal Towns of Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces of China, Havana (Cuba), Saint Louis (Senegal), Porto Novo (Benin) and Georgetown (Guyana), and others are in preparation. Rather than imposing a model, the urban policy promoted in each city is based on the specificity of its natural and cultural heritage and urban problems. The project in Vigan, focuses on the restoration of its splendid timber mansions of Spanish Baroque influence and the rehabilitation of its public spaces while protecting its Spanish colonial urban pattern, the only surviving in Asia. In Manila, focus is put on enhancing linkage between the intramuros historic centre with the rest of

the megacity that Manila has become. In the historic towns and villages in the Kathmandu Valley, control on new construction through the implementation of urban development regulations will continue to be the main challenge, along with exemplary conservation of historic buildings. In Lahore, the rehabilitation of the world-renown Shalimar Gardens representing the Mughal landscape architecture and control of illegal construction in its vicinity will be the major axe of UNESCO's action. The feasibility of establishing a mixed public-private company for the management of the Shalimar Gardens will be another element of our programme. In Rattankosin district of Bangkok, design work provided by UNESCO has transformed the once cluttered parking lots into five wonderful public spaces where the children and the aged can now enjoy. Conservation and tourism development based on inter-communal co-operation have gone hand-in-hand in the six canal towns of the Lower Yangtze River in China, where the national and international visitors can enjoy the gentle rhythm of life escaping from the hectic speed of Shanghai less than an hour away.

In Georgetown, Guyana, planning is underway for the conservation and development of the town, whose urban morphology is marked by the grid pattern of the plantation system. The challenge is how to give centrality to a town whose form has been dictated by the multi-ethnic population each with their own neighbourhood. An urban renewal project focusing on the enhancement of the central market is under preparation.

In both St Louis of Senegal and Porto Novo in Benin, particular attention is needed to manage the urban development pressures in order to preserve the fragile and largely immaterial base of their heritage characterized by the shared heritage between the local African communities and that of their colonial occupants. Porto Novo's wealth in the Afro-Brazilian architecture bought back by the slaves returning from Brazil add to the heritage impregnated by the spirituality of voodism, and the superimposition of the urban form and architecture of the French colonial administration. Both towns require a proactive approach in accommodating for increased housing and facilities with projections of growth, on the one hand from tourism and related commerce and, on the other from the installation government services.

Housing needs in many of these World Heritage cities are met exclusively through the rehabilitation of the existing buildings, while in others, new constructions are promoted as in-fills between the existing. The modernisation of collective and private transport systems and road networks to ensure urban mobility has been in all these cities and historic centres, a major challenge, primarily due to pressures from major contractors to impose industrial standards, rather than to customize and to cater for the difference. Resisting change is not the goal of conservation, rather how to manage change is the aim within the overall

objective of an environmentally sustainable and culturally sensitive and socially just development. The conservation of historic monuments, and of historic urban centres has no meaning in themselves. It is only when they serve to “humanize the city” through enriching the cultural and social dimension of its inhabitants and its visitors that heritage stands a chance of being protected.

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