

Editorial

Urban Heritage, Planning and Design and Development

Tigran Haas ^{1,*} and Krister Olsson ²

¹ Department of Urban Planning and Environment, School of Architecture and the Built Environment, KTH—Royal Institute of Technology, 100 44 Stockholm, Sweden

² Conservation Department, Gothenburg University, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden; krister.olsson@conservation.gu.se

* Correspondence: tigran.haas@abe.kth.se

Urban heritage is increasingly expected to contribute to future urban development, not least in declining cities that have experienced drastic economic, social and spatial structural change. This increased interest can be regarded as a response to changing prerequisites for urban development during the last few decades, including economic and cultural globalization, de-industrialization, a diminishing public sector, increased mobility, and tough territorial competition. Consequently, societal development challenges contemporary heritage management and traditional ways of working with heritage issues. Urban heritage has become an essential measure in many branding and development strategies, aiming at attracting new inhabitants, visitors, and investors.

The world is becoming predominantly urban in this age of hypersocial, cultural, and economic globalization. New Geographies are emerging, bringing about rapid rural migrations, new economic opportunities, and enhanced global mobility. Cities have spatially expanded in a dramatic fashion, resulting in urban transformations and structural changes, as well as posing new challenges to their character and identity. Several ideas have influenced the practice of urban planning and design to address large-scale structural change. In particular, past urban design ideals have been revisited and put forward to solve contemporary social, economic, and environmental problems, where modern planning and design are believed to have failed. A stimulating question lies in using urban heritage and planning and design measures to revive cities, communities, and neighbourhoods. Can urban heritage and urban planning and design be viewed as effective measures for the reinvention of cities and towns that experience structural change?

Our aim with this Special Issue was to put forward some ideas we have investigated and discussed in our research in the last decade together with the invited array of authors. This research is based on and draws directly from texts published in various contexts. In essence, our introduction to this Special Issue is about ideas on urban heritage, urban planning and design, and how heritage and planning and design can contribute to urban development. This introduction ends with concluding remarks about the “designing of the past”, i.e., the role of the past in future urban development.

Urban heritage is increasingly expected to contribute to urban development, not least in cities that have experienced drastic economic, social and spatial structural change. Several ideas have influenced urban planning and design to address these large-scale structural challenges (e.g., New Urbanism, Re-Urbanism). A stimulating question lies in using urban heritage and planning and design measures—Heritage Urbanism—to revive cities, towns, and communities. This question is discussed in five articles following our editorial introduction. These five articles in this Special Issue scrutinize the question from empirical viewpoints, and, in particular, from different theoretical perspectives: heritage management; place branding/marketing; urban design; and infrastructure development. Moreover, based on various theoretical perspectives, the articles address the issue of citizen input to urban heritage and urban development management. Out of five articles, we draw particular attention to “Heritage Urbanism” by Mladen Obad Šćitaroci and Bojana Bojanić



Citation: Haas, T.; Olsson, K. Urban Heritage, Planning and Design and Development. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 12359. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151612359>

Received: 8 August 2023

Accepted: 11 August 2023

Published: 14 August 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Obad Šćitaroci, which is a keystone article when it comes to defining Heritage Urbanism, as presented in this Special Issue. The standard method employed in urban heritage management is identifying and protecting monuments, specific objects, and well-defined areas that are especially valuable from a historical perspective. Hence, management is based on expert values within academic fields traditionally concerned with urban heritage, i.e., art history, architecture, and archaeology. However, as expert values, they are decided independently of values held by other interests, the latter often having entirely different perspectives concerning the urban environment: for example, perspectives held by urban and regional planners, real estate owners and developers, and, presumably, local citizens. In that sense, the role of current public heritage management in urban planning and design is ambiguous.

The urban environment or landscape is a complex system of recognized monuments, modest buildings, and other structures. Consequently, the environmental context substantially defines a particular structure or object within the system. Each object has an external impact on the surroundings, which can be negative or positive, and will indirectly impact the understanding and valuation of adjacent objects. In this way, the surroundings, neighbourhood, district, or city add and compound the value of each object. A vast majority of the structures in the urban environment do not qualify for preservation activities in traditional heritage management, i.e., as monuments or well-defined conservation areas, and can be referred to as the general urban landscape, which includes a diverse set of artifacts that are spatially and socially linked. From this point of departure, it seems reasonable to consider the urban landscape as a totality in heritage management, and not only monuments and conservation areas but also modest buildings and the urban landscape as urban heritage.

Thus, the view of urban heritage put forward here is a systems view, which means that the interplay between different parts of the system characterizes the urban landscape as heritage, rather than different monuments and conservation areas, which heritage experts have identified. Consequently, urban heritage is seen as a system encompassing defined conservation areas and heritage objects and tangible and intangible phenomena that link various objects and areas together, thus defining their value in a broader setting. Urban heritage, as the valued tangible and intangible legacy of the past but also a resource for the present and source of capital of the future, should represent a crucial asset for cities, not just in terms of place branding but also as much more of a systemic approach to everyday life, tourism, and investment. To attain and retain sustainable urban heritage, cities, governments, and local communities must create and nurture buildings, objects, spaces, places, contexts, and practices that have embedded meaning and value, are filled with historical narratives, and are enriched with local cultures and social interfaces.

The systems view provides a foundation to define urban heritage as an infrastructure and, hence, a public good, comparable with other infrastructures as a frame for people's daily activities and business development. Infrastructure is traditionally associated with technical systems, such as roads and railroads. However, a road, for example, is not in itself an infrastructure but has the potential to function as an infrastructure. Hence, the actual use (broadly) is significant for defining built structures as infrastructure. In sum, regarding urban heritage as an infrastructure underlines its potential role in urban social and economic development, i.e., as a resource for people's everyday activities and business development.

Urban design is not a straightforward concept, and there is no commonly accepted definition of urban design in academia or practice. In its most straightforward interpretation, urban design can be described as architecture on a larger scale and within a broader context or as a bridge between architectural design and urban planning. Urban design connects many disciplines: architecture, planning, landscape architecture, and engineering. Urban planning can be defined as a political, economic, and social 'framework' that has direct and indirect consequences for technical and political processes. It is primarily concerned with the welfare of citizens; water and land use management; shaping

and composing—designing—the urban environment, including transportation and (tele) communication networks; and ecology, through the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Planning can be distinguished as a process-oriented activity, and design as a product-oriented activity. Therefore, urban planning and design is a cross-border field specializing in static and dynamic urban conditions. Dynamic processes are characterized by the flow of people and their interactions, which give kinetic energy to the environment. The dynamic defines how we look at our spatial landscapes and experience a particular urban condition and context. Static processes are defined by their permanence of assemblage, i.e., the creation of stable built forms and shapes—the streets, buildings, squares and open spaces that define the environment—to provide a stable reference system and a performance structure. One cannot exist without the other, and both permeate space, place, and time. Throughout the last three decades, some ideals have influenced the practice of urban planning and design. In particular, five different ideals dominate today's urban planning and design discourse:

- Re-Urbanism, which could be described as being oriented towards constant urbanity, addressing the repair of the urban fabric in particular;
- Green Urbanism, which is focused on ecological sensibility;
- New Urbanism, which, among other things, is based on a neighbourhood concept and walkability;
- Post Urbanism, which could be labelled as generic hybridity with a focus on reinvention and restructuring;
- Everyday Urbanism, which could be described as vernacular spatiality with a bottom-up approach.

Ideas about contemporary and future society, and, hence, approaches to the past, are expressed differently in these five urban planning and design ideals. For example, Post Urbanism connects to the idea that the past has no real relevance for future development. It is based on a rejection of, or freedom from, traditional ideas about what characterizes the urban environment and urban planning and design. Instead, it emphasizes, in particular, architectural monuments and iconic buildings that claim to be innovative and to express a new era. This directly reflects the heritage of the future, which is being created in cities and towns by 'starchitecture'—new iconic flagship architecture. On the other hand, new urbanism is based on ideals and qualities from the time before modernist planning and is trying to recreate these qualities in contemporary urban planning and design. It includes mixed-use ideas and emphasizes public spaces and environments suitable for pedestrians. Moreover, in everyday urbanism, emphasis is put on the present; thus, ideas about the future and approaches to the past are not important at all. Everyday urbanism can be connected to the idea that society is the unintended consequence of peoples' actions rather than urban planning and design efforts.

What is needed is something similar, but that includes a discussion about urban heritage in urban planning and design, aimed at urban development and acknowledging urban heritage as an infrastructure. Traditional methods in heritage management are based on expert values, which are assumed to correspond with values in society at large. Generally, it is reasonable to assume that there is a common view among various interests that conservation activities are worthwhile. However, this is not self-evident in a specific case in which concrete values of different kinds have to be weighed against each other. Furthermore, the traditional way of working, i.e., stressing historical monuments and well-defined conservation areas, implies that modest buildings and the general urban landscape will be neglected, and, thus, the systems view of urban heritage is not acknowledged. To include a broader view of urban heritage in urban development, it is first necessary to examine social and economic values rather than historical ones defined by experts. Thus, the question is how to define urban heritage as an infrastructure and a public good based on how people and businesses use and benefit from the urban environment. Additionally, for heritage sites and 'historic urban landscapes' to develop into a more robust mechanism

in emerging urbanism, they will inevitably have to be part of a universal approach to urban heritage.

In practice, the urban environment can be associated with different, and sometimes competing, value dimensions, such as real estate and historical values. These values are generally based on self-interests or expert perspectives and, consequently, do not necessarily reflect a broader view of urban heritage defined as an infrastructure. However, in the context of our short editorial and accompanying papers in this Special Issue, we need to see and understand that urban heritage—with its physical and social qualities—is situated in a spatial continuum. In our understanding, urban heritage is the interplay between different features in the spatial continuum and their relational meanings; therefore, it becomes a vital value category in contemporary urban planning and design aimed at urban development.

Profound and evident changes in city skylines and urban spatial boundaries, transforming the notion of urban heritage as we know it, are often accompanied by more subtle transformations that aim to preserve the present but also promote the past against competing demands for space in cities. As heritage managers, urban planners, and designers, we must be mindful of how the urban landscapes and structures we provide, and the built objects we conserve or design, affect people and spaces both directly and indirectly. Such interventions form habits and create ways of life; they allow users to pursue individual happiness and create relations with others when embedded in space and time. However, we must equally recognize how forces of structural change contribute to shaping the urban landscape. The resulting urban heritage affects people's urban experiences, stimulating or limiting how people live their everyday lives and providing opportunities or restrictions for business development. In the end, it is all about “designing the past.” In any given situation and context, the dominant urban planning and design ideal will define the specific urban heritage and, thus, influence how we will understand the past—today and in the future. We invite you to discover and dwell on these issues in this unique Special Issue on urban heritage and planning and design.

Author Contributions: T.H. and K.O. equally contributed to the writing of this paper in all its aspects, especially in conceptualization and originality of the idea. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: The authors wish to thank the late Emeritus Douglas Kelbaugh, former Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and late Emeritus Gregory Ashworth, from the Department of Geography at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands, for constructive discussion, advice and inspiration for the subject at hand.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.