Mundus Urbano: (Re)thinking urban development

Luana Xavier Pinto Coelho / Lorena Melgaço
Silva Marques / Regina Orvañanos Murguía (eds.)

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Ugur, Lauren

Global urbanisation is one of the most dynamic and challenging processes being faced by the contemporary world, as more and more people join the ranks as urban citizens each day. We increasingly live, work and interact within our rapidly changing urban environments, boasting as much challenge as they do potential. It is the unpredictability of the modern urban milieu, which fascinates us most and forces us to recognise opportunity in developing innovative, practical and of course sustainable development solutions for the future of our professional playground – the city.

(Re)thinking Urban Development is a publication developed in the spirit of innovation, originality and advancement, as the perspectives of interdisciplinary, multi-national students are drawn together to produce a new look at some of the most current issues testing our urban experiences.

The requirement to re-think implies inadequacy and this is exactly what our young, internationally experienced graduates aim to address. The identification of what previously went wrong, what may have worked well and what might work better in the future is what the process of re-thinking involves and the challenges with which we, as urban development planners, are being faced provides the physical reality that new and innovative approaches to urban development are crucial in order to create and develop cities in which we all can and want to live.

The ever prominent and increasing challenges facing cities throughout the world calls not just for a process of re-thinking but also for a re-structuring and re-education on how these forceful challenges can be approached within very diverse urban settings, across the so-called developed and "developing" world. A re-thinking of urban development and the ways in which we approach planning obstacles is only possible through pioneering the education of young professionals from a diverse range of backgrounds resulting in a far broader range of views and ideas that contribute to developing more workable solutions than ever before. It is when these differing and sometimes opposing concepts and experiences come together that highly innovative solutions to incredibly complicated urban puzzles can be realised in order to ensure, not just workable, but innovative and sustainable solutions.

Ours is no longer a world in which it suffices to blindly replicate previously successful examples of urban development. Dynamic, contextual shifts, constantly being driven by various global forces are ubiquitous and need to be both understood in contextual isolation as well as part of the global "bigger picture" so to say. Through publications such as this, our alumni work towards bridging the gap between an interdisciplinary education and the variety of practical challenges existent in urban contexts. This book encompasses such topics and addresses such challenges in a variety of urban settings as their academic research aims to present viable conclusions, drawing on real and very current urban challenges.

(Re)thinking Urban Development is a starting point for the process of experienced graduates to explore, express and implement their ideas aimed towards addressing urban challenges with a new perspective and creativity. Some solutions will be outrageously successful while others will need to once again be re-thought and re-moulded but it is this kind of publication that forms the basis and sews the seeds from which the future of urban development and planning as a profession will evolve.

On a personal note, I am honoured to have been a part of this publication process, not just because I believe that re-thinking what we do is a fundamental part in developing our purpose but because I have had the experience of being able to work closely over the past couple of years with such an inspirational and motivated group of international professionals whom have brought with them a diverse wealth of knowledge that I would not have been able to benefit from in any other setting.

As the 2009-2011 Mundus Urbano group moves forward I wish each and every one of them only the best for successful, productive careers. Whatever path you choose, keep in mind that, as Gandhi once said, you must *be the change* you wish to see in the world.

Mundus Urbano: (re) thinking urban development

CHAPTER I

SOCIO-CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND URBAN SPACE

Prof. Dr. Amos Rapoport
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SOCIO-CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND URBAN SPACE: INTRODUCTION

Prof. Dr. Rapoport, Amos[1]

The growth and development of any field depends on continuity. The future of Environment-Behaviour Studies (EBS) generally and culture-environment relations specifically depends on whether and how students will carry on the work of the past 40 years. It is therefore encouraging and gratifying that the students of the Erasmus Mundus Master course have undertaken the present project. I am delighted to have been asked to write this introduction on culture and urban space.

I begin with a few important general points I have made previously. First, 'culture' as such is too abstract and general to be used – it is not possible to relate it to the environment. To make is usable, to operationalise it, it needs to be dismantled into specific expressions and components. Note that dismantling is a general process and that 'environment' (among other concepts) also needs to be dismantled.

In the use of 'culture,' a major dismantling dealing with its excessive abstractness considers social variables separately as a set of less abstract, more concrete and potentially observable social expressions. It follows that the term 'socio-cultural' may not be helpful. The social expressions of culture such as kinship, status, identity, institutions, etc., unlike culture, can be considered separately and related to specific aspects of environment (also dismantled, e.g. as the organisation of space, time, meaning and communication; systems of settings; cultural landscapes consisting of fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed features; etc.).

In response to the excessive breadth and generality of culture, it needs to be dismantled into ever more specific components such as world views, values, ideals, images, schemata, meanings, norms, standards, rules, expectations and especially lifestyles and activity systems which can relatively easily be related to aspects of the environment.

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These steps are, I believe, essential in order to make 'culture' usable, i.e. in making it operational.

It should be noted that most of the literature on culture-environment relations (including my earlier work) has been concerned primarily with arguing for the importance of culture, trying to demonstrate it through examples, mainly cross-cultural comparisons of differences among groups and environments and trying to explain this variability, e.g. by dismantling activities and emphasizing the importance of their latent aspects (i.e. meaning) as very important functions.

As a result, culture may sometimes have been overemphasised and the impression created that it was the only (or the most important) variable. This was never the intention, this being as unlikely as the view that culture has no impact and can, therefore, be ignored.

At that point this was reasonable because culture was neglected in EBS, as was also the case in other fields (e.g. economics, business, medicine, psychiatry, the military, etc.). These fields have also become aware of the relevance of culture.

Clearly, its importance is somewhere between these two extremes, its importance generally or, in my given case, is an empirical question. It may (and probably does) vary with type of environment, scale, for different groups, different situations, in different contexts, etc.

This needs further research and I therefore turn to some suggestions about the nature of such future research emphasizing aspects that have been neglected.

This research needs to fill a major gap, not only in culture-environment relations but EBS generally – the lack of synthesis, conceptual frameworks and theory. Without these the wheel is constantly being reinvented, there is no progress and the mass of scattered empirical work is difficult if not impossible to use and may actually become counterproductive. With their development much material can be compressed and become manageable. In doing such research it is imperative not only to synthesise existing work but constantly be aware of, refer to and use new material and developments not only in EBS but in many (new) disciplines/fields, which become relevant at some level of abstraction, which conceptual frameworks and theory both make possible and demand.

I pointed out earlier that work on culture and environment emphasised differences and variability. It is important to realise that this variability may not be as extreme as it seems, which also makes culture more useable. There is much recent work in a number of fields that suggests that there are human universals, there is human nature and that even apparently variable aspects may be the expression of constants. If that is indeed the case, and I believe it is, it reduces the "search space," makes it easier to study and apply culture and needs to be incorporated into any research programme.

Related to this and the empirical study of the role of culture is the need to consider the relative importance of culture and other variables in EBS. This, in turn, implies a new kind of comparative work (which remains essential) moving from cross-cultural studies to studies of how all variables interact, making culture-environment relations an integral part of EBS.

In other words, there is a need for research that examines the joint effects of culture and other variables (economics, technology, politics, perception, cognition and way-finding, climate, resources, etc.) and their relative importance. It is encouraging that, in a way (albeit implicitly and not jointly), this book is aware of this. There is a need to begin to build more comprehensive, realistic, multi-variable models emphasizing the joint effects of all relevant variables.

In reviewing the literature on culture and environment, it is striking that almost all the work deals with housing, the residential environment. This was reasonable as a starting point because housing is the most responsive to culture and it is useful to begin with clear-cut examples. It is, however, important to begin to study the non-residential environment. The few attempts of which I am aware (a systematic review would be useful) to relate culture to office buildings, universities, airports, hospitals, etc., mainly in terms of cultural identity, have not been successful. This is partly because they are new types of settings responding to new activities and requirements which by their nature are less variable.

It may, however be partly a matter of scale. Whereas office buildings may neither need nor be able to respond to cultural variables, there is evidence that culture may be important in how offices and other settings are organised. This also seems to be the case with settings within, e.g. consular offices and hospitals. In the latter, for example, patient rooms may be strongly related to culture whereas operating rooms, laboratories, etc. are not.

Note that housing, if properly defined for cross-cultural work as a system of settings within which certain systems of activities take place, begins to overlap with the urban environment. What I call the house-settlement system inevitably includes what may be considered the non-residential environment – neighbourhoods and settings within them, urban spaces, etc. This makes the study of urban environments a useful starting point as it 'straddles' the boundary between the residential and non-residential environments.

Scale may also play a role in the study of culture and the urban environment. It seems to be the case that, considered globally, cities seem to be becoming more alike as they seem to respond to images of modernity, economics, politics, technology (e.g. transportation), etc. This, however, is occurring at large scales. The urban landscape is a particular type of cultural landscape and can be understood in terms of frameworks and infill. It can be suggested that the former are similar or the same with no (or little) cultural impact. This also is an empirical question but, since people live in these smaller units, these may respond to culture.

It also seems that even in the case of housing there is increasing uniformity. In many countries, with development and increasing affluence (i.e. starting with elites) housing becomes more similar, with the suburban image dominating. This may be partly due to constraints more than wants. There are also cultural reversals as groups try to maintain or recapture their cultural identity. While the role of the urban environment in this needs research, I have hypothesised that the infill, the smaller urban units, can be variable, more traditional and respond to lifestyles, activities, etc. of inhabitants – of the many (and increasing) number of different groups that live in cities. It can further be suggested that, in this connection, the semi-fixed features of the environment (e.g. signs, neons, 'furnishing') play a major role. This demands open-endedness which is critical not only in the framework/infill at large scales but also in the infill itself. This then allows for modernisation in place in response to changing standards, cultural supportiveness as culture (or populations) change, the expressions of cultural identity, etc. Moreover, even as all these change, they will retain their variable local character. This view of the city also increases perceptual and experiential richness and complexity as one moves among these different smaller units.

This, combined with constancy, human universals, etc. makes possible learning (not copying) from traditional and spontaneous settlements. Learning from the full range of environments about which we know or can learn is essential. These are an invaluable resource, a record of how humans

have created and used environments, why and how, their successes and failures, the nature and reasons for differences and similarities. This resource has been neglected and could teach us much. It offers a most important area for research.

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CHAPTER I - SOCIO-CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND URBAN SPACE

HERITAGE FORGETTING-REMEMBER DYNAMICS IN LIBERIA'S HISTORIC CENTRE

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Abstract

This article reflects upon the socio-cultural meanings of urban heritage for the community of Liberia, Costa Rica in the context of a debate about the *Puente Real*'s conservation or demolition and replacement. The concept of heritage is discussed as a social construction, place-making process and identity building phenomenon, but also as an urban development matter that depends on political decisions.

The potential of inclusive heritage management of Liberia's Historic Centre through local participation is explored in workshops with local teenagers. This methodology is analysed and recommended as a complement to a value-centred approach.

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Introduction

Liberia's late colonial 49 block Historic Centre in Guanacaste, Costa Rica presents a controversial situation regarding Urban Heritage Management. While the local government proposes to replace the *Puente Real* (a historic 1907 bridge in the city of Liberia); the *Comandancia* (old military headquarters) is being restored and rehabilitated to become Guanacaste's Museum and Cultural Centre. In reaction to the Municipality's decision, some community members and cultural organisations have protested in opposition to the demolition of the bridge. Consequently, between 2009 and 2011 the *Puente Real* has been a topic of discussion in Costa Rican newspapers.

Contrasting bibliographic research (Landscape Urbanism, 2011) with site visits one can observe that the rapid economic growth the region has experienced for the last 10 to 20 years is expressed in the local culture and built environment. Some sites and monuments have been destroyed, many modified. Liberia's scenario leads one to question: does Urban Heritage in Liberia's Historic Centre still have a relevant meaning for the local community? Does the *Puente Real* have a meaning for the citizens of Liberia? Is it disappearing from the citizen's memory? If it is, why shouldn't it be replaced? Why does the development of a cultural centre at the *Comandancia* have population acceptance and government support while the *Puente Real* doesn't? Are these buildings relevant for the further urban development of Liberia?

Without disregarding professional and technical inputs to urban heritage management, this paper contrasts the meaning of urban heritage for Liberia's community with the local government's approach; in which the values and potential of urban heritage as raw material to construct local, regional and global identity is being overlooked. A critical discussion on the Historic Centre's management is complemented with the results of a consultation exercise to a specific segment of the citizens, a group of teenagers.

Understanding urban heritage

The multidisciplinary nature of heritage produces a wide range of definitions. Heritage in this paper is understood as a social construction (Prats, 1997). As a process instead of an object, a result of the continuous social attribution of symbolic meanings to an artistic, ethnologic, architectonic or intangible object from the past. Heritage exists in the present, it is not a memory, but rather the contemporary identities assigned to a memory by today's social

groups (Dormaels, 2010). However, heritage is also understood as a market product selected by demand criteria. Ashworth and Larkham (1994) define heritage as a commodified product that selects resources of the past to construct contemporary products that satisfy the socioeconomic demands of the population. This process of transforming selected resources into "products" is the *making of* heritage or *heritagisation*.

Both definitions view heritage as a contemporary social creation strongly determined by the present context and with the potential of acquiring and giving different meanings in the future. The monument, space or practice in the collective memory being interpreted as heritage or as a symbol of identity is simply the object that receives relevant meaning from the individuals. Whether heritage is a commodified product or an identity symbol depends on how and by whom it is interpreted.

Heritage, as a product of practices and processes of negotiation, shapes local identities while attributing meanings to an object or practice. Even though, a heritage process depends on political power, it is also on social demand. In today's society, *heritagisation* is a deliberate way in which culture is shaped (Prats, 2005; R. Mason, 2006).

Parallel to art in public spaces, heritage is now playing a more dynamic and interactive role in the urban scenarios. Conservation of towns and neighbourhoods over individual buildings becomes an urban planning matter and the treatment of historic places depends on land use priorities and decisions as well as the planning capacities of each community and its government.

In the particular case of urban landscapes, the inhabitants and visitors determine and are simultaneously influenced by the public spaces and buildings framing them. Heritage, just as art, cannot be interpreted without context, and context is always changing. Objects' meanings are defined all together by place, time, author or beholder (Bourdieu, 1979). As Vinken (2011, p.4) points out: "*Urban spaces are not merely the products of architectonic processes, of mutable social actions and attribution. Rather, they inform the social actions performed on and with them*".

Public space is the context where individuals attribute meanings through everyday experiences to objects and practices, a community influences the object and the object meanings are influenced simultaneously by the community. Tying this phenomenon with Setha Low's definition of place, as a space with cultural meaning that provides a scenario for social

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interaction and cultural processes to happen (Low, 1994); it can be affirm that *heritagisation* is actually a place making process where public spaces become meaningful heritage places.

Even though urban heritage is a public concern, its management is not always carried out by the community. Heritage is usually selected and activated by those with technical, administrative and political power. Therefore, a disconnection appears between those officially qualified to manage heritage and the protagonists of the space, those who attribute meanings to objects and practices. This gap is precisely what is generating conflict in Liberia.

Theories in both heritage and place propose that through participation and a value-centred approach the local needs and wants can become part of the selection and interpretation processes of heritage (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Including these approaches into the heritage management practice would not only guide the urban planning process but it would also nurture community identity and therefore multiply the local engagement with the general urban development.

Selection and activation of Liberia's heritage

Having set a theoretical base, one is now able to tackle the questions triggered by Liberia's controversies in order to answer the introductory inquiries. There is no doubt of the presence, in quality and quantity, of meaningful objects and practices in the central neighbourhoods of Liberia; however, it has not been fully valued by the local authorities nor by some of the property owners.

The 2001 official inventory (Centro de investigación y conservación del patrimonio cultural, 2001) identifies those constructions with certain values in Liberia. The inventory recognises only some of the values existing in the historic centre: architectonic, historic and environmental while disregarding citizen's usage of the space. By doing so, once again a gap is opened between the past and the present; the Cultural Heritage Research and Conservation Centre is only evaluating preceding characteristics of an object in opposition to contemporary values. With time the original intentions and lectures of an object dilute and transform. Buildings, sites and traditional practices contain several symbolic meanings for the community that go beyond the historic or aesthetic values identified by the research centre. Also in the official inventory, the evaluation of the heritage worth considers that the level of transformations influences the cultural meaning of an object. This