TO MAINTAIN INVISIBLE? THE CASE OF ICHERI SHEHER, BAKU

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Abstract

Actual conservation charters not reflect practically the “soul of place” phenomenon that is important for appropriateness and feasibility of the conservation programs in the sites of urban heritage.

Some attempts made by the author to raise the interest to the soul of place issue in the historic cities of former USSR countries are show that a possibility of its considering exists despite the resistance of convention conservation practice.

The Integrated Area Management Action Plan (IAMAP) for Icheri Sheher, the World Heritage site in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, included in the list of the World heritage in danger due to the vigorous redevelopment, was elaborated by international expert team with the author participation in 2006-2007 according to universal rules of the international urban conservation consulting.

The mental opportunity of creation of “another project” for this place more targeted to the genius loci’s understanding and preservation is discussed.

The development of methods of the soul of place investigation and the categories needed is in the very beginning only. Anyway it is stressed that the soul of place issue must become a significant useful component of urban conservation methodology and practice.

Key-words: The soul of place, genius loci, conservation methodology, heritage understanding and management

All the lanes are blind deaf-mute here, doors are not numbered and without mail boxes; even local mosques are in silence here for a long time, streets and houses are anxious about something invisible and unvoiced, which will, probably, appear and will be uttered one day behind this corner, beyond that turn, under that glazed balcony covered by the grape foliage… But when will it be – and where will you be that time? Afanasy Mamedov (Mamedov A., 2002).

Introduction

This article discusses how conservation charters and practice reflect the “soul of place” phenomenon in the sites of urban heritage, and in particular:

- was this phenomenon considered in the conservation charters;
- may an outer expert not deeply rooted in the object feel and define its “soul”;

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could this issue become a significant component of conservation methodology and practice in principle?

I will try to answer these questions using contemporary cases of urban conservation (or so called “reconstruction”) in post-soviet cities. I’d like to stress in particularly the case of Ichervi Sheher – the World Heritage site in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, where I worked on the elaboration of the Integrated Area Management Action Plan in 2006-2007 (IAMAP, 2007). I consider this case very instructive to think on the contradictions in the quadrangle “normative chartered approaches – chaotic and corrupted urban reality – conservation experts often outer for heritage sites – atmospheric and vulnerable soul of place” in the aspect of the weakness and oblivion of its last (fourth) corner.

![Mental "quadrangle" of contemporary urban restoration.](image1.png)

Various topics I’d like to approach have leaded me towards the concept of diversity (and to the seminar section of the same name). A diverse nature of the case chosen (Ichervi Sheher and the city of Baku are somewhere between Europe and Asia, Muslim and liberal worlds, tribalism, socialism and capitalism, richness and poverty, etc.), diversity of lives and deaths bonded in old urban milieu, diversity of images superimposed on the local substance, diversity of tools failed or succeeded to save the heritage – this is a mental environment of my article. Consequently I base my reasoning on the assumptions that not sole but diverse answers are relevant to tackle an issue of the soul of place and that this urban soul is diverse due to its multi-subjective nature.

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1 The ancient core of Baku – Ichervi Sheher (Walled City) of 21,5 ha was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2000: “Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah’s Palace and Maiden Tower. Built on a site that has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic, the Walled City of Baku reveals evidence of Zoroastrian, Sassanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian presence in cultural continuity. The Inner City (Ichervi Sheher) has preserved much of its 12th-century defensive walls. The 12th-century Maiden Tower (Giz Galasy) is built over earlier structures dating from the 7th to 6th centuries BC, and the 15th-century Shirvanshah’s Palace is one of the pearls of Azerbaijan architecture” (WHC Nomination Documentation). The site was transferred to the “black” list of the World heritage in danger due to the vigorous redevelopment in 2003.
One more important preposition is that a large collection of famous philosophical and theoretical works devoted to the issues of genius loci and the spirit or the soul of place is deliberately passed over in this article. It concentrates on the relationship between methodological approaches and real conservational processes but not on theory.

The article consists of three sections. The first section contains an observation of spiritual values’ reflection in the set of conservation charters and other official papers devoted to urban heritage. The second section discusses some examples of actual conservation practice indifferent to the soul of place question and some attempts made by the author to raise the interest to this issue. The main, third section tells the story of the Icheri Sheher’s IAMAP and examines the mental possibility of elaboration of “another project” there more targeted to the genius loci’s understanding and preservation.

1. Conservation charter s’ analysis from the soul (spirit) of place point of view

The principal conservation charters – the Venice and the Washington Charters – are both targeted mainly towards the material part of the heritage; there is nothing distinctive said about the spirit or sense of monument or place there.

“A message from the past” transmitted to us by the historic monuments is mentioned in the very first paragraph of the Venice Charter; we can guess on some immaterial values important for this process, but it is not developed hereinafter.

In the Washington Charter adopted a quarter of a century later a “spiritual component” was named once, but it hasn’t been developed in any way either: “Qualities to be preserved include the historic character of the town or urban area and all those material and spiritual elements that express this character, especially: a) Urban patterns as defined by lots and streets; b) Relationships between buildings and green and open spaces; c) The formal appearance, interior and exterior, of buildings <…>; d) The relationship between the town or urban area and its surrounding setting <…>; and e) The various functions that the town or urban area has acquired over time” (Washington Charter, 1987, Article 2; here and future italic selection made by the author – A.I.).

The Nara Document on Authenticity, 1994, is dealing with a “spirit” precisely in the same way: “Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors”. The “spirit” considered here as one of numerous “factors” of a monument and knowledge of it joins in understanding of authenticity of a monument by means of data from those or other sources.

The same standing mentions are founded in more special papers on a heritage, e.g. in the Belgrade Declaration, 2004: “We condemn ethnic violence, which caused loss of

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2 Bachelard, G., The Poetics of Space; Greenberg, M., The Poetics of Cities: Designing Neighborhoods That Work; Lefebvre, H., The Production of Space; Norberg-Schulz, Ch., Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture; and many others.

3 “Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity” (The Venice Charter, 1964).
lives and devastation of precious tangible, intangible and moral values belonging to all communities in the area”. Nevertheless in the subsequent text the authors never return to those “moral values”.

In many documents the spiritual component of a heritage is not mentioned at all; in others it is mentioned but has not become the institutional conservation’s parameter5.

One of the documents closest to our discourse is the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage. The spirit is not particularly mentioned in it, but some important concepts related to spiritual aspects appear:

- “The conservation of the built vernacular heritage must be carried out by multidisciplinary expertise while recognising the inevitability of change and development, and the need to respect the community’s established cultural identity”;
- “Contemporary work on vernacular buildings, groups and settlements should respect their cultural values and their traditional character”;
- “The vernacular embraces not only the physical form and fabric of buildings, structures and spaces, but the ways in which they are used and understood, and the traditions and the intangible associations which attach to them”.

However at a switch to the practical preservation’s issues authors hope for the ethical principles only: “Adaptation and reuse of vernacular structures should be carried out in a manner which will respect the integrity of the structure, its character and form while being compatible with acceptable standards of living. Where there is no break in the continuous utilisation of vernacular forms, a code of ethics within the community can serve as a tool of intervention” (Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage, 1999). We know, however, that the lack of ethical base in everyday life of local communities is observed worldwide. In contemporary cities, especially in greater cities, even a presence of any communities is in doubt; what to speak on a presence of any ethics of these communities shared by the all members? I am afraid that these ethical principles can be hardly efficient in the course of conservational processes.

Sometimes when it is necessary to add something “intangible” to prevailing material components such vague concepts as “associative connections” appear in lists of heritage values. For example: “As such, protection and conservation of the historic urban landscape comprises the individual monuments to be found in protection registers, as well as ensembles and their significant connections, physical, functional and visual, material and associative, with the historic typologies and morphologies” (Vienna Memorandum, 2005, paragraph 12). However the concepts we are interested in are entered sometimes simply as a tag in my opinion: “Taking into account the emotional connection between human beings and their environment, their sense of place, it is fundamental to guarantee an urban environmental quality of living to contribute to the economic success of a city and to its social and cultural vitality” (ibid, paragraph 16). The achievement of “an urban environmental quality of living” understood from the point of view of a consumer society results frequently in completely opposite consequences.

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4 Accepted by the participants of the Regional Conference on Preventive Activities in Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the Areas Affected by Ethnic Tensions and Armed Conflicts held in Belgrade on May 10-11, 2004.

The dissatisfaction in the recognized charters which is visible today in circles of conservationists is connected often not with a lack of spiritual aspect of a heritage but more likely with stylistic disagreements.

And only rare experts speak about necessity of intrinsic expansion of understanding of cultural valuable place. For instance, Julian Smith, Canadian architect, has estimated the Vienna memorandum as the document reflecting a begun transition from modernist to postmodernist paradigm in preservation of a heritage, from obsession with object/building to attention to ritual, from a visual estimation of a townscape from the outside to its experience from within, to the analysis of a relationships between objects (a “landscape ecology”). It means occurrence of concepts of a sense of place and a sense of identity: «Our problem is that we are still in our infancy in terms of understanding and documenting the urban landscape as a landscape of the imagination. <…> It has to be measured within the cultural framework and the ritual understanding…” (Smith J., 2006). But it is still only a statement of a problem.

So, in charters concerning a material heritage we deal with ideas based on positivist ideology (and, more narrowly, on the architecture-centered approach in spite of a concept of “landscape’s” inclusion): the cumulative value of a place/monument is the combination of estimated (by different sciences and methods) and verifiable values. The components are material, are seen, and are describable: “The historic urban landscape is embedded with current and past social expressions and developments that are place-based. It is composed of character-defining elements that include land uses and patterns, spatial organization, visual relationships, topography and soils, vegetation, and all elements of the technical infrastructure, including small scale objects and details of construction (curbs, paving, drain gutters, lights, etc.” (Vienna Memorandum, 2005, paragraph 8). No doubt that all this is very significant. But whether the essence of conserved object is a sum of these material elements?

It would seem, the recent UNESCO paper on the intangible heritage could reflect somehow the spirit of place, but it has not happened also. The scope of “non-material cultural heritage” applies there only to such domains, as: “(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship” (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, paragraph 2).

Thus “the spirit of place” disappears somewhere in an interval between the material and non-material heritage; it drops out of subjects, described by charters; the scope of charters has not covered it. So, we may ask ourselves after the complete reading of the chapters: whether it is necessary (and whether it is possible) to maintain (or to protect, to save) this invisible soul of a heritage place at all?

It seems that the Egyptian mummy is perfectly saved in a museum. But its senses are lost, and almost nobody knows what meaning it used to have for ancient Egyptians and what it means today (in spiritual sense). What may we say about senses (especially lost senses) of such complex social-and-spatio-temporal organism as a city?

Let me have the courage to use an example from Brazilian context. We shall imagine that there is a need to conserve the oldest fragment of a historical core of Rio de Janeiro,

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6 E.g. in the case of INTBAU – the organization which recently held a special conference with the purpose of supplementing the Venice Charter with new senses, – it is a contradiction of “modern classicists” with modernists (http://www.intbau.org/conferencesarchive2006.htm#VeniceCharter110606).
where a “spirit of place”, according to the Brazilian authors, is the major factor of a place’s identity. “Saying “carioca”, we mean all those who were born in this city <…> and also everyone who was born in any other point of the world, but lives here and associates himself with “jeito” (an indefinable spirit of city), became a part of city and gives to it even greater originality. <…> Under “jeito” we mean unwillingness to take ourselves seriously adjoining with masochism, a combination of boredom and humor which covers us in the face of any authority, and not in the last instance – “joie de vivre” as the Frenchmen name the cheerfulness ignoring any reasonable reasons” (Castro R., 2005, pp. 63-64).

How would the preserved material substance of this place look like without this “jeito”, without a fiery carnival in souls and behavior of inhabitants? But whether something like “Charter of jeito preservation” is possible, and whether it could be feasible? The situation will become even more problematic if we imagine that this “jeito” or something as important for the certain place as “jeito” for Rio vanished from it due to any reasons over the ages.

So, it is true to say that the “spirit of a place” is difficult to catch, it is not defined scientifically, and it is even more problematic to regulate it or to plan its preservation while we cannot even conserve properly material heritage substances. But are these reasons enough to ignore it completely in the conservation practice?

2. Some preliminary attempts to approach the soul of place issue made by the author vs. “anti-spiritual” conservation practice

It is important to mention that one of peculiarities of the countries I want to observe is that the conservation charters are formally validated there but usually not implemented in everyday practice even in their “material” part. For instance, the Venice Charter insists that “The process of restoration <…> must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp” (The Venice Charter, 1964, Article 11). But in some recent restoration examples of Kiev (the capital of Ukraine, one of the former soviet republics) one can see rather curious attempts to reflect the historical deepness in the reconstructed medieval monuments totally demolished in the soviet time (IMAGE - 02).

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7 Another definition of the “jeito” is spread onto the whole nation’s spirit: “the jeito (an untranslatable term that corresponds roughly to a “knack”, “twist”, “way”, or “fix”), which is the finest Brazilian tradition” (Roenn K. S., 1971).
The same free-style attitude towards the universally recognized conservational principles is visible in the fresh case of restoration of the palace and park ensemble of Tsaritsino in Moscow that is in fact an expensive reconstruction of non-existed reality (one of variable architect’s sketches of 18 c. became a base for contemporary restoration). But these palaces covered now with pompous pseudo-gothic roofs were never finished and being the ruins served as a spiritual heart of this place for many Muscovites for as long as two centuries) (IMAGE - 03).
Displeasure with the practices full of cases like these led me to some attempts of defining and “fixing” the intangible component of urban heritage objects that I used to deal with. I will list some of them.

The first one is the inclusion in one Russian historic city’s Municipal Atlas assembled in general frames of very rational positivist methodology of urban analysis (the Danish SAVE system; see: Ivanov A., 2001; Ivanov A., 2003a), the special section devoted to the spirit of place (Gorbatenko S., Ivanov A., 2002). It is Tsarskoye Selo (now the city of Pushkin renamed after the famous Russian poet) – one of the former Emperor residences in surrounding of S.-Petersburg. The reason to insert the chapter named “The poetics of Tsarskoye Selo – Pushkin” in a series of “Dominating features of the territory” was the special role of this place in Russian culture as a “city of Muses”: the landscapes of Tsarskoye Selo inspired dozens of Russian poets for hundreds of years. It is written in the Atlas: “To reflect the poetic contents of the environment in the architectural atlas is not easy. The poetics of the town is hardly perceptible and transferred with even more difficulty into the text or graphic. <…> We shall try to reflect the poetics of town in a series of visual images of urban environment. Play of light and shade, change of seasons,

8 According to the SAVE method, “dominating features of the territory are its landscape, developing, architectural dominants, as well as major spatial and structural relations defining the character of the environment” (Gorbatenko S., Ivanov A., 2002, p.17). Other “dominating features” described in the Atlas were much more “material”: Junction of the communications; Tsarskoye Selo agglomeration; Relief peculiarities; Palaces and parks – the main town-developing factor; The town of Russian classicism.
seasonal palette and mood… Combination, interlacing, collision of architecture and nature in park landscapes and townscape… Mystery of ruins, artificial and real… Emptiness and filling of urban spaces with people and with marks of the past and present…” (ibid, p.25) (IMAGE - 04).

However these pages of the Atlas have served only as a tool for informing its readers in order to extend their local heritage understanding in hope that they will apprehend this message and then apply it somehow in their activity – the same romantic hope that was observed in some recent charters quoted above.

The second example is the post survey in **Rostov the Great** – one of the oldest Russian towns included in famous tourist route “Golden Ring of Russia”. The project of the “Federal Target Program of Rostov the Great Revival” elaborated in the Institute on Reconstruction of Historic Towns, Moscow in 2000-2002 was devoted to the “comprehensive revitalization” of the hole historic environment and stressed on its material components (architectural ensembles, separate monuments, valuable old development, natural landscape, etc.). The mass social survey was implemented by the author in order to investigate real use of public spaces, inhabitants’ attitude to the monuments, etc. (Ivanov A., 2000). Anyway there was a feeling that we had lost something important in the understanding of this urban phenomenon. It made me ask Rostov people to participate in the post survey devoted to recent past of the city (1950s – 80s). That was time of childhood and youth for my informants. The letters I received were full of narratives describing a rather close relationships between people and place (everyday urban life’s descriptions, children game customs, the changing of behavior patterns in a course of time, etc.) that in my opinion is no less important for the revitalization strategy elaboration than the restoration of recognized monuments (Ivanov A., 2003b). But the real including of such local knowledge into official governmental program was unfeasible.
The third case is the elaboration of the Rules of Land Use and Development for the city of Karakol in the frame of big ‘Kyrgyz Land Reform’ project sponsored by USAID in 2003-2004. The in-depth analysis (visual observation, source study, and inclusion in social life during field visits) of historic part of this former Russian colonial city close to Chinese border of the Empire let me find out some important features of local heritage quickly disappearing in new situation\(^9\) and define urban areas where these features are concentrated. Then I include these areas into the Rules as special legal zones with appropriate regulation of building activities, which became local law after the Rules’ approval by the city council. The second tool of the spirit of this place enhancement was the atlas-like book devoted to local urban and architectural heritage with stressing on the everyday historic environment and social roots of the heritage of this city (Ivanov A., 2004).

I am far from overestimation of these modest attempts but hope that they are in frames of one trend of actual conservationism – the “moving away from visual object and language of visual literacy (i.e. volumes, forms, scale) through an ecological approach that combines physical and associative values <…> towards historic environment as a place for ritual and human experience” (Van Oers, R., 2006).

This mood surprisingly finds a response even in thoughts of some “starchitects” – most subtle of them, certainly. A citation from the Louisiana Manifesto by Jan Nouvel will serve as a bridge to the description of the Ichery Sheher case:

“\(\begin{align*}
\text{The architect is not aware of having come to the end of his work until he slips and slides} \\
\text{from creation to modification,} \\
\text{from assertion to allusion,} \\
\text{from building-up to filling-in,} \\
\text{from construction to infiltration,} \\
\text{from imposition to superimposition,} \\
\text{from the neat to the nebulous,} \\
\text{from addition to deviation,} \\
\text{from calligraphy to etching, to erasure …} \end{align*}\)” (Nouvel J., 2005).

We have made our work (IAMAP) but I am not aware it is finished… at least in my minds.

3. The case of Ichery Sheher

IAMAP

When conservationists doubt of their concepts the soul is going out of many valuable historic places. Let us see narrowly at the Ichery Sheher’s case.

As it is written in the IAMAP’s site description, “The Walled City of Baku is remarkable for its long history, varied cultural heritage and for its strategic location near the waterfront at the western end of Baku’s late 19th and early 20th century Historic Centre.

\(^9\) Now this city is the administrative center of remote Yssyk-Kul region of independent Kyrgyz Republic.
This medieval city, built upon a hill and surrounded by thick walls, has served many functions throughout its long history. After becoming the capital city of the Shirvanshah state in the 12th century, it was an important trading centre along the Silk Route” (IAMAP, 2007, V. 1, pp. 6).

Annexed by Russia in 1806, Baku became the Provincial center in 1859 and, thanks to the discovery of oil fields a prosperous economic centre. Its economics is still largely based on petroleum. The oil boom that began in the 1870s brought great wealth to Baku. The population grew from 4,500 in the mid 19th c. to 215,000 in 1910, and the development of the “modern” city outside of the walls of Icheri Sheher significantly changed its traditional role as it gave its commercial importance to the new area developed in the Western European style. Icheri Sheher remained a traditional residential area coexisting with the surrounding city. The urban heritage of the “Icheri Sheher Historic and Cultural Reserve” is a critical component of Azeri history and cultural identity10.

In 2000, Icheri Sheher was included in the World Heritage List according to the proposal of Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Culture. But the changing development dynamics in Baku in time of the ‘second oil boom’ led to many demolitions and new constructions on the site, often in styles incompatible with the historic fabric. (IMAGE - 05).

It was combined with dramatic changes in the whole Baku. The international multi-cultural city became monoethnic losing the most priceless component of the urban culture: “social capital of diversity” (Blair Ruble). Hundreds of thousands of local residents of different nationalities have moved to other parts of the world; the city has been invaded by refugees from Nagorny Karabakh and rural citizens. Ruralizing such typical of capitals of new South-Caucasian and Central Asian countries is characterized by a new construction boom: dozens of high-rises prick through the historic fabric of the downtown (Ivanov A., 2006).

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10 According to local classification 3 monuments of international importance (the Gyz Galasy tower, the Muhammad Mosque, and the Shirvanshah’s Palace), 28 monuments of national importance, 569 monuments of local importance and patterns of residential neighborhoods are concentrated there.
Due to considerable threats, caused by inappropriate changes in the urban fabric and lack of proper conservation policy, the World Heritage Committee at its 27th session (Paris, 2003) decided to inscribe Icheri Sheher on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The World Bank was committed by Azerbaijani authorities to the development and preparation of the Management Plan of Icheri Sheher as a part of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Project in Azerbaijan. The Implementation Group of this Project (in frames of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) held an international tender for the preparation of the Management Plan of the Walled City of Baku in 2006. The winner of the tender was the Institute for International Urban Development (Cambridge, Massachusetts) and “Alstrup and Avnby Architects ApS” (Denmark). From August 2006 till April 2007 the team consisting of experts from USA, Denmark, Lithuania and Russia carried out the IAMAP for the World Heritage site of Icheri Sheher.

The plan provided an institutional framework for the newly created Administration of the State Historic and Architectural Reserve Icheri Sheher (SDHARIS) and outlined its technical responsibilities. It defined guidelines for a safeguard and development strategy for the site, proposed key strategic interventions required to implement it and outlined the nature of development controls to preserve local historical integrity. The plan also defined a financial framework for the new authority, and proposed a citizens’ participation as one of the key stakeholders in the decision-making process, and formulates a long-term strategy of Icheri Sheher and its urban surroundings’ conservation in order to protect the World Heritage site from external development pressures and maintain its integrity as a coherent urban entity (IMAGE - 06).

Another project’s possibility?

So, we have elaborated the IAMAP trying to enter some useful urban conservation mechanism that could be relevant to the place in outer expert opinion. The Plan was highly assessed by the Joint UNESCO-ICOMOS mission in Baku in March 2007 as “a strategic guideline for conservation management not only of the Walled City but also of
the buffer zone and the wider 19th-century urban area” and as the document that “now needs to be implemented” (Mission Report, 2007, p. 16, 17).

But for some reason there is a disturbing sensation of non-penetrating in an essence of our object. And if this feeling has any bases, whether other project was possible?

One may imagine that our work deserves a high enough estimation by the international criteria. But it would be necessary to strive for the highest ball (“6” in the 5-mark scale). At least, to dream of it. Try to fall outside the limits of the rational, to overcome the border of the usual. And, apparently, it would be possible, if we considered from the very beginning not only technical and political situation, but also a metaphysical essence of the Old City.

What is the heritage? In other words, what we would like to save and transfer to our descendants? Stones? Towers, palaces, walls? Shells, forms, material traces of the past?

Or – the light in windows, a gleam of mosaics below front doors, gentle murmur of small court yards’ fountains, an aura of Old city, which – if you are lucky – can be felt once in the evening, in last slanting sunbeams on walls of Small Fortress street (Kichik Gala), enlivening their plain, simple coloring: dirty-pink – grey-yellow – grey…

A view from the Fortress, from the fortification wall in the same Kichik Gala, to the Caspian Sea. A view, connecting two metaphysical substances – the City and the Sea. The relationship between these phenomena caught by you through that casual sight (you is a stranger here), but penetrating, possibly, all the life of Icheri Sheher dwellers. The mood that is only here, only in this place in the world… (IMAGE - 07).

What if these hardly perceptible, nondescript, non-material features of a place are the quintessence of its value? Whether it is necessary to “save” them? Or you need just
allow them to live, and may be to die if they will inevitably die? Because if something may survive here at all it would be possible not due to “managerial” efforts but thanks to genetic code of this place and its people.

“The wind blows where it wills” (John 3:8) – one more statement seeming pertinent here.

What is “in danger”? Certainly, it is not necessary to demolish old structures without real need, to build rubbish on that place… But what about people? What do we know on them? What they are thinking, dreaming, are anxious and aspiring still living here?

The life and the death – it could be the main theme of “another project”. We started with rational western attitude that the life is a priori better than the death, and that the death or its symptoms are surmountable as a result of cogitative efforts and then in practical following to their conclusions… But if we were more sensitive we could hear there some voices (genius loci voices?). “Please not revive us”, “don’t touch us”, “let us alone” (and even “get out of here!”) – whisper us the silence behind fortress walls, chipped basalt sidewalks, peeled doors, red garbage cats… Kichik Gala as Venetian ‘Watermark’ by Josef Brodsky, Icheri Sheher as Old Istanbul by Orhan Pamuk… Unrecognized, mysterious Old City – we have started to comprehend its alphabet only. And we are far from the opportunity to read the whole book…

Considering uneasy conditions of urban reality as much as possible, we have made rational, nominally correct offers how “to improve a situation”, “to launch activity”, “to include Icheri Sheher in the central city’s functioning”, “to revitalize it”, “to lift its status”… But what if these proposals are located in some extraneous, parallel plane concerning the present Old City, and therefore may become killing for the rests of Icheri Sheher spirit (in a hypothetical case of their implementation, certainly)?

So active new intrusions into its fabric (embassies, offices of foreign companies) have led to mortification of their surrounding while many forgotten sites still untouched by developers (looking almost thrown from outside) are alive: children play a ball on asphalt, men tittle-tattle at greengrocery… (IMAGE - 08).

Our Baku driver Tofik told us ones: “Our city was another [more European] earlier, just 15 years ago. Now, when I see on TV cities of Pakistan or India, I recognize the present Baku there more and more. It seems, we come back to ourselves – to our Eastern
nature?” The new country searches for itself, for the first time in the history. But if is somewhere on the earth a prototype of a “grass-roots” Azerbaijan city it is half-dead Icheri Sheher?

“In front of me there were, in fact, not one, but two cities, grown together like a nut. The outer city was a nutshell outside the wall of the Fortress. The streets in this city were wide, houses – tall, and people – greedy and busy. The main thing in that city was oil, extracted from our land. It was the oil that brought main income. In the outer city, there were theatres, schools, hospitals, libraries, policemen, beautiful women with naked shoulders. If anyone fired a shot there it was for the money. The border between Europe and Asia also goes in our city between outer and inner parts <…> On this side of the Fortress walls the streets were curved and narrow, like an oriental dagger. If there, outside the fortress walls, the sky was pierced by the rigs of the Nobel oil fields, then here the fluffy clouds were ascended by the minarets of the mosques” (Kurban Said, 2004, p. 19) – it is description of ambivalent nature of Baku of early 20th century.

But the remains of Old Asia, in any strange way, have stood its ground somehow till now within the Fortress wall in all troubles of the 20th century. And may be, the actual struggle in Baku is not between “Asia” and “Europe” but between “Old” and “new” Asia?

And in fact the originality of Icheri Sheher in the scale of huge megapolis filled by new-Asian activities is visible as soon as you look at the Baku plan. It sharply differs both from the surrounding “capitalist” city of the turn of 19th and 20th cc. and from more remote quarters where contemporary high-rises are mixed with old clay huts. The planning pattern of Icheri Sheher is full of mystique, is confused. The sensation of marginality, security, separateness, leaving from vanity of the center appears inside fortifications… (IMAGE - 09).
Not only the space but the time is different here – so called “godforsaken time” according to one Azeri writer (Badalov R., s. a.)\(^{11}\). All these secrets were not considered in our work…

And the artistic reflections of Icheri Sheher’ spirit in mugam-jazz\(^{12}\) by brilliant piano player Vagif Mustafazadeh who used to live there or an expressionistic townscape painting of 1960s were not considered either (IMAGE - 10).

\(^{11}\) By virtue of their spatial isolation and reserved status Icheri Sheher was doomed in the Soviet period to the life in the “other time” than the rest of the city. It was some kind of stability island in the “city of winds” (the definition of “Baku”); but the slowed-down speed of changes has weakened the sustainability of historic environment against aggressive incursions. Therefore especially great losses were put to the Old City in post-soviet time, when dynamics of urban processes has increased sharply.

\(^{12}\) A symbiosis of traditional Azeri mugam music and modern jazz.
May be, the white hole on the place of the Old City on urban planning maps of late soviet period made in Moscow\textsuperscript{13} was reasonable – as a quiet recognition of impossibility to understand this place from the outside and to offer something appropriate for it? (IMAGE - 11). A white hole on the paper; a black hole – in our understanding of this place (both in 1970s-80s and now)?

\textsuperscript{13} The grandiose work on analysis of urban planning conditions for the reconstruction of central Baku’s ordered by the city government was elaborated in 1960s – 1980s in the Central Research and Design Institute of Urban Planning under the leadership of architect Svetlana Regame who is one of famous Russian urban restorers.
May be there was a need to stress the social survey first, the dialogue with locals? To speak with people asking them about their childhood in Icheri Sheher, about their favorite places, about their mood and plans\textsuperscript{14}… And then inject this knowledge (even partial and imperfect) reflecting the spirit of Icheri Sheher into the rational management plan produced by our command according to the strict rules of an international consulting?

Now it is obvious to me that it is impossible to understand such a unique urban heritage site as Icheri Sheher at a unilateral sight from the West, using only universal euro-centrist concepts of the historic heritage and its preservation’s methods. Therefore a construction of some kind of conceptual model of the spirit of place understanding on a joint of categories of Western and Eastern (Azeri in particular) cultures could be useful.

Categories of the West $\rightarrow$ \textbf{Icheri Sheher} $\leftarrow$ Categories of the East (Azerbaijan)

\textsuperscript{14} The part of IAMAP devoted to the interviews with stakeholders (see IAMAP, V. 2, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was done by the team but didn’t play the significant role in the whole job context.
Certainly, this dichotomy is rather conditional and does not assume the rigid division of notions. Their mutual interlacing is obvious: sometimes the ideas invented in the West are quite suitable for the comprehension of “eastern” phenomena, and vice versa\textsuperscript{15}.

It is possible to name the following among the already developed “western” categories applied to the phenomena similar to Icheri Sheher:

- the patina of the city (Zancheti S., 2006);
- an intimate anonymity (Schocken, H., 2003);
- an associative landscape (UNESCO papers);
- an inspirational value (Johnston Ch. and Ramsay J., 2005).

There are more difficulties with categories of the Eastern (and especially Azeri) culture, important for understanding of Icheri Sheher phenomenon. We know very little about them. However it could be possible to depict, at least very approximately, a few concepts that are important for understanding of the nature of this environmental and cultural-historical phenomenon where local natives are living and elements of the so called “medieval urban culture” are still alive (Icheri Sheher is one of such traditional enclaves. See: Rumyantsev S., 2005).

As a first approximation one can mention:

- a love to ornamental patterns (both in art and in life);
- an idea of cyclic (non-linear) time;
- a combination of meditation (contemplation) and expressivity (enterprise) in the attitude to external world;
- a mysticism and a hedonism simultaneously,
- a passion to pleasure/luxury in inner home life in the contrary to some indifference to external space organization.

Compiling this row we can use some observations by local writers, e.g. the following:

“The pedestrians are more ontological in Baku [in comparison with Moscow. – A.I.]; they go out-of-doors to pick up at a case a thrill of someone (and this case by all means became a miracle), to catch up someone’s myth, someone’s sight, someone’s hand and to go from a way, as to go mad. Though they perfectly know, how frequently Baku streets – as any madness – come to an end by cul-de-sacs. At the same time all of them (in particular women) are so unhurried, so sleepy and so phlegmatic, that their sleepy state and phlegm, seems, resemble a mirror reflection of some basic mood – a frame of mind – that wrapping up this city that hours” (Mamedov A., 2002); “Bridges and roads penetrate this culture, they go from the East to the West and from the West to the East, from the North to the South and from the South to the North, from Asia to Europe and from Europe to Asia, leaving their traces, their adherents, leaving an atmosphere of an eternal uncertainty, an eternal ‘betweenness’” (Badalov R., s. a.).

\textsuperscript{15}I do not mean here a distinction of Christian and Muslim outlook – we shall remain within the limits of environmental conceptions which certainly reflect the religious ideas but rather indirectly and abstractedly.
All this is, certainly, only the first approaches to the understanding of Icheri Sheher’s spirit. Generic features of it, in my opinion, must be taken into consideration necessarily at elaboration of its conservation strategy. Without similar efforts we remain outside the object. Then our paper advices would exist on their own, and the heritage place will continue to live – or to die – under its own laws, irrespective of our honest-minded and quite qualified managerial efforts.

**Conclusion**

The plans of the IAMAP type are necessary for the urban heritage sites’ developing, but we must consider them as first steps needed for the best heritage comprehension. We should mean indubitable limitation of such managerial offers, and also their potential danger to object (if they are wrong they may act against the real heritage values).

The searches of another type of project culture must be continued. It should be not the universal managerial culture of the international consulting but the culture adequate to real social situation and directed on disclosing and maintenance of latent, not obvious, muffled, but very important spiritual components of the object of heritage.

To insert any sentences on the obligation of considering the soul of place in the universal conservation charters would be nonsense – this phenomenon is too local, too narrowly defined, and too indefinable.

We, probably, must think on a drawing up some kind of ethical charters – the codes of a professional etiquette of a local level, specially for concrete heritage places or objects (for the World Heritage sites in particular). They would be the documents of indirect force targeted towards a deepening and expansion of heritage’s comprehension but not towards direct preservation actions.

The “Code on the Ethics of Co-existence in Conserving Significant Places” which is one of documents by Australia ICOMOS following The Burra Charter, 1999, devoted to diverse cultures and cultural groups coexisted in Australian heritage landscape is one of examples (Code of Ethics of Co-existence in Conserving Significant Places, s. a.).

An elaboration and adaptation of such ethical documents for each place we are dealing with concerning the duty to preserve its “soul” is our aim and duty as I see it.

And while we do not know exactly what is more important – the stones or the soul – let us at least remember of the presence of the last one.

Confucius told ages ago: “Teach only those who are able to learn about one angle of a square and let them imagine the other three”. Returning to the quadrangle described in the beginning of this article, may we begin our work with heritage from the “forth corner”, from the spirit of place examination?

**References**


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