

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF CITY & TIME

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The source of the articles in this Special Issue of C&T is ICOMOS CIVVIH 2010 annual meeting & scientific symposium; Valetta, Malta, April 7-11: 'The historic city, a reference model for urban sustainable development policies'.

This Special Issue does not attempt to reflect on the whole wealth of the thoughts and debate of the meeting and symposium in Valletta, and neither does it try to analyze the theme in any particular angle. The selection of the papers depended on the productive dialogue with the prospective authors, and it has not been influenced nor endorsed by CIVVIH in any particular way. Hence the whole responsibility for this selection rests with the Editors of the City & Time, and the positions expressed in this publication are solely by the Authors of the submissions. The Editors have simply used the opportunity to illustrate the ongoing debate on the issue of sustainable cities thus enticing the readers to contribute their thoughts in further submissions to this theme.

Whether the urban management theory and practice of the day can be positively informed and inspired by history of development of the cities has boggled the minds of many researchers and practitioners. Whilst the history of learning from spatial organization of the past is very rich and well-studied, looking at the urban transformations from the holistic point of sustainability becomes much more complex inasmuch as it includes complex relationships among an array of social, cultural, economic and environmental considerations, and this list is not finite. This complexity introduces considerable methodological difficulties. The known problem of trying to assess and evaluate the constructs of the past from the platform of contemporary worldview is just the most obvious one.

Trying to learn from the past requires more than understanding the worldviews of the yore – it requires accepting them as valid without necessity of evaluating them from the context of modernity. To give just one example, when we read Peter Ackroyd's "London: The Biography", our modern mind is appalled by some documented descriptions of the living conditions and customs, but only if we measure the recorded facts from the point of view of today. Whilst not necessarily unavoidable, some of the conditions of the times may have been common, even productive – London survives and still develops as one of the major metropolises of the World through many centuries. Many of its contemporaries throughout those ages succumbed to very different fates: just think of Venice, which was once 4 times the size of London in population, and then New Yorks, Singapores and Riodejaneiros did not even exist. So sustainability of a city is not just about fairness and equity, conservation, and neutrality to resources: when we look at history, it is inevitably about Darwinian continuous survival ahead of the others as well.

The acceptance of the paradigms of the past is not the only methodological challenge in answering the CIVVIH's inquiry into the historic city as a model. One of the issues that has been surfacing a number of times is whether the conservationist approaches, methods

and instruments, directed to preserving “the existing” and enacting it in the presence and the future can be employed in designing and forming “the new”.

Other, reactive concerns with the aftermath of the urban development of the modern times have included among other apprehension with territorial separation of uses and resulting mobility issues, and growing divide between professional planning and actors in the frameworks created by such planning, and looking at the history of development of the cities with a view to understanding why the cities in history seem so much more integral to us from the contemporary point of view.

The articles from the CIVVIH authors engage with the whole array of key issues in this complex context, demonstrating different types of approaches offering variety of foci.

In the realm of theory and research, while prof. arch. Elvira Petroncelli in her “Rules of the historical town for sustainable urban development” offers a systematic range of astonishing intellectual insights to the key question of understanding the past organisation of the cities well beyond their aesthetic aspects, dr. Claus-Peter Echter presents the results of a meticulous, extensive research programme, carried out by the German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu), following up on results of previous research programme, and focussing on decisive elements and trends of the residential function in the inner cities, and referring to wide and rich developmental context.

This issue also includes three accounts of the cases, all relevant for the theme of debate from different angles: Prof. Saleh Lamei writes on how Cairo attempts to include community in decision making on regenerating the Historic Cairo and retaining traditional uses beyond catering to tourism needs, D. Tirrell and D. Belci review how Timisoara, a historic Romanian city, is coping with post-communist developmental issues during transition from planned economy to market by strengthening institutions, and Dipl.-Ing. Ilse Friedrich demonstrates on the example of Constance, Germany, how working methods of urban conservation can and should be applied in to urban development in general.

The most extensive effort in this issue is the article on The Local Identity and Design Code by Arch. Agnieszka Kiera of Freemantle, Australia. Arch. Kiera has transcended a challenging question -- whether the prevailing practice and doctrinal texts of the heritage conservation are sufficient to answering the challenges of the day. She took the opportunity to develop her presentation in Valletta into a comprehensive account of understanding identity of a city, and then researching, conceiving, designing, developing and using a new instrument to make sure that the profound layers of meaning are retained and used in managing the inevitable transformations of the urban life.

We believe that this particular selection of articles will provide an engaging reading for the audience of the City and Time.

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