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Editorial

Urban Heritage in Transformation: Physical and Non-Physical Dimensions of Changing Contexts

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Abstract

Urban heritage is at the core of the process of many changes observable in the cities today. The pace of urban change in heritage contexts, however, differs widely across the globe. In some areas, it goes slowly, in others it is astonishingly rapid. In some cases, change is coupled with risks of erosion of heritage and urban areas of value and in others change is synonymous with prosperity and positive impacts. Change in urban heritage areas is not only confined to the physical and tangible aspects, but needs to be regarded as mirroring changes related socio-political practices, economic implications, and cultural impacts. In this regard, the present thematic issue looks at various patterns of the interrelationship between heritage and urban change from both the physical and the non-physical perspectives. This editorial presents the topic of urban heritage and patterns of physical and non-physical transformation in urban heritage contexts and introduces the thematic issue “Urban Heritage and Patterns of Change: Spatial Practices of Physical and Non-Physical Transformation.”

Keywords

non-physical transformation; patterns of change; physical transformation; urban heritage

Issue

This editorial is part of the issue “Urban Heritage and Patterns of Change: Spatial Practices of Physical and Non-Physical Transformation” edited by Frank Eckardt (Bauhaus-University Weimar) and Aliaa ALSadaty (Cairo University).

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Heritage is regarded as being of value for generations under different circumstances. Reserving heritage means therefore that following generations can find some elements of continuation and can integrate current changes into a wider non-personal narrative. As centers of everyday life and venues for human interactions and experiences, urban contexts, and particularly heritage settings, are at the core of unavoidable processes of transformation to meet the changing needs and aspirations of successive generations and communities. In the path of their transformation, urban heritage contexts might undertake several trajectories and patterns of change, from radical and abrupt to minor and incremental transformations, and from change on the physical features and tangible aspects of settings to change in non-physical, intangible aspects of settings.

The physical change of urban settings has been the focus of several disciplines concerned mainly with the morphological characteristics of settings. Urban morphology is the field concerned with the study of physical forms of urban contexts and their formation and transformation through time. It is concerned with the examination of the relationship between the constituent elements of urban form as well as the part-to-whole relationship (Kropf, 2014). In addition, urban morphology is concerned with the understanding of driving factors driving urban transformations as agents and processes of change through time (Oliveira, 2016). The stream of knowledge of urban morphology provides a range of approaches and tools articulating the different aspects and elements of urban form as well as the relation between them (Kropf, 2017). Studies on the physical

aspects of form can enriching interventions including post-disasters developments, infill design, urban growth, and urbanization impacts, among others.

The physical forms of urban settings have been always interlinked with non-physical factors including the cultural, political, and socio-economical processes. Studies of urban forms cover non-physical issues related with human-environment relationship, activity patterns (Hillier & Hanson, 1989); sense of place and belonging (Relph, 1976); safety measures and crime rates (Jacobs, 1961); change of races and classes within societies; gentrification issues (De Cesari & Dimova, 2019), displacement of people, capitals, and goods; among other topics.

By addressing the complex and multilayered issue of urban change in heritage contexts this issue aims at a better understanding of the phenomenon of change and its implications on both the spatial and the social contexts. In addition, by providing a wide range of in-depth investigations of the phenomenon of change, the present issue seeks to provide insights on possible ways to control and tame this inevitable change towards more positive, non-destructive impacts to current and future generations.

This thematic issue includes 12 articles investigating urban settings located in three continents and 11 countries: Belgium, Egypt, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey. This transnational investigation provides a wide overview on the urban heritage in transformation and brings together the issue of urban change across different cultures and backgrounds.

On the physical level, the selected articles tackle a range of urban contexts with diverse nature and different scales including dispersed territories in country sides, historic neighborhoods in central capitals, industrial heritage sites, historic towns, commercial cores in mid-sized cities, and central historic squares and spaces. On the non-physical level, the selected articles tackle topics including sustainability, historic character, patterns of attachment and detachment with urban settings, heritage perception, socio-spatial practices, urban food production and commercial horticulture, shared heritage against violent heritage management, cultural amnesia, building regulations and local conservation policies and development control, liveability of historic centres, and decision-making processes in urban practice.

The assemblage of articles in this issue begins with the article by Maarten Gheysen and Sophie Leemans (2023), which focuses on the phenomenon of change in dispersed territories, particularly on the evolution of moated farmstead in South-West Flanders. By doing so, this study investigates the change of the urban territory from the perspective of the architectural typology highlighting the importance of moated farmstead on the architectural, economical, socio-political, and ecological land management levels. The authors call for the re-interpretation of the moated farmstead as a new prototype to establish a more sustainable way of urbanizing the countryside in dispersed contexts.

Milica Muminović (2023) focuses on Nezu neighbourhood, in Tokyo, one of the very few historic neighbourhoods that has been spared destruction caused by the Great Kanto Earthquake and the Second World War. Despite constant change and lack of conservation, the neighbourhood has, however, surprisingly maintained its persistent urban character. Through her article, Muminović (2023, p. 19) illustrates how the historic character of Nezu is mainly maintained due to the continuity of the “complex system” of relationships between public and private spaces.

Leo Bockelmann (2023) analyses the perception of previous industrial heritage structures in the Vogtland Region, Germany. Through semi-structured interviews with the local community, the author investigates the role the industrial heritage plays for the local population and the local community perspectives for future developments of industrial structures. Findings reveal both positive and negative connotations linked with heritage sites in the Vogtland Region and highlight the importance of these sites for supporting local identity.

Heike Oevermann et al. (2023) highlight the possibility of informing sustainable urban transformations in historic towns by understanding the lessons offered by how continuity and change interact within commercial horticulture sites in Bamberg’s old town, Germany—a town where long-standing family enterprises maintain traditional techniques in cultivating local varieties of fruits and vegetables, a culture that has mostly vanished elsewhere. The discussed case shows that the integration between urban development and food production is possible through urban horticulture. It also stresses that the continuity of the historical sites and their spatial structures are at the core of the dynamics through which urban horticulture can thrive.

Margarita Vološina et al. (2023) focus on Cēsis and Bauska, two medieval towns in Latvia that both have protection status and have been recently subject to public spaces improvements. The two settings, however, maintained different interplay between governmental and non-governmental players. The study evaluates urban interventions and implementations in the two towns, varying between top-down and bottom-up approaches. The authors end with a discussion on the spatial planning challenges of both approaches and suggest possible integrated solutions.

Mirhan Damir et al. (2023) delve deeper in the impacts of tangible transformation of industrial heritage sites on their surrounding urban contexts. The study documents and explores the patterns and spatial linkages produced by the successive industrialization and de-industrialization of the former phosphate processing plant in el-Quseir, a coastal town located on the Red Sea Coast, in Egypt, during and throughout the 20th century. By highlighting patterns of detachment with this industrial heritage, the authors call for the necessity of addressing the vacuum created by the dismissal of these physical sites both economically and socially.

Helena Cermeño and Katja Mielke (2023) tackled the issue of common heritage transformation in post-conflict societies. Based on empirical data collected on heritage practices in the Old City of Lahore, Pakistan, the authors assess heritage management policies towards shared history with Hindus and Sikhs before and during the 1947 partition of British India. This article points out that heritage management policies can, however, pave the ground for future reconciliation and coexistences between local communities.

Ilgı Toprak (2023) focuses on the transformation of Rum community's urban narratives that were manifested with the different urban transformation phases of Fener neighbourhood, Istanbul. The author adopted qualitative research methods to approach the complex urban narrative provided by the Rum community in the periods of stability, unrest, displacement, and gentrification. Results reveal that reconstructing fragmented narratives is essential to fight cultural amnesia and reach a better connection with the urban setting.

Catarina Fontes and Graça Índias Cordeiro (2023) portray urban change in the historic Alfama neighbourhood, Lisbon. Through a spatio-ethnographic lens they investigate impacts of regeneration and urban development policies; more specifically, they examine the urban change driven by tourism. The authors describe responses where traces of the community's resilience emerge. The article highlights socio-spatial practices driven by the community to benefit from the new possibilities brought by tourism.

Helena Gutmane (2023) analyses the micro landscape of decision-making processes using the theory of practice by Bourdieu. The author focuses on the case of the reconstruction of the Castle Square in Riga, Latvia. Gutmane examines the interrelationship between motivation and actions of professionals involved in the reconstruction. Findings confirm the relevance of habitus for the investigation of urban practices.

Cilísia Ornelas et al. (2023) focus on the contribution of institutional stakeholders in improving the implementation of urban and building regulations to assist decision-making processes, especially when facing rapid transitions and transformative changes in urban heritage areas. In this study, the authors analyze and compare urban and building regulations of three Southern European countries, namely Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Then, using the same countries, the study proceeds with a comparison of implementations at three different levels: national, regional, and municipal.

Finally, Heather Barrett (2023) investigates local conservation policies and their impacts on the trajectories of development and change within historic cities, with special reference to the commercial core of the historic city of Worcester, England. Using the idea of conservation planning as an "assemblage," the article highlights how deficiencies in articulating urban values and character could lead to incremental erosion on the morphological and functional levels.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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