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# COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Urban development is always related to social transformation. This can be seen in several examples through history, from the French “*luxury polemic*” of the 18th century, discussing where new real estate should be developed, through the *Grossstadt* discussion at the beginning of the 20th century about the relevance of the masses, up to the 1968 social protests, when the theory of Lefebvre about the “*right to the city*”, gave a new interest to the quality of everyday life (Secchi 2013:7). In the last of these, there is an implicit new role for ‘the ordinary citizen’, who became an important stakeholder in the development and regeneration of urban regions. During the seventies several attempts to strengthen the role of citizens in urban planning and design developments were attempted, notably the ones by Yona Friedman and Giancarlo de Carlo, but they did not reach a wide audience, and tended to be only limited, single experiences (Cimadomo, 2014a). They did, however, show the necessity to get the citizen’s opinion and get to know their needs, as a relevant social act in any design and urban transformation intervention, considering not the administration, but the citizens themselves as the real clients.

The weight of the real estate and subprime lending components in the financial crisis at the beginning of this century had, and still has, a great impact on the lives of millions of people. In particular, cuts in welfare benefits have generated protests everywhere, giving a renewed importance to the role of citizens in policy-making. The *15M* movement in Spain, or *Occupy Wall Street* in the United States, just to mention two, constitute a profound transformation and a point of no return in the way public policies are administered. Such movements have also had an effect on urban transformation, leading to a more

bottom-up approach to, and the participation of, ordinary citizens in the planning process.

Focusing in on heritage preservation, this area of policy has, on the one hand, benefited from the downturn in real estate development, especially in those countries where conservation is relatively weak compared to the power of the property developers with the demolition of many heritage sites and buildings as a result. On the other hand, it is also suffering from the serious cuts in government spending and the decrease in finances available to private companies and organisations involved in heritage conservation. Such a decrease in the funding of heritage conservation and preservation projects, both big and small, have had, in many cases, permanent effects, threatening built heritage projects with irreversible damage or even disappearance.

### 1. 15M manifestation in Seville.

source: Pilar Martínez Ponce



These economic and social changes, together with new Information technologies, social media and networks, have provided new opportunities to share concerns and to start reclaiming at least some social justice, and have increased

social conscience and facilitated citizen participation in, and funding possibilities of, many kinds of socially-orientated urban projects. Such participatory practices have encouraged the recovery of some public spaces, which in turn has served to strengthen the cultural identity of the inhabitants of the surrounding neighbourhoods. Through the use of communication networks, local urban transformation projects can be ‘delocalized’, making possible a global resonance unimaginable a few years ago. While in many other policy areas the *Do It Yourself (DIY)* model developed during the crisis period, in the areas of architecture, urban planning and heritage protection there was a greater degree of experimentation with *Do It With Others (DIWO)*. The case studies presented here below show how it is possible to create new models of urban transformation that respond to the needs of citizens, and encourage the social responsibility required in new models of production in our society. They reflect a new way of planning the city, where co-participation and new ways of application and management of public values is possible. They also reflect different ways to act: informality, cohesion, subversion, contamination, hybrid responses, transgression and appropriation; these have all been revalued, and are not considered anymore as negative.

## 2 CASE STUDIES

The case studies presented here show how the *Do It With Others* experiences brought about by recent IT innovations, together with the above-mentioned experiences of the 70s, offer new possibilities to respond to the needs of citizens, to increase responsibility amongst stakeholders involved in social development, and also to give heritage preservation in periods of crisis an impulse by providing new and better collaborative ways to protect and preserve our built heritage.

During recent decades, DIWO practices have been on the whole poorly implemented, prioritizing top-down processes which gave little responsibility to the citizens. This has resulted in a lack of cultural identity and feeling of ownership which is recognized as crucial for the improvement of the relationship between citizens and their built environment. Looking at several recent experiences, we can recognize both the aforementioned bottom-up processes, giving to citizens an important role in the renewed efforts to preserve our cultural heritage, and the top-down processes which foster this participation. Compared to the strict rigidity of previous trends, other solutions have been shown to be possible, involving citizens being inherently involved in the governance of public administrations and therefore being part of the solution, especially when public and neo-liberal investments are scarce. The thinking behind these experiences is that the financial crisis of the beginning of the 21st century opened the way for this kind of new processes in which citizens have a fundamental role. (Cimadomo, 2014b)

### Case 1. THE SCOTTISH COAST

The Scottish coast has been inhabited since the Mesolithic period, offering good opportunities and resources to farm, fish and build new settlements. For this reason, it is an important archaeological area, and many heritage sites have been identified by Historic Scotland, the executive agency of the Scottish Government in charge of safeguarding the nation's heritage. However, these coastal areas are also a place of rapid change, mostly due to sea-level rise and erosion provoked by climate change and the increase in strong maritime storms. Natural coastal processes continuously move sediment which can reveal archaeological remains from any period, but can also cause them to disappear if no actions are taken.

To make a systematic record of these sites, the Heritage Agency has commissioned several Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys since 1996, which are actually managed by the Scottish Coastal Archaeology and Problem of Erosion (SCAPE) organisation. The use of new methodologies, and the possibility to offer the results as digital outputs, enabled about one third of Scotland's 15.000 km of coastline to be covered. In many cases, the number of records quadrupled, many of them showing they were at risk from coastal erosion. To complete the survey and to monitor sites around Scotland's coast, the Shorewatch Project, started in 2001 and funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, was managed by SCAPE and the University of St Andrews.

After a meeting to familiarize participants with recording techniques to facilitate essential pieces of equipment and to explain specially designed forms to be used, the communities were able to start their independent surveys and to complete them as much as they were able to (sketches, plans, excavations with the aid of professional archaeologists). It has been estimated that around 12.000 sites in total could be at risk by erosion, ranging from those of just local interest to ones of international significance; they cannot all be protected. 940 of them are potentially important coastal heritage sites 'at risk' from erosion. The project encourages and assists members of local communities to locate, record and monitor archaeological sites, many of them known only by the communities themselves and still unreported.

The further development of these early projects, which will run until 2016, make good use of new technologies. Scotland's Coastal Heritage at Risk Project (SHARP) looks at the involvement of citizens in the fight against the risks of erosion, and offers opportunities for them to benefit from and enjoy the satisfaction of taking part in archaeological explorations and discoveries. It

### 2. Community excavations at Loch Paible.

source: SCAPE Trust



asks people to both correct errors and to update information of eroding sites, uploading the valuable information which citizens themselves can collect, either through the website, or more easily through the Android or Apple ShoreUPDATE mobile apps. Both platforms offer the possibility to download a PDF pack for each site, modify it manually and then upload it updated to the site, or just modify it, attaching new pictures, GPS coordinates and uploading it on the way through the mobile app. To date, the digital applications recorded 849 surveys and over 1.600 images uploaded by volunteers.

At the same time, a call for ShoreDIG projects has been initiated, where local communities can propose a project idea to be developed on an existing priority site. SCAPE looks at projects which can be safely achievable by volunteers, young people etc. from within the coastal community, as well as established community heritage groups. They should have a wide freedom to act, like improving site conditions and management, or developing project related events. Up till now, over 833 volunteers have worked directly on some of these projects. Two examples of the projects actually underway are the digital documentation and interpretation of Pictish carvings in the Wemyss Caves, which will produce an interactive 3D digital replica, and the aerial photography of inaccessible coastal sites provided by volunteers from the UK Civil Air Patrol Lowland and Highland Units.

By the end of the project, the information provided by the citizens will have helped Heritage Scotland to identify what is important and what is at risk, at both local and national level and so improve the management of coastal heritage in Scotland. What is, however, important is that such active participation of communities also delivers unexpected results, identifying and proposing projects which the government agency had not come up with.

## Case 2. RIWAQ

The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Riwaq, founded in 1991 in Jerusalem, has as one of its aims the preservation of the cultural and architectural heritage of Palestine. One of its earlier projects was the documentation and cataloguing of heritage buildings. It lasted thirteen years, and offers more than 50,000 records spread over 422 sites. Due to the politically and socially sensitive conditions in this region, the Palestinians planned their own solutions to preserve this valuable heritage, using new concepts for the regeneration of villages, with indirect effects on the relationship between Jews and Arabs. The protection of cultural heritage is used as a strategy of empowerment, based on small-scale transformations which, in a coordinated way, can be a silent demonstration against Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Plans for the regeneration of the historical centre of Birzeit, a small village in the region of Ramallah, with 5.000 inhabitants, were developed by the architectural office NGArchitects, and can be considered a pilot project to explore the possibilities of rebuilding the cultural identity of Palestine, redefining the concept of heritage at an urban scale. This approach to heritage is not new, corresponding with the shift of focus from single buildings to the broad environment which encompasses not only buildings but also intangible urban elements.

This project started in 2007 with a broad sociological and behavioural survey, challenging traditional interventions on the built heritage and investigating the possibility of using heritage regeneration to help reclaim a previously lost identity, eroded by the inflexible policies of Israel. The results of the survey showed how heritage, representing 1% of the total number of buildings, were commonly in an advanced state of abandonment. This was due both to the consequences of Israeli military



forces who, it was felt, were aiming at the total erasure of the Palestinian identity, but also to the activities of their own citizens, who prefer to replace old buildings with new, higher and bigger ones, in order to house growing families and with few opportunities to find houses elsewhere. (Meade 2011)



**3. Preventive conservation in a street, Birzeit.**

source: AKAA-RIWAQ

The proposal itself focused on a balance between preservation, aesthetic values and the development and regeneration of the historical centre. On the one hand it aimed at strengthening the value of traditions and formalities of the citizens, on the other hand at introducing small interventions, not visible on a small scale, but which, as a totality, have a definite significance, reinforcing social networks, mapping, designing and using public spaces.

It also provided the possibility to work on different scales at once, at the village level and the detailed level. It proposed two routes for the centre of the village. The first one is related to business activities and the second one connects the most relevant buildings with a 15<sup>th</sup> century caravansary. Both configure the connecting structure with the rest of the city, and make possible an interconnection between the most important elements existing there.

The smaller scale aimed at emphasising the commonality and normality of daily activities, which generate an informal social dynamism which can help improve the whole area. Small interventions, such as the re-pavement of the main streets, offered increased safety for more vulnerable people like children and women, creating new meeting points and fostering new investments and possible new commercial activities which would contribute to the regeneration of the area. Other activities are directed towards the renovation of several heritage buildings, like the Eiyet Rabi, the old guest house which was transformed into a public facility. The proposed solutions for reducing water waste and installing thermal insulation are offered as a model to be taken up by all citizens, as this would offset the dependence on Israeli companies, which increases the basic prices of supplies for the Arabs from expropriated territories. (Golzari, 2011)

The final aim of the regeneration project was to create a sustainable community, which could maintain the identity and history of the village, as steps towards its preservation. This first project is a model for a larger effort also designed by Riwaq, the *“Project of the fifty villages”*, as this is the number of villages where more than 50% of the records surveyed can be found. It reflects a change of thinking, from protectionist rehabilitation, usually instigated by governments, to a dynamic process of creativity towards a new

concept of heritage conservation through the strengthening of cultural identity and a sense of belonging of the inhabitants.

### Case 3. HER.M.E.S. (Heritage Management E-System) in HERMOUPOLIS

Following Brand (1995), buildings which have severe shortcomings tend to deteriorate faster, until considered dangerous. At that point, the most usual option is demolition, whether the building is of cultural or historical value or not. In Greece, where the economic crisis has hit all social sectors hard, municipalities have had great difficulty in maintaining common services, so that the preservation of their cultural and historical heritage in many cases had to be suspended. The municipality of Hermoupolis, with 13.400 inhabitants located in the Cyclades islands, together with the National Technical University of Athens found a way of monitoring such heritage buildings so as to determine their construction status and risk to collapse, thereby establishing a strategic approach for the protection of the building stock of the village. The survey was carried out on 924 buildings, with 10 main categories of deficiency, subdivided into in total 192 detailed specifications. This effort has provided a greatly expanded and profound knowledge of the deficiencies and problems of the building stock, and has resulted in proposals to protect up to 63% of the total number of buildings surveyed, offering a far better protection of the character of Hermoupolis than the present criteria to preserve only specific buildings.

The tools used for analysis and decision making are a Database system (DBMS Hermes processed with the statistical analysis software SPSS by IBM) to store the survey results, and a Geographical Information System (GIS Hermes) to permit spatial searches according to

different criteria and complex questions. In this way, it is, for example, possible to identify the most valuable buildings needing “absolute protection” in relation to the degree of deficiency, in order to make decisions on the priorities of intervention. In this specific case, 160 buildings needed urgent attention, something impossible to accomplish in the present economic and financial situation. So to establish more detailed priorities, an on-line questionnaire was distributed to 30 architects and civil engineers to evaluate these buildings based on more subjective criteria, like the influence on the town as a whole, the social impact, the role of the building in the town, the usage of near buildings, or the existence of a known owner. In this way a more solid and financially viable risk ranking could be realized, and the municipality was able to select those buildings to be restored in the first year of implementation of the planning. (Chatzigrigoriou, 2013)

4. Graphical identification of the “risk factor” for endangered buildings in Hermoupolis. The bigger the circle, the bigger the social need for intervention.

source: P. Chatzigrigoriou



Apart from the participation of experts to realize the final multi-criteria ranking of buildings in danger, there were other activities being carried out, like crowd-funding, in order to save buildings of cultural interest when an impelling economic situation made direct intervention by municipalities impossible. Moreover, through the web page, citizens could get additional, more detailed information and data on the building stock of the town, historical images and descriptions of heritage neighbourhoods and buildings to complement the documents collected. Through community engagement, the selected buildings were labelled in order to make inhabitants and tourists aware of their cultural and historical value and their need of care. The low amount of money required for preliminary essential restorations, led to an increase in the number of buildings undergoing such improvements, giving the feeling that much can be done in the field of heritage protection in times of scarcity. Lastly and most importantly, the project showed that the heritage value of buildings could be quantified and that rules could be established in order to make decisions on how to save them, giving to the people objective facts instead of often difficult to understand rather subjective criteria.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS - MOVING FROM HERITAGE AS AN INSTRUCTION TO HERITAGE AS AN ASSET

The case studies presented here show that the protection of cultural heritage is not only a responsibility of state authorities, but local communities can and should have an active role in the process. The dichotomy between *Heritage by assignation* and *Heritage by appropriation* is hence very important, as the former is evolving and transforming into a new model where communities have a real participation in its development. If “*heritage by assignation*”

embraces all listed buildings and other urban features institutionalised and labelled by experts under the umbrella of governmental institutions, following in most cases a top-down strategy, “*heritage by appropriation*” is recognized by citizens who want the inclusion of other kinds of heritage items, identified by their use rather than through deliberate consideration (Rautenberg 1998, Tweed 2007).

Information technologies offer new opportunities, and the cases analysed above show not only how easy it could be to engage communities in safeguarding cultural heritage at risk, but also how innovative, original methods of heritage protection can be developed when citizens are given more decisional power. The Periodic Report and Regional Programme for Arab States (UNESCO 2004:40) recognizes how one of the most important things determining the preservation level of cultural heritage, is local human activities. The negative effects of these activities can only be offset by education and the awareness of being member of a collective social and territorial community with its own identity. It is with this perspective that participation has to be implemented, in order to create new opportunities for the development of the community and its identity. Heritage is definitely more than the sum of recognized objects worthy of being protected; it has to be approached as a territorial system where the relationship between the physical heritage and human actions is an integral whole.

The Council of Europe “Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society”, signed in 2005 in Faro, can be considered as a turning point in the role of communities in the protection of cultural heritage. It aims, firstly, at emphasizing the value and potential of cultural heritage to be wisely used as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life in a permanently evolving society, and secondly at

hermoupolis.omeka.net

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5. Citizens interaction with the Hermoupolis project through web based applications.  
source: P. Chatzigrigiou

reinforcing social cohesion by fostering a sense of shared responsibility towards the places in which people live. The concept of heritage community has been officially defined, possibly for the first time, as a group that values specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish to protect and

transmit to future generations, and which reflects the need to open public participation in discussions related to cultural heritage. Heritage should be understood as a 'capital of place' to be promoted and expressed. To do so, it is necessary to compare the area's identity with the place's potential in order to develop it without any loss of identity, something that not all the stakeholders realize or are aware of (Parente 2012:58). For this reason, stakeholder participation in all phases, from identification to regeneration to management, should always consider the implementation of participative processes, and foster a sense of shared responsibility towards the places in which people live. Technologies have improved citizens networks, their mobility and activities, including the claim for cultural identity as the only thing that differentiates one people from the other in a globalized world.

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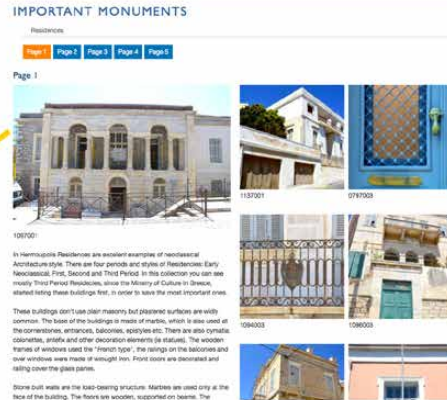
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