

Preface

Many cities around the globe, (still) comprise of historic fabric, particularly in the urban core areas. Very often intangible values, such as beliefs, events, habits or rituals are intrinsically linked with it.

At the same time, ongoing urbanization and changing preferences or lifestyles potentially alter the urban outline. Particularly economic development has the potential to fundamentally change the urban appearance of a quarter or even the city as a whole. While an economic decline very often results in decay of the historic fabric, an economic upturn might have even bigger impacts, like verticalization or gentrification. In parallel, changing urban paradigms and wishes for ‘modernity’ are triggering supposedly fashionable urban appearance, leading to an increasing grade of uniformity. In this way, historic fabric often is sacrificed for the sake of presumed modernity, without consideration of the intangible added values. Particularly cities in developing countries are struggling somewhere within a transformation between a ‘Third-World City’ on the way to become a ‘global’ one, leaving the ‘old’ and presumably outdated behind.

Processes to preserve urban heritage—tangible and increasingly intangible ones—do exist. However, often legal policies are insufficient or outdated in their approach, and their execution may be deficient. Furthermore, global paradigms on heritage and preservation mostly emerged from a Euro-American background, and are not always adequate for different cultural or regional backgrounds. While the global reference frame, with actors like UNESCO or different regional networks, is slowly changing and moving towards more holistic concepts of heritage considering intangible values as well as the global variety of cultural backgrounds and traditions, the national and urban are often lacking behind—particularly intangible values are hardly addressed. This is again especially true for the Global South where traditional understanding of conservation as a process, and not something static, and related practices may even contradict international paradigms and even relevant legislation. In addition, these cities are confronted with comparably higher challenges: namely urbanization, lack of available budgets, high levels of informality and insufficient means of protection. As a consequence, historic fabric is

destroyed; intangible assets like traditional customs and beliefs are not cherished and may vanish easily.

Therefore, this research work aims at gaining a better understanding of the challenges that cities in the Global South are facing, regarding the preservation of their tangible and intangible heritage. It argues that urban heritage has a value going beyond the mere object value; constituting a crucial source of identity for urban inhabitants. The same is true for the urban intangible values and practices which often are associated with places or buildings. The empirical research is based on case studies of Kathmandu in Nepal, Yogyakarta in Indonesia and Recife in Brazil; three cities that still comprise of core areas with a high percentage of historic fabric and distinct cultural expressions.

The comparative study of the three areas reveals the similarities and differences of urban conservation policies, past and present upgrading strategies in the core areas and the importance of tangible and intangible heritage. All three cities share that urban heritage, habits and beliefs are still of importance to the population. While there are significant differences in the kind and level of protection the legal system provides, partly uncontrolled urban dynamics pose a threat to all of them.

After analysing the importance of heritage in shaping urban identities, central conclusions are drawn on the meaningfulness of global heritage paradigms in local non-Western contexts, and the need for integrated approaches considering the different facets of heritage as a whole.

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