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URBAN HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY  
IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION





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# Conclusion: Sustainability in the Age of Globalisation

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The case studies presented in this volume have been analysed by researchers and practitioners from diverse backgrounds and countries. The contributors, including architects, civil engineers, urban planners, sociologists and philosophical anthropologists, sought to investigate different urban contexts and their heritage to understand the stakes of conservation, management and development in a globalised world. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this book explores aspects of urban heritage at four key levels: city, neighbourhood, building and landscape.

The book's first half prioritises perspectives on urban heritage, with architects, civil engineers and sociologists focusing on the sustainability of historic cities and, in particular, their urban development processes. They underscore the historical and cultural richness of these cities and their significance in people's lives. Moreover, the contributors evaluate the sustainability of traditional neighbourhoods, shedding light on the specificities of their urban formation and transformation over time. By analysing the conditions of the past, they seek to inform the present and the future.

The book's second half shifts the focus to perspectives on architectural heritage. Architects, urban planners and philosophical anthropologists prioritise the sustainability of old buildings, particularly their facades and envelopes. They analyse and assess selected buildings according to

climatic objectives and design parameters. Furthermore, the contributors emphasise the enduring presence of history in urban and architectural landscapes, the cultures of local communities and the development of the built environment. In approaching these topics, the contributors consider the architectural process and cultural context as interconnected with the environmental context.

In the twenty-first century, sustainable development is an essential element in the consideration of urban life, evincing the need for 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.<sup>1</sup> Along with its environmental facets, sustainable development also includes human development, values and cultures.

Researchers recognise that cities are progressively affected by regional, interregional, national and international economic conditions. At the crossroads of expertise and initiatives, urban areas foster education and innovation, encouraging economic growth.

This reality becomes especially striking in the context of globalisation, as financial markets subtly push towards uniformity for the sake of cost-efficiency. This trend is also apparent in architecture, where it threatens the cultural diversity of cities. Breaking away from repetitive architecture can appear to be a daunting task in light of the stringent economic system of the construction industry and the constraints of prefabrication processes.

In this framework, local life and its spatial dimension are uniquely situated to support identity. A locality's evolution should be driven by the population's needs and their motivation to collectively organise to express their values. This approach considers economic factors, the broader cultural context and the choice of local construction materials, prioritising the human aspect of architecture over dominant trends.

Drawing on a range of disciplines, this book demonstrates that historic cities foster diversity and cultural exchange through the continuous development of their urban heritage. Old cities are characterised by the forms and contents of their urban networks, residential and infrastructural building, and urban spaces such as streets, squares and

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1 United Nations, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, General Assembly Resolution 42/187* (New York: United Nations, 1987), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/153026?ln=en>

gardens. Urban heritage is perceptible through the five senses and frames the life setting of the local population, interacting with identities, values and cultures. This book investigates the liveability of these built environments and the sustainability of old cities for future generations.

The globalisation of the economy goes hand-in-hand with the global standardisation of architectural production. According to Jean-François Dortier, 'the West had colonised the world previously by strength, producing thus ethnocides. Today, westernisation develops mainly by acculturation, a voluntary adherence'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the growing resemblance among major international cities testifies to the undeniably homogenising nature of globalisation.

However, urbanism goes beyond the simple material dimension to include social, economic and political considerations. Urban planners recognise that the economic domain is by no means independent from the social and political context nor subject exclusively to its logic. Urban heritage transcends architectural features, requiring cities to establish shared values and consistent institutional practices in order to pursue social objectives with more equal ambition. Lived experiences prove to be considerably more complex, and local populations resist the homogenisation of their ways—and spaces—of life.

The political decisions made today impact the present and future of historic cities in many ways. These decisions shape cultural life through public spaces and the cultural activities that generate urban atmospheres. These cultural elements are an important tool for reinforcing local identity.

Moreover, recent studies have revealed the considerable influence of atmospheres in various fields, especially in architecture and aesthetics. The term 'ambiance'—often confined in literature to romantic, seasonal or festive atmospheres—has emerged in recent years as a relevant instrument for spatial analysis and design and a foundation for various theoretical and operational practices.

For architects, this approach to the built environment involves considering all sensations—sound, light, odours, texture and heat, among others. Cultural ambiances contribute to reviving interest in

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2 Jean-François Dortier, 'Vers une uniformisation culturelle?' (March 2007), *Sciences Humaines*, [http://www.scienceshumaines.com/10-questions-sur-la-mondialisation\\_fr\\_279.htm](http://www.scienceshumaines.com/10-questions-sur-la-mondialisation_fr_279.htm)

local values and preserving the richness of local life, as communities cherish that which is specific to their local cultures in contrast to global influences.

Therefore, for sake of present and future generations and the long-term liveability of cities, the urban field must devote greater attention to the local aspects of contemporary cities in defiance of the ideology of globalisation. To preserve identity and economic aspirations, architectural practices must be localised to specific places, empowering diverse expressions as an alternative to the totalitarian features of the so-called global city.