THE RECONCILIATION OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT: The Success of Criteria in Guiding the Design and Assessment of Contemporary Interventions in Historic Places

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Abstract
Since built heritage continues to teach contemporary societies valuable lessons about traditional building practices among other substantial matters, its protection from environmentally insensitive development is important. The reconciliation of heritage conservation and development, therefore, is an appropriate research topic. This article aims at contributing to the global discourse on that topic, which is primarily supported by UNESCO and ICOMOS. It does so by evaluating the success of criteria in guiding the design and assessment of contemporary interventions in historic places. The purpose is to determine whether criteria, which usually come in the form of standards and/or design guidelines, hold the key to thoughtful change in historic places. To achieve this purpose, the author first gives an overview of the current state of knowledge on the topic, then analyzes major scholarly literature to identify the strengths and weaknesses of criteria and finally suggests other avenues worth exploring. As a result of this qualitative research, readers would gain a better understanding of the background, questioning and principles that should frame new architecture in existing urban fabric.

Keywords: Assessment; change; heritage conservation; design intervention.

INTRODUCTION
Heritage conservation is currently understood not only in terms of protecting the legacy from the past, but also in terms of managing urban growth while looking toward a sustainable future. In view of this paradigm shift, the reconciliation of heritage conservation and development has become a timely research topic of increasing importance to scholars and practitioners alike, especially because rapid and uncontrolled urbanization continues to cause a variety of pressures. These pressures are particularly alarming in historic places, which range in size from small urban areas to entire cities, where new construction is sometimes designed and built in a manner that threatens to diminish heritage values and character-defining elements and appears “to erode the integrity and authenticity” of these places (Gustavo, 2011: 55). New construction, such as an addition to a historic building, a separate building or an infill, is a contemporary intervention that will inevitably induce change in the urban environment. Whether that change will be positive or negative depends, to some extent, on the guidance available for applicants and evaluators who respectively submit and review new project proposals such as the proposal for high-rise development.

At the international level, guidance usually comes in the form of Charters, which set “principles and codes of good conduct,” or Recommendations, which institute “norms [that] are considered public international law” (Luxen, 2004: 4). In fact, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), which is the Advisory Body for cultural heritage, have strived to cope with the challenge of intervening in historic places for decades by means of Charters and Recommendations, also known as standard-setting instruments. At the national and
city/municipal/local levels, guidance often involves policy documents, which usually set forth criteria in the form of standards and/or design guidelines. Standards are “prescriptive metrics” that are “generally black and white, providing a measurable box in which new construction can take shape” whereas design guidelines are “parameters describing the preferred look and feel of new construction” and “can be advisory or serve as approval criteria applicants must meet” (Joslin, Karlsson & Michaelson, 2011: 4 & 6). However, do criteria hold the answer to thoughtful change in historic places?

The problem under study here is a gap in the global discourse and resulting literature on the reconciliation of heritage conservation and development. The review of the most relevant literature such as the Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (1976), the Washington Charter (1987), the Vienna Memorandum (2005) and the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011) shows that the above-mentioned research question has been overlooked. The latest Recommendation, in particular, encourages local and national authorities to develop and apply regulatory systems but does not question their appropriateness or effectiveness in achieving the goal of harmonious architectural integrations. For this reason, the present author investigates the success of such systems, mainly criteria, in guiding the design and assessment of contemporary interventions in historic places. In this qualitative study, document analysis is selected as the principal method to address the research problem and to generate the data that would bring an answer to the research question. The knowledge gained as a result of this study constitutes a useful basis for the author to rethink current orthodoxy in relating new architecture to existing urban fabric and to recommend other avenues worth exploring in future studies. Ultimately, this article might be of interest to diverse target groups, including the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, national and local decision-makers and professionals such as architects, conservators, and policy-makers or any individual who seeks information on the research topic.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Whether new construction should look like or differ from adjacent historic buildings and structures is one of the most hotly contested battlegrounds in the debate over the reconciliation of heritage conservation and development. Advocates of the traditional outlook fear that contrasting forms will result in the loss of the heritage values and character-defining elements of historic places, whereas advocates of the contemporary outlook fear that similar forms will inhibit design creativity and obstruct the sense of evolution. This issue of how to add new construction to existing fabric is not a recent phenomenon; in fact, it is “as old as the second building ever constructed by human beings” (Semes, 2009: 25), but it became an increasing concern with the advent of the International Style in the 1920s, which later became known as the Modern Style.

Before modernism, interventions were destined to be compatible with their surroundings because “context [was] an essential source of design inspiration” (Brolin, 1980: 138). Local communities were members of the same group of users who designed all kinds of buildings according to the social, cultural, physical, natural, economic, religious and political aspects of their geographic location (Rapoport, 1987: 10-15). Architectural design was guided by tradition and reached back in time to understand the formation, evolution and values of a place (Zyscovich & Porter, 2008: 11). With the emergence of modernism, however, design was approached from a new ideology. In essence, modernist-trained architects followed three main principles: function is the main source of design inspiration; technologies that arose from industrial design and structural engineering must be used in new construction to reflect contemporary realities; historical references, particularly ornament, must be rejected because modern architecture is a new tradition with its own themes, forms and motifs (Curtis, 1996: 11-13; Tyler, Ligibel & Tyler,
Accordingly, this ideology favoured the spirit of the time over the spirit of the place. It opposed the integration and harmonization of new architectural expressions with historic fabric. This explains why interventions often contrasted heavily with adjacent buildings while others ignored their surroundings intentionally (Brolin, 1980: 140).

As a result of changes in ideologies, materials (e.g. concrete) and methods of construction (e.g. steel frame), cities and towns worldwide witnessed an increase in the size and height of new buildings, which later invaded local vernaculars and, in consequence, adversely affected historic character, heritage significance and human experience. For clarification, the problem is not the insertion of modern architecture in historic places per se, but rather the potentially adverse environmental impacts of new construction on its surroundings. For example, Arabian towns have been jeopardized because many modernist designers and decision-makers have not critically evaluated the appropriateness of modern forms, materials and layouts with regard to Arabian urban morphologies, typologies, cultures, practices, values and climates (Elsheshtawy, 2008; Hawker, 2008; Jayyusi, Holod, Petruccioli & Raymond, 2008). In fact, the ongoing recruitment of famous foreign architects and architectural firms who have little knowledge of, or care for, local values and traditional patterns of development, continues to challenge the conservation of Arabian historic districts. The excess of oil money has fed the desire for international-style buildings, which has enhanced the sense of the possible as opposed to the sense of place. Surviving historic buildings often find themselves in the midst of high-tech structures that pose like narcissistic status symbols for the world to see, photograph, admire and envy. Although some of those buildings possess spectacular architectural and structural qualities, they do little to fulfill the environmental and cultural needs of local communities or to connect with their surroundings (Khalaf, 2012: 35-38; Khalaf, 2013: 19-20). Instead, their main purpose is to attract tourism and international capital. The conservation of site-specific qualities and attributes as part of new construction, therefore, is a complex design challenge that merits some guidance.

To protect historic and traditional urban ensembles from insensitive development worldwide, the movement for urban heritage conservation was launched in the 1960s (Rodwell, 2007: vii). Subsequently, UNESCO Recommendations and Charters were written and adopted such as the Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (1976) and the Washington Charter (1987). These documents are built on the basis of internationally accepted guiding principles; however, they do not sufficiently deal with the insertion of new construction in heritage settings, or in urban environments generally speaking, because they are “often weak and powerless in front of the forces of change that dominate the world and its urban scenes today and in the foreseeable future” (UNESCO, 2010: 2). The lack of explicit guidance explains why the UNESCO World Heritage Committee requested the organization of a symposium to discuss this issue during its 27th session, which was held in Paris, in 2003. That discussion exposed the need for the establishment of new international norms and principles that would complement existing guidance and facilitate the evaluation of new project proposals, particularly for the benefit of properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List because, at the time, the global discourse was limited to World Heritage properties.

When new projects are proposed in such properties, the World Heritage Committee can express its concern about their potential threats to Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which is the basis for inscription on the World Heritage List as explained in the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2013). This was the case, for example,
with the proposal of four towers at the Wien-Mitte Urban Development Project site, located within the buffer zone of the Historic Centre of Vienna, in 2002. The proposal compromised the Historic Centre’s OUV and its cityscape, characterized by low-rise buildings. For this reason, the World Heritage Committee argued that if the development were to proceed, it would cause the removal of the property from the World Heritage List. The Committee requested the organization of the international conference on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture to further discuss this issue, in May 2005, in Vienna. Additional cases of new construction were examined by the Committee, such as the Jahan-Nama commercial complex that includes a 58 meters in height tower located 760 meters from Meidan Emam in Iran, a high-rise development around 800 meters from Cologne Cathedral in Germany, several developments near the Tower of London in the United Kingdom, and the RMJM Tower at the edge of the historic centre of St. Petersburg in Russia (Cameron, 2008: 28). There were other cases, such as those proposed in Beijing, Kathmandu, Riga, Potsdam, Avila, Antigua Guatemala, Bordeaux, Istanbul, Dresden, Riga, Vilnius, Sevilla, Graz, Liverpool and Tallinn (Oers, 2006: 5; Bandarin & Oers, 2012: 62).

It is noteworthy that the main focus of the global discourse at the time, when the above-mentioned cases were being reviewed, was to identify and protect important views, particularly from large-scale and high-rise buildings that were judged inappropriate (UNESCO, 2013a: 1-21). These proposals were considered visual intrusions that would cause the fragmentation of existing urban fabric. They were mainly evaluated based on their obstruction to views from or toward historic buildings in, or near, World Heritage properties especially because the OUV of each property has strong visual qualities. For this reason, attention was given to visual impact assessments, vistas, panoramas, viewpoints, skylines and integrity among other visual aspects of change, which were popular discussion points.

During the conference in Vienna, in 2005, the Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture - Managing the Historic Urban Landscape was written. It is neither a Charter nor a Recommendation, but rather a transitional document. It states that the Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, adopted in 1976, “should be complemented by a new Recommendation taking into consideration that over the last thirty years the concepts of historic urban area conservation have evolved” (Oers & Haraguchi, 2010: 9). This new Recommendation, moreover, “would not be specific to World Heritage cities, but broadened to all historic cities” (UNESCO, 2010: 4). In view of this statement, the global discourse moved beyond the boundaries of World Heritage properties to include places that have local, national or regional importance. Subsequently, the proposition and exploration of new ideas, guidance, tools and approaches as well as the exchange of best practices, case studies and outcomes were requested from researchers and professionals worldwide to assist decision-makers, including the World Heritage Committee, in developing the Recommendation. The latter had to primarily address “the need to link contemporary architecture to the urban historic context” and to facilitate the evaluation of new interventions proposed in historic places as per the Committee’s decision during its 29th session, in Durban, in 2005 (Item 8 of Decision 29 COM 5D).

In the following years, five regional expert meetings (i.e. in Jerusalem 2006, Saint Petersburg 2007, Olinda 2007, Zanzibar 2009 and Rio de Janeiro 2009), and three planning meetings held at UNESCO Headquarters (i.e. in September 2006, November 2008 and February 2010) took place to prepare the content material of the new Recommendation, which became known as the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL). The rationale behind HUL is that “a landscape approach, where all is layered and interrelated […] seems more appropriate to deal with the management of change in complex historic urban environments” than
other approaches (Oers & Haraguchi, eds., 2010: 12). During the meetings, definitions of HUL, tools (e.g. buffer zones) and methodologies (e.g. zoning with cultural mapping) were discussed and documented in reports (e.g. St. Petersburg Summary Report, UNESCO, 2007). Yet, these reports do not explain how local and national decision-makers can use the suggested tools and methodologies to achieve the goal of harmonious architectural integrations (Khalaf, 2013: 57-59).

In October 2009, the UNESCO General Conference adopted Resolution 35 C/42 to authorize the writing of the new Recommendation, which was adopted in November 2011. The Recommendation explains that historic places are living landscapes that carry many layers of significance, including contemporary architectural layers that ought to be harmoniously integrated with existing ones. It defines HUL as both an “approach to urban heritage conservation” and as an “urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes [...]”. This document marks an important shift in the global discourse from the initial focus on the protection of important views and the establishment of visual threads in the urban fabric to the recognition of the layering and interconnection of values. Yet, for clarification, the HUL approach does not guide the design or assessment of contemporary interventions but rather the identification, conservation and management of historic places as explained in Item 5. Although it is seen as an attempt “to break the walls’ of separation between conservation and development” (Bandarin & Oers, 2012: 191), it does not provide sufficient guidance to achieve the goal of harmonious integrations nor does it make “special reference to the contextualization of contemporary architecture,” which was supposed to be the driving force behind this Recommendation as indicated in the Vienna Memorandum (p. 6) and the decision of the World Heritage Committee (Decision 29 COM 5D). Instead, the document suggests financial, regulatory, civic engagement, knowledge and planning tools, all of which remain to be developed and applied by national and local authorities and municipalities.

As a result, additional guidance is deemed necessary. For example, Smith, President of ICOMOS Canada and one of the co-authors of the Recommendation, explains that “the Recommendation itself is not a tightly constructed document” and “has the weakness of being the product of an international committee further edited by the member states;” therefore, Smith argues that ICOMOS should probably produce complementary guidance since it would be useful “to develop something intermediate between theory and practice” (2012a: 1). This suggestion would help filter the HUL approach from the international to the national and local levels; consequently, it would make it more comprehensible and facilitate its practical application. Still, Rodwell, a consultant architect-planner, judges that “it is too soon to anticipate the practical outcome of this 2011 Recommendation and the success of applying the landscape approach” (2012: 81). Furthermore, efforts should be undertaken to strengthen capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and the centralization of information (Oers & Roders, 2012: 7). Accordingly, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris Headquarters as well as UNESCO Category II Centres in different regions are striving to clarify, disseminate and implement the HUL approach in national and local policies and practices, and to support tool development (e.g. civic engagement tools) by means of training courses, seminars, workshops and symposia that aim at bringing together scholars, practitioners and decision-makers from different parts of the world (HUL, 2014). In fact, the Recommendation confirms that “academic and university institutions and other centres of research should be encouraged to develop scientific research on aspects of the historic urban landscape approach” (Item 26). This may explain why recent studies in the field such as Bandarin & Oers 2012 as well as Ph.D. studies such as Veldpaus 2012 focus on the HUL approach and the mechanics of its dissemination and implementation. However, a study that specifically focuses on the design and assessment of interventions while questioning the success
of regulatory systems in linking contemporary architecture to the urban historic context and in facilitating the evaluation of project proposals is overlooked. For this reason, this article investigates whether criteria, which constitute the most common regulatory system embedded in conservation policies, hold the answer to thoughtful change in historic places.

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CRITERIA

Criteria have been established by a number of jurisdictions, cities and nations worldwide to provide direction for the applicants and evaluators of new project proposals, such as new construction proposed in a historic place. They provide a common framework for design and assessment. In different sources of literature, they are referred to as ‘rules’ (Goldberger, 1980: 258), ‘regulations’ (Loew, 1998: 39), ‘design criteria’ (Brolin, 1980: 4), ‘design control criteria’ (Wilson, 1980: 151) or ‘preservation criteria’ (Lu, 1980: 187) among other terminologies. They are either “prescriptive, defining desired results in precise terms” or “interpretive, establishing a range within which acceptable solutions may be found” (Stovel, 1991: 27). Put simply, they are either standards, which rely entirely on words and rigid vocabulary, or design guidelines, which often rely on a combination of words and photographic examples for illustration purposes. For instance, ‘a new building must not exceed the height of adjoining buildings’ is a standard because it emphasizes a specific and measurable indicator (i.e. height); whereas ‘a new building should be compatible with adjoining buildings’ is a design guideline because it is open to interpretation.

Both standards and design guidelines are derived from principles that stem from international wisdom and from agreement among local and/or national government, communities and professionals such as architects, archeologists, urban designers, planners, site managers and conservators. Some examples of policy documents that illustrate a range of criteria are “Building in Context: New Development in Historic Areas” in England (Golding, 2001), “Design in Context: Guidelines for Infill Development in Historic Environments” in New South Wales (NSW) Australia (NSW Heritage Office & RAIA NSW Chapter, 2005) and the “Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada” (2010). The latter is the result of federal, provincial and territorial collaboration involving many governments and authors.

On the one hand, criteria are deemed necessary to ensure predictability, certainty and consistency in decision-making. According to Bennett, a former director of policy, they provide “points of reference,” especially for applicants such as developers and consultants, to avoid ambiguity and undesirable architectural outcomes (2006: 78). Standards, in particular, establish what is allowed or not allowed in historic places. They dictate to applicants what must or must not be done by means of rigid directives that, if followed, may guarantee that their project proposals will be supported and eventually approved. As a result, standards assist the assessment of interventions. Lu, an urban planner and designer, agrees that “without preservation criteria, the design relationship between old and new architecture is not defined; thus, there is no assurance that the new will not disrupt the old” (1980: 187). The author adds that criteria should be explicit and include not only architectural aspects such as materials, colors, scale, rhythm and other visual elements, but also land use, setbacks, density, floor areas, signs, subdivisions and street plans. Nevertheless, the same author asserts that criteria, alone, “will not assure fine design,” because it is up to the designer to use them “creatively” (1980: 190); for this reason, rigidity is “relatively useless;” criteria “should be as flexible as possible” (1980: 199). Warren, an architect and conservator, also finds that criteria must permit “invention and creativity” (1998: 16). In this respect, design guidelines tend to be useful because they provide a framework in which creativity can flourish. Yet, they may be too flexible as to give the impression that applicants can design what they want because, by definition, they are interpretive.

In addition to their rigidity, which tends to inhibit creative thinking, standards are subjective
and biased because they often embrace one design response, such as the use of similar forms to ensure compatibility between the new and the old or, on the contrary, the use of contrasting forms to differentiate the new from the old for legibility purposes. This pre-determined black or white position toward new construction is problematic because it covers a wide range of dissimilar cases. For example, a standard that enforces insistence on ‘contemporary’ as the only legitimate approach to interventions such as Article 9 of the Venice Charter (1964) that states “any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp” may be applicable to a place that is valued for its architectural diversity but it may not be applicable to another that has a unified architectural character and defined equilibrium. For this reason, Stovel, a heritage conservation expert with an architectural background (in memoriam), judges that standards “may impose an unnatural homogeneity on historic districts characterized by diversity of expression” or vice versa (1991: 2).

In light of the example given above, one may argue that any design response can be appropriate in so far as the architectural outcome results from the understanding of the place of intervention. In fact, many authors agree on this point. For instance, Wells-Thorpe, an architect, states, “the correct response depends on the circumstances” of the place (1998: 113). Macdonald, an architect and Head of Field Projects at the Getty Conservation Institute, also asserts, “A traditional response may be as valid as a more contemporary response” (2011: 15). Smith, an architect-planner and conservator, confirms, “We cannot judge the new until we have understood the old, or we will simply perpetuate biases” (2010: 51). Accordingly, whether new construction is appropriate or whether it fits into its geo-cultural context is a question that could only be answered once the characteristics and qualities of the place have been thoroughly examined. For this reason, Loew, an architect and town planner, judges that guidance and policies should “insist on the obligation to understand” the place “rather than try to define particular rules to be followed” (1998: 39).

Criteria raise a number of other concerns, such as the use of unclear terminologies and expressions. For example, “motherhood statements” such as “there shall be a high standard of design” without explaining the meaning of “high standard” are ineffective (Loew, 1998: 220). Furthermore, because the meaning of the words ‘suitable’ or ‘compatible’ or ‘harmonious,’ which are often used in design guidelines, is not readily evident, “it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish guidelines to judge what is suitable or unsuitable to historic surroundings” (Cavaglieri, 1980: 48). In this respect, Semes, an architect, clarifies that “harmony can be neither described nor prescribed by any series of merely verbal desiderata, which is why design guidelines cannot produce beauty, although they may prevent the most egregious ugliness” (2009: 69). The author insists that “the relation between new and old architecture is always defined in terms of the perceptions, values, and interests operative in the architectural culture of the moment” (2009: 115). Accordingly, the understanding of compatibility is different from one geo-cultural context to another as well as from one historical period to the next.

To clarify Semes’ point of view, one may give an example from the United Arab Emirates. Before socio-economic and technological change, which was brought about by oil money in the 1960s, a palm frond house was compatible with the harsh local climate and societal needs of the Emirati community. Today, however, Emiratis no longer live in palm frond houses because their needs, perceptions and interests have changed; their understanding of compatible architecture has changed. In view of this example, one may deduce that criteria may be appropriate to a historic place at a certain time, but they may no longer be appropriate to that place at a different time. Similar to the concept of authenticity, defined in Article 11 of the Nara Document (ICOMOS, 1994), judgments about compatibility differ from one culture to another and even within the same
culture; for this reason, an intervention must be judged and evaluated within the cultural context to which it belongs rather than within fixed criteria, which ought to be revised and updated as perceptions and priorities in jurisdictions or cities change over time. Yet, since standards are prescriptive metrics, by definition, they cannot easily adapt to changing realities.

Furthermore, standards in particular tend to focus entirely on tangible attributes, visual design elements and aesthetic values when they should also focus on human values, rituals and cultural references, because a place is “experienced from within, not observed from without” (Smith, 2006: 70) and “it must be experienced within the cultural framework of those who have created and sustained it” (Smith, 2010: 46). Smith clarifies that assessors may choose to control interventions with “criteria pertaining to height, form, material and style” as long as these criteria reflect the realities of local inhabitants. He gives the example of a tower (i.e. criterion pertaining to height) and explains that if it “symbolizes a source of employment in an economically depressed and secularized town […] then it may be acceptable," and therefore compatible, even if it is located in a conservation area (2010: 51). This example suggests that an intervention should be judged not only by its appearance, but also in terms of its relevance (e.g. cultural, economic) to inhabitants. For this reason, it is essential to involve and consult local communities, to understand how they relate to their built heritage, and to understand what constitutes that heritage. In fact, Smith argues that community-based design, planning and decision-making could be more successful in marrying new construction with existing urban fabric than the fulfillment of criteria (2012b: 1), including land-use and zoning regulations, which not always succeed in shaping desirable community development.

Finally, many authors agree that criteria function best as points of reference or as a reminder list for applicants and evaluators, but they cannot guarantee good, or prevent bad, design. Carlhian, an architect, admits that criteria “can be useful as guides for architects and guideposts for design review board members whose task is to evaluate the appropriateness of the solutions presented,” but they “can never substitute for the exercise of judgment by the architect” (1980: 52). Goldberger, an architectural critic, clarifies that “there are no formulas or simple guidelines” that can magically produce good architectural outcomes. The author stresses “the making of architecture is never the following or the breaking of rules," because it is a “creative process that transcends such quantifiable things” (1980: 258). He concludes with “only a trained eye can know whether materials are most important in one case, scale in another, and roofline in another […]” (1980: 265). Wilson, an architect, also finds that “no simple formulas […] can assure good design” and adds that standards “stifle creativity, which has led to the “picturesque diversity of style and character so much admired in European towns” (1980: 151). Alderson, an architectural conservator and policy-maker, approves that criteria cannot “prevent out-of-scale development” or “make a less-creative architect more creative or be counted on to bring about outstanding design solutions” (2006: 24 & 26). Because the weaknesses of criteria seem to outweigh their strengths, what else could be explored to better relate new architecture to existing urban fabric and further contribute to the global discourse on the topic of concern?

**THE WAY FORWARD: SOME AVENUES WORTH EXPLORING IN FUTURE STUDIES**

The previous section of this article has provided different but complementary data derived from the observation and experience of erudite scholars and practitioners. They were selected from a diversity of interdisciplinary fields within the wider scope of heritage studies and practice such as architecture, conservation, urban design, planning and policy-making to avoid bias and to report multiple perspectives. The analysis and interpretation of the data show that only once a place has been understood can the characteristics of an intervention be determined. It is the understanding of the place that should guide the design and assessment of an intervention.
Accordingly, the key to thoughtful change or to harmonious architectural integrations is not the fulfillment of criteria per se, but rather the process of understanding and responding to historic places. Thus, to move forward, some indicators, which are based on the author’s comprehension of the data, are proposed in Table 1. Their intent is to facilitate understanding a place and responding to it during the design and construction phases of an intervention. Nevertheless, Table 1 is open-ended: it is neither conclusive nor comprehensive because definitive solutions or formulas do not exist, as explained in the previous section. Its purpose is rather to move the focus from criteria to the knowledge needed to establish a compatible relationship between the new and the old. This shift in focus may lead to a useful set of discussion points as part of future dialogue and studies on the topic, particularly on the concept of compatibility, which is insufficiently explored in Charters and UNESCO Recommendations (Khalaf, 2013: 30-62).

Table 1. Phases and indicators (Source: Author, 2014).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases for establishing a compatible relationship between new and old</th>
<th>Indicators (tangible attributes and intangible qualities)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A. Pre-design phase:</strong> Understanding the place</td>
<td>heritage values/heritage significance, traditions, customs, cultural frameworks, rituals, character-defining elements/features/attributes, climate, topography, morphology, landscape, views, historic character, patterns of development, archaeological remains, urban fabric, overall composition, individual parts/elements/components, condition and historical evolution of the place, events, people associated with the place or with existing buildings, local knowledge, building practices, skills, craftsmanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Design-phase:</strong> Responding to the place while designing the architectural intervention</td>
<td>scale, height, form/shape, size, mass, bulk, volume, materials, colors, line, space, ornament/detailing, tonality, texture, architectural style, silhouette, façade, circulation, rhythm, proportions, dimensions, use/functions/activities, openings/holes (e.g. doors, windows), lots, street alignment and street plans, surface covered, land use, setbacks, density, floor area, subdivisions, landscape elements (e.g. vegetation, ecological features), relationships (e.g. between buildings and green spaces, between solid and void), building type/typology, footprint, layout, roof shape, accessibility, human experience, cultural or social or economic relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Post-design phase:</strong> Responding to the place while constructing the architectural intervention</td>
<td>method of construction/building method, foundation, structure, techniques, skin, envelope, environmental impacts (e.g. biophysical such as air, soil and water, or human such as economic, demographic, social and cultural, or visual), safety codes (e.g. public health)</td>
</tr>
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Although the indicators are arranged in no particular order of importance or preference in Table 1, it is noteworthy that heritage values are purposefully mentioned at the very beginning (A) because the establishment of a compatible relationship between an intervention and its surroundings starts with the identification of heritage values (e.g. architectural, archaeological, aesthetic, anthropological, cultural, historic, scientific, spiritual). It is the understanding of what makes a place valuable that should guide design and construction decisions as well as the assessment of project proposals because the conservation of the old when introducing the new necessitates the retention of values to ensure their transmission to future generations. This is a basic conservation principle. Accordingly, the lack of reference to values in decision-making would inevitably obstruct the goal of achieving thoughtful change in historic places. For this reason, the choice of highlighting certain tangible or visual indicators (e.g. materials, height, skin)
at the expense of others during the design and post-design phases (B & C) ought to be justified in relation to heritage values and existing conditions (A). One way to investigate and determine the success of these phases and indicators in guiding the design and assessment of interventions is to embed them into a policy document as part of future research on the topic. However, given that criteria do not easily allow for the justification of an intervention in relation to its context, the author recommends formulating probing questions in the policy document instead. In other words, probing questions would serve as an alternative to criteria, particularly standards.

For clarification, the previous section has shown that criteria usually place emphasis on what applicants must or must not do thereby limiting the opportunities available for achieving the goal of potentially compatible interventions. The author would argue that probing questions, unlike criteria, place emphasis on what evaluators expect to see in, and understand from, project proposals: explicit information that justifies the characteristics of an intervention in relation to its context. For further clarification, a probing question, by definition, cannot be limited to a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer because its purpose is to probe, which means that it compels a person to think more deeply about the case at hand, which, in this scenario, is a design case. Applicants would not be free to do whatever they want because their design and construction choices must make sense to evaluators. Also, a probing question as opposed to a leading question or a yes/no question or a standard may have multiple responses and, consequently, may help applicants consider different design variants for the same intervention and then select the one that best balances the conservation of the place with new development. Accordingly, this approach to design and assessment does not favour a particular way of intervening in historic places; it is less biased than standards that tend to impose pre-determined opinions on what constitutes a desirable architectural outcome. Moreover, asking a probing question would be a way for evaluators to find out more detail about the applicants’ choices and, consequently, it may facilitate the understanding and assessment of interventions on a case-by-case basis. Most importantly, introducing probing questions to a new generation of urban conservation policies would constitute an original contribution to the current state of knowledge because, as explained in the first section of this article, UNESCO and ICOMOS encourage the proposition and exploration of new ideas, approaches and guidance directed at the insertion of new development in historic places.

For example, under the design-phase (B in Table 1), a possible probing question might be: ‘How exactly does the exterior design of the intervention relate to the architectural character of the historic place?’ thereby bringing into play a range of the proposed indicators (e.g. scale, height, form) and providing an opportunity to applicants to explain why their design choices are appropriate or complementary. This question might be asked as an alternative to the following standard: “Make the new work physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic place” (Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, 2010: 23), which imposes a particular design philosophy and relies on strict terminology dictated to applicants without leaving room for justification. In fact, the lexicon of terms (e.g. “subordinate to”) is a minefield of ambiguity because the meaning is not readily evident. Another possible probing question might be: ‘How do the tangible attributes and intangible qualities of the intervention contribute to the understanding and experience of the historic place?’ It might be asked as an alternative to this standard: “Do not create a false sense of historical development by adding elements from other historic places or other properties, or by combining features of the same property that never coexisted” (Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, 2010: 22). Although it is somewhat apparent that the standard seeks to protect the understanding and experience of the place, it is built on a problematic assumption. To clarify this point, one may present a few arguments. For instance,
Semes argues that there is no such thing as false architecture or false history or false sense of historical development (2008a: 5). He explains that interventions are either “appropriate or inappropriate – they either conform with our ideas […] or they do not” (2008b: 704). He clarifies that “truth or falsehood are qualities that we may attribute to historical accounts or interpretations but not to buildings” because architecture “may only be judged good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate” (2009: 154). Adam, an architect and one of the directors of ADAM Architecture in the UK, adds, “Logically, it is simply not possible to be falsely historical,” because any intervention that occurs “will become a historical event,” which “cannot be false and, even if the attempt is to falsify,” the intervention is still “a relevant piece of history” (2010: 82).

The indicators identified in Table 1 could be used to inspire and formulate additional probing questions for each of the three chronological phases (A, B and C). Next, those questions could be integrated into an existing policy document, such as the above-mentioned Canadian one, or into a new policy document developed from scratch and adapted to a given national or local geo-cultural context. The purpose of this exercise would be to demonstrate how the phases and indicators might guide the design and assessment of interventions and how they might be presented to, and used by, applicants and evaluators. In fact, Creswell, an expert on qualitative inquiry among other areas of expertise, recommends composing a “polished product” to communicate suggestions or findings to participants and then to determine whether they are accurate or appropriate or effective or applicable (2009: 191). Accordingly, a policy document may serve as a “polished product,” which, for example, could be shared with professionals in the field during in-depth interviews or focus group discussions or by means of a qualitative survey. The comparison, analysis and interpretation of the resulting data would then help validate the phases, indicators and idea of probing questions. That being said, a policy document will not be composed as part of this article because this is an inquiry that extends beyond the research question put forth in the introduction; it is a future research direction.

Future studies could also investigate how to base design and construction decisions on heritage values since this particular issue, which is generally known as values-based decision-making, is insufficiently explored in the literature. There is a lack of guidance directed at the recognition of, and responsiveness to, heritage values in decision-making processes, which explains why the problem of reconciling conservation and development exists in the first place. Here, the author would argue from the outset that values-based decision-making, similar to architectural creativity, which was discussed in the previous section, is a skill that develops with experience and training. Traditionally, this skill came naturally, because decision-makers shared the same values and were members of the same group of users. Now, however, the situation has changed because applicants, in particular, are also foreign professionals (e.g. expatriates, star architects, international firms) who may not necessarily understand what the local community valued in the past and what it still values today. For this reason, the provision and implementation of professional training to develop the skill of values-based decision-making by means of, for example, international or regional educational programmes and capacity-building workshops that may occur in different historic places and regions would be beneficial. Practitioners such as architects, conservators, planners, urban designers, developers and policy-makers would have an opportunity to exchange information, share their experiences, learn from different case studies and reintroduce themselves to design ethics. Although it will be difficult to engage practitioners and embed new learning processes into their career structure, it is worth trying because the knowledge that will be gained as a result of these efforts will most likely have positive implications for training, policy and practice.

At the local and national levels, the involvement and consultation of communities during
public information sessions, for example, would be beneficial to recognize values, to identify the character-defining elements that carry those values, to understand how different indicators interact and how they contribute to the architectural identity of the historic place in question, and to determine the limits of change that would damage or maintain that identity. This participatory approach can also help manage the positive and negative environmental impacts (e.g. human, visual) of an intervention on its surroundings in a more systematic and objective manner. Nevertheless, governments and contemporary societies must be interested in their built heritage in the first place and must establish heritage values and character-defining elements through formal recognition or designation in order to clarify what merits protection from future development. The real challenge, therefore, is to elevate heritage on the list of local priorities and make it an integral part of a city’s development and planning processes with a view to balancing urban growth and urban conservation on a sustainable basis. That is the ultimate goal.

CONCLUSION

This article began with an overview of the current state of knowledge on the reconciliation of heritage conservation and development to provide background and contextual information for readers. The global discourse and resulting literature on the topic, such as the Recommendation on the HUL and recent studies, concentrate on the dissemination and implementation of the HUL approach but do not question the appropriateness or effectiveness of regulatory systems in achieving the goal of harmonious architectural integrations in historic places. For this reason, this article investigated the success of criteria in guiding the design and assessment of interventions. Document analysis was the principal research method employed to achieve the purpose of this qualitative study. Many sources were consulted to juxtapose and report the arguments of scholars and practitioners who were selected from a diversity of interdisciplinary fields within the wider scope of heritage studies and practice. The investigation has shown that standards could set common benchmarks for applicants and evaluators who seek predictability, certainty and consistency in decision-making; nevertheless, standards address almost entirely tangible or visual indicators such as height, but often fail to address intangible qualities such as the cultural, social or economic relevance of an intervention in relation to its surroundings. Also, they tend to impose rigid directives, use ambiguous terminology, mandate a particular design philosophy, suppress professional judgment and restrain architectural creativity. Moreover, they cannot easily adapt to changing perceptions and priorities in jurisdictions and cities over time. They are too black or white, which causes a problem because they cover a wide range of design situations that would differ from one place to another given that each place is unique.

For these reasons, standards are most appropriate and effective when combined with design guidelines, which are more objective and flexible, less reliant on quantitative measures and more adaptable to changing realities. A combination of standards and design guidelines would better direct judgment about the goodness and quality of an intervention than broad norms alone. However, even if applicants and evaluators were to follow a set of criteria, they may not necessarily produce good interventions or prevent bad ones. It was found that the key to thoughtful change is not the fulfilment of criteria per se, but rather the process of understanding and responding to a historic place when designing and assessing an intervention. In light of these results and the answer to the research question, global discussions and studies on the reconciliation of heritage conservation and development, which are currently focusing on the HUL approach, should consider revisiting the structure and contents of regulatory systems in existing or new conservation policies to better reflect and improve that process, which in return, would help achieve the goal of harmonious integrations.
Accordingly, a shift in focus from criteria to the knowledge needed to establish a compatible relationship between the old and the new was made in the last section of this article. Phases and indicators were proposed in Table 1 in concert with the idea of probing questions to support the justification of an intervention in relation to its context, which is one way to search for compatibility. To empirically investigate the phases, indicators and idea of probing questions, it was recommended to embed them into a policy document and then to share that document with professionals in the field, for example, during in-depth interviews or focus group discussions or by means of a qualitative survey. The resulting data would then be compared, analysed and interpreted to validate whether they are accurate or appropriate or effective or applicable. Other avenues of thinking that could further contribute to future dialogue and the advancement of knowledge were also suggested. For example, how could the skill of values-based decision-making be developed? What are the strategies to engage diverse interest groups and mitigate their differences? How could heritage rise on the list of local priorities? These lines of qualitative research support the importance of context as a whole, where it is the acknowledgment of values, priorities and other lessons learned from heritage that would allow thoughtful change to be introduced in places, whether they are historic or contemporary.

REFERENCES


NOTE

This article uses a minor part of a research that was conducted since 2009 at the Université de Montréal (Canada) to write and defend the author’s Ph.D. dissertation in 2013 (unpublished). Further research was carried out and additional literature was consulted to prepare this article, which is dedicated to the Special Issue on the Contemporaneity of Built Heritage.

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