The Hague International
Model United Nations

Forum: GA 3

Issue: Balancing urban development with protection of historical and cultural sites
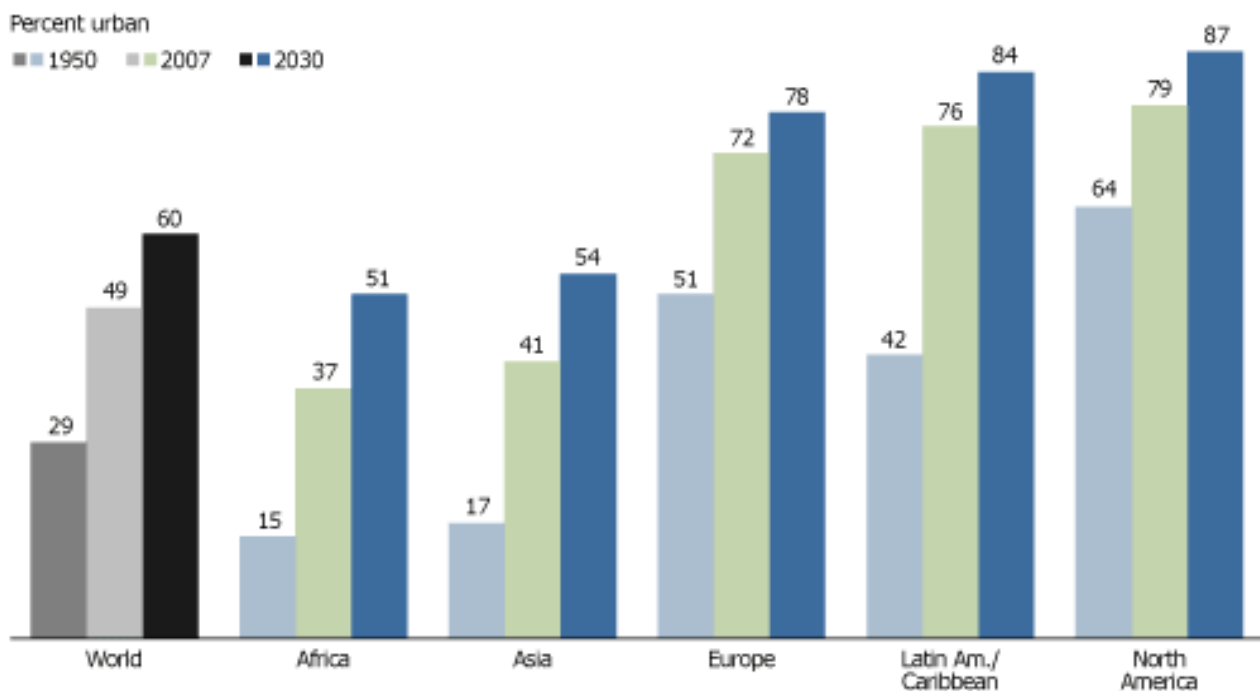
Student Officer: Marwan Elnadi

Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

A geoanalysis of the location of historical and cultural sites indicated they are mainly located in cities around the world.[1] Many of these cities have evolved from their historical origin over centuries. However, over time, and especially over the last 200 years, the world has witnessed rapid changes from industrialization, globalization, technology, and urbanization. This evolution has resulted in rising concerns about the impact on culture and heritage. Whether stemming from the industrial or technological revolutions, the historical urban landscape has struggled to strike a balance between cultural heritage management and sustainable urban development.

By 2030, Nearly Two-Thirds of the World's Population Will Live in Urban Areas[2].

Percent urban
■ 1950   ■ 2007   ■ 2030

Source: United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision* (2006) and Carl Haub, *2007 World Population Data Sheet*.

Sustainable development (SD) is defined as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs[3]." However, until the past decade, heritage has been largely absent from sustainable development dialogue. Furthermore, when considering the role of cultural sectors, if balanced with urban development, it leads to the protection of cultural identity as well as increased economic growth. Hence, the correlation between cultural identity and its influence on values and institutions underpins economic development from historical and cultural sites. However, there are several challenges facing UNESCO World Heritage including uncontrolled urban development, environmental threats, and a lack of funding.

Definition of Key Terms

Cultural Heritage Sites

A heritage site is a location of historical, cultural, or scientific significance that is legally protected.

Urban Development

Urban development is the process of improving and building on land within a city or town, from physical construction to social, economic, and environmental aspects of a community.

Environmental Threats

Climate change causes a range of environmental issues, including intense, frequent weather events like droughts, floods, rising sea levels, and wildfires, often harming ecosystems and displacing communities.

Urban Sustainability

Urban sustainability is the practice of designing and managing cities to be environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically viable for current and future generations.
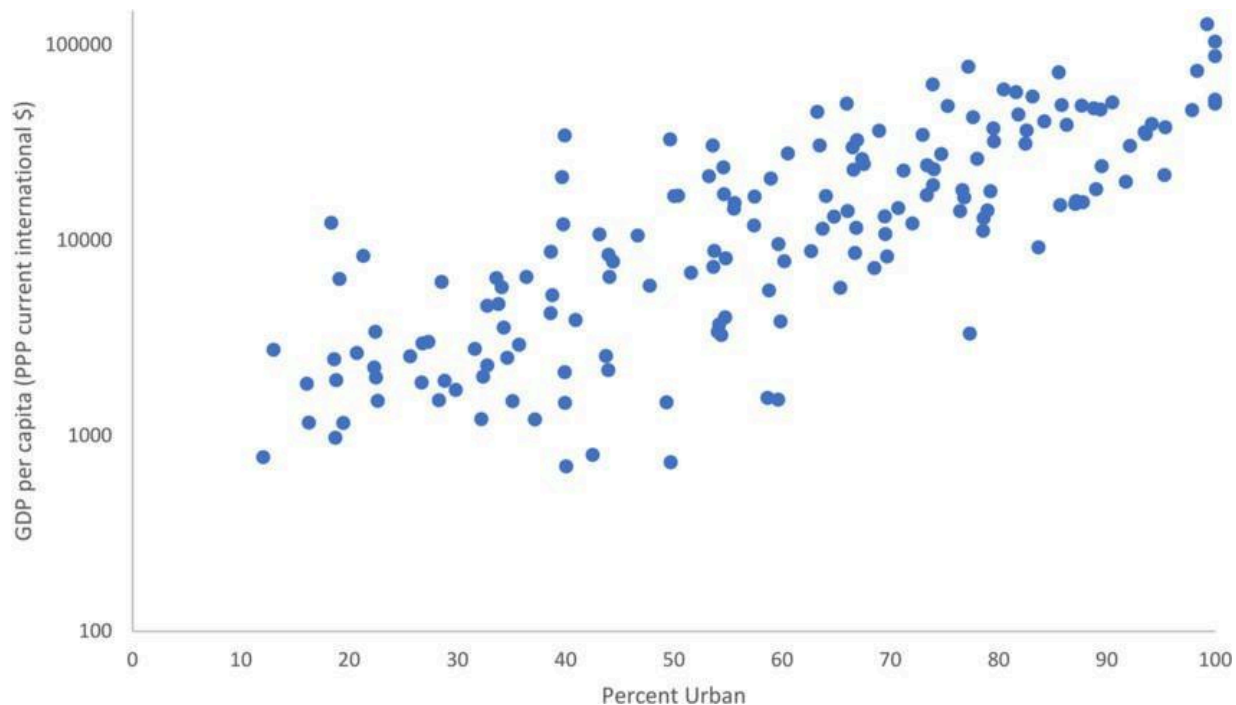
Background Information

Ostensibly, there are many initiatives for addressing sustainable urban development and balancing the protection of cultural Heritage sites. Overall, the trends show improvement in awareness, policy, and global cooperation. However, although the focus initially started decades ago, a uniform result is yet to be achieved due to economic pressures, weak enforcement, and rapid urbanization.

Integration of historical heritage sites into urban planning

The consequences of poor urban planning can still be seen in many cities today. Overall, issues

such as traffic congestion and inadequate infrastructure result in a decline in quality of life due to overcrowding and the absence of essential services. There is a snowball effect where environmental degradation from poor waste management, unsafe housing, and a lack of green spaces leads to social and economic inequalities through a lack of affordable housing and access to jobs and services. Consequently, cities with poor urban planning do not properly safeguard historical heritage sites.

Source: Research Gate - Urbanization and economic development. The relationship between the percentage of a country's population and its GDP per capita. Urbanization data taken from the UNPD for 2015. Per-capita GDP taken from the World Bank. *Some small island states and nations are excluded from this graph, as are nations with missing data.*[6]

A key goal of the UNESCO WH+ST Program is to strengthen the enabling environment by advocating policies and frameworks that support sustainable tourism as an important vehicle for managing cultural and natural heritage.[4] Furthermore, UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Recommendation has proven critical for the management of urban heritage to protect and integrate historical heritage sites into urban planning for sustainable development.[5] The HUL Recommendation enhances synergies with the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the New Urban Agenda, and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

Environmental impact resulting in the loss of heritage sites

Rising sea levels, floods, and extreme weather events result in environmental changes, causing loss and damage to cultural heritage in cities as well as underwater. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1 in 3 natural sites and 1 in 6 heritage sites are currently threatened by climate change.[7] Loss not only affects the sites themselves but also the greater ecosystem, including skills related to local resources and livelihoods, often impacting more vulnerable communities more. International processes and initiatives need to define actions under urban development and sustainability to safeguard cultural heritage as well as the skills of local communities. Integrating cultural heritage into urban

development risk management, accounting for climate impact, is essential.

Funding and financial resources to protect cultural heritage sites

Financing the protection of cultural heritage sites and urban planning is funded by government grants, private endowments, international organizations like the UNESCO World Heritage funds, and revenue from activities like heritage tourism. The HUL Recommendation recommends innovative financial mechanisms involving local communities that result in more inclusive economic growth.[8]

According to the HUL survey, about 20% of the member states have policies to ensure the continuity of local communities and regeneration strategies. Conversely, less than 40% include policies such as microcredit and loans to support small businesses in the heritage sites supporting the ecosystem.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UNESCO Conventions Programmes & Initiatives

Treaties governing the global framework for the protection of cultural heritage sites threatened by urban development.

Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) (UNESCO 2011)

Provides an integrated method for managing rapid urban development while preserving historic areas. Encourages assessing cultural, social, environmental, and economic values together rather than viewing heritage sites in isolation.

UN Habitat

New Urban Agenda (2016) emphasizes the need for heritage-sensitive urban planning.[9] Promotes sustainable urban development that protects cultural and historical identity. Includes guidance for integrating heritage considerations into city planning and redevelopment projects.

UNESCO World Heritage Centre Reactive Monitoring & Impact Assessment

Requires Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) for major development projects near heritage sites.

UN Security Council Resolutions

See Timeline of Events for UN Security Council Resolutions.

UN General Assembly Resolutions

See Timeline of Events for UN General Assembly Resolutions.

Regional Organizations and International Bodies

- Council of Europe
- European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage
- European Union: EU Urban Agenda (Partnership on Culture & Cultural Heritage) promotes heritage-sensitive city development.
- European Capital of Culture Programme revitalizes historic urban areas through culture-led regeneration.
- The Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Cultural Policy Framework includes guidelines on urban heritage management.
- ASEAN: ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage

Timeline of Events

Date	Event / Description
14 May 1954	Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (UNESCO): First global treaty safeguarding cultural heritage, including built heritage at risk from reconstruction and rapid urban change.
31 May 1964	Venice Charter (ICOMOS): Establishes key conservation principles for monuments and historic urban areas; foundational guidelines for preserving urban heritage during modern development.
16 November 1972	World Heritage Convention (UNESCO): Creates the World Heritage List; requires States to protect heritage from negative development impacts through management plans and impact assessments.
1975	European Architectural Heritage Year (Council of Europe): Promotes integration of architectural heritage protection into regional and urban planning systems across Europe.
3 October 1985	Granada Convention (Council of Europe): Legally obliges States to incorporate architectural heritage protection into urban and spatial planning frameworks.
16 January 1992	Valletta Convention (Council of Europe): Strengthens protection of archaeological heritage; requires archaeological considerations in all urban and regional development planning.
14 June 1996	UN-Habitat II, Istanbul Declaration, highlights the importance of preserving cultural and historical identity within sustainable urban development

policies.

25 July 2000	ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage (ASEAN): Encourages member states to protect built and intangible heritage amid rapid Southeast Asian urbanization.
17 October 2003	Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO): Protects living traditions that can be endangered by aggressive urban redevelopment and displacement.
23 December 2004	UN General Assembly Resolution on World Heritage (A/RES/59/254): Reaffirms the need to protect World Heritage properties from threats, including uncontrolled urban development.
10 November 2011	UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL): Introduces a holistic management approach integrating heritage conservation with modern urban planning and sustainable development.
12 December 2013	UN General Assembly Resolution on Protection of Global Cultural Heritage (A/RES/68/223): Addresses threats such as rapid and unregulated urban expansion to heritage sites globally.
19 December 2014	UN General Assembly Resolution: Culture and Sustainable Development (A/RES/69/230): Recognizes cultural heritage as central to sustainable cities and responsible urban development.
22 December 2015	UN General Assembly Resolution: Culture and Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/214): Strengthens the link between heritage preservation and the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 11.4.
20 October 2016	New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat III): Global policy framework supporting sustainable urbanization that protects cultural and historical heritage in development decisions.
24 March 2017	UN Security Council Resolution 2347: First UNSC resolution dedicated solely to cultural heritage, addressing destruction and stressing protection during urban conflict and reconstruction.
2018	EU Urban Agenda – Partnership on Culture & Cultural Heritage: Guides EU cities on integrating heritage into urban regeneration, sustainable tourism, and planning policies.
2021–2024	Implementation of UNESCO HUL Pilot Cities (e.g., Zanzibar, Ballarat, Cuenca): Demonstrates practical balancing of modernization with heritage through participatory planning and impact assessment tools.

Possible Solutions

Policy, Regulatory, and Integrated Urban Planning

Continue to enforce heritage protection laws with regard to updated listings, and implement zoning regulations. Include required cultural heritage impact assessments (physical, environmental social) before approving major infrastructure or construction projects. Policies should adopt long-term urban plans that incorporate heritage conservation from the start, not as an afterthought.

Economic & Financial Solutions

Set aside tourism revenues dedicated to the upkeep of historical heritage sites, and reinvest in the local business ecosystem. Work with private developers and investors to finance restoration and conservation projects. Create awareness on the economic uplift from balancing urban development with cultural heritage tourism. Create walkable cultural districts that blend preservation with economic vitality.

Architectural & Technical Solutions

Repurpose historic buildings while retaining core architectural features and leveraging modern technology for restoration, urban planning, and structural monitoring. Integrate heritage into city planning as active urban features. Use parks, plazas, and gardens as buffers around heritage sites.

Endnotes

1. Haub, Carl. *2007 World Population Data Sheet*. Population Reference Bureau, 2007.
2. United Nations. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2006.
3. World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future* (Brundtland Report). United Nations, 1987.
4. UNESCO. "World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme." *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, 2019, https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/.
5. UNESCO. "Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape." *UNESCO*, 2011, https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul/.
6. ResearchGate. "Urbanization and Economic Development: The Relationship between the Percentage of a Country's Population and Its GDP per Capita." Data sourced from UN Population Division and World Bank, 2015.
7. Banjo, Fadeke. "7 Heritage Sites We Are Losing to Conflict and Climate Change." *Global Citizen*, 15 Mar. 2024, https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/hertiage-sites-conflict-climate-change/.
8. UNESCO. "World Heritage in Danger." *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, 2017, https://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/.
9. UN-Habitat. *New Urban Agenda*. United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, 2016.

Bibliography

Works Cited

Banjo, Fadeke. "7 Heritage Sites We Are Losing to Conflict and Climate Change." *Global Citizen*, 15 Mar.

2024, www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/hertiage-sites-conflict-climate-change/.

Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. "'Financing Sustainable Urban Future for All': The World Heritage Cities

Programme Celebrates World Cities Day 2023 through 'Ensuring Inclusive Economic Benefits of

Urban Heritage.'" *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, whc.unesco.org/en/news/2619.

UNESCO. "UNESCO World Heritage Centre - List of World Heritage in Danger." *Unesco.org*, 2017,

whc.unesco.org/en/danger/.

---. "World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme." *Unesco.org*, 2019, whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/.