

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE – WHAT’S EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

This article considers a selection of international projects focused on city management as well as observations on the ways other cities in Europe address challenges related to the management of their public realm. The emphasis is placed on different challenges, solutions and ways of thinking about shared space in a historic city.

There are many reasons why city managers should look into international practice. For historic cities, such as Edinburgh, challenges are complex and often involve a smart balancing between economic growth and monument protection. Moreover, Europe is enjoying one of its longest periods of peace, shifting competition between nations to different aspects of life such as the economy, sport and even broadly understood culture. The latter is manifested by increasing efforts of cities to attract visitors who can significantly contribute to the local economy by paying for local cultural attractions, hotels and restaurants. Despite that ‘silent’ competition, cities work together to improve the ways they manage themselves through the development of European and global networks addressing the city management challenges.

PRIDE IN WORLD HERITAGE STATUS AND MONUMENT PROTECTION

Cities are proud of their history and identity. One of the best recognitions of that is World Heritage (WH) status, which in practice can be perceived as a brand given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to places of outstanding universal value to humanity. In fact, most World Heritage Sites (WHS) are global landmarks, such as Taj Mahal in Agra, India, or the Great Wall of China. Some received the status as a protective measure, such as the Abu Simbel temples in Egypt, while others are fine examples of urban planning or played a role in the development of humankind, such as Edinburgh’s Enlightenment along with its Old and New Towns. Interestingly the WH status becomes a factor when it comes to choosing a holiday destination, especially for frequent travellers interested in a particular aspect of cultural heritage. Given that there are seven hundred and seventy-nine cultural WHS on the list at present, people have plenty to choose from.¹

The added value is that all of them are well documented and intellectually accessible via the internet. Also the state parties have to ensure that their WHS benefit from appropriate protection, which is not always the case. Some authorities make a significant effort to promote their destinations by using the status as an attribute in marketing campaigns. The WH centre does not provide any financial support to the sites (unless they are under a serious threat), so in pragmatic terms it is all about prestige. Many cities in Europe are really proud of their WH status and ensure that visitors not familiar with the brand have an opportunity to find out about it through heritage interpretation. For

example, the city of La Laguna on the Spanish island of Tenerife placed the WH emblem on its police cars; Lviv in Ukraine has a plaque on the facade of its city hall; and Vienna in Austria installed navigation signs within the WHS to inform visitors. Bordeaux, a historic French city well known for its wine heritage, used the status to diversify its promotion to potential tourists by refocusing its marketing strategy from a well-established wine legacy to the built heritage.

BRAVERY IN MONUMENT PROTECTION

Krakow is the former ancient capital and a cultural heart of Poland. The city itself has a special status for Polish citizens, both historically and symbolically. It also has a large concentration of historic buildings such as medieval defensive structures, renaissance palaces and university buildings, highly decorative baroque as well as mannerist churches. Nowadays, Krakow's historic centre is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Europe and it benefits from a great deal of care and attention. The state of conservation of this WHS is high allowing the municipality and its partners to focus on 'soft' improvements such as the legal side of monument protection, promotion and interpretation.

Krakow's conservation is funded from municipal resources, private donations as well as governmental. The latter is transferred through the budget of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland and in 2014 it was thirty million zlotys (about five point seven million pounds).² This money is well spent on quality restoration in Krakow, particularly in the Main Square, which forms the heart of the WHS. The square was delineated in 1257 and since that time has been the largest urban square in Europe. Until the eighteenth century its main function was trade and, therefore, it was filled by tightly plotted commercial buildings. The square's architecture has been evolving throughout centuries and its current shape comes from the nineteenth century, when the main central building, the Cloth Hall, was rebuilt and the entire space was setted.

In 2005–07 the city along with the Historic Museum of Krakow implemented a programme to commemorate the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Krakow's foundation on the basis of Magdeburg Law through a number of investments and cultural events. One of the main investments was the reconstruction of the square's surface preceded by extensive archaeological excavations, which started in the summer of 2005 (Figure 1). The excavations lasted for five years due to a large number of discoveries, but were not totally refilled when the work was completed. The eastern part was turned into an underground museum exhibition route, presenting medieval Krakow's connections with other European centres of that period. The entire complex includes the Cloth Hall's cellars as well as an exhibition explaining the project itself. The quality of interpretation is high, innovative and interactive making this place a great starting point for those interested in the city. Its modern character makes the facility accessible and attractive to everyone. The changes added a new function to the square without compromising its architectural integrity and enabled improvements to the public realm such as repaving of the square.

VISUAL CLUTTER

There is a certain mindset among many shop owners in Krakow that a strong part of their business success relies on presenting a more attractive shop front than their neighbours. This leads to visual competition between shop fronts and, as a result, a less attractive and dysfunctional space. In many cases it should be more about explaining to the business owners the value of dropping visual competition for strengthening the architectural character of a place (street, block or square). In this way shoppers can associate the



Figure 1. Market Square during excavations in Krakow, Poland. Photo: Piotr Guzik/AG

shopping experience with a particular place consisting of a number of shops, which visually complement each other. William Street in Edinburgh is a good example of this and has been achieved with support from the Edinburgh World Heritage's Conservation Funding Programme.³

Poor advertising includes issues such as inappropriate use of colours and forms, oversized fascias, a poor relationship between facade and shop front, and the introduction of visual 'decoys' such as LED signs. It is particularly challenging in historic towns, supposedly well managed through planning regulations aiming for the protection of historic areas' architectural integrity and authenticity. Nevertheless, cities started addressing the issue, enforcing regulations that, although in place, were not necessarily respected, or rather understood, by many business owners. It raised the question of whether it was the fault of the planning authorities, shop owners or designer, although probably all contributed to the problem.

The city of Lublin in Poland, as a member of the HerMan Project (Management of Cultural Heritage in the Central Europe Area), had to address the issue of poor shop front design through a pilot action focused on collaboration with various stakeholders in the city, and the 'Factory of Good Design' initiative.⁴ The aim was to raise awareness of good design standards among business owners and the community. The activities involved the local authority's officers organizing workshops for local schools to ensure early education on the subject. In addition to direct meetings with citizens, on-street exhibitions with examples of good practices from cities such as Regensburg (Germany) and Paris (France) were installed in different parts of the city.

In Krakow, the municipality declared almost a war against poor advertisements. It involved strengthening planning controls at the local level by the introduction of the Cultural Park status in Krakow Old Town in 2010. All inappropriate advertisements were removed by enforcement officers followed by ongoing monitoring. This seemingly forceful process gave positive results and encouraged citizens to think about their surroundings. The results of the process can be seen in Market Square, for instance. Also, La Laguna introduced regulations to protect and enhance the architectural integrity and authenticity of its WHS, placing a strong emphasis on the quality of shop front



Figure 2. Examples of functional small architectural forms: Vienna, Austria; Warsaw, Poland; and Malaga, Spain. Photos: author

restoration as well as the introduction of new ones in a historic context, strengthening the architectural vibrancy of many small yet popular squares scattered within the site.

One of the ways to accommodate necessary street furniture, which also form visual clutter, is by clever design. It is about creating a pragmatic piece of small architecture – a functional landmark. There are plenty of good examples in Europe, for instance bicycle racks in Malaga, Spain; Vienna's artistic and informative navigation system encouraging exploration of the city; or Warsaw's (Poland) Old Town benches, which provide navigation in the city, historic interpretation and play Chopin's music for those who want to relax (Figure 2).

CITIES TELL THEIR STORIES THROUGH PUBLIC SPACE

Historic cities, especially those considered as a WHS, have a lot to communicate about their identity not only to tourists and newcomers but also to citizens. Good practice in heritage interpretation encourages cities to use their public space to tell public urban histories, but it also expects 'street' clutter to be minimized in streets, parks and squares. Both are necessary. Therefore some cities have tried to rationalize the management of public space through compromise. For instance, in Vienna pedestrians can use discretely installed QR codes in paving to receive useful information about a place on their smartphones (Figure 3). This approach achieves maximum impact with minimum interference in the public space.

Urban regeneration projects in the historic context can bring significant visual and functional changes to a place. That, in turn, can be received by the local communities in various ways, depending on the level of engagement at the pre-planning stage or even conservative attitudes to change and development. However, often the main reason why



Figure 3. QR code interpretation in Vienna, Austria. Photo: author



Figure 4. A project interpretation in Oporto, Portugal. Photo: author

development projects are objected to by the community is poor communication between the authorities and interest groups. It may result in community-driven campaigns, which stall the development of projects and ultimately make them more expensive. A way to soften the dialogue is a smart interpretation explaining what is happening with a particular place.

Only six to seven years ago the core of the historic centre of Oporto, Portugal, was in a poor state of repair and the living conditions in many historic buildings were low. However, it contained a community that in many ways lived the same way as its predecessors. Gradually the area was improving through heritage-led regeneration projects (Figure 4). From the perspective of the city management it was important to respect the traditional community and make an effort to explain the changes through interpretation. A similar case can be found in Santa Cruz, Tenerife, where school children were involved in the implementation of the new tram system along with all physical interventions in the urban space. The children were asked to write thematic poems about their city and recite them on the tram during school trips.



Figure 5. A street being re-setted in Rome, Italy. Photo: author

One can easily understand the current state of city management in the city through observation. Re-pedestrianization of historic cities is a widely discussed issue, especially in those cities that have managed to keep their setted spaces partially intact. There is a perception among transport managers that covering setted spaces with tarmac is cheaper in maintenance and reversible in terms of conservation practice. However, cities such as Rome (Italy) take an opposite approach to the issue and make an effort to maintain their setted streets in historic parts, such as the Colosseum and Forum (Figure 5). The process is managed in parallel with the restoration of surrounding buildings, which sends a clear message to the public: we are reinforcing the historic character of the city because it is valuable.

Square des Ursulines in Brussels (Belgium) is a good example of how an open and unused space within an historic setting can be readapted. In the 1990s the concrete-laid square was in a poor condition, yet popular among dog walkers. It was also a time when skate culture was growing in Europe and there was a demand for skate parks. The local community of skaters in Brussels had been pressing the local authority to construct a skate park in the square. After years of arguments, protests and securing support from the regional administration, it was decided that Square des Ursulines would accommodate a new skate park (Figure 6). The design process was led by the community and future users delivering a new function to the space. In this way the authorities provided the community with a demanded function, empowered them through the design process and revitalized the public space.

The previous example could be perceived as brave and original, but there are more similar urban stories. Rucker Park in New York's Harlem is a legendary basketball court, founded in 1950 by Holcombe Rucker, a teacher and director for the New York City Parks Department. The aim was to start a basketball tournament for children threatened by social deprivation and to support them in efforts to improve their future prospects by joining the college. The idea worked well and soon Rucker Park became a place associated with many of the National Basketball Association's legendary athletes. The park from the very beginning



Figure 6. Square des Ursulines in Brussels, Belgium. Photo: Radek Slomnicki

was owned by the local community, but is open to everyone. Nowadays, it attracts famous athletes, actors, politicians and tourists, as well as members of the community, making them all equal in the context of the shared passion of basketball (Figure 7).

CAPACITY FOR GREATNESS

In order to be great, cities have to build their capacity. Cities provide structural foundations for greatness embodied in their citizens, history, knowledge, work culture and social intelligence. The political stability in Europe, as well as evolving democratic regimes, enable citizens to participate in the management of their cities and form interest groups represented by street associations, community councils, non-profit trusts etc. Those organizations are instrumental in the formulation of civic societies as they are not driven by income, and in most cases people join them because of their interests. In practice, they form connections between society and the authorities, enabling them to articulate their interest.

Local authorities managing historic cities need to balance the scale of physical development with historic preservation. Although in many cases the latter depends on the former it has to be noted that for many cities revenue from tourism is a significant part of the total income. When it comes to Edinburgh the numbers provide a good idea of how it works in practice: sixty-eight per cent of visitors come to Edinburgh because it is 'a historic city' and ninety-three per cent of them spend their time 'walking around it'.⁵

It is easy to forget these factors when a perspective of quick economic growth is on the horizon. However, at the political level democratic structures enable cities to control their growth through participative processes such as public consultations, which in many cases involve the aforementioned organizations and interest groups. Edinburgh has the charity Edinburgh World Heritage, with over forty years of experience; and Porto (Portugal) has Porto Vivo, responsible for urban regeneration in the historic city. The scope of their mission is wide, but key for Porto Vivo is its relationship with the municipality.⁶



Figure 7. Rucker Park and Julius 'Dr J' Erving in New York's Harlem, United States.
Photo: <http://www.slamonline.com/>

In order to ensure an efficient monitoring of changes, problems and projects on site, representatives of Porto Vivo undertake site inspections jointly with officers of various municipal departments on a weekly basis. Having senior officers on board makes them more connected to problems, allowing decisions to be made at first hand.

Another organization to consider is the International Cultural Centre (ICC) in Krakow (Figure 8). A non-profit entity set up by the first Polish democratic government in 1991, the ICC looks at heritage from many perspectives, describing itself as 'a venue for meetings and reflections on heritage'.⁷ In practice the ICC contributes to Krakow's and Poland's political capacity within the Visegrad Group and Europe by strengthening understanding of cultural identity through cultural diplomacy. Now it has a significant influence over the discussion on heritage in Central Europe, cleverly implementing the national priorities of cultural diplomacy as well as pan-European political agendas, such as Europe 2020 in areas such as education and skills development. Moreover, despite its focus, the ICC is based in two listed buildings located at Market Square, cleverly modernized to form a functional space for meetings, conferences, exhibitions and a library. The organization employs fifty-four people overseen by twelve board directors.

CONCLUSIONS

Population in cities has been growing rapidly over the last fifty years, raising potential conflicts over the ownership, quality of living and functionality of shared spaces. Cities make efforts to maintain their identity, especially those of historic status, which tend to attract large numbers of visitors. Fortunately, the number of cities reinforcing their historic character through monument protection and contextual design in Europe is increasing. To an extent it was caused by the expansion of the European Union over the



Figure 8. The International Cultural Centre (ICC) in Krakow, Poland. Photos: ICC

post-Communist and Southern European countries as well as its politics to strengthen European regionalism. Seemingly, the period of time in which they have been catching up with the West is coming to an end in many aspects. Those countries involved use the capacity of their cities to work together towards a better practice in self-management.

REFERENCES

¹ See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>.

² See <http://www.skozk.pl/rola-prezydenta-rp.html/>.

³ See <http://www.ewht.org.uk/looking-after-our-heritage/shopfronts/william-street/>.

⁴ See <http://www.herman-project.eu/project.html/>.

⁵ See <http://www.etag.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/facts-and-figures-2012.pdf/>.

⁶ See <http://www.portovivosru.pt/pt/porto-vivo-sru/missao-e-estrategia/>.

⁷ See <http://www.mck.krakow.pl/page/mission/>.