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Cultural Heritage as a Basis for Resilience - a Reserve for the
Regeneration of Historical Cities

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Of all the values and phenomena which pertain to the conceptual sphere of cultural heritage,² the historical town or city is one the most complex forms and types (including elements of both tangible and what is called intangible heritage).³ At the same time, it is not only or primarily due to the appreciation of their cultural heritage that towns or cities have become increasingly dominant as the 'habitat' of human communities. It is widely known that since 2007 the majority of humankind lives in urban environments. Today in 2014, this amounts to 54% (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2014: 7)

Since the present work has a special focus on considerations affecting the V4 countries, it seems justified to present their current rates of urbanisation as well (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2014: 23-24): Czech Republic 73%; Poland 61%, Hungary 71% and Slovakia 54%. The data forecast for 2050 clearly shows a continuing intensification of urbanisation: Czech Republic 79%, Poland 70%, Hungary 82% and Slovakia 63%. Admittedly, these data only reflect a quantitative change in the sense that the present and forecast rates of urbanisation, although they may well represent an improvement in quality compared to the non-urbanised conditions, offer no information on just how much of an improvement in life conditions an urban environment grant.

It would hijack our train of thought if at this point we were to discuss at length the living conditions of the millions of people who live their lives in the sphere of a mega-polis. It must at least be mentioned, however, that sadly such a shift does not by any means guarantee an improvement on previous living standards (e.g. the 'traditional' lifestyle of a rural setting); indeed, in many cases it is worse.

The 'historical city' is one of the possible forms of the urban environment, but at the same time difficult to define in terms of space or time. The evident gifts of the historical city are in many cases only beneficial for a certain portion of the population. Often they only represent a (more or less enduring) attraction for the tourists visiting the town, while they remain mostly unexploited by the rest of the city over the long term. In better cases historical heritage is seen as a developmental reserve, the mobilisation of which would be extremely desirable were the required sources available. A number of research projects which have emerged over the past years and decades have aimed to find ways to measure what these cities offer to inhabitants and users in the broadest sense (cultural, service, leisure etc.). Various studies of the 'creative city', 'smart city' or 'green city', as well as related projects and programmes, offer approaches for the complex qualification and measurement of cities. A

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2 The concept of 'cultural heritage' and the content of the concept emerged gradually over the recent decades. Even at present there are several definitions in use. (Cf. UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention, 2003 World Heritage Convention), also Román 2004; and Erdősi and Sonkoly 2004.

3 Cf. various definitions: Charter For The Conservation Of Historical Towns And Urban Areas (WASHINGTON CHARTER 1987), http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/towns_e.pdf; and: „The Valletta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historical Cities, Towns and Urban Areas - Adopted by CIVVIH 10/04/ 2010.

recently developed tool called the 'KRAFT Index' came out of the research at ISES based on the targeted research of Kőszeg, Szombathely and their vicinity and is now offered up for further consideration and practical application (Miszlivetz and Markus 2012).

The 'Creative City – Sustainable Region' report (Miszlivetz 2012) presents a novel approach designed to guarantee, through the cooperation of town and country, that inhabitants of the area attain a practically urban standard of living without having to move from their present residence. The dynamic of urbanisation does not equivalent to moving to the city – instead this can take place through dynamic development of the local environment.

The crucial characteristic which determines both the idea of 'the creative city' (particularly if it also includes the idea of sustainability) and the programmes and projects which aim at the invigoration of towns while preserving their existing values, is their *uniqueness*. All of the above can be seen, without exaggeration, as a kind of response to the challenges of an ever more globalised wider context. Responses to challenges and trends will always be unique, precisely because they are based on the intransigent characteristics of the city and emerge when those unfold.

This is the point at which it becomes truly important and interesting to identify the components which enable historical cities to rejuvenate without damaging their identity by becoming diluted, distorted, or, in the worst case, lost. What are the foundations upon which these cities can learn to absorb modern values or gain the ability to generate them, and do this in a way where simultaneously the physical and intangible *attributes* which carry the identity of the town also survive? The aim of the targeted research presented here is to assess and appraise the role and significance of cultural heritage items and to offer conclusions and proposals. Throughout this research, the holistic character of the totality of the town or city as a complex social (collective and individual) unit needs to be kept in mind.

It is certainly important here to refer to the dynamic of 'heritagification' (See footnote 2) which affects a somewhat narrower range of the cultural heritage elements in historical towns, primarily focussing on the built heritage, even if we necessarily also include the relevant intangible dimension. Fundamentally, and this is true of all elements of the built heritage, 'nothing is built as a heritage building, it only becomes one if the social needs or appraisal of posterity, whether of the directly following or of much later ages, so dictates (Fejérdy 2010).

The results of past actions and achievements are still present for us, encapsulated in the assets of historical cities. This kind of 'embodied creativity' may be recognised, for instance, by UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, supported by those attributes which are results of genuine, creative answers given by communities to the challenges, both natural and social, which emerge from their environment (if their outstanding universal quality is measured and meets the special criteria of the WH)⁴. This creativity is available for the current generation; materialised as the built environment of our lives, which provides the given setting for all new interventions (including those which are most creative). Historical cities, by definition, have usually been shaped over longer periods of time, overarching centuries of changes and challenges. The results of the subsequent interventions and interactions between previously existing assets and what were then seen as new additions form a kind of *continuity*. This continuity plays a fundamental role in maintaining the identity of those cities and their living (and therefore changing) communities.

⁴ The approach of "outstanding answer" is based on Jukka JOKILEHTO's presentations on OUV of World Heritage properties (a non-published working document).

As mentioned above, creativity has always been present throughout the centuries but not always on the same level, nor with the same intensity. We also have to be clear that in many, or even the majority, of cases creativity meant something like the ‘creative adaptation’ of solutions or approaches born or developed elsewhere. This is simply logical, while the response to challenges always requires creativity, but does not in each and every case need solutions or actions which were independent, diverging from the already existing basis and urban framework – on the contrary. One of the most sophisticated kinds of creativity – at least in the context of historic cities – is based on recognized tools and methods that are able to provide a special feature with the characteristic that it has always been there. In other words, the most important qualifier in measuring the efficiency of a creative context and intervention is by identifying the level at which the ‘creative response’ can be adaptive and creates measurable added value, without diminishing or damaging existing ones.

This same kind of creativity could easily be seen as a tool for better understanding and, even more, a better use of assets concentrated and accumulated in historical cities as a kind of expression of continuity in the community’s life. It should not be viewed as static, but rather as an evolving process. This evolving character does not contradict with continuity, which is interconnected with sustainability in a number of ways. Changes involved by their evolution traditionally remained sustainable, determined by conditions and resources of given communities and the intrinsic qualities (unchangeable physical characteristics) of the land they covered.

Accumulation of and consecutive ‘creative answers’ given to sequentially emerging challenges usually resulted in a rich, multi-layered heritage. It is important to highlight that this heritage is not only a (mostly physical) achievement but also has the potential to serve as a source of inspiration for creativity and therefore should be considered as such, too. One of the most striking issues concerning Creative Cities is the extent to which they create the conditions for formulating clear questions or allow for the emergence of well-defined situations which need really creative answers, or, at least, keep open the kind of processes and events required for creativity. Places with special qualities which act as sources of inspiration and initiative for supporting or strengthening continuity are without exception multi-layered, both in their physical existence and their (social) functions. This includes the need to assure an open spirit inspired by the environment that is ready to recognise values. This is the main source and basis for creativity, equally able to preserve existing values and to produce and accept new ones. In this approach, to recognise, respect and sustain continuity is a necessity, but not only in order to conserve and reuse or readapt heritage. Restorers of historical buildings quite often face extreme challenges where they need to use their creativity in order to develop solutions which guarantee the preservation of historical values while, at the same time, meeting the needs of contemporary life.

A special approach to creativity in historical cities always has to rely on a basis of existing values and attributes of their identity, which needs to be recognised and respected. Therefore, certain boundaries, identified as intransigent qualities of the given city, must never be crossed by forced, contrasting interventions such as implementing ‘imported patterns’, in order to show off how fashionable the city was as a home of creativity. In the large majority of cases there is in fact no real need for any kind of intervention that is inspired by the contemporary mainstream and has only a short term effect; since creative cities are particularly rich in assets which have evolved and accumulated over time and which are able to nourish present and future creativity. In addition, creative cities provide the openness and *resilience* to rejuvenate cultural heritage assets and to offer a creative ambiance for their community, to inhabitants and other ‘users’ of urban life (Fejérdy 2013).

It is useful and necessary to take a more in-depth look at *resilience*, or the *resilient* qualities of historical cities. Even more important, however, is to provide more clarity on what resilience means, first generally, and secondly in the particular context of historical cities. While a large (and rapidly growing) number of sources addressing the nature and importance of resilient capacities exist, one can identify at least two crucial basic features. The first crucial point is closely related to the fact that the concept originally came from field of medicine where it refers to the phenomenon of recovery after illness. It is through this association that scholars became interested in the resilience of communities affected by various challenges (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, Pfefferbaum 2007). The second important point is that although the use of the concept of *resilience* has begun to spread in the field of study of the (built) cultural heritage, a clear and common understanding of its meaning has not yet emerged. One of the most pertinent definitions of resilience with regard to cities runs as follows, ‘A sustainable network of physical systems and human communities, capable of managing extreme events; during disaster, both must be able to survive and function under extreme stress’ (Godschalk 2003).

In this context, a more developed use of resilience is also connected with risk and with being prepared for hazards affecting cultural heritage. In this regard – as a result of a large cooperation of international bodies and institutions – the ‘Venice Declaration on Building Resilience at the Local Level towards Protected Cultural Heritage and Climate Change Adaptation Strategies’ was adopted, highlighting the important role of cultural heritage.⁵ ‘This Declaration affirms some important principles, such as the need to raise awareness about the potential of cultural heritage as an asset for building resilient communities and the necessity to integrate heritage concerns in disaster mitigation plans’ (Heritage and Resilience 2013). The Fourth Session of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (Geneva, 18-23 May 2013) took place as a kind of continuation or follow-up activity to the cooperation described above. A detailed background-paper, prepared for this event, further developed the idea whereby ‘protecting heritage promotes resilience...’ (Heritage and Resilience 2013). More explicitly, under chapter ‘2.4 Heritage contributes to resilience’, it clearly states:

In the same way that biological diversity increases the resilience of natural systems, cultural diversity has the capacity to increase the resilience of social systems. The maintenance of cultural diversity into the future, and the knowledge, innovations and outlook which it offers, increase the capacity of human systems to adapt to and cope with change. Cultural heritage, as a key component of cultural diversity, is a critical consideration for any strategy to build the resilience of communities. ...Resilience applies to both people and the built and natural environment and is shaped by both physical and social factors.⁶

5 The event was organized by UNISDR in cooperation with Council of Europe, the European Commission, UNESCO, UNHABITAT and with representatives of Local and National Governments (in Italy) as well as with representatives of the Private Sector
<http://www.unisdr.org/campaign/resilientcities/assets/documents/Venice-Declaration-2012.pdf>

6 The recent Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Managing Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation” defines resilience as: “the ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including through ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions”. Heritage and Resilience 2013: 21.

This document shows a clear connection with the ‘Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters’⁷ which offers the following definition of resilience:

The capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organising itself to increase this capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures (UN/ISDR 2004).

It is clear that these extremely valuable and inspirational thoughts almost exclusively address cultural heritage-based resilience as a tool for risk preparedness and for recovery after disasters. However, there are other features which underline a much larger scope of interpretation of resilience in connection with the cultural heritage of historical cities. In order to unveil several other elements of resilience in the case of historical cities, further investigation has proved to be necessary. An important, in-depth and detailed paper published recently in this field was written by Matthias Ripp under the title, ‘Crisis: an Opportunity for Historical Cities – built cultural heritage as a factor of urban resilience’ (Ripp 2013). In the first part of this paper the author discusses terminology and reviews the previous history of the use of the phrase ‘resilience’. During the subsequent analysis, the paper highlights the relationship between resilience, architecture and urban planning, then goes on to investigate the opportunities and limitations of the resilience of urban heritage, accounting for possible components of its resilient capacity. Finally, it considers the possible ways to strengthen or sustain the resilience of historical cities.

The developments described above offer a reliable foundation for further research into the resilience of historical cities. In this respect, the research needs a more narrow focus in order to both verify the validity of the previous general conclusions and to generate new ones. This is the point at which we return to the Visegrad (V4) countries mentioned in the introduction, and to studying the resilience of cities in their territory. Of all the characteristics of the area selected, it may be particularly useful to explore the effect of historical and political changes. The reason for this is that in such cases the resilience of communities is tested not primarily by abrupt disasters as much as social change. The history of this region has seen plenty of both relatively rapid changes and slower, long term processes of transformation. There is a good chance for the observation of models (both positive and negative) by the fact that the direction of the described effects changed back and forth over time in this particular sub-region.

One of the difficulties of the present research is precisely how to objectively evaluate situations and processes which may be similar in their most important features but which differ considerably in their details (due to historical, economic or social differences). This renders it difficult to draw conclusions or make statements which can be considered generally valid or to make suggestions on their basis. Even in the preparatory phase of the projected research it has become clear that certain factors deserve particular attention. The physical elements of the cultural heritage of historical cities determine their resilience not only through their physical attributes and parameters but also through the intangible components which they carry or represent.⁸

7 International Strategy for Disaster Reduction - www.unisdr.org/wcdr

Particularly important in this respect is the traditional land use by the historical towns and the similarly traditional connections between the town and its vicinity (cf. Creative Cities and Sustainability – *KRAFT*). Naturally, this does not mean that historical cities need to be preserved unaltered, nor nostalgically restored in order to consolidate their resilience. Instead, we need to consider how far the knowledge and experience encoded in the physical components may be converted into raw material for responses to present and future challenges.

Possible directions for future research efforts could be, without going into detail, the following. Research could assess the extent to which the totality and the individual elements of the cultural heritage are known, accepted and acknowledged by the wider society, in direct connection with the previously mentioned ‘dramatic’ changes which affected the V4 region (in the field of social and economic relations, e.g. ownership); or, partly in connection with the former, the considerable amount of built and other elements in our environment whose present function and use are dissatisfactory. While these heritage elements have a huge potential as carriers of identity (and thus in strengthening social resilience), in the technical sense they are often in poor condition or their very existence is under threat due to the absence of morally, not materially based decisions. In this context, it may also be important to clarify the role cultural heritage plays in sustaining and increasing the resilience of the historical town and to explore the opportunities for sustainable development and utilisation.

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⁸ Actually the reverse approach is equally significant. The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ associated with the identity of the historical city (traditional holidays, events etc.) also requires a certain set of physical components and a particular setting. These two major ‘branches’ of the cultural heritage became more clearly articulated than previously after UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was accepted and implemented. Paradoxically, recognising their organic community and their intimate and close ties has not, at least to date, led to improved co-operation between the two areas.

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