

# URBAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

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# Outline

- What is Urban Cultural landscape?
- Why Urban Cultural Landscape Matters?
- Urban Cultural Landscape as a Form of Visualization
- Urban Cultural Landscape as a Form of Experience

# What is a Cultural Landscape?

- A landscape comprises the visible features of an area including its physical elements, living elements and human elements such as human activity and the built-up environment. Since a landscape is shaped by human activity, we may use the expression “cultural landscape”.

# What is a Urban Cultural Landscape?

- Traditionally, a landscape is considered as an expanse of natural scenery that people come to see and enjoy.
- A landscape comprises the visible features of an area including its physical elements and human elements such as human activity and the built up environment
- But in a city, the urban landscape changes with the position of the viewer, or even better, the "*flaneur*" – a person leisurely strolling through its streets.
- The landscape then becomes an experience.

- Ingold:

- « *An alternative mode of understanding based on the premise of our engagement with the world rather than our detachment from it* »

- Rose:

- « *The engine for the landscape is practice; everyday agents calling the landscape into being as they make it relevant for their own lives, strategies and projects* »

# Why is UCL so Relevant? (1)

- - The ecological movement has convinced city-dwellers and communities of the need to look after the environment and prevent its deterioration that may not always be immediately visible.
- Paradoxically, it is often the invisible attacks that are noticed first, undoubtedly because they call for scientific knowledge and the principle of precaution, and are better understood than the often confused debates on the definition of the cultural landscape.
- A methodological issue: naturalization or humanization?

# Why is UCL so Relevant? (2)

- Cultural tourism: the landscape becomes a lever of economic development through tourism. This was already true of mountainous and coastal areas, but it is now also applicable to urban and rural areas where the landscape is a priori less spectacular. It is thus advisable to manage and reproduce such landscapes as a source of employment and income.

# Why is UCL so Relevant? (3)

- The role of cultural atmosphere for creating a creative city.
- During the last decade, many people have felt that the Florida approach has underlined the importance of a creating a new cultural atmosphere to attract the creative class. Florida's new cultural atmosphere is very different from the earlier one as it focuses on cafés with live music, street arts and so on.

# Culture & Economy: 3 Approaches

- Culture as a fragile sector among others (Live Arts): The rate of the cultural sector can impede the growth of the economy)
- Culture as a competing sector among other sectors (Audiovisual): The growth of the cultural sector can leverage the growth of the economy
- Culture as a resource for creative economic system (« creative design »): Culture nurtures creativity by producing new images, sounds and values; and by disseminating new creative processes)

- It is then possible to open a wider debate on the role of seminal grass-roots cultural enterprises for disseminating new values and new forms of creativity as long as the milieu is organized so as to both recognize and catalyze these purposes.
- Two issues: the definition of a creative economy; the link between culture and creativity

# Urban Cultural Landscape as a Form of Visualization

- Criteria and assessment
- Instruments and efficiency

# Assessment Criteria (1)

- Ugliness: It is the easiest criterion to define since it is the antithesis of beauty.
- Offensiveness: Although the ugly may not necessarily be unbeautiful, it may still offend us.
- Banality: It may also be considered as offensive, but only by default.
- Dullness: It is generally a consequence of banality. The landscape may be dull due to the absence of inventiveness.

# Assessment Criteria (2)

- Lack of fulfilment: An object is not appreciated because it does not live up to our expectations.
- Inappropriateness: Ethnic designs used without regard to local building traditions can have a disastrous effect.
- Trivialization: A form of inappropriateness.
- Deceptiveness: It intensifies the negativity of the trivial by making evident a voluntary dimension.
- Destructiveness

# Instruments? The Police

- The police force is employed to prevent people from using their land or property in a way that it alters the cultural landscape in a negative manner.
- As far as cultural landscapes are concerned, the police define zoning laws for restricting the built-up area (size and density)
- This policy is not always effective since developers tend to violate laws related to the built-up area.

# Instruments? Fee simple

- The best way to prevent any harmful use of real estate or land is to acquire absolute ownership with unrestricted rights of disposal (fee simple).
- The problem is that when a local government wants to buy land, it has to indicate its objective clearly and the court that assesses the property and decides the price must accept this objective.
- Further, the cost of an outright purchase is very high, and many local governments do not have the necessary resources.

# Instruments? Easement

- The easement law gives a person – or an institution - certain rights or privileges in another's land. A main advantage of easement is that the burden of conservation is lightened.
- Among the issues:
  - The future owners will be tied by the agreement;
  - The difficulty to assess the compensation amount to be paid to the owner.

# Instruments? Rights

# Development

- An extension of easement: Solving the compensation problem
- The cost: A displacement effect
- An examples: The re use of the churches

# Urban Cultural Landscape as a Form of Experience

Criteria

New levers

# Changing the criteria

- The aesthetic value is elusive and ambiguous.
- Adopting a purely contemplative approach cannot enhance the aesthetics of a landscape, as it tends to exacerbate subjectivism and conflicts between various actors.
- Sauer(1925): “The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area the medium, the cultural landscape the result.”
- As human beings, we carry our knowledge, beliefs and attitudes with us. We go through an aesthetic experience that is more than subjective since our criteria are manmade. Thus, over a period of time, the cultural landscape becomes a repository of the values that each generation associates with a specific region.

# Criteria (1):The Mechanical Vision of Landscape

- Is the landscape adapted to a specific task that it performs with the greatest economy of movement and a minimum of wasted effort.
- The mechanical function has two positive characteristics: it is highly practical and it is eminently pleasing.
- An aesthetic function emerges and overlaps our perception of the landscape, mainly through design, architecture and urban planning.

## Criteria (2): The Organic Vision of Landscape

- Is landscape creating cohesion and mutual responsiveness so that the function of the whole is more than the action of the individual parts.
- There should be unity between the perceiver and the object in order to have a full organic function.
- Finally, the organic function adds elements of vital harmony and self-generation to the austere efficiency of the mechanical function.

# Criteria (3): The Humanistic Vision

- The cultural landscape becomes a kind of conjunction between the landscape content and its perception bringing them together in a mutually fulfilling transactional relationship. A landscape does not fit in with the traditional models of disinterestedness, isolation and permanence.
- It makes the receiver experience a relationship with the landscape.

# New Levers

- Reconverting brownfields
- Creating new sustainable cultural districts
- Organizing cultural quarters
- Others: Public Arts, Arts of the streets

# Reconverting Brownfields (1)

- The conversion of former industrial sites into art facilities can contribute:
  - To improve the quality of life by offering new facilities in often underserved areas,
  - To allow individuals and groups to become actors in their own development, and to offer local groups and communities the chance to rebuild their identities
  - To popularise a forward-looking “project” culture by instilling the principle of creativity in an environment that is often degraded and disadvantaged, and from which that principle has long since disappeared.

# Reconverting Brownfields (2)

- A lot of issues
  - Some local people consider very negatively the memory of such buildings
  - The cost of rehabilitation can be considerable, due to the respect of safety and environmental standards
  - Potential conflicts between local government and activist social entrepreneurs; and imported activist social entrepreneurs and local communities
  - The gentrification issue?

# Creating Sustainable Cultural Districts

- From the supply side : the product
- Why cultural enterprises can benefit from proximity and contiguity?
  - The ad hoc product
  - The artistic labour market
- Districts or clusters?
  - Nobody Knows
  - Risk: Clusters
  - Uncertainty: Districts

# A Statistical Test (2008, LER)

The rate of hazard of cultural companies is to a large extent dependent on their geographical clustering.

- On one hand a new cultural company can suffer from the proximity of companies pursuing an identical activity (the “competition effect”),
- On another hand it can benefit considerably from the presence of a large number of new cultural companies with diverse cultural activities (the “synergy effect”).
- In absolute value, we have shown that the second effect tends to exceed the first (the net effect on hazard or instantaneous disappearance was -70%, thus testifying to the productivity of cultural districts

# Which Environment for Sustainable Cultural District? (2004)

- The proximity between producers and users: old and new approaches
- A better equilibrium between production and distribution
- The transmission of know how
- Skill training
- The geographical indication (The WIPO debate)

# Organizing cultural quarters

- From the demand side
- According to the nature of the program, there are two possible sets of organizational linkages:
  - *The vertical chain, that of the official public sector;*
  - *The horizontal chain, made up of small, interdependent units.*
- When flagship cultural projects are undertaken, the vertical chain wins out over the horizontal.
- When strategies for rehabilitating or creating cultural quarters are implemented, the two chains intersect, and the project's success will depend on their ability to create proper synergy.

# Organizing Cultural Quarters: Issues

- Anything that can be reopened or renovated — warehouses, convents, quays, monasteries, gas plants, or military barracks — can also become a source of exclusion. Art becomes a pretext, a kind of lure to which commercial and political interests flock.
- Some cultural quarters that have welcomed big retail chains selling products that are “cultural” to some degree have been promptly transformed into commercial districts.
- They are often based on a few projects that are considered worthy, but the sum of these projects does not guarantee the hoped-for result, because other interests - real estate, politics or business - may be pushing in other directions.

# Some Public Policy Issues

- Gentrification

- *On SoHo district, Sharon Zukin showed how the district progressed from a depressed rag-trade area into a zone for the expression of ethnic cultures, which was indeed its desired state, and then on to a zone for the consumption of works of art, an activity that led to "ghettoisation" and gentrification of the quarter*
- *Alternative visions of gentrification*

- Destruction of Intangible Heritage

- *The expulsion of some categories changes the atmosphere and suppresses the direct dialogue between producers and users*

- Internal public policy incoherences

- *There are frequent conflicts due to the lack of integrated views and references among public bureaux: Culture, environment, Finance, etc.*