ASSESSING IMPACTS: Promoting a Constructive Relationship between Heritage Resource Conservation and Urban Development

ABSTRACT

There are at least two means of considering the relationship between cultural heritage resources and social and economic development in the urban context. One approach is to consider the well-documented contribution of heritage conservation to sustainable development in cities throughout the world. This is illustrated by several factors, including: the conservation of natural resources and building materials in rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of historic structures; the generation of local employment; the economic gain from tourism which supports diverse local enterprises; and the 'livability' of an area and generation of local civic pride. This approach considers heritage resources as the focal point of an assessment.

A second approach considers a development project (in the case of Environmental Impact Assessment), or numerous projects (in Strategic Environmental Assessment). The impact of a project or projects on several components of the environment is investigated, analyzed, and discussed among stakeholders. Mitigation measures are proposed for potential or assumed negative impacts and an Environmental Management Plan is created for the project implementation phase. The three areas of investigation enshrined in the original concept of EIA and which continue to form the basis, are: biophysical, social and cultural heritage. Since the inception of EIA in the early 1970s, its practice has spread throughout the world, supported by national legislation and international institutional policies. However, the effectiveness of EIA is extremely varied, with the cultural heritage component often receiving scant attention. The reasons for this situation are explored and corrective measures are presented, together with suggestions for further action by cultural heritage proponents. With the spread of impact assessment as a tool, there has been a trend for particular interest groups to establish separate impact assessments, in such fields as health, gender, and even cultural heritage. While such specialized assessments may have value, they are no substitute for the synthesis prescribed by the original EIA concept.