Heritage Impact Assessment in Asia: From Concepts to Legislation

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Abstract

Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) are just two of several similar terms that are often used interchangeably to refer to tools for the conservation of cultural and natural heritage values of all scales (from individual buildings to cultural landscapes). Implicitly, the specific aspect of the built and social environment has been included in environmental / ecological impact legislation ever since it came up in the 1960s in North America and Europe. The timely assessment of impacts on wider social values was later incorporated in environmental impact statements. However, it is a much more recent concern to explicitly examine the harmful effects of any new development on existing heritage properties prior to granting planning and building permits. In Asian countries, with some exceptions, formal tools for this kind of assessment hardly exist yet.

The current lack of professional and legal tools in this respect should not be tolerated any longer because rapid urban-economic development continues to threaten the extant rich heritage that has been at a disadvantage for too long already. Conservation and development must be managed to co-exist on the basis of resolving the inherent conflicts. HIA is a tool for facilitating a sustainable balance of development and conservation. With this goal, scope and directions of HIA guidelines can be designed for cities and countries where they do not exist yet. The paper explores how the leading guidelines (in Europe, Australia and elsewhere) are structured, with an emphasis on using them as appropriate models, determining minimal requirements and possible entry points within existing legislation in the target countries.

By and large, the environmental legislation in Asian countries, which is now accepted standard practice, would allow to incorporate the more specific requirements of a new HIA, without necessarily going for entirely new laws and regulations. In other words, a clear understanding of the underlying concepts of HIA/CIA would show the way forward towards drafting full-fledged legislation for this increasingly important subject area.

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