Historic Urban Landscape: Towards Integration of Conservation and Development

Abstract by Ron van Oers
Coordinator World Heritage Cities Programme
UNESCO

During its 27th session in Paris in 2003, the World Heritage Committee called for the organization of a symposium to discuss how to properly regulate the needs for modernization of historic urban environments, while at the same time preserving the values embedded in inherited townsapes, in particular of cities inscribed on the World Heritage List. In response the World Heritage Centre in cooperation with ICOMOS and the City of Vienna organized the international conference ‘World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape’ in Vienna, Austria, in May 2005. At this conference a first outline of principles and guidelines was adopted, the so-called “Vienna Memorandum”,¹ which promoted an integrated approach to contemporary architecture, urban development and integrity of the inherited landscape.

At the request of the WH Committee, the Vienna Memorandum formed the basis for the adoption of a ‘Declaration on the Conservation of Historic Urban Landscapes’ during the 15th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention on 11 October 2005 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.² During this session, the Committee also recommended “that the General Conference of UNESCO adopt a new Recommendation to complement and update the existing ones on the subject of conservation of historic urban landscapes, with special reference to the need to link contemporary architecture to the urban historic context”.³

Over the past 6 years UNESCO has developed an international framework for the elaboration of a new Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, a non-binding ‘soft-law’, defined as a management approach to better frame heritage conservation into strategies of urban development and regeneration, in co-operation with a large group of institutional partners and international experts from all regions of the world, and in consultation with the Member States, which is put forward for adoption at the 36th session of UNESCO’s General Conference (November 2011).

¹ Available at: http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/Cities
² Ibid.
³ Decision 29 COM 5D