

OPINION / GÖRÜŞ

The Role of Boundaries in Holistic and Integrated Conservation of World Heritage Sites: The Case of Diyarbakır

Dünya Miras Alanlarının Bütüncül ve Bütünleşik Korunmasında Sınırların Rolü: Diyarbakır Örneği

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Introduction

Heritage conservation paradigm has taken a different form starting from the 1960s which affected the content and methodology of conservation. The tenet behind this transformation is the idea that spatial strategies and policies are far more than a physical issue to be managed merely by technician. Following the stepping further beyond the monument-level conservation with the Venice Charter in 1964, heritage places are now the subjects of holistic and integrated conservation with tangible and intangible, physical and non-physical dimensions, which is also an overwhelming standard and one of utmost objectives of the World Heritage Convention. This paper is a viewpoint about the latest World Heritage Committee decision regarding Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape in respect to the requirements for the holistic and integrated conservation as defined within the UNESCO framework, and in particular the role of world heritage and buffer zone boundaries in achieving this.

Holistic and Integrated Conservation in Doctrinal Papers

Amsterdam Declaration (Council of Europe, 1975) emphasized the multi-aspect nature of conservation efforts and announced the need for a policy framework towards integrated conservation to strengthen the link between the economic, social, technical, administrative and legal aspects of conser-

vation. Recommendation of Nairobi Conference (UNESCO, 1976) similarly put the focus on integrated conservation with placing the terminology first, as an indication of the intention to clarify and underline the importance of scale. The Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 1979) which is published in response to the Euro-centric and “still” monument-oriented perspective of the Venice Charter (Lesh, 2017), expanded the notion of cultural heritage from “sites” to “places” as a milestone contribution to protect the significant places against specific values for past, present or future generations. The charter emphasized that the heritage values and statements of significance are to form the basis of “conservation policies” that would guide the “management of heritage”. Washington Charter (ICOMOS, 1987), which was adapted as complementary to Venice Charter, further underlined the multidisciplinary and comprehensive nature of conservation planning in historic urban areas as well as the participation and involvement of residents into the planning.

The following years have witnessed more focused and detailed discussions about how to achieve integrated conservation by the help of different methodologies, including but not limited to management planning (UNESCO et al., 2013), impact assessment (ICOMOS, 2011a; UNESCO et al., 2022), historic urban landscapes (UNESCO, 2011), sustainable development (ICOMOS, 2011b; UNESCO, 2015a) approaches. The scale

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of conservation by which the heritage places is assessed and managed is one of key inputs into these methodologies. The prerequisite is the fact that the contextual understanding of heritage places together with their surroundings where they have been interacted then and now geographically, spatially, historically, socially, and/or economically helps maintaining years-long integral relations within and around heritage places, which is key to managing the change while ensuring sustainable local development.

Besides, the dependent and interactive relationship between heritage and society is increasingly taking on a central role in decision-making processes in this new paradigm (Council of Europe, 2005; ICOMOS, 2017; ICOMOS, 2018). Therefore, community engagement in heritage planning and management is indispensable attribute of a well-structured integrated approach.

In conclusion, the focus and intent through the texts shifted from monumental to multi-layered scales; from physical to integrated conservation; from a result-oriented technical job to a process-based joint political effort. Cultural heritage management in the sense of today refers to an effort for conservation of heritage places in a comprehensive, inclusive, and holistic way, by taking into account all the tangible and intangible elements as well as social, economic and financial aspects.

The Role of Boundaries in Holistic and Integrated Conservation of World Heritage Sites

As essential requirements for effective protection, and for ensuring the integrity and/or authenticity, world heritage boundaries should include all the attributes as direct tangible expressions of Outstanding Universal Value (hereafter “OUV”) (UNESCO 2021, paragraphs 99–100) whereas a buffer zone is an added layer of protection including complementary legal and/or customary restrictions, which should be delineated to include all areas and attributes functionally important to the property and its protection (UNESCO, 2021, paragraph 104). Buffer zones are, however, “*integral component of the State Party’s commitment to the protection, conservation and management of the World Heritage property*” (UNESCO et al., 2011, 32) as for that the policies for both areas should be integrated (ibid:83). One requisite of effective management system is also the assessment of the vulnerabilities to social, economic, environmental, and other pressures and changes, and the monitoring of the impacts of trends and proposed interventions (UNESCO, 2021, paragraph 111). The threat is not directed merely to the physical and tangible fabric of the property, but it “*should be appraised according to the normal evolution of the social and economic framework in which the property is situated*” (UNESCO, 2021, paragraph 179).

Both boundaries, together with wider settings, have been referenced in subsequent guidelines as complementary, interdependent and equally important to assess any impact on the

property without putting the attention in isolation (UNESCO et al., 2022, 26, 42). Therefore, the inference is that if protection and management system is to be effective, then it shall consider all ascertained and potential pressures and trends for change in both world heritage and buffer zone areas. To put in another way, the status and degree of the boundary is immaterialized in respect to the State Parties’ responsibility as long as a proposed action have an impact on the OUV.

Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape

Diyarbakır, situated on a steep slope in the Upper Tigris River Basin along significant trade routes, has captivated numerous civilizations with its magnificence and power. The fortified city, together with its surrounding terrain, has served as a significant hub and regional capital from the Hellenistic, Roman, Sassanid, and Byzantine eras, continuing through the Islamic and Ottoman periods up to the present day. Once the capital of Mesopotamia, a province of the Roman Empire, this city symbolizes the harmonious coexistence of several cultural groups and their various activities over a continuous history spanning 7 millennia. The alluvial layers, deposited by the Tigris River and influenced by the topographical formations, have transformed into agricultural area, known as the Hevsel Gardens, which have been an integral component of the city since its establishment. It represents a distinctive blend of a landscape that harmonizes with historical-cultural, natural, and geographical characteristics, as well as a cultural region. (Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, 2014, 24–25; UNESCO, 2016, 13–14).

The property was nominated as a cultural landscape for inscription during the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee in 2015. ICOMOS technical evaluation found that the “*cultural landscape offers a rare and impressive example, particularly in relation to the extensive City Walls (and their numerous features) and their continuing relationship with the Hevsel Gardens and the Tigris River*” (UNESCO, 2015b, 278), so the property was justified for the nominated criterion (iv). However, due to the lack of protection and management coordination between the property and its buffer zone (ibid, 280–1), ICOMOS recommended the referral of the decision whereas the final decision by the Committee was for the property’s inscription on the World Heritage List with certain recommendations for strengthening the conservation and management system.

In December 2015, the property has entered a politically turbulent period which resulted in the shift of site management authority from local to central government. During post-conflict period, the central government has adopted a series of policies and plans that affected the spatial and social integrity of the Suriçi district extremely. As recorded by the ICOMOS and World Heritage Center Joint Reactive Monitoring mission, which could have been possible for the first time in 2022 since the inscription, the OUV of the property were severely dam-

aged due to the lawfully implemented new constructions without any impact assessment, such as construction, landscaping and infrastructural projects, consolidation of land parcels of the Hevsel Gardens, demolish and the restructuring of the historic city inside the City Walls, occasional invasive restoration of historic monuments, and an effective management system is still lacking (UNESCO, 2023). Based on these outcomes, Reactive Monitoring Mission reported that the property has undergone significant change since inscription on the World Heritage List, which have significantly eroded the OUV of the property, threatened the key attributes of the property, and harmed the relationship between the Hevsel Gardens, the city and its inhabitants, so the property was recommended for immediate inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger (hereafter “Danger List”) during the 45th session of the Committee.

However, following the verbal statement by the State Party of Türkiye, the Committee decided not to register the site on the Danger List at the current session, as agreed on the following two main issues:

- The nearly 100-page report of Reactive Monitoring mission was delivered to the State Party just before the Committee meeting started, thus the State Party could not assess and adapt the recommendations adequately in due course.
- The destructions recorded by the Reactive Monitoring mission took place mostly in the Suriçi district, which is the buffer zone of the property. The current state of conservation within the buffer zone affects negatively only the visual integrity of the property, but not its OUV.

The discussion below will include author’s perspectives as regards to the second issue.

Discussion

As Smith (2006,44) previously put forth that “*heritage is a cultural practice, rather than a thing*”. This is, with no doubt, a much more key assent for cultural landscapes. I argue that the statement by Türkiye, as supported by the Committee, is mismatching with the policies for holistic and integrated conservation and management of cultural landscapes which is advocated by the provisions of various guidelines already integrated into the World Heritage mechanisms. My arguments are summarized under two items below:

Justification of OUV and Delineation of Respective Boundaries

The justification of the property’s OUV under criterion (iv), which is highlighting the monumentality of the property, has resulted in the registration of the Suriçi district as part of the buffer zone, as an area contributing only to the visual integrity of the property despite the fact that the fortified city with its

associated landscape has been an important center and regional capital during different periods (UNESCO, 2016, 13–14).

Besides, the nomination dossier once argued that the urban fabric has developed following existing landscape limits so the combined values make the city an ideal example of a historic urban landscape (Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, 2014, 103), and the city “*could not have survived without the cultural landscape of the Hevsel Gardens.... the link between the city and the Gardens is a very strong and historic one the economic success of the city throughout its history is due to the Tigris River that provided easy access to large areas of the region*” (ibid:107). Such a formulation of OUV was reciprocated from ICOMOS viewpoint and the site was inscribed as a cultural landscape.

Therefore, although the city settlement and the social structure have provided both the suitable conditions and the rationale for construction, development and maintaining of monumentality of the city walls as well as the intertwined uninterrupted interaction between culture and nature, the State Party proposal and ICOMOS justification came to an agreement to disregard the inner-city settlement (Suriçi) as a direct attribute to the OUV. While the OUV of cultural landscapes arises from the inter-relationship between culture and nature (UNESCO et al., 2011, 33), the evolution of human society and settlement in Diyarbakır over time, which is the key manifest to the cultural landscape category (UNESCO, 2021, paragraph 47), was undermined in the criteria justification within OUV. This is partly due to the requirements for referencing spatial attributes for justification of human interaction and intervention in nature, but in cases where evidence of interaction is confined to the physical attributes only, then the social life is valued secondary to the OUV. Therefore, the dynamic functions present in the cultural landscape which is essential to its distinctive character was not maintained within the world heritage boundary though required by the Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 2021, paragraph 89).

The below statement available within the summary of Reactive Monitoring mission report exemplifies the serious consequences that might arise from such a misconception of OUV.

The assumption that the (Suriçi) buffer zone serves only as morphological setting to protect the visual integrity of the property, and that therefore reconfiguration of the urban fabric, which has evolved over centuries, has no impact on the OUV of the property as long as it retains some semblance of its scale and appearance, is misconstrued. Such an assumption erroneously reduces the OUV of the property to the mere manifestation of the City Walls surrounded by agricultural production areas (UNESCO, 2023, 84).

Therefore, the above statement clearly justifies the importance of Suriçi as an attribute to the OUV.

The Impact of Suriçi District on the OUV

Yet, being a buffer zone does not diminish the importance of Suriçi as part of the property's integrity. The buffer zones are also vital for the survival of the property and its values (UNESCO et al., 2011, 83), they serve as planning tools to enhance mutual benefits for communities (UNESCO, 2015a, paragraph 10) and how the various protective regimes provide an integrated or complementary management should be demonstrated (UNESCO et al., 2011, 89).

The property is truly an example of a historic urban landscape, which is constituting a dynamic human settlement in an urban environment and manifesting the ensemble of different historical and morphological layers in a natural context. Therefore, regardless of the degrees of boundaries, the property should be managed integrally to include the broader urban context, taking into consideration historic and contemporary built environment, social and cultural practices, economic processes, and intangible dimensions of heritage. This approach provides tools for managing physical and social transformations as well as the harmonious integration of contemporary interventions into the historic setting (UNESCO, 2011).

The strengthening of the legal protection of the buffer zone, reinforcement of Suriçi conservation plan provisions, and the coordination between the property and the two buffer zones were a necessity for achieving better integrated management system already at the time of inscription (UNESCO, 2015b, 281). Nevertheless, the move of indigenous community outside the Suriçi district as a result of the destruction occurred in the historic fabric, and change of ownership due to the urgent expropriations, as triggered by the ongoing restructuring of the field patterns in Hevsel Gardens (UNESCO and ICOMOS, 2023, 6, 36–37, 42) further damaged the social and economic relations within the site, and “*has resulted in the severing of the connection between the Gardens and the city they once nurtured*” (UNESCO, 2023, 83).

To conclude, the destruction in the buffer zone has largely affected not only the physical fabric, but also the non-physical or intangible attributes of the cultural landscape, that is the OUV of the property. Disregarding the social practices and fabric as part of the cultural landscape has led to the misinterpretation of totality of cultural accumulation in Diyarbakır, and this led to the decision makers' adopting an isolated approach to property management. I fundamentally contend that the current management issue concerning Diyarbakır is rooted in definition of boundaries at the stage of inscription and that the integrated and holistic conservation is a matter of reasonable scale that is not confined to the limitations by legal boundaries.

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