

Underground Built Heritage Valorisation

A Handbook

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Underground4value Training School

Edited by

Giuseppe Pace and Renata Salvarani

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CHAPTER 11

The Underground Cultural Landscape as an essential component of local identity

An implementation solution of the UNESCO Recommendation of Historic Urban Landscape

Laura Genovese

11.1. The Underground Cultural Landscape: a matter of definition

Some success stories in the field of Underground Built Heritage (UBH), such as the urban regeneration of Matera (Italy) and Göreme in Cappadocia (Turkey) have captured the attention of the world [1][2]. Every year new underground heritage-led regenerations are promoted and developed worldwide. Furthermore, there are numerous archaeological areas and monumental sites carved into the rock, in which not only stands the local identity, but are represented models of successful enhancement, having become a pillar of tourist economies, as the Mogao Caves (China) or Oya museum (Japan).

The newborn class of UBH embraces a variety of artefacts of archaeological, historic, artistic and architectural interest, each of them having historical and cultural uniqueness and being source of identity for local communities. However, this cultural resource is largely unexplored. Commonly, UBH becomes a constraint for underground development within the planning system, competing with new urban functions and the need of saving surface space for urban development [3].

This is part of a global condition, particularly accelerated in the last few decades, due to unprecedented dynamics of urbanization, the increasing demand for modernization and the real estate market pressure, and climate changes, leading to the deterioration and destruction of urban heritage [4]. Thus decision-makers take into account the underground space for its 'invisibility' and potential 'space availability' when surface limitations force to use it [3], by locating there new urban functions rather than recognizing it as a resource to be reuse by returning it to sociability.

Another critical issue is the mass tourism impact and the mirage of short-term economic interests driving local policies towards unsustainable solutions, as investing in the promotion of large famous sites in spite of the systemization with

the smaller, but equally significant ones, so as to create virtuous circuits and make cities unique and competitive in a global scenario.

Given these premises, underground sites' cultural routes - as experienced in the CNR interdepartmental project related to the Anthropic Subsoil of Southern Italy, coordinated by the CNR-Institute of Study on Mediterranean and still ongoing [1] [5] - or the integration of cultural assets above and below the ground - as experienced in the bilateral project between the CNR and the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage "Valorisation-Tourism-Participation: Developing alternative integrated solutions for less promoted historic sites (2016-2019)" [6] and, as implemented in the case of Naples [7] [8], are rarely proposed as a sustainable and alternative solutions to avoid the anthropic pressure.

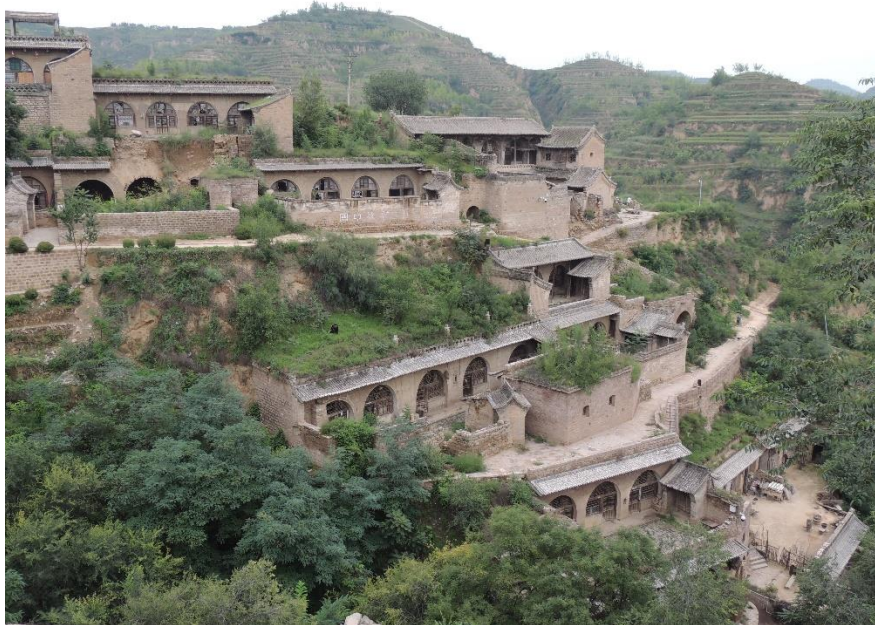


Figure 11.1: Lijiashan Village, in Shanxi Province, China 2017 [9] (by Fratini, F.). These dwelling caves, called yaodong, represent a very traditional way of living in China since long time, particularly in those provinces sited in the Loess plateau. The area has been the subject of a research still ongoing.

Nor do rural settlements suffer less. For many decades, residents have moved to big cities in search of work and, nowadays, only few villagers are still standing. In some cases, they tackled the challenge of not losing their vitality, by attracting tourism, and converting some traditional houses into affordable accommodation for travellers. Nonetheless, the sustainable development of this resource is still limited by several difficulties. Specifically, there is an underestimation of the rural villages' past and current values, evident in underground settlements, unique cultural landscapes full of character at the core of local identity and examples of living

heritage - as experienced in the context of a research project on Chinese underground rural villages, so-called *yaodong* [9] [10] [11] (Fig. 11.1).

Thus, both contexts would need a change in paradigm by experimenting innovative pathways for regeneration and culture-led development strategies that reuse and enhance built heritage - including UBH - and engage with local citizens to reinforce local culture and community's sense of pride and local identity, thus also determining the competitive edge over global travel destinations.



Figure 11.2: Sovana district, Tuscany Region (Italy) 2011 (by Genovese, L.) [12]. Rock necropolis system organised along the course of the Fiora river with the ancient road system that connected them to the ancient settlements (the area was the subject of the bilateral project between the CNR and the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage (2016-2019) "Valorisation-Tourism-Participation: Developing alternative integrated solutions for less promoted historic sites".

In this perspective, the context and the UBH typology considered from time to time are important factors to keep in mind when evaluating the actions to adopt and this element is not to be underestimated, having a conceptual and operational relevance. In fact, while the case of archaeological areas or isolated underground monumental contexts can be subject of intervention strategies already widely tested, although they can be improved [13], the case of urban districts or entire cities quarried in the rock is very different. These are land use patterns very common in central and southern Italy [1][5], as in a specific climatic zone in plateaux located between latitude 34° and 40° North, where the characteristics of the soil, over the centuries, have facilitated this type of "negative" construction activity. Such as the

Etruscan districts between Tuscany (Fig. 11.2) and Lazio region in Italy [12] [14] or the *Loess Plateau* underground settlements in China [9] [11].

The identification of the elements supporting the creation of a common approach to an heritage-led enhancement based on UBH needs the improvement of the definition of the class itself and the related re-use map [1] [9], so as to explore all the potential of these forms of heritage, whose variety and complexity have yet to be fully understood.

While part of the research is moving in this direction, also in the context of the COST Action CA18110, a possible research topic could be the concept of Underground Cultural Landscape (UCL), as a macro set of UBH varieties. UCL concept would represent a territorial continuum, comprising both the good and the complex of historical-cultural-social and economic values of the context in which it is inserted in a perspective of planning for conservation and sustainable reuse, as already experienced in a series of projects. In other words, UCL set could reflect the definition of historical landscape as promoted by the Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) [15], which represents the COST Action CA18110 reference tool.

11.2. The UNESCO Recommendation of Historic Urban Landscape (HUL)

Adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 36th session on 10 November 2011, the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape – HUL (36 C/Resolution 41) calls on Member States to integrate conservation and management of heritage in cities and settlements with policies and practices for sustainable urban development [16] [17]. This innovative standard-setting instrument embraces the heritage potential to make cities and settlements culturally vibrant, economically prosperous, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable [18].

The HUL Initiative was launched in 2005 under the World Heritage Cities Programme, “to raise awareness of the need to safeguard historic cities by including inherited values and cultural significance of their wider context into strategies of conservation and urban development. It had become apparent that protection and conservation of living historic cities by way of ‘conservation areas’ or otherwise geographically limited ‘special districts’ was no longer sufficient to cope with the increasing pressures exerted on them” [19].

As one may read in the Preamble of the 2011 Recommendation, it had a long genesis, as the result of a long-term debate, held in the context of “a corpus of UNESCO standard-setting documents, including conventions, recommendations and charters exist on the subject of the conservation of historic areas, all of which remain valid” [15].

The Recommendation is a “soft-law” to be implemented by UNESCO’s individual Member State on voluntary base. The Recommendation does not replace existing doctrines or conservation approaches; rather it is additional tool providing us with a road map to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built

environment into the wider international goals of urban development, whilst respecting the values of different cultural context [15].

It also suggests a Toolkit, which includes a range of interdisciplinary and innovative tools, organised into four different categories, each made of established approaches, practices, and instruments [20] [21]. Below is a list of the four categories:

- Community engagement tools
- Knowledge and planning tools
- Regulatory systems
- Financial tools.

It should be emphasised that the urban heritage management achievements, policies, and actions, classified in these four categories, must be adapted to local contexts, and simultaneously tackled, being interdependent. Given this flexibility, the HUL toolkit can be adapted to suit each local context - as rural settlements, or small hill towns or water towns, as experienced in the bilateral project between China and Italy for the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation on the “Historic Urban Landscape – HUL” in small historic cities (2013-2020) (Fig. 11.3) - and applied as the case changes and evolves over time.

That is why the HUL approach is based on a new concept of historic environment “as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting” [15].

“This wider context includes notably the site’s topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity.” [15]



Città d'acqua – Città di collina. Cina-Italia e la raccomandazione UNESCO sul “Paesaggio Storico Urbano”
水城·山城 中国-意大利以及教科文组织关于“城市历史景观”的建议



Figure 11.3: Bilateral project between China and Italy for the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendation on the “Historic Urban Landscape – HUL” in small historic cities (2013-2020) (<https://hul-bric.cnr.it/>)

This definition allows us to include the UBH or, possibly, the UCL class in a holistic approach to the territory, helping us to identify the complex elements that make a context distinctive and create its sense of place and identity. This approach could provide us with a knowledge base “to guide planning decisions and manage change, integrating urban conservation within an overall sustainable development” [20]. From this perspective, some other definitions in the Glossary in the Appendix to the Recommendation text [15] are relevant for the implementation of this approach in underground contexts. Below are some significant concepts underlined.

Historic urban area (from the ICOMOS Washington Charter): Historic urban areas, large and small, include cities, towns and historic centres or quarters, together with their natural and man-made environments. Beyond their role as historical documents, these areas embody the values of traditional urban cultures.

Urban Heritage (from European Union research report N° 16 (2004), Sustainable development of Urban historical areas through and active Integration within Towns – SUIT) comprises three main categories:

- Monumental heritage of exceptional cultural value
- Non-exceptional heritage elements but present in a coherent way with a relative abundance
- Built environment

The *Built Environment* refers to human-made (versus natural) resources and infrastructure, designed to support human activity, such as buildings, roads, parks, and other amenities.

According to the HUL approach, these values should be taken as a point of departure in the overall management and development of the city [20].

11.3. Conclusions

Meanwhile the research is confronted with new varieties of UBH and its definitions searching for common approaches and tools for heritage led enhancement and reuse, a series of projects carried out in the context of underground settlements or territorial systems show the validity of the UNESCO Recommendation on HUL in these cases. In fact, the Recommendation already contains all the analysis and interpretation tools that allow us to extrapolate the complex of identity elements that makes a context distinctive and create its sense of place and identity, thus providing us with knowledge base to guide planning decisions and manage change, integrating urban conservation within an overall sustainable development.

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