

Urban Cultural Heritage and Development Co-operation

Discussion Paper, September 1998



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION AGENCY

DESO/Division for Culture and Media

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The purpose of this paper is to look at the status of cultural heritage in urban development and the role of development co-operation in the preservation of urban cultural environments. This paper is intended as a discussion paper for the Seminar "The City - Local Tradition and Global Destiny", September 1998. Following the proceedings of the Seminar the paper will be revised and developed into a Sida policy document (position paper).

Background

We live in an age of rapid urbanization. In this new urban world we face many problems of development, causing the degradation of the urban environment, misery and social conflicts. We also face the challenge of establishing democratic institutions at the local level and safeguarding popular participation.

The drive for modernization and development in many countries will lead to a rebuilding of the city. What happens to the historical centres of the cities? How can we preserve our urban cultural heritage, and what will be the role of development co-operation in this transformation? How can historical urban environments be preserved in an age of modernization and globalization? Why should scarce resources be used for this if, at the same time, basic needs cannot be satisfied?

Some of the main threats to urban cultural heritage are:

- Poverty and lack of resources for reconstruction and preservation of buildings and environments.
- A misguided drive for modernization with little understanding or regard for the cultural heritage of the city.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of urban history and local traditions.
- Strong incentives for a standardized town planning code throughout the world and thereby promoting a global urban culture.
- War and military actions with the objective to destroy the cultural heritage of other communities and ethnic groups.

- Lack of democratic decision making mechanisms and awareness among political power-holders.

Some of these threats to the cultural heritage have been there for a long time, since the early period of industrialization, others are new and are increasing while we approach the 21st century.

Arguments in favour of supporting urban cultural environments

Why is it important to support cultural heritage in an age of transformation and increasing social problems in many urban regions?

The first answer to this question is that we should respect the history of different cultural manifestations as expressed in old towns and buildings. The promotion of cultural pluralism should be a basic principle in international development cooperation. This idea is elaborated in the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity* (UNESCO, 1995).

Another reason is that the urban heritage is an irreplaceable element of the local tradition, without which the meaning of locality and the individual references to the place and its history will be lost. This need for local specificity is more important than ever in the era of globalisation. Pluralism and variety based on local tradition is a necessary counter-weight to world-wide uniformity in media, manufacturing and culture.

The relevance of cultural heritage management for Swedish development co-operation can be clarified when we look at the main policy documents and action plans of Sida:

1. Environment

Swedish development co-operation shall contribute toward the *sustainable* use of natural resources and the protection of the environment. This also includes the protection of the man-made environment, such as the protection of open landscapes and of the built environment. In the context of the urban environment it is not just the authenticity of shape and materials that need careful attention, but also the general character of a whole neighbourhood including its scale, density and use of space.

In the context of sustainability, it is also important that historic city centres are economically viable and ecologically sound, i.e. that they provide economic opportunities and can regenerate themselves in a way that is not harmful to the environment over time. Sustainability is a broad concept including not only economy and ecology but also social and human aspects of development. Cultural patterns and life styles are considered to be important factors in this holistic view of development.

2. Poverty

The fight against *poverty* is the main objective of Swedish development cooperation and it is expressly stated that its guiding principle should be “to raise the living standards of the poor”. The guidelines for current activities are presented in a recent policy document, Reducing Poverty, Sida’s programmes for poverty reduction.

In most developing countries, the urban poor are found crowded together inside or close to the historic town centres which are often also the centres of commercial activities. In these overcrowded pockets, economic opportunities by far outweigh the surrounding environmental degradation. The inhabitants manage to eke out a living from odd jobs in shops, restaurants and laundries, from the manufacturing of small industrial products, and from street hawking and begging. Any improvement of the living conditions of the people living in these quarters also contributes to the environmental improvement of the area as a whole.

However, projects aiming at preservation and maintenance of such areas in old towns may also push the poor away. Typically neither the previous inhabitants nor the small scale business can afford the cost level in newly restored buildings. This is nothing unique for rehabilitation projects - to replace the old buildings with new ones is even more difficult within the affordability level of the poor.

A well-directed co-operation programme can thus help to maintain the existing diversity of the town centres, and contribute to maintaining its mix of people and activities and thereby support its cultural environment. Furthermore, the maintenance and development of historical towns and buildings is an area where traditional handicrafts and artisans are needed. This will promote small scale production and provide additional employment for the poorer section of the community. Cultural tourism can be another source of income for the inhabitants and a stimulus for local production.

3. Democracy and human rights

The preservation of our urban heritage also becomes an issue of sound *governance*, based on broad participation of the various groups or stakeholders concerned with the future of the urban centres. This includes representatives from the inhabitants, municipality, shop owners as well as the various organisations active in the central area.

The strengthening of local democracy should therefore be part of a strategy for support to urban cultural environment. Sida recently published a policy and programmes for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights. Some of the issues emphasized in this policy are directly dealing with “local democracy and local administration” and the development of a civil society.

The protection of cultural heritage is also a question of human rights. This is of particular concern in countries where potential conflicts arise from the interests of several cultural and ethnic groups. A common vision to protect a national cultural heritage may in some cases promote reconciliation between ethnic groups. But cultural heritage management can also be used as a means of oppression, with discrimination of the heritage belonging to one cultural or ethnic group and a biased valuation of cultural heritage representing the history or historical myths of the ruling ethnic group.

4. Gender equality

Gender equality is another strong concern within Swedish development co-operation and is thus addressed in project planning, studies, implementation and evaluations.

Equity can be strengthened by raising awareness of those parts of the cultural heritage that are of specific importance to women, to make their history and presence visible in the urban landscape.

Development of urban areas can only benefit from involving women and men, girls and boys in planning and decision making on equal conditions, by giving them equal access to knowledge about safeguarding the cultural heritage and by providing equal job opportunities for women and men to create a dynamic environment.

5. Urban development

Urban development is not merely seen here as the development of new residential areas, the renewal of its infrastructure and the generation of new economic activity. On the contrary, the preservation of the *cultural diversity* of existing cities is seen as an integral part of urban development, without which the urban fabric is losing its historical reference point around which the city life is revolving. This approach to urban development requires specific management solutions, which cannot be generalized but need to be tailor-made for each situation in question.

Immediately after the second World War a different approach was prevailing in Europe and North America. In a misguided attempt to *modernize* its cities, large areas of valuable building stock were demolished to give way to steel and concrete structures, uniformly built in the then fashionable *international style*. Developing countries can learn from the mistakes of the industrialized countries. Particularly now that globalization is threatening to promote a more uniform urban life style, it becomes even more important to maintain and develop what is specific and local.

Sida has prepared a strategy for co-operation in the field of urban development: *Towards an Urban World* (1995). Considering the rapid urbanization in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the environmental and social consequences, increased and coordinated development co-operation is needed. However, a more active involvement in the cultural aspects of urban development is required to

complement the strategy, and it is hoped that this discussion paper shall be a step on the way to formulate a Sida Policy for development co-operation in urban heritage management.

The role of development co-operation

How can Swedish development co-operation contribute to a balanced urban development including the cultural environment?

Some basic values and principles should be guiding Sida's activities in the field of cultural co-operation:

- Sida's support should be *non-discriminatory* as far as different cultures and religions are concerned. Respect and support for cultural pluralism is considered a basic value. Cultural exchange and meetings between cultures should be promoted. (This is elaborated in Sida's strategy for cultural development cooperation, *The Role of Culture in Development*, 1996).
- An *international* perspective is important, stressing the common dilemmas and problems in urban development and learning from international experience. For this purpose a dialogue is needed between countries and cultures, North - South and South - South.
- Cultural heritage programmes should not be limited to the restoration of historic monuments but should also include the *preservation of the urban environment* of common people who live in towns. The focus should be on the social history and development of urban settlements and cities.

Experiences and ideas from different countries are presented as background papers (abstracts) to the Seminar. This information will form the basis for the development of the position paper that will present Sida's policy and guidelines. Sida's recent projects and activities in the field of urban heritage are summarised in the box below.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the *priorities* in the management of urban cultural heritage in Africa, Asia and Latin America? Who takes decisions about priorities

"It is...impossible to preserve all the vestiges of the past. And dare we even attempt to do so when the money and energy may be better spent helping people meet basic needs? Hence questions arise: What should be preserved? Who is to decide? According to what criteria? Have the special needs of diverse heritages been recognized and have their custodians been properly trained?" (*Our Creative Diversity*, UNESCO, P. 177)

2. How do we *mobilize financial resources* for cultural environment in urban areas? The preservation of cultural heritage is not only a national but also a global responsibility. The donor community should cooperate in joint efforts. However, the mobilization of national and local resources are necessary for long-term sustainability. How can the projects generate income for the country and for the local community? Can the development of tourism, cultural tourism, be a possible solution for developing countries? Can it be controlled to avoid the negative effects on cultural environments of unlimited tourism?

“Tourism is fast becoming the biggest industry in the world and cultural heritage provides much of its blood” (p184)

3. How can *human resources* for cultural heritage management be mobilized and developed?

“There are “lacunae in training and in the institutional base” for this kind of work (p197). “New thinking and training is required, so that the relationship of society to their heritage can be revalued.”

This includes such disciplines as bio-sciences, archeology, history of art and other fields of culture, architecture and the urban sciences. The local knowledge of traditional handicrafts and building technology skills are also important.

4. A basic question in this context is the raising of awareness of the *history of urban settlements* and environments. Without historical knowledge and interest in the communities and in the administration there is no basis for cultural heritage management. What is needed is research linked to education and information. New media like films and multi-media presentations should be used to reach a broad audience.
5. What is the strength of the *Swedish experience* in this field and what is its manpower capacity? What kind of institutional cooperation can be used? What are the comparative advantages of Swedish co-operation? What kind of support should be given priority? *Long-term support* for capacity development, training and institution building or *short-term action* projects that will have a demonstration/multiplier effect. Projects including practical work or only “software”?
6. What should be Sida’s *relationship and channels of support* in this field? Cooperation with government authorities, institutions, NGOs, community groups, etc. Is *regional cooperation* on a South-South basis a useful approach to develop capacity and interest in cultural heritage management? What is the experience in Eastern Africa and in other regions? And finally, what does this mean for *Sida’s mode of operation*? How can support for urban cultural environment be integrated into Sida’s plans for development co-operation in various sectors and regions? How can the concerned Sida departments cooperate in this endeavour?

NICARAGUA

The Restoration Project of San Francisco Convent, Granada

LAOS

The Renovation of the former Royal Palace in Luang Prabang

SOUTH AFRICA

District 6 Museum

VIETNAM

Renovation and Development of the Ancient Quarter in Hanoi

KENYA

Lamu; Renovation of the Market Place

WEST BANK/GAZA

Rehabilitation of streets, market and Manger Square in the Old Town of Bethlehem

TAZANIA

Zanzibar; Rehabilitation of the Stone Town

EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Urban Origins

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Kursumlija Mosque in Maglaj

GUATEMALA

The Petexbatun Regional Project in Guatemala 1989-1996



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