

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN CONTEMPORARY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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CULTURAL LANDSCAPE is one of the strongest determinants of the 'Sense of Place', yet it constitutes a largely unexplored realm when it comes to land-use planning. Landscape is a living entity and represents a cultural continuum. Change is inevitable and manifests itself as 'layers' over cultural Landscape. However, in this change from traditional to the contemporary, one needs to assess those few and uncluttered principles that governed the intangible meanings of the space resulting in its uniqueness.

I: Understanding historical landscapes & delineation of heritage zones

Historical Landscapes, comprise of:

NATURAL LANDSCAPES, The regional setting containing the designed environment, it's chief components being physiography, vegetation and hydrologic features.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES, Landscapes other than pure nature that is a result of human activity on the natural fabric, emerging as utilitarian patterns.

DESIGNED LANDSCAPES, Creative design expressions associated with architecture or independent, often seen as a means of ordering ones natural environment.

These together give important clues to generate evidence of the aspirations, cultural ethos and technological achievements of the past societies and depict the attitudes that the particular civilization held towards the natural environment, based on the ability of its inhabitants to modify the same.

The term **heritage-site** has been used to include settings based on:

Historical and religious significance

- Sites of important events
- Open spaces associated with places of worship or where religious practices are held
- Landscapes representing landmarks of achievement that reflect attitudes towards the design of open space in specific periods, or the extent to which a case authentically exemplifies a particular style or school of thought.
- Planning responses to the natural landscapes perceived as important components of the urban open-space structure.

Extent to which these determine visual characteristics of the area

- Prominent and topographically distinct landscapes that are perceived as regional landmarks because of their intrinsic qualities.
- Extent to which the configuration of a particular landscape has directional qualities and defines or frame views which are generally acknowledged to have a special meaning.
- Landscapes, whether distant or close, that are perceived to be an integral component of the visual character of the area; or the degree to which a landscape forms a backdrop essential to the visual quality of a particular scene.
- Foregrounds, especially those along roads that are most vulnerable in the way strip development along these causes visual obstruction.

Extent to which these define or enclose space at the settlement scale, their contribution to townscape

Unique ecological characteristics and scenic qualities, or rarity in a particular context

Delineating heritage zones

PHYSICAL EXTENT & ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

These are the actual physical boundaries demarcating various areas within the site so as to clarify the ownership and maintenance agencies involved with various parcels of land. In most cases these might not offer the best way to demarcate land, yet, are important in making realistic proposals for the area.

WATERSHED OR ECOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Watershed or ecological boundaries depict the smallest extent of a self-sustaining ecological unit comprising the site & its surroundings that can function independently in the environment with minimal direct interference or impact on the adjacent ecosystems.

Functional Boundaries

Functional boundaries include within their purview those economic or communication centers that have a direct bearing on the functioning of the site for its essential supplies and links.

Visual Boundaries

Often extending much beyond the physical extent, these include all those features of the surrounding distant

landscape, which form the constituent elements of panoramic views from the site as well as those that form foregrounds to view the site from strategic vantage points.

Evaluation of state of landscape around historical precincts

Macro issues:

- Relation of the monument sites to the contemporary urban fabric, or identifiably
- Disturbed 'setting' as a result of natural and human activity

Micro issues:

- Absence of landscape leading to incomplete perception of the site
- Insensitive (out-of-context) landscape treatment
- Unthoughtful inclusion of infrastructure elements
- Lack of maintenance
- Poor micro-environment (absence of soft landscape)

Need for intervention

The evolution or development of landscape is a continuous process and it manifests itself in the form of regional patterns associated with vegetation, movement routes, location of structures and settlements and land subdivision. A distinct mark, though not comprehensible in isolation, is left by each phase in the history. It is the need for preserving historical continuity that remains the most important objective of regional conservation policies, done primarily for academic interest, historical record, environmental benefits, perpetuation of cultural traditions and aiding in proper interpretation of heritage. The last point needs further elaboration to list the role of landscape in site interpretation. This is affected at three levels:

Visual: Open space design helps in restoring and creating the desired visual effects for proper perception of built elements as well as the enclosed space, thereby giving meaning to the overall composition. The visual effects could include accentuation, framing, emphasizing important lines, enclosing space, forming backdrops or creating foreground for appreciation of an artifact.

Functional: Designed circulation, restoring the historical linkages, would enable visitors to experience the complex in the desired manner, thus aiding in effective interpretation.

Environmental: Environmental management ensures restoration of the natural setting, thus enhancing the visual appearance of the historical 'object' under consideration. Landscape development also plays a role in improving the micro-environmental conditions.

II: Inventorization of spaces of historic significance

"...The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting

in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event.... The sites of monuments must be the objects of special care in order to safeguard their integrity and ensure that these are cleared and presented in a seemly manner." *Venice Charter ICOMOS – 1964*

To ensure that one doesn't miss out smaller open spaces that form part of the historical complexes, those that are necessary to aid in effective interpretation of the site, the Florence Charter further notes:

"... A historic garden is an architectural and horticultural composition of interest to the public from the historical or artistic point of view, as such it needs to be considered as a monument.... Whose components are primarily horticultural and therefore alive, which means that they are perishable and renewable." *Florence Charter ICOMOS – 1982*

At the diametrically opposite end lies the other scale of intervention, referring to historic towns and urban areas, which are included as the following definition:

"... Cities, towns and historic centers or quarters, together with their natural and man-made environment.... Beyond their role as historical documents, these areas embody the values of traditional urban cultures." *Charter for the conservation of historic towns and urban areas ICOMOS – 1987*

The following text is aimed at establishing the need to document the resource systematically, devise an approach to categorize areas of cultural and historical importance and develop formats to build a usable inventory of heritage that would plug in as invaluable data for future planning and development incentives.

Definition of 'Historical Urban Area'

In order to take the heritage inventory work forward, the City/complex has to be understood as a 'Historical Urban Area' whose

- 'HISTORIC CHARACTER' needs to be preserved through spiritual and material elements that express this character:
- Urban patterns, as defined by streets, lots, complexes, planning grids and gateways.
- Relationship between the built and the open space.
- Architectural appearance in terms of the external treatment.
- Natural setting comprising hillocks, gorges, rivers, lakes and forests.
- Cultural landscapes including agricultural fields, orchards and water bodies.
- Relationship between the fortified area and the surrounding setting, both natural and man-made.
- A continuous Maintenance mechanism needs to be evolved.
- Compatibility of new or proposed functions & activity pattern as well as the form of future growth needs to be

checked against the historical character.

- Traffic control needs to be structured to avoid damage to the historic fabric.
- Natural disaster protection and mitigation procedures need to be put to action.

Classification of cultural areas

CULTURAL AREAS-I: *Built-up areas*

- Sites of religious and historical significance
- Individual buildings and complexes situated in densely built-up areas with little or no associated open space.
- Buildings & complexes with associated open space as an integral part of the whole.
- Built-up areas within the municipal zones with no great architectural significance but of considerable historical value, being expressive of local traditions.
- Village abadi areas, representative of vernacular architecture.

CULTURAL AREAS-II: *Landscape areas*

- The regional setting containing the designed environment.
- Landscapes emerging out of utilitarian patterns, like agricultural fields, orchards, etc.
- Designed open spaces, gardens, baolis and tanks, etc. attached to monument sites.

Prerequisites for successful development and planning effort

- Systematic approach and discipline..
- Multidisciplinary studies and inputs to include

archaeology, history, architecture, sociology, environmental sciences and economics.

- Involvement of resident communities and stakeholders

DOCUMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT of the resource.

Need for the inventory

- Contribution that the document could make towards the study of cultural continuity.
- Landscapes are a fragile and finite resource and intimately tied to the lives of communities and the perception of heritage.
- To guard against derogatory change .
- To illuminate the importance of landscapes and open spaces in the perception and interpretation of historic buildings and precincts.
- To help in the delineation of boundaries of heritage areas as a first step towards the conservation and rejuvenation of landscapes. These may be administrative, visual, utilitarian, ecological/watershed etc.

Proposed listing format

Name and Identification of the landscape unit.

Age / period

Layers of development (Natural, mythological, historical and contemporary)

Current ownership and administrative or maintenance control / boundaries

Historical Background

Space or Object	Activity pattern								
	Sustenance	Leisure	Religious activity, Congregation	Social gathering	Festive or ritual	Tomb, Internment	Political assembly	Discourse <i>Political</i> <i>Religious</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Military</i>	Others
Maidan									
Park / garden									
Court									
Enclosure									
Terrace									
Processional, trade, ritual route									
Urban space									
Road, Linkage									
Agrarian holding									
Grove									
Pond or Kund (Artificial)									
Baoli / Well									
Water Harvesting structure									
Cave									
Fountain / Water fall									
Sculpture									
Plant Material									
Others									

Present activity pattern, supplies, market forces, movement patterns, easements, rights of access

Integrity of historic fabric

- Extant evidence
- Description of physical state
- State of maintenance, preservation
- Impacted community in the event of change

Physical description

Spatial, volumetric account

Visual units

Detailed inventory of elements:

- Landform
- Vegetation
- Water
- Built elements

Ecological position, regional context

Natural features and the design or planning responses to the same may be recorded in the following manner:

Natural Feature	Significance							
	Physical Extent	Visual limits	Ecological boundaries	Visual importance <i>Landmarks</i> <i>Vistas</i> <i>Foregrounds</i> <i>Frames</i>	Ecological importance, Rarity	Role in defining or enclosing space	Threats and dangers	Age
Hill, Hillock, Mountain or range								
Spur								
Ridge								
Valley, Gorge								
Plateau								
Forest								
River or stream								
Pond or lake								
Drainage basin								
Others								

Value for posterity & Cultural continuity, based on:

- Visual aspects (Rarity of composition, contribution or relation to the setting, whether it is a stand-alone object or forms an element in a visual sequence.
- Ecological aspects
- Utilitarian aspects
- Academic Significance Milestone, trendsetter, illustrative example, pioneer in terms of style or school of thought.

Implication of inclusion

- Legal, administrative and people’s co-operation in the conservation of heritage and resource.
- Statutory protection and additional powers to control development work over such sites, beyond the normal planning powers.
- Clarity on current position or status.
- Delineation of planning boundaries.

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A graduate in architecture from School of planning and architecture, New Delhi, India moved on to pursue a masters degree in landscape architecture and planning from the same institute and completed his academics in 1997. Since then he is engaged in private practice as the director of his company, Oracles, that organizes professionals associated with the field of habitation design under a single roof, geared towards providing design solutions and management services. His noteworthy academic career took him to teaching and is presently involved as a lecturer in the SPA New Delhi.

A keen interest in the natural environment and the human response to it in terms of traditional and vernacular architecture has seen him getting involved with work in historical precincts such as Mehrauli, Nizamuddin, Mandu and various settlements in the Himalayas. After doing a specialization in conservation of historical landscapes from De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, he is currently pursuing a self driven research on documenting cultural landscapes and landscape planning in the historical context.