

UNDERSTANDING AND PRESERVING SPIRIT OF PLACE BY AN INTEGRATED METHODOLOGY IN HISTORICAL URBAN CONTEXTS

Mert Nezih R_FA_O_LU, Neriman_AH_N GÜÇHAN
*Middle East Technical University, Department of Architecture,
Graduate Program in Restoration, İnönü Bulvarı, Turkey
mertnezih@gmail.com; neriman@metu.edu.tr*

Abstract. Understanding and preserving *spirit of place* in a historical urban context is a difficult and complicated subject, given that such a spirit is formed from both tangible and intangible features.

The intention of this paper is to define the concept of the spirit of place, and then to identify methods for its preservation in historical urban contexts. The paper begins by discussing the key themes and issues related to the concept of spirit of place in the fields of urban morphology and conservation; the second part then introduces, the methods used in urban morphology and conservation for understanding and preserving the spirit of place. Finally, the third part proposes a new approach, *an integrated methodology*, for the identification and preservation of the spirit of the place as a conclusion.

1. Introduction

Spirit of place is an elusive phenomenological concept defined by various disciplines. The conceptual approach to the meaning of spirit of place emphasizes that, it is created through history in a particular place of a town or a city, and requires an individual method of approach in conservation activities (Cullen 1961; Conzen 1966, 1975; Sharp 1969; Worskett 1969).

Christian Norberg-Schulz in the 1980s explored the character of places and their meanings to the local residents. He stressed that *place* means more than merely location, as there exists a “spirit” which cannot be described by analytical and/or scientific methods. He proposed a phenomenological method in order to understand and describe the “spirit” of the place through a depiction of its physical features and an interpretation of the human experiences within that place.

It is clear that Norberg-Schulz's studies are based on Heidegger's thoughts on architecture: that the place, the building and the human being are an essential feature of human existence in place (Jokilehto 1999; Deviren 2001).

According to the basic principles of the phenomenological methods used to investigate the "substance of being" and/or the "substance of existence", the "spirit of place" may be defined as; "The substance of place, the formation of the genetic order of place and its interrelations, which forms the urban context, the origin of the place's existence, and a dialectic link in between the place and its inhabitants".

Consequently, the place is formed through time by its unique and distinctive character, and is the base of both a building and its users. Nevertheless, buildings are erected out of the "spirit" of place, increasing the meaning of the place, and act in harmony to create a *cultural landscape*. In this context, human beings are responsible for giving "spirit" to place through their touches and their logical experiences between the buildings and the place. As Alexander states: "*There is a central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a man, a town, a building, or a wilderness....In order to define this quality in buildings and in towns, we must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there....These patterns of events are always interlocked with certain geometric patterns in the space. Indeed, as we shall see, each building and each town is ultimately made out of these patterns in the space, and out of nothing else: they are the atoms and the molecules from which a building or a town is made*" (Alexander 1979: ix-x).

Following these elaborate definitions, it can be seen that there are many relational notions that form the *spirit of place* in a historical urban context, and understanding and resolving those interrelations becomes an important task for researchers. Certainly, understanding and evaluating the components of the urban context through a phenomenological method of understanding is very complicated and is a case-dependent research. Different cases contain different physical, social, economic-functional and spiritual notions that may create diverse hidden values which might not be defined in a general physical, social and morphological analysis. Thus, understanding and appreciating the *substance* of the urban context and its

hidden values, including its *spirit*, requires an objective evaluation and decisions for its conservation and management. As Kroft (1996) stressed, the relation between “observer and observed” is important, and researchers should be objective and use objective and comprehensive tools if they are to properly designate and conserve the local distinctiveness of historical urban contexts.

In its contemporary meaning, conservation evolved as a reaction to the destructive effects of industrialization at the end of the 18th century. Following the development of a conservation consciousness, especially after World War II, the content of the conservation expanded from single monuments to the scale of settlements.

As Erder stressed: “*After the Second World War, the monument was no longer considered only with its immediate surroundings but as part of a complex of buildings, a settlement or a region, thus expanding the physical concept of architectural heritage. Authorities could consciously concentrate their efforts on conservation and take legal measures, thus securing the serious and responsible involvement of official organizations*” (Erder 1986: 15).

It can be seen from the charters and declarations of international organizations that, similar to urban morphologists, focus has been on the concept of *authenticity*, *identity* and *spirit of place* in the conservation of cultural property. For example, in the Nara Document (1994) it is declared that, “the world is increasingly subjected to the forces of globalization and homogenization: therefore, defining ‘authenticity’ becomes an important issue for the conservation of “cultural heritage”. The document defines the social and cultural values as vital features for understanding the unique tangible and intangible characteristics of every culture. In addition, although a national document, The Australian ICOMOS Burra Charter (1999) provides principles for the conservation and management of cultural significance for cultural heritage places which reflect the Australian identity and experience. The Charter is of particular significance due to its definition of place, that place forms with cultural significance, which consists of aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and spiritual values for past, present or future generations. Following this, the Xian Declaration (2005) introduced both tangible (the setting interacting with the natural environment) and intangible (social or spiritual practices, customs, traditional knowledge, use

or activities) values, which create the significant and distinctive character of the setting of a heritage structure. The Declaration also indicates that heritage structures, sites or areas of varying scales have developed their significance and distinctive character from their meaningful relationships with their physical, visual, spiritual and other cultural contexts and settings.

Such a concise review shows that charters and declarations have broadened their focus to include the conservation of historical urban contexts in their settings by considering their distinctive identity, authenticity, character and spirit. The numbers of national charters has increased within the last three decades, establishing principles and guidelines for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance and assessing cultural property within its cultural context.

2. Proper Methods for Understanding and Preserving the Spirit of Place

There are different methods used in the analysis of urban forms, grouped as methods of urban morphological analyses, architectural and urban design analyses, and urban conservation analyses. These have developed over time from being conventional techniques to contemporary with the rapid development of technology.

For the purpose of this paper, the typo-morphology and urban conservation analysis methods are proposed, as the most relevant methods for the topic of inquiry. In this regard, other methods in common use by sociologists, urban designers and in architectural studies are disregarded.

2.1. TYPO-MORPHOLOGY

Typo-morphological studies have been used as a design tool throughout history. They deal with the physical and spatial structure of the built environment and are derived from studies of typical spaces and city structures, based on detailed classifications of buildings and open spaces by type “typology”. They consider not only the various scales of the built environment, but also characterize the urban form with its inhabitants. As Moudon (1994: 290) states, “typo-morphology offers a working definition of space and building type, and serves as a rich launching ground for

studying the nature of building design, its relationship to the city, and to the society in which it takes place”.

Nevertheless, while the major point of intersection is the historical context, the concept of zoning in the historical urban context becomes a fundamental issue in typo-morphological studies. As Kropf (1998: 127) states: *“Zoning...is a tool for analysis and explanation. It helps us to understand both the physical structure and the historical development of urban areas and the relation between urban areas and individual buildings...the general structure and mechanism of zoning offers an ideal context for the application of typo-morphological principles....in particular, a typological approach to zoning addresses the complaint that zoning tends to prohibit historical or traditional forms of buildings and urban fabric”*.

The principles of typological investigation introduced by Italian architect Saverio Muratori, and later developed by Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei, among others, suggest a number of working assumptions for a typological approach to zoning (Moudon 1994) in which the zones should be taken as a starting point for local and regional forms. Especially in multi-cultural historical urban context, typological studies should be made through zoning. For this reason, zones should be conceived as tools for analyzing the different built environments by shaping different socio-cultural aspects which have different spirits of place.

2.2. URBAN CONSERVATION ANALYSES

The methodology used during a conservation analysis considers the various actors and aspects of the town itself. Such a methodology, applied in all the stages of an urban conservation analysis, is the main tool for the identification and conservation of historic urban contexts in most countries. It includes careful and systematic documentation, an analysis and evaluation of data related to socio-cultural, economic, administrative, historical and physical aspects of urban contexts at various scales, and the making of correct decisions for their conservation.

Similar methods to those used in urban conservation projects are applied through the historic urban contexts in many different countries. In the METU Graduate Program in Restoration, a comprehensive methodology is practiced in urban conservation projects in the urban conservation design studio (see Table 1).

The methodology of an urban conservation project begins with the documentation phase, comprising the pre-survey and survey. The pre-survey includes a comprehensive literature review, during which all graphic, historical, verbal and written documents related to the various aspects of the site are gathered. Then, base maps of various scales and survey sheets related to the buildings and social groups are prepared for the collection of data during the field work. Hence, the maps and data sheets assist in gathering the required information on the general characteristics of the site which will provide a foundation for the subsequent stages.

During the site survey phase, data related to socio-cultural, economic, administrative, historical and physical features of the building, site, environment and settlement are collected using survey sheets and social questionnaires. Such a systematic method in allows the researcher to document the various dimensions and components of the urban context including information about open and built-up areas, public open areas, infrastructure and public services, traffic-circulation, natural elements, private open areas, landmarks, vista/panorama points, nodes, preserved building groups, socio-cultural activities, customs of inhabitants, economic activities, touristic and historical places and/or view points, building spaces, architectural elements, material, structural and construction techniques, deterioration, changes, characteristics and attitudes of inhabitants towards the site, historic buildings and so forth.

The data collected during the pre-survey and survey are analyzed and evaluated in the subsequent stages. In the evaluation stage, the general characteristics of the site, as well as the values, problems and potentials of the town are defined, based on objective criteria.

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TABLE 1. The Process of an Urban Conservation Project
(Rifaio_lu and _ahin Güçhan 2007: 1108)

SOCIO-CULTURAL – ECONOMIC – ADMINISTRATIVE – HISTORICAL – PHYSICAL FEATURES	REGION & SETTLEMENT SCALE	PRE-SURVEY & SURVEY STAGE	ANALYSIS and EVALUATION STAGE	DECISION STAGE
	ENVIRONMENTAL SCALE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ gathering all graphical, historical, verbal and written documents related to legal and administrative structure, active private and public institutions, demographic features, production and trade facilities, geographic and climatic conditions of the region _ collection of data in the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ Analysis of physical, functional, social, cultural, historical, economical, administrative aspects of the region _ evaluation of the region and the settlement within the main characteristics and aspects which define the values, potentials and problems of the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ decisions on existing legal and administrative aspects of the region for defining the roles of governmental and non-governmental organizations, institutions and creating financial sources for the conservation project
	STUDY AREA SCALE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ studying natural characteristics of environment, topography, location, transportation, land use, historical quarters, monuments, zones, customs of inhabitants, economic activities, touristic, historical places and/or view points, conservation and planning activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ analysis of environmental aspects gathered during the survey stage _ defining environmental values such as panoramic points, natural and geographic features _ defining environmental potentials such as national and/or international highways, routes, historical, archaeological, natural sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ decisions for conservation and rehabilitation of environmental aspects
	BUILDING SCALE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ collection and preparation of base maps, studying of accesses to site, open and built-up areas, public open areas, infrastructure and public services, traffic-circulation, natural elements, private open areas, landmarks, vista/panorama points, nodes, preserved group buildings, socio-cultural activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ problems of physical, social, economical, administrative aspects of the site _ physical, social and functional values such as landmarks, monuments, conserved streets, places and buildings for collective memory, nodes _ environmental potentials such as social gathering places, empty lots or areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ decisions on physical, social, cultural, economical, administrative aspects of the site _ decisions on physical, social and functional potentials, values and problems of the site
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ preparation of exterior, interior and social survey sheets _ collection of data in the field such as; building lot, façade, building spaces, architectural elements, material, structural and construction techniques, deterioration, changes, characteristics and attitudes of inhabitants towards the site and historic buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ physical and socio-economical correlations _ problems related to the uses of the buildings and deriving from, economical and administrative aspects _ potentials of buildings _ building values _ functional and social values such as buildings with their functions associated with town identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ decisions on types and degree of interventions _ specific decisions for preservation, rehabilitation, and re-functioning of building groups _ decisions on administrative, financial and legal aspects for restoration, intervention, rehabilitation of buildings _ decisions on the social values

3. Integrated Methodology for Identification and Preservation of Spirit of Place

As mentioned before, the *spirit of place* mainly depends on the features of the site and the logical relationship between the inhabitants and the place; however this begins with the settlement activity. Since the settlement activity is the basic necessity of creating a place related with the natural characteristics of the site, the logic behind it becomes important in the analysis of the current historic urban fabric and defining the spirit. It is important to remember that settlement activities differ from region to region, as can be seen in the organically developed settlements in Anatolia, which have intricate physical and social structures to the grid and heterogenic settlements. The logic behind medieval settlements differs to that of Anatolian-Turkish settlements, which in turn differ from region to region.

Consequently, man-made settlement borders, such as circumscriptions, lot-plot lines, zones and regions are accepted as the roots of the meaningful and/or logical relations between the inhabitants and the site in the definition of places. As Habraken (1998) state the basic necessity of settlement activity of the human being is to define the zones and divide the site with border lines. In addition, Bill Hillier (1996) states that the circumscriptions created from the border lines are at the same time sociological separations that not only provide a physical separation of the site, but also create different zones of particular benefits and territories.

Even so, the transformation of an empty plot into a built-up area requires spatial organization and the physical existence of the buildings. Buildings are not only erected from the natural characteristics of the place, but also from its borders and the physical characteristics of the neighborhood (Deviren 2001). As a result, the “spirit” might be defined in a historical urban context as the relationship between the site and the circumscriptions-plots, the logic behind the creation of buildings according to the plots and their way they are used by their owners, and the benefits and liabilities between neighboring plots and the buildings.

However, the integrated methodology for understanding and preserving the spirit of place in its historical urban context proposed in this paper mainly originates from understanding both the “spirit of the settlement activity” and “the spirit of place” using both typo-morphological analyses

and the urban conservation analyses, and utilizing new technological tools especially GIS, and special primary visual and written sources.

The “spirit of settlement activity” mainly refers to the understanding of the natural and general characteristics of the site, and the original circumscriptions, lots and plots of the site, as well as the ownership pattern. The ownership pattern is an important aspect as inhabitants design the urban context through their definition of the circumscriptions-lots and plots under the ownerships rights. Moreover, the “spirit of place” refers to the understanding of the physical, social, economic, functional and spiritual relations between the three constant parameters proposed for research in this methodology, namely circumscriptions-lots and ownership, place and inhabitants.

In order to understand the original circumscriptions-lots and the ownership pattern, the integrated method is proposed using primary written and visual sources, which in this case are “historical cadastral maps” and “registers of title deeds”. The cadastral maps help to clarify the original circumscriptions-lot patterns, while the registers of title deeds provides useful information on the pattern of the original circumscriptions-lots, with the original feature of the real estate property; ownership pattern; the religious/ethnic identity of both the judicial owners’ and, if possible, the inhabitants; unifications and divisions in lots through the history; benefits and liabilities in between the lots and neighbors; the original borders of districts and so forth. Therefore, the data collected during a systematic and objective research of the historical urban fabric using the cadastral maps and registers of title deeds, transferred to and then correlated within the GIS medium, can help provide an understanding of the spiritual, physical, and economic-functional relationships in the formation of a dialectic link between urban context, place and its inhabitants, which are the *substance* behind *the spirit of place*. In this regard, the correlation between building categories and the area of the lots provides the physical relations in an urban context; while the correlation between ownership and building category and its distribution helps to reveal the spiritual relations in the urban context.

Such an analysis of both cadastral maps and the registers of title deeds has been carried out by the author for his PhD dissertation on the historic urban context of Antakya (Antioch on the Orontes). The research provided original data on the formation of a dialectic link between the urban context,

place and its inhabitants. One such correlation between the ownership and the feature of the real estate property, revealed a different kind of building category which may not be defined during a survey of the current fabric, namely the residential-religious building category. If the dwelling's owner was a religious pious foundation and the feature of real estate property in the registers of title deeds clearly states that the dwelling was used for religious purposes in its history and had a spirit for their users which might not be defined by observing and analyzing the current situation of that dwelling.

In addition, the relationship between building categories and the area of the lots shows that there can be different sized residential buildings. For instance, there were many small dwellings (around 10-15 m²) owned by various pious foundations and citizens, the locations of which within the urban fabric give reliable clues about the social and spiritual interactions between the owners and users of the dwellings. The resolution of these two different aspects shows that when a number of dwellings are clustered around the trade zone of the historic urban context or a commercial building this might refer to their usage by a single worker. Such examples, aimed at understanding the interrelations between the physical and social aspects, can certainly be expanded. What should be mentioned here is that these aspects provide very important clues as to the “spirit of the settlement”, as well as to the “spirit of the place” in a historical urban context.

Following a conscious research on the entire historical urban context, the integrated methodology proposes a definition of zones through the urban contexts in order to allow a deeper analysis. The zones are determined by correlating the data from the previous stage, which provides a representation of the different relational notions that form the spirit of place in a historical urban context. After determining the zones, the methodology seeks to analyze them using value-based detailed analyses, which are used in urban conservation projects to define the *sine que non* features desired for preservation.

The systematic research on the cadastral maps, carried out in conjunction with the gathering of information from the registers of title deeds, and the zones, defined through the data drawn from that research and correlations in between, and the value-based analysis and evaluations may help to reveal both the “spirit of settlement activity” and the “spirit of the place” in a historical urban context.

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Finally, the aim of this methodology is to help researchers make an objective analysis and evaluation related with the very delicate subject; *the spirit of the place* and its comprehensible meanings from tangible features to intangible ones.

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