

SPECIFYING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC SITES IN HERITAGE PLANNING

Ahmadreza Shirvani Dastgerdi*

Department of Architecture, School of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Florence, Italy

Giuseppe De Luca

Department of Architecture, School of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Florence, Italy

Keywords: heritage planning, preservation, historic urban landscape, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

In the nineteenth century, the awareness of heritage values was basically associated with its monumental value. A century later, the element of social preservation became part of this awareness, while the historic city was better understood in its morphological and typological dimensions. Nowadays, the perception of the values of the historic city has expanded to encompass the symbolic and aesthetic values of places and to a new use of the urban spaces that define the historic city (or site) as a living heritage. Historic places, considered to be urban heritage, are of vital significance for cities today as well as in the future. Tangible and intangible features of urban heritage are sources of social cohesion, factors of diversity and drivers of creativity, innovation and urban regeneration [1].

Heritage planning is the combination of heritage preservation and urban planning. It begins with the presumption that communities look after historic places that are valued; their significance provides reasons to retain them. At the same time, there is reasonable economic and social pressure to demolish those historic places together with their background. The aim of heritage planning is, therefore, to manage and control these situations and changes wisely, not to prevent them [2]. According to Tyler [3], preservationists are not against development, rather they are against unsatisfactory development. In fact, they disagree with development that is unresponsive to the current context of a community and its important heritage. They are, however, in support of development that mixes modern and old in an appropriate way that reinforces both. Heritage planning does not aim to freeze a historic place in time. It strives to maintain the significance of a historic place within the real-world context of urban planning and development [2]. This study intends to discuss “what kind of approach can be effective in recognizing the significance of the historic site and its sustainable development”, utilizing the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach.

The HUL approach considers the historic city as the layering of significance origi-

* Corresponding author: ahmadreza.shirvanidastgerdi@unifi.it

nating both from natural and man-made features. While the view of the historic city as a complex formation has always been integrated into conservation policies, other aspects (such as the relationship with the geological, symbolic or spiritual value of the place) have normally been associated more with cultural landscape than with historical areas where architectural aspects have always played a predominant role [1]. The HUL approach introduces a wider notion of "conservation". This is understood not as a simple tool for the protection of selected heritage items but as a method to manage the process of change in an urban environment. It considers the heritage value of the historic city as the legacy of the ways the urban environment has evolved over time, and it assumes that it cannot be preserved without ensuring the vitality of the historic environment, through functions, uses, and meanings that are compatible with its spatial and social characteristics [4]. The HUL approach moves beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focuses on the entire human environment with all of its tangible and intangible qualities. It seeks to increase the sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values. In many cities, this approach has had very positive and encouraging results; e.g. Lyon, Amsterdam, Quito and Fez. For each local situation, a balance is reached between the preservation and protection of urban heritage, its economic development, functionality and liveability. Thus the needs of current inhabitants are satisfied while sustainably enhancing the city's natural and cultural resources for future generations [5].

2. Research methodology

In this research, the preservation approach for determining the significance of historic sites is fundamentally based on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach and guidelines for the preservation of historic sites. The HUL concept interprets urban areas as layers of significance, descending both from natural and man-made features. Seeing the city as a layering of significances will help to identify the conservation policies and the "trade-offs" of conservation and development that communities and decision-makers must think about. For data analysis, the qualitative method of content analysis is used. Then, based on the results, an approach is presented for the sustainable development of the historic site through specifying its value and significance.

3. Evolution of the concept of sustainable development

The concept of sustainability has been around for a long time. However, only since 1987 has it taken on the particular meaning used today. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, "sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [6].

After 1992, sustainability came to be commonly accepted as requiring the resolution of three interrelated areas including the social, environmental, and economic dimensions. "Sustainable development is said to be achieved when the goals of social equity, economic development, and environmental quality are met in a coordinated manner"

[7]. In this model, culture and heritage, when considered to be a cultural endeavour, are considered to be part of the social dimension.

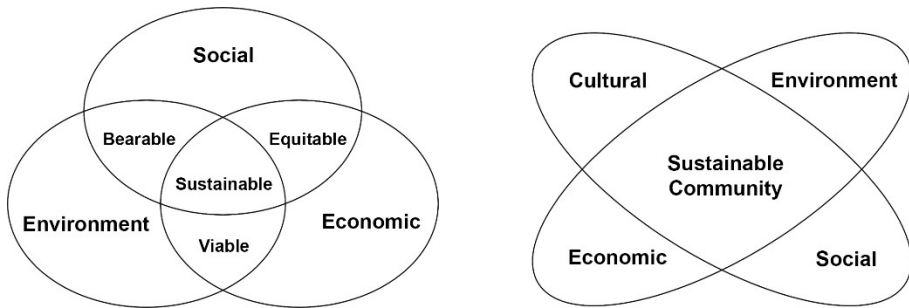


Figure 1. Models of sustainable development comprising three and four pillars [2].

Several authorities argued for culture as a fourth, independent pillar of sustainability. As Turkish-Dutch conservation specialist Silvio Mital expressed it, “conservation is not sustainable if it is only carried out for cultural reasons” [8]. Heritage preservation has significant environmental and economic dimensions, as well as the long-familiar socio-cultural one.

In fact, heritage is increasingly thought of as a social activity that addresses issues such as quality of life; an economic activity associated with planning and sustainable development; and an environmental activity with the potential to play a meaningful part in the drive to preserve resources and diminish greenhouse gases. However, one may choose to classify heritage and whichever of the two sustainability models (three or four pillars) is preferred (Figure 1). Authorities together with the general population have come to identify and recognize the close ties between heritage preservation and sustainable development [2].

4. Understanding the evolution of the historic fabric

The significance of a place includes all the diverse cultural and natural values that people associate with it. These values have a tendency to grow in strength and complexity over time, as understanding deepens, and people’s perceptions of a place evolve. Understanding and articulating the values and significance of a historic fabric are necessary to inform decisions about its future. The degree of significance indicates what protection, if any, including statutory designation, is appropriate under law and policy [9].

4.1. Historical research

History is the study of human past, which includes its events, players, places, and the outcomes of their interactions. History elucidates the past in the background of the present day. As an academic discipline in the field of architecture and preservation, history may be categorized into different branches (Table 1). The aim of historical re-

search is to perceive the circumstances under which the historic fabric was built, used and reshaped over time, as well as the way in which people have used and thought of the place. The historical disciplines are analytical, in that the professional assesses the different sources and their context to make a critical judgment that indicates what occurred in the past, why it occurred and what the impacts were [2].

Table 1. Application of history in heritage planning (Authors).

History Branch	Description
Chronology	History without the interpretive part. It is a sequence of events, which is useful to obtain a basic understanding of the evolution of a historic place.
Public history	It is more practical than academic history and is frequently identified with heritage preservation, museums, and archives.
Archaeology	Study of the human past through the research and analysis of its physical remains.
Architectural history	A discipline that uses the method of both historical and architectural research to investigate the history of architecture.
History of styles	It satisfies the natural urge to classify things and has been the subject of countless studies.

To describe cultural and natural values, it is not sufficient only to report the appearance and specify the chronology of a historic place. Rather, historic research must go beyond explaining the chronological information by encompassing the construction, change and use of a historic place. It should look at the stories and narratives associated with the place. According to Kaufman, the final aim of heritage preservation is not repairing or saving old things but rather creating places where citizens can live comfortably and connect to meaningful narratives about history, culture and identity [10]. If this perspective points to the future of preservation, then the core arrangements of the discipline will have come full circle in little more than a century: from “saving old things” with historical value in the late nineteenth century to saving things with architectural value in the early twentieth century; also, from focusing on “fixing old things” [11], to valuable places for their social and spiritual association [12]. And today saving places with historical, social, and spiritual value. For now, we accept that both tangible and intangible features are significant in understanding historic places and that research must consider both the actualities and the associations [2].

4.2. Physical investigation

Physical investigation plays a critical role in making responsible decisions about treating and interpreting historic sites. A successful project to research, inventory, document, and ultimately treat and interpret a building is directly linked to the knowledge and skills of architectural investigators and other historic preservation specialists. The expressed goal of historic preservation is to protect and preserve materials and features that convey the significant history of a place. Careful architectural investigation

- together with historical research - provides a firm foundation for this goal [13]. For physical investigation in the heritage planning process, four characteristics may be recorded which are explained in the following table (Table 2).

Table 2. Characteristics of physical investigation of historic site [14].

Characteristics	Description
Authenticity	The conditions that cultural values are truthfully and credibly expressed through a variety of attributes including: form and design, materials and substance, use and function, techniques and management systems, location and setting, and other internal and external factors.
Integrity	It is a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes.
Boundary	It defines what properties will be subject to controls.
Buffer zone	An area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property.

4.3. Community engagement

Many values associated with historic fabrics, i.e. sociocultural, spiritual/religious, economic and aesthetic values, are felt and represented by the community. We have come to appreciate that the opinion of people who are not experts in the heritage field are necessary to gain a thorough understanding of historic fabrics. As the Burra charter states, “conservation is based on respect for the existing fabric, use, associations and meanings” [14]. Therefore, we need a way to identify the associations and meanings that society gives to the places from the past. According to Denis Byrne [15], the values and meaning of historic places are found in communities and individuals, rather than in the places themselves. He further proposes that cultural heritage is a field of social action. Therefore, the full meaning of places and their broader social, cultural and political context can be learned only by paying attention to people who are familiar with them [15].

These intangible values are obtained by a process of public participation. Consultation with the community may serve several distinct purposes. The first is to learn what people value and therefore believe should be preserved. Another is to understand aspects of the historic place that might otherwise go unnoticed. And a third is to hear and assess the public’s reactions, concern and conflicting options with respect to plans for change. Traditionally a municipality would act as a mediator between the public and a proponent (such as a developer) by facilitating participatory activities, but the proponent is now increasingly taking on the engagement process [2].

5. Identifying values

According to Kalman [2], value is a characteristic that is valued in itself. The Burra charter declares that “Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups” [12]. Values change over time because society is constantly in the process of revising what it values. It follows that different parties may hold different sets of values with respect to a historic place or may assign different weight to the same values. An important factor about heritage values is that they are contingent, not objectively given. The values of heritage are not simply found and fixed and unchanging, as was traditionally theorized in the preservation field. Values are produced out of the interaction of an artefact and its contexts; they do not emerge from the artefact itself [16].

Table 3. Summary of heritage value typologies devised by various scholars and organizations

Scholars/ organizations	Value typologies	Description
Alois Riegl (1903)	Intrinsic (memorial)	Age, historical, commemorative.
	Temporal (present-day)	Use, art value, newness, relative art value.
English Heritage (1997)	Evidential	The potential of a place to yield evidence of past human activity.
	Historical	The ways in which past people, events, and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.
	Aesthetic	The ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual simulation from a place.
	Communal	The meaning of a place for the people who relate to it.
Burra Charter (1998)	Aesthetic	The same as architectural value.
	Historic	Having an extraordinary history.
	Scientific	Describing educational value.
	Social (or spiritual)	The qualities for which a place has become a focus of spiritual, political, national or another cultural sentiment to a majority or minority group.
Randall Mason (2002)	Socio-cultural	Historical, cultural, social, spiritual, aesthetic.
	Economic	Use (market), non-use (non-market), existence, option, bequest.

Therefore, a simple site visit, paired with research on the place, is clearly insufficient. Sufficient knowledge of the various uses of the place over time is needed in order to be able to make meaningful comparisons and thereby determine how effectively particular values are demonstrated in the primary historic fabric as compared to other

places. The sampling of heritage value typologies devised by different scholars and organizations is summarized in Table 3.

Values can thus only be understood with reference to social, historical and even spatial contexts through the lens of the person who is defining and articulating the value, why now and why here. For preservation professionals, this requires some substantial rethinking of the kinds of research and knowledge that are needed to support preservation. Traditionally, values were articulated by experts' analyses of heritage as a work of art or a record of the past. Manson argues that values are socially constructed. They are situational, and not inherent, depending on the memories, ideas and social motivations of the interested communities. He explains that a certain tension exists between two "cultures" in the conservation profession, represented on the one hand by the older "pragmatic/technical solutions"; and on the other the "strategic/political mind-set" which seeks to learn the interest of stakeholders ranging outside the realm of experts [16]. In other words, Manson differentiates between the professional "experts" and the untrained "public" [2].

6. Statement of significance

Significance is a synthesis of values. The heritage significance of a historic place is determined by synthesizing the many values that are attached to it. The degree of significance determines what, if any, protection, including statutory designation, is appropriate under law and policy. This is often expressed in a formal document called a "statement of significance" (SOS) [2].

A statement of significance is a declaration of value that briefly explains what a historic place is and why it is important. The statement of significance identifies key aspects of the place that must be protected in order for the historic place to continue to be important [17]. While the details of the document vary from one jurisdiction to another, the primary goal is the same (Figure 3).

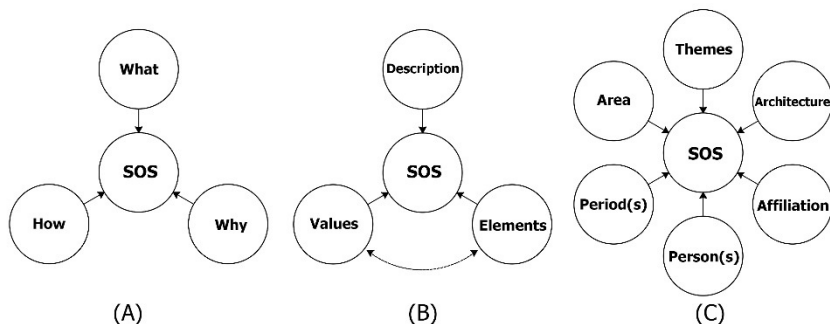


Figure 3. Different types of SOS in different countries. (A) Australia (B) Canada (C) USA (Authors).

Regardless of the template or format, the SOS is a highly useful document that summarizes heritage values and demonstrates heritage significance. The SOS satisfies the first question (does the historic place have heritage significance?) but fails

to provide an answer to the critical questions. Is the place significant enough to merit formal recognition and protection? On the other hand, if it lacks sufficient significance, can it be left without formal protection?

7. Assessment of significance

Strategic decision-making with respect to heritage recognition and protection requires a more rigorous evaluation process to determine the level of significance of each historic place under consideration. At its simplest, this consists of establishing criteria and assessing whether or not the values meet the criteria. In other words, whether the place is sufficiently significant for recognition. A criterion is a standard against which things are judged. The reliance on criteria and the proficiency to make a competent value judgment - with or without a significance threshold - usually works well when nominations for recognition are considered on a one-off basis. However, this system can fail when many places are being evaluated as a group, such as when looking at all the properties within a neighbourhood, in order to determine which of the group should and which should not achieve formal recognition. Comparisons must be made among numerous candidates, rather than between a single candidate and comparable former nomination.

In a more complicated version, grades are assigned to the assessment of each criterion, in order to determine with greater precision the extent to which the criteria are met. The determination of whether to provide formal recognition depends on the outcome of this grading process. In other words, rather than responding to a criterion with a "yes" or "no", we respond by deciding that the association is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. The choice of which grade to apply to a specific criterion should be justified in point-form or narrative.

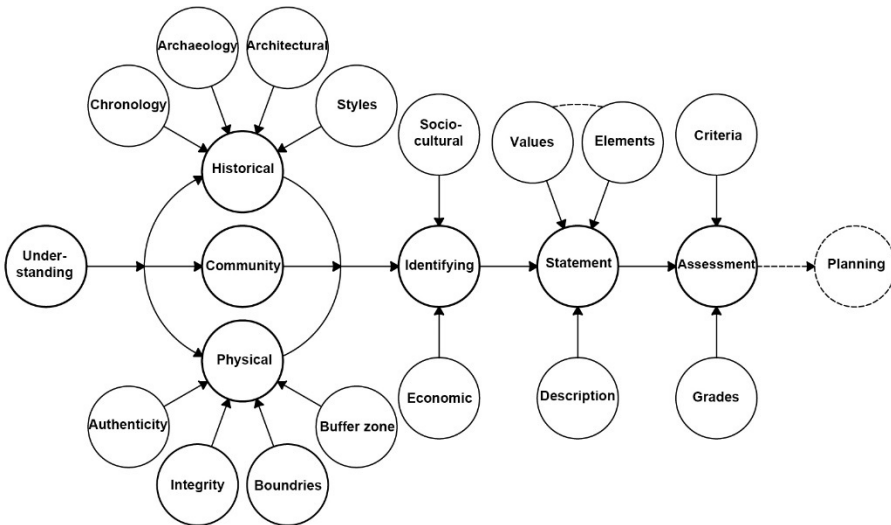


Figure 4. Process chart for determining the significance of the historic fabric (Authors).

Determining heritage significance is usually undertaken by assessing the values of a historic place against a set list of criteria for determining whether the place has sufficient significance to be formally recognized. Most jurisdictions have their own lists of criteria for determining significance.

8. Conclusion

In the mid-twentieth century, heritage conservation was mostly concerned with techniques of safeguarding the material remains of architectural monuments. By the first decade of the present century, heritage preservation had become a social practice that accepts varied and conflicting values en route to creating places where people can connect to meaningful narratives about history, culture, and identity. Nowadays, urban heritage is a human and social-cultural element that goes beyond the static notion of groups of buildings. To define urban development strategies and policies, the significance of historic fabrics must be clear at the outset and be used in this approach in a practical manner. This study uses a value centred approach to identify the different types of values that are an intrinsic part of historic sites, showing they possess a dynamic character which can help in promoting the social and functional diversity that exists in the historic fabric. It also indicates that determining the significance of the historic fabric is a process involving a variety of inquiries to understand and recognize, and to make statements and assessments.

In specifying the significance of historic sites, it is necessary to assess all the information relevant to an understanding of the place and its fabric. The task includes a report comprising both written and graphic material. The contents of the report should be arranged to suit the site and the limitations on the task, but it will generally be in two sections; the first will be the assessment of its cultural significance and the second, a statement of its cultural significance. The assessment of cultural significance follows the collection of information. The validity of the judgments will depend upon the care with which the data has been collected and the reasoning applied to it. It is essential that the statement be clear and pithy, expressing simply why the place is of value but not restating the physical or documentary evidence. Therefore, heritage planning needs a progression from identification to evaluation and from evaluation to management as a basis for policies. The identification of values and the determination of significance are only means to a greater end. That end is the management of change within a historical place/site in a manner that retains its values and respects its cultural significance.

References

- [1] Bandarin, F. & Van Oers, R. (2012). *The Historic Urban Landscape: Managing Heritage in an Urban Century*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- [2] Kalman, H. (2014). *Heritage Planning Principles and Process*. New York: Routledge.
- [3] Tyler, N., Ligibel T. J., Tyler, I. R. (2009). *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*. WW Norton & Company.

- [4] Pini, D. (2005). *The Historic Urban Landscapes: A Comprehensive Approach to Conservation*. ISLAMIC URBAN HERITAGE, 13.
- [5] UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2013). *New Life for Historic Cities: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach Explained*. Paris.
- [6] WCED. (1987). *Our Common Future. World Commission on Environment and Development*. Oxford University Press.
- [7] Levy, J. M. (2011). *Contemporary Urban Planning*. Boston: Longman.
- [8] Rodwell, D. (2011). *Urban Conservation and Sustainability*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [9] Drury, P. & McPherson, A. (2008). *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*.
- [10] Kaufman, N. (2009). *Place, Race, and Story*. New York and London: Routledge.
- [11] ICOMOS. (1964). *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (The Venice Charter 1964). IInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, pp. 1-4.
- [12] ICOMOS. (1999). *The Burra Charter: The Australian ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Cultural Places of Cultural Significance*.
- [13] McDonald Jr, T. C. (1994). *Understanding Old Buildings: The Process of Architectural Investigation*.
- [14] UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2015). *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. , (July).
- [15] Byrne, D., Brayshaw, H. & Ireland, T. (2003). *Social Significance: A Discussion Paper*. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- [16] Mason, R. (2002). *Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices*. *Assessing the values of cultural heritage*, pp. 5-30.
- [17] Canadian Register of Historic Places. (2011). *Writing Statements of Significance*. Parks Canada. Retrieved from www.historicplaces.ca/medial/5422/sosguideen.pdf

Biographical notes

Ahmadreza Shirvani Dastgerdi, holds a PhD in Architecture, from the school of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Florence, Italy. His research focuses on planning and architectural theory and specifically on the preservation of historic urban sites. He has a broad range of teaching experience as a visiting lecturer in graduate and undergraduate courses on architecture at Isfahan's universities.

Giuseppe De Luca, is a Full Professor in Spatial Planning, at the School of Urban and Regional Planning, Florence University, Italy. He is currently Deputy Director of the Department of Architecture and Coordinator of the PhD programme in Architecture. From October 2000 to June 2011 he was Vice-president of the National Society of Town, Territorial and Environmental Planning. From May 2011 to July 2016 he was General Secretary of the National Institute of Urban and Regional Planning (INU) in Rome. He is a consultant on territorial and urban planning for several local Governments.

Summary

Heritage planning is the preservation, conservation, rehabilitation, restoration and management of heritage resources. This paper aims to propose an approach for specifying the values and importance of historic sites. In this study, the Historic Urban Landscape approach is taken as the research framework. This approach moves beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focuses on the entire human environment with all its tangible and intangible qualities. It seeks to increase the sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values. This study indicates that a values-centered planning approach has emerged as a way of formalizing strategies for dealing with preservation challenges. The importance of values-centered preservation is the framework it offers for dealing holistically with historic sites and addressing both the contemporary and historic values of a place, a task which includes a report comprising written material and graphic material. The contents of the report should be arranged to suit the site and the limitations on the task, but it will generally be in two sections: first, the assessment of cultural significance and second, the statement of cultural significance. Therefore, determining the significance of historic places is to be considered as the basis for planning and implementing management strategies and sustainable development. Furthermore, heritage planning needs a progression that goes from identification, to evaluation, to management and together form a basis for preservation policies.

Riassunto

La tutela del patrimonio culturale si ottiene mediante una attività pianificata di conservazione, riutilizzo, restauro e gestione. Questo articolo propone una metodologia per individuare i valori e l'importanza dei siti storici inseriti nel Paesaggio urbano. Nello studio si considerano non solo gli interventi conservativi sull'edificio ma anche i rapporti che esso ha con l'intero ambiente culturale e sociale circostante, con tutte le sue caratteristiche tangibili e intangibili. Si vuole, in definitiva, aumentare la sostenibilità degli interventi di pianificazione e progettazione tenendo conto dell'ambiente immobiliare esistente, del patrimonio immateriale, della diversità culturale, dei fattori socio-economici e ambientali insieme ai valori della comunità locale. Lo studio indica che mediante un approccio di pianificazione centrato sui valori, si ottiene un modo per individuare idonee strategie per affrontare le sfide della conservazione. L'importanza della conservazione centrata sui valori permette di considerare in modo olistico i siti e affrontare le esigenze contemporanee nel rispetto dei valori storici di un luogo, acquisiti attraverso una accurata ricerca documentaria. La progettazione dell'intervento deve riguardare il sito e le sue caratteristiche specifiche e, quindi, considerare due istanze: in primo luogo, la valutazione del significato culturale e in secondo luogo, la dichiarazione di rilevanza culturale. Pertanto, la determinazione del significato dei luoghi storici deve essere considerata la base per pianificare e attuare strategie di gestione e sviluppo sostenibile. Inoltre, la pianificazione del patrimonio necessita di una serie di procedure che vanno dall'identificazione, alla valutazione, alla gestione e che insieme, costituiscono la base per le politiche di conservazione.