

An Indicator of the State of Conservation of Urban World Heritage Sites*

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out a proposal for an indicator of conservation to assess the state of conservation of urban heritage sites. The Indicator of the State of Conservation (Isc) was designed as a monitoring instrument for evaluating the conservation performance of cities, towns, villages and other types of urban areas of heritage value. The indicator was designed to perform two tasks: (1) to evaluate how the conservation of an urban site evolves over time (internal performance analysis) and (2) to compare cities as to their conservation performance (comparative performance analysis). This paper presents the main concepts used as key performance indicators (KPIs) – that is, significance, integrity and authenticity – and how they contribute to meeting the objective of attaining the sustainable conservation of heritage sites. This paper also presents the mathematical structure of the indicator.

It is clear from the literature that significance, integrity and authenticity are the three central variables for assessing the state of conservation of heritage sites but, so far, there is no general acceptance as to how to determine estimated values for them. These concepts are qualitative. They cannot be measured in the traditional way expected of objective investigation. Their values can only be estimated subjectively by individuals or groups of individuals. This paper sets out a model for this and presents the methodology used to determine the two sets of weights used in the Indicator of the State of Conservation of urban heritage sites. This methodology involves the use of the technique of the Delphi Panel of Experts in allocating scores for: (a) each KPI, in the Isc equation and (b) the opinion of the stakeholders in order to determine each KPI.

Introduction

Since about ten years ago, UNESCO has asked each new site included in the World Heritage List (WHL) to produce a management plan and to designate a national institution responsible for its implementation. These plans are important as they provide UNESCO with monitoring instruments to assist evaluations included in the Periodic Reports (PR) on the state of conservation of the sites, which are conducted every six years. The reports assess the permanence of the heritage values as well as the state of conservation of the sites.

In spite of the importance of the PR, it is clear that what is lacking are even more effective monitoring instruments, especially to evaluate the state of conservation of the sites. It is important to use instruments to indicate changes in the state of conservation of each urban site in the WHL, within a period of time that is sufficiently short to trigger control measures to prevent, correct or mitigate problems and tackle conservation. Indicators have been identified as the best instruments for performing this task.

This paper presents the development of an indicator to measure the state of conservation of urban heritage sites. The indicator is expressed as a function of significance, integrity and authenticity, assessed by surveying the opinion of the main stakeholders involved with the conservation management of sites. The indicator is thus based on the subjective judgement of individuals, framed by an intersubjective survey structure. The structure of the Indicator of the State of Conservation (Isc) is fixed and is the same for all sites, independent of their geographical location. However, the structure of the indicator can be adapted to express the social composition of stakeholders and to use the capabilities and resources of the management institutions of the sites.

* This paper benefits from two previous publications by the same authors: Zancheti, S. M. and Hidaka, L.T.F., 2011. Measuring urban heritage conservation: theory and structure (Part 1). *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1(2): 96–108; and Zancheti, S. M. and Hidaka, L.T.F., 2012. Measuring urban heritage conservation (Part 2). *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*. 2(1): 15–26. Reproduced with permission from the publisher.