

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF GEORGIA: FOR A PARTICULAR BORDERLINE OF THE GEORGIAN SITES SAFEGUARD

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Abstract

As the UNESCO *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL) of 2011 states, the «urban heritage, including its tangible and intangible components» and it defines the historic urban landscape as an «urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting». This definition «provides the basis for a comprehensive and integrated approach for the identification, assessment, conservation and management of historic urban landscapes within an overall sustainable development framework».

Since the concept of HUL is a ‘hub’ where many aspects and features are mixed and integrated, the Georgian landscape appears to be a significant and typical case: the Georgian culture is characterized by openness and continuous contacts with a lot of Greek, Roman, Iranian, Arabian, Russian and other cultures. This has given the Georgian landscape a specific identity and it offers to the same cultural landscape notion a challenge for his application and working out too (Cultural Landscape Convention, 2000).

The main purpose of contribution is about the complexity of the Georgian cultural heritage resources and the particular approach has to be applied in relation to the national cultural programs of conservation and valorization of the Georgian historic urban and natural landscape. This demonstrates that multidisciplinary approach is essential to obtain the conservation of identity and cultural values especially with reference to the management plans which must guarantee that the programs meet with success.

Keywords: Conservation, heritage, landscape, identity, authenticity

Introduction:

Georgian country offers a double level of reflection: the former is about the abundance of tangible and cultural elements connoting Georgia and its places and culture; the latter concerns the multidimensional approaches which have to be followed in a heritage conservation program. From this point of view Georgia, and particularly, we can say, the Georgian landscape allows to have an interesting discussion table.

However, the conservation discipline, having the purpose to protect the cultural heritage, must include several other disciplines as well as history of architecture, planning, aesthetic, strengthening, economics, archeology, and so on. This shows us the multidisciplinary and, we have to say, the interdisciplinarity at the same time.

On the other side, we should remember that the concept of conservation and the way of restoring the cultural heritage change everywhere and they depend on the civilization which produced it in time.

The Georgian territory has been in antiquity a special connection between the Mediterranean coast due to the presence of the Black Sea. The site of Phasis (maybe the actual Poti and founded in the middle of the VI century b.C.) was the main connection point

between the West and the East, providing to develop the influence of the Caucasian and Scythian culture on the Western one.

This characteristic of simultaneous presence of different cultures represents the main peculiarity of the Georgian identity and actually it seems to be in a strong relationship with the global and general aims of the conservation culture that is linked to the present needs; in other words, the layered and historic Georgian context appears to be in concordance with the Proclamation of an international decade for the rapprochement of cultures (2012-2022) adopted by the General Assembly of ICOMOS in Paris in 2011.

At the present the Georgian country is facing a very significant economic and social development and several conservation programs, planning and new buildings are being realized. From this point of view we can note that the same historic urban landscape - as well as its natural one - is being changed and there is, we think, the real risk of losing its own identity. On the other hand the *Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape* (2005) remarks that «Historic buildings, open spaces and contemporary architecture contribute significantly to the value of the city by branding the city’s character. Contemporary architecture can be a strong competitive tool for cities as it attracts residents, tourists, and capital. Historic and contemporary architecture constitute an asset to local communities, which should serve educational purposes, leisure, tourism, and secure market value of properties» (art. 31).

Moreover, «the *Vienna Memorandum* focuses on the impact of contemporary development on the overall urban landscape of heritage significance, whereby the notion of historic urban landscape goes beyond traditional terms of “historic centres”, “ensembles” or “surroundings”, often used in charters and protection laws, to include the broader territorial and landscape context.».

However, we cannot disregard that there have been a lot of international meetings of experts – and we could cite some documents such as *Déclaration sur la conservation des paysages urbains historiques* (2005); the Round Table of Montréal (2006), *Declaration of Jerusalem* (2006); *Les villes entre Intégration et Désintégration* (ISoCaRP, 2006);

Conclusions of Vilnius (ICCROM, 2006) - that have remarked the need to join actions finalized to a sustainable urban (and social) development through the heritage conservation, detecting the direct link between development and preservation, enriching the latter with connotations related to socio-anthropological factors.

As matters stand the main question is: how could the multidisciplinary preserve and improve authenticity of the Georgian heritage identity?

From multidisciplinary to interdisciplinary. Heritage conservation and identity

As it is well-known, the expanding notion of cultural heritage, in particular over the last decade, includes a broader interpretation leading to recognition of human coexistence with the territory and human beings in the social and anthropological context; this requires new approaches and methodologies for urban conservation and development in a land context.

However, to understand the essence of the “sense of place” that has to be considered in respecting cultural heritage, we could look at an image that shows us the character of a part of the historical and urban landscape.

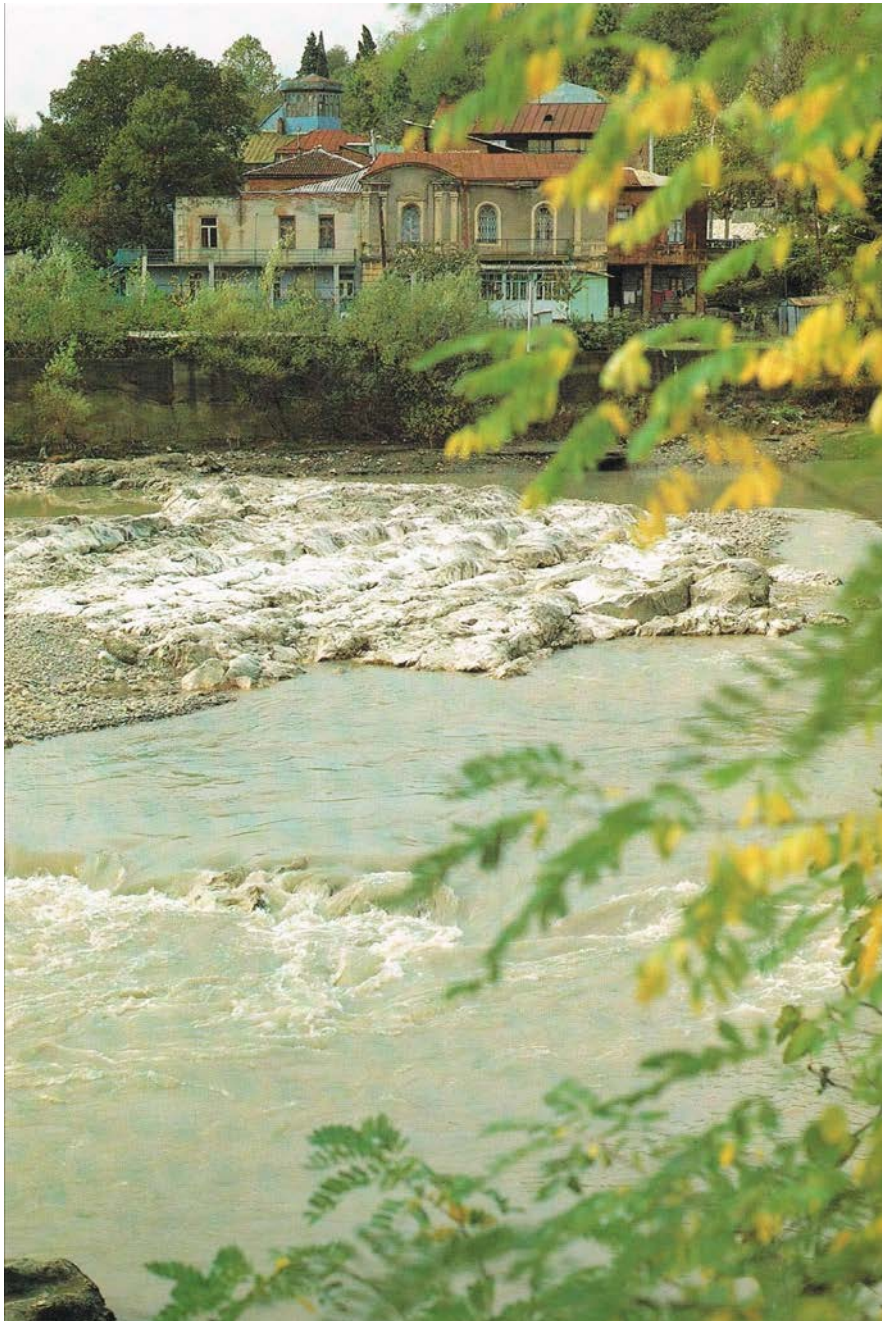


Fig. 1_Kutaisi, Old buildings on the Rioni's left bank (Tamaz Gersamia, Kutaisi, 1990)

In any case, to explain this image and to bring out from it some tools to deepen our considerations we have to underline the Historic Urban Landscape significance.

Above all it is necessary to specify the concept of “spirit of place”. In fact, the typically physical aspects of the sites considered together with the immaterial ones has brought the evolution of the concept of heritage towards the connotation of a city that becomes real through a comprehensive idea within which the historical dynamics are especially important. In other words, with the passing of time it has become more and more concrete the cultural structure within which to insert the notion of “heritage”, and such a structure is based on “values” and “spirit of place”. In fact the Québec Declaration states that «Recognizing that the spirit of place is made up of tangible (sites, buildings, landscapes, routes, objects) as well as intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, festivals, commemorations, rituals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), which all significantly contribute to “make” the place and giving it spirit, we declare that intangible cultural heritage gives a richer and more complete meaning to heritage as a

whole and it must be taken into account in all legislation concerning cultural heritage, and in all conservation and restoration projects for monuments, sites, landscapes, routes and collections of objects». Moreover we have to interpret “spirit of place” as a relational concept, based on a plural and dynamic character which can possess multiple meanings and peculiarities, of changing through time, and of belonging to different groups.

It is useful to add that the Faro Convention of 2005, by directly linking heritage and human rights (“...reconnaître que le droit au patrimoine culturel est inhérent au droit de participer à la vie culturelle, tel que défini dans la Déclaration universelle des droits de l’homme”, art. 1) recognizes the public interest associated to the cultural patrimony (art. 5) and identifies its factors supporting human development (Section II).

But the most recent document which has faced the HUL notion is the *UNESCO Recommendation on the Historical Urban Landscape* of 2011. It states that the «urban heritage, including its tangible and intangible components, constitutes a key resource in enhancing the liveability of urban areas and fosters economic development and social cohesion in a changing global environment». It defines the historic urban landscape as an «urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting». Moreover the Recommendation, going back to the 1976 “UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas”, defines the HUL as «ensembles of any group of buildings, structures and open spaces, in their natural and ecological context, including archaeological and palaeontological sites, constituting human settlements in an urban environment over a relevant period of time, the cohesion and value of which are recognized from the archaeological, architectural, prehistoric, historic, scientific, aesthetic, socio-cultural or ecological point of view. This landscape has shaped modern society and has great value for our understanding of how we live today». The multiple aspects that shape the urban landscape are evident.

From these few remarks it appears essential to start our analysis about the term “landscape”: it comes from the Dutch “landschap”: land as area that comes from the Basque word “landa” (labored earth); and “schap” corresponds to the term “ship”, that means “position held”.

Therefore, the word “landscape”, first recorded in 1598, was borrowed as a painters’ term from Dutch during the 16th century when they became masters of the landscape genre. But the artistic sense of “landschap” starts when it was brought into the English language, meaning a picture depicting scenery on land.

It can be interesting to refer to the origins of the term in the Arabic language: we are actually in a land/landscape that had a particular relationship also with the Mediterranean culture and this means that the values have to be compared with these aspects. The word landscape is represented by “manthar” or “mashhad” and they mean «that which is viewed, seen or witnessed» (Ch. Dabdoub-Nasser, 2012).

Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves what are the current challenges for the concept “landscape” and how we can manage knowledge, interpretation and, finally, intervention. However, if we want to aim to safeguard identity and with it the authenticity of the places and heritage, we need to understand that to preserve them means to conserve the material. In fact, there is an important aspect which has to be considered: the relationship between the urban (and natural too) landscape with the material, the physical “material”.

So, before individuating interventions for a cultural landscape, I suppose that these ones are just a small series of elements for re-considering our concept of landscape.

In fact, the analysis of the transformation of this sort of concept allows us to think landscape as – we should say – a box of a lot of associations since we could say that landscape is a “place”. It concerns the relationships between ourselves and the external

physical context and every place can give us a series of material information which we interpret thanks to our cultural tradition and background.

However, landscape is a work of architecture in the sense of organization of space in shapes and functions. But, moreover landscape is a real document, because it witnesses history; it is an archive because it conserves past human life style, cultures, techniques and so on; it is a palimpsest because it represents a text where the transformations are visible and, more, the other ones are in progress.

It is the place where memory and present are really mixed; where intangible factors and physical elements show themselves together, each giving significances to the other.

All this lets us consider the complexity and also our boundaries of intervention on landscape. In the field of the discipline of conservation, knowledge, analysis and interventions are focused on the material. For this reason there are a lot of disciplines which allows us to determine its knowledge and, so, to choose a good action for the conservation. Nevertheless, we cannot consider material only from the scientific point of view. The scientific disciplines are not enough to preserve the identity of the cultural heritage: instead the criteria and also the aims of conservation drive us to ask ourselves about the esthetical and ontological essence of material/substance in the sense of its appearance as phenomena.

As the physician E.Mach underlined: «every physical phenomena is a psychological phenomena». This means that the physical phenomena, besides their scientific aspect, possess a substance that exists when the man observes them. In other words, the physical phenomena (and now we can say Nature as a whole) assume and show significances just when the subject or the witness looks at them.

Another relationship which is important for understanding the complexity and, more, the peculiarity of the Georgian heritage is represented by the one between material and nature. It is possible to grasp a deep connection between some typical Georgian buildings and their natural site. We can note a particular and singular aspect in traditional architecture: the constructions being at the ridge on the river seem to express the Georgian history and the experienced lives of the Georgian people. They seem to look at the nature which, through the river, flows as well as the history and the people who passed across this country giving the possibility to different cultures to trade and meet.

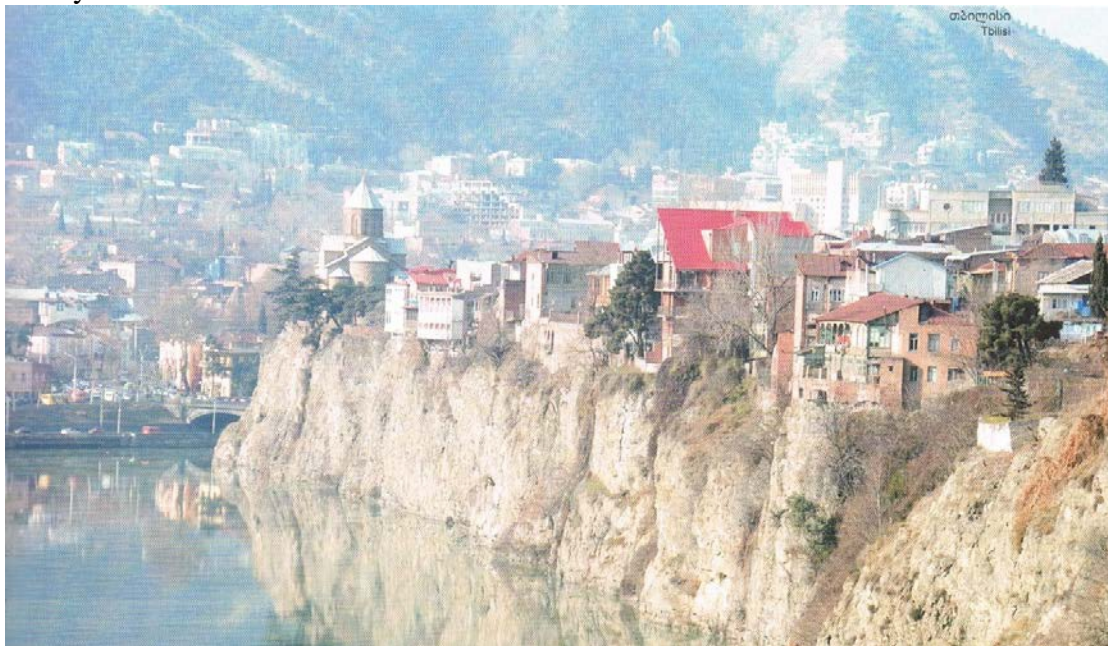


Fig. 2_View of Tbilisi (Nino Laghidze, Georgian Architecture, 2009)

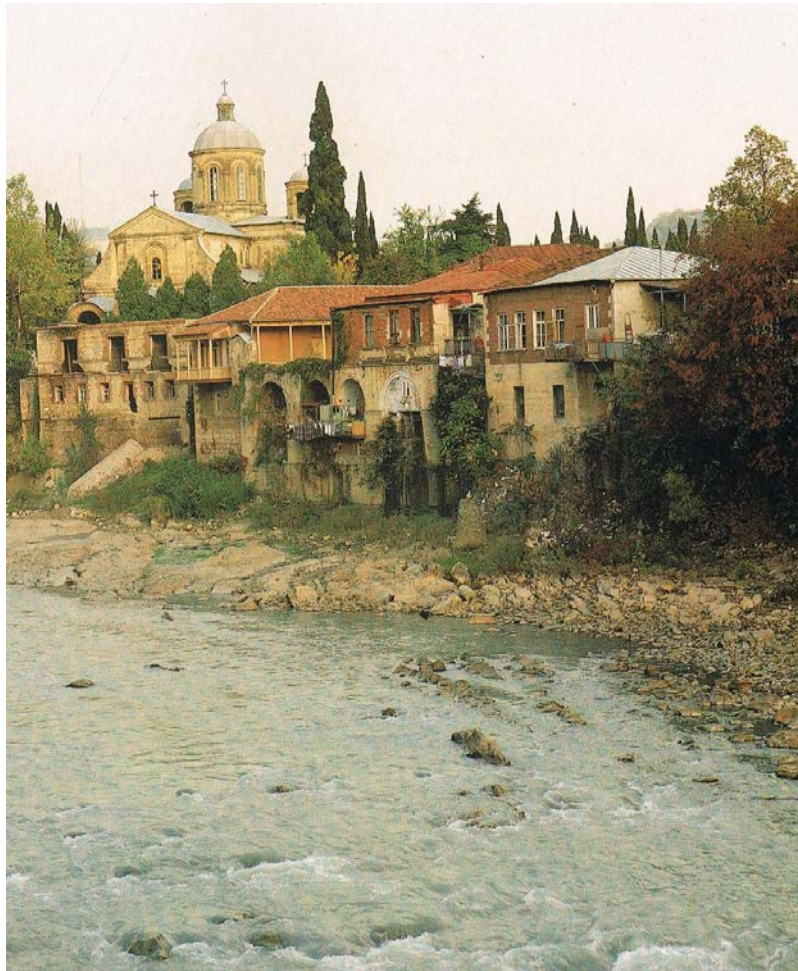


Fig 3_ Fig. 1_Kutaisi, Another view of the old buildings on the Rioni's left bank (Guram Pandzhikidze, Kutaisi, 1990)

We know that nature, through the natural interactions between the natural phenomena and the organic and inorganic elements and the transformation actions re-shapes and changes material; because of these above-mentioned transformations the subject perceives the sense of time and that causes the mechanism of the human memory.

On this point, we cannot forget to remark the contribution of the Brandi's theory: in the act of "recognition", which is an action of interpretation, we find a real theoretic instrument (linked also to the practice) to deepen the culture of preservation and restoration of architecture and landscape.

In fact, it represents a valid tool and a research field that might guarantee a fruitful path for the comprehension of the architectural work and site multidimensionality; and also, we have to say, it concurs to the recent changes in our current aesthetic conscience and perception. These are only a few aspects that have to be considered to avoid the loss of identity and authenticity, especially in the case of the complex Georgian heritage.

However, the aspect of the perception and interpretation of landscape is important to understand and detect the sense of landscape. We could try to define perception and its characteristics because the question is compulsory. In fact, we perceive our environment in a different manner in comparison with our forefathers, and perception is different for every civilization.

We can say that perception of natural landscape and architecture is based on three main aspects which we could compare with the (almost static) perception of works of art (T.Griffero, 2005): first, there is a psychophysical participation that drives the subject to "adapt" himself to the nature and landscape and to feel in joining with them; second, there is a fluidity, an

instability, an unsettled state that give us undetermined shapes and dynamic images linked to our state of mind and feelings; at last, there is a character of “surprise”, to say with Michel Dufrenne, there is a “persevering improvisation” that has the potential to go further the settled perceptive codes.

These issues drive us to reflect upon a persevering concept we find in the contemporary aesthetic thought: the “experience place”. This, together with the corporeality - which represents the “hub” of experience - consists of an emotional place, operative place and finally an intuitive place. They are strongly connected with each other and they do not admit any sort of unilaterality in thinking the landscape.

As matters stand we can very well understand the meaning of the terms “urban” and “historic”. It is not possible, when we debate on towns, to divide the two adjectives: they are integrated and shown in a whole through material and shapes, chromatism and atmosphere, places and real lives.

This drives us to recognize another element to be considered: the imagine of historic heritage and sites that local community, and not only that, possesses. This because of the idea of HUL takes substance and blends, integrated and overlapping, natural and built landscape, nature and historical transformation and community, to include in this sense an element belonging to the Georgian historical landscape, that is a sense of opening to the ‘other’, very visible within the contemporary urban scenario and mediated also by its historical views, that contribute to the formation of a collective memory of the idea of “landscape”.

In fact, we could maintain that the stratification of meanings, the one that shapes the spirit of the places represents the basis of the individual aesthetic experience and is aligned and stratified in turn with and within the collective memory. It is not a change if the perception of places as material and physical coagulation of factors, also intangible, arises also in the cultural research in the psychoanalytic field: in particular, the essence of architecture is investigated, or, if you want, the urban landscape, in connection with the mental work that guides and conditions perception itself. Even if, initially, it is recognized the practical component of the city, and the fact that modern disciplines keep into account, in the organization of life environments, ethological components and social samplings for a correct correspondence of planning to the needs of the community, we can note the missing of considerations of the effective psychic reality that guides any process of spaces apperception.

Conclusion:

As we can see, the multidisciplinary on which the discipline of conservation is based, allows to integrate the scientific instruments we dispose with the unescapable action of interpretation of cultural values that, in the case of the Georgian sites, are complex and strongly linked to its peculiar identity.

All that suggests us to use a particular approach in relation to the national cultural programs of conservation and valorization, especially of the Georgian historic urban and natural landscape that can be a stimulant laboratory for the application of the more updated conservation philosophy.

In other words, the Georgian context represents a big challenge for a methodology, that starting from the concept of HUL which “also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity” could experiment the cross of different disciplines with the aim to conserve the spirit of openness to different cultures which have found place in this particular door of East.

For this we should speak in this case of inter-disciplinarity that allows a more dynamic and conscious approach not only to protect the cultural heritage in its identity, but also to guarantee an harmonious growth of the community in a long term time.

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