Cultural Memory

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Historic urban landscapes (HULs) are composed of layers of imbedded tangible and intangible features such as cultural memories. As the collective memories of city inhabitants, cultural memories can affect elements of social sustainability such as health, well-being, community identity, place perception and social engagement.
This topic review points to the value of recalling cultural memory features in HULs, which can be used to achieve social sustainability. In addition, it contributes to sustainable development through the contribution of cultural memory and its influence on the formation of place identity, sense of place, civic pride and quality of life in HULs.

historic urban landscapes   participatory planning   place identity   quality of life

sense of place   social sustainability

1. Introduction

Cultural/collective memory is the act of recalling events that are related with objects, places and encountered by people in a social framework or between groups that experience these events [1]. Collective memory is reckoned to be a repository of culture, and sometimes this view leads to the term 'cultural memory' being used interchangeably [2]. Cultural memory (or collective memory) was parented for the first time into the literature by Maurice Halbwachs in his books The Social Frameworks of Memory (1992 and 1925) and On Collective Memory (1980 and 1950). His understanding of cultural memory was founded on a differentiation between individual and collective memory, and he described individual memory as 'personal' and 'autobiographical', while collective memory is 'social 'and 'historical' [3]. Following the introduction of the concept by Halbwachs, it was Pierre Nora who further studied spatial collective memory, and he was notably concerned with the geographical and built environment. He discussed how certain places can capture different emotions and embody national memories [4]. Further building on Halbwachs' contributions, the concept of 'urban memory' was founded by Aldo Rossi in his book (The Architecture of the City) and that allowed the concept of collective memory to be introduced into architecture and urban design. In this book, Aldo Rossi argues that preserving heritage sites is the equivalent of retaining people's cultural memories and protecting their national identities [5].

Christine Boyer added to this discussion in her book City of Collective Memory in which she explains that a city's architecture is what governs its collective expression, which carries the traces of the earlier architectural shapes, along with planning and monuments of the city. She explains that while the names of cities may not change, their physical elements are always transformable, being forgotten and modified to match new demands, or even vanish in the pursuit of different purposes. 'The demands and pressure of social reality always impact the material order of the city'. However, our collective and individual memories can inform the changes happening and help us to
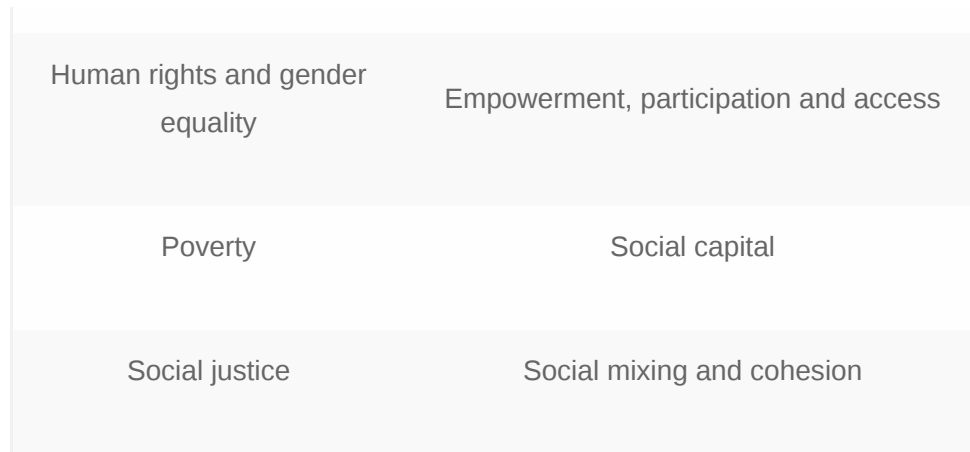
distinguish our city from others by recognising its streets, monuments, architectural forms and traces [6]. Paula Hamilton notes the importance of the physical aspects of an environment that trigger remembrance and emotions through processes that continually re- enchant city spaces. Echoing Halbwachs she says collective memory is 'a record of resemblances and similarities. That is kept viable by persistent reworking and transmission[7]. Here, 'similarity' is a useful concept employed later in this paper to understand how tangible and intangible features of a place contributes to users' social image of place.

All these theorists point to the important link between cultural memory and memorable places in cities that evoke collective images and perceptions and shape the city's character and identity. Kevin Lynch also contributes to this link through his books What Time is This Place? and A Theory of a Good City Form in which he explains that the existence of an 'image of time' is important for users' psychic and mental health. In addition, his explanations point to the links existing between planning and psychosocial well-being (please see below) [8], and he states that the 'crucial function of planning is to feed psychological and social bonds to places by seeking after the values of community, continuity, health, well-functioning, security, warmth and balance'[9][10].

Recently, the sequential analysis of social sustainability has shown a shift from appreciating only the tangible 'hard' themes towards the intangible 'softer' concepts within the sustainability debate. In this process, traditional themes, such as poverty alleviation, equity and livelihood, have been substituted by emerging themes—those that are less measurable and more intangible, such as identity, sense of place and the added-value of 'social networks' (see Table 1) [11][5]. Accordingly, some key areas of social sustainability are inter-related with cultural memory and have the potential to facilitate sustainable development. These include identity, sense of place and community engagement [5].

Table 1. Traditional and emerging key themes of social sustainability.

Traditional	Emerging
Basic needs, including housing and environmental health	Identity, sense of place and culture
Education and skills	Health and safety
Employment	Well-being, happiness and quality of life
Equity	Demographic change (aging, migration and mobility)

Human rights and gender equality	Empowerment, participation and access
Poverty	Social capital
Social justice	Social mixing and cohesion

2. Take Alexandria, Egypt as an Example

Alexandria, the 'second capital' and main port of Egypt, has recently been experiencing an accelerated rate of urbanisation and industrialisation to meet the needs of its growing population. This has created urban, social and environmental threats to the city's Historic urban landscapes (HULs). The Zanqit Alsitat (also known as 'Zanket el Setat' or 'Zane't El-Settat') historical street market is one of the most important and memorable HULs in Alexandria (see Figure 1). It is currently facing physical decay and environmental pollution, issues which are threatening the place attachment, memories, place image, usage and social interaction of its users [12].

Figure 1. Zanqit Alsitat located in the El Mansheya district, Alexandria Egypt. Source: F. Hussein

The finding indicates that people appreciate the significance of recalling their memories in the formation of their HUL mental images. People also regarded the site's stored memories and history as an important driver for creating place identity and a sense of place that is reflected in their place experience and quality of life. The

findings indicate that having a series of lived events and recording similarities are crucial for recalling and reproducing the tangible and intangible dimensions of cultural memories.

The results also show that cultural memory contributes to place identification through protecting the site identifiers (e.g., landmarks or monumental buildings) that promote feelings of continuity and distinctiveness. This complies with Lynch's argument that people will form clear and accurate images of their places if the city-scape has a clear and identifiable physical form and the function and they will position themselves according to parks, edges, nodes and landmarks [13]. Participants' comments showed that the uniqueness and continuity of this site as being 'one of a kind' in Alexandria and the fact that it had not experienced any major planning transformation, created feelings of certainty and enjoyment that protected the place identity and experience. This supports Anton and Lawrence's understanding about sites possessing place identity and suggests that places that are more likely to be assimilated into the identity structure are those capable of making us feel unique, in charge, satisfied about ourselves and are aligned with our subjective realisation of who we are [14].

It was noticeable that all the participants were completely aware of the suq's historical background: Starting with the Napoléonic French campaign, the soldiers' horse stables had given the suq's main edge its name (Faransah Street), and the later existence of the Turkish Town was reflected in the urban fabric (the narrow alleys), while stories about the crimes of Raya and Skeena were recalled. This awareness of site history led to a repetition of the cultural memories rooted in this HUL and created collective feelings of responsibility and civic pride. This relationship between historical value and cultural memory agrees with Hoteit's argument that 'collective memory consists of the valuable landmarks in nation's history, it is these landmarks that are capable of advancing the sense of belonging at national level, as well as affecting the current and future lives of the community' [15].

The results indicate that cultural memory, place attachment, and the historical value of place, altogether, adds to a sense of place through forming relationship towards a place and a community attachment. This result agrees with Williams and Stewart explanation that sense of place is an appreciation of historical, cultural and spatial context that forms values, meanings and social interactions [16] and also with the argument of Cross concerning the components of sense of place as being the relationship to a place and community attachment [17].

The findings indicate that users related differently to the suq and expressed various types of bonds to the site, for example the spiritual, commodified and narrative bonds, experienced by all users, while the static users mainly experienced biographical ties. These bonds added to their site identification and founded the base for immense emotions of rootedness in relation to the suq. This complies with Williams and Stewart contribution when they defined sense of place as the emotional bonds that people form with their places [16].

3. Conclusions and Prospects

It is recommended that national urban planning authorities, urban designers and planners to recognise HULs as repositories of cultural memories and to ensure that their development and management reflect historical values by recalling and memorialising the activities and events that occurred there. It is highly recommended that these acts

involve the representation of cultural memories together with conservation of historical physical fabric. This could happen through participatory planning, where the government would need to engage with the community and allocate sufficient time for realistic data gathering, making it possible to consider the cultural memories, emotions and opinions when dealing with HULs. Social groups could be more involved in participatory planning by conducting in-person interviews with static and mobile users of the site of interest. Such approach will cater for the identification of the memories that they want to preserve and sustain for next generations in order to create social cohesion and protect site identity, site experience and sense of place. Nonetheless, this is recommended to happen hand-in-hand with local community trust that their opinions—after practical considerations—will be recognised and acted upon.

To conclude, cultural memory can work as an agent linking generations with the places of important events so that the old, current and foreseen mental dimensions of the people connected to the HULs can stay related. In this context, sustaining cultural and physical heritage for future generations is important and should be approached with the same acknowledgement that present generations have for mainstream sustainability and sustainable development.

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