



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Heritage Conservation and Environmental Sustainability: Revisiting the Evaluation Criteria for Built Heritage

Paper Abstract

The aim of this paper is to propose “environmental sustainability” as an independent criterion in the evaluation of built heritage, to serve as a quantifiable indicator towards the goal of “sustainable development” in the urban context. According to the 2013 Hangzhou Declaration, a key basis for achieving urban sustainable development is by protecting a city’s cultural heritage assets. However, since the introduction of “sustainable development” in the 1987 Brundtland Report, built-heritage conservation has not factored into environmental protection policies. Making this connection is the premise of this paper.

Urban historic buildings are often centrally located and built using durable, local materials, reflecting local climate and site conditions. Their embodied energy can be calculated and compared with the environmental cost of new construction, including the impact of construction waste. Clearly, it is reasonable to assume that the adaptive reuse and improved energy performance of historic buildings can play a critical role in environmental sustainability.

Developers, architects and urban planners, use tools such as LEED, BREEAM, Green Star, HK-BEAM to collect, analyze and assess the environmental sustainability of building projects with the goal to reduce impact and achieve sustainable development. Heritage conservationists have long argued that conserving heritage buildings can play an integral role in sustainable urban development. By merging the tools and approaches of these various sectors, it is possible to come up with a system that can evaluate heritage buildings and quantify their impact in the global sustainability agenda.