Abstract

Cultural heritage, in its manifold expressions, is as a key urban component that (i) adapts and evolves through time with the changes occurring in the city, and at the same time maintains its identity, integrity, and continuity, and (ii) enables and drives the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The recent 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) called for the application of a value-based landscape approach to urban management to ensure the integration of cultural heritage conservation concerns within the wider framework of sustainable urban development. The Recommendation declared cultural heritage to be a social construct, subject to diverse associations of meanings related to personal experience, knowledge, practices, and change over time, and challenged existing methods for the characterization and mapping of urban landscape. This thesis follows this conceptualization and develops a novel method that integrates traditional and innovative tools to grasp the range of cultural values attributed by the different stakeholders to the urban landscape, and to provide insights into all facets of the perceived landscape character. In this regard, Tripoli, Lebanon is taken as a cased study to apply the proposed method. This thesis draws attention to the social co-construction of meanings of everyday landscape. It goes beyond historic centers and designated heritage to address the city as a whole and recognize in-between liminal spaces, where heritage boundaries are challenged, alternatives to dominant narratives of identity are articulated, and diverse cultural values are claimed through community interests and social activism. First, this thesis identifies the prospects and challenges for the application of a value-based landscape approach to urban management. Second, it applies the proposed method to the characterization of the HUL. Third, it recalls the dissonant, conflictual, and process-based character of heritage values, and investigates the role of “non-expert” actors in shaping the dynamics of heritage production. In doing so it addresses both collective and connective action. The latter is built upon online communities and digital activism. The results show that value judgments are very complex in nature and are bounded by the local sociopolitical structure and economic conditions. Another important finding of this thesis is that the analysis of social media metadata provides additional knowledge about everyday encounters with the HUL, and that digital platforms play a role in building online communities that contribute to the co-production of local knowledge and that challenge authorized understanding of heritage.