

# **The impact of cultural events on the image of the city: the Historic Urban Landscape of Eleusina, European Cultural Capital 2023**

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Extended Abstract (1200-2000 words)

The concept of landscape appears around 1550 in the french/latin dictionary “Robert Stephen”. It refers to a canvas of a painter, depicting a garden, or a view of the countryside. It is interesting to note that the notion of “landscape” appears shortly after that of cultural heritage. These two concepts are interrelated, as they are the result of thinking of the elite of that time, which consists largely of humanists. Landscape is increasingly considered as the key element of individual and social well-being as well as the quality of life in the city. It contributes significantly to cultural, ecological, environmental, and social sectors and appears as a favorable factor for the development of economic activities rooted in local wreath-producing resources.

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was no special legislation concerning Landscape in any country. It took a long time to see any legislation specific to this issue to emerge. Landscape as a concept first appeared in legal texts of international law around early 1970s with the Ramsar International Agreement (1971), the Paris Convention (1972) and the Barcelona Convention (1976). The UNESCO Convention on Landscape marked a turning point, when, in 1992, it was decided to protect sites by categorizing them as cultural landscapes, in contrast to past practices, where cultural and natural landscape were two notions clearly separated.

In 2011, UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, (hereafter the HUL approach) aiming to facilitate the integration of heritage management and urban development. This practice promotes a landscape-based approach, in which the existence of an inventory of resources and the identification of values and vulnerabilities are essential factors where drawing up urban development policies (Veldpaus, 2015). The HUL approach is holistic and interdisciplinary. It addresses the inclusive management of heritage resources in dynamic and constantly changing environments, aimed at guiding change in historic cities. It is based on the recognition and identification of a layering and interconnection of natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, international and local values present in any city. According to the HUL approach, these values should be taken as a point of departure in the overall management and development of the city.

The core to the HUL approach is a new understanding and perspective of the historic environment. The Historic Urban Landscape is the 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 wider context includes notably the site’s topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial

organization, perception, and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure.

The methodology process used while implementing a HUL approach to a city consists of six critical steps. First and foremost, it is crucial to undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the city's natural, cultural, and human resources, then to reach consensus using participatory planning and stakeholder consultations on what values to protect for transmission to future generations and to determine the attributes that carry these values. Furthermore, it is important to assess vulnerability of these attributes to socio-economic stresses and impacts of climate change, and to integrate urban heritage values and their vulnerability status into a wider framework of city development, which shall provide indications of areas of heritage sensitivity that require careful attention to planning, design, and implementation of development projects, as well. Finally, it is vital to prioritize actions for conservation and development and to establish the appropriate partnerships and local management frameworks for each of the identified projects for conservation and development, as well as to develop mechanisms for the coordination of the various activities between different actors, both public and private.

The city chosen in the current research to be seen and studied under the prism of the HUL approach, is the city of Elefsina, in Attiki, Greece. Elefsina is also the European Capital of Culture 2023. The European Capital of Culture as an institution focuses on highlighting the richness, diversity and common aspects of European cultures, seeking to reinforce ties and mutual understanding between European Citizens. It also aims at the revelation and development of the tangible and intangible Economy of a city via the interventional contribution of Art, Culture and Research. With these main principles as a guideline, 2023 Eleusis focuses on four strategic objectives: Culture, People, City, Environment. Elefsina, differs from the stereotypical image that any tourist or visitor may have (from Greece) since it is a purely industrial city, which in the mid 60s and 70s suffered major degradation due to pollution caused by the industrial infrastructure. The project "Transition to Euphoria" (the official bid of the city as a candidate for the ECOC), aims, among others, to strengthen the rich cultural profile of the city and clarify its cultural identity, (thus) changing its stereotypical image of an industrial city. The plan involves many strategies that are already taking place, including financial, but also physical planning, to bring benefits in the fields of transportation, accommodation, tourism competitiveness etc.

While observing the city and its characteristics, it is obvious why Elefsina should be observed as a case study of the HUL approach. First of all the city's archaeological identity is quite strong; the cultural heritage material consists of the archaeological site and Archaeological Museum, which hosts major exhibits of world cultural heritage value. The archaeological site is located in the centre of the city and is surrounded by the main pedestrian area that links the city centre to the coastline (images 1,2). The city's cultural assets dating from up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century include Hadrian's aqueduct and bridge, samples of the engineering genius of the time, as well as the chapels of Panagitsa in the archaeological site and Saint Zacharias from the late Byzantine era.



Im.1 The Archaeological Site of Elefsina



Im.2 The Archaeological Site of Elefsina

Furthermore, according to the official bid for the ECOC, a strong aim regarding the future of the city, is to turn Elefsina into a Living Museum. The partnership of School of Architecture NTUA and Municipality of Eleusis attempts to find an answer on the question of how to make visible the city's contemporary identity in the contemporary fluid in social, cultural, spatial and political environment. In effect, the research program consists of a collection of diverse narratives and references on Eleusis history, which, in the future, will help conclude to ideas and studies regarding the urban planning and transformation of different aspects of the city, while the program's concept is to describe the city's cultural heritage in a contemporary context and language.

The offer of HUL's tools will not only help to understand the actions taken or to be taken in the future regarding the city of Elefsina, but also to enhance the academic discussion on the city's urban planning, by setting a framework of long term planning of the city, taking into consideration its cultural and historical values. The main objective of this research is to make an analysis of the HUL steps proposed by UNESCO and see how these steps can be combined along with the official bid of Elefsina for the European Culture Capital 2023, the actions proposed, and the diverse events that are already taking place, enhancing the city's image and defining its new identity.