

Final Proposal on the Problematic of “Protecting and Strengthening the Residential Function of the City’s Historical Centers”

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Introduction

The Quebec Roadmap stands as a pioneering strategy crafted by the Organization of World Heritage Cities, designed to steer the sustainable development of residential historic centers. It champions a holistic approach that seamlessly integrates heritage preservation with contemporary urban living, nurturing dynamic communities within these cherished locales.

The roadmap advocates for a hands-on approach, urging cities to glean insights through practical initiatives, and exchange knowledge and best practices to forge a fresh wave of urban policies that harmonize cultural legacy with ecological and societal imperatives. Within the framework of the Quebec Roadmap, the second issue underscores a compelling prospect: the potential for historic districts to undergo rejuvenation. These districts, imbued with a tapestry of cultural richness and architectural grandeur, serve as poignant reminders of bygone eras. However, they often grapple with formidable challenges—ranging from issues of comfort and security to adaptability—that imperil their vibrancy. Yet, far from being static relics frozen in time, these districts pulsate with an innate dynamism. Through the embrace of adaptive reuse strategies, they can undergo metamorphosis while safeguarding their distinctive essence.

Now, let's delve into how this issue converges with our overarching theme: "Protecting and Strengthening the Residential Functions of the City’s Historic Centers." The quality of life in a historic city center must offer a unique blend of charm, culture, and convenience. However, these areas can also face challenges like noise, limited space, and high costs.

In order to address this priority thematic, it is essential that the vital values of heritage conservation are followed and respected. In this sense, it is important to highlight the important role of international conventions such as the Venice Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, the Enhancing our Heritage Toolkit, the United Nations 2030 Agenda or the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society.

The Venice charter includes a set of advisory recommendations to address the management of restoration and conservation processes of World Heritage historical sites which shall be followed in the proposals presented in this document. Moreover, the Faro Convention establishes an important mindset to consider when managing World Heritage, particularly considering the connections between the heritage and the population of the cities it belongs to.

Finally, the principles set in the Enhancing our Heritage Toolkit and the 2030 Agenda must be taken into consideration to ensure a proper sustainable and respectful course of action. For instance, the Sustainable Development Goal 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” specifically aims to safeguard global natural and cultural heritage, an objective that must be kept in mind in the development of the proposals.

Objectives

The general objective of this document is therefore to propose measures to preserve the particular character of a historic site by keeping it liveable and alive through improving the quality of stay and increasing the participation of local communities and residents.

The particular objectives to improve the quality of stay include the following:

Enhancing Livability:

- **Noise Pollution:** Implement traffic calming measures like pedestrian zones, lower speed limits, and designated delivery times to reduce noise pollution.
- **Deposit Management:** Adopt strategies and scheduled programs for waste disposal to maintain the overall aesthetic of the street.

- **Green Spaces:** Create pocket parks, rooftop gardens, or transform underutilized areas into green spaces for residents' recreation and well-being as well as improving the micro-climate.
- **Local Economic Sustainable Development:** Encourage the development of local shops, cafes, and essential services like grocery stores and pharmacies within the historic center to meet residents' daily needs.
- **Inhabiting City Centers:** Explore initiatives like tax breaks, rehabilitation grants, or mixed-income and social housing projects to create a diversity of housing options that are financially accessible.

Preserving Character:

- **Sensitive Renovation:** Develop guidelines and incentives for historic building renovations that prioritize functionality for residents while respecting the architectural integrity of the structures.
- **Adaptive Reuse:** Explore the conversion of historic buildings into modern residences, incorporating sustainable features while maintaining the historic character.
- **Public Art & Events:** Organize cultural events, walking tours, or art installations that celebrate the history of the city center, fostering a sense of community and pride among residents.

Sustainability:

- **Traffic Reduction:** Promote car-free living options by improving public transportation, cycling infrastructure, and pedestrian walkways.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Offer financial assistance or rebates for residents to upgrade historic buildings with energy-efficient appliances and insulation.
- **Waste Management:** Implement efficient waste collection systems and encourage resident, visitor and institutional participation in recycling programs.

Community Building:

- **Resident Engagement:** Organize workshops and meetings to involve residents in decision-making processes concerning the historic center's development and residential needs.
- **Community Events:** Create opportunities for residents to interact, such as farmers' markets, block parties, or historical reenactments, fostering a sense of belonging and social cohesion.

By focusing on these objectives, historic city centers can become even more desirable places to live, attracting residents who appreciate the unique character and vibrant atmosphere while ensuring a comfortable and sustainable lifestyle.

Challenges

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintaining the city's identity (daily activity, manners, accents) ● Intangible heritage. ● Enhancing the connection of the city's population with their heritage. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The limiting of tourism access can negatively affect the economy. ● It may be difficult to encourage the local population to adopt some proposals if they do not feel deeply connected to their heritage ● Poor awareness of values of heritage among the cities' population
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keeping cities alive, regarding both their heritage and their citizens' life. ● Improving the conservation of the city's heritage. ● Raising awareness on the cultural connections citizens share with their heritage 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Restoration initiatives must be respectful with the heritage in order to avoid its deterioration. ● Private companies may let buildings crumble so that they can rebuild them without obeying the original spaces that are protected by the law. ● Lack of finances directed at heritage conservation projects

Historic city centers grapple with distinctive challenges concerning housing, with ones standing out: The surge in property values and the influx of tourism often result in the displacement of long-time residents, as businesses catering primarily to tourists take precedence. This displacement not only uproots residents but also fractures the social cohesion within the community.

Preservation vs. Development: Balancing the preservation of architectural heritage with the need for modern development poses a continual challenge. Striking a harmonious equilibrium between maintaining historical authenticity and accommodating contemporary necessities is often complex.

Infrastructure and Utilities: Historic city centers may grapple with outdated infrastructure and utilities, such as aging water and sewage systems or inadequate transportation networks.

Upgrading these essential services while preserving the area's historical integrity requires careful planning and investment.

Solutions and Proposals for Historic City Center Challenges:

As our city grapples with the intricate balance between preserving its historic charm and embracing modern development, a series of challenges emerge, each demanding thoughtful solutions. Among these challenges, we confront the pressing issues of housing affordability, the delicate equilibrium between preservation and progress, the necessity of robust infrastructure, and the impact of tourism on our urban landscape.

Challenge 1: Gentrification

- **Proposal 1:** Inclusionary Zoning: Mandate developers to set aside a certain percentage of new units in historic centers as affordable housing for low and middle-income residents.
- **Proposal 2:** Tenant Protection Laws: Implement rent control measures and "just-cause" eviction policies to safeguard residents from unreasonable rent hikes and displacement.
- **Proposal 3:** Community Land Trusts: Establish non-profit organizations that acquire land and buildings, keeping ownership but offering affordable long-term leases to residents.

Challenge 2: Preservation vs. Development

- **Proposal 1:** Form-Based Codes: Establish regulations focusing on building form, scale, and materials, allowing for modern design within the historic context
- **Proposal 2:** Adaptive Reuse: Encourage the transformation of historic buildings for new uses like museums, community centers, or mixed-use developments.
- **Proposal 3:** Archaeological Impact Assessments: Require thorough assessments before development projects to minimize disruption to potential historical remains.
- **Proposal 4:** Local Commerce Enhancement Projects: Small local enterprises can receive aid and bonuses to establish their businesses in the city center by refurbishing the buildings to maintain their historical heritage. Additionally, the project can foster mindful practices that respect and protect heritage of the city, by promoting local crafts, gastronomy and customs. Local commerce can also be promoted through municipal initiatives such as the establishment of periodical flea markets where local shops can sell their products, the development of competitions related to typical gastronomy or the celebration of artistic fairs to foster local handcrafts and traditions.

Challenge 3: Infrastructure and Utilities

- **Proposal 1:** Municipal Investment: Allocate dedicated budgets for infrastructure upgrades in historic centers, prioritizing essential services like water, sewage, and transportation.
- **Proposal 2:** Public-Private Partnerships: Partner with private companies to leverage expertise and funding for infrastructure projects, ensuring responsible development
- **Proposal 3:** Trenchless Technologies: Utilize minimally disruptive techniques for infrastructure upgrades, minimizing damage to historic streets and buildings.

Challenge 4: Tourism Pressure

- **Proposal 1:** Congestion Pricing: Implement tolls or fees for entering heavily touristed areas during peak hours, encouraging responsible tourism choices.
- **Proposal 2:** Tourist Dispersion Strategies: Promote lesser-known historic sites and local businesses outside the main tourist hubs, distributing tourism benefits more evenly.
- **Proposal 3:** Resident Passes: Grant residents access to specific areas or discounts for local services, mitigating the negative impacts of tourism.

Challenge 5: Maintenance and Conservation

- **Proposal 1:** Historic Tax Credits: Offer tax breaks for property owners who invest in the restoration of historic buildings.
- **Proposal 2:** Public-Private Restoration Funds: Establish dedicated funds with combined public and private resources for large-scale restoration projects.
- **Proposal 3:** Skills Development Programs: Invest in training programs to create a skilled workforce qualified in historic building restoration techniques.
- **Proposal 4:** Special Taxes on Abandoned Buildings: Discourage individual landowners from leaving their real estate properties by taxing the abandoned historical buildings.

Challenge 6: Accessibility and Inclusivity

- **Proposal 1:** Universal Design Standards: Develop and implement design guidelines that integrate accessibility features into historic buildings without compromising their character.
- **Proposal 2:** Assistive Technology Programs: Provide financial assistance or rental programs for assistive technology devices that enhance accessibility in historic environments.
- **Proposal 3:** Accessible Routes and Signage: Develop designated accessible routes and clear signage throughout historic centers, allowing for easy navigation by all visitors

The importance of the different objectives and strategies to achieve them as well as the challenges vary according to the specific preconditions of the respective Heritage site.

The following proposals may therefore be adapted to the distinctive context and include local communities and residents in the decision making and implementation process.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Quebec Roadmap offers a groundbreaking approach to fostering the sustainable development of residential historic centers, seamlessly marrying heritage preservation with contemporary urban living. Through practical initiatives and the exchange of best practices, this strategy empowers cities to navigate the intricate balance between cultural legacy and ecological imperatives. In addition, we have to improve the coexistence between tourism and citizens and draw a discontinued line to preserve the intangible heritage.

Fortunately, there are some useful tools that could help us to measure and mitigate these problems. As the Unesco established, it is important to manage tourism efficiently, responsibly and sustainably. It is here where we can find the vast majority of the solutions. Otherwise, we will see how these solutions evolve in the future according to those cities which have already implemented these solutions.

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