POLITECNICO DI TORINO
Repository ISTITUZIONALE

Balancing conservation and revitalisation: Evidence from urban design practices for historic districts

Original
Balancing conservation and revitalisation: Evidence from urban design practices for historic districts / Chen, D. - In: SPACE. DASP Yearbook 2023 / Bianco P., Gardella, F.J.. - STAMPA. - Torino : Politecnico di Torino, 2023. - ISBN 9788885745933. - pp. 24-25

Availability:
This version is available at: 11583/2980704 since: 2023-07-26T13:07:39Z

Publisher:
Politecnico di Torino

Published
DOI:

Terms of use:

This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

Publisher copyright

(Article begins on next page)

06 September 2026

BALANCING CONSERVATION AND REVITALISATION: EVIDENCE FROM URBAN DESIGN PRACTICES FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Dingran Chen

Cycle
38° - CSC Grant

Year
2022 - 2025

Supervisors
Michele Bonino

Research Group
China Room

The world is currently facing challenges in balancing cultural heritage conservation and urbanisation requirements, particularly in China, where serious social problems have gradually emerged as "bottlenecks" with the booming of the urban area. This research investigates the application of urban design strategies for the conservation and revitalisation of historic districts. Gaining sufficient empirical evidence on how urban design practice affects cultural heritages from different points of view, such as social, economic, and environmental aspects, is crucial to comprehend and optimise the state of conservation and revitalisation of historic districts in the context of urbanisation. The research explores case studies and lessons learned from various urban revitalisation efforts in historic districts worldwide, to identify effective design strategies for conserving the historic character of a district while also promoting vitality. Moreover, this research will select Guangzhou as the main research scope and, from an urban design perspective, focuses on the conservation and revitalisation of historic districts for those affected by the urbanisation process. The insights gained from this research can inform future urban revitalisation efforts in historic districts, helping to promote sustainable and vibrant urban communities while conserving the rich cultural heritage.

Background

Today, urbanisation is a topic of concern for numerous government agencies and the general public. Rapid urbanisation has not only contributed to the development of cities but has also shed light on an array of problems. At the same time, the deterioration of spatial form in historic districts has sped up the process by which the surrounding neighbourhoods have become obsolete. The historic district, as an essential component of the city, is forced to contend with the issues that urbanisation presents. Li et al. (2021) conclude that urbanisation is one of the reasons for the decline of most historic districts. Achieving a balance between conservation and revitalisation is one of the effective ways for historic districts to confront these challenges. By investigating urban design practices within historic districts, this research will primarily focus on the value of the objective and explore the reasons and implications of conservation. Moreover, in terms of revitalisation, this research focuses on making historic districts more vibrant, promoting the sustainable development of historic areas, and discussing the effect of innovative technology. Due to limited resources, lack of awareness, and other obstacles, the heritage conservation is frequently neglected in developing countries. As a result of the rapid and unbalanced urban development prevalent in developing countries like China, historic districts are rapidly deteriorating (Li et al., 2021). According to Xie and Heath (2017), due to urbanisation and redevelopment, thousands of China's historic districts confronted destruction or irreversible damage in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This study will focus on Guangzhou as the main research scope, and through a cross-sectional comparison of other comparable urban design cases, it seeks to investigate the current status of heritage conservation in China and reflect on this issue in depth.

Li, M., Liu, J., Lin, Y., Xiao, L., & Zhou, J. (2021). Revitalizing historic districts: Identifying built environment predictors for street vibrancy based on urban sensor data. *Cities*, 117.
Xie, J., & Heath, T. (2017). *Conservation and revitalization of historic streets in China: Pingjiang Street*, Suzhou. Journal of Urban Design, 22(4), 455-476.

Ruínas de São Paulo, Part of the Historic Centre of Macao (China) in the world heritage list
© Dingran Chen

Research Questions

What lessons can be learned from efforts to revitalise historic districts worldwide? What are the key challenges and opportunities in developing urban design strategies that balance the conservation of historic districts with the needs of modern communities? What insights can be drawn from case studies of urban revitalisation projects that can inform effective strategies for conserving China's cultural heritage?

Methodology and Procedure

This research employed a mixed methodology, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, the research involved various methods, including literature review, case study, field survey, questionnaire survey, and data collection and analysis procedures.