

Mission to Tbilisi, Georgia 17-18 March 2014

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The purpose of the mission was to assist ICOMOS Georgia with their input to the development of a new cultural heritage policy of Georgia. The development of the policy draft is in its last stage and input on certain specific topics was desired.

When I arrived in Tbilisi the political/administrative situation in the heritage sector was very open. Both the Vice minister for Culture responsible for heritage, and the director of the Heritage state agency were being replaced. The reason seemingly being the reluctance to give consent to the destruction of a probably 6000 years old gold mine. Later the news broke that the minister will also be replaced. How these open posts will be manned is critical for the possibility of developing a better heritage policy in Georgia. The current political situation is not encouraging.

This report will focus on giving background on the following topics:

- Cross sectorial responsibility for heritage listing and protection
- Oslo City renewal project; combination of solving social housing problems and heritage protection
- Differentiated levels of listing; pros and cons
- Public awareness; Medias role and the heritage sectors approach to media

Cross sectorial responsibility for heritage listing and protection

The situation in Norway since the establishment of heritage legislation at the beginning of the 20 th. Century has been that heritage buildings owned by the state sector has had weak formal protection. The principle has been that the different state sectors should take care of their own heritage values and follow the professional guide lines from the National Cultural heritage Agency (Riksantikvaren).

In 2003 a project to systematically identify the heritage values in the respective state sectors and secure legal protection, was started. The aim has been to identify state-owned historically important properties/buildings from a total of ca 30.000 buildings, and giving them formal protection. The work is founded in a government mandate and is based on sector responsibility which is a common strategy in the Norwegian administration.

The task was organised as a project under the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs which is responsible for the policy at the national level concerning state-owned properties. The project was performed in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment and the Directorate for Cultural Heritage who in 2009 took over the responsibility for the project.

The review of the nationally owned properties is conducted sector wise; each ministry is responsible for funding and performing the work done within its sector. Nearly all the government ministries have been involved as well as the Public Construction and Property Management, The Norwegian Defence Estates Agency, The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research and The Directorate for Cultural Heritage. Some sectors have done the work with their own resources while others have outsourced it to consultants.

For practical reasons, the work is divided into phases, starting with a quick review of the entire inventory of properties, followed by closer documentation of the properties/buildings that can be perceived to be worthy of protection and finally, selection of the installations/buildings proposed for preservation. The project differentiates between two forms of protection: State listing according to the cultural heritage act § 22 a, or recommendation for municipal protection according to the building and planning act.

The selection decided upon is then presented along with a description of the extent of work, criteria for selection and the sector's history in a consolidated planning document: A national protection plan for the specific sector/activity. The objects given priority for listing according to the cultural heritage act § 22 a are passed as government regulations, sector by sector.

The Directorate for Cultural Heritage will formally register the properties for protection in a database, based on the recommendations of the national protection plan. In practice the final level of protection is based on a consensus between the sector and the Cultural heritage agency. Each ministry is responsible for making management plans for the properties for which they are responsible.

It is estimated that the economic effect will be positive, but it is difficult to make a specific quantification. The positive effect can be seen in better planning and cooperation, better knowledge, maintenance and preservation of state owned cultural heritage.

My personal assessment of the project is positive. The process has heightened the awareness in each sector, especially when they have built professional units to do the work within the organisation instead of outsourcing it. Much new knowledge is gained and many new, valuable heritage objects are recognised and given formal protection.

The main weakness of the project is the stress on consensus on the final listings. In some sectors that has led to objects of obvious national value not being listed, due to the priority of economic and other interests. The results have to a certain degree been too strongly influenced by personal priorities and values of key officials in the sectors.

My knowledge of the public sector in Georgia is not sufficient to suggest how it could be implemented here, but the principle of sector responsibility is certainly a sound one.

Oslo City renewal project; combination of solving social housing problems and heritage protection

In the 1970's and 80's Oslo faced many of the challenges of the residential areas of historic Tbilisi. The buildings from the last part of the 19th. century had become very rundown and whole districts had serious social problems. The situation was partly due to rent regulations that made investments in maintenance pay poorly for the house owners, and partly to the sanitation plans from the 1930's which intended to remove whole areas of brick housing and replace them with new, modernist structures.

In the 1970's the tide turned and it was recognized that these urban areas had positive qualities and that sanitation was not the right strategy. The new approach was to lift the rent regulations gradually, renovate the houses and give necessary social support to the poorest renters. The tool to do this was the Oslo City renewal project. The necessary investments was done by the house owners, but with credits from the state through the Bank for Housing, and the municipality.

A law was passed enabling the municipal politicians to pass decisions on improvement programs for single properties. This gave the authorities a tool to start renovation also on properties with unwilling owners. The City renewal agency organized the rehabilitation work with the aim of:

- Rehabilitate dwellings in poor technical condition and with low social living standard
- Improve the environment of the dwellings, including the outdoor space
- Varied apartment structure (small apartments was often merged into bigger ones)

Special emphasis was put on improving sanitary conditions, reduce fire risk and making the buildings structurally sound.

The majority of the costs were carried by the owners who got state credits to make it possible to finance the investments. This gradually gave problems as building costs rose and the property market crashed. To help the owners, debts were partly canceled by the state. The regulations were also changed with more support being given as grants. The share of the municipality's part of the grant has varied between 20 and 50%. The rest of the grant came from the State housing bank.

My evaluation of the project is mostly positive. It stopped the degeneration of the historic dwelling districts, which are now among the most popular places to live in Oslo. However many of the old inhabitants could not afford to live in the center any longer and moved to modern apartments in the suburbs. As cultural heritage preservation was not one of the main goals, many solutions could have been better. In the long run that would also have been more economical as the choice of cement for most repair work on facades has added millions in unnecessary, later repair work.

To make the approach work in Georgia it would be necessary to ensure:

- **Grants to motivate and compensate the inhabitants with social needs.**
- **If the grants were partly foreign it may make it easier to make good safeguards against the misuse of funds, which is critical for success.**
- **The heritage values should be one of the main goals, ensuring international best heritage practice, which also will ensure technically viable solutions in the long term.**

Differentiated levels of listing; pros and cons

In general it is an advantage to be able to differentiate between more levels of formal protection of cultural heritage values. However it should be based on different legal tools and administrative levels to mirror a spread of responsibility to agents on national, regional and local level. Introducing more levels to the current list of national cultural heritage in Georgia may lead to some objects being regarded as less valuable and thus easier to delist, instead of the desired upgrading of the few most important monuments.

In Norway there are four different categories of heritage protection. The categories don't directly mirror value: An object on the lowest level which is without specific juridical protection, can still be of National value. This system gives a flexibility which makes it more robust. The four levels are:

- Cultural heritage act: Automatic protection (Objects and cultural layers older than 1537 – National value by definition)
- Cultural heritage act: Listing by decision (Preparation on regional level, Decision on state level. Any object which is considered of National value)
- Building and planning act: Protection through regulation. (Decision on municipal level. Can have national, regional or local value)
- Building and planning act: Local listing indicating heritage value, but not giving protection beyond the general legal regulations applying for all buildings which have cultural value. (Decision on municipal level. Can have national, regional or local value)

The suggestion for Georgia could be to amend the building and planning act or start using the possibilities in the current legislation, in such a way that protection decisions are made on the municipal level through zoning plans. Also the cultural heritage act could be amended with the introduction of automatic protection of monuments dating from pre 1783 (Russian conquest). This would include most of the listed churches. A new category of listing by decision could be added. This move could lift the oldest monuments without necessarily devaluating the newer ones.

Public awareness; Media's role and the heritage sectors approach to media

A national strategy for cultural heritage should recognise the crucial role of the media in creating the public awareness which the heritage sector depends on. As "a soft value" cultural heritage will be losing support if the level of knowledge and appreciation in the population and among the decision makers is not high enough. Only the combination of education, mass media and new media can ensure this knowledge.

Cultural heritage matters rarely reaches the front pages as it is normally little conflict oriented. However our experience from Norway is that the media takes positive interest in good examples and stories connected to heritage. Also heritage often gives good picture opportunities, which is attractive for magazines and television.

However to reach the media it is essential to make a concrete media strategy aimed at giving the media the stories that is strategically most important for the heritage sector, in a way that the mass media find attractive. Try to spread concrete knowledge and positive news. A consumer approach to owners of old houses is one of the possible, positive strategies.

New media, active websites and Facebook, can also be effective and economic ways to spread information to those who have a certain interest in the field.

Ambitious media strategies should be an integrated part of any heritage policy both in the public sectors and in the NGO's