## *CIVVIHH Symposium Climate Change in Historic Towns and Villages of the Mediterranean Area Theme 3: The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Charter of Venice*

## FACING CLIMATE CHANGE VULNERABILITIES: CAPACITY FOR LEARNING FROM HISTORIC URBAN STRUCTURES

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The Venice Charter envisioned cultural heritage as a living witness of the past "imbued with a message to next generations" and declared its commitment to respecting "the valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument". A brief review of next key international policy documents in the field of cultural heritage confirms that six decades ago the Charter marked the starting point of a long-going process. While the definition of cultural heritage expanded in scope and complexity, and the approaches to its preservation evolved in line with the evolution of societies and the emerging development challenges, the commitment to Venice concept provided the sound basis to further frame theoretical thought and guide practical action in the long run. The Washington Charter emphasized in 1987 the significance of historic towns and urban areas as cultural heritage in evolution; the Valletta principles document stressed in 2011 upon their continual change, affecting all elements, natural, human, tangible and intangible, and was the first to point out the need for protecting them from climate change impacts. Cultural heritage is nowadays interpreted as valuable resource in the societal striving for sustainable development (Labadi et al, 2021). ICOMOS endeavour to engage cultural heritage in global climate action built upon its estimation as "a composite of human experience developed over generations of trial and error, learning and successes"; it also responded to the estimated urgency for increasing local resilience (ICOMOS Climate Change and Cultural Heritage Working Group, 2019). The concept of resilience raises the issue of building complex societal capacities - coping, recovery, adaptive, but also transformative ones (de Graaf-van & Ovink, 2021). Navigating societies in an uncertain world while encompassing knowledge that spans relationships between place quality and wellbeing, while using 'big' datasets and mapping infrastructure, is claimed to require today "a culture of reflection, discretion and proactive attitude traditionally related to spatial planning, has been recently strongly diminished by a 'box-ticking' culture" (Parker et al, 2020).

The affirmation that "culture-based climate response includes addressing both those elements of culture that can help solve the climate crisis and those that have helped cause it" (Climate Heritage network, 2019) provoked the authors' interest to visualize and discuss potential links between the estimated current vulnerabilities of an urban system to climate change events and the overlapping planning concepts and policy decisions developed and implemented during different historic periods in order to outline climate-related long-term consequences of urban planning and governance modes. Moreover, the professional community of planners themselves have recently acknowledged that "with a number of critical challenges facing planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, among which the rising challenge of climate change, public health crises, technological innovation and political uncertainty, leaders in the field need to be able to analyse problems at a range of different scales and from different points of view and patterns in 'big-data', but also to master the critical thinking skills to synthesize this with traditional knowledges (Parker et al, 2020).

Acknowledging that each city bears the codes of its social and economic development but also of more general urbanistic tendencies, and of national historic urban patterns, the authors have chosen the case study of Sofia. Despite the millennia-long development path of the ancient settlement, the city has had a historically brief track of modern urban planning after declared the capital of Bulgaria in 1879. Four development stages are still visible in its morphology: (1) the initial formation of the modern city structure, 1881-1919; (2) strategic planning efforts between WWI and WWII, 1919-1939; (3) socialist central planning and urban restructuring, 1945-1990; and (4) market-led urban development and planning crisis after 1990.

The paper traces probable links between the estimated climate-change related risks and vulnerabilities of the contemporary city, the physical characteristics of the contemporary urban structure, and the planning approaches developed and followed in the past. It discusses the messages of two recently developed documents: the Plan for sustainable energy and climate action of Sofia municipality, officially adopted in 2021, and a MSc in Urbanism thesis on the urban dimensions of Sofia population's vulnerability to overheating, defended in 2023. The process of the plan elaboration enabled observations on experts' and policymakers' perceptions and attitudes on climate change, their motivations for initiating the plan, the interaction within the interdisciplinary team, the approach to analysing available datasets on climate events and urban vulnerabilities; it provided a chance to outline climate-related expert and institutional culture and capacity gaps for implementing policies aimed at climate change resilience. The MSc thesis undertook socio-economic and spatial analyses of the urban system of Sofia, identified the locations of heat islands and related them to the characteristics of the urban environment resulting from the interaction of social-cultural-natural factors. The analyses confirmed that planning principles such as urban greening, air flow management, and the morphology of the residential areas, also proposed by the so-called "Musman Plan" in 1938 have with a direct impact on climate change resilience. A set of guidelines for planners and policymakers was proposed on approaches to effectively enhance the resilience of the physical urban environment and its inhabitants to climate change impacts.

The authors claim that through carefully studying the track of action undertaken for building a city under a sequence of different planning and governance systems, as well as their long-term consequences, researchers could have the access to knowledge and understanding about how planning ideas and the steps undertaken have provided or hampered the opportunities to adapt to and benefit from the natural environment. Conclusions are drawn about the importance to encourage the building a shared value-based view of institutions, experts, business and citizens on urban planning practice as a key living element of intangible cultural heritage - an evolving heritage to be carefully recorded, analysed and translated into the language of all the actors and institutions standing for resilient societies and their sustainable future.

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