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# Towards a Comprehensive Framework for Understanding and Documenting Urban Cultural Heritage

Keywords

Comprehensive Framework
Documentation
Multi-Dimensional Heritage
Multi-Scalar Heritage
Urban Cultural Heritage

## Abstract

This paper proposes a comprehensive framework for understanding urban cultural heritage (UCH). This is done by identifying and categorizing the elements that contribute to its layered significance across multiple dimensions and scales. It conceptualizes UCH not only as a group of historic objects or structures, but as a dynamic cultural entity shaped through continuous historical evolution, social practices, and spatial interactions. Following a qualitative methodology, the study critically analyses the development of UCH definitions in international documents. It maps the tangible and intangible components of heritage—such as physical form, collective memory, and symbolic meaning and investigates the complex interrelationships among them. The study also investigates measuring tools and interpretation instruments to help practitioners to document UCH. Special attention is given to the experiential and representational dimensions of historic urban areas, where identity and memory are interwoven with material environment. The findings underscore the need to recognize these multifaceted layers before undertaking any intervention or documentation process.

## Introduction

Urban historical areas are a living witness to the past that shaped them. They are considered spatial structures where the evolution of a society, its cultural identity and character can be manifested (ICOMOS CIVVIH, 2011). Cultural heritage within urban areas is considered a process and a product that enriches communities with a wealth of resources (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, its definition, has dramatically evolved over time not only to include isolated built elements but also the setting and the urban context which contributes to and is a part of its significance (Fig. 1) (ICOMOS, 2005; Veldpaus, Pereira Roders and Colenbrander, 2013: 4). According to UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Urban Cultural Heritage (UCH) is essential in creating an inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable city (UNESCO, 2014). This includes the material and spiritual qualities of UCH as well as the natural and man-made contexts (ICOMOS CIVVIH, 2011).

Over the past decade, a holistic understanding of Urban Cultural Heritage has been addressed in international doctrines, most notably the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach. HUL recognizes historic urban areas as layered, dynamic environments which are shaped by cultural, social, economic and spatial processes (Bandarin and van Oers, 2012; UNESCO, 2011a). While HUL approach represents a major conceptual shift by incorporating multi-dimensional and multi-scalar values, presenting "what" should be valued, it abstains from providing practitioners with the "how" to systematically record these values using specific methods, indicators or documentation tools. Therefore, the translation of the HUL approach's principles into systematic analytical frameworks remains challenging while the identification of the elements constituting UCH also remains context-dependent (Ginzarly, Houbart and Teller, 2019; Veldpaus, 2015).

This shows a gap between the integrated conceptualization and the practical documentation of UCH. Consequently, it raises the need for a synthesized framework that makes the components of UCH explicit and structured while following the holistic principles of the HUL approach. This paper fills this gap by providing a technical roadmap that allow practitioners to deconstruct a complex urban site into a systematic matrix of multi-dimensional and multi-scalar indicators. By assigning compatible documentation instruments to each intersection, the framework transforms theoretical values into a functional manual for practitioners.

Accordingly, in order to address implementation challenges, the objective of this paper is to develop a structured operational framework that translates the holistic HUL concept into specific documentation categories and measurable indicators. While the framework's theoretical foundation is grounded in international documents, its primary contribution is the shift toward a technical methodology ready for field application. To achieve this objective, the research follows a systematic workflow beginning with data collection from international documents and literature analysis. Followed by a coding process, whereby heritage elements are categorized into specific dimensions (tangible and intangible) and scales (urban, object, and people). The structured framework designed to make the components of UCH explicit and operational for documentation is developed through a cross-tabulation and synthesis of these codes.

## Methodology

To bridge the gap between the conceptual depth of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach and the documentation practice, this research employs a systematic qualitative content analysis and framework synthesis. The development of the proposed multi-dimensional and multi-scalar matrix followed a three-phase workflow designed to translate international doctrine into operational categories.

### Phase I: Analysis of International Documents Regarding Urban Cultural Heritage

The research involved a systematic collection and analysis of international documents focusing on the evolution of UCH. Key documents were selected based on their global role in expanding the heritage definition from "monument" to "landscape". These documents, spanning from the 1964 Venice Charter to the 2011 Recommendation of the Historic Urban Landscape, provide the primary data for identifying heritage elements and values.

### Phase II: Cultural Heritage Framework Building

The selected doctrines were subjected to a deductive coding process. UCH attributes mentioned within the documents (e.g. "visual relationships", "social practices", "building fabric") were extracted and categorized according to two primary axes:

– Dimensions: distinguishing between intangible and tangible.
– Scales: categorizing elements according to the spatial impact which is either urban, object or people scale.

Where elements were assessed according to their documentability which provide the possibility to identify, map and record them later during urban surveys.

### Phase III: Framework Synthesis and Urban Cultural Heritage Matrix Construction

The final step involved the cross-tabulation of these elements into a synthesized matrix. This methodology allows the systematic identification of intersections between dimensions and scales. For example, by intersecting "Intangible" dimension with the "Urban" scale, the framework identifies "Sensory Aspects" and "Visual Relationships" as specific documentation targets. This synthesis presents a foundation for the proposed framework, making sure that all aspects of the significant urban area are documented, regardless of their scale or materiality.

## Dimensions and Scales of Urban Cultural Heritage

The understanding of UCH's nature has evolved along time (ICOMOS, 2008a; UNESCO, 1972, 2003, 2011a). While earlier in 1964, the Venice Charter stated that UCH was not only a single architectural product but also the urban or rural setting in which the evidence of a particular community was found (ICOMOS, 1964), it wasn't until 2003 that the UCH was perceived as a multi-dimensional construct. After the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), the notion of intangible cultural heritage was mentioned without being classified as an independent dimension contributing to the identity of UCH.

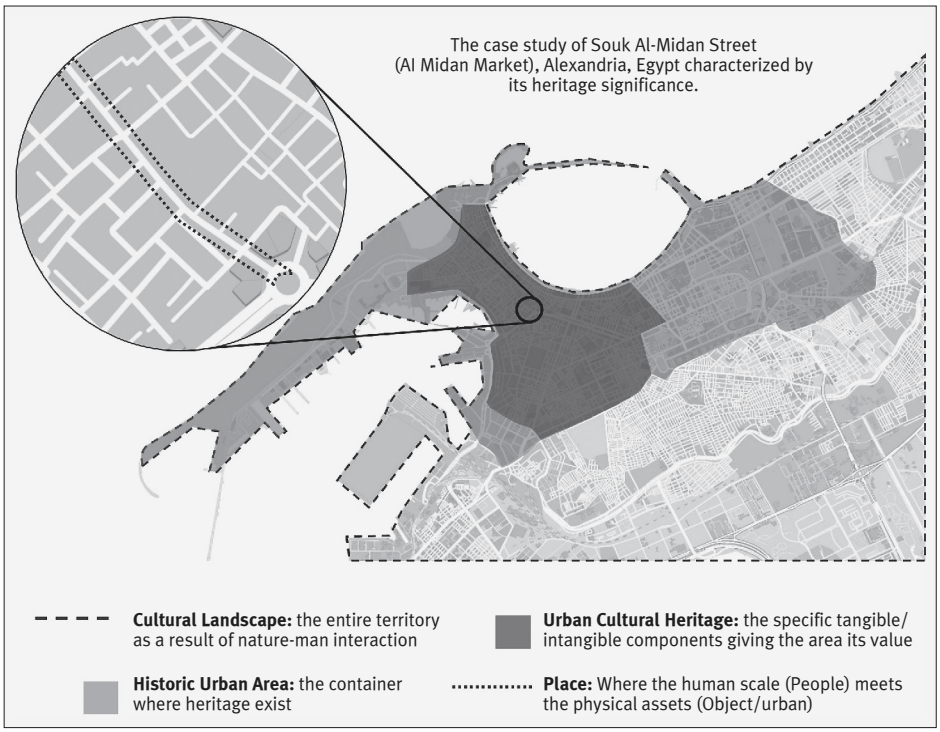



Fig. 1 Conceptual hierarchy of urban heritage. Source: (Authors, 2026)

In 2011, the Historic Urban Landscape Approach followed by the Burra Charter in 2013, stated that UCH is multi-dimensional, encompassing tangible and intangible dimensions (Australia ICOMOS, 2013; UNESCO, 2011a). Accordingly, UCH was perceived as the physical significant cultural heritage and the non-physical social living wealth (Australia ICOMOS, 2013; UNESCO, 1972, 2003). This notably contributed to a greater understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of UCH leading to the inclusion of all elements, objects, spaces and views in the recording process to create a comprehensive interpretation of UCH (Australia ICOMOS, 2013).

Simultaneously, urban-based expressions and approaches to heritage management began to surge, putting into consideration the multi-scalar nature of UCH (Australia ICOMOS, 2013; UNESCO, 2011a). Gradually the focus shifted from being solely on the object of historic significance to include its urban context, the people that contributed to it and the relationship between them (Australia

Table I International documents defining and listing notions indicating the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar nature of urban cultural heritage. Source: (Authors, 2026)

| Source | | Urban | Object | People |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Venice Charter (1964) | Tangible | Urban Setting[1] | The architectural work | |
| | Intangible | History<br>Urban Setting | History | |
| Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (1976) | Tangible | Groups of buildings<br>Historic towns<br>Old urban quarters<br>Public & private open spaces<br>Natural/manmade setting | Structures<br>Physical conditions of buildings | |
| | Intangible | | | Values[2]<br>Human dimension<br>Cultural, religious, social & human activities |
| Washington Charter (1987) | Tangible | Urban patterns<br>Relationships between buildings and open spaces | Material elements<br>Formal appearance<br>Building's interior/exterior<br>Various functions | |
| | Intangible | Historic Character<br>Relationship between the urban area and its surrounding setting | Historic Character | Historic Character<br>Spiritual elements |
| Vienna Memorandum (May 2005) | Tangible | Land uses & patterns<br>Spatial organization<br>Visual relationships<br>Topography & soils<br>Vegetation<br>Elements of technical infrastructure | | |
| | Intangible | Sense of place<br>Spatial organization<br>Visual relationships | Sense of place | Sense of place<br>Current & past social expressions |
| Xi'an Declaration (October 2005) | Tangible | Setting including interaction with natural environment<br>Physical aspects | Physical aspects | |
| | Intangible | Visual aspects<br>Traditional knowledge<br>Use & activities | Visual aspects<br>Traditional knowledge<br>Use & activities | Social & spiritual practices<br>Customs<br>Traditional knowledge<br>Use & activities<br>Any forms of ICH aspects |
| The Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of the Place (2008) | Tangible | Sites<br>Landscapes<br>Routes | Buildings<br>Objects | |
| | Intangible | | | Memories<br>Narratives<br>Written Documents<br>Festivals & rituals<br>Commemorations<br>Traditional knowledge<br>Textures, colours, odours[3] |
| Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (November 2011) | Tangible | Urban context<br>Geographical setting<br>Topography<br>Geomorphology<br>Natural features<br>Infrastructure<br>Open spaces gardens<br>Land use pattern<br>Spatial organization<br>Built environment | | |
| | Intangible | Historic layering of cultural & natural values & attributes<br>Visual relationships[4] | Historic layering of cultural & natural values & attributes<br>Intangible dimensions of heritage | Historic layering of cultural & natural values & attributes<br>Social & cultural practices & values<br>Identity |
| The Valletta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historic Cities, Towns & Urban Areas (November 2011) | Tangible | Urban structure<br>Landscapes within & around the town<br>Panoramas<br>Skylines<br>View-lines<br>Landmark sites | Architectural elements<br>Archaeological remains | |
| | Intangible | Symbolic and historic functions | Symbolic and historic functions | Activities<br>Cultural practices<br>Traditions<br>Memories<br>Cultural references that constitute the substance of their historic value |
| Burra Charter (2013) | Tangible | Spaces<br>Land, water & sky | | |
| | Intangible | Visual setting from a place & along a cultural route<br>Sensory aspects like smells and sounds<br>Historical, contemporary relationships<br>Relationships with other places | Use & activities | Sensory aspects like smells & sounds |

ICOMOS, 2013; UNESCO, 2011a; Veldpaus, 2015; Veldpaus, Pereira Roders and Colenbrander, 2013). According to the Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (UNESCO, 1976), UCH include three main categories of scales:

– The urban scale which includes the surroundings, the environment, the urban context, etc.
– The object scale which includes the architectural heritage itself, the shared character, building materials, etc.
– The people scale which includes the human activities, values, memories, etc.

The Following Table I shows the different notions included in international documents indicating the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar nature of UCH (Australia ICOMOS, 2013; ICOMOS, 1964, 1987, 2005, 2008b; ICOMOS CIVVIH, 2011; UNESCO, 1976, 2005, 2011a).

According to table I, urban cultural heritage can be considered a result of the entanglement of elements and layers, whereby each of them constitutes a part of the significance and the authenticity of the UCH subjected to study. Therefore, to comprehensively protect and conserve UCH, the documentation process should consider the multi-scalar and multi-dimensional nature of UCH (Australia ICOMOS, 2013; ICOMOS, 2010; Mezzino, 2017). Taking this into account, the elements constituting UCH can be subcategorized as follows (Fig. 2), whereby the Tangible Aspect of UCH represents the intertwined relationship between the tangible dimension and the three main scales. The Intangible Aspect of UCH represents the intertwined relationship between the intangible dimension and the three main scales.

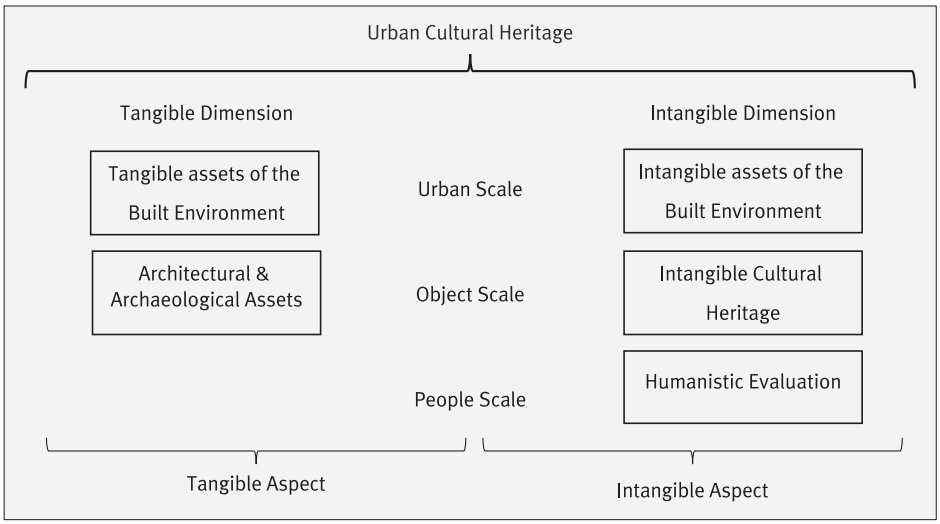



Fig. 2 Tangible and Intangible Aspects of UCH. Source: (Authors, 2025).

## Tangible Aspect of Urban Cultural Heritage

To fully understand the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar nature of UCH and to assure a comprehensive approach to the conservation and protection of UCH elements, the tangible aspect of UCH is classified into two main sub-categories: Tangible Assets of the Built Environment and Architectural and Archaeological Assets. Tangible Assets of the built environment are concerned with the elements and components of the heritage urban context (the urban scale) while Architectural and Archaeological Assets is concerned with the elements related to a single or a group of heritage buildings and archaeological elements (the object scale).

### Tangible Assets of the Built Environment

Urban built environment is a multi-dimensional complex composition which is formed under the influence of several factors. Elements of urban environment can include tangible elements which incorporate two groups of features: anthropogenic features and natural features. These tangible elements play an important role in the creation and formation of intangible elements, which incorporate both anthropogenic and natural features (Khusnutdinova, Faizrakhmanova and Khusnutdinov, 2020).

### Tangible Anthropogenic Features

While heritage buildings are considered the main element of UCH, it remains as only one component of a wider set of important elements and parameters (Jamieson, 1990). Often it is other elements that give the area its

1 Urban setting in the heritage field is perceived as a multi-dimensional entity that encompasses both material characteristics and physical features (buildings, open spaces, streets, etc.) as well as intangible attributes and cultural meanings (social practices, cultural values, uses, etc.) (Bandarin and van Oers, 2012; UNESCO, 2005, 2011a).

2 Values are intangible constructs attributed by people and communities to both tangible and intangible heritage (de la Torre, 2013; Historic England, 2017), hence, in this research they are identified as elements of intangible nature.

3 Textures, colours and odours stem from physical stimuli, yet they evoke memories, atmosphere and associations. Also, they are part of the sensory and experiential fabric of heritage and contributors to the spirit of place (ICOMOS, 2008b).

4 Despite involving physical elements (like sight lines, vistas, spatial organizations, etc.) visual relationships are experienced and valued in intangible ways (like beauty, symbolism, memory, etc.) (Australia ICOMOS, 1999)

significance and special character. Therefore, their inclusion in the documentation process is crucial for the interpretation of the authentic character of the UCH (Sirisrisak, 2007). It is also important to take into consideration the documentation and recording of all features, not only those which seem to be historic. Anthropogenic features can also be included (Jamieson, 1990; Khusnutdinova, Faizrakhmanova and Khusnutdinov, 2020; Sirisrisak, 2007; Ulvi, 2021; Zhang, Ghosh and Park, 2023):

- Layout / Street Patterns
- Land and Building Use & Densities
- Views / Vistas / Sceneries / Skyline
- Focal Points / Landmarks / Nodes
- Public Spaces
- Streetscapes of significant value.
- Groups of buildings
- Other structures
- Archaeological resources & ancient cities remain
- Condition of resources
- Level & nature of the use of a resource
- Hardscape

### Tangible Natural Features

Natural features constitute a part of the UCH's setting (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). It could be a naturally generated setting associated with the urban area. Natural features are considered as an important parameter which gives an area its significant and unique character. Like some natural elements that can only grow or exists in some specific areas or have a meaning or stories connected to the local residents and users of the place (Sirisrisak, 2007). Tangible natural features can include (Jamieson, 1990; Khusnutdinova, Faizrakhmanova and Khusnutdinov, 2020; Khalil and Stravoravdis, 2019):

- Natural Setting
- Natural open spaces
- Topography
- Water bodies
- Flora & Fauna
- Vegetation
- Climate

Tangible assets of the built environment mainly focus on the physical and spatial configuration of the city. Prioritizing urban morphology during the documentation process can be achieved by measuring aspects such as street patterns and connectivity, land-use and building density through Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-based morphological analysis and historical map overlays (Zhang, Ghosh and Park, 2023). Also, visual relationships, including the skylines and vistas, which constitute the character of the historic urban landscape can be captured using 3D Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) scanning or Unmaned Arial Vehicule (UAV) to ensure that the visual ensemble as defined in the Nairobi Recommendation and the HUL approach is preserved (Ulvi, 2021; UNESCO, 1976, 2011a).

### Architectural and Archaeological Assets

Tangible cultural heritage was the focus of any documentation or recording process during the late 20th century. However, many heritage buildings were left undocumented, or it lacked an accurate comprehensive documentation that includes all the elements that characterize the heritage building beside the geometry. Being fragile wealth, tangible cultural heritage is constantly threatened by damage, accidents, natural disasters and urban development. Therefore, the documentation of tangible cultural heritage should include every aspect of the heritage building: the geometry, its history, pathology and performance (Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020; Khalil and Stravoravdis, 2019)

### Archaeology and History

Archaeological and historical data aim to focus on the UCH's history, the context that helped shape it and the alterations, whether in geometry or function, throughout its lifetime. This analysis deepens the understanding of the heritage building's architectural style, construction techniques, building materials, structure and systems used at that era (Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020). Also, the temporal dimension must be put into consideration when documenting UCH. Heritage buildings were subjected to a series of alterations throughout their life span that include additions or subtractions to the original form, uses and functions that varied according to users' needs and what the historical building affected and represented to its context (Santoni et al., 2021).

Archaeological and historical data can include qualitative and quantitative data retrieved from various sources (Historic England, 2016; Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020; Mckee, 1970). It includes:

- Historical records, text and photographs;
- Past drawings & sketches;
- Building archaeology;
- Oral histories;
- Multimedia.

### Geometry

Geometry is the main perceived aspect of heritage buildings. It is crucial to collect data concerning the form, shape, size and identity of every component of the heritage building to achieve comprehensive documentation (Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020). According to The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the geometry of heritage building includes the exterior envelope as well as the interior fabric of the building (Mckee, 1970). The data concerning the exterior envelope and the heritage building can include (Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020; Mckee, 1970)

- Foundations;
- Wall construction;
- Structural system;
- Porches, stoops, terraces & bulkheads;
- Doorways & doors
- Windows and shutters
- Roof.

Also, data concerning various elements constituting the interior of the heritage building includes (Khalil, Stravoravdis & Backes, 2020; Mckee, 1970):

- Floor plan;
- Flooring;
- Walls & ceiling;
- Openings (doorways and doors);
- Interior trim;
- Hardware;
- Mechanical & electrical equipment.

### Pathology

Pathology and damage recording is a crucial part of the data collection for documentation of UCH. Studying historical buildings' pathology and the reason of its decay help in the decision-making and any future measures or processes (Khalil and Stravoravdis, 2019). Pathologic data collection and analysis aim to deepen the understanding of the genuine structural aspects of the heritage building. Also, it helps to better understand the present condition and the reasons of the actual damage, to establish structural safety measures for several actions (like soil settlements, earthquakes, etc.) and to determine necessary remedial actions. Pathological investigation focusses on the analysis of the material, inner and outer skin of the heritage building and also the structural system (Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020). The collected data can include information of the main building materials and its characteristics, the structural system and the building techniques, the building' decay maps and crack patterns (Conti et al., 2022).

### Performance

The collection of data concerning the heritage building's performance is considered the first step to support any future decision-making. The building performance data act as the basis for the heritage building management and help in setting the objectives for the required degree of intervention (Khalil and Stravoravdis, 2019). The performance data can include several aspects including (Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020; Khalil and Stravoravdis, 2019):

- Energy, thermal & acoustic performance;
- Moisture survey;
- Lighting/visual performance;
- Indoor air quality;
- Furniture & equipment;
- Systems;
- Users' behaviour;
- Accessibility;
- Functionality;
- Safety & security.

The documentation of architectural and archaeological assets can be collected using instruments such as GIS mappings, Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS), photogrammetry and non-destructive testing (NDT) like Infra-Red technology, which provide high resolution 3D models and condition assessment reports (Colucci et al., 2024; Khalil, Stravoravdis and Backes, 2020; Khalil and Stravoravdis, 2019). The use of such techniques along with the architectural survey drawings to measure the architectural and archaeological assets indicators (i.e. material condition, structural integrity, presence of period-specific ornamentation, etc.) can ensure a detailed documentation of material authenticity that meet international standards.

## Intangible Aspect of Urban Cultural Heritage

To fully understand the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar nature of UCH and to assure a comprehensive approach to the documentation and recording of the UCH's elements, the Intangible aspect of UCH is classified into three main sub-categories: Intangible Assets of the Built Environment, Intangible Cultural Heritage and Humanistic Evaluation. Intangible assets of the built environment are concerned with immaterial elements and components of urban heritage context (the urban scale), while intangible cultural heritage is concerned with immaterial elements related to the heritage building, monument or group of buildings (the object scale). Humanistic evaluation is concerned with emotional and socio-cultural values and aspects that define

the interrelationship between the community and the UCH (people scale).

## Intangible assets of the built environment

Intangible assets of the built environment, along with the tangible assets, constitute the urban built environment. The intangible assets of the built environment could be divided into main subcategories: intangible anthropogenic features and intangible natural features. The intangible elements of the built environment are radically attached and connected to the physical elements (Khusnutdinova, Faizrakhmanova and Khusnutdinov, 2020). The intangible assets of the built environment significantly affect how UCH is perceived and are, therefore, a major contributor in its significance and unique character (García-Esparza, 2019).

Heritage urban areas can be considered a sequence of spaces that induce a rhythm, which results from the interrelationships between space, form, texture, colour, pattern and light. One of the main aspects that gives the environment an identity and a structure are the visual sensations of shape, colour, light, movement, but also other sensations like touch, smell, hearing and kinaesthesia (Seccaroni, Aquinardi and Bettollini, 2021). Identifying and structuring the environment can be considered a vital ability among all living creatures (Lynch, 1964). Therefore, every element contributing to the perception and identification of the heritage environment through senses should be recorded and documented.

### Intangible Anthropogenic Features

Intangible sensory factors (sounds – smells – light and images) can be generated due to several factors. Some could be considered noise and disturbance elements, others could be considered a source that increases the connection with heritage urban context. However, both contribute to how UCH is perceived. For instance, intangible sensory factors could be a result of a specific activity or a special festive event, a tradition, a celebration, etc. (García-Esparza, 2019). It could include:

- Noisy markets, the sound of transport, celebrations, etc.
- Culinary smells
- Artificial lighting[5]

### Intangible Natural Features

Natural features include intangible sensory factors (sounds – smells – light and images) generated from natural sources. It could be natural elements from a natural setting attached to UCH, or natural elements which are man-made, like street trees or artificial lakes (Khusnutdinova, Faizrakhmanova and Khusnutdinov, 2020). These elements could include:

- Birdsong, water noise, parks silence, etc.
- Flowering plants & trees
- Sunlight & natural trees' shade

Intangible asset of the built environment captures the atmospheric and contextual values that define a site's *spirit of place*. Key indicators including sounds, smells and lighting as elements that can influence how the urban area is perceived (Khusnutdinova, Faizrakhmanova and Khusnutdinov, 2020). Therefore, the documentation process can rely on archive mining and semi-structured interviews to extract heritage narratives, as well as satellite imagery to map environmental context (Gupta, 2007; Mezzino, 2017). Using tolls such GIS, HBIM and ArcGIS StoryMaps can help in mapping and visualizing these significant features.

## Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage incorporates every aspect that helped in defining the people's identity, the diversity of their culture and their individual creative potential throughout history (Mezzino, 2017). It also includes all types of events that designate places, their residents and their history. Moreover, it incorporates skills, knowledge, as well as the used tools and instruments, practices, expressions, artefacts and every object associated with a specific significant site (UNESCO, 2003). Intangible cultural heritage is prominent by being created specifically by the local community and groups which are strongly connected with the history and local environment (Mezzino, 2017).

According to the World Heritage Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), intangible cultural heritage is defined as "*the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, … that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their Cultural Heritage. This Intangible Cultural Heritage … is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature*

5 While artificial lighting stems from physical stimuli, it is considered an intangible element in heritage field because it shapes sensory experience perception and reflects cultural traditions and social practices. It also holds memory and symbolism (Bista et al., 2021; Navaraj and Inkarojrit, 2024)

*and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity*". Intangible cultural heritage can be manifested in several domains which include the following:

– Oral traditions and expressions
– Performing arts
– Social practices, rituals & festive events
– Knowledge & practices concerning nature & the universe
– Traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003).

Being associated with tangible cultural heritage and the tangible aspect of UCH, intangible cultural heritage could be manifested in various scenarios. It could be skills, the know-how and knowledge concerning the building techniques, the materials' selection and assembly, various construction phases, systems used and techniques to adapt to the local climate. It could also be skills, the know-how and knowledge concerning the building localization and orientation, spatial design, decorative elements suitable for every function (Mezzino, 2017).

Intangible cultural heritage is mostly described as "*Living Heritage*". These skills and knowledge are the intangible cultural heritage that today societies consider the main part of their cultural identity (UNESCO, 2011b). Intangible cultural heritage is dynamic, constantly evolving and trying to adapt to different needs. It is a result of the fusion of history, culture and tangible cultural heritage. Therefore, intangible cultural heritage can be considered as traditions yet, it is, at the same time, living and contemporary (Jigyasu, 2014).

Intangible cultural heritage is directly linked to the symbolic and spiritual significance of the built fabric. Indicators focus on the religious or social meanings related to architectural elements or sites (UNESCO, 2003). Data concerning the intangible heritage can be collected through focus groups, rapid ethnographic assessment procedure (REAP), digital 3D and 4D motion capture systems (Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017; Gupta, 2007; Low, 2002). It can be interpreted through Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), facial expression analysis and modelling, body and gesture recognition and sound processing (Alivizatou-Barakou et al., 2017).

## Humanistic Evaluation

The significance of UCH is the result of experiencing the ensemble or the entity within its context, acknowledging values that people and society have placed on it and recognizing its connection to other factors (Historic England, 2017). It is considered a repertoire of values, meanings and symbols embodied and given by people and society (Park, 2011). Therefore, to achieve comprehensive documentation for UCH, people and the humanistic evaluation of UCH should be put into consideration. These meanings and values could be analysed by three main affected groups which include: people, experts and governments (Del, Sedghpour and Tabrizi, 2020).

This section shalll discuss the humanistic evaluation and societal aspects that contribute to the definition of the significance of UCH. This will include (Historic England, 2017) values attributed by society, memory and identity and a sense of place.

## Values

To document a heritage object or a place, there should be a certain or a group of values that, later, affect the decision-making process and help in choosing the type and degree of intervention. Some values are more important than others and that depends on several social, economic and cultural aspects. It is to say that intangible values are often what gives UCH its significance and are considered the origin of identities and the source of diversity and creativity. Despite their intangible nature, their physical manifestation can be perceived in many aspects such as thoughts, believes, language, etc. (Del, Sedghpour and Tabrizi, 2020).

Values of UCH are characterized by being attributed by either people, experts or governments but they are never inherent (de la Torre, 2013). Practitioners and experts constantly try to identify and categorize the values of intangible cultural heritage that reflect the meanings, emotions and identity of the UCH. These attributed values can be classified into scientific values and social values (de la Torre, 2013; Del, Sedghpour and Tabrizi, 2020) and can include (Table II).

Table II Scientific and Social Values of Urban Cultural Heritage. Source: (Authors, 2025)

| Scientific Values | Social Values | |
|---|---|---|
| • Value Integrity<br>• Aesthetic<br>• Authenticity<br>• Contextual<br>• Heritage<br>• Scientific<br>• Architectural<br>• Archaeological | • Historical<br>• Spiritual<br>• Functional<br>• Symbolic<br>• Pride<br>• Universal<br>• Connecting<br>• Bequest<br>• Humanistic<br>• Resilience<br>• Individual<br>• Visual<br>• Recreational<br>• Unwanted Heritage | • Political<br>• Psychological<br>• Rarity<br>• Educational<br>• Dominant Opinion<br>• Grandeur<br>• Acquired<br>• Emotional<br>• Donor's<br>• Demolishing<br>• Moral<br>• Tourist's<br>• Scenic<br>• Local's |

## Memory

UCH is more than just what is seen: it is seen with the eyes, interpreted by the mind and valorised by intangible reasons. UCH is identified as the setting where people and the society experience their everyday life (Taylor, 2008). This is why it is considered a repository of intangible meanings and human values which constitute the base of society's existence. UCH and memory cannot be separated because it is the core element of personal and collective memories (Apaydin, 2020b).

Memories can be classified according to their scale. The individual scale which incorporates

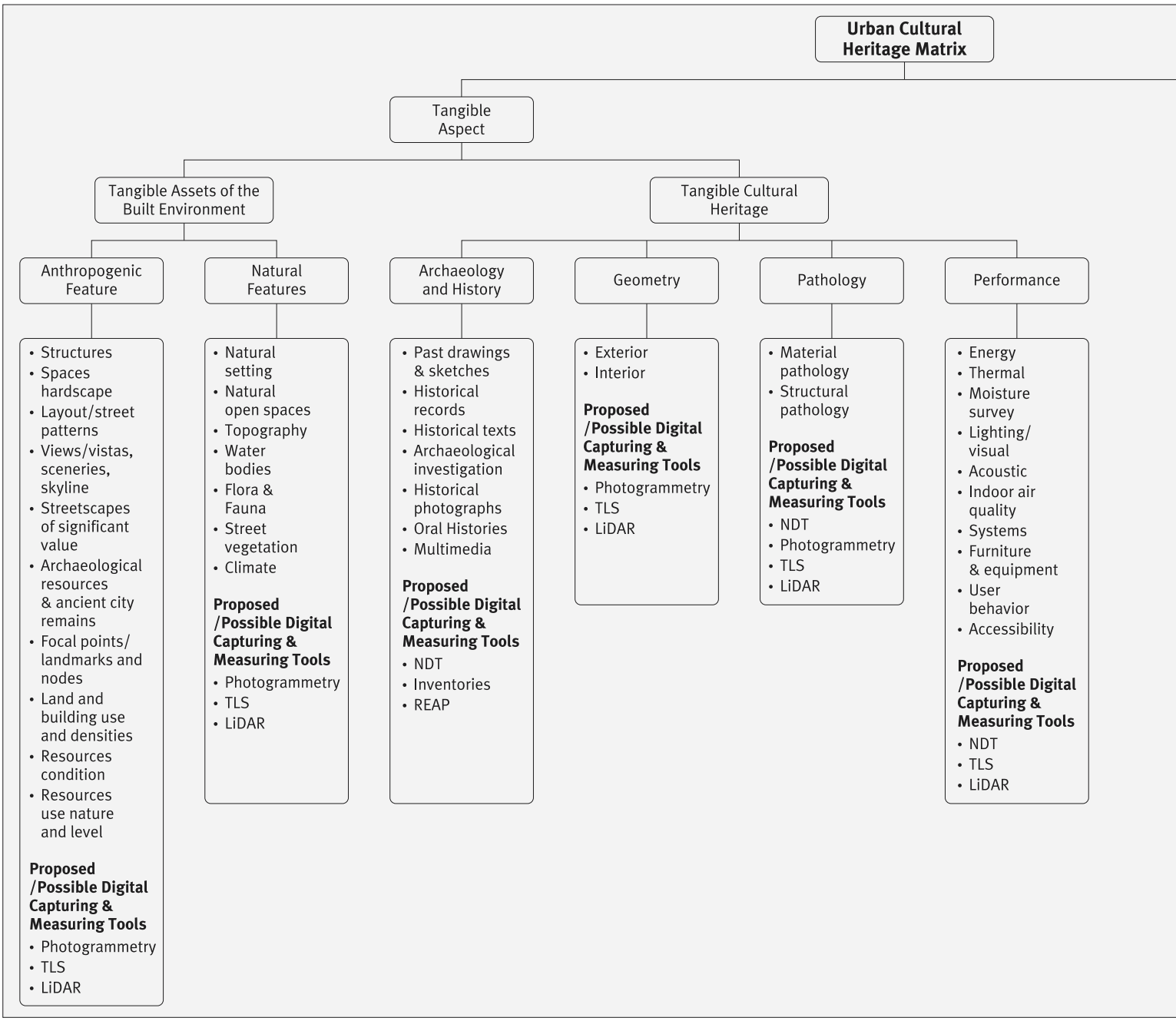
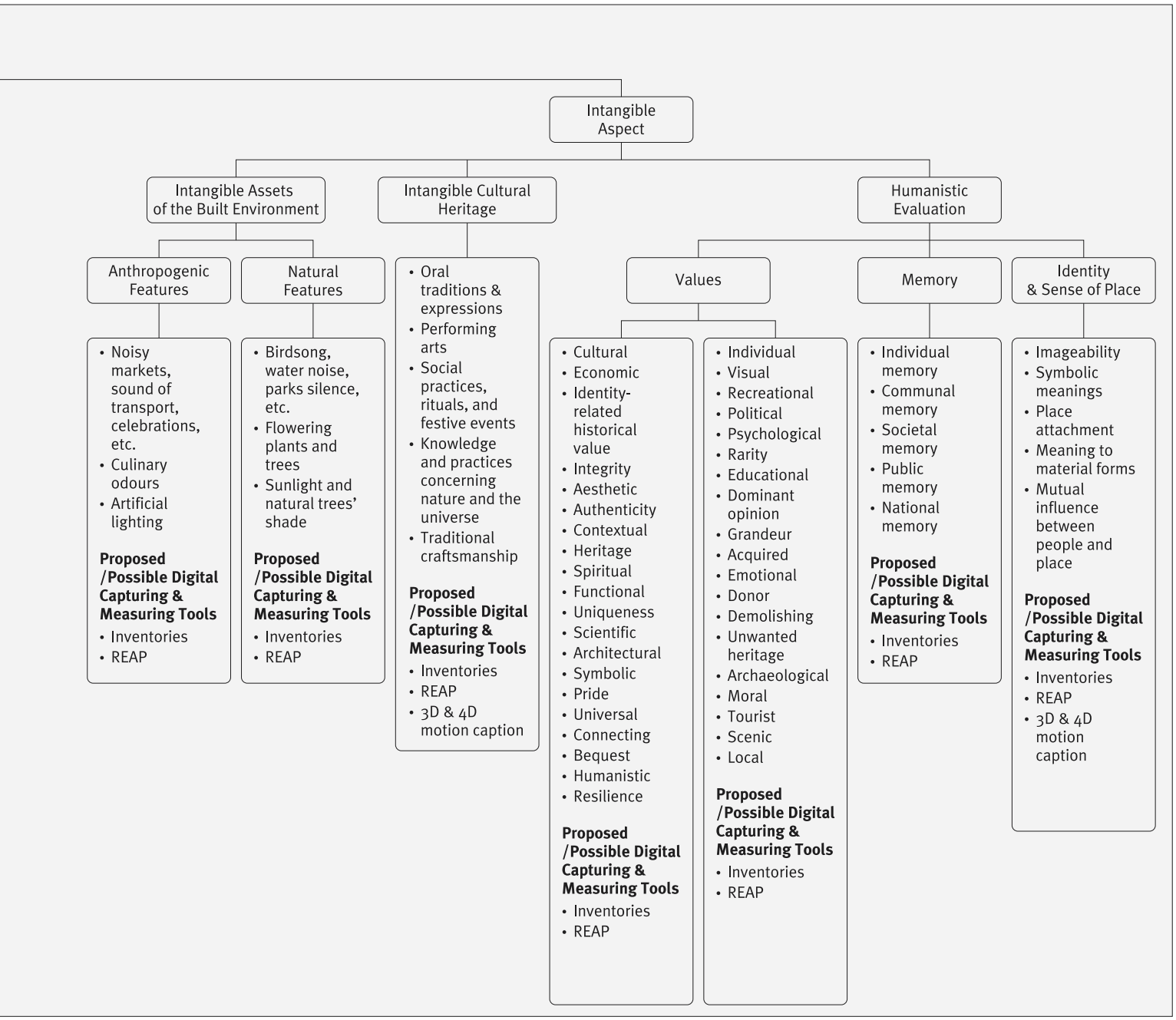



Fig. 3 Urban Cultural Heritage Matrix. Source: (Authors, 2026).

memory of personal or individual experiences such as losing and suffering (Apaydin, 2020b), the communal or local scale which include memory of events or experiences that took place within small groups of people, societal scale which include memory of experiences or past narratives which affected a loosely interconnected population. Societal scale also includes public and national memory. These different scales of memories are common in the fact that they are all attached to a certain place, and they contribute to its identity. Without a memory, the identity, the sense of self, culture and heritage are lost (McDowell, 2016). Therefore, the various scales of memory should be included in the recording and documentation of UCH.

UCH and memory are highly connected (Apaydin, 2020b). Tangible cultural heritage is the manifestation of the past and present knowledge and experiences of people. And through memories and commemorative events, this knowledge can keep alive the collective iden-




tity of those people. Urban heritage is a cultural production which meanings and values are attributed to later by the community and the people. The memories developed from UCH and its values and meanings are a significant representation of the collective identity of the community (Apaydin, 2020a).

## Identity and Sense of Place

UCH, which includes old heritage buildings, traditional urban landscape, street patterns and activities, is what gives a city its local significance and reflects its culture and identity. The presence of heritage urban areas containing cultural heritage is important to its people's sense of place and belonging (Shinbira, 2012). It is the activities of ordinary people, the traditions and the places that witness it that creates a rich cultural tapestry of life, through the identification of the values and meanings people give to their daily places as well as the sense of place and identity (Taylor, 2008).

A heritage place is more than just an abstract location. It consists of tangible aspects that have a certain shape, materials, texture and colours as well as intangible elements. These aspects are what gives a heritage place its identity and character. A sense of place is the ability to identify various places and various identities of a place. In this process, people depend on their imageability, symbolic meanings and attachment to a place. As a sense of place is a result of the attribution of meanings to material forms, a heritage place is influenced by people and in return, people are influenced by heritage places.

This leads to interaction with the heritage place instead of a simple response which enrich the heritage place with meanings (Shinbira, 2012).

A heritage place is mainly created due to the relationship between people and a physical setting, group and individual activities and meanings.

The concept of a sense of place can describe the quality of the people's relationship to a heritage place. This concept could be used in studying and understanding the human-place attachment, bonding and place meaning. It could also define and explain the different ways in which people sense and feel heritage places, and how they attribute values and concepts to it. Therefore, the recording, documentation and preservation of the sense of place of UCH is crucial in maintaining the integrity of the community's life within it as well as the quality of the heritage urban area (Najafi and Shariff, 2011).

The documentation of the humanistic evaluation, whereby the indicators focus on the values attributed by the community, memory and a sense of place depend on instruments such as qualitative interviews, rapid ethnographic assessments, 3D and 4D motion caption and GIS mapping (Colucci et al., 2024; Jones, 2017; Low, 2002; Skublewska-Paszkowska et al., 2022). These instruments are important to capture community identity and attachment to a place. Also, community-based inventories that use participatory actions like social mapping and semi-structures interviews (Nebot-Gomez de Salazar et al., 2023) can ensure that memories, and a sense of place of the inhabitants are recorded as a critical component of the urban ensemble.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this research has drawn attention to the evolution and expansion of the notion of UCH as it evolved from a monument-focused perspective towards a wider, more inclusive understanding of the Historic Urban Landscape approach. Through an analysis of international doctrines, this research establishes that cultural heritage in urban contexts cannot be fully understood through architectural and historical evaluations alone. Instead, it is shaped by the complexity of intertwined social, spiritual, humanistic, and material dimensions.

The proposed classification (Fig. 3) is based on the amalgam of dimensions (tangible and intangible) with scales (urban, object, and people) to bridge the gap between the doctrines and practical documentation. This is done by the classification of the significant UCH into tangible assets of the built environment (tangible/urban scale), architectural and archaeological assets (tangible/object scale), intangible assets of the built environment (intangible/urban scale), intangible cultural heritage (intangible/object scale), and humanistic evaluations (intangible/ people scale). This classification makes sure that all significant components influencing the historical urban cultural fabric are recorded and preserved. The matrix provides measurable indicators, data capture and interpretation instruments to translate the abstraction of the HUL approach into operational workflow.

The multi-dimensional and multi-scalar approach to understanding UCH is not only necessary for theoretical reflection, but most importantly it provide structured workflow for practitioners to achieve comprehensive conservation and preservation of the UCH subject to study. The proposed framework is designed to maintain a modular and flexible structure, to allow the calibration of indicators and methods to align with the specific nature and multi-layered significance of the historical site subject to study. Based on this classification, future research can focus on the empirical validation of these indicators through site-specific application. In other words, the framework contributes to more complete, dynamic, and contextually grounded heritage management strategies in the digital age.

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## Sources of Figures and Tables

Fig. 1 Authors, 2026
Fig. 2 Authors, 2025
Fig. 3 Authors, 2026
Table I Authors, 2026
Table II Authors, 2025

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