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Between Contrast and Continuity: Approaches to New Architecture in Cultural Landscapes

Między kontrastem a ciągłością. Podejścia do nowej architektury w krajobrazach kulturowych

Keywords: cultural landscape, built environment, Baukultur, new construction in heritage context, conservation theory

Słowa kluczowe: krajobraz kulturowy, środowisko zabudowane, archikultura, uzupełnienia architektoniczne w otoczeniu zabytkowym, teoria konserwacji

Introduction and research aim

Recently, there has been a growing consensus that not only elements of buildings, buildings, and building complexes should be objects of heritage conservators' concern, but also whole landscapes and, more precisely, cultural landscapes. Unfortunately, with the broadening of the scope of protection, the orthodox approach to conservation (orthodox as rooted in Alois Riegl's and Max Dvořák's thought and codified especially in the Venice Charter [Riegl 1982; Dvořák 1984; Petzet 2009, pp. 54–55]) is being seen as problematic and too restrictive for use in a constantly changing built environment.

Simultaneously, the tension that has always been present in conservation practice [Torbus 2019; Omiłanowska 2016], between what is done and what is said at the formal level, is becoming too acute to be ignored [Szmygin 2024]. On the one hand, we can see development of unprecedented scale and provenance on a global level; on the other, the urge for the unification of doctrine clashes with the equally powerful imperative of pluralism.

The aim of this study is to investigate the language of normative conservation texts to identify which specific elements of the built environment are afforded special protection in these documents. Once they are

set, a question emerges—are these elements and statements coherent, and do they sufficiently protect the cultural landscape as a whole? I try to answer this by indicating its consequences for the newly built architecture and its existing context.

Materials and methods

In this study, I explore the theoretical literature and several voices from the practical field of designing new architecture in the cultural landscape. Drawing on discussions of heritage areas and sites, I extrapolate theoretical problems in the conservation of historic buildings to the field of newly designed buildings developed within the historic built environment. Secondly, I analyze the coherence of doctrine/discourse in the light of its impact on the protection and preservation of cultural landscapes.

The first part of the study is a literature review based on various texts, mostly written during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with several references to earlier authors. The body of texts represents a specific category in terms of its form and scope.

They could be called normative and framework documents, which include official documents and recommendations issued by ICOMOS, UNESCO, and

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Fig. 1.1 Original photo of streetscape consisting of three buildings in the historic center of Valetta. Below are four examples of the outcome of the implementation of rules codified in different documents and gathered by author in table 1. These attempts were made with LLM model Chat GPT 5.0. with prompts taken from abovementioned table 1

Ryc. 1.1. Oryginalne zdjęcie pejzażu ulicznego składającego się z trzech budynków w historycznym centrum Valetty; poniżej przedstawiono cztery przykłady zastosowania zasad sformułowanych w dokumentach z tabeli 1; opracowane z wykorzystaniem ChatGPT 5.0 na podstawie wskazówek z tabeli 1

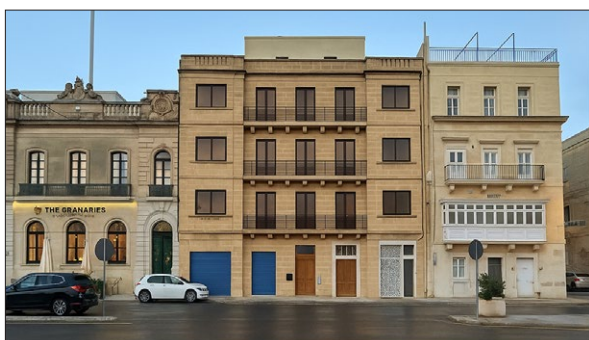


Fig.1.2 The Athens Charter prompt: New building should retain character of the context, relationship with the context and views on existing buildings

Ryc. 1.2. Prompt z Karty Ateńskiej: „Nowy budynek powinien zachować charakter otoczenia, relację z otoczeniem oraz widoki na istniejące budynki”

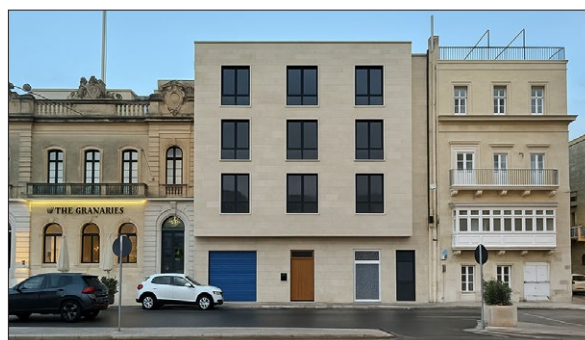


Fig.1.3 The Vienna Memorandum prompt: New building should retain volume, scale of the context, relationship with the context. New building should be also added in harmony with the surroundings but should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design (important!)

Ryc. 1.3. Prompt z Memorandum Wiedeńskiego: „Nowy budynek powinien zachować bryłę, skalę otoczenia oraz relację z otoczeniem. Powinien również harmonijnie wkomponować się w otoczenie, unikając jednak wszelkich form pseudohistorycznego projektowania [ważne!]”



Fig.1.4 The Valetta Principles prompt: New building should retain volume, scale, color, material, form, siting and decoration of the context, relationship with the context, volumetric characteristics of built-up and open spaces. New building should be also added in harmony with the surroundings but should bear contemporary stamp

Ryc. 1.4. Prompt z Dokumentu z Valetty: „Nowy budynek powinien zachować bryłę, skalę, kolor, materiał, formę, lokalizację i dekorację otoczenia, relację z otoczeniem oraz cechy bryłowe przestrzeni zabudowanych i otwartych. Nowy budynek powinien również harmonijnie wkomponować się w otoczenie, ale powinien posiadać cechy współczesne”

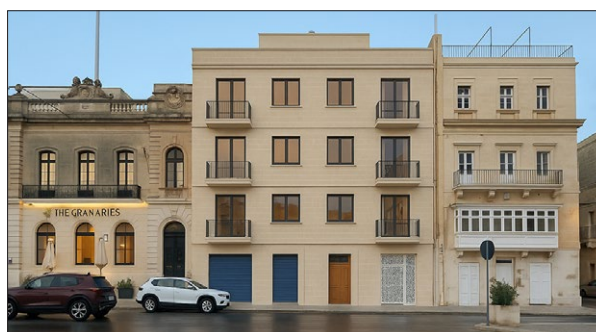


Fig.1.5 The Davos Declaration prompt: New building should retain scale and material of the context, relationship with the context. Historical buildings, infrastructure and public spaces should be taken as a reference point for new architecture

Ryc. 1.5. Wytyczne z Deklaracji z Davos: „Nowe budynki powinny zachowywać skalę i materiały otoczenia oraz relację z otoczeniem. Zabytkowe budynki, infrastruktura i przestrzeń publiczne powinny stanowić punkt odniesienia dla nowej architektury”

Fig. 1. Examples of new architecture in the historical center of Valetta based on selected documents, generated in ChatGPT 5.0 with prompts drawn from Table 1; all photographs and drawings by J. Jabłoński

Ryc. 1. Przykłady nowej architektury w historycznym centrum Valetty na podstawie wybranych dokumentów, wygenerowane w ChatGPT 5.0 z wykorzystaniem promptów przedstawionych w tabeli 1; autorem wszystkich fotografii i rysunków jest J. Jabłoński

other international organizations, including the Declaration of Amsterdam and the Davos Declaration. These texts, which establish guidelines and principles for heritage conservation and cultural landscape management, are collectively referred to as law-making sources.

The second part of the study is a comparative analysis of the sources categorized above, with particular emphasis on architectural and conservation sources, ranging from normative and framework documents to monographs and research papers. In this analysis, I focus especially on contradictions between different approaches, including those of formal documents and those of thematic monographs and popular works. This part is presented in the context of architectural practice.

Additionally, I add a layer of language analysis, and a case study of how the different statements in the documents can be interpreted in practice. I do this using the MLLM¹ ChatGPT 5.0. This approach was chosen because of the nature of ChatGPT's data processing which is similar to the data processing that an architect has to go through to interpret provisions of normative and framework documents [Forty 2019, pp. 29–41]—it starts with language analysis, then it proceeds to find an internal description (language token) and finally it recreates it as an image (or in case of an architect, in a design). Furthermore, this language model was trained on large human-generated databases, which implies that the outcomes of its processes are rooted in the intersubjective view of the problem across the population. This tool enabled rapid prototyping, but it was not explored to achieve more nuanced, in-depth results.

ChatGPT was not used for any other purpose other than the one mentioned in the paragraph above.

The study closes with a synthesis and conclusion on the aforementioned parts. The main point is to identify overarching trends, contradictions, and problems in the discussion about altering the cultural landscape.

The cultural landscape, a key concept in this research, is understood as a testament to the evolving relationship among communities, individuals, and their environment, resulting from and reflecting prolonged interaction among societies, people, nature, and the physical environment [Charter of Kraków 2000].

The built environment, which is also discussed in this paper, is understood here as human-made (in contrast to natural) resources and infrastructure designed to support human activity [Petzet 2013, p. 252].

Normative documents for research were chosen on the basis of four ICOMOS publications in the following order: *Vademecum Konserwatora Zabytków: Międzynarodowe Normy Ochrony Dziedzictwa Kultury: edycja 2015* [Szmygin 2015], *International principles of preservation* [Petzet 2009], 'Conservation of Monuments and Sites', in *Monumenta II: The ICOMOS Discussions on Conservation of Cultural Heritage* [Petzet 2013], and *Das Erbe als Basis der Baukultur* [2022]. Of these collections of documents, those documents were selected which directly or indirectly addressed the issue of architectural additions to cultural landscape.

Results

As one is supposed to—*ab ovo*—start, first I analyze the normative and framework documents that underpin the whole discourse in conservation, namely two charters—the Athens Charter (1931) and the Venice Charter (1964) [Petzet 2009, pp. 47–49, 54–55].

The Athens Charter, which is still the gold standard of concise legislative work, in chapter III, "Aesthetic Enhancement of Ancient Buildings," first addresses the problem of designing new architecture in relation to the existing context. This is phrased as "the character and external" aspect. Emphasis is put on the neighborhood of ancient monuments, but the document clearly states the importance of regard for context in newly built architecture in general.

In summary, the Athens Charter considers monuments and groups of monuments, along with their immediate surroundings, according to their character, their relation to their context, and views of existing buildings (see Table 1).

The Venice Charter is more specific than its predecessor and addresses the problem in Articles 6, 13, and 14, although the authors made it explicit that the Charter's subjects are monuments. Nevertheless, Article 1, especially its second part, leaves room for a modest broadening of the text's scope of impact. Article 6 concerns "scale, relations of mass and color," which are to be protected in the new construction and modification. To amplify the message in Article 13, concerning additions, there are issues put forth such as "traditional setting, the balance of composition," and "relation with surroundings." New notion, although pointed towards conservation, arises in this Charter's Article 9—namely, that new construction, which is not a pure, well-documented restoration, should "be distinct from architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp."

In summary, the Venice Charter considers monuments and their urban settings in terms of harmony and their relationship to the context, and stipulates that new work should bear contemporary features and that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

These are followed by a series of Charters, Recommendations, and Principles by ICOMOS, UNESCO, and other international organizations concerned with the conservation of heritage places and spaces, as well as with built culture *en masse*. I would like to point out some of the ones I found particularly important during my research on the topic.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) [Petzet 2009, pp. 56–62] defines cultural heritage in Article 1 of chapter I as "groups of buildings for their architecture, homogeneity and their place in landscape," while it defines sites as "works of man or the combined works of nature and man." These definitions already give an impression of what I consider the cultural environment,

Year			Document							Scope of protection										
Mass/bulk/volume	Scale	Color	Material	Texture	Form	Siting	Decoration	Character		Proportions	Balance of composition /harmony	Relation with surroundings / context/setting	Relationship to the physical and cultural landscape	Volumetric characteristics of built-up and open spaces	Views on existent buildings/sightlines	Skyline	New work should be readily identifiable as such/ should bear contemporary stamp	Contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings	New work should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design	Historical buildings, infrastructure and public spaces should be taken as a reference point for new architecture
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I		K	L	M	N	O	P	R	S	T	U	V
1931			The Athens Charter							Monuments and groups of monuments with their immediate surrounding										
								I				M			P					
1964			The Venice Charter							Monument as an architectural work with its urban or rural setting										
A	B	C									L	M					S	T		
1972			Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage							Monuments: architectural works [...] Groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science										
1975			The Declaration of Amsterdam							Individual buildings of exceptional quality and their surroundings, but also all areas of towns or villages of historic or cultural interest										
														O						
1976			UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (Warsaw-Nairobi)							Any groups of buildings, structures and open spaces [...] constituting human settlements in an urban or rural environment such as historic towns, old urban quarters, villages and hamlets. Natural and man-made setting										
	B	C	D		F	G		I		K	L	M		O	P			T		
1979			The Burra Charter							All types of places of cultural significance including natural, Indigenous and historic places with cultural values. [...] Place can be large or small: for example, a memorial, a tree, an individual building or group of buildings, the location of an historical event, an urban area or town, a cultural landscape [...]										
A	B	C	D		F	G											S			
1987			The Washington Charter							Historic urban areas, large and small, including cities, towns and historic centers or quarters, together with their manmade environments.										
	B	C	D				H			K		M						T		
1999			Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage							Vernacular buildings, groups and settlements										
						G		I					N							
2000			Charter of Kraków							Historic buildings and monuments, ensembles of buildings and open spaces, which are part of larger urban areas, or of entire small urban or rural settlements, cultural landscape, built environment [...] buildings that form historic areas may not have a special architectural value in themselves, but they should be safeguarded because of the organic unity of the town										
A		C				G	H					M	N				S			

Year			Document						Scope of protection										
Mass/bulk/volume	Scale	Color	Material	Texture	Form	Siting	Decoration	Character	Proportions	Balance of composition /harmony	Relation with surroundings / context/setting	Relationship to the physical and cultural landscape	Volumetric characteristics of built-up and open spaces	Views on existent buildings/sightlines	Skyline	New work should be readily identifiable as such/ should bear contemporary stamp	Contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings	New work should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design	Historical buildings, infrastructure and public spaces should be taken as a reference point for new architecture
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	K	L	M	N	O	P	R	S	T	U	V
2005			Vienna Memorandum on „World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape”						Groups of buildings, structures and open spaces in their natural and ecological context										
A	B										M			P	R		T	U	
2005			Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas Heritage structures, sites or areas of various scales, including individual buildings or designed spaces, historic cities or urban landscapes, landscapes						Heritage structures, sites or areas of various scales, including individual buildings or designed spaces, historic cities or urban landscapes, landscapes										
											M			P	R		T		
2008			Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place						Buildings, sites, landscapes										
		C		E				I											
2008			UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape						Monuments, sites, groups of buildings, cultural landscape, built environment										
											M	N					T		
2011			The Valetta Principles for the Safeguarding and management of Historic Cities, Towns and Urban Areas						Historic towns and urban areas urban structure, architectural elements, the landscapes within and around the town, monuments and authentic urban fabric, in which buildings express the cultural values										
A	B	C	D		F	G	H				M	N	O	P		S	T		
2011			The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape						Historic areas/city as any groups of buildings, structures and open spaces [...], constituting human settlements in an urban or rural environment, in particular historic towns, old urban quarters, villages and hamlets as well as homogeneous monumental groups, it being understood that the latter should as a rule be carefully preserved unchanged.										
											M	N					T		
2018			Davos Declaration						Built environment, i.e. cultural landscapes, villages and cities										
	B		D								M								V

Table 1. Scope of protection and preferred approaches to new construction in heritage and cultural environments; by J. Jabłoński

Tab. 1. Zakres ochrony i preferowane podejścia do realizacji nowych inwestycji budowlanych w środowiskach dziedzictwa kulturowego i krajobrazie kulturowym; oprac. J. Jabłoński

although it is clearly stated that, as a subject to protection, this applies only to sites or buildings “of universal value from the point of view of history, art or science.”

In summary, the Convention considers monuments and groups of buildings, because of their architecture, their homogeneity, or their place in the landscape, to be of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, or science (see Table 1).

The Declaration of Amsterdam (1975) [Szmygin 2015, pp. 55–60; Council of Europe 1975] broadens the scope of conservationist care to include larger organisms such as “towns and villages” and reintroduces the notion of “cultural” significance, returning, as it were, to the legacy of the Athens Charter. Second, there is a new element —the negative, cautionary notion of “incongruous new construction,” in contrast to what was stated in previous documents, a positive guideline to make new construction “harmonious” with the environment. Another important notion introduced in this document is the use of the term “man-made environment,” taken from phenomenology [Norberg-Schulz 1971], combined with the idea of “continuity.” Additionally, the Declaration reinstates “architectural and volumetric” features of the “urban and rural context” as a basis for conservation effort.

In summary, the Declaration of Amsterdam considers individual buildings of exceptional quality and their surroundings, as well as all areas of towns or villages of historic or cultural interest, based on their volumetric characteristics of built-up and open spaces (see Table 1).

This is followed by the UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (1976) [Petzet 2009, pp. 63–69], which again refers to phenomenology and states that the “environment” (man-made or natural), understood as context, is “spatial, social, economic or cultural.” Particularly important for our deliberations is the demand that architects and urban planners pay special attention to integrating historic areas harmoniously into contemporary life. In this document, particular emphasis is placed on preserving the “authenticity” of historic areas.

In summary, the UNESCO Recommendation considers groups of buildings, structures, and open spaces, such as historic towns, old urban quarters, villages, and hamlets. It also addresses the natural and man-made settings, including their scale, color, materials, form, siting, character, proportions, harmony, relationship with the context, the massing characteristics of built-up and open spaces, and views of existing buildings, and it emphasizes that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

The Australia ICOMOS Guidelines for Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance [Burra Charter 2013], with its most up-to-date version of 2013, puts pressure on retaining the character of a place when adding new structures to cultural environments, as in previous documents, but we can see here in Article 22. “New work” that “new work should be identifiable

as such.” This is a reference to Article 9 of the Venice Charter.

In summary, the Burra Charter considers all types of places of cultural significance, building or group of buildings, cultural landscape according to their mass, scale, color, material, form, siting, and regarding that new work should bear a contemporary stamp (see Table 1).

The Charter for Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas [The Washington Charter, 1987; Petzet 2009, pp. 73–74] outlines qualities to be preserved in historic towns and urban areas. These are, generally, a summary of previous charters. It also states that new construction within an urban context should not be discouraged, provided it is “in harmony” with the surroundings.

In summary: the Washington Charter considers man-made environments according to their scale, color, material, decoration, proportions, relation with context and regarding that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

The Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (Mexico, 1999) [Petzet 2009, pp. 86–87] builds on previous charters in defining the subject of protection, but in addition to the physical features of the built environment, it adds the postulate of respecting the “cultural landscape” of which the “built vernacular heritage” is a part (point 4 of “Principles of Conservation”). Additionally, it places further emphasis on “cultural landscape” in point 2 of “Guidelines in Practice.”

In summary, the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage considers vernacular buildings, groups, and settlements based on their siting, character, and relationship to the physical and cultural landscape.

Principles for Conservation and Restoration of Built Heritage (The Charter of Krakow, 2000) [Charter of Kraków 2000] follows several (unspecified) charters concerning the development of “cultural landscapes,” especially in point 9, which broaden the scope of preservation beyond heritage places, sites, and monuments. It also addresses additions to heritage buildings, stating that if they are to be permitted, they should “reflect contemporary architecture.”

In summary, the Charter of Kraków considers historic buildings and monuments, as well as ensembles of buildings and open spaces, according to their mass, color, siting, decoration, relationship to the context, and relationship to the physical and cultural landscape. It also holds that new work should bear features of contemporaneity (see Table 1).

The Vienna Memorandum on “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape” (2005) [Petzet 2013, pp. 231–233] is directly aimed at new construction in the built environment (still restricted to the Historic Urban Landscape). While maintaining previous notions of scale, setting, skyline, etc., it introduces the idea that new work should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design.

In summary: The Vienna Memorandum considers groups of buildings, structures, and open spaces in their natural and ecological context according to their mass, scale, relationship with context, views on existing buildings, skyline, and regarding that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings and new work should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design (see Table 1).

In the Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas (2005) [Petzet 2009, pp. 95–97], much less is said about tangible elements of the heritage/cultural landscape. However, in point 7, there is a direct reference to protecting “skylines” and “inappropriate visual and spatial encroachments,” which, in the document, applies to heritage sites. In point 8, there is also an indirect reference that new construction within the “setting of heritage structures, sites and areas” should “positively contribute to the distinctive character” of such places.

In summary, the Xi'an Declaration considers heritage structures, sites or areas, including individual buildings or urban landscapes, landscapes according to their relationship with context, views on existing buildings, skyline, and regarding that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

The Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place [ICOMOS 2008] introduces into normative discourse the notion of *genius loci* (borrowed from architectural theory [Norberg-Schulz 1979]), which had previously been used implicitly (for example, in the Xi'an Declaration [Petzet 2009, pp. 95–97] and the Nara Document on Authenticity [Petzet 2009, pp. 78–79]) but had not been explicitly mentioned before. In addition to listing the intangible elements of this phenomenon, it also defines tangible elements. In addition to what was stated in previous documents about buildings and sites, the Québec Declaration clearly points toward “landscapes” as one of the tangible elements of *Genius Loci*, as well as “textures, colors,” which are listed as intangibles.

In summary, the Québec Declaration classifies buildings, sites, and landscapes by their color, texture, and character (see Table 1).

The UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011) [Petzet 2013, pp. 248–252] builds on previous texts to produce a state-of-the-art document for conservation in urbanism and architecture, drawing on definitions from the Burra Charter, the Washington Charter, the Xi'an Declaration, among others. In addition to recapitulating previous charters and documents, it again stresses the need to add contemporary elements in harmony with the surroundings.

In summary, the UNESCO Recommendation considers monuments, sites, groups of buildings, cultural landscapes, and the built environment in relation to their context and the physical and cultural landscape, and holds that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

The Valetta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historic Cities, Towns and Urban Areas (2011) [Petzet 2013, pp. 243–258] is, to date, the most extensive document (paired with the Warsaw-Nairobi Recommendation of 1976) that considers the physical qualities of new construction and could serve as guidelines for town planners and architects. Among these qualities, it reintroduces the notion that new work should be readily identifiable as such and bear a contemporary stamp, a principle it takes from The Venice Charter, though its application is broader (in The Venice Charter, this principle applied only to new work carried out on historic buildings/monuments).

In summary, the Valetta Principles consider monuments, sites, groups of buildings, cultural landscapes, and the built environment in relation to their context and the physical and cultural landscape, and hold that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

The Davos Declaration [2018], as a document from outside the main conservationist organizations (ICOMOS, UNESCO), places a slightly different emphasis on new construction in cultural landscapes, stating that it should take “historical building as a reference point.” In addition, it devotes considerable attention to the issue of temporal value (durability) to be considered in new construction (described in depth in the insightful book *How Buildings Learn* [Brand 1994]) and to the cultural weight of building quality in new buildings. This declaration is followed by further development, summarized in The Davos Quality System [Amréus et al. 2021].

In summary, the Davos Declaration considers monuments, sites, groups of buildings, cultural landscapes, and the built environment in relation to their context and the physical and cultural landscape and holds that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings (see Table 1).

One more aspect of these documents is worth noting. Until the time of the Warsaw-Nairobi Recommendation, the authority of the documents described stemmed mainly from the bodies that established and signed them. They were treated as self-explanatory and self-sufficient, but since 1976, with the rapid growth in the interconnectivity of documents (which peaked in the twenty-first century), the source of authority shifted from the signatories to the documents themselves.

As shown in Figure 3, the number of distinct documents has grown over time, accompanied by increased interconnectivity, particularly after the year 2000. Unfortunately, this increase in interconnectivity does not necessarily lead to better clarification of the issues under consideration. There seems to be a problem with the influx of normative texts, which are increasingly repetitive, and only rarely does a document add a new layer of meaning to the existing body of texts [Szymygin 2024].

Based on the analyses above, we can observe that over almost one hundred years of modern documen-

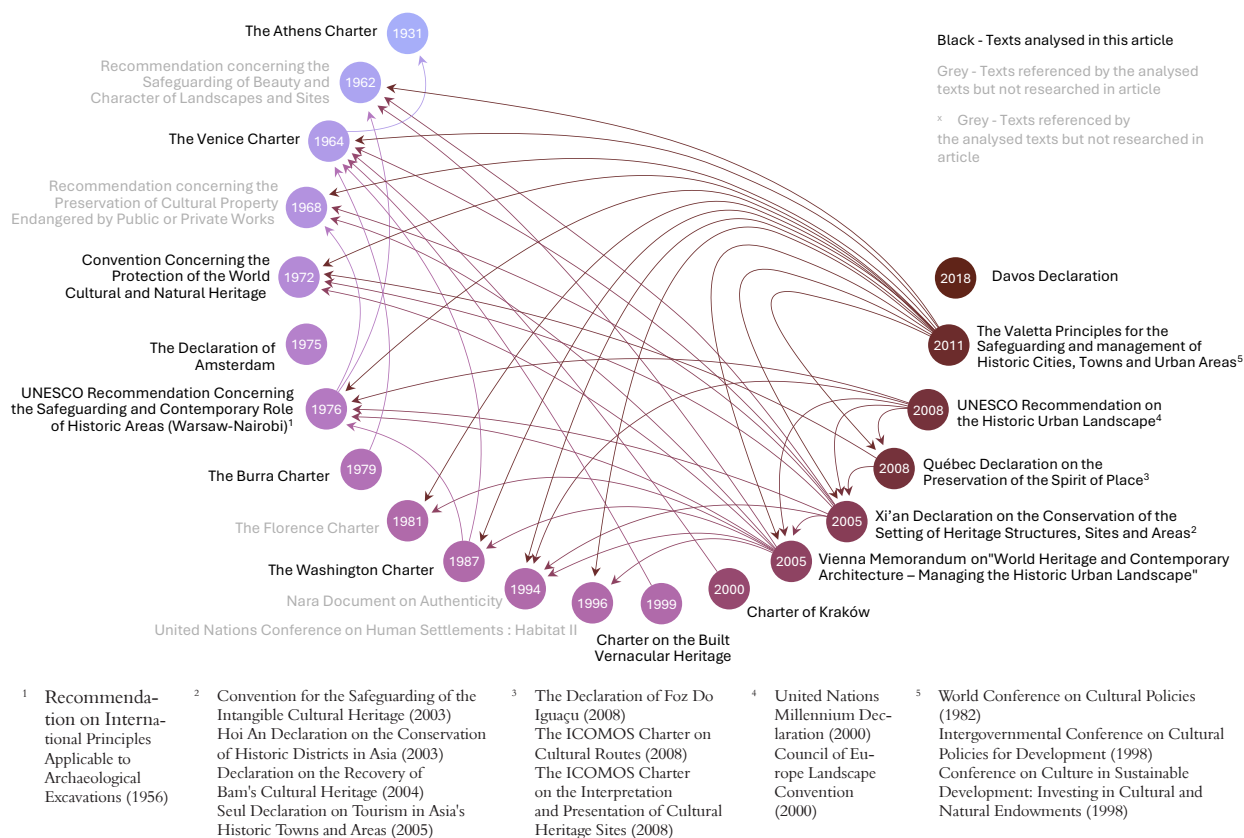


Fig. 3. Graph representing interconnectivity between normative documents from the Athens Charter to the Davos Declaration
 Ryc. 3. Wzajemne powiązania między dokumentami normatywnymi – od Karty Ateńskiej po Deklarację z Davos

tation in and around the field of conservation, several required and desired qualities for new construction in cultural landscapes have been identified. These include scale, color, material, form, etc. (see Table 1). Simultaneously, a few approaches to introducing new architecture into the built environment emerged. They can be summarized by the following four statements:

1. New work should be easily identifiable as such.
2. New work should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design.
3. Contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings.
4. Historical construction should be taken as a reference point for new architecture.

Based, inter alia, on the analyzed Normative Documents, conservation and architectural practice have established that new construction may be introduced into cultural landscapes in three ways. New architecture can be introduced by contrast, be neutral, or be introduced complementarily (sometimes called pastiche) [Tomaszewski 2012, pp. 119–120; Molski 2023, p. 49]. This threefold captures the essence of the problem with introducing contemporary architecture into pre-existing built environments with cultural and/or heritage values. These three ways are not explicitly stated in any of the documents analyzed in this article, but they can be traced to four statements from the documents listed above.

Discussion

Although international normative documents are a valid body of texts for analyses of conservationist theory and practice, it is important to remember that, for their provisions to be implemented, each signatory country or region must formally adapt them. This process of adaptation can vary between countries and from the original. It can be due to regional specifics or to practical realities. It can also result in discrepancies between the original international text and the local text to be implemented in practice. Thus, one cannot obtain a complete overview of conservation from these fairly general international texts alone.

An important aspect not developed in the article is the problem of community identity anchored in the built environment and how different types of new construction can impact it. Among the documents considered, the first to state this problem explicitly was the Declaration of Amsterdam (1975) [Szymygin 2015, pp. 55–60; Council of Europe 1975]—fourteen years after Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which added a new layer to the issue of social concerns in urban planning and, therefore, in conservation [Jacobs 2014; Forty 2019, pp. 102–117]. This care for the community's place-based identity is increasingly present in subsequent documents. There are at least two good reasons for this. One is an inward tendency, and it



Fig. 2.1 Original photo of streetscape consisting of three buildings in the historic center of Valetta. Attempts were conducted using the MLLM (Multimodal Large Language Model) model ChatGPT 5.0, with prompts specified below the accompanying figures. In order to refine the generated outcomes, these prompts were reinforced through reference to ArchDaily's Extension category [ArchDaily, 2025], one of the most prominent and frequently consulted architectural platforms. This approach was intended to align the results with established understandings of contrast, neutrality, and complementarity as recognized within contemporary architectural practice

Ryc. 2.1. Oryginalne zdjęcie pejzażu ulicznego składającego się z trzech budynków w historycznym centrum Valetty; opracowane przy użyciu ChatGPT 5.0, z wykorzystaniem wskazówek określonych poniżej, rozszerzonych o odniesienia do kategorii „Rozbudowa” z serwisu ArchDaily [ArchDaily, 2025] w celu dostosowania wyników do utrwalonych sposobów rozumienia kontrastu, neutralności i komplementarności we współczesnej praktyce architektonicznej



Fig. 2.2 The Contrast prompt: The New building should be added by the means of contrast

Ryc. 2.2. Polecenie dotyczące kontrastu: „Nowy budynek powinien zostać wkomponowany poprzez wykorzystanie kontrastów”

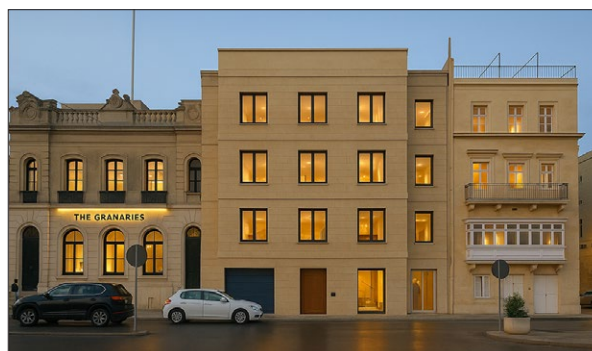


Fig. 2.3 The Neutral approach prompt: The New building should be added in a neutral way

Ryc. 2.3. Wskazówka dotycząca podejścia neutralnego: „Nowy budynek powinien zostać dodany w sposób neutralny”



Fig. 2.4 The Complementary approach prompt: The New building should be added in a complementary manner

Ryc. 2.4. Wskazówka dotycząca podejścia komplementarnego: „Nowy budynek należy dodać w sposób komplementarny”

Fig. 2. Examples of new architecture in the historical center of Valetta based on a threefold approach to new architecture in the cultural landscape, generated in ChatGPT 5.0

Ryc. 2. Przykłady nowej architektury w historycznym centrum Valetty oparte na trójstopniowym podejściu do projektowania nowej architektury w krajobrazie kulturowym, wygenerowane w ChatGPT 5.0

can be summarized as follows: if the cultural landscape is changed drastically, the community will lose its physical anchor and be robbed of an important expression of its culture. The second tendency is outward and can be stated as follows: a drastic change in the cultural landscape will sever the bonds between the community and its environment, thereby endangering the cultural landscape itself, because the local community is a guarantor of its upkeep and survival. That being said, community identity is based not only on the visual factors of the landscape, which is the main subject of this article, but also on economic, ethnic, political, and religious factors. [Petzet 2013, pp. 231–233]. Nonetheless, physical appearance is a crucial element in maintaining the bond between the community and the cultural landscape, as shown in numerous examples [Alexander 1979] and confirmed by the rejection of the well-known Theory of Broken Windows [Wilson et al. 1982].

Another issue concerns perception—the root of how we deal with architectural heritage, the Venice Charter, and the notion of falsification by added elements that do not bear a contemporary stamp. This approach originally arose from orthodox conservation but was later extended (for lack of a separate theory) to all matters of new architecture in the cultural landscape, not only heritage places, but also infills or renovations in existing fabric. The main problem with this theory is that it rests on a presupposition about what will or will not be seen as “old” or “new.” In short, it presupposes that, in a certain way, one should work not to mislead the viewer about the ancient lineage of new construction in a valuable built environment, given the problem of authenticity. Yet the heart of the problem is the apriority of such an approach, which was strengthened in the twentieth century by the architectural theories of modernism. This is a genuine problem, and one way to approach it is to determine people’s actual perceptions. A promising route for determining this lies in the rapidly growing field of cognitive science, especially eye-tracking research on human visual perception [Salingaros 2013; Sussman, Hollander 2015; Bermudez et al. 2024; Montero et al. 2018].

The growing notion of sustainability also needs to be addressed. As we dive deeper into our relationship with the environment, we begin to regain awareness of our place in a larger system. Not with Enlightenment-based “look from the outside” or Rousseauian “return to the original state” but with more down-to-earth knowledge of our interconnectivity and interdependence with nature, which is manifested, among others, in the theory of Earth as a garden [Boivin et al. 2023; Jenkins et al. 2023; Reiff et al. 2025; Munschek et al. 2023; Brand 2009]. This insight is a realization of the postulate advanced by many thinkers since the beginning of the twentieth century [Guardini 2022; Stara 2023] and should influence how we design new construction. Nowadays we almost never build *in cruda radice*, therefore there is always a notion of context or cultural landscape. Among some architects, one way to seek sustainability is to ana-

lyze historical buildings and draw from them the principles for new construction, as their approach to thermal mass, gravitational ventilation, and use of natural, renewable, and reusable materials could be an answer to the requirements of sustainability [Idam 2022; Swittalek 2022]. This could be treated as an objective argument for a complementary approach to introducing new construction into the cultural landscape. On the other hand, it can also be argued that these arguments concern the structure and operating principle of buildings and do not determine the visual aspect, which is at the center of the discussion in this article.

Conclusions

As shown above, normative documents, starting with The Athens Charter, have, over the years, expanded the scope of preservation and, consequently, the set of tangible and intangible values that are the direct subject of protection. By implication, these values also serve as guidelines for new construction in areas under conservation.

All analyzed documents aim to protect heritage, and over time, the scope of protection has expanded from monuments and groups of monuments with their surroundings to the cultural landscape and the built environment. One document states that new work should avoid all forms of pseudo-historical design. Four of them state that new work should be readily identifiable as such or bear a contemporary stamp. Seven state that contemporary elements should be added in harmony with the surroundings, and one document states that historical buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces should serve as reference points for new architecture. This gives an almost 2:1 ratio in favor of harmonizing with the context. When we add that, apart from the specific guidelines quoted in the body of the normative texts, there is a clear emphasis on the preservation of heritage in its physical form, as illustrated by the number of tangible attributes that can be extracted from the documents (Table 1), it seems legitimate to say that special care should be taken when handling new architecture in the cultural landscape.

The problem with these documents is their vague stance toward architectural practice. On the one hand, as has already been said, they must be fairly general because of their ambition to be widely accepted. On the other hand, one might get the impression that they are written with the profession’s most prominent representatives in mind, who can strike a delicate balance between harmonizing with their surroundings and emphasizing their distinctiveness/contemporaneity. Unfortunately, the reality of architecture is that most buildings are built by everyday architects on tight schedules and with budgets that are almost too small, which effectively prevents them from searching for the best way to introduce new architecture into the cultural landscape; instead, they go for the most readily conceivable solutions.

Given the above, introducing new architecture through contrast is a hazardous approach. It risks destroying the integrity of the cultural landscape, built up over centuries of layering and a shared pattern language [Alexander 1979; St. John Wilson 2024]. Therefore, introduction by contrast should be allowed only in exceptional cases where the function or symbolic value justifies a breach of the existing built environment.

On the contrary, the complementary introduction of new construction into the cultural landscape should be treated as the default. Although it can pose a threat to the other capital rule of preservation—authenticity [Tomaszewski 2012, pp. 119–120; Molski 2023, p. 49]—when considered at the scale of the cultural landscape rather than at the scale of a historic building (e.g., as an addition of a top floor to the building), it can even serve the authenticity of the built environment. Authenticity is understood as the preservation of *Genius Loci*, the

specific image of a city or village, which also seems to be preferred by architecture users [Montero et al. 2018; Salinger 2013, pp. 172–194; Kullberg 2022].

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Footnote

- ¹ Multimodal Large Language Model, where a large language model is a language model trained with self-supervised machine learning on a vast amount of text, designed for natural language processing tasks, especially language generation, and multimodality means having multiple modalities, where a “modality” refers to a type of input or output, such as video, image, audio, text etc.

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Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule zbadano wpływ formy i materiału na kształtowanie nowej architektury w środowiskach kulturowych, w szczególności obszarów dziedzictwa oraz krajobrazów o historycznie uwarstwionej strukturze. Na podstawie analizy dokumentów doktrynalnych i normatywnych ICOMOS, UNESCO oraz innych organizacji międzynarodowych zidentyfikowano kluczowe zasady konserwatorskie wyznaczające kierunki integracji nowej architektury z istniejącym kontekstem. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono skali, kolorystyce, autentyczności oraz relacji pomiędzy nową a historyczną zabudową, a także napięciom występującym między ortodoksyjną teorią konserwacji a współczesnymi koncepcjami zarządzania zmianą. W części dyskusyjnej omówiono rozbieżności między teorią a praktyką projektową, ich konsekwencje dla tożsamości miejsca i społecznej percepcji oraz rolę zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju w kształtowaniu współczesnych strategii ochrony i przekształcania krajobrazów kulturowych.

We wnioskach podkreślono, że choć rozwiązania oparte na wyraźnym kontraście mogą być uzasadnione w wyjątkowych sytuacjach, to podejście komplementarne należy uznać za najbardziej racjonalną strategię zapewniania ciągłości krajobrazu kulturowego oraz zachowania jego *genius loci*.

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of form and material in newly built architecture within cultural environments, with particular emphasis on heritage and historically layered landscapes. Through an analysis of normative and framework documents issued by ICOMOS, UNESCO, and other international organizations, this study identifies key conservation principles that guide the integration of new construction into existing contexts. Special attention is given to recurring themes such as scale, color, and authenticity, as well as the tension between orthodox conservation theory and contemporary approaches to managing change. The discussion highlights contradictions between theoretical principles and architectural practice, the implications for community identity and perception, and the role of sustainability in shaping contemporary approaches. Conclusions emphasize that while contrast may be justified only exceptionally, complementary integration emerges as the most reasonable strategy for safeguarding continuity and *genius loci* in cultural landscapes.