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Recurring Issues in Historic Building Conservation

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Abstract

Historic building conservation is often challenged by a number of issues in its process. This paper reviews past studies about challenges of heritage building conservation, then goes on to describe a small pilot study carried out in Malaysia to measure the number of significant issues faced among local conservators. A total of 46 issues were identified from literature and classified into five themes of technical, environmental, organisational, financial and human issues. Tentative findings showed that technical issues such as limited availability of specialists, availability of original components, labour and skill shortages, and lack of personnel training, were the biggest challenges in conservation projects.

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Keywords: Historic building, conservation; heritage

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1. Introduction

The search for values to a particular heritage building has become a pressing concern in our modern society (Ahmad, G., 2006). In heritage buildings, historical features are tangible aspects of cultural heritage that provide an identity we affiliate with. Tuan (1977) reminds us that heritage buildings go beyond aesthetic appreciation and provide a ‘sense of place’ (Cresswell, 2004; Hubbard & Kitchin, 2010). Conservation by definition means the retention of existing buildings without altering or destroying character or detail, even though repairs or changes may be necessary (Curl, 2000). Conservation of historic buildings is sensitive to the preservation of as much original fabric as possible, and to distinguish new additions and changes from the originally existing structure. Conservation allows considerable intervention on condition that changes done are of architectural and historic interest that enhance and respect the existing building character. It is a process that leads to prolonging the life of the building and its utilisation. While its importance is clear, heritage building conservation is a complicated task that follows some strict guidelines and procedures. Conservators are often faced with various issues – some of which are commonly recurring in the local Malaysian scene. This paper reviews past studies about challenges of historic building conservation, then goes on to describe a small pilot study carried out in Malaysia to attempt to measure the number of significant challenges faced among local conservators. A large-scale, generalised survey using similar methods is proposed to build on the knowledge gained from the pilot study. Tentative findings are put forward to indicate a positive response to the types of challenges highlighted in the research.

2. Issues in conservation work

A total of 46 issues were identified from past studies on historic building conservation. The issues were coded and arranged under five focal themes to denote the nature of concern (Figure 1). The themes were named environmental, human, technical, financial and organizational issues.

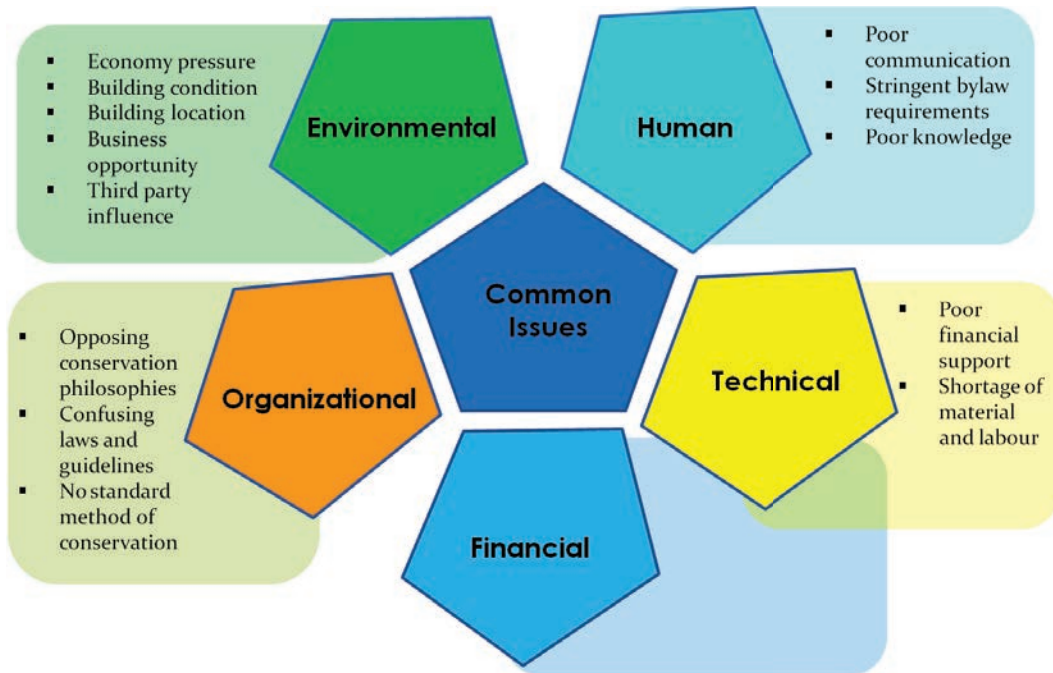


Fig. 1. Themed categories of historic building conservation issues

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