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Research Article

Community Landscape Design from the Perspective of Architectural Heritage Conservation: A Case Study in Hoi An, Quang Nam

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Abstract: Urban development in Vietnam is entering a phase characterized by survival and sustainable growth, where challenges such as heritage preservation and improving community quality of life have become more urgent than ever. A central design question now focuses on how to create diverse and integrated community landscapes while simultaneously protecting historical architecture, activating cultural heritage, and fostering sustainable community development. This article examines specific types of community landscapes, including pocket parks and historically styled old quarters, to explore the challenges faced during preservation and renewal efforts in Hoi An, Vietnam. Through technical design analysis and performance evaluation, the study presents landscape design strategies from the perspective of architectural heritage conservation. These findings offer valuable insights for guiding community landscape renewal practices in Hoi An. The paper proposes a multi-scalar design strategy that incorporates living heritage principles into small-scale urban interventions such as pocket parks. This approach remains underexplored in current Vietnamese heritage conservation studies and contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable urban design.

Keywords: Architectural heritage; living heritage conservation; community landscape design; urban revitalization

Highlights:

- Proposes a multi-scalar strategy for heritage-based urban design in Hoi An
- Uses pocket parks to connect cultural heritage with community space renewal
- Identifies challenges in preserving historic architecture during urban growth
- Presents design strategies linking landscape renewal and heritage conservation

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the rapid urbanization of Vietnamese cities has triggered profound transformations in spatial structures, social organization, and local cultural values. Modernization has often been driven by a "demolish and rebuild" approach-a strategy once seen as a symbol of economic growth and land-use efficiency. While this approach has contributed to improved technical infrastructure and increased population density, it has also revealed numerous negative consequences, particularly in areas rich in historical and cultural value. The unplanned demolition of historical buildings and the erasure of traditional communal spaces-without a clear strategy for inheritance-has led to a rupture in urban memory, the erosion of local identity, and the breakdown of social relations embedded in traditional spatial configurations (Larkham, 2002).

Against this backdrop, contemporary models of sustainable urban development are increasingly focused on integrating conservation and development, rather than treating them as opposing forces (Pendlebury, 2013). Heritage-rich cities like Hoi An have become “living laboratories” in the search for balanced approaches that harmonize preservation, adaptation, and urban restructuring.

Recognized as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site since 1999, Hoi An exemplifies the complexities of urban heritage governance amid modernization. With its timber-framed architectural structures, Chinese assembly halls, ancient temples, public wells, and intricate street networks of East Asian influence, Hoi An not only serves as a physical testament to East–West trade history but also remains a vibrant living space where the local community continues to uphold traditional cultural practices (Winter, 2007). However, this condition of "living within heritage" generates internal tensions in urban development-between maintaining the integrity of the heritage and accommodating socioeconomic growth (Tran & Walter, 2014).

A major challenge is the pressure of mass tourism. Over the past two decades, the surge in visitor numbers has led to widespread functional conversions of heritage buildings-from residential use to service-based businesses-disrupting usage patterns and driving up living costs (Dai Dung et al., 2020). Moreover, unauthorized extensions, unregulated renovations, and illegal construction in peripheral heritage areas are gradually dismantling the original spatial fabric, blurring the boundaries between old and new đại (Avieli, 2015). Urban infrastructure-including drainage, waste management, and public spaces-remains underdeveloped relative to the seasonal population spikes caused by tourism, placing immense stress on the urban ecosystem (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Another critical issue is the decline of the indigenous population in the historic core-a result of rising land prices, excessive commercialization, and insufficient support for traditional crafts. This not only depletes cultural vitality but also fractures the "living heritage"-the cultural lifeworld intertwined with the physical environment (Liu et al.). Within this context, the concept of "living heritage" has been emphasized by UNESCO as a central principle of contemporary conservation: heritage truly exists only when it remains actively embedded in community life bày (Smith, 2006; UNESCO, 2011). In Hoi An, this concept is vividly embodied in the continuity of practices such as lantern-making, night markets, floating lantern festivals, and residents still living in ancestral houses (Hien, 2019).

However, to sustain living heritage effectively, an integrated theoretical framework is needed-one in which conservation is not merely about "freezing" physical forms, but about reactivating the use value of heritage through spatial planning, design, and management. While previous research in Vietnam has largely focused on legal-technical dimensions or physical status assessments, there remains a lack of systematic studies that classify and analyze adaptive conservation-based spatial interventions, particularly in small yet culturally distinctive cities like Hoi An.

In addition, the prevailing understanding of "architectural heritage" in Vietnam remains largely limited to officially designated structures under the Law on Cultural Heritage (2009). Meanwhile, many undesignated historical buildings-such as French colonial villas in Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi-are being demolished due to the absence of protective mechanisms (News, 2022; Nien, 2021). This highlights the need for a broader conceptual framework, in which architectural heritage is seen not only as an object of preservation but as a key component of urban memory, reflecting the cultural and social evolution of the city over time.

Thus, architectural heritage conservation must go beyond physical retention. It must ensure authenticity and integrity-including form, materials, color, landscape, space, and social connectivity (Feilden & Jokilehto, 1998; Jokilehto, 2006). Urban landscape design around heritage cannot be separated from the task of spatial restructuring: rationalizing circulation, maintaining traditional architectural proportions, and controlling building density to protect the harmonious relationship between the old and the new (Thao, 2020).

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a classification and analysis framework for urban spatial renewal models in heritage areas of Hoi An, grounded in the principles of "conservation through use" and the living heritage approach. Rather than treating conservation as a rigid constraint, the research proposes a community landscape design approach rooted in heritage conservation-focusing on the restructuring of vibrant spatial configurations, encouraging community interaction, safeguarding architectural identity, and enhancing the adaptability of heritage zones amid the uncertainties of modern urban change.

2. Explain the concept

2.1. Architectural Heritage

Conceptually, architectural heritage constitutes a vital component of tangible cultural heritage, reflecting the accumulation of historical layers, construction techniques, and spatial aesthetics across generations. This concept encompasses not only officially recognized heritage structures-protected at national or international levels-but also extends to historically significant architectural works that possess cultural, artistic, and social value, even if they have not been formally listed (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998). In Hoi An, the interweaving of prominent monuments such as the Japanese Covered Bridge, the Phuc Kien Assembly Hall, and the Tan Ky Ancient House with hundreds of unlisted traditional wooden homes demonstrates the layered and multifaceted nature of architectural heritage in the urban context.

However, the practical management of heritage in Vietnam still faces numerous limitations, especially due to the lack of clarity in distinguishing and applying conservation policies between officially listed heritage monuments and historically valuable architectural works that have not been formally recognized. This lack of consistency often leads to superficial preservation-where structures are physically retained but are no longer connected to community life (Logan 2002). Meanwhile, recent studies emphasize the need for an integrated approach to architectural conservation-viewing architectural heritage as a living entity capable of adapting to contemporary development and social transformation (Smith 2006, Pendlebury 2008).

Chen argues that the conservation of historic architectural structures should be regarded as an evolutionary extension of monument preservation-shifting the focus from form alone to also include function and the spatial-community relationship. Conversely, experiences from conserving historical buildings-with their functional adaptability and active community engagement-can offer useful models for listed monuments, which often fall into a state of "static musealization" (Chen 2006).

Thus, there is a pressing need to establish a comprehensive and inclusive definition of "architectural heritage"-not only for identification purposes but also to support long-term policy planning, conservation, and effective utilization. In Hoi An, this is particularly significant, as the architectural landscape is inseparable from the rhythms of community life. It constitutes an organic part of the living heritage system-where the past and present coexist, interact, and evolve together.

2.2. Historic Urban Landscape

The concept of Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) is an expanded framework for urban conservation. It encompasses not only individual architectural structures of value, but also the overall urban fabric-including spatial layout, street network, building density, landscape, and social practices of a particular historical period (UNESCO, 2011). These areas often vividly reflect the cultural and social characteristics, construction techniques, and architectural aesthetics of the communities that inhabited them during their formative and developmental stages.

Hoi An serves as a quintessential example of a historic urban landscape in Vietnam, where the traditional urban structure has been relatively well preserved. The harmonious integration of traditional tiled-roof houses, the gentle curves of the gable ends, the intricately crafted eye-shaped door details, and the use of traditional plaster materials, pedestrian streets, waterways, temples, pagodas, and artisanal village spaces has created a unique urban scenery, deeply reflecting the East–West cultural exchange of the 17th to 19th centuries. Street spaces in ancient towns like Hoi An play a critical role in shaping community identity functioning not only as transportation corridors but also as stages for social interaction, festivals, and microeconomic activities .

However, Hoi An is currently under intense pressure from commercialization and mass tourism development. The increasing density of commercial activities, the conversion of residential spaces into tourism services, and the reduction of public space have led to the loss of authenticity in many areas and the displacement of local residents from the historic town center (Logan 2002). This not only compromises the physical authenticity and integrity of the heritage but also threatens the dynamic continuity of local cultural life-an essential component in effective heritage management (UNESCO, 2011; Yung & Chan, 2011).

Preserving historic urban landscapes like Hoi An requires a holistic and integrated approach-one that goes beyond protecting physical architecture to managing living spaces and community structures. Such an approach is crucial to maintaining urban identity and ensuring long-term cultural sustainability.

3. Community landscape design strategy from the perspective of architectural heritage conservation

3.1. Research Methodology

To establish a scientific foundation for strategies of conservation and landscape development within urban heritage zones, this study adopts a multi-layered methodological approach, combining field surveys, quantitative spatial analysis, and participatory community engagement. The method is designed to ensure comprehensiveness, reflecting both the physical conditions and the underlying socio-cultural values embedded within the heritage space.

(1) Site Survey and Architectural Assessment

The study conducted systematic fieldwork across five representative areas within Hoi An's Old Quarter, focusing on key spatial typologies, including: main streets, residential alleys, internal courtyards, public spaces, and traditional interaction points (e.g., wells, temples, markets). Each space was evaluated based on a predefined set of criteria: architectural form, physical condition, materials, current functional use, and degree of modern intervention. In total, over 90 architectural structures and 45 distinctive spatial nodes were documented in detail through drawings, photographs, observational logs, and direct interviews with residents.

(2) Spatial Configuration Analysis

To better understand the relationship between urban morphological structures and patterns of spatial use, the study applies axial analysis via DepthmapX-a tool grounded in Space Syntax theory. Key indicators such as Global and Local Integration, Choice (movement potential), and Visual Connectivity were calculated for the entire street and alley network within the study area. The analysis identified spatial bottlenecks, highly isolated zones, and high-potential cultural-commercial corridors. These findings inform a set of "soft restructuring" strategies aimed at restoring accessibility and spatial vitality.

(3) GIS-Based Quantitative Analysis

In addition to Space Syntax, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were used to overlay geospatial data with field survey layers-including building density, green space distribution, public space area, and informal construction activity. This layering approach enabled the identification of spatial conflict hotspots, priority intervention zones, and transitional areas with potential for transformation into multifunctional public spaces.

3.2. Conservation strategy

3.2.1. Architectural Heritage Conservation

Architectural heritage is a form of tangible heritage rich in historical, aesthetic, and humanistic value-deeply embedded with the social and technical accumulation inherent in the urban development process. In the context of rapid globalization and urbanization, conserving architectural heritage involves more than simply preserving the original architectural form; it is also an effort to safeguard spatial memory and local cultural identity (Feilden & Jokilehto, 1998; Jokilehto, 2006). According to international conservation principles proposed by ICOMOS, the process must respect both authenticity and integrity-the two fundamental pillars of heritage value.

In Hoi An, a UNESCO-recognized heritage city, architectural conservation requires strict control over spatial form, building facades, and traditional color schemes (such as turmeric yellow and yin-yang tiled roofs), along with carved wooden elements and traditional construction materials such as ironwood, terracotta bricks, and laterite stones. These elements are not only material assets but also vessels of collective memory. Restoration practices should adhere to the principle of "restoration-in-kind", meaning the use of traditional techniques and materials to maintain the original characteristics of the structure (Orbasli, 2008).



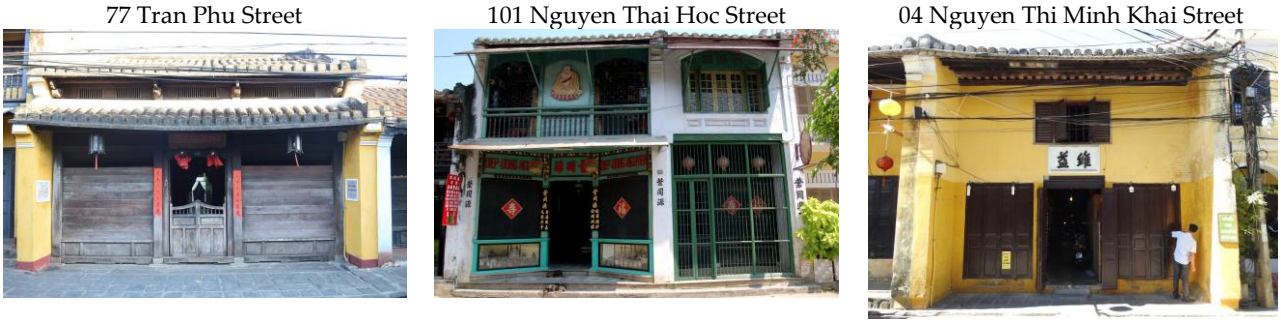

Figure 1. Typical elevations of traditional houses in Hội An (Source: Mai Thành Chương (2025), Architectural Heritage of the Ancient Urban Area of Hội An).

Beyond the architectural form itself, associated landscape elements-such as courtyards, ancient wells, boundary walls, verandas, and traditional alleys-also constitute integral components of the historical space and should be preserved in a coordinated manner. Uncontrolled alteration or modernization of these elements can se0ver the interconnectedness between architecture, landscape, and community, resulting in a fragmented and decontextualized heritage (Pendlebury, 2008).

In practice, effective management in Hoi An requires the establishment of robust control mechanisms involving close collaboration among local authorities, property owners, and heritage professionals-particularly in renovation and repair projects initiated by individuals and businesses. The development and implementation of detailed technical conservation guidelines tailored to different types of structures will provide a clear legal framework, ensuring consistency and preventing the erosion of traditional architectural identity (UNESCO, 2011; Zhang et al., 2024).

3.2.2. Spatial Structure Restructuring

Architectural space does not exist in isolation but is organically embedded within the broader urban environment, where spatial structures-including streets, alleys, open spaces, and layered building forms-function not only as the physical foundation but also as the semantic layer of heritage. The spatial structure in architectural heritage zones is a product of historical accumulation, reflecting the urban evolutionary process, transformations in function, morphology, and patterns of community life over generations (Rossi, 1982). Therefore, heritage landscape conservation must be intrinsically linked with spatial restructuring, aimed at clarifying, enhancing, and restoring historical spatial relationships that have been eroded over time.

In Hoi An, although the core of the ancient town is relatively well preserved, peripheral areas-particularly narrow alleys, secondary pathways, and bordering residential zones-are increasingly facing issues such as unauthorized extensions, chaotic architectural encroachments, and uncontrolled development of modern structures. These conditions disrupt the rhythm of traditional spatial organization, obscure visual corridors, and diminish the legibility of heritage structures (Logan, 2002; Pendlebury, 2008).

Landscape design strategies in such contexts should adopt a "soft restructuring" approach-one that avoids disruptive interventions while reconfiguring spatial logic through three primary actions:

(i) Eliminating visual clutter, such as oversized advertising signage that obscures heritage façades, makeshift structures, or materials incongruent with the historic context;

(ii) Optimizing micro-traffic organization, particularly enhancing pedestrian circulation and establishing continuous connections across public, semi-public, and private spatial layers;

(iii) Restoring transitional spatial elements such as verandas, narrow alleys, and steps-features that play a vital role in defining the identity of traditional urban structures.

These actions not only help to reveal and reinforce the formal structure of historical urban morphology but also reactivate spatial–social networks that were once vibrant. A truly sustainable heritage space is not one that merely preserves form, but one where present-day communities continue to live, move through, and interact with inherited spatial layers (Gehl, 2011; Orbasli, 2008).

3.2.3. Preserving Site-Specific Elements

One of the core aspects of architectural heritage conservation is maintaining the spatial connection to historical memory and local identity through the preservation of highly symbolic site-specific elements. These components often transcend their purely material value to become collective mnemonic symbols, embodying the "spirit of place" (genius loci)-a fundamental concept in landscape design (Schulz, 1980).

In Hoi An, elements such as the Ba Le Well, vernacular ancient wells, mature trees along the Hoai River, moss-covered tiled roofs, and iconic yellow walls are not merely physical entities-they carry profound symbolic significance deeply interwoven with local cultural life. Preserving these features helps retain the historical sediment embedded in the landscape and facilitates the development of cultural semiotics within urban design (Rossi, 1982).

The use of timeworn materials-such as reclaimed bricks, yin-yang tiles, laterite stone, and ironwood-not only aligns aesthetically with heritage architecture but also functions as a medium of temporal evocation, enhancing spatial emotion and contextual coherence (Orbasli, 2008). Rather than directly replicating or reconstructing historical forms, landscape design should focus on the symbolic transformation of cultural motifs. In this approach, elements like wood carvings, images of round basket boats, or Hoi An lanterns are abstracted and distilled into expressive design features. This strategy offers an evocative path for cultural transmission, enriching the historical depth of spatial experience (Smith, 2006).

More importantly, the preservation of site-specific elements is not solely for tourist consumption-it also serves as an urban memory system that enables local residents to maintain connections with their historical roots and reinforces their sense of belonging. Landscape design from this perspective should aim to create a dialogic space-one that mediates between tradition and contemporary life, where heritage values are meaningfully sustained in vivid, unforced, yet deeply resonant ways.

3.3. Development Strategies

3.3.1. Extending Life, Activating Use

Tangible heritage-especially architectural heritage-is not merely a static remnant of the past, but serves as the spatial foundation for the vibrant activities of contemporary communities. It is the use value-comprising function, everyday life, lived experience, and collective memory-that plays a critical role in ensuring the continued existence of heritage over time (Jokilehto, 2006). Preservation efforts that strip heritage of its vitality-separating it from communal life-risk rendering architecture into isolated shells, devoid of soul, and prone to "musealization", a one-dimensional form of conservation that has been widely criticized by scholars (Pendlebury, 2008; Smith, 2006).

In Hoi An, one of Vietnam's most prominent heritage cities, the continued use of traditional buildings is a key factor in sustainable preservation strategies. Many ancient houses remain in use as residences or sites of small-scale commerce; assembly halls continue to function as religious and communal centers; and cultural practices such as releasing flower lanterns on the Hoai River, night markets, and traditional crafts like lantern-making, silk-weaving, and tailoring ao dai all contribute to making the heritage "breathe" within contemporary life (Zhang et al., 2024). This ensures not only the material survival of heritage structures but also extends their social and cultural lifespans.

The concept of "living heritage" emphasizes the agency of the community in sustaining and adapting heritage within changing contexts. According to (Zhao et al., 2024), living heritage involves not only architectural preservation but also encompasses customs, ways of life, and how communities engage with space-all of which determine the vibrancy and regenerative capacity of heritage. Therefore, landscape design for heritage conservation should not merely recreate forms, but facilitate contemporary social activities grounded in historical values, particularly amid increasing tourism pressure in Hoi An.

Such activation must be carefully guided and regulated: preservation without prohibition, adaptation without loss of identity. Models of "living with heritage"-such as traditional homestays, cafés operating within heritage houses, or artisan workshops-should be supported through appropriate incentive policies. These initiatives must adhere to principles of sustainable design, respecting original materials, spatial proportions, and traditional patterns of use (Orbasli, 2008).

In this light, extending the life of heritage is not a superficial development strategy, but a test of conservation flexibility-a framework in which historical value, cultural continuity, and present-day social needs coexist and evolve in a harmonious, sustainable way.

3.3.2. Multifunctionality and Community Participation

In the contemporary context, a shift from static preservation to dynamic utilization has become a key trend in architectural heritage management. Heritage should no longer be viewed as passive artifacts for observation, but as integral parts of modern life-flexibly reprogrammed to meet the diverse and evolving needs of the community. In Hoi An, traditional heritage structures-originally designed for single uses such as housing or trade-now require adaptive restructuring to align with a society increasingly rich in cultural, recreational, and commercial demands (Carmona, 2019).

Urban spatial planning in heritage areas should incorporate interactive and multifunctional uses, such as handicraft shops, small cafés, traditional performance venues, hands-on craft classes, and children's play areas-carefully integrated to avoid harming heritage integrity. These functions serve both residents and tourists, while also reinvigorating the social fabric of the area, counteracting the "hollowing out" of communities-a common outcome in heritage cities experiencing rapid commercialization (Yung & Chan, 2011).

Furthermore, genuine community participation plays a crucial role in improving the effectiveness of heritage use and conservation. While heritage conservation has achieved broad social consensus, many projects still adopt a top-down approach, lacking dialogue and cooperation with local residents. This results in mismatched expectations and even resistance. As Smith emphasizes, heritage is not just about physical structures, but is a product of social practices; thus, conservation must be accompanied by open dialogue mechanisms that recognize community voices and ensure that residents are not merely "affected parties," but active co-creators of heritage spaces (Smith, 2006).

This approach requires that the design, planning, and operation of heritage spaces strike a balance between preserving architectural form and supporting contemporary life. In doing so, it lays the foundation for a sustainable, connected living environment capable of continuously regenerating cultural value (Hou, 2010; Logan, 2016).

4. Multigenerational Community Hub: Pocket Park Design in Hoi An

4.1. Project Overview

The Pocket Park project in Hoi An is conceived as a strategy to enhance the quality of public space within the city's historic fabric. Proposed for a small alley or leftover courtyard between heritage houses in Hoi An's Old Town (Quang Nam Province, Vietnam), this space lies amidst well-preserved heritage architecture and a mixed community of local residents and long-term dwellers-yet under pressure from modernization and tourism development.

The pocket park aims not only to increase green space but also to foster multigenerational social interaction, providing a local gathering place that is accessible and inviting. Key components include: (i) creating soft landscape features; (ii) restoring nearby heritage structures to maintain local character; and (iii) improving urban living conditions-from rainwater management to introducing microclimates in tight spaces.

Recent studies highlight pocket parks in dense urban settings as sustainable solutions that enhance neighborhood resilience, support public health, and strengthen social ties (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Nordh et al., 2011).

4.2. Site Analysis

The proposed site is surrounded by culturally significant heritage buildings-including traditional houses, village communal halls, and local shrines-representing the architectural styles of Hoi An from the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, due to the absence of a comprehensive planning framework and effective construction control, many narrow alleyways have become cluttered with unauthorized and haphazard structures. This results in spatial discontinuity and disrupts the integrity of the urban landscape and the legibility of local identity (Gehl, 2011).

Certain areas beyond the main streets have experienced severe degradation of infrastructure and landscape, particularly where regular maintenance has been lacking. High building density, coupled with the expansion of tourism-oriented businesses such as cafés, souvenir shops, and restaurants-while contributing to the local economy-has reduced actual public space available for residents. The lack of facilities for community use-such as play areas for children, relaxation spaces for the elderly, or communal gathering spots-has fueled the need for a compact and flexible green space catering to a wide range of users.

In this context, the pocket park functions not only as a micro-ecological space but also as a "community anchor" that fosters intergenerational connection-a dynamic that is increasingly eroded by the rapid urbanization of heritage cities like Hoi An (Peters et al., 2010). The project also presents an opportunity to pilot integrated design models that balance heritage conservation, sustainable development, and social well-being-core tenets of human-centered urban design theory.

4.3. Design Strategies

The renewal and retrofitting approach is grounded in architectural heritage conservation, while simultaneously activating spatial use. The design strategy includes: (1) Restoring adjacent heritage structures-such as ancient houses, vernacular wells, and old boundary walls-following conservation principles. These spaces will be activated as cultural hubs, exhibition areas, or resting spots, linking heritage with contemporary use; (2) Organizing internal pedestrian circulation to form a multigenerational, multifunctional shared space that welcomes both residents and visitors; (3) Preserving iconic vegetation and symbolic flora (e.g., bougainvillea trellises, areca palms, almond trees), and employing materials imbued with local memory (e.g., reclaimed bricks, yin-yang tiles, ironwood, laterite stone). This helps construct a shared green space enriched with diverse elements of community life.

4.3.1. Comprehensive Conservation and Inheritance

(1) Architectural Heritage Preservation

In the design of the Hoi An pocket park, preserving historically significant structures-such as ancient houses, vernacular wells, and old stone walls-is given top priority. These structures are not only tangible heritage assets but also cultural anchors that evoke local memory and reflect the area's historical development. An appropriate approach involves flexibly repurposing these elements into small exhibition spaces or cultural rest points to activate their usage (Jacobs, 1961; Pendlebury, 2008). Traditional crafts-such as lantern-making, Thanh Ha ceramics, or Kim Bong carpentry-can be showcased through static displays, interactive formats, or regular workshops. Transforming heritage from static objects into dynamic environments significantly enhances the park's social value and cultural identity (Choay, 2019).

(2) Preserving Lifestyles and Practices

The design applies the principle of tactical urbanism to maintain local ways of life and minimize spatial conflict with existing residents. This includes preserving familiar domestic features-such as front porches, steps, and ornamental plants-and subtly reorganizing pedestrian pathways to avoid disrupting existing spatial rhythms. Prioritizing community participation in the design process helps reduce friction and increases the acceptance of newly introduced spaces (Hou, 2010; Lydon et al., 2015).

(3) Maintaining Site Memory:

Physical elements like ancient banyan trees, moss-covered tiled roofs, and old wells serve as repositories of collective memory. Materials such as reclaimed bricks, laterite stone, yin-yang tiles, and ironwood are used not just for aesthetics but also as temporal carriers, enabling users to feel the historical continuity embedded in the place (Rossi,1982). This material–memory fusion helps cultivate a strong sense of place (genius loci)-a vital component of sustainable urban design.

4.3.2. Multifunctional, Intergenerational Sharing

The design of the Hoi An pocket park aims to create a spatial structure that accommodates a diverse range of users, with a special emphasis on intergenerational interaction within a community that coexists with living heritage. In traditional neighborhoods of Hoi An's Old Town-where multiple generations often live together in dense conditions-designing small-scale public spaces with integrated functions is a practical solution for

enhancing urban livability while preserving the rhythms of local community life (Francis et al., 2012; Mehta, 2014).

Proposed functions of the pocket park include: Small-scale commerce (e.g., tea stands, coffee kiosks, craft stalls), Cultural and artistic activities (e.g., painting or musical instrument exhibits, traditional workshops), and Community uses (e.g., reading areas, spaces for tai chi, children's play zones). This model goes beyond multifunctionality-it creates a micro-social convergence structure, where seniors can relax, children can play safely, and adults can engage in creative or commercial exchanges. As Buffel notes, designing intergenerational shared spaces is crucial for strengthening social cohesion and reducing urban isolation (Buffel et al., 2012).

The space is organized with compact walking paths and soft linkages between functional zones. Transition buffers-such as porches, bougainvillea trellises, or stone steps-create a fluid continuity instead of rigid separations. The use of local materials and native vegetation enhances both cultural identity and ecological familiarity. (Gehl, 2011) underscores the importance of "soft spatial edges" in stimulating spontaneous social behaviors.

In summary, the pocket park is not merely a supplementary green space-it functions as a nexus of generational and functional interaction, forming a small-scale but socially resonant infrastructure for sustainable community life.

4.3.3. Restructuring and Reinterpreting Place

In the design of the Hoi An pocket park, spatial restructuring extends beyond the preservation of architectural forms-it becomes a process of reinterpretation, recontextualizing the meaning of place within the contemporary setting. Rather than replicating heritage elements in pursuit of a "false harmony," the design prioritizes authenticity and integrity by placing the new alongside the old with respect and subtlety (Richmond & Bracker, 2009). This approach aligns with progressive conservation thinking, which views heritage as a living part of the city, capable of adapting to and engaging with the present (Pendlebury, 2008).

The design incorporates modern elements-such as minimalist stone benches, stylized lanterns made from new materials, and lightweight metal canopies-not to disrupt the space, but to create intentional contrast that highlights and celebrates the existing heritage. This "dialogic design" strategy encourages users to recognize and reflect upon the value of the old through its relationship with the new (Choay, 2019). Crucially, the analysis and reinterpretation of local elements-including materials, spatial proportions, and community use patterns-helps avoid rigid formal imitation, allowing for flexibility in function and architectural form, a foundational principle in modern landscape urbanism (Carmona, 2019).

More importantly, blending traditional and contemporary design is not merely an aesthetic gesture; it reflects a serious cultural stance-eschewing the theatricalization of history and instead fostering authentic, everyday engagement with heritage.

4.4. Implementation Outcomes

The pocket park in Hoi An represents not just a new public space, but a tangible manifestation of urban regeneration strategies rooted in heritage conservation-a direction increasingly recommended by urban and cultural experts amidst mounting pressures of modernization on historic districts (Carmona, 2019; Pendlebury, 2008). In this project, heritage structures-such as ancient houses, wells, and mossy walls-are not isolated as static relics but are reintegrated into use, serving as cultural symbols and anchors within the park. This activation of heritage breathes new life into the site, making it both meaningful and practically valuable.

The park is organized around three key objectives: (i) to serve local residents as a space for relaxation, gentle exercise, and community interaction; (ii) to offer visitors authentic, uncontrived experiences of Hoi An's culture; không gượng ép; (iii) and to maintain the continuity of local memory through daily interactions between people, space, and heritage. The landscape's vibrancy across different times of day-from early morning to dusk, from light rain to lantern-lit nights-embodies the spirit of a culturally rich, flexible public space (Gehl, 2011).

Unlike exclusionary interventions that either "musealize" heritage or erase it in the name of redevelopment, the Hoi An pocket park adopts a middle-ground, adaptive approach-preserving original values while transforming space to meet present needs. This aligns with the concept of "living heritage," where heritage is sustained through active integration into contemporary community life (Taylor, 2004).

Through this strategy, the pocket park not only relieves spatial and density pressures in the old town, but also functions as a cultural intermediary-a space for public education, intergenerational exchange, and the meaningful transmission of historical values, all in a natural and engaging manner.

4.5. Future Research Directions

The implementation of the pocket park model in Hoi An as a community landscape design strategy grounded in architectural heritage conservation has not only introduced a flexible planning approach for historic urban spaces, but also laid the foundation for a range of interdisciplinary research questions to be explored in the post-intervention phase. To comprehensively evaluate the impact of this model, future research should address the following key directions:

(1) Evaluating Post-Intervention Socio-Cultural Impact

A central question is whether public spaces designed with a conservation mindset actually enhance usability and attachment among local residents, or merely cater to tourist experiences. Qualitative methods-such as in-depth interviews, user behavior diaries, and spatial memory analysis-will be crucial for assessing community receptiveness and the capacity for micro-social networks to recover from the disruptions of rapid urbanization (Manzo & Perkins, 2006).

(2) Quantifying Spatial Use and Interaction Indicators

Building on the success of tactical urbanism strategies, future studies should establish a system of quantitative indicators to measure the spatial performance of the intervention. Metrics such as frequency of use by age group, time of day, purpose, levels of intergenerational overlap, and density of social interaction across different functional zones of the park will provide critical data for refining design models (Francis et al., 2012; Gehl, 2011).

(3) Assessing Impact on Identity and Place Recognition

A more nuanced yet essential area of study concerns whether newly introduced design elements-particularly modern components embedded within the heritage context-erode or reinforce local identity. Tools such as mental mapping, spatial semiotic analysis, and studies on cultural-symbolic attachment (e.g., to old wells, moss-covered roofs, native flora) could be applied to assess the degree of symbolic resonance between old and new. This would help evaluate the effectiveness of the "dialogic design" approach (Choay, 2019; Schulz, 1980).

(4) Heritage Tourism and Visitor Behavior Analysis

Another promising direction is examining visitor behavior in spaces activated through the living heritage model. By integrating GPS tracking, structured questionnaires, and GIS-based spatial data analysis, research can investigate how the point–line–plane structure of the park influences exploration patterns, heritage value perception, and visitor dwell time. These insights could guide adaptive design or visitor flow management strategies to alleviate pressure on traditional tourist hotspots (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

(5) Scaling the Model to Other Heritage Cities

Finally, the model's scalability and adaptability to other heritage-rich urban settings-such as Hue, Da Lat, Hanoi's 36 Old Streets, or Chinatowns in Ho Chi Minh City-requires in-depth comparative analysis. Studies of social structure, urban density, planning interventions, and local regulatory frameworks will inform the development of a flexible guideline for applying "community space design linked to heritage conservation" in context-specific ways.

5. Community-Driven Heritage Neighborhood: Landscape Renewal of Hoi An Old Town

5.1. Project Overview

Hoi An Old Town, located in the center of Hoi An City, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, is a historic urban space recognized as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site since 1999. This area is renowned for the remarkably intact preservation of hundreds of traditional architectural structures-ancient houses, communal halls, temples, and assembly halls-which serve as living evidence of a thriving port city from the 16th to 19th centuries. Beyond embodying the aesthetics and building techniques of local craftsmanship, the Old Town represents a confluence of Eastern and Western cultures, creating a unique identity with immense historical and cultural research value-especially relevant in today's context of globalization.

5.2. Site Analysis

Located at the heart of Hoi An City, the Old Town is a historic urban ensemble featuring a network of pedestrian streets and traditional wooden architecture, including temples, shrines, and communal spaces-an urban fabric officially recognized by UNESCO. Despite notable achievements in heritage preservation and tourism promotion, the area is also facing significant challenges related to spatial management, tourism development, and the preservation of local community life.

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On a positive note, most registered heritage structures have retained their original form, structural integrity, and materials. The continued presence of local residents and traditional trades-such as lantern-making, silk weaving, and woodcraft-has sustained the "living spirit" of the heritage site, preventing Hoi An from turning into a mere museum (Taylor, 2004). However, without a sustainable intervention strategy and a community-centered planning framework, the threat of "hollowing out"-where locals are forced to leave due to rising living costs and tourism pressures-remains a serious concern (Yung & Chan, 2011).

5.3. Design strategies

5.3.1. Interwoven Spatial Structure

Given the complexity of the site and the special conservation requirements of a World Heritage historic urban landscape, the landscape design adopts a "spatial patchwork" approach to restore and reinterpret the area. The first step involves surveying, planning, and reorganizing small-scale or incongruent structures and architectural details. Through selective removal and refinement, the design aims to gradually reveal the original spatial structure of the area.

Building on this foundation, the plan continues with recomposing the spatial layout and optimizing its form by: (1) Aligning with surrounding community conditions, rationally organizing alley entrances, creating a main pedestrian axis through the site, and establishing shared spaces at entry points and key intersections (e.g., restored public wells or small courtyards between housing clusters); (2) Designating spatial nodes at intersections of primary and secondary pathways and at dead ends (e.g., communal courtyards, traditional mini-markets); (3) Interweaving "gray spaces"-transitional zones such as verandas and narrow passages-between buildings, and between structures and the street. By integrating points, lines, and planes, the design establishes a clear, multi-layered pedestrian network and an active sequence of spatial experiences, encouraging community interaction and offering diverse visitor experiences. The renewed spatial structure takes the restored ancient street grid as its spine, connecting open public spaces with semi-private environments, forming an interwoven "point–line–plane" spatial composition.

(1) "Points" – Semi-Private Commercial and Garden Spaces. Semi-private commercial points are integrated into architectural spaces, such as lantern shops, small family-run eateries, or artisan workshops. These retain a sense of place and local identity while using new materials and construction techniques in a subtle, non-mimetic manner, creating a multistyle commercial atmosphere and serving as visual highlights within the landscape.

(1) "Points" – Semi-private garden spaces are enclosed by greenery (e.g., bougainvillea, iconic Hoi An ornamental trees) and defined through simple decor (lanterns, water jars, small sculptures), ensuring visual boundaries and providing comfortable zones for social interaction.

(2) "Lines" – Ancient Street Network. The redesigned spatial structure features a clearly defined grid, using the restored ancient streets as the backbone to link architectural heritage elements. This results in an interconnected "line" structure optimized for pedestrian access and functioning as the main axis for cultural and tourism activities.

(3) “Planes” – Open Public Spaces. Open public planes are concentrated at entryways and central areas (e.g., the small plaza near the Japanese Covered Bridge, the Hoai River quay, or voids reclaimed from the removal of unauthorized structures). These provide new public faces along narrow streets and serve as venues for gathering and a wide range of community and visitor activities.

(1) "Point" – Shopfronts as semi-private commercial spaces.

(2) "Line" – Architectural structures that define spatial corridors.

(3) "Plane" – Squares as open public spaces.

Figure 2. The spatial structure of "point", "line", and "plane" in practice. (Source: Mai Thanh Chuong (2025), The Architectural Heritage of the Ancient Urban Area of Hoi An)

5.3.2. The Collision Between Old and New

The project preserves the layout and spatial structure of the historic area while ensuring a balanced mix of functions following the renewal. Landscape renovation begins with the careful treatment of form, materials, and color to create harmony and dialogue between modern design language and historical architecture. The intent is to accentuate the distinct characteristics of both old and new, co-creating a shared space that is open yet quiet, dynamic yet contemplative, imbued with life and artistic expression. (1) Form-The design retains valuable architectural elements, such as heritage buildings, mature trees, boundary walls, and historically significant gates-preserving the memory of place. Newly introduced landscape structures are kept simple and contemporary, utilizing restructured shapes and human-scaled proportions to highlight the emerging sense of shared community space. (2) Color-Landscape features and decorative elements may employ bright and uplifting colors to generate a gentle contrast with the iconic golden hue of Hoi An’s heritage architecture. This color tension, handled with sensitivity, helps revitalize the streetscape, making it visually engaging while maintaining harmony. (3) Materials-Material choices are carefully curated to create temporal layering and spatial continuity. Surfaces incorporate materials that evoke a sense of time, such as reclaimed bricks, laterite stone, paving stones, and ceramics-especially Thanh Ha pottery-to extend the architectural rhythm into the landscape. Decorative elements, by contrast, use modern materials such as transparent glass (for canopies), thin metal sheets (for stylized lantern frames), and recycled materials, introducing deliberate contrasts with the old structures. These contrasts are handled with subtlety, honoring the presence of historical architecture and traditional character without overwhelming them.

Figure 3. Illustration of the harmonization of form, materials, and color in new constructions within the Hoi An Ancient Town (Source: Ngọc Anh (2021), Advertising Vietnam.)

5.3.3. Cultural Function Resonance

The renewal design responds to the spatial narrative of Hoi An Old Town, creating new public spaces within its narrow alleys that accommodate the recreational, commercial, touristic, and social needs of diverse user groups throughout the day. These become distinctive community interaction venues. The historical and cultural memories embedded in old alleyways and architectural structures are preserved and reawakened through the artful depiction of landscape details. With a fresh appearance, these transformed areas evolve into emotionally resonant, humanistic spaces with a unique cultural character.

The design also activates previously underutilized or "negative" spaces across the site: (1) Narrow alleys are optimized by reconfiguring space along their edges-incorporating local cultural slogans, commercial logos, and leftover greenery to install artistic seating. This gives these tight spaces both function and new cultural imagery, redefining their use. (2) The main entrance to the landscape area is framed by symbolic water features and sculptures (e.g., ceramic statues, artistic lanterns), combined with lighting and fog systems where appropriate. This space serves as a central exhibition node, drawing visitor attention and marking the entry experience with cultural expression. (3) Open public squares within the site are reactivated to host diverse events. By reserving flexible gathering areas and designing a series of auxiliary spaces for performances and rest, these squares become versatile venues for commerce, culture, and community eventssupporting dense public activity and shared experience.

Figure 4. Arrangement of symbolic imagery to create an exhibition space for the area (Source: Google Maps (2025))

Figure 5. Hoai River Square – An open space designed for public gatherings and community events. (Source: Viet Duc (2022), Vietnam Pictorial)

The detailed landscape design emphasizes the use of traditional materials and the integration of cultural symbols. To ensure coherence with the architectural character of the historic district, materials such as reclaimed bricks, laterite stone, and ceramics are used for paving. Iconic local elements like lanterns, brick relief motifs, and Hoi An's familiar ornamental plants are also incorporated to reinforce a culturally consistent and historically grounded style.

5.4. Implementation Outcomes

The renovation project of Hoi An Old Town has adhered from the outset to the principle of "respecting local residents' aspirations and encouraging broad community participation." Throughout its development, the project has gradually shaped a renewal approach centered on "community activation, heritage revitalization, multifunctionality, and landscape renewal."

The renovation of the Old Town successfully achieves the integrated objectives of "defined conservation + innovation + upgrading." As a community-level open neighborhood, the post-renovation landscape space of Hoi An is layered, flexibly scaled, and blends dynamic and tranquil functions in a complementary manner. The landscape transformation has authentically and integrally preserved the historical urban landscape, while creatively restructuring the spirit of Hoi An through inventive design interventions. Commercial activities in the area have largely undergone controlled and sustainable investment attraction, and local residents-whether resettled or continuing to live in the area-have returned to daily life in newly renovated ancestral homes, maintaining traditional lifestyles and rhythms. The distinctive architectural character of Hoi An has continued to draw both residents and visitors, transforming the area into a vibrant communal hub that fosters public participation and cultural exchange, while further activating the vitality of the historic city.

5.5. Future Research Directions: Post-Intervention Evaluation

The renovation and spatial restructuring of the Hoi An Old Town landscape represents a strategic effort to simultaneously preserve heritage value and revitalize community life. However, to ensure that conservation–development objectives are realized in a sustainable and scalable manner, it is essential to conduct post-intervention studies that are multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary, and longitudinal. The following research pathways are critical in building a scientific foundation for model replication, policy evaluation, and adaptive responses to socio-environmental and cultural dynamics in heritage cities.

(1) Assessing Community Recovery and Identity Continuity

One key research direction involves analyzing the extent to which local residents return to original spaces and re-engage in traditional cultural practices post-intervention. Using qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews, place-memory recall, and community diaries, researchers can evaluate usability, satisfaction, and cultural identity retention from the perspective of the residents themselves. The focus is not merely on usage

data, but on the quality of relationships between people and renewed space-a fundamental aspect of the "living heritage" concept (Smith, 2006; Taylor, 2004).

(2) Measuring the Socio-Spatial Impact of the "Point–Line–Plane" Structure

The spatial restructuring model's interwoven point–line–plane system provides a framework to study how spatial organization influences user behavior, interaction levels, and spatial perception. Mixed-methods research may apply tools such as GPS tracking, focus group interviews, and cognitive mapping to explore how spatial structure aligns with patterns of social engagement in the post-renovation urban fabric (Gehl, 2011; Carmona, 2019).

(3) Evaluating the Aesthetic and Perceptual Effects of Design Innovation

When modern design language is introduced alongside historic architectural heritage, a central question emerges: does this dialogue reinforce or disrupt the perceived value of heritage? Surveys of different user groups (residents, tourists, experts) will help assess acceptance levels and emotional responses to "dialogic design"-a method already in use but in need of empirical validation (Choay, 2019; Pendlebury, 2008).

(4) Analyzing Socioeconomic Impact and the Viability of Small-Scale Commercial Models

Small-scale commercial functions-such as craft workshops, coffee stalls, and family-run lantern shops-designed as "points" within the intervention are meant to stimulate the local economy. Research is needed to evaluate operational efficiency, income levels, self-sufficiency, and the distribution of benefits among residents, local authorities, and private actors. This analysis will clarify the sustainability and replicability of micro-economic ecosystems embedded within heritage zones.

(5) Evaluating Environmental Performance and Green Infrastructure Contribution

Beyond its cultural and historical value, the project functions as a community green infrastructure in a densely built heritage area. Future studies may employ microclimate monitoring (temperature, humidity, air quality), assessments of native biodiversity, or examine the environmental role of indigenous vegetation in heat mitigation, shade creation, and noise reduction. This would reinforce the view that heritage landscapes are not only aesthetic but also ecologically vital components of historic cities (Beatley, 2016).

(6) Developing a Planning Toolkit for Comparable Heritage Contexts

Finally, insights from both the intervention and its evaluation can inform the creation of a toolkit for landscape retrofitting in similar heritage zones-such as Hue, Hanoi's 36 Streets, Da Lat, or Chinatown districts in Ho Chi Minh City. These toolkits should include design principles, community consultation protocols, evaluation frameworks, and legal support mechanisms-paving the way for institutionalizing community landscape models integrated with architectural heritage conservation.

6. Conclusion

The pocket park projects in Hoi An and the renovation of Hoi An Old Town are two exemplary cases of community landscape design approaches rooted in the conservation of architectural heritage. The pocket park focuses on preserving small-scale heritage structures, integrating public service functions to create multifunctional spaces. In contrast, the Old Town renewal aims to revitalize the historical neighborhood by activating the use of heritage assets, transforming the area into a distinctive community-oriented commercial district while sustaining local life. Despite differing in scale and scope, both cases apply authentic and integrated conservation and renewal strategies, preserving the memory of place-such as historic architecture and ancient trees-and activating use to foster diverse functions, spatial vibrancy, and community development.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that community landscape design and architectural heritage conservation can no longer be separated from public participation. As an organic part of the community, landscape design must stem from local needs and be goal-oriented. Likewise, heritage conservation must respect residents' aspirations. Sustainable use and development can only be achieved by considering the continuity of local life and empowering communities to take part in decision-making processes.

The traditional "demolish and rebuild" approach disrupts not only historic structures but also severs social continuity, erasing diverse community values embedded in physical space. On the other hand, the opposite extreme-"static preservation"-risks disconnecting heritage from the public, stifling its vitality. Conserving architectural heritage requires attention to authenticity, integrity, and the continuity of everyday life, alongside public engagement and use activation strategies. Landscape design from a heritage conservation perspective

must respect historical authenticity, retain memory, accommodate diverse functions, and regenerate the spirit of place. This is key to achieving sustainable development, particularly for a living heritage city like Hoi An.

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