

**PROGRAMME LEAD:** University of Cuenca - Ecuador  
**TIMELINE:** March 2014 - ongoing  
**APPLICATION:** Historic city centre of Cuenca and surrounds  
**FUNDING:** Dirección de Investigación de la Universidad de Cuenca (DIUC), Facultad de Arquitectura de la Universidad de Cuenca (FAUC), Netherlands Funds-in-Trust (World Heritage Centre)  
**PROGRAMME PARTNERS:** Municipality of Cuenca; WHITRAP  
**PROFILE:** Population 505,585 (2010)  
**KEY CHALLENGES:** Extreme urban development; socioeconomic changes (gentrification); emigration and immigration; heritage buildings threatened; tourism; modern heritage abandoned in El Ejido; real estate investment; mobility and traffic; and proliferation of poor contemporary architecture

# Cuenca

E C U A D O R

*The text shown is part an abstract of the Research Project titled Reassessment of the Cultural and Natural Heritage of the city of Cuenca from the strategies of sustainable development supported in the figure of the Historic Urban Landscape (PUH\_C).*

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HUL APPROACH IN THE CITY OF CUENCA, ECUADOR

**The historic center of Cuenca was included in the World Heritage List in 1999 on the basis of criteria II, IV and V which are linked with inland Spanish urban planning, landscape and fusion of cultures.**

### 1. Layers of the site

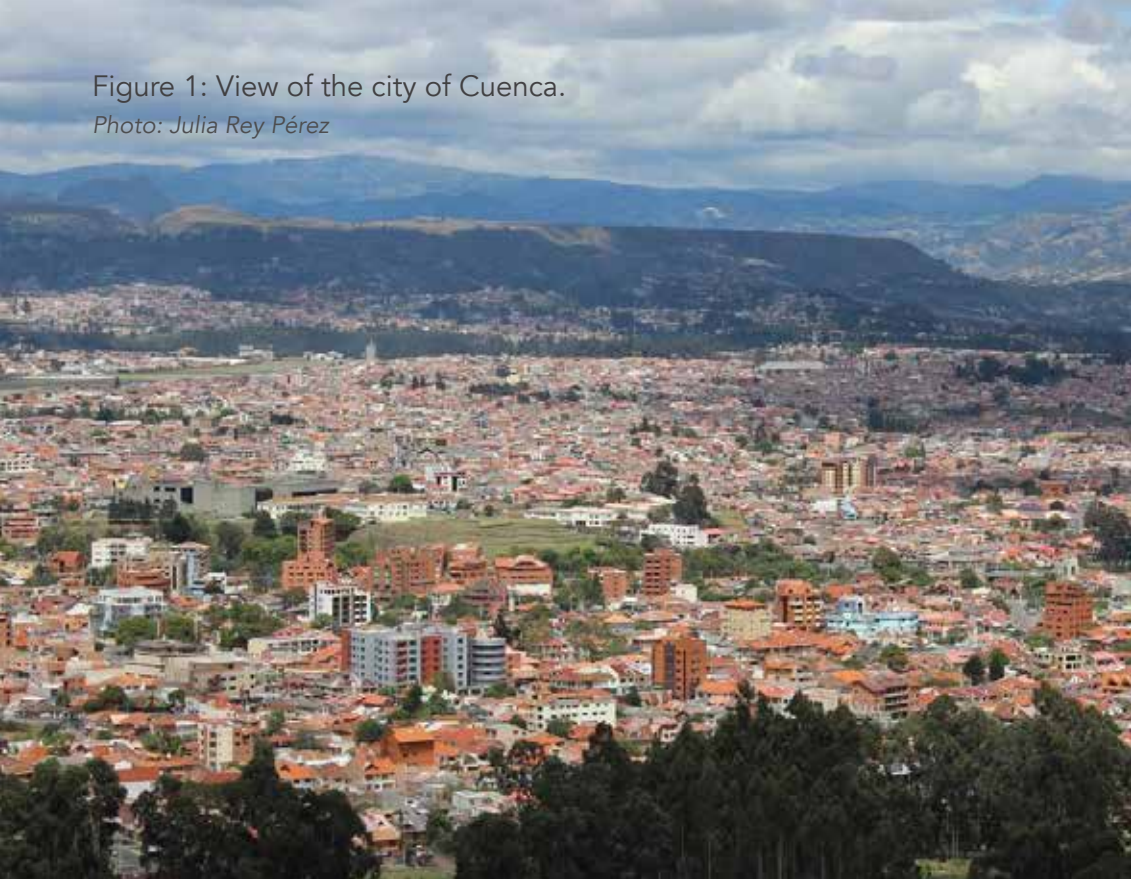
The material values of Cuenca are the result of a combination of historic, natural and social processes. The location of Cuenca in a valley, surrounded by hills and crossed by four rivers, has shaped the city together with its plains and hills. Some of these hills are sacred places and viewpoints used by the ancient inhabitants of the territory. The banks of the rivers have been converted into green linear parks. This information provides an understanding of the archaeological, geomorphological and environmental layers. Overlapping layers of urban development and territorial articulation, show the periods of growth of the city, revealing the grid pattern corresponding to *Indian Law*, together with an eclectic mix of different typologies of heritage buildings. In most cases the heritage value of these buildings resides in its overall value rather than artistic or typological values.

### 2. Background

The nomination of the World Cultural Heritage Site highlights the relationship between the historic centre of Cuenca and the city's intangible and social components. The successful fusion of different societies and cultures of Latin America is symbolised in a striking manner by the layout and townscape of Cuenca. However, during the last decade, this balance has been changing because of the impact of the economic activities that tourism is generating. Trade is an important traditional activity in Cuenca, clearly visible in the Municipal Markets of the historical centre. In addition, an important informal food, arts, craft and clothes market has been developed on the streets together with Municipal Markets. Indigenous people with their traditional dress are the main players in these activities.

Figure 1: View of the city of Cuenca.

Photo: Julia Rey Pérez



On the one hand, they embody the intangible heritage of Cuenca, and on the other, they are the main attraction for tourists. Areas like Simón Bolívar and Mariscal Lamar Street, the Mercado 10 de agosto and Mercado 9 de octubre, San Francisco, Flowers or Rotary Square are the concentrated areas of economic activity in Cuenca (intangible assets).

Strengthening of tourism in Cuenca has caused a diversification of the population, not only visitors to the city, but also citizens. The arrival of foreign retirees has improved the economy, but it has also increased the price of housing, rent, medical care and restaurants, generating the displacement of the local population and impacting their identity. Other intangible elements of HUL in Cuenca are festive, ceremonial events including religious events, gastronomy, handcrafts and indigenous rituals. The multi-functionality of its historic centre generates layers from anthropology and economics as intangible assets belonging to the immaterial heritage. And finally, the information obtained from pictures of Cuenca and those provided by the community about their personal heritage assessment of the city's landscape. is the most important information layer to work in the memory and identity of Cuenca's people.

### 3. Management of change

Due to the complexity of heritage understanding in the urban area, it has been considered necessary to build an interdisciplinary research team, including experts in environment, economy, anthropology, archaeology, geology, architecture and sociology. The phases include: a) Phase 1: Studies are focused on knowing very specific aspects of the city of Cuenca and its context. In this phase sixteen citizen workshops were very important to identify less obvious heritage values for researchers. Also, at a *Visionary Conference* event developed in May 2015, was an exchange about HUL experiences between the cities of Edinburgh, Zanzibar, Ballarat and Cuenca.



#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Participatory citizen workshops; cultural mapping from different disciplines



#### KNOWLEDGE AND PLANNING TOOLS

Detailed and contextual studies; conferences; fact sheets; federated data; recommendations; and database



#### REGULATORY TOOLS

Degrees of protection; Manual of Good Practices



#### FINANCIAL TOOLS

Funding

At this event, cities were able to identify the landscape quality objectives of Cuenca from the view of citizens, University of Cuenca researchers and technicians from the Municipality. b) Phase 2: Identification of Landscape Units based on the information learnt by cultural mapping. The objective was to study the characteristics that define each subzone and it allowed the research team to establish degrees of protection and to manage activities and uses. c) Phase 3: Elaboration of a landscape unit fact sheet and assessment. In this phase, all the information gathered is put in a model sheet where cultural values, heritage resources, recommendations and necessities of each landscape unit is identified. This information enabled the research team to define the intervention criteria and the landscape quality objectives which shape the Action Proposal of a Visionary Strategic Plan. This plan is used to manage the evolution of Cuenca, not only for the city centre, but also for the rest of the city.

#### 4. Perspectives and results

One of the most important results of the research project PUH\_C has been the Agreement signed in 2015 between the Municipality of Cuenca, the University and WHITRAP. The main objective of this agreement is joint research about the HUL approach in Cuenca. Thanks to this agreement it was possible to develop the *Visionary Conference* event with the objective of raising awareness about the diverse and complex heritage values of Cuenca. The research team is managing an addendum to the Agreement to embed cooperation and information gathered from the research Project PUH\_C The Protection Plan of the Historic Center of Cuenca. Finally, other results like papers, participation in international conferences and the publication of part of the project has been achieved thanks to Netherlands Funds-in-Trust at the World Heritage Centre for 2017.

Figure 3:  
Overlapping  
layers of  
information.

Source:  
PUH\_C  
Research  
Project  
Team

