
Urban landscape regions and conservation: new approaches and problems in Antequera, Málaga Province, Spain

Michael Barke

Division of Geography, University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 8ST, UK. E-mail: michael.barke@unn.ac.uk

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Abstract. *This paper describes the approach taken in attempting to deal with the problems of urban conservation in the Andalusian town of Antequera. The methodology adopted in formulating a Special Plan bears a close resemblance to that advocated by M.R.G. Conzen in identifying distinctive spatial units as the starting point for the future management of the townscape, based on plan elements, building types and land use. However, amongst the problems that will be encountered in implementing the Plan are the intense pressure for retail change in central but historic areas, the modernization of traditional housing in residential areas and, in the absence of a significant tourist industry, the limited perceived value of the townscape as a resource in itself.*

Key Words: urban landscape regions, urban conservation, Special Plan, townscape management, modernization, Antequera (Spain)

Although there is a widespread consensus in favour of the conservation of historic townscapes, there remains considerable uncertainty over the means by which effective conservation policies may be achieved. Scholars working in the urban morphological tradition have long promoted an approach to urban conservation and townscape management that recognizes the identification of morphological regions as an essential first step in order that the future management of the townscape is powerfully informed by its historical development. Interestingly enough, policy-makers in the United Kingdom have recently shown enthusiasm for the recognition of character areas within British towns as a means of

informing planning policy (Morton, 2002), perhaps reflecting the increasing dissatisfaction with conservation area policy as it has been experienced since the later 1960s (Mageean, 1998). From very different perspectives, therefore, and developing over different time periods, there is an emerging view that the fundamentally geographical task of identifying urban landscape regions forms the basis of any effective management policy. This paper demonstrates the increasingly international complexion of this view by providing an account of the adoption of a similar strategy in the town of Antequera, in southern Spain.

Whilst considerable attention has been given to the study of urban form and the

problems of conservation in several of the larger cities of Spain (Ford, 1985; Cabo Alonso, 1981; Ayuntamiento de Toldeo, 1994; Vilagrassa Ibarz, 1998), rather less consideration has been granted to smaller urban centres. Although the pressures for development and consequent changes to urban structures have, until relatively recently, been felt more powerfully in the former, they are far from absent in the latter. In their core areas, many smaller towns have also been relatively freer from earlier generations of change and, in some senses, therefore present a more complete record of past townscapes and morphological influences. Such locations therefore deserve equal recognition and protection as their more famous counterparts at higher levels of the urban hierarchy. However, it is often the case that, within a historic urban structure with distinctive and distinguished characteristics, there lives a substantial residential population. Although this may present considerable opportunities in the sense that, in some cases, new uses for older buildings may be easier to find, some of the other problems of urban conservation are compounded by the presence of residents who require modern services and facilities. Inevitably, such a situation gives rise to significant tensions and their deleterious consequences have been noted by Vilagrassa (1992) for the whole of Spain: 'there has been a failure to ensure continuity between the existing urban landscape and new development proposals' (Vilagrassa, 1992, p. 293). This failure has often led to bizarre juxtapositions of building styles and buildings of different quality on adjacent sites.

This paper presents a brief account of the approach and methodology taken in one recent attempt to protect and enhance the morphological inheritance in the medium-sized town of Antequera (population estimated at 40 816 for the entire municipality in 2001), in Málaga province, Andalucía. Although earlier legislation existed, the urban planning system in Spain is essentially that introduced in the *Ley del Suelo* of 1976 with subsequent modification

in 1992, the latter being particularly concerned with the relationship between the different tiers of government (Keyes *et al.*, 1993). This legislation requires that municipalities with a population of over 10 000 produce a *Plan General*, in effect a land-use plan for the entire urban area. However, in addition *Planes Especiales* (Special Plans) may be produced to manage specific issues such as large infrastructure projects and large-scale conservation (Estévez, 2001). It is the latter Special Plan for Antequera with which we are concerned (Junta de Andalucía, 1995).

The case of Antequera is particularly interesting for students of morphological change, conservation and planning, as it is an excellent representative of a new approach to urban conservation within the Spanish context. As elsewhere (Larkham, 1996), conservation in Spain in the past was largely interpreted as being primarily concerned with the preservation of 'monuments', leading to an overemphasis on single buildings and, sometimes, a rather arbitrary selection of protected elements within historic urban structures. A broader view of urban conservation (Conzen, 1966; 1975) has also been handicapped in the past because the Spanish planning tradition has rarely concerned itself with aesthetic standards and has been more concerned with the 'technical' and quantitative issues of single, individual proposals, for example building heights and plot dimensions (Vilagrassa, 1992). Therefore, whilst there are notable publications promoting conservation in relatively small towns – for example, Miró (1987) on Ronda, Molina Hipolito (1982) on Baeza and Moreno Mendoza (1979) on Ubeda – in all of these the emphasis is on individual buildings of distinction. The concept of group value and therefore the notion of applying conservation principles to whole townscapes is encountered much less frequently. The Special Plan for Antequera appears to offer a very different approach.

After a description of this Special Plan and its approach this paper provides an assessment of the current and future pressures

for townscape change which emanate specifically from the processes of commercial change and modernization that have recently been felt throughout contemporary Spain (Barke and Morphet, 1994). This is based mainly on the results of a detailed street-by-street survey of retail change within Antequera, conducted in the early 1990s. The survey sought to establish some of the main physical characteristics associated with retail modernization and, thereby, their implications for townscape change. The main point here is that, whilst there is the usual conflict between conservation and the provision of modern services within a historic core, this conflict is exacerbated in the case of Antequera and similar towns because of the extensive nature of a very high quality townscape of considerable antiquity (Junta de Andalucía, 1995). But, until recently, in all but the larger cities of Spain, 'modern' retail facilities have been relatively scarce. The paper concludes with a consideration of some further problems relating to townscape change that are arising as this comprehensive conservation strategy is being implemented.

The Special Plan for Antequera

Initially an important Roman and then Islamic settlement, Antequera expanded west from its original hill-top site from the late-sixteenth century onwards. At this time the town emerged as an important religious and cultural centre. Many fine churches (at least thirty), palaces, and other religious institutions such as convents were built right up to the late Baroque period (Parejo Barranco, 1985), 'turning the place into what is today one of the architectural showpieces of Andalusia. The town continued to prosper throughout the nineteenth century, but thereafter went into a sharp decline, from which it has been rescued only in recent years' (Jacobs, 1990, p. 244). These factors led to the development of, and subsequent limited change in, a distinctive built environment and townscape.

However, a central part of the diagnosis for Antequera's Special Plan was not simply

to identify individual buildings of specific character or which faced specific threats but, for the whole of the town, to define areas of homogeneous character using, essentially, a morphological framework of analysis. Although differing in detail, the identification of the homogeneous areas has considerable resonance with Conzenian ideas on the recognition of unitary areas (Conzen, 1975; 1988). The Plan then assessed the characteristics and condition of each homogeneous area, defined the main objectives for each area and then proposed the specific interventions necessary to reach these objectives. In other words, what was envisaged was a process of townscape management. But, significantly for scholars of urban morphology and conservation, the intended future management of the urban landscape as envisaged by the Plan is to be firmly based on its historical development, a fundamental tenet of the Conzenian approach to urban conservation (Whitehand, 2001). In total, 22 areas of varying size and character were defined within the historic nucleus of Antequera (Figure 1), an area within which just under 30 000 residents live.

Two broad sets of criteria were used in defining the homogeneous areas, first a range of morphological criteria and secondly, functional criteria. The former included the size and shape of building plots, the stage of historical development of the town plan, the architectural style of the buildings, the quality of the buildings, their state of conservation and, interestingly in the present context, the degree of transformation and change from the original structure. Six functional types of area were recognized: residential with commercial use and local services; residential with city-wide services; institutional and city and regional services; residential with institutional and city and regional services; areas of tourist interest and residential; and finally, industrial use. The recurrence of residential functions in juxtaposition with other categories relates, of course, to the Spanish tradition of retaining a significant proportion of residential land use in city centres (Vilagrassa, 1992). These two groups

apparent than it would be in the Conzenian methodology and the notion of a hierarchy of divisions is not formally recognized, nor is the principle of morphogenetic priority (Conzen, 1988). The homogeneous areas have been differentiated from each other primarily on the basis of the presence or absence of particular features. However, it is of considerable interest that, with the objective of active townscape management, morphological criteria were given equal status in this process with functional criteria. This, of course, reflects a basic tenet of the Conzenian approach to urban conservation (Conzen, 1966, 1975) that morphological research can make a major contribution to conservation theory and practice and is, in fact, a starting point for the management of urban landscapes in the future (Whitehand, 1992), a view that finally appears to be gaining widespread support (see, for example, Mageean, 1998).

Figure 1 shows the areas defined and the street layout of the study area. As part of the plan for townscape management, detailed provisions for the active restoration and restitution of buildings and their elements have been made. Demolition and strictly controlled new building in specific designated locations will also be permitted. As a result of the diagnosis carried out, a large number of individual buildings were designated as worthy of particular protection. These were in addition to a number that had already been identified as being of national importance, had been catalogued by the Administracion del Patrimonio Histórico, and had become eligible for heritage funding (Orbañal, 2000). Three categories of protection were designated with particular recommendation that there should be no loss of original architectural features.

The first category includes monuments of civil architecture, religious buildings, and military buildings: they should be totally protected, the only developments allowed being those that are necessary for restoration. The second category includes buildings, groups of buildings, and spaces that have been identified as being of particular interest

but where there is pressure for change through transformation, change of use or enlargement. The third category concerns buildings that possess some specific elements of historical and architectural interest, such as hallways, patios and stairways. In keeping with the 'total townscape' approach, for the first two categories, buildings in their immediate vicinity are also protected. However, as already noted, the intention of the Plan is to promote active management of the townscape of the historic core and, to that end, 48 locations, mainly groups of buildings and public spaces, were identified for positive intervention. This could include landscaping, rehabilitation of exteriors and interiors, improving access and vistas, and restricting traffic and parking. Although offering no acknowledgement to Conzenian ideas on historic townscape management, there is an unmistakable similarity between these and the philosophy enshrined in Antequera's Special Plan (Junta de Andalucía, 1995). The historicity of the townscape is the essential starting point and the identification of townscape units supplies the framework for both identifying variations in the intensity of that historicity and the appropriateness of specific interventions in the townscape (Conzen, 1975).

However, whilst the level of detail and the ambitious extent of Antequera's Special Plan are worthy of admiration, it must be recognized that a number of factors may prejudice the full achievement of its objectives.

Townscape implications of retail modernization

A key issue in the present context is that we are discussing an inhabited urban central area, and the resident population increasingly demands modern services and facilities. In addition, Antequera is an important sub-regional centre for a highly productive agricultural area (Navarro Rodríguez, 1997). These factors produce considerable pressure for townscape change. Other changes also have important implications. Whilst the

structure of retailing in Antequera is not dissimilar to that described by Vilagrasa (1992) in that there is considerable persistence of small-scale commercial enterprises, this is in a process of transition: multiple firms are emerging and there is associated townscape change (Barke, 1997). This includes the visual impact of the closure of 'traditional' small units and the obvious size, decoration, company logo and simple modernity of design of new units. Therefore, amongst the most obvious physical consequences of retail modernization is the replacement of older multi-use buildings by purpose-built units, specifically designed for retail trade. Yet 'the balance between purpose-built and adapted, vernacular forms of retail outlet within any settlement is of paramount importance for the visual qualities of the townscape' (Barke, 1998, p. 165). Other physical changes include the likely requirement to carry more and a greater variety of stock, and the need to display that stock effectively. This requires specialized storage space, window display space and the ability to design an attractive display. All of these factors have obvious implications for change in the built environment of retail units. Such changes may be contrasted with the traditional form of retail outlet in much of southern Europe which, for convenience, we can term 'archaic', where the 'shop' is simply an extension of the dwelling, is not purpose-built, has no window to display goods and the very limited stock carried requires the minimum of storage space (Barke, 1997). As the 'traditional' gives way to the 'modern' in terms of retail provision, the implications for the townscape are therefore immense and pose a massive challenge for any attempt to manage and control townscape change.

Some of the pressures and likely conflicts that are being experienced can be examined in a simple spatial manner. Figure 1 shows the 'homogeneous areas' identified in the conservation plan and the groups of buildings where it is intended to extend special protection. Table 1 shows the number of listed buildings in each homogeneous area

compared to the number of retail units and some of the measures of retail modernization.

It is clear that the majority of listed buildings and substantial parts of their surrounding structures deemed to be important for the overall townscape character of the area are within the central core area incorporating Calle Infante and Calle Cantareros (areas A1 and A2) (Figure 2). Predictably, however, given the centrality of these areas, so too are the most significant manifestations of retail modernization. Pressures for further townscape change, related to the changing structure and character of retail outlets, are likely only to increase. Significantly, the Special Plan proposes that planning permission should not be granted for any new commercial banks in Calle Infante and adjacent streets. Some similar pressures and changes exist in Calle Carrera and Santo Domingo (areas A8 and A11) (Figure 3), both identified as areas of significant townscape quality and with special conservation requirements. But townscape change due to retail modernization is apparent in these areas too. Their location and character are likely to give rise to a different set of conflicts than in the central core streets of Calle Infante and Calle Cantareros (areas A1 and A2) as they are either access routes or lie adjacent to one of the key groups of tourist attractions in the town, the Castillo, the collegiate church of Santa María, the church of El Carmen and nearby buildings. Any tourism expansion is likely to produce increased demand for tourist services and facilities, many of which may not be compatible with the overall character of the area, a phenomenon already noted in the Albaicín district of Granada (Orbaşlı, 2000).

Other locations present different problems related to retail modernization. Predominantly residential areas (Figure 4) in peripheral zones of the urban nucleus to both north and south (areas A6, A21, A15 and A16) were identified as possessing distinctive characteristics and as making a significant overall contribution to the townscape of Antequera. However, they consist of rela-

Table 1. Homogeneous areas in Antequera: listed buildings, retail units and percentage of retail units with various forms of physical 'modernization'

Area ¹	Number of listed buildings	Total retail units ²	Percentage purpose-built	Percentage with modern windows	Percentage with significant window display	Percentage with significant storage space	Percentage 'archaic' units ³
A1	43	91	65	71	68	48	4
A2	48	148	62	77	66	44	1
A3	1	0	-	-	-	-	-
A4	1	43	47	42	35	23	9
A5	7	31	45	61	42	48	16
A6	2	39	51	33	23	28	20
A7	4	44	48	66	43	55	2
A8	13	29	45	45	41	48	3
A9	1	3	100	100	66	100	0
A10	10	4	25	25	25	50	50
A11	10	4	25	25	25	50	50
A12	3	0	-	-	-	-	-
A13	9	0	-	-	-	-	-
A14	3	0	-	-	-	-	-
A15	7	7	0	0	0	0	100
A16	5	36	50	33	14	19	42
A17	2	2	50	50	0	0	50
A18	1	0	-	-	-	-	-
A19	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
A20	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
A21	0	9	0	0	0	0	56
A22	0	25	60	28	20	28	8

¹ see Figure 1 for location of areas A1 – A22

² excludes service functions such as banks

³ see text for definition

tively poor neighbourhoods with small houses built in a vernacular tradition and, in some cases, self-built. Part of this vernacular tradition is related to the physical character of local service provision, including retailing. It is in these areas where the 'archaic' shop types are most frequently found, but such functions seem likely to have only a limited

future at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They are likely to disappear entirely, possibly leaving vacant sites and being replaced by fewer, but larger-scale outlets such as supermarkets. The local townscape implications of such changes are obvious.



Figure 2. Calle Infante (area A1), looking towards the castle.

Further problems

Although the core principles enshrined within the Special Plan for Antequera are greatly to be welcomed and mark a considerable step forward in the approach to urban conservation by a Spanish municipality, the fact that a number of problems are inherent within its 'total townscape' approach should not be overlooked. First, the 'listing' of individual buildings still continues and, indeed, has recently been enhanced (Junta de Andalucía, 2001). This means that some individual buildings that have architectural, cultural or symbolic significance may gain special protection, regardless of whether or not they form an integral or coherent part of the historic townscape. Antequera's recently-listed El Torcal cinema, an exuberant art-deco building, illustrates this well. Although, in itself, a building of considerable architectural interest, it is scarcely in harmony with the predominant townscape characteristics of its locality and, indeed, the

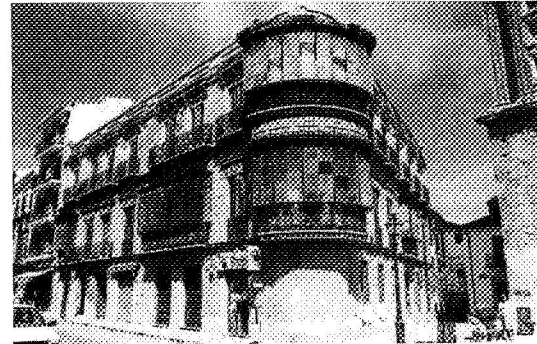


Figure 3. Calle Carrera (area A11), where there is a strong concentration of convents, churches and other buildings of distinction.

entire historic core. There may exist, therefore, a fundamental conflict between the aims and objectives of the total townscape approach to conservation, which is concerned with the protection and rehabilitation of the urban fabric as a collectively harmonious entity, and the continuing need to give special protection to individual elements, simply because, for one reason or another, they are 'special'. In other words, the total townscape approach is no panacea for many of the conflicts that arise in the conservation process.

The second problem arises at the scale of the residential neighbourhood. The Special Plan for Antequera clearly recognizes that much of the character of the historic core is derived from the traditional, high-density housing development which possesses 'a peculiar intimacy of [its] own, an intimacy and directness which have helped to preserve at least something of the supremacy of the personal over the functional life of [its] inhabitants' (Gutkind, 1967, p. 290). Clearly, a total townscape approach to urban conservation, as opposed to one that is focussed on individual buildings, implies the inclusion of residential neighbourhoods as the objects of conservation. The main issue in this context is that most of the older residential areas which give Antequera's townscape so much coherence and harmony are lacking in basic services and are inconvenient for modern living. In the early 1990s only 60 per cent



Figure 4. A residential area of traditional housing

of houses in Antequera had a mains water supply and electric power. In many, cooking and heating infrastructure was rudimentary (Sistema Estadístico de Andalucía, 2001). It is perhaps not too surprising, therefore, that many households prefer a modern apartment or house with modern facilities (de Miguel, 1998). Manifestly, this presents a major problem for the conservation of the most typical and fundamental features of the urban landscape. As modern, internationally influenced houses and flats replace smaller, vernacular style cottages, the cumulative impact on the townscape is considerable.

A third problem relates to the relative strength of the economic arguments that can be proposed in favour of large-scale conservation. In the larger cities of Andalucía (Seville, Granada, Cordoba and, to some extent, Málaga) strong economic arguments in support of conservation policies can be made due to the considerable significance of tourism within those cities. Apart from obvious exceptions such as Ronda, such arguments are less easily made for smaller towns like Antequera. The built

environment is now widely recognized as an invaluable component of the heritage product in the larger urban centres but such recognition has been slower to develop for many less well known centres lower down the urban hierarchy. In these circumstances it may be easier for a pro-development lobby to argue a persuasive case for redevelopment or modification of substantial parts of the urban fabric.

Conclusion

The Special Plan for the historic core of Antequera is of interest due to its attention to urban landscape regions and the use of morphological analysis in delimiting these. Furthermore, the character of these regions, especially their degree of historicity, has been used to devise proposals for townscape management. However, in practical terms, the problems of implementing what is essentially a conservation strategy are quite considerable. Limited change in the past has meant that there is much to conserve, but that limited change itself increases the pressure

for contemporary change in order to accommodate many of the physical manifestations of a modern advanced society, whether it be in terms of service provision or housing. The major challenge, therefore, in implementing Antequera's Special Plan, will be to ensure that whilst avoiding the creation of a fossilized museum in the historic core, inappropriate development is prevented.

Despite these problems, which are to some extent localized, the example of Antequera signals an increasing international awareness of the importance of identifying urban landscape regions and the broader significance of morphological concepts and methods. Perhaps for too long these tasks have been seen as purely academic exercises, divorced from the practical, 'day-to-day' functions of managing the urban landscape. Yet, as M.R.G. Conzen pointed out over 30 years ago, they form the very basis of any policy of townscape management (Conzen, 1966). As policy-makers show renewed interest in the character of urban landscapes and ways of protecting these into the future, the growing opportunities for urban morphologists to influence planning policy are self-evident.

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Eleventh International Planning History Conference, Barcelona, 2004

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 - Innovations and infrastructures
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- This conference seeks particularly to encourage

participation from under-represented areas and languages, and particularly Latin America and 'Latin' countries within Europe. Spanish and English will be the joint official conference languages, and it is hoped that some of the working sessions will be able to accept papers in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French.

The conference sessions will largely be held at the Centre de Cultural Contemporània de Barcelona, a wide-ranging research organization created in 1990 in a city-centre location.

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Islam and built form

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