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**The World Heritage Site of Historic  
Bridgetown and Its Garrison and today's  
challenges: engaging with heritage specialists,  
researchers, students, and stakeholders**

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# The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society

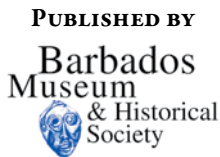
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# **The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society**

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## The World Heritage Site of Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison and Today's Challenges: Engaging with Heritage Specialists, Researchers, Students, and Stakeholders

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Casey D. Allen, Rhianna Smith, Ariel Hinkson,  
Amanda Haynes, Alissandra Cummins, and Gordon Ashby*

### Abstract:

*This paper presents insights obtained during a workshop about the Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison World Heritage Site (February 2024). This workshop focused on a bottom-up approach to collect information by different specialists, researchers, students, and stakeholders on which topics they consider most relevant and urgent to investigate. By having Open Space Technology sessions and group discussions the participants formulated seven topics for further research: 1) Sustainable tourism & Preventing over tourism; 2) Strategic plan / Master plan; 3) Narrative, interpretation and impact; 4) Conservation: how?; 5) 10 years of WHS: failures and successes; and 6) Resilience of Barbados heritage. In this paper these topics will be discussed and contextualised.*

**Keywords:** World Heritage City, Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison, Living Heritage Cities, UNESCO

### Introduction

In 2022 the edited volume 'Living (World) Heritage Cities. Opportunities, challenges, and future perspectives of people-centred

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approaches in dynamic historic urban landscapes' was published.<sup>2</sup> In this book, specialists from different disciplines and geographical and cultural backgrounds explored how (World) Heritage Cities preserve their living heritage and what challenges they face. One of the contributions focused on the World Heritage Site of Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison.<sup>3</sup> This contribution partially focused on the fact that World Heritage Status nominations often go preceded by positive expectations with regards to heritage conservation, stimulation of the cultural sector, sustainable development of the area, increased local awareness, participation and ownership, job creation and economic growth, and increased tourist numbers.<sup>4</sup> These expectations are not always tested, and holistic and synergetic studies are almost non-existent. However, the fact that World Heritage Cities are living cities that are experiencing the effects of today's social, political, economic and natural challenges on a daily basis, makes it relevant to conduct research focusing on these topics in order to investigate what the effects are for people living in or close to such cities.

These topics are particularly relevant for Caribbean World Heritage Cities. Considering that many of these are in vulnerable coastal locations, filled with colonial heritage, in Small Island Development States (SIDS) and heavily dependent on the tourism industry, the challenges to be countered by these cities are many, and local support and upholding, both by financial, societal, and political means, are not automatically generated. Taking this as a starting-point, Maaïke de Waal planned to design a larger research project focusing on Caribbean World Heritage Cities in the light of today's global challenges. As a pilot preparation phase, she organised a (hybrid) workshop focusing on the Bridgetown World Heritage Site at The University of the West Indies (UWI), Barbados, on February 5-8 2024 in order to inventorise with local heritage specialists, researchers, students, and stakeholders which research topics should be focussed on first.

The present insight paper presents the outcomes of this workshop, entitled 'Caribbean World Heritage Sites in the light of today's global

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2 De Waal et al. (2022).

3 De Waal (2022).

4 De Waal (2024: pp. 127-8).

challenges: the case of Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison'. This workshop had five goals:

1. To create a common background and a relevant network for holistic and synergetic study of the Bridgetown World Heritage Site;
2. To define urgent issues, opportunities and challenges;
3. To set a research agenda;
4. To stimulate new (co-authored) publications;
5. To provide a concrete basis for a grant proposal to allow further academic study of this topic.

The workshop was designed to connect with Barbados heritage specialists, researchers, students, and stakeholders<sup>5</sup> in an informal setting, to freely and openly discuss the Bridgetown World Heritage Site in the light of today's challenges.

## Methods

At the start of the workshop, a common background was created by four keynote-lectures. The first presentations focused on visions of revitalisation of Bridgetown, or Town as it is locally affectionately called, through pedestrianisation, recreation and habitation, arts and culture, and history and education,<sup>6</sup> and the need and options to have society reimagine Bridgetown, and the initiatives already undertaken to investigate this by FutureBARBADOS.<sup>7</sup> The latter includes the interactive "hello futureCITY" experience,<sup>8</sup> in which residents and visitors can share their ideas and dreams about Bridgetown. Next, the natural impacts affecting Caribbean World Heritage Sites in general and Barbados heritage in particular were presented, focusing on natural hazards, disasters, and risks, on resilience and on Disaster

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5 Institutions represented by the participants include (in alphabetical order) architect firms, the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc., , the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, Barbados National Art Gallery, Barbados National Commission for UNESCO, Barbados National Register of Historic Places, Barbados National Trust, Barbados Public Workers Cooperative Credit Union, Breda University of Applied Sciences, FutureBARBADOS, Heritage First Barbados, International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, Leiden University, The Division of Culture in the Prime Minister's Office and University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus.

6 Callender (2024).

7 Gibbons (2024).

8 <https://fix2y5gqh01.typeform.com/futurecity> (last visited on May 31 2024).

Risk Reduction and Disaster Risk Management.<sup>9,10</sup> The last keynote-lecture focused on stories, narratives, heritage, and tourism, stating that stories are fundamental to shaping and reshaping identities, to making sense of the world around us, and to communication, and on storytelling as a means to make sense of heritage.<sup>11</sup> We used these presentations and the subsequent discussions to identify the natural and cultural challenges that affect the Bridgetown World Heritage Site, to ascertain which ones were considered most urgent by the workshop participants, and to start outlining potential research and solution directions.

The workshop subsequently included Open Space Technology (OST)<sup>12,13</sup> sessions and group debates, to more concretely define key issues (urgencies, opportunities and challenges) with respect to the Bridgetown World Heritage Site. OST was selected as a method because it has the advantage that the participants determine what is on the agenda, and therefore automatically focus on what they think is relevant and urgent. For each agenda topic a report was to be written, including a short outline and the background of the topic, as well as a short summary of the discussion. The idea was originally to have the participants prioritise the topics, but as the group of participants was quite dynamic and slightly changed in composition over the days, it was decided to skip this phase of the OST sessions.

The last day of the workshop included a guided city walk by Dr. Karl Watson, emeritus senior history lecturer at The UWI Cave Hill and former president of the Barbados National Trust).

After the workshop was finished, Ilja Simons carried out interviews with several workshop participants. These will be reported on in a forthcoming paper.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Cumberbatch (2024).

10 Also see UNESCO (2010).

11 Simons (2024).

12 Owen (2008).

13 Also see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCPZ5iQLlnA> (How to Facilitate an Open Space Session); (last visited on May 31 2024).

14 Simons and De Waal (2024).

## Results

During the Open Space Technology sessions, the workshop participants suggested and discussed seven topics. These included: 1) Sustainable tourism & Preventing overtourism; 2) Strategic plan / Master plan; 3) Narrative, interpretation and impact; 4) Conservation: how?; 5) 10 years of WHS: failures and successes; and 6) Resilience of Barbados heritage. Below, the different topics are described as they were discussed during the workshop.

### Sustainable Tourism & Preventing Overtourism

One of the expectations during the World Heritage inscription process of Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison was that as a result of the inscription, tourism would increase.<sup>15</sup> During the workshop, questions were raised whether this has actually happened and whether this has been investigated. Related to this are broader questions about tourism in general, and heritage/cultural tourism specifically: 1) Which types of tourists does Barbados receive and want to receive (e.g. sun/sea, all inclusive, active and adventurous tourists, cultural tourists? 2) To what extent do Barbadians benefit and profit from the different types of tourism? 3) What role does heritage and the World Heritage status play in attracting different types of tourists? 4) Is there a vision for what cultural tourism activities should be developed? 5) How should Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison as a UNESCO World Heritage Site be developed and presented as a tourist attraction?

A lot of information to answer these questions is probably already available (e.g. at the Division of Culture, Tourism Authorities, The UWI, and the Tourism department of the Barbados Community College), but in order for Bridgetown as UNESCO World Heritage to benefit from it, it needs to be shared with other groups (e.g. heritage professionals). Collaboration is essential in order to prevent reinventing the wheel. Moreover, it should be clear who will take direction of the developments (who will maintain oversight, set out the guidelines and provide structure).

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15 The Environmental Planning Group Inc. & HLA Consultants (2014a: p. 40). Also see De Waal (2022, p. 128).

The participants of the workshop suggest that given the current branding of Barbados, it is difficult to attract tourists that are purely interested in culture or heritage, as tourists will not be 100% focusing on culture alone in Barbados. Instead it is a matter of offering sufficient and diverse cultural tourism practices and activities, such as heritage tours, music performances, art related events, and food tastings. In order for these practices to take place, it is necessary to create attractive outside spaces (including shade, picnic tables, toilets and so on) where both local Barbadians and tourists like to spend their free time.

These cultural activities can be a way to attract more tourists into Bridgetown, and to allow comfortable contacts between tourists and local inhabitants. This way, tourists can be seen as more than people who bring in money, but also as people who contribute to the atmosphere in the streets of Bridgetown, so it becomes more attractive for everyone.

A development to prevent, however, is visitor increase towards overtourism. Overtourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (2018, p. 4) as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitor experiences in a negative way”.

Although Bridgetown does not currently have the number of tourists to be called a destination with overtourism, several issues were raised that should be addressed to prevent negative impacts on Bridgetown as a tourist destination, and to ensure quality of life of both residents and visitors. The workshop participants stressed the importance of balancing developmental tourism interests with the long-term consequences for people in Barbados.

Areas that were mentioned to be crowded at times are bus terminals, fast food restaurants, department stores, and the sea port during peak times in the tourist season (November to April).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, when discussing the prevention of overtourism, and (negative) impacts of tourism on quality of life, it became clear that the workshop participants associated this specifically with cruise tourism and all-inclusive tourism. Points of attention mentioned were (1) the destruction of coral reefs and coastal areas by the cruise ships, (2) privatisation of beaches and overbuilding of hotels, leading to lack

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16 Environmental Planning Group Inc.& HLA Consultants (2014a, p. 35).

of access to areas integral to local communities and (3) the relatively short time that cruise tourists spend on the island, which reduces opportunities for local communities to benefit from tourism and to have meaningful interactions. A lack of empathy between tourists and locals was mentioned, where tourists are seen as somewhat ‘aloof’.

In the discussion about preventing overtourism, it became clear that even though this was a concern of the workshop participants, Bridgetown does not suffer from overtourism at this moment in time. On the contrary, according to the participants of the workshop, both locals and tourists use the city mainly for transit, instead of using it as a destination to spend and enjoy time. A similar trend has been identified by the Hello Future City project, interviewing people in Bridgetown. On the question “What is your favourite part of the city and why?” a majority of interviewees answered “nothing in particular” (Gibbons 2024). This is striking because the fact of it being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, would define it as a destination to spend time.<sup>17</sup> The lack of leisure options was mentioned as a cause of this, such as the erasure of waterfront cafes, areas to lounge and relax, and a lack of music in the city. This is felt by more people in Barbados. In the above-mentioned Hello Future City project, a majority of interviewees answered the question “what key space or experiences do you think are most LACKING in the city?” by selecting the Museums/Art/Culture option (Hello Future City; Gibbons 2024). In addition, safety and some issues were brought up. The waterfront cafes, that used to draw (tourist) crowds, have stopped existing as result of city development (Figure 1). The general idea is that by making the city more attractive for locals, this will benefit both the locals and the tourists.

As a way forward several ideas were raised such as fostering the relationships between tourists and locals by creating places from which both can benefit, such as lounging areas within Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison, including art and music. Cultural tourism and community based tourism can be encouraged by offering more Barbadian themed tours in Bridgetown, and across the island, which would create mutual understanding and pride.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Environmental Planning Group Inc.& HLA Consultants (2014a, pp. 41, 85; 2014b, p. 134; 2014c, p. 2).

18 Environmental Planning Group Inc.& HLA Consultants (2014c, p. 5) includes a list of



Fig. 1 Desolate and abandoned waterfront cafes and an empty careenage (picture by De Waal, February 8, 2024).

The participants consider it important to not keep the history stale but refreshing and highlight the lesser known stories. A central role is seen for the Barbados National Register of Historic Places in the Division of Culture and Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. The Environmental Planning Group Inc. & HLA Consultants presented a listing of potential Barbados narratives by theme, focusing on the questions “What stories must we tell about Barbados” and “What stories would we be delightfully surprised to hear about Barbados?”. The resulting themes listed include Freedom & Resilience Stories, Laying the Foundations, Locals & Legends, Eat, Drink and Be Merry, Ten Fathoms & Maritime Exploits, The Story of Sugar, Nature’s Treasures, Sports in Bim, and Cultural & Creative Arts.<sup>19</sup> This list could be consulted as a starting point.

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18 actions that were brought up in 2014 to revitalise the city, including (amongst others) maintaining the UNESCO World Heritage Designation, enhancing and developing particular areas and attractions, to developing educational kits and a mobile exhibition, developing transportation for visitors (trams, river boats, historic bus), and promoting heritage tours by night.

19 (2014c, p. 65, table 7).

## Strategic Plan/Master Plan

During the workshop the need for cooperation between different parties involved in Bridgetown was stressed several times, including the need for a strategic plan or a master plan, in order to be able to sustain the city's heritage. As one of the participants put it: "Town is a living organism, and all elements need to be healthy to sustain the city". The importance of an overall plan, which clearly outlines the national identity and what Barbados wants the World Heritage Site to represent, and which also includes tourism impacts, was emphasised. Focus should be on life in the city for people who live, work and commute there, by making the city sustainable and to bring it to life again.

Such a plan it turned out did exist, however, as part of the Physical Development Plan (chapter 7).<sup>20</sup> This plan was developed by the Town and Country planning department, with the involvement of members of the World Heritage Committee.<sup>21</sup> In 2023 the plan was updated by an amendment.<sup>22</sup>

Although this plan is very thorough and extensive, and some elements are in operation indeed, many parts of the plan still need to be operationalised. For example, there is a lack of clarity about the responsibilities and the resources, for example for the site manager of the World Heritage Site. In order to operationalise the plan, more clarity is needed on these aspects, and it is vital that ownership is taken. The workshop participants felt that the authorities should really take action here. They can instigate heritage management and conservation by making this one of their priorities.

The workshop participants feel that people in power should embrace the conservation of the World heritage site, while not all people in power are equally enthusiastic about this. The position of heritage and the importance of heritage in relation to national identity is not obvious to everyone. Some see culture and heritage only as entertainment or

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20 Planning and Development Department (2017).

21 The World Heritage Committee, which includes the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, the Town and Country Planning Department, and the Site Manager, is appointed by the Cabinet for three or four years. Committee members are not appointed in their personal capacity, but they represent parties. The Site Manager is the chairperson of the Barbados World Heritage Committee.

22 Planning and Development Department (2023).

as a way to attract tourists. The idea that conservation of heritage is linked to national identity is not recognised by everyone.

### **Narrative, Interpretation and Impact**

This topic was originally brought in under the title “What is the PR for Bridgetown?”. This title was borrowed from a recent blog, in which Georgina Callender wonders what is the Caribbean’s PR, when looking at a history of representation. She ponders questions such as “Do we have any places and spaces that speak to who we are?” and “From a PR perspective are we actually telling the world anything?” and concludes that a legacy should be built “beyond colonialism and tourism”.<sup>23</sup>

During the discussion, we changed the topic focus to “Narrative, interpretation and impact”, as the participants agreed that what is important is that local people need to like or even love Bridgetown in order to be interested in conservation and management, as community support is crucial for necessary conservation measures to take place. The basic idea here is that if people do not care for the city, regulations will not be accepted, let alone followed, and people will be against spending money on the conservation and management of historic buildings. The topic redirected to the question “What is needed to get Bajans enthusiastic about town”?

We started by exploring what attracts the workshop participants in Bridgetown. The answers varied from the town lay-out and cosiness, and the opportunities to stroll around, to the characters that belong to the city. It was stressed that the town is defined by the atmosphere (“feeling”) and the historic buildings, of which it was remarked that many have such beautiful details. It was also mentioned that there is an emotional connection to town: everyone has a story about town, and people either hate it or love it. What is needed is an opportunity to codify what that feeling is, to create more tangible symbols of a collective story, and to create an identity. As an example, the event of the Rio de Janeiro carnival was mentioned. Vendors, snow cone vendors, Chamberlain bridge, Queens Park, and the Fairchild bus terminal were mentioned as town elements that will be recognized as a symbol. It is important to emphasise those elements that speak to and attract Barbadians. (Public) education and interpretation can play a central

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23 Callender (2023).

role in this, as they did in the early years of the WHS inscription, when the Ministry of Family, Culture, Sports and Youth and the Barbados World Heritage Committee launched informative campaigns, and the Barbados Museum and Historical Society (BMHS) and The UWI organised presentations, workshops, and tours in Bridgetown.<sup>24</sup> Such efforts should continue. If the standards must be obtained, the programs should be maintained, including the history curriculum in schools. The Environmental Planning Group Inc. & HLA Consultants<sup>25</sup> also mentions that “many of the sites within Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison are relatively unknown to Barbadians in general. Although hundreds have been introduced to key highlights through heritage walks and local television showcases, many sites remain unexplored, minimised, or are taken for granted as part of the enduring landscape”. They have listed valuable recommendations to continue introducing Barbadians to Bridgetown’s heritage values. These include stimulating and demonstrating reuse of heritage sites and viability of heritage tourism enterprises, developing a travelling photo exhibition, restoring the Carnegie Free Library, creating educational materials, and installing a yearly celebratory moment.

During the discussion of this topic, the idea “Maybe the parts of the World Heritage Site are too different from one another” came to the table. Reasons mentioned for bringing this up were “The Garrison is not the historic inner city”, “The Garrison is quite far from town”, “The Garrison brings up negative feelings relating to British military history”. As an example, one of the participants asked: “The changing of the guard: why are we celebrating that?”. She also stressed that it is important to focus on the narrative, the impact, and the re-imagination of space, and that is also how the colonial aspect fits in, as it’s part of it. The essence is meaning (meaning-making) and interpretation.

As essential key-players tourism concept developers were mentioned, even though hiring them is costly and it can also be questioned whether this is really needed, as the city must be vibrant and lively for and appreciated by Barbadians first. An indisputable role was seen for the Ministry of Education, with respect to national history education, the Ministry of Tourism, with regards to

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24 Inniss (2012, pp. 73-75).

25 (2014c, p. 103)

official Tour Guiding programs, and the Barbados World Heritage Committee which is an advisory committee.

On the question “how to get Barbadians enthusiastic about Bridgetown?” workshop participants also mentioned potentially positive effects from street music, as a form of story-telling and to add livelihood and ambiance to town, social media, with influencers promoting town life and user/inhabitant generated content on TikTok, and creating a creative space, where Barbadians can benefit. The session ended with a warning to be careful not to add too many artificial incentives.

### **Conservation: How?**

This topic was suggested to be discussed during the OST sessions by one of the participants, who also wrote a short report about this, but none of the other participants selected this topic as urgent. This topic revolves around the challenge that the historic buildings and areas in the Bridgetown World Heritage Site need constant care and active conservation and management. Unfortunately, today, the maintenance and conservation of many buildings and areas are being neglected and there is a risk that they might develop into such a state that they cannot be maintained anymore. As key challenges to the conservation issue, the following questions were listed:

- So many buildings need restoration. Where to start? And who decides?
- Who is responsible for restoration works?
- Who pays for the restoration works?
- Who has the knowledge, skills, and materials for the necessary repairs?
- How can buildings be modernised and made apt for re-use without losing their historic character?
- Is there legislation/regulations? And do contractors, developers, and real-estate owners know about these?

As a positive start to deal with the issue of conservation, it was brought forward that it is needed to clearly define and propagated who is in charge of conservation of the World Heritage Site, to provide inhabitants, building owners, and craftspeople with the

necessary information of what is needed in terms of conservation and management, to select where to start and define why conservation efforts should first be concentrated on the buildings or in the areas selected, and find funding to guarantee solid and regular conservation activities. It was felt that none of these aspects is currently in place for the Bridgetown World Heritage Site, and considering the state of many historic buildings in town, this is urgent (Figures 2-3). That said, to potentially move the conservation agenda forward, it was noted that one participant from The UWI has a background in stone deterioration research, and discussions regarding the application of a non-invasive, inexpensive assessment method, the Cultural Stone Stability Index (CSSI)<sup>26</sup> took place in the context of a mutually benefitting cooperation between The UWI and the BMHS. Such efforts would utilise on-island expertise already available, further reducing costs, while also training local people in the CSSI, perhaps acting as a springboard for future local involvement with and in continued conservation plans.

Also mentioned was the need to document the rapidly disappearing knowledge and skills with respect to local building materials and building traditions, amongst traditional masons and carpenters in Barbados.

During the workshop we also discussed the threat posed to low lying coastal cities like Bridgetown from the effects of climate change, such as storm surge, flooding and hurricanes, and the fact that significant investment is required to build resilience through coastal infrastructure such as boardwalks, jetties, groynes, revetments, or breakwaters.<sup>27</sup> This was confirmed by Mycoo et al. in their research on Human Adaptation to Coastal Hazards in Greater Bridgetown, Barbados, where they concluded that “it might not be likely for a city’s capacity for coastal/urban resilience to be maximized without institutional prioritization of vulnerability, increased stakeholder “buy-in” and participation, along with significant investment in adaptation and the protection of valuable coastal infrastructure.”<sup>28</sup>

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26 <https://www.shralliance.com/>.

27 Also see Banerjee et al., (2018), Coastal Zone Management Unit (2020), UNEP (2014).

28 Mycoo et al. (2021, p. 16).



Fig. 2 One of the oldest brick buildings in Bridgetown (17th century), with a poorly thought out roof repair that has made the historic Dutch gable disappear from view (picture by De Waal, February 8, 2024).



Fig. 3 Left above: One of the last remaining slave huts in Barbados (Hutson Alley, seen towards the west). Right above: Historic buildings in Suttle street (seen towards the west). Left below: Historic buildings in Pierhead Lane, with a direction sign towards the historic, and now inaccessible, screw dock area. Right below: 18th century Spirit Bond building at The Wharf Road (pictures by De Waal, February 8, 2024).

## 10 Years of WHS: Failures and Successes & Resilience of Barbados Heritage

The topics of discussing the failures and successes of 10 years of the World Heritage Site of Historic Bridgetown and Its Garrison and Resilience of Barbados heritage were each brought up for discussion by one of the participants, but none of the other participants selected this topic as urgent and no report was created either.

## Guided City Walk

The last day of the workshop included a guided city walk<sup>29</sup> by historian and Bridgetown expert Dr. Karl Watson, which allowed opportunities for on-the-spot group discussions of challenges and successes in Historic Bridgetown.<sup>30</sup> By presenting the earliest town lay-out and many of the city's historic buildings, as well as visiting the newest monuments and town developments, today's issues and challenges were made very much alive. An incidental find of pre-contact material as well, in the form of a prehistoric pottery sherd found at St Mary's Church cemetery, even provided us with a glimpse of the Indigenous people who originally lived here.

The city walk gave good insight into different aspects that had been discussed during the OST sessions at The UWI, especially with regards to the challenges and successes with regards to conservation and management of the Bridgetown World Heritage Site. First of all, it was remarkably quiet in the historic city centre, even though we spent a good part of the day (9:30 am - 3 pm), in the high season, in this area. Few tourists seemed to be visiting town that day, and there certainly were no crowds. Another aspect that was clearly visible is the absence of inviting public and commercial areas where Barbadians and tourists can sit down and relax. The historic Pierhead area that currently is awaiting redevelopment was completely closed off to the public. Apart from the foreseen redevelopment, this is a pity, as there

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29 The city tour started at Independence Arch, and went via Pierhead Lane to Pierhead beach, then via Chamberlain Bridge and the newly designed National Heroes Square to The Wharf Road. From there, we walked via Prince Albert street to Jubilee Gardens, then to St Mary's Church, via Hutson Alley to Suttle Street, via James Street towards the Historic Jewish District, and from there via Prince William Henry Street to Swan Street.

30 The Garrison was not visited on this occasion.

is no more access to the historic screw dock, and, as mentioned above, the formerly active and attractive tourist location with waterfront cafes and moored boats is now deserted (Figure 1).

Also uninviting is the poor state of conservation of many historic buildings. Figure 3 displays some examples, including one of the last remaining slave huts in Barbados at Hutson Alley, historic buildings in Suttle street that go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and parts of the Pierhead area. The Figure right below shows a historic building that is actually well maintained, but of which the traditional plastering has been removed which makes it more vulnerable from influences from the natural elements. These are in great contrast with magnificently restored buildings, for example the Mutual Life Assurance Society building (Prince Alfred Street) and many historic buildings at The Wharf Road and in the Jewish Historic District. Identification of specific areas of concern on poorly conserved historic buildings could be quickly assessed, for little to no cost, via the CSSI, in cooperation with The UWI, as noted previously. This would help conservators, investors, and other stakeholders to decide which conservation locations and actions are most efficient.

Some other challenges were observed in adapting the historic city to modern day demands with respect to vehicles. Parking in Bridgetown is problematic, as it is in most historic city centres, as the original street and city layout designs are not suited for having large numbers of cars.<sup>31</sup> Fortunately, in the central part of the historic centre there are areas without or with only a limited number of cars, which greatly enhances the experience for walking through the city, but the City Central Mall car park does visually dominate an important part of the city centre (Figure 4).

Apart from the fact that conservation and management of historic buildings is a challenge, information panels and displayed archaeological values are also prone to the devastating effects of constant exposure to the natural elements, as well as vandalism (Figure 5).

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31 The Environmental Planning Group Inc.& HLA Consultants (2014a: p. 39) indicates that traffic congestion is most serious on cruise ship days and during the Christmas season.



Fig. 4 Left: The City Central Mall car park towering over the traditional buildings in Suttle Street (seen from Reed Street, looking south). Right: The City Central Mall car park, dominating the view from St Mary's Church towards the east (pictures by De Waal, February 8, 2024).



Fig. 5 Left and right above: historic elements and information panels in the park between The Wharf Road and the car park south of Princess Alice Highway. Left and right below: a preserved and displayed part of one of Bridgetown's late 17th century cobblestone streets at Jubilee Gardens (pictures by De Waal, February 8, 2024).

## Synthesis and Discussion

At the start of the workshop, it was expected that topics brought forward by the participants would strongly focus on climate hazards for Barbados (World) heritage, on political and economic aspects relating to Barbados being a Small Island Development State (SIDS), on the Sustainable Development Goals, on colonial and painful heritage, and participation, ownership and well-being. Surprisingly, only the last topic was discussed, even though not as a topic in itself, but relevant elements were brought to the table while discussing the topics that participants brought in for the workshop discussions.

During several discussions, the topic became centred on the challenge that both residents and businesses have moved out of Bridgetown. For Bridgetown to flourish, it needs to be an attractive place to live, work and play. This is also deemed essential to create sustainable tourism options in the city, and to create support for management and maintenance of buildings and areas in town. So an important side question that was raised several times during the workshop was: how can residents and businesses be persuaded to return to Bridgetown? This importance was also recognised by Environmental Planning Group Inc. & HLA Consultants, listing the responsibility “to create a “Bridgetown Brand” (a must see, must do by visitors) that also attracts new businesses and investment”.<sup>32</sup>

Three reasons for moving out of Bridgetown were identified. Firstly, during COVID, many small businesses that had shops in Bridgetown moved and started working from their homes. After COVID most of them did not return to Bridgetown, because they could avoid paying rent. Many who did return share stores, a practice that was already omnipresent before 2020.

Secondly, government and larger businesses, such as banks, have moved their offices out of Bridgetown as well. At the moment many financial institutions still consider Main Street and Broad Street as the main locations, which indicates that there is still a presence and a level of prestige, even though this is decreasing

Thirdly, the rents in Bridgetown are extremely high, which has prevented start-ups from opening stores. A possible reason behind

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32 (2014b: p. 161, table 3.7).

these high rents is that proprietors consider Bridgetown to be a prime location, since it is the capital city. As a result of the high rents many properties are unoccupied as well. Typically, when houses are not occupied in a city, students and artists can move in at low rents to keep the area lively and to turn around the downward spiral of the towns liveability. However, in Bridgetown, rents have not gone down yet, and even student dorms are considered expensive. Prices seem to be kept artificially high. This lack of residents also has an effect on the viability of amenities like restaurants and cafes, which can lead to the city becoming less and less attractive, both for inhabitants as well as tourists, and turn into a ghost town.

Several solutions were mentioned to make Bridgetown more liveable. These include 1) creating affordable student housing in Bridgetown, maybe even a University campus, to encourage people come to town; 2) exploring living above shops, which increases safety, especially at night; 3) providing financial incentives for people who are attracted to the city centre, such as start-ups and young professionals; 4) creating a more pedestrian friendly city; and 5) convincing property owners to lower rents to artists and students, in order to lessen the existing waiting list for artists wishing to rent studio space, and to enliven town. There are buildings in Bridgetown which are rented out to artists to have their studios there, and there is a long waiting list. This shows that there is a great interest and potential to make the city more lively. It was felt that property owners play a key role in the topic of town liveability, a topic that also resonates in heritage management and conservation. It seems important to investigate what the perspective of property owners on the World Heritage inscription is. Are they willing to contribute to conservation, or do they prefer to continue replacing historic buildings with modern ones?

Considering the fact that there was a strong focus on the liveability of Bridgetown (or the lack thereof), it is remarkable that the topic of conservation was not discussed during the workshop, not only considering how urgent conservation and maintenance challenges are,<sup>33</sup> but also considering how much this affects the appearance and atmosphere of the city, and the attractiveness for both Barbadians and tourists. The city's appearance is greatly determined by the

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33 See De Waal (2022).

conservation of its historic buildings, and by the addition of unfitting modern-life elements such as highly elevated car parks. The same goes for the topic of “10 years of WHS: failures and successes”. The lack of interest in this topic might be partially explained by the fact that this topic would only provide a general overview and that participants probably did not have the feeling that discussion of this matter would actually help solving the negative effects of issues they face today.

The focus on the effects of overtourism, even though by definition Barbados does not have overtourism and the city did not really seem crowded by tourists during the workshop city tour, can probably also be seen in the light of the urgency to create positive and attractive areas in Bridgetown for Barbadians.

Another remarkable aspect was the fact that Bridgetown's World Heritage consists of colonial, painful heritage was not a topic that participants chose to discuss during this workshop. As one of the participants indicated, an important part of the participants are professionals interested in heritage, which makes them look differently at these historic remains, for example by focusing on the aesthetics of architectural elements.

What was also interesting to see, is that some participants seemed first quite negative about Bridgetown,<sup>34</sup> but on being asked which elements of town they really like, they described areas that are or were important for them, with obvious love and pride. This is important, because the public support for regulations and budgets for conservation and management of historic buildings and areas starts here.

Some points were mentioned during the discussions of several different topics. First of all, it is not very clear who is in charge and different organisations seem to be working towards similar goals. Linked to this, it is not clear where relevant information (for example on rules and regulations) can be found, and there is a risk that individuals and organisations working in heritage are engaged in activities that have already been carried out. For example, very few of the participants knew of the existence of the Barbados Physical Development Plan. Collaboration is key.

It is also clear that it is the authorities who need to act: The Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, and Town and Country Planning,

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34 As one of the participants mentioned, ‘town is not for me’.

advised by the Barbados World Heritage Committee. If the authorities prioritise positive developments and actions relating to liveability in town and to heritage conservation, it is believed that changes can be made to turn the situation in Historic Bridgetown to the better.

Most issues and potential solutions mentioned by the workshop participants were also listed by The Environmental Planning Group Inc.& HLA Consultants.<sup>35</sup> Their listing for Bridgetown, as presented in the Barbados Tourism Master Plan 2014 – 2023, includes crowding/congestion, poor sanitation, harassment/safety, traffic/pedestrian conflict, lack of guest facilities, static/boring [city life], inebriated individuals/poor behaviour. The fact that 10 years after publication these issues are still prevailing demonstrates that these challenges have not yet been sufficiently mitigated.

## Conclusions

The workshop at The UWI was organised to bring together Barbadians with different backgrounds involved in all their different capacities in Bridgetown World Heritage, to find out which topics are priorities when continuing investigations of the Bridgetown World Heritage Site seen in the light of today's challenges. It should be acknowledged that all participants have an interest in heritage, whether based on professional or personal ties, which might have biased the outcomes of the workshop. Nonetheless, some ideas discussed during the workshop were confirmed by outcomes by the futureCITY project, in which Barbadians living, working and visiting Bridgetown are interviewed on how they see the town.

The workshop made clear that the liveability of the city is an extremely important topic, not only as an aspect of itself, but also when it is regarded for its links with economics, public support for maintenance and conservation, and sustainable tourism. Liveability allows improvement of these aspects, and in turn, these aspects strengthen the liveability. One of the main foci of upcoming research into the topic of Caribbean World Heritage Cities in the light of today's challenges will therefore focus on heritage and well-being.

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35 (2014a: pp. 39-40, table 2.7).

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