



## **Old Lhasa changing: how are official private initiatives affecting the historical environment and traditional morphology of Old Lhasa, Tibet?**

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The paper focuses on my current studies of transformation of typological morphology of traditional Lhasa townscape, with perspectives towards understanding processes of intervention, managing tourism, and meshing the management of cultural resources with other efforts of planning and urban development.

The principal question is “Why does old Lhasa change?” Leading on from this, it is natural to ask “How does old Lhasa change and what are main reasons for urban transformation in Lhasa”.

In order to highlight the current context of Lhasa, I will relate parallel and conflicting issues of two World Heritage towns – the other being the 16th C mining town of Røros, located in the midst of the mountainous region of Norway.

### *1. Introduction – Macrolevel*

- Traditional/historical town in Asia – pockmarked urban ‘chequerboard’ of areas in development and areas in decline; zones of overcrowding, cultural/socioeconomic plight and environmental degradation compete with areas in intensive commercial development.
- Fragmenting historical/ traditional centre losing traditional functions and cultural identity, their lifelines for a sustainable future.
- Urban development needs to reflect historic-cultural context and earlier development.
- Urban conservation is meaningless when isolated from overall development activity in society, and integrating heritage resources with developmental processes requires society to have a relevant knowledge of its resources – including those of cultural heritage.

- Living historic urban environments have different needs – need tools that reflect the context.
- Can a historic environment accommodate pressures of urban development and economic activity (tourism) without losing the integrity of its cultural resources.
- Urban conservation aiming at development with adequate safeguarding of built cultural heritage presupposes intimate collaboration between local community and authorities.

#### Study Level – Lhasa

- Lhasa demography, economy and cultural base – today different from that of 30 years ago – modernity, socio-economic and cultural-political interventions, international influence and gradual opening up.
- Old Lhasa population – 25,000 to 80,000 in 40 years.
- Urban area – from 1,5 km<sup>2</sup> to 100 km<sup>2</sup> in 40 years.
- Lhasa population – about 30,000 persons in 1950 and today about 450,000.
- Traditional-historical buildings and structures are demolished and replaced with larger new construction allowed also to fill urban space that was earlier not built on.
- World Heritage designation of the Potala Palace (1994), Jokhang Temple Monastery and Barkor (1999) and Norbulingka (2000) sites and buffer zones has highlighted the needs for an integrated resource management and urban development of the traditional-new townscape.
- Urban development is allowed inside the traditional-historical townscape, with new and in part inappropriate development allowed inside the WH-designated areas.

#### Study Level – Røros

The historic town of Røros, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1980, is today extremely important to the regional tourism industry. This exposes the entire built and social fabric to considerable pressures, including those of economy and physical development. Central questions are asked today as to how Røros can remain an 'authentic' historic environment.

#### *2. Issues*

Then and largely Now with reference to the major dynamics of Demography and ethnicity, governance responsibilities and interests, old and new order, fragmenting culture, new priorities. Unlocking a past, liberating history? Poverty of urban spaces? Urban development versus cultural resources – also WH. Hierarchies, zones and borders, seen or perceived. Local, national and international concerns.

### 3. *Fieldwork*

A case-corridor is selected starting with the Jokhang-Barkor 'doughnut' going towards the north-west into the 'new town'. How to access information, establish relevant dialogue with authorities? Information reliability and validity, stakeholders and roles?

#### Selected cases

Shatra Mansion, Pomdatsang Mansion, Tromsikhang Palace, Meru Nyingba Dratsang, Shide Dratsang, Tsomonling Dratsang, Meru Dratsang, Bonsho Mansion, Jamyang Courtyards, and the Shasarsu Lam and Barkor neighbourhoods are then discussed in terms of criteria such as

- public-private processes – process shortcut, bottom-top-bottom,
- public-private processes – processes respected
- tenure and use patterns, rights
- living conditions