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# Investing in heritage: the future of our cities

**A wide range of experts from Asia and Europe emphasised the role of heritage assets for the sustainable development of urban living.**

A heritage-led development of cities in Asia and Europe can ensure an attractive environment for people, tourists and business, if based on the specific needs and requirements of local communities. To this end, heritage revitalisation should not only be limited to historic buildings, but also consider the social dimension implied in traditional uses of public spaces, lifestyles and practices, including local craft and creative industries. This message was at the core of the findings that emerged from the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Experts' Meeting and Public Forum on 'Investing in Heritage Cities: Stimulus for Sustainable Tourism and Livelihoods', held on 24-25 June 2013 in Yangon, Myanmar.

Over 30 experts from about 25 Asian and European countries gathered in Yangon for this bi-regional dialogue and exchange. The participants included architects and urban planners, representatives of governmental bodies, civil organisations and international organisations, such as UNESCO and the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). Over 100 government officials, heritage experts and tourism professionals from Myanmar attended the event.

During the course of discussions, participants stressed the opportunities for and challenges of sustainable development in heritage cities that aim to maintain a right balance between the intrinsic values of conservation and the necessity to accommodate contemporary needs. Among others, it was noted that good governance of heritage cities should ensure a blend of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to create useful synergies among different stakeholders.

The importance of balancing economic development and the preservation of cultural heritage was also emphasised by H.E. Sanda Khin, Deputy Minister of Culture and H.E. Tin Shwe, Deputy Minister of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar, during the opening ceremony on Monday, 24 June. The vital role of urban heritage in the management of thriving cities was confirmed by the Mayor of Yangon, H.E. U Hla Myint, at the Public Forum on 'Conservation Strategies for Yangon's Heritage' on Tuesday, 25 June.

ASEF will present the full set of recommendations at the next Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Culture Ministers' Meeting scheduled to take place in 2014.

*The ASEF Experts' Meeting and Public Forum on 24-25 June 2013 in Yangon, Myanmar was organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in partnership with Hanns Seidel Foundation and the Yangon Heritage Trust with the support of the Governments of Italy and France. Civil society organisations, Europa Nostra, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) participated actively in the proceedings and fully endorsed the findings and recommended actions.*

For further information, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/urbanheritage>

## ABOUT THE ORGANISERS

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The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and facilitates cooperation among the people and institutions of Asia and Europe. ASEF enhances dialogue, enables exchanges and encourages collaboration across the thematic areas of governance, economy, sustainable development, public health, culture, and education. Founded in 1997, ASEF is a not-for-profit, intergovernmental organisation located in Singapore. It is the only permanently established institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Together with about 700 partner organisations ASEF has run more than 600 projects, mainly conferences, seminars and workshops. Over 17,000 Asians and Europeans have actively participated in its activities and it has reached much wider audiences through its networks, web-portals, publications, exhibitions and lectures.

For more information, please visit [www.asef.org](http://www.asef.org)

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Since its establishment on April 11, 1967, the **Hanns Seidel Foundation** has been practicing political education work with the aim of supporting "the democratic and civic education of the German people with a Christian basis" – as the foundation's statutes say. Hence, the political education work of the Hanns Seidel Foundation is based on a human ideal that includes free personality development and autonomy as well as social responsibility and solidarity. Today, this mission is more important than ever, since requirements for more autonomy, a new "culture of independence" and an "active society of citizens" are increasingly evolving.

For more information, please visit <http://www.hss.de/southeastasia/en/myanmar.html>

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The **Yangon Heritage Trust (YHT)** is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Myanmar. The YHT was founded in January 2012 by a group of like-minded historians, architects and businesses passionate about the protection and promotion of Yangon's urban heritage. The mission of the YHT is to promote and protect Yangon's built heritage as part of a comprehensive urban planning process. As part of its mission, the YHT will advocate for heritage protection, develop policy options, advise the government, present ideas to the public, undertake specific conservation projects, facilitate training, and organise studies and conferences.

For more information, please visit <http://yangonheritagetrust.org/>

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