In the field of urban planning hundreds of different methods and tools have been developed to measure the sustainability of the built environment, each with its own perspective, approach or goal. Unfortunately, none of these tools is adapted to the specific characteristics of a heritage site which, in turn, makes them unsuitable in heritage conservation. In the best case, heritage aspects receive limited attention in a single indicator or sub-indicator. Many elements, though, that are essential for an integrated sustainability assessment of specific cases like cultural heritage sites, are simply overlooked in heritage value-based management. The purpose of this research therefore was to create a framework of indicators that enables us to measure the classical dimensions of sustainable development (People, Planet, Profit) in combination with the sustainability of the heritage values and the policy dimension.

Methods that were developed as an approach to sustainable urban planning and that were based on system analysis models, are modified, streamlined and adapted into a concrete set of indicators for historical city sites. Cultural heritage and sustainability are dynamic systems, hence a multimodal system is required that describes all the aspects and their mutual interrelations in an integrated way. This holistic approach includes a wide range of modalities that extends from extremely determinative or substantive to very normative or subjective. A multi-criteria analysis is proposed as a means to evaluate the quantitative as well as the qualitative indicators.

A framework to map out the holistic sustainability can be used in two directions. On the one hand it can serve as an incentive from the policy to the heritage world to implement sustainable objectives, while on the other hand it can be used as an extra argument for the broader social relevance of heritage care.

Keywords: indicators, system analysis, holistic