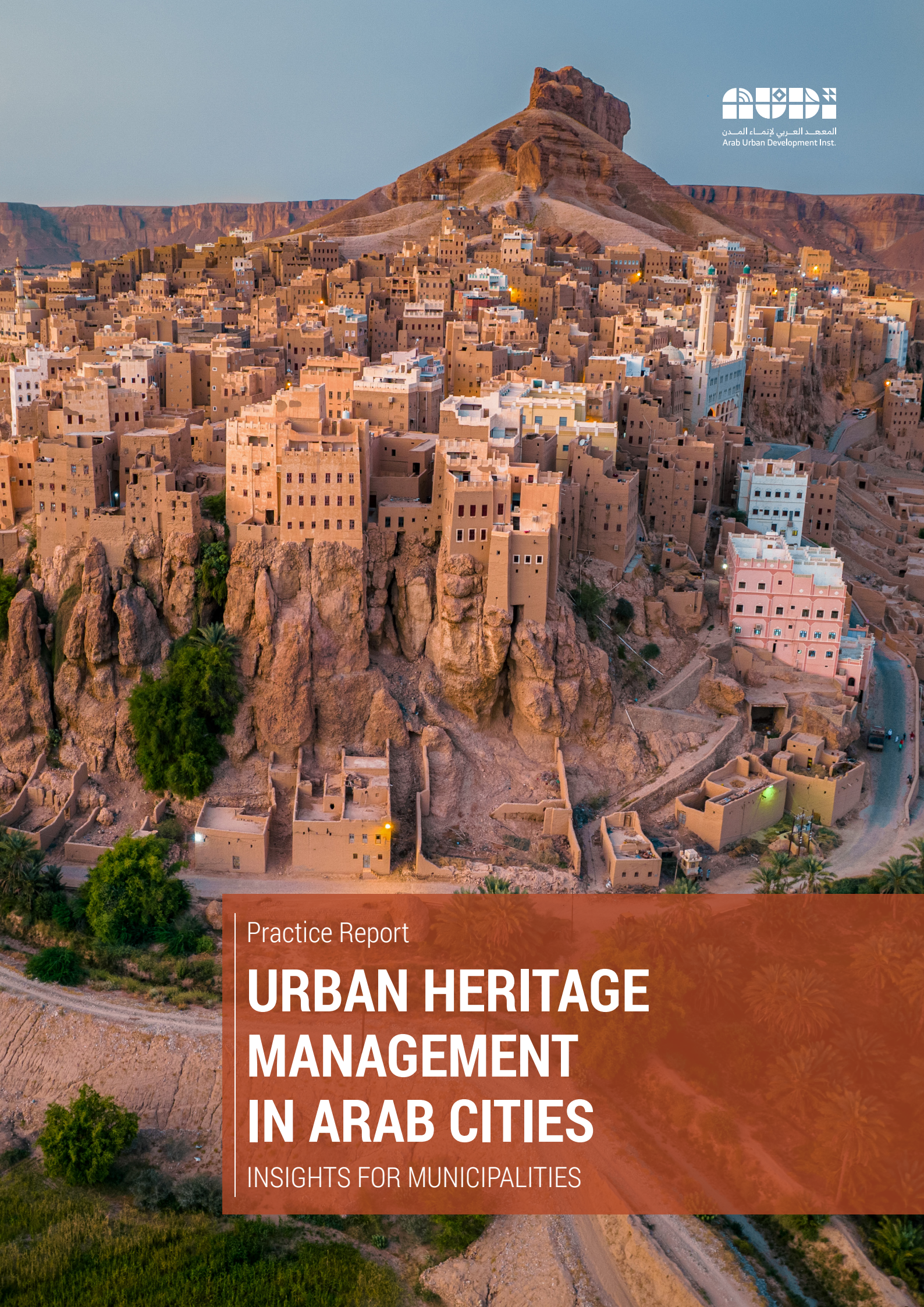

المعهد العربي لإنماء المدن
Arab Urban Development Inst.

Practice Report

URBAN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN ARAB CITIES

INSIGHTS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Practice Report

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URBAN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN ARAB CITIES Insights for Municipalities

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About the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), a regional, non-governmental, and non-profit organization, established in 1980 by the Permanent Bureau of the Arab Towns Organization, with its headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. AUDI is the first Arab institution specializing in urban development and municipal support. It has over 650 member cities across 22 countries and focuses on research and studies in urban policies, capacity development and training, and networking in the fields of urban development and municipal affairs.

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Foreword



Diriyah, Riyadh
Source: Ahmad Alhamwan | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition



Prince Dr.Faisal bin Abdul Aziz bin Ayyaf
The President of AUDI, the Mayor of Riyadh Region Municipality

The Arab region is home to some of the world's most distinctive heritage and historical sites, showcasing the authenticity of local communities, that are deeply rooted into their urban settings and strongly connected to the cultural legacy. Historic sites and districts have always been vibrant centers for life, intellectual exchange, and economic and social activities, and preserving and managing them adequately remains a top priority for cities. Therefore, heritage is regarded as a dynamic asset that can stimulate economic growth, strengthen a city's cultural identity, and boost its quality of life.

However, rapid urbanism, economic and social changes, and the demands of modern infrastructure have placed immense pressure on historic areas, posing a significant challenge to the sustainability of urban heritage. As a result, the need for effective governance in the municipal sector is now more crucial than ever. Strong leadership at both the national and local levels is essential in establishing clear policies that balance urban development with heritage preservation, ensuring that historic sites are protected from neglect and irreversible loss.

Heritage preservation and conservation can only be achieved through dedicated community engagement. The original communities of historical areas serve as the cornerstone of cultural heritage protection, making their involvement in rehabilitation, urban renewal projects, and strategic planning essential. Moreover, education, knowledge dissemination, and community awareness are critical to instilling a sense of responsibility for heritage preservation. As a result, educational and cultural institutions should take an active role in promoting awareness campaigns that highlight heritage as a national symbol and source of pride for future generations.

On the other hand, we also see that urban heritage management is subject to substantial economic and institutional pressures and can be considered as a tactical process that needs additional costs and expenses, therefore relying on significant budgets and resources that are frequently constrained.

From this perspective, the Arab Urban Development Institute emerges as an active entity in this field by preparing a report titled 'Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities: Insights for Municipalities', which outlines the major challenges and pressures that municipalities face when managing their heritage. The report provides insights into the region's most significant solutions and practices, as well as numerous approaches for managing urban heritage in a way that enhances the city's sustainability, cultural identity, and economic vitality.

This report is a valuable resource for decision-makers, city planners, and specialists looking to preserve their urban heritage and integrate it into their cities' contemporary urban landscapes. It does so by highlighting the diverse experiences and strategies adopted by cities across the region and extracting lessons learned from them. The report also underlines the importance of building inclusive and adaptable governance models that see heritage preservation as a driver of innovation, social cohesion, and economic development rather than a barrier to growth.

Finally, AUDI will continue to develop urban policies and strategies that address the development needs of Arab cities, while always aiming to streamline knowledge exchange, build capacity, improve cooperation and partnership, and work together to achieve sustainable urban development that honors our shared history and embraces future opportunities.

We hope this report will encourage our cities to continue investing in their cultural legacy and acknowledge it as a foundation of resilience, identity, and long-term success.

Message from the Director General



Alexandria, Egypt
Source: Summer Kamal | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition



Dr.Anas Almughairy
Director General, Arab Urban Development Institute

The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) is thrilled to present this report, 'Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities: Municipal Visions and Practices', as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting Arab cities in urban development, with a special focus on preserving and managing urban heritage. By working with municipalities, international organizations, and urban planning professionals, AUDI offers insights, best practices, policy recommendations, and case studies that highlight the need to integrate heritage preservation into urban development frameworks. This integration is vital for maintaining the unique identities of cities amid rapid urban and economic change.

As a pioneering organization in urban and municipal development, AUDI helps its member cities tackle urban challenges by researching innovative policies, promoting the exchange of ideas, building institutional capacity, and fostering local and international partnerships.

This report emphasizes the key role urban heritage plays in shaping the identity of Arab cities, strengthening social cohesion, and driving economic growth through cultural tourism and sustainable development practices. Preserving historic urban areas is not just about honoring the past—it's also about creating vibrant, inclusive, and adaptable cities for the future.

Given the unprecedented rapid urbanization and environmental challenges in the Arab region, urban heritage management must become a core element of urban planning. This requires forward-looking policies, smart technologies, and inclusive governance that actively involves local communities in heritage preservation efforts throughout Arab cities.

This report aims to serve as a key resource for decision-makers, urban planners, researchers, and others dedicated to preserving urban heritage in Arab cities. It forms part of the Institute's broader urban policy research program, which seeks to document and share practices and policies across all areas of urban development in the region. Through the visions and strategies outlined in these reports, the Institute hopes to encourage collaboration and collective action that will advance urban development across Arab cities.

The report aims to be a practical resource for decision-makers, planners, researchers, and others committed to urban heritage preservation in Arab cities. It is part of AUDI's broader research initiative to document and share policies and practices related to urban development in the Arab world. The Institute hopes the insights shared here will foster collaboration and drive progress in urban planning across the region.

Finally, AUDI expresses deep appreciation to the experts, institutions, and city representatives who contributed to this work, and highlights its online platform as a valuable space for showcasing urban projects, especially those focused on heritage conservation and municipal development.



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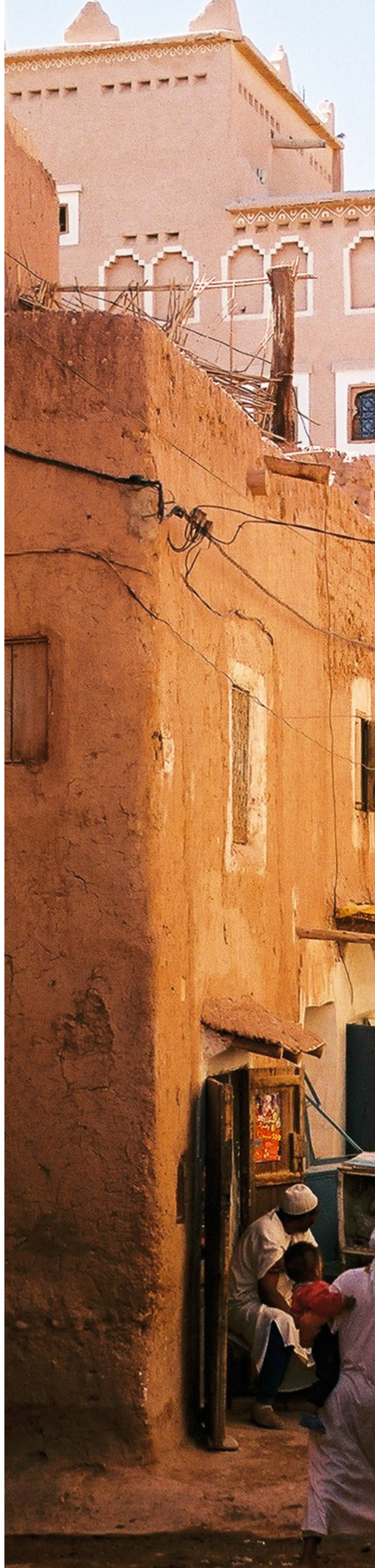
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADER-Fès	Agence pour le Développement et la Réhabilitation de la Médina de Fès
AFESD	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development
AKTC	Aga Khan Trust for Culture
AKTC-Egypt	Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Egypt
AMB	Barcelona Metropolitan Area
ANSS	National Agency for Safeguard Sectors
ARC-WH	Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage
ARRU	Agence de la Rehabilitation et de la Rénovation Urbaine, 'Agency for Urban Rehabilitation and Renovation'
ASM	Association Sauvegarde de la Médina
ASCDP	As-Salt City Development Projects Unit
ASGM	As-Salt Greater Municipality
BACA	Bahrain Authority for Culture & Antiquities
BDC	Al Balad Development Company
BEST	Building Economic Sustainability through Tourism
CAC	Cairo Governorate
CCSR	City Core Special Regulations
CDR	Council for Development and Reconstruction
CHEC	Cultural Heritage Enrichment Center
CHUD	Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Project
CMP	Conservation Management Plan
DGA	Directorate General of Antiquities
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
HUL	Historical Urban Landscape
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICESCO	Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
ILDH	Moroccan Local Initiative for Human Development
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHT	Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (Oman)
MoC	Ministry of Culture (Egypt)
MoHUUC	Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities
MoMRA	Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (Saudi Arabia)
MoTA	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
NOUH	National Organization of Urban Harmony
NUA	New Urban Agenda
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIF	Public Investment Fund
RSS	Royal Scientific Society (Jordan)
SBAH	Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage
SCA	Supreme Council of Antiquities
SCITHOS	Smart City Hospitality
SCTH	Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage
SDC	Salt Development Corporation
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-WHC	UNESCO World Heritage Centre
URHC	Urban Regeneration of Historic Cairo project
WHS	World Heritage Site





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Diriyah Heritage Village, Saudi Arabia
Source: Mishele Ijaz

The archaeological evidence in Arab cities stands as a testament to their close connection to heritage. The finest examples of this are the masterpieces of Egypt, the majestic Islamic architecture of the holy lands of the Hejaz, and the rich cultural heritage of the Maghreb. Retaining and strengthening this connection, therefore, becomes a key agenda for cities across the region. However, the process by which each municipality or local government entity governs and manages its heritage varies depending on both the heritage type, and on the city's legal, political and socio-economic context.

This report on Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities has been produced with the aim of providing insights to municipalities on policies and practices prevalent in the region in the domain of urban heritage management. It is rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the concept of heritage as a social, cultural, and economic asset, that is preserved from the past not only to serve as a memory but also as a means to shaping the future. There are various approaches adopted internationally when it comes to the management of heritage, with the predominant one being the 'Historic Urban Landscape' approach that focuses on the integration of heritage management and policies with the overarching goals of sustainable urban development.

As a municipal responsibility, the management of heritage management relies heavily on an adept governance system that is well integrated with other sectors and functions in alignment with an appropriate legal, political, and financial framework.

In the case of the Arab region, UNESCO's World Heritage List includes 26 cities and towns from Middle East and North Africa alone. The challenges faced by Arab cities when it comes to the management of their heritage vary depending on social, political, and economic context. These include issues related to infrastructure and services, rapid urbanization, gentrification, urban poverty, lack of regulation and others.

Through an in-depth study of 9 cities in the Arab region, this report highlights innovative and local approaches to heritage management that have been adopted by across the 9 cities and are relevant to others in the region. Approaches such as the participatory heritage policies and practices of Tunisia and Morocco, post-conflict regeneration in Iraq, linking of heritage to climate action in the Sudan, integration of local communities in the management of heritage in Oman, the growing class of independent conservation professionals in Egypt, targeted investment in heritage management and revitalization in the Gulf, and the building of consensus around the value of heritage in Jordan all represent the diversity of practices prevalent in the Arab region.

Each case study provides insights into the city's unique heritage context, the legislative and regulatory framework that governs it, and the major issues it faces. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of a specific project or initiative in the respective city and the key lessons learned from the process by which the initiative was implemented.

Furthermore, the report uses these case studies as a backdrop to engage the reader in an insightful discussion on how cities can manage their urban heritage. This discourse is presented through three key levels of city management, namely the institutional vision and policy level, the strategic level, and the managerial level. A series of recommendations are also presented at each level, focusing on a range of concerns including the right to heritage, the need for tailoring international urban heritage frameworks to the local context, the vital role played by Conservation Management Plans, the importance of academic and vocational training programs, and the value of participatory frameworks.

By shedding light on the diverse experiences and strategies adopted by cities across the region, this report serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, urban planners, and heritage professionals striving to preserve and integrate urban heritage within contemporary cityscapes. It highlights the importance of fostering inclusive and adaptive governance models that ensure heritage conservation is not seen as a constraint to development but rather as a catalyst for innovation, social cohesion, and economic prosperity.

01
INTRODUCTION

Beirut Lebanon
Source: Joseph Khoury | @joekhourystudio Project @bouyoutbeirut

This report reviews the state of urban heritage management policies and practices in Arab cities. It provides city managers with an overview of the challenges, possibilities, successes and failures in dealing with the subtle balance between preservation and change that is at the heart of urban heritage management. It reflects on how urban heritage management could contribute to the sustainable urban development and resilience of cities in the Arab region.

This introduction discusses the main definitions, issues and approaches of urban heritage management before providing an overview of the main challenges concerning it in Arab cities. It then outlines the research methodology behind this report and concludes with a brief description of the report's structure.

What is Urban Heritage Management?

Meanings and types of urban heritage

Heritage is a fuzzy concept with unstable boundaries, shifting meaning depending on context. It is commonly understood as what we have inherited from the past to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations. This definition may seem obvious and instinctive, but it is also the result of a long thought-exercise that grapples with questions such as:

- What (and who) determines which material and immaterial aspects of our past count as heritage?
- What are the different types of heritage?
- How do we preserve this heritage?
- What are the resources needed to preserve this heritage? Is heritage itself a resource?
- Who owns this heritage?

These questions inspired a more nuanced definition of heritage, coined by South Africa's National Heritage Council in 2020:

"Heritage is what is preserved from the past as the living collective memory of a people not only to inform the present about the past but also to equip successive generations to fashion their future. It is what creates a sense of identity and assures rootedness and continuity, so that what is brought out by dynamism of culture is not change for its own sake, but it is a result of people's conscious choice to create a better life" (Sloggett & Scott, 2022, 4).

In this definition, heritage is primarily conceptualized as a communal resource that is identified and preserved through a constant process of negotiation between continuity and change. This understanding forms the foundation of this report, whose purpose is to enable municipal authorities to ask the right questions concerning the management and preservation of their urban heritage.

Heritage is divided into cultural and natural heritage. Cultural heritage is human made while natural heritage is formed by nature. Cultural heritage is further divided into tangible physical artefacts such as buildings and movable objects, and intangible heritage attributes such as inherited knowledge and skills. These divisions are fluid and overlapping, especially in an urban context in which many different types of built and spatial heritage (buildings, groups of buildings, historic city centers, historic cities) interact with cultural norms, traditions and identities. This is why UNESCO has attempted to bring them together in the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach. According to this systems-based approach,

"Urban heritage is for humanity a social, cultural and economic asset, defined by an historic layering of values that have been produced by successive and existing cultures." (UNESCO, 2011)

This approach will be discussed below in more detail, but first, it may be useful to review the different definitions of urban heritage that led to the HUL definition.

The 1987 Washington Charter adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Site (ICOMOS) listed the qualities that express historic urban character as:

a) Urban patterns as defined by lots and streets;

b) Relationships between buildings and green and open spaces;

c) The formal appearance, interior and exterior, of buildings as defined by scale, size, style, construction, materials, color and decoration;

d) The relationship between the town or urban area and its surrounding setting, both natural and man-made;

e) The various functions that the town or urban area has acquired over time. (ICOMOS, 1987)

The Valletta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historic Cities, Towns and Urban Areas, adopted by ICOMOS in 2011, clearly refers to the tangible and intangible elements that together constitute historic urban environments:

"The tangible elements include, in addition to the urban structure, architectural elements, the landscapes within and around the town, archaeological remains, panoramas, skylines, view-lines and landmark sites. Intangible elements include activities, symbolic and historic functions, cultural practices, traditions, memories, and cultural references that constitute the substance of their historic value". (ICOMOS, 2011)

Building on the 2008 Quebec Declaration (ICOMOS Canada, 2008), the Valletta Principles refers to the overarching concept of spirit of place or genius loci which it defines as:

The tangible and intangible, the physical and the spiritual elements that give the area its specific identity, meaning, emotion and mystery. The spirit creates the space and at the same time the space constructs and structures this spirit. (ICOMOS, 2011)

At the heart of these internationally established definitions of urban heritage is the challenge of formulating heritage management practices that are locally orientated, participatory, inclusive, and integrated so that heritage becomes a true communal asset in our cities.

Three different approaches to Heritage Management

Heritage management starts with declaring an element or aspect of the city as a historic asset worthy of preservation. Traditionally, this has been organized through the identification of certain attributes of value or significance worth preserving. The thoughtful identification of values results in a well-articulated statement of significance which, in turn, provides the basis for listing. Through listing, elements within the city are designated as heritage that should be preserved. One heritage site can have multiple statements of significance depending on the vision of its management apparatus. This vision tends to oscillate between three approaches. These approaches attempt to resolve an underlying tension between heritage values associated with essential approaches of preserving heritage for its own sake and societal values aiming to instrumentalize heritage as an asset (Avrami et.al., 2019).

- Material-based evaluation and management of heritage emphasizes the historical fabric and art-historical attributes of cultural heritage and is most suited for heritage sites belonging to older civilizations, and as such are no longer in use.
- Values-based management seeks to identify the significance of heritage through an analysis of its different values as perceived by relevant stakeholders. In this approach, the challenge may be to reconcile different understandings of heritage held by different stakeholders.
- Finally, people-centered or narrative-based management conceives of heritage sites as 'living heritage', repositories of narratives that are always in the process of becoming.

Developed in response to the shortcomings of the first two approaches, the living heritage approach is, in theory, the most nuanced and democratic of approaches and yet, in practice, it is the hardest to implement. It is a participatory approach that requires a commitment from all stakeholders to the continued custodianship of heritage and a constant negotiation of the "Right to Heritage".

Planning and Implementing Urban Heritage Management Practices

Urban heritage management begins with the evaluation of heritage, the listing of heritage sites based on a statement of significance, and the development of a management approach that responds to local conditions and stakeholder requirements. International documents such as the Washington Charter (ICOMOS, 1987) and the Valletta Principles (ICOMOS, 2011) grappled with these issues on an urban scale, leading to the establishment of UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach which framed the question of 'Right to Heritage' within the concept of Sustainable Urban Heritage Management.

These documents and frameworks all align, in varying degrees, with principles embedded in global approaches to sustainable development, as reflected in Target 11.4 of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals which aims to "strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage" (United Nations, 2015).

After all, urban heritage management is not about freezing the built environment in a moment in time. It is about managing change to preserve heritage as a resource for present and future generations. The New Urban Agenda adopted in 2016 at Habitat III, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, commits to leveraging cultural heritage for sustainable urban development and recognizing its role in stimulating participation and responsibility (UN-Habitat, 2016A, item 125).

Urban heritage can be incorporated into processes of sustainable development by conceiving of the city as a set of systems. This is best achieved through an inclusive, participatory people-centered process in which communities are custodians and beneficiaries of their heritage.



Shibam, Yemen
Source: Hidden Architecture

Urban heritage management is first and foremost a municipal responsibility. It should be carried out within a well-articulated governance system in partnership with other sectors, the most significant being the sector responsible for heritage in general on a local and national level. This is a technically complex and culturally nuanced process that requires a well-structured legal and management framework, political will, adequate funding and human capacities.

The challenges of integrating urban heritage management and sustainable urban development are many and diverse, as articulated in the Manual for City Professionals developed jointly by UNESCO and UN-Habitat:

1. How should the protection of historic districts be integrated into urban policies, urban strategies and management programs, and how should professionals and managers be trained in participatory processes?
2. How should the sustainable management of historic surroundings be used for the social and economic regeneration of historic districts, and how can the area benefit from an urban revival through revitalization and the reuse of urban heritage?
3. At the same time, how can decision-makers and city professionals be made aware of the need for a balance to be maintained between the preservation of buildings and street fittings with enhancement and conservation of intangible heritage, particularly its values, memory and history?
4. How can the new economic and social needs fit into the original urban context without compromising the identity and authenticity of the historical fabric as "living" entity of the whole city?
5. How can one ensure that inhabitants' aspirations are taken into account in the development process?
6. How can inhabitants be made aware that they themselves constitute the specificity and the sociocultural richness of their own district? (Veirier, 2008, 11):

The HUL approach, one of the methodological frameworks employed in this report, attempts to respond to these challenges.

The Historic Urban Landscape approach

The purpose of the HUL approach is to "ensure the integration of cultural heritage policies and management concerns in the wider goals of sustainable urban development." (Ginzarli et. al., 2018, 999). It proposes a six-step action plan, which begins with a diagnostic phase of: (1) mapping cultural and natural resources; (2) identifying values; and (3) assessing vulnerabilities. It then moves to a prescriptive phase: (4) integrating heritage elements into spatial planning; (5) prioritizing policies and actions; and (6) developing partnerships and coordination mechanisms for implementation. (UNESCO, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2023A). The implementation of the HUL approach is supported by four categories of tools: (i) knowledge and planning; (ii) civic engagement; (iii) financial tools; and (iv) regulatory systems.

With the support of UNESCO, this comprehensive and ambitious framework has been adopted in many cities around the world. The most substantive critique of the HUL approach relates, however, to its ambitious scope and broad mandate. The approach requires a lengthy, labor-intensive planning phase. Moreover, many cities face considerable challenges in the implementation phase, including: a lack of knowledge, capacities or frameworks for planning; insufficient political buy-in; limited governance frameworks for civic engagement; inadequate financial resources; and/or poor regulatory systems.

In 2023, UNESCO published a report on the implementation of the HUL approach within several member states. The consolidated results covered six themes: governance mechanism and planning; inventories; participatory management; ensuring inclusive benefits of urban heritage; advanced sustainable development; and knowledge and capacity building. To assess the adoption of the HUL approach as an urban management framework, surveys were sent to UNESCO member states. It is noteworthy that Arab states had the lowest response rate (10%) and that they have the lowest percentage of participatory processes open to the public.

Overview of Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities

The richness of heritage in Arab cities is indisputable. The magnificence of the cities of Egypt, Iraq, and Bilad al-Sham, the charm of the medinas of the Maghreb, the sacred cities of Palestine and the Hijaz, and the splendor of natural settings and architecture in Yemen and Oman all connect contemporary life to age-old customs and traditions. These locations are also rich in traditional crafts and intangible heritage, carried into the present by rooted communities.

UNESCO's World Heritage List includes 26 cities and towns in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (UNESCO-WHC: Arab States). Attempts to integrate heritage in urban management vary depending on the type of heritage and according to different legal, political and socio-economic contexts. Arab cities struggle, to varying degrees, with the generic issues of urban heritage: namely, the lack of an effective urban management framework; the deterioration of urban fabrics, infrastructure and services; insufficient housing-led revitalization; unchecked urbanization and poorly regulated new construction; inadequate controls over tourism and gentrification; spatial inequality and urban poverty; unemployment; and the gradual loss of social cohesion, to name a few. This is in addition to the immediate threat of war and conflict in certain contexts and the growing threat of climate change in general.

Intact medinas, such as those of the Maghreb, require an integrated approach to heritage management. Morocco and Tunisia have been pioneers in this area [Case studies 3 & 4: Fez & Tunis]. Municipalities work with national heritage protection bodies according to management plans that integrate conservation with development. The challenge tends to be securing the necessary financial resources. Ideally, heritage management should be funded by resources from heritage industries such as cultural tourism and crafts. A well-run heritage city is also a valuable real estate asset, although this can risk producing new challenges in the form of social disruption and gentrification. However, the initial investment into conservation and regeneration requires the allocation of resources, whether by the state, local government, private investors or international funding bodies.

Larger scale cities such as Cairo feature a mix of Islamicate,[1] colonial, and modern heritage, but the demands of an exploding metropolis generate considerable challenges for heritage management. [Case Studies 1 & 2: Cairo]. The tasks of streamlining management, securing funding and reaching consensus between different stakeholders concerning the significance of and management framework for heritage has yet to be adequately addressed.

Some cities, mostly in the Gulf, are new to the game of heritage and have the resources to build their heritage management frameworks on strong foundations [Case Studies 8 & 9: Muharraq & Jeddah]. They have the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of others. The challenge here is to ensure that policies are built on a strong framework that takes into account the "right to heritage" and a well-reasoned understanding of the significance of this heritage.

In cities across the region, rocked by social polarization, military occupations and armed conflicts, urban heritage is instrumentalized in political narratives and is often in danger of destruction. However, heritage can also become symbols of hope, solidarity, resilience and healing during and after conflicts [Case Study 7: Mosul]. In these cases, the challenge is not simply heritage protection but involves navigating the complex social and political claims around heritage, especially in contexts of reconstruction.

Another issue prevalent in the MENA region is related to operational frameworks and processes of implementation (ICCROM, 2016; Feilden & Jokilehto 1998; UNESCO et.al. 2013). Many of the attempts at improving the state of heritage in MENA cities are project-based, linked to a limited funding cycle or a fleeting window of political will. Sometimes, these attempts succeed in embedding a project into an institutional framework, linking it to legislative, regulatory, and institutional reform and capacity building. But several do not.

Finally, there is the question of human resources and capacities. Whether it is at the level of traditional crafts or the professional knowhow needed for conservation, much needs to be done in terms of vocational training and higher education to cultivate the skills needed for effective heritage management (Soufan, 2022).

Framework, Methodology, and Structure of the Report

The report provides a closer look into these various challenges facing Arab cities. It aims to support city managers and urban policy makers in dealing with them. It does so based on an analysis of urban heritage management practices in more than 20 Arab cities, of which 9 are covered in detail through 10 case studies. The selection of these case studies is intended to cover the widest possible geographic diversity within the Arab region, but also to capture a diversity of issues and challenges faced by Arab cities when it comes to urban heritage management. The analysis is based on a review of the available literature and documentation regarding urban heritage, taking into account the ways in which it is regulated and governed as well as examining specific conservation initiatives and projects. It builds on more than 25 interviews with urban heritage specialists and municipal representatives from across the region.

1 The cultural, socio-economic, and political realm historically associated to Islam and Muslims and incorporating a diversity of religions and ethnicities and sub-cultures within it.

After a detailed account of the case studies, the report reflects on the three main levels of intervention framing urban heritage management: the institutional level, the strategic level and the operational/managerial level. The institutional level concerns the governance and regulatory frameworks of urban heritage management, the way they define urban heritage, the values that are attributed to urban heritage, and the role of different institutions within urban development frameworks. The strategic level reviews the ways that understandings of heritage are redefined within the local urban context and translated into modes of intervention, while taking into consideration the developmental priorities of cities, the interests of their diverse stakeholders and the specific moments in which these initiatives and projects are taking place. Finally, the operational/managerial level focuses on issues of funding, the need for particular skills, the challenges of coordinating between institutions and relevant stakeholders, the opportunities for public engagement, the different approaches to monitoring urban heritage systems and more.

In the concluding section, the study synthesizes its findings into a series of key observations and recommendations meant to serve municipalities as they work to preserve the heritage of their cities for the benefit of their citizens.

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Ait Benhaddou Village in Morocco
Source: Alex Azabache | Unsplash

02
CASE STUDIES

Image: Alhajrain, Yemen
Source: Hamza Abu Bakr | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition

Historic Cairo Darb-Al-Ahmer

Cairo was founded at the southern tip of the Nile Delta in 641 as the first Islamicate capital of Egypt. The modern city is a conglomerate of capitals that include al-Fustat (est. 641), al-'Askar (est. 750), al-Qata'i' (est. 868) and al-Qahira (est. 969)

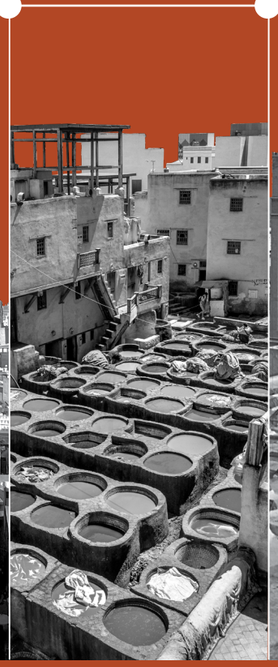
Cairo



ADER-Fes

Founded during the 9th century, Fez initially consisted of two autonomous settlements on the banks of the river Fez. In the 11th century, the Almoravid Dynasty united the two settlements into what is today Fez el-Bali (old Fez)

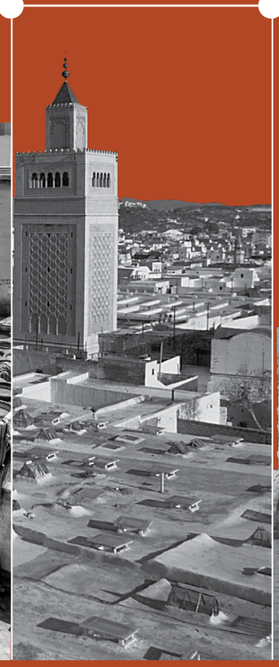
Fez



The Medina of Tunis

The Medina of Tunis is one of the first Arab Muslim cities established in the Maghreb (698 CE.) and was considered one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in the Arab world from the 12th to the 16th centuries.

Tunis



Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Project

Byblos, also known as Jbeil, is believed to have been first settled between 8800 and 7000 BCE, and continuously inhabited since 5000 BCE, making it one of the oldest cities in the world.

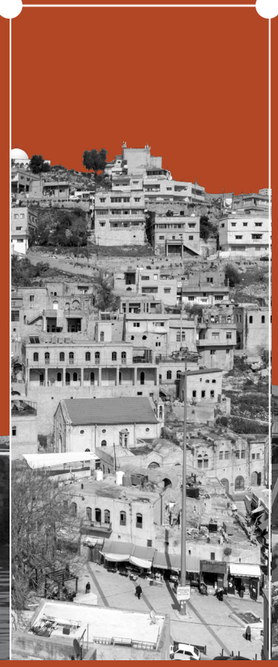
Byblos



Conservation Management Plan

Located in the Balqa highland in west-central Jordan, As-Salt was the capital of Trans-Jordan during the Ottoman period and thrived as a trade center between the 1860s and the 1920s.

As-Salt



Reviving the Spirit of Mosul

Mosul was once an integral part of the Assyrian Empire, holding strategic importance on the banks of the river Tigris and providing the link between Eastern and Western civilizations. Al-mawsil in Arabic means the link, the junction or the bridge

Mosul



The Pearling Path

In the 19th century, Muharraq thrived as Bahrain's capital and as a prominent global hub for the pearl industry. Its status as an important trade center also made Muharraq a hub for Bahraini intellectual, cultural and political life

Muharraq



Jeddah Historic District Project

From the seventh century CE, Jeddah served as a major port for Indian Ocean trade routes, channeling goods to Mecca. The city flourished as a vital trading hub on the ancient Silk Road and became a global gateway for pilgrims to Mecca

Jeddah



Community Cooperatives

Nizwa is one of the oldest cities in Oman and in the wider Gulf region. The city has been a center of agriculture, trade, religion, education and art for thousands of years and has played a vital political and cultural role in Oman since ancient times

Nizwa



The 10 case studies in this section are intended to represent the diversity of Arab cities capturing variations in geographic location, context, scale, urban fabric, historical character, socio-economic profile, heritage challenges and regulatory and legislative framework that shaped the solutions for these challenges. Histories of conservation in Arab cities are tied to different histories of political, cultural, and socio-economic development, reflecting place-specific transitions from traditional to modern cities. Some cities were shaped by shifts from colonial to post-colonial governance, others transformed by oil booms, while others bear the marks of economic crises and political and military conflicts.

The review begins with the cities of North Africa, all of which started their journey of urban conservation under European colonial rule, and all of which have intact medinas around which modern cities have grown. They all have a relatively well-established tradition of conservation marred by a lack of economic resources. Cairo, the first of these cities, is the largest, most diverse and the most problematic due to recurring shortfalls in economic resources and adequate operational tools.

The first two case studies are devoted to this context. The first focuses on the process of identifying the administrative borders of the historic city and the discrepancy between the borders set by local regulatory frameworks and those set for the purpose of the city's registration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The second case study focuses on what is arguably the first attempt at integrated urban conservation in Cairo: the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's Darb al-Ahmar Project.

The two other North African cities reviewed are Fez and Tunis, sites for some of the earliest and most exemplary experiences of integrated conservation in the Arab world. Both cities set up pioneering participatory frameworks that include civil society. Both also established special bodies to manage their historic cities, with Fez's framework proving the most durable. Both struggle with economic resources and supplement local funding with international loans and grants, in addition to the revenue generated by tourism and heritage industries. Both must stay vigilant against the dangers of overtourism and gentrification.

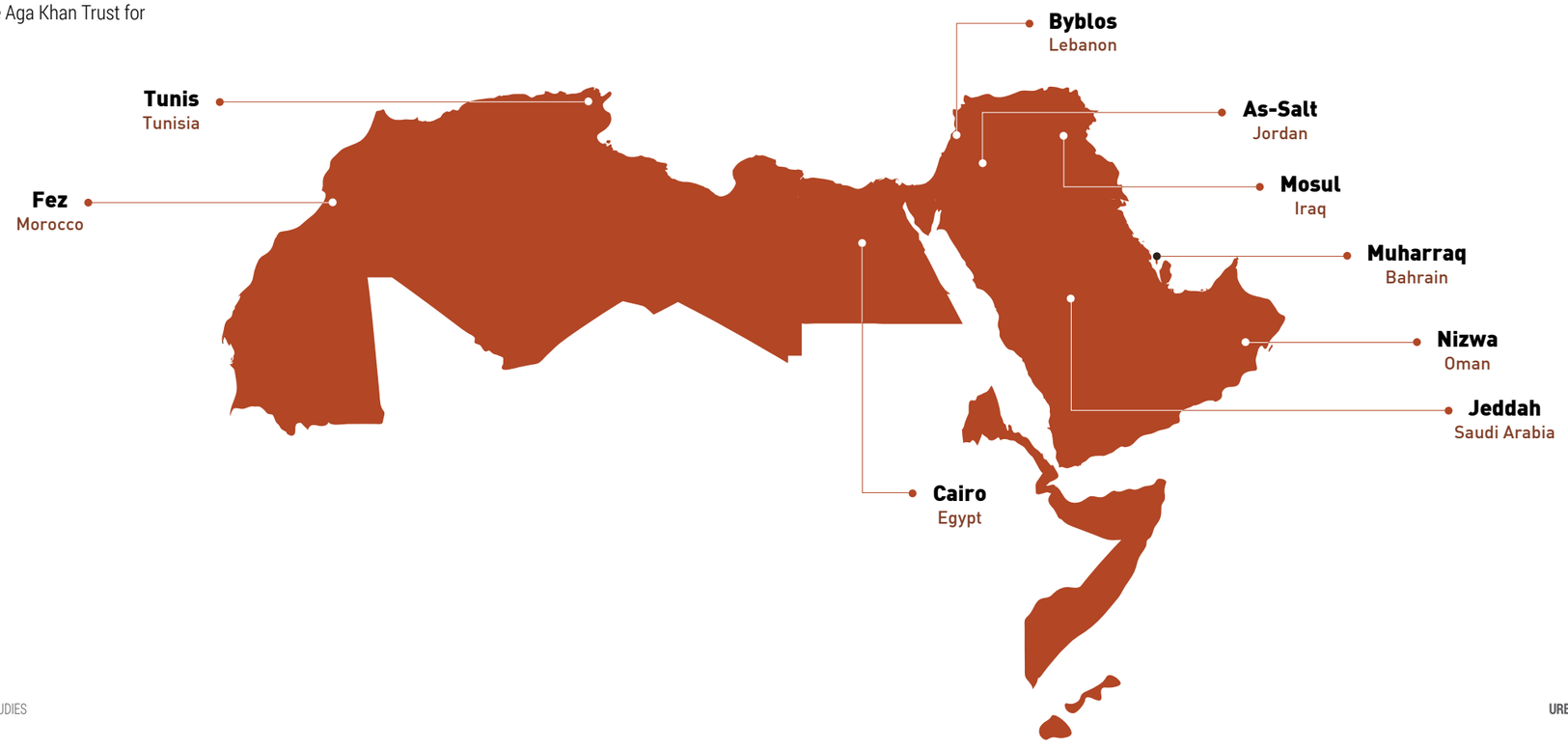
Cities in Bilad al-Sham and the Fertile Crescent are more diverse in terms of the stories they tell. Byblos in Lebanon and As-Salt in Jordan are both examples of cities that were revitalized through initiatives that have since waned due to changing political and/or economic circumstances. In the case of Byblos, it was a combination of the end of a World Bank loan, economic and political breakdown in Lebanon and the reduction of the scope of the state-owned company that oversaw implementation. In both cases, seeds were sown. Byblos continues to benefit economically from tourism. As-Salt was listed as a World Heritage Site in 2021 and tourism has started to surge. However, neither initiative brought about the full measure of institutional reform required to effectively manage change.

The case of Mosul in Iraq provides stories of post-war reconstruction, where reconstruction efforts coordinated by UNESCO target monuments to Mosul's history of co-existence. They are intended to encourage the city's original communities to return to their neighborhoods. They also combine rehabilitation with initiatives that celebrate Mosul's art and culture. Both cities use post-war reconstruction as a means of nation-building and job creation.

Two case studies represent the Gulf region: Muharraq in Bahrain and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. In these cities, the economic resources and political will were present to facilitate conservation and revitalization efforts, but the objectives, scale, approach, and regulatory frameworks characterizing these efforts have brought about very different results. In the case of Muharraq, the scale of the project is relatively small and it is supported by the State and the ruling family. Its strength is in its use of contemporary design as a generator and culture as an activator. However, so far, this has not been linked to a clear national vision, nor has it resulted in wider legal or regulatory reforms. The work in Jeddah, on the other hand, is linked to a complete turn in Saudi Arabia's vision of the role its heritage can play in the future of the country. All heritage strategies are linked to the government's Saudi Vision 2030 program and institutional reforms are underway to streamline heritage management and urban revitalization. However, in the case of Jeddah, the outskirts of the historic city have been affected by urban developments that are also part of that vision.

Finally, the case of Nizwa in Oman illustrates the efforts made by the national government to find creative management and technical solutions through the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the custodianship of heritage. Solutions range from training professionals and supporting them to set up heritage conservation firms and contracting companies, enabling community-led companies to manage heritage sites and partnering with researchers to streamline the production of heritage materials.

Across these 10 cities, urban heritage has become a driver of socio-economic development. It has the potential to provide a potent foundation for an improved quality of life for each city's citizens. To ensure this, there is a need for further capacity building on all levels, better cross-sectoral coordination, improved operational and regulatory tools and, most importantly, stronger mechanisms for governance and participation. All of these cities must root their solutions in their citizens' fundamental right to their own heritage: not just in terms of benefit and access, but also as a cultural signifier of their diverse histories and identities.



CASE STUDY

HISTORIC CAIRO, EGYPT

Cairo was founded at the southern tip of the Nile Delta in 641 as the first Islamicate capital of Egypt. The modern city is a conglomerate of capitals that include al-Fustat (est. 641), al-'Askar (est. 750), al-Qata'i' (est. 868) and al-Qahira (est. 969). In the 19th and early 20th century, new neighborhoods such as Downtown (Khedival) Cairo, Heliopolis and Maadi were built. The Greater Cairo Region is today a sprawling megalopolis that combines the Governorate of Cairo and sections of al-Giza and al-Qalyubiyya Governorates, in addition to new desert communities, the latest of which is the new administrative capital of Cairo currently being built to the east. Historic Cairo was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Property in 1979 (UNESCO-WHC: Historic Cairo).

Image: Al-Azhar Park, Cairo
Source: Al azhar | Wikimedia commons

Introduction

Cairo was founded at the southern tip of the Nile Delta in 641 as the first Islamicate capital of Egypt. The modern city is a conglomerate of capitals that include al-Fustat (est. 641), al-'Askar (est. 750), al-Qata'i' (est. 868) and al-Qahira (est. 969). In the 19th and early 20th century, new neighborhoods such as Downtown (Khedival) Cairo, Heliopolis and Maadi were built. The Greater Cairo Region is today a sprawling megalopolis that combines the Governorate of Cairo and sections of al-Giza and al-Qalyubiyya Governorates, in addition to new desert communities, the latest of which is the new administrative capital of Cairo currently being built to the east. Historic Cairo was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Property in 1979 (UNESCO-WHC: Historic Cairo).

Morphology, topography and context

Cairo Governorate is located around the southern tip of the Nile Delta. Historic Cairo is integrated within the core of Cairo Governorate, overlooking the Nile at its northernmost extension (Bulaq) and southernmost extension (al-Fustat). Historic cemeteries extend along its southern and eastern borders, at the foot of al-Muqattam Hill. Historic Cairo is mostly flat, with some eastern sections on higher ground provided by the outcrops of al-Muqattam Hill.

10.1 million

Population of Cairo Governorate (2022) [2]
Population of Historic Cairo: unavailable for the current borders.

308,467,600 ha	18,898,200 ha[3]	524 ha
Cairo Governorate	Inhabited area	Historic Cairo

Significant heritage type

Historic Cairo contains within it more than 600 listed monuments from the Islamicate period (roughly from 641 till the end of the 19th century) and 700 listed historic buildings (roughly from the end of the 19th century to around the mid-20th century). Significantly, it retains much of its historic urban fabric and is a living city with a vibrant traditional craft and street culture, maintained by a rooted community. It contains Cairo's unparalleled historic cemeteries whose shrines, multifunctional funerary structures and non-funerary clusters render them an integral part of the city's urban dynamics. The scale and diversity of what remains from pre-modern times distinguishes Cairo as a site of living heritage. The city's landmark monuments testify to the historic international, political, strategic, intellectual, artistic and commercial significance of Cairo.

2 State Information Service. 2022. Cairo Governorate.; https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/166905/Cairo-Governorate?lang=en-us

3 State Information Service. 2022. Cairo Governorate.; https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/166905/Cairo-Governorate?lang=en-us

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

Historic Cairo does not have one single governmental body in charge of its management and protection. Its main governmental stakeholders include Cairo Governorate (CG), the Ministry of Culture (MoC) represented by the National Organization of Urban Harmony (NOUH), the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), and the Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities (MoHUUC). At a national level, Cairo's citizens are represented in Parliament by members of the House of Representatives and members of the Senate. Governors and heads of municipalities are appointed. Elected local and city councils have been suspended since 2012.

Law 119 (2008) and its bylaws provide the general urban regulatory law for Egypt as a whole. Historic Cairo has three tiers of listing: 1) historic areas (urban scale); 2) historic buildings (buildings of significance dating from around the 19th century onwards); and 3) historic monuments (roughly mid-19th century buildings and older). Special regulations for Historic Cairo's borders and urban management, and for the preservation of listed historic buildings, are set by NOUH (NOUH, 2010; NOUH 2022). Listed monuments are governed by MoTA according to the Antiquities Protection Law 117 (1987) and its amendment Law 3 (2010).

Issues

Historic Cairo's scale, diversity and complete integration with the contemporary city requires a clear vision translated into a well-thought-out management framework. It also requires the political will and resources to implement this vision. The poor condition of Historic Cairo's buildings and open spaces is part of a bigger set of issues facing the city that include dilapidated infrastructure, rising groundwater, uncontrolled urban transformation, lack of maintenance and services, as well as socio-economic pressure. Despite ongoing efforts toward the preservation of monuments by MoTA with both national and international partners, many of Historic Cairo's listed monuments require major intervention and most lack an adequate maintenance framework. Responsibility for the preservation of listed historic buildings is often left to their owners, with no financial or technical support from the government. The development of the urban management laws and guidelines described above constituted an important step forward, but the implementation of these laws is still lacking. A number of government-led urban upgrade projects are currently underway, but they are hindered by a lack of collective vision and undermined by the state-level demolition of historic urban fabrics for the creation of cross-city roads, highways and flyovers.

1800-1850

Spatial interventions in Cairo

First measured map of Cairo by the Napoleonic Expedition to Egypt and first attempts to cut straight streets through the Islamicate city.

1850-1900

Protection and conservation of Monuments

Committee for the Conservation of Monuments of Arab Art established. Construction starts on Khedival Cairo. First monument protection law 18 (1918).

1900-1950

First plan proposed

The first plan for urban management of the historic city proposed but never fully implemented.

1970-1980

Historic Cairo as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Major roadworks cutting through the Historic City. Outward migration from Historic Cairo. Historic Cairo listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Monument Law 118 (1987)

1990-2000

Historic Cairo Development Project

1992 Earthquake. Historic Cairo Development Project established in 1998 with a program for urban management focusing on the main spine of Historic Cairo. Aga Khan Darb al-Ahmar Project starts in 1984

2000-2010

Regulations to protect heritage

Law 144 (2006), then Law 119 (2008). New Historic Cairo borders submitted to UNESCO in 2007. Monument law amendment 3 (2010)

2010-2024

Establishment of institutions and regeneration projects

January 25th 2011 revolution. Ministry of Antiquities established in 2011. Ministries of Tourism and Antiquities merged in 2019. UNESCOs URHC project proposes new borders for Histoirc Cairo. Ministry of Housing's Urban Development Fund pilots neighbourhood regeneration projects.



Case study 01

Setting a Management Framework for Historic Cairo

Image: Aerial view of Historic Cairo | Source: Mishele Ijaz

What are the boundaries of Historic Cairo?

Historic Cairo has two different protection boundaries. The first were presented by the Egyptian state to UNESCO as the boundaries for the World Heritage Property of Historic Cairo. The current map of Historic Cairo was prepared in 2007. Between 2010 and 2014, UNESCO's World Heritage Centre ran the Urban Regeneration of Historic Cairo project (URHC) to help the Egyptian government reformulate borders and prepare a conservation management plan for Historic Cairo. URHC proposed to extend the boundaries of Historic Cairo while setting a system for grading its administrative neighborhoods (shiyakhas) according to the physical integrity and intangible values of their historical urban fabric. The Egyptian government did not ratify the URHC modifications. In 2022, it submitted a proposal for minor modifications of the 2007 boundaries and the World Heritage Centre countered with a request for further revisions. The second boundaries were ratified by the National Planning Council according to Law 119 (2008). The setting of bylaws and architectural and urban management guidelines for the area within these boundaries is the responsibility of the NOUH and Cairo Governorate is responsible for implementation.

The two maps included on the next page were prepared by URHC to represent the following:

- Map I indicates the World Heritage boundaries and buffer zone submitted in 2007, delineated against the modifications proposed by URHC in 2014.
- Map II indicates the boundaries and buffer zone of Historic Cairo as set by NOUH, delineated against the boundaries proposed by URHC in 2014. This map also illustrates the boundaries of the neighborhood of Khedival Cairo and its intersection with Historic Cairo.

Who manages Historic Cairo?

The following table illustrates the responsibilities of different Egyptian state actors towards Historic Cairo. This framework is fluid, resulting in a fuzzy overall vision and generating difficulties in terms of implementation. However, the framework also accommodates non-state actors, enlisting local and international civil society to develop agile solutions.

Cairo Governorate (CG)

Municipal body responsible for enforcing architectural and urban guidelines, in collaboration with the NOUH. The main area of Historic Cairo is part of eight administrative districts within the Governorate. All offices within the municipal body are appointed.

National Organization of Urban Harmony (NOUH), part of the Ministry of Culture (MoC)

Setting boundaries and urban management guidelines for Historic Cairo (among other historic zones in Greater Cairo) and providing technical support to Cairo Governorate in the enforcement process. Setting national guidelines for the listing of heritage buildings of outstanding styles (mostly 19th and 20th century buildings).

Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA)

Listing and protection of antiquity buildings (generally dating up to the 19th century). MoTA officials liaise with UNESCO with regards to Historic Cairo. Within MoTA, the Department of Historic Cairo is responsible for the upgrade and management of al-Mui'zz Street and surrounding areas and for the conservation of historic monuments.

Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (MoHUC)

Responsible for public housing projects, roads, utilities (except electricity) and the upgrading of dilapidated neighborhoods through its Urban Development Fund (UDF). Some of these fall within Historic Cairo. The MoHUC also runs the Fatimid Cairo Project, which implements conservation projects under the supervision of MoTA.

The work of these entities is complemented by other relevant governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Endowments (a major landowner with responsibility for religious buildings), the Ministry of Interior (security, traffic and civil protection), the Ministry of Social Solidarity (social services and oversight of NGOs), the Ministry of Culture (intangible heritage, cultural activities within listed buildings) and the Ministry of the Environment (responsible for Environmental Impact Assessments that include socio-economic impact assessments for larger projects). It should also be noted that, around 2020, the Army Engineering Corps has been involved in the implementation of conservation projects as well as roadworks.



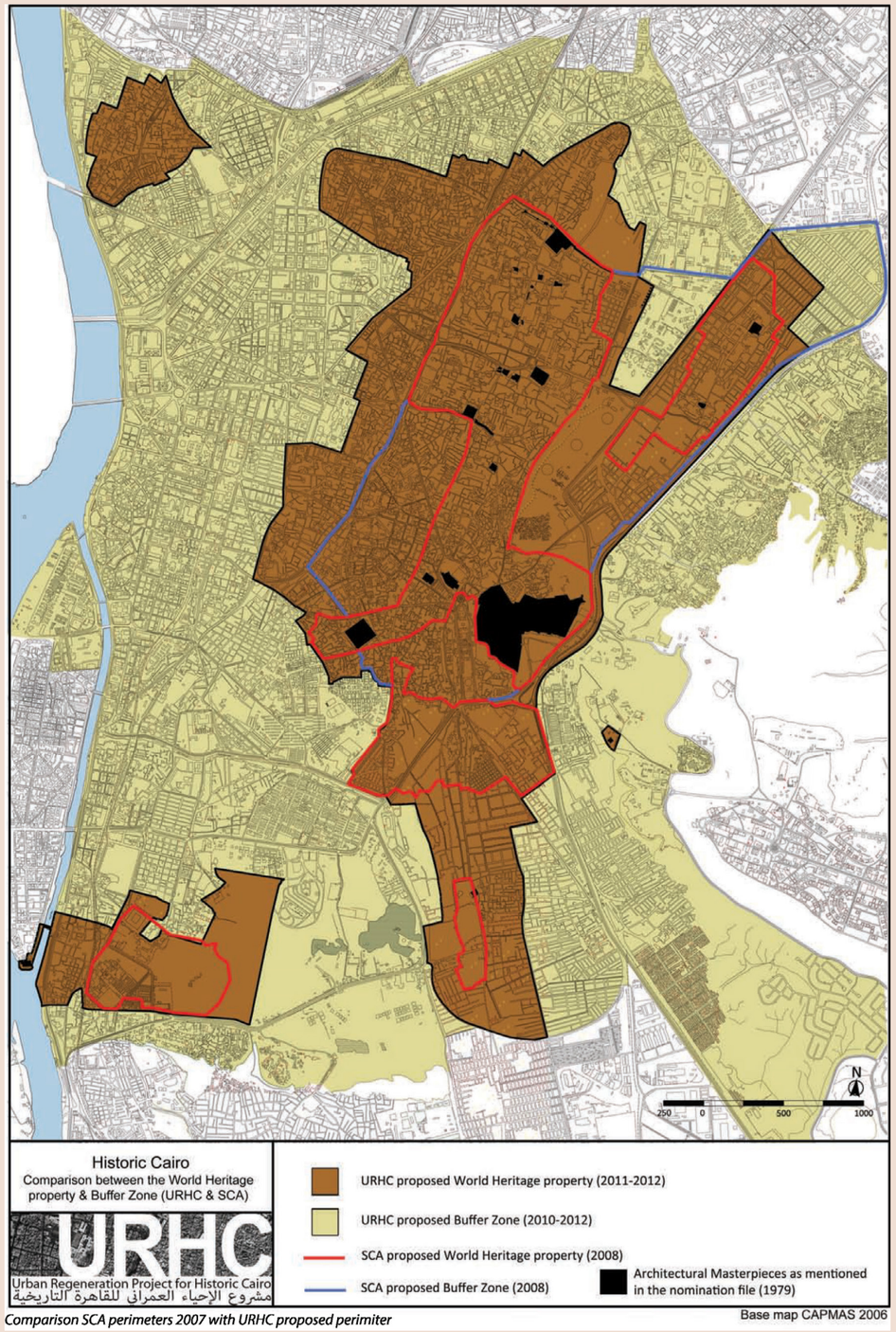
Aeiral view of Cairo
Source: Martijn Vonk | Unsplash

Does Historic Cairo have an urban conservation and management plan?

The area delineated by NOUH as Historic Cairo is governed by a set of regulations that restrict modifications to the historic urban fabric. These regulations are not supported by an adequate, integrated management framework that ensures that the living heritage of Historic Cairo is protected and recognized as an asset contributing to an improved quality of life. To address this issue, in 2014 URHC prepared a set of thematic studies to guide a well-informed management policy. It also proposed a management framework that was later elaborated on by the Egyptian government within a second, more detailed study prepared over the following 5 years. These studies have yet to be synthesized into a Conservation Management Plan (CMP).

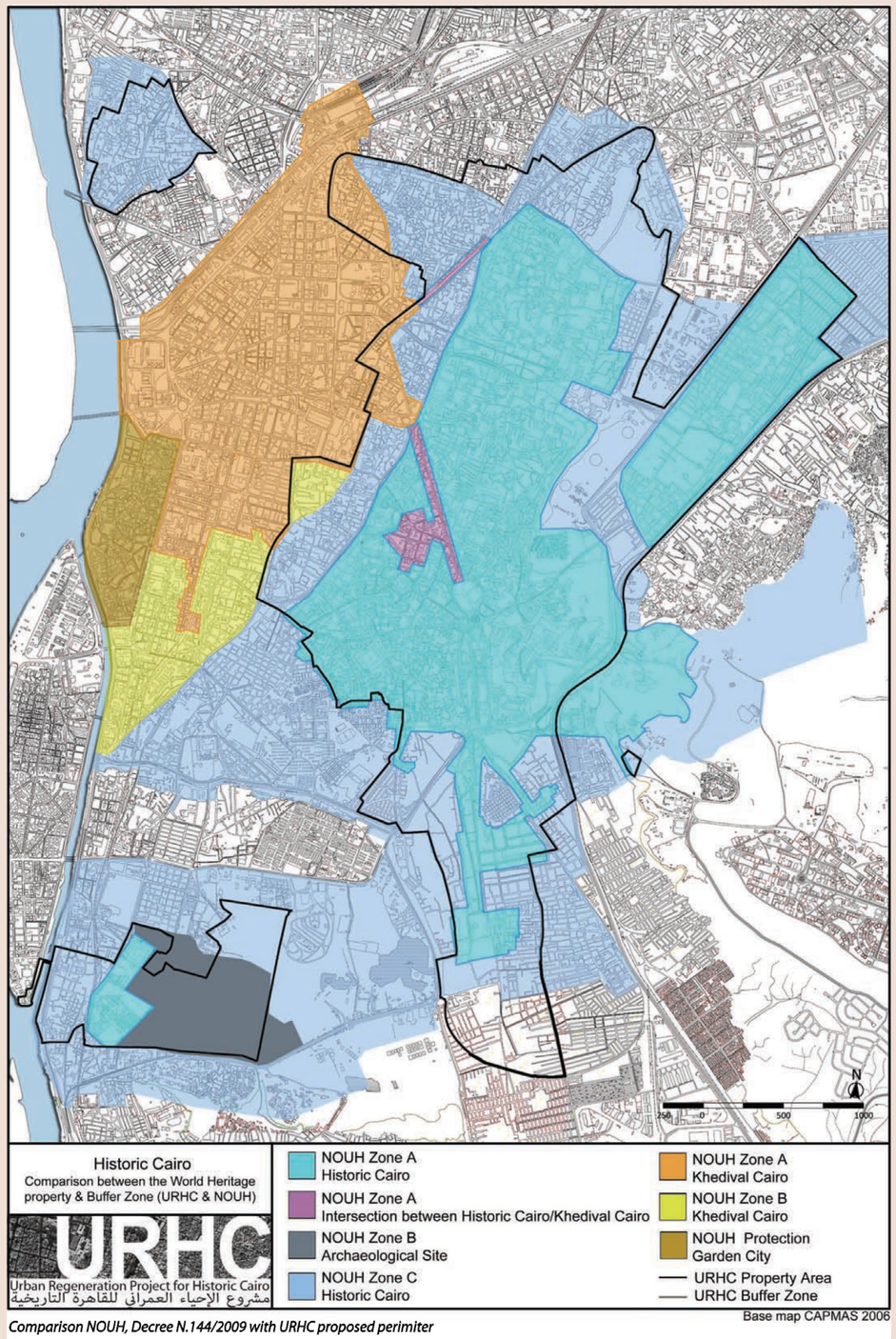
Lessons Learned

A management framework for a historic city or urban area should include tools for setting clear boundaries and developing adequate heritage protection measures for use within these boundaries. These protection measures should be tailored to different types of heritage, whether tangible or intangible, cultural or natural. Cultural heritage should be protected along a sliding scale of measures to preserve urban fabric, open spaces and architectural structures of different types of significance. Heritage protection policies should be directly tied to the city's vision to improve the quality of life and provision of public spaces for its inhabitants and users. The policies should be translated into strategies and tactics grounded in a well-articulated legal and management framework that clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of state actors and community stakeholders. They also require an economically sustainable model for planning and implementation supported by political will. This is especially important for large-scale historic areas such as Historic Cairo, the size and complexity of which is both a blessing and a curse.



Comparison SCA perimeters 2007 with URHC proposed perimiter

Figure 1: Map I - Historic Cairo: Comparison between the World Heritage property & Buffer Zone (URHC & SCA)



Comparison NOUH, Decree N.144/2009 with URHC proposed perimiter

Figure 2: Map II - Historic Cairo: Comparison between the World Heritage property & Buffer Zone (URHC & NOUH)



Case study 02

Al-Darb al-Ahmar Urban Regeneration Project

Image: Staircase with wooden balustrade leading to Zeinab Khatoun historic house, Darb Al-Ahmar
Source: Halit Sadik | Shutterstock

Introduction

The first comprehensive, non-governmental attempt at area conservation in Historic Cairo came in the form of a pioneering project run by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) in al-Darb al-Ahmar. This initiative was a direct result of Egyptian Architect 'Abd al-Halim Ibrahim being awarded the Aga Khan Award for al-Hawd al-Marsud Park, which is located within the borders of Historic Cairo in 1992. AKTC wished to endow Egypt with the gift of another park. The site chosen was also within Historic Cairo, on the mound east of the walled Fatimid City of al-Qahira and west of the historic cemetery of al-Sahra'. The project then expanded westwards into al-Darb al-Ahmar to include monument conservation, the renovation of historic houses, upgrades to public space and the pursuit of socio-economic development through job creation, small loans, capacity building and the development of crafts, art and culture. The AKTC also developed an urban management plan for al-Darb al-Ahmar District and organized capacity building activities for governmental stakeholders.

Al-Azhar Park

Construction started in 1997 and the park was inaugurated in 2005. At the time of writing, the 71 feddan park is still managed by AKTC's local counterpart AKTC-Egypt. Residents of Al-Darb al-Ahmar enter at a reduced fee and are given priority when there are employment opportunities in the park.

Monument Conservation

In addition to conservation work on the eastern city wall and gate, other notable conservation projects include: the al-Aslam Silahdar Mosque Project (with support from the American Research Centre in Egypt), which also involved the upgrade of the square on which it is located; the Blue Mosque/Alin Aq cluster (with support from the World Monument Fund) that included the retrofitting of some spaces for adaptive reuse; and al-Maridani Mosque (with support from the European Union).

Urban Rehabilitation and Upgrade

The most innovative component of the Al-Darb al-Ahmar Urban Regeneration Project was its work on upgrading and rehabilitating non-listed historic residential buildings. The initial funding for this was provided by the AKTC, but as the project grew, the AKTC requested partial funding from owners and residents. It then reached an agreement with the Egyptian Government's Social Fund for Development and the Cairo Governorate to fund the renovations through small loans to residents. In this way, a state-owned 19th century building was adapted for reuse as offices. In addition to the upgrade of Aslam Square, the entire infrastructure of the streets in which the rehabilitated houses were located was also upgraded.

View of the Historic City Wall and al-Darb al-Ahmar from the park. Image: AKTC / Anthony Wain, reproduced from the akdn.org website

Socio-economic Development

Parallel to the establishment of a small loans program with funding from the Social Fund for Development, the creation of new opportunities for training and employment, and upgrades to the quality of public space through urban rehabilitation, the AKTC supported the formation of local NGOs that focused on craft, family health, arts and culture. This work was grounded in an extensive socio-economic survey carried out in 2003 that identified the following areas for attention: Housing and open space upgrading; and access to credit, employment and basic social services (the latter subdivided into Health, Education and Solid Waste Disposal).

Management and Capacity Building

The AKTC had unprecedented success in getting the infamous tanzim (alignment) lines[4] cancelled for al-Darb al-Ahmar and preparing a conservation plan which unfortunately was never ratified or implemented by Cairo Governorate. It worked with Governorate employees and City Council members to build a better understanding of urban preservation through training and study trips. While this project was funded and supervised by non-Egyptians, its staff and management were mostly Egyptian, many of which trained in the Al-Darb al-Ahmar Project and continue to work in conservation and urban management to this day.

4 A set back of around 5 m from the current street line forced on new constructions with the end purpose of widening the street.

Current Situation

Most of the work described above had a positive impact on the neighborhood, However, with the downsizing of the project, the historic fabric of the area was also impacted by uncontrolled illegal construction along the edge of the park, which created a skyline of modern high-rises to its west. This construction mostly happened during the security vacuum of 2011 onwards. AKTC-Egypt continues to run the al-Azhar Park and in 2018 restarted its work on monument conservation and introduced a guided tour program for al-Darb al-Ahmar. However, its urban development and infrastructure activities remain at a standstill.

Lessons Learned

As the first entity to adopt an integrated approach that links urban environmental upgrading to heritage and heritage to socio-economic development in Egypt, the AKTC's Al-Darb al-Ahmar Urban Regeneration Project and al-Azhar Park pioneered approaches that continue to guide the work of urban conservation in Egypt. The process highlighted the importance of agility and learning on the job. The project to build a park took note of the need to provide the residents of its adjoining neighborhood with basic municipal services. It then recognized the importance of preserving the neighborhood's heritage as an asset that can contribute to an improved quality of life. It gave equal importance to tangible and intangible heritage, preserving the urban fabric, housing stock and listed buildings alongside local craft traditions and community customs. It also addressed the problem of multi-level capacity building, initially for the AKTC's staff, then for community members through NGOs supported by the AKTC and eventually for governmental partners whose support was needed for policy change. While learning from these lessons, it is important to acknowledge that agility should be grounded in well-structured plans that prevent premature decisions that might reduce activities or slow them down. Untimely interruptions in an ongoing process of urban transformation can lead to negative repercussions.

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CASE STUDY

THE MEDINA OF FEZ, MOROCCO

Founded during the 9th century, Fez initially consisted of two autonomous settlements on the banks of the river Fez. In the 11th century, the Almoravid Dynasty united the two settlements into what is today Fez el-Bali (old Fez). Further urbanization took place southwest of the old city, and from the 13th to 15th centuries Fez el-Jdid was founded and developed. These two areas constitute the medina of Fez, which was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981.

Image: Fez, Morocco
Source: fotografu | Unsplash

Introduction

Founded during the 9th century, Fez initially consisted of two autonomous settlements on the banks of the river Fez. In the 11th century, the Almoravid Dynasty united the two settlements into what is today Fez el-Bali (old Fez). Further urbanization took place southwest of the old city, and from the 13th to 15th centuries Fez el-Jdid was founded and developed. These two areas constitute the medina of Fez, which was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981.

Morphology, Topography and Context

The city (baladiyya) of Fez is located within the Greater Fez Metropolitan Area in the northeastern part of Morocco, surrounded by hills and rural landscapes adjacent to the Atlas Mountains. The third largest city in Morocco, Fez is composed of the medina (Fez el-Jdid and Fez el-Bali), the Ville Nouvelle, and its adjacent suburbs. The medina of Fez has a dense urban fabric with narrow streets and buildings of usually two or three stories in height. Despite wider pressures of modernization and industrialization in the city, the medina remains one of the most extensive and best conserved historic Islamicate towns.

Significant Heritage type

Fez's key heritage sites include its hydraulic system, historic residential buildings, souqs and the 20-km long historic wall. The medina is also home to the famous Qarawiyyin University, one of the oldest in the Islamic world, and the shrine of the founder of the city, Moulay Idris II. In addition to numerous historic mosques, religious colleges (madrasas), Quranic schools, caravanserais (funduqs), mausoleums and baths (hammams), Fez Medina boasts a range of traditional craft industries, including ceramics, mosaics, leather, metalware and carpets. The city, according to UNESCO, "not only represents an outstanding architectural, archaeological and urban heritage, but also transmits a lifestyle, skills and a culture that persist and are renewed despite the diverse effects of the evolving modern societies." (UNESCO-WHC: Medina of Fez)

1,150,131
Greater Fez Metropolitan Area (2014)

1,296,772
(2023)[5]

160,000-200,000
Medina of Fez (Fez el-Bali and Fez el-Jdid) (2003)[6]

31,150 ha[7]
Greater Fez Metropolitan Area

280 ha[8]
Medina of Fez
(Fez el-Bali and Fez el-Jdid)

5 Haut-Commissariat au Plan du Maroc - Centre National de Documentation. (2009-2023). Recensement général de la Population et de l'Habitat; https://www.hcp.ma/Note-sur-les-premiers-resultats-du-Recensement-General-de-la-Population-et-de-l-Habitat-2014_a1516.html; City population, Fez; https://www.citypopulation.de/en/morocco/admin/03__f%C3%A8s_mekn%C3%A8s/

6 Estimate based on a survey of existing literature. See for example, Radoine 2003, El-Harrouni 2023, and World Bank 2006.

7 Euromed Cities Network. (2024). Fez. https://www.reseau-euromed.org/ar/ville-membre/%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B3/

8 375 ha. according to Radoine, based on information from Ader-Fes. The UNESCO listed area could be smaller than the administrative borders.

Legislative and Regulatory framework

Moroccan heritage is mainly governed by Law 22-80, which concerns the conservation of historic monuments and sites, inscriptions, art objects and antiquities. The law relies on the concepts of historic monuments or sites rather than more expansive understandings of heritage or antiquities. Law 113-14 states that municipalities are responsible for exercising the powers which may be transferred to it by the state, particularly in the protection and restoration of historical monuments and cultural heritage. Other governmental bodies contributing to heritage management include the Directorate of Cultural Heritage within the Ministry of Culture, which is directly charged with safeguarding heritage, and the Ministry of National Territory Planning, Land Planning, Housing and City Policy, which is responsible for the quality and safety of buildings and urban landscape. Finally, in the case of Fez, planning and implementation is mostly coordinated by the Agence pour le Développement et la Réhabilitation de la Médina de Fès (ADER-Fès) in accordance with the Fez Rehabilitation Master Plan, developed in 1995 and updated and expanded on since.

Issues

When UNESCO listed the medina as a World Heritage Site in 1981, it suffered from poverty, overcrowding and neglect. Its buildings had deteriorated, its infrastructure was collapsing, and its traditional artisan industries were at risk. Several of these issues were mitigated after the successful efforts of the Moroccan government through its agency, ADER-Fès, particularly along its strategic thoroughfares. This increased the medina's economic potential and attractiveness to national and foreign investment, which in turn resulted in a significant change in ownership patterns during the 1990s and 2000s. Europeans and wealthy Moroccans began purchasing and renovating historic properties – mostly Morocco's iconic riads, traditional homes characterized by internal courtyards – for private and business purposes. This was the catalyst for the displacement of local communities and an increased income gap between the city's new residents and its rooted working-class community, some of whose homes were still in need of repair (Boussaa and Madandola, 2024). Finally, while the capacities of governmental and non-governmental actors were vastly improved due to an initiative of the Moroccan royal family and state investment in heritage efforts, the scale of the tasks at hand required further training.

1976
Launching of the National and International Fez Conservation Plan
Fez is the first Arab city to be a part of an international campaign for heritage conservation

1981
Inclusion of the Medina of Fez in the World Heritage Site List
One of the first Arab cities to be granted this status

1982
Establishment of the Delegation for the Safeguarding of the Medina
Delegation concerned with data collection and implementation of pilot projects

1989
Founding of ADER-Fès
Institutional framework development epitomising in the concentration of governmental efforts for the conservation of the Medina

1995
Rehabilitation Plan
Launched by ADER-Fès. Comprehensive conservation plan promoting large scale project implementation

1998-2005
Rehabilitation Project of the Medina of Fez
Project funded through a World Bank Loan facilitating larger scale urban interventions

2005-Present
Integration on a sectorial level
Integration with the local craft sector, featuring projects such as the "Artisan and Fez Medina Project"



Case study 03

ADER-Fès

Image: Fez, Morocco

While Fez was designated as a preservation zone in the 1970s, serious efforts toward its revitalization can be linked to a few milestones: first, the launch of an international campaign for its safeguarding in 1976; second, its designation as a World Heritage Site in 1981; and third, the establishment of ADER-Fès in 1989 with the consequent chain of support for its urban rehabilitation.

Fez listed as a World Heritage Site (1981)

Listing came hand in hand with the International Campaign for Safeguarding the Medina of Fez. In 1982, the Delegation for the Safeguarding of the Medina of Fez was created to conduct the necessary studies on the medina and implement pilot projects. This work was pursued in collaboration with local experts, most notably social scientists from the University of Fez.

Establishment of ADER-Fès and Development of a Rehabilitation Plan

In 1989, ADER-Fès was established as a semi-private organization tasked with the implementation of projects related to the conservation of the medina and supported with public capital. ADER-Fès is responsible for national and international fundraising, intergovernmental coordination, liaising with community groups, and overseeing applied research, policy development, planning and design with support from academic and professional experts. Its mission is facilitated by a board of directors with representatives from relevant government ministries as well as NGOs and the municipality. In addition to implementing pilot conservation and rehabilitation projects, ADER-Fès synthesized its years of field research and surveys into a GIS and a Rehabilitation Master Plan, developed in 1995. This plan is now supervised by the Agence Urbaine de Fès, a local agency whose main role is the implementation and monitoring of urban plans (Radoine, 2003).

The Rehabilitation of the Medina of Fez (1998-2005)

The majority of funding for rehabilitation efforts in the medina of Fez came from the Moroccan State, but international funding and technical support also played a key role. From the late 1990s, a World Bank loan shifted the focus from documentation, surveys, and pilot projects to larger scale interventions. The World Bank loan focused on housing rehabilitation, the creation of tourism circuits and related services, improving critical access to the medina and institutional strengthening. It was envisioned that these activities would create jobs that would, in turn, contribute to the alleviation of poverty. However, this project component fell below the mark due to the downsizing of funding. On the positive side, this project came hand-in-hand with crucial work by the Moroccan government on urgent structural consolidation and the shoring of decrepit housing units. The period also saw improvements to services and infrastructure. Governmental bodies such as the Water Supply and Electricity Public Utility of Fez and the Ministries of National Education and Public Health focused on key services such as improving sewage and water supply, extending the electricity grid and providing new schools, nurseries, and health facilities. Infrastructure development constituted 53% of project investments between 1981 and 2005 (Fig.3). This was in addition to private investment in the rehabilitation of historic buildings as tourist facilities and the contribution of NGOs to other conservation works. In fact, according to the World Bank, investment in rehabilitation from other sources was three times as much as that provided by the World Bank (World Bank 2006).

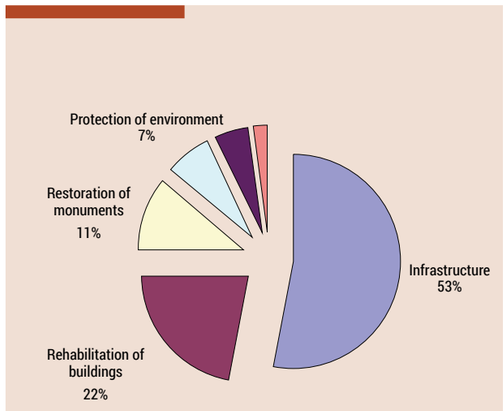

Figure 3: Project investments in Fez between 1981-2005 | Source: Khaled El-Harrouni







Examples of the consolidation and rehabilitation of houses by ADER-Fès, early 1990s.
Image: Hassan Radoine[9]

Integration on a sectorial level from 2005 to the present

It can be argued that one of the positive outcomes of the World Bank funding was the transformation of ADER-Fès into a stronger and better-structured organization. This enabled it to juggle different projects and different sources of funding and to strengthen its capacity for integrated action, building on an institutionalized commitment to participation and collaboration. The most notable international project was the Artisan and Fez Medina Project, funded by the Millenium Challenge Corporation, which focused on supporting artisanal crafts through branding, training, and the rehabilitation of workspaces and their surrounding urban context.[10]

Importantly, local funding continues at a steady pace. The Moroccan government funded the Ziyarates Fès pilot project, a program that facilitates home stays for tourists. It also introduced self-guided tours in different neighborhoods through the installation of innovative signage and continues to work on the improvement of public spaces and tourist amenities. In addition to its efforts to involve local communities and stakeholder groups, the Moroccan government coordinated significant actions with local partners such as the Moroccan Local initiative for Human Development (ILDH), which worked on improvements to sanitation, craft ateliers, libraries and street vendor spaces, and Banque Populaire, which funded the Bab Mahruq Gateway restoration. Collaborations with regional actors were also facilitated: for example, the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development supported the rehabilitation of seven kilometers of water networks.[11] ADER-Fès also taps into national programs for tourism and craft development and in the nation-wide Ksour and Kasbah Rehabilitation Project. ADER-Fès is now the model for similar bodies in other Moroccan heritage cities.

9 Radoine, Hassan. (2008) "Urban Conservation of Fez-Medina: A Post-impact Appraisal" Global Urban Development, v. 4, no. 1./

10 MCC. (2015). Closed Compact Report; Morocco Compact; https://www.mcc.gov/resources/story/section-mar-ccr-artisan-fez-medina-project/

11 CHIFA.. Impact and Identity, Investing in Heritage for Sustainable Development; https://heritagefinance.org/resources/

Lessons Learned

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the work on the Fez medina is its participatory framework. The project recruited civic leaders, NGOs, merchants, artisans, homeowners, and renters during the conceptualization stage. It built a sense of ownership that facilitated community mobilization, resulting in self-initiated and self-funded interventions that have been economically sustainable. It also responded to the need for housing rehabilitation. However, it should be noted that there has been a disparity in the magnitude of improvements between affluent and less affluent neighborhoods and working classes have been displaced from zones increasingly identified with tourism. With the exception of housing rehabilitation, then, it is clear that the poorer the segment of the population, the less the benefit and the contribution.

Another important lesson concerns the advantages of setting up an agile body such as ADER-Fès, in which all relevant governmental entities are represented, and through which fundraising, coordination, research and implementation is possible. The focus on both conservation and infrastructure in parallel to conservation and rehabilitation is also a significant takeaway, as is the care taken to tap into national projects such as those related to craft and tourism development. Finally, there is a need for constant vigilance against displacement and the negative consequences of touristification. Tourism is an important source of revenue for any city, but it should be well-managed in order to keep local communities in place. While the organization of sectors of the Fez medina community into guilds, syndicates and NGOs is commendable, it has not been enough to protect local activities and working-class communities from the disruptions created by increased tourism.

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Fez, Morocco
Source: Vince Gx | Unsplash

CASE STUDY

THE MEDINA OF TUNIS, TUNISIA

The Medina of Tunis is one of the first Arab Muslim cities established in the Maghreb (698 CE.) and was considered one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in the Arab world from the 12th to the 16th centuries. The Medina represents the historic core of the capital city of Tunis, taking up 1% of its total area. It was inscribed as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 1979.

Medina of Tunis
Source: Médina de Tunis, Tunisie | Unsplash

Introduction

The Medina of Tunis is one of the first Arab Muslim cities established in the Maghreb (698 CE.) and was considered one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in the Arab world from the 12th to the 16th centuries. The Medina represents the historic core of the capital city of Tunis, taking up 1% of its total area. It was inscribed as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 1979.

Morphology, Topography and Context

The Medina of Tunis is located in north-eastern Tunisia in a fertile plain region. It is the historic core of the larger, modern capital city of Tunis. The Medina is relatively flat, situated on a low plateau about 20–30 meters above sea level, with remnants of ancient walls defining its boundaries. The area includes the central medina, built in the eighth century, and its surrounding suburbs to the north and south, which date back to the 13th century (Jmour, 2023). The Medina of Tunis has conserved its traditional urban fabric, morphology, and architecture without significant alteration.

Significant Heritage type

The Medina of Tunis was the capital of several influential dynasties and thrived particularly under the rule of the Almohads and the Hafsids. The quarter houses approximately 700 historical monuments spread across seven districts. Notable landmarks include the Zitouna Mosque,

63,531 inhabitants Medina (2023)

16,255 residing in the central medina[12]

599,368 inhabitants in City of Tunis (2023)[13]

296.41 ha Medina (with 190.19 ha buffer zone)

21,200 ha City of Tunis (Jmour, 2023)

Bab Jedid and Bab Bhar Gates, Souq el-Attarine and Tourbet el Bey. "With its souqs, its urban fabric, its residential quarters, monuments and gates, this ensemble constitutes a prototype among the best conserved in the Islamic world" (UNESCO-WHC: Medina of Tunis).

Legislative and Regulatory framework

The Medina is protected under Law no. 35 of 1994 for the protection of archaeological, historical and traditional heritage—one of the first in the Arab region to take a holistic approach to understanding and conserving urban heritage.

The Association Sauvegarde de la Médina (Association for Safeguarding the Medina, or ASM) was established in 1967 as a technical arm of the Municipality of Tunis for the management of the Medina, although it enjoys special non-governmental status in order to retain its neutrality and independence. It receives funding from the municipality and works in close collaboration with governmental entities such as Tunisia's Institute of Heritage, the Agency for the Promotion of Heritage and Culture, the Agency for Urban Rehabilitation and Renewal and the National Tourism Office. The ASM is primarily concerned with developing a sustainable strategy for safeguarding the Medina, its urban heritage, social and economic climate and intangible heritage. It identifies key issues through interactions with the Medina's residents, generating studies which are then presented to the municipality in order to secure funding.

ASM served as a forum for discussions on urban conservation. Accordingly, it was entrusted by the municipality with the responsibility of reviewing the Urban Plan for the Medina of Tunis, part of the wider Urban Development Plan for the City of Tunis. This plan regulates urban and architectural interventions. The Urban Plan of the Medina of Tunis focused on maintaining the area's architectural, cultural, and urban character while allowing for controlled development and preservation. It divided the Medina into different zones, identifying their characteristics and functions and setting the appropriate planning, land use and construction regulations for each zone (Plan d'aménagement Urbain de la Ville de Tunis, 2017).

Issues

The Medina faces a number of challenges related to outdated infrastructure, the precarious living conditions of some local residents, heritage degradation and the abandonment of some ancestral dwellings and the disappearance of traditional economic activities (Jmour, 2021).

The Medina also faces issues related to the current legal and administrative frameworks, which need to be reassessed to determine effectiveness when it comes to managing and safeguarding heritage. Since 2011, the work of the ASM has been challenged by a significant decrease in the number of employees and by updates to Tunisia's Associations Law that do not particularly suit its unique legal status.[14]

Another challenge to the safeguarding and management of the Medina is the lack of sufficient economic resources and the decline in participatory frameworks.

12 Medina. (2023). City Population. https://www.citypopulation.de/en/tunisia/admin/tunis/1152__medina/; João Sarmento (2017). Tourists' walking rhythms: 'doing' the Tunis Medina, Tunisia. Social & Cultural Geography, 18(3), 295-314. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2016.1174283; ; Aouididi. S (2024, July 24). Director of the Foundation for Arab Historic Cities and Heritage [Interview]

13 The National Institute of Statistics (INS). (2023). Estimated population January 1st 2023. Statistique Tunisie. https://www.ins.tn/en/publication/estimated-population-january-1st-2023

14 Aouididi. S (2024, July 24). Director of the Foundation for Arab Historic Cities and Heritage [Interview]

1967

Establishment of ASM

The Association Sauvegarde de la Médina (Association for Safeguarding the Medina (ASM) is established in order to safeguard and preserve the Medina's Urban Heritage

1968-1970s

Documenting the Medina

In collaboration with UNESCO and Tunis Municipality, ASM initiates comprehensive efforts to document the Medina, its urban heritage, and the economic and social patterns of its residents

1973-1976

First Phase of the Hafsia Project

Project for reconstructing the residential and commercial sectors of Hafsia initiated by ASM with aid from UNESCO and support from Tunis Municipality

1979

Inscription of the Medina of Tunis as a World Heritage Site

The Medina, representing the historic core of the capital city of Tunis, is inscribed as a World Cultural Heritage Site.

1981-1993

Third Urban Project & Second Phase of the Hafsia Project

The second reconstruction phase of Hafsia within the framework of the Tunisia Third Urban Development Project co-funded by the World Bank and the Tunisian government.

1991-2012

Oukalas project

Project to improve living conditions for residents of the Medina, many of them internal migrants, whilst restoring heritage sites initiated by Tunis Municipality and ASM with loan from Fonds Arabe de Development Economique et Social (FADES)



Case study 04

The Oukalas Project

Image: Medina of Tunis | Source: Unsplash

The establishment of ASM

In the 1960s, Tunis was threatened by a master plan proposal which would have established a new road across the city center, connecting the main axis of the European City, Bourguiba Avenue, to the casbah and bisecting the Medina. In 1967, following mobilization by the municipality against the project, the head of the Municipality of Tunis suggested a new association be created, leading to the establishment of the ASM as a technical arm of the municipality. In the late 1960s, ASM began its efforts to manage the medina and its heritage with a mapping project led by a local multidisciplinary team. Based on the detailed mapping exercise and a needs assessment, ASM, in collaboration with the local community, put forward a strategy which has informed how the area has been managed since. These management and conservation efforts led to the medina's UNESCO-WHC inscription in 1979. In the 1970s, a key conservation activity run by ASM was the surveying of 600 oukalas, which together hosted 3000 households. The term "oukala" refers to a building in multi-occupancy, often in an extremely poor state of repair. Starting from the 1930s, the Medina witnessed a significant shift in its population as its more affluent residents departed and rural migration increased. Many buildings in the Medina were subsequently "oukalized" or turned into multi-family dwellings, housing up to twenty households per building. These buildings deteriorated over time, creating poor and often precarious living conditions. The ASM survey, conducted in collaboration with UNESCO, laid the foundations for a comprehensive rehabilitation project for the city's oukalas, with the main goal of improving the housing conditions of its residents. The project was carried out by the ASM as project leader, the Municipality's social services department, the ARRU (Agence de la rehabilitation et de la renovation urbaine, 'Agency for Urban Rehabilitation and Renovation') and the various Tunisian public utility companies.

Initiating the Oukalas Project

In 1990, political will to address Tunisia's informal housing structures led to the launch of Oukalas Project, implemented by the Municipality of Tunis with the assistance of ASM. It was mandated in December 1990 as part of the National Programme of the Reabsorption of Spontaneous Housing. Its main aim was to restore the oukalas while relocating many of the families who were living in unsafe conditions, providing the local population with adequate housing and basic services. A number of the oukalas were in an advanced state of deterioration and so the project was approached as an emergency after the initial budget allocation. All buildings designated as high-risk were evacuated and their occupants were placed in temporary housing. The Oukalas Project was largely funded by the municipality but was also a beneficiary of a loan from the Arab Fund for Economic Development. Hobus, an endowment system, is also an important stakeholder as a major property owner in the Medina.

Programs

Between 1991 and 2012, the project consisted of three main aspects: 1) a rehousing program to reduce overpopulation; 2) a rehabilitation program to mitigate the deterioration of the Medina; and 3) a restoration program to conserve the Medina's cultural heritage. The project evolved in several stages, starting with the identification of oukalas for demolition.

In 1991, initial surveys identified 170 oukalas for demolition, later revised by ASM to just 89, with the remainder slated for rehabilitation. Over the course of the project, 256 oukalas were determined to be in dangerous condition, 126 required heavy repairs and 235 needed light repairs. 13 oukalas were recognized for their architectural or historical significance and designated for public reuse. Social surveys were conducted to assess the socio-economic profiles of the households affected, revealing that 80% did not qualify for social housing and their incomes were significantly below the minimum wage.

For the rehousing program, a municipally owned parcel of land at Douar Hicher was selected for the permanent relocation of households. Originally intended for 200 households with larger lots, the plan was revised to accommodate more families with smaller, extendable single-family units due to the size and socio-economic needs of relocated households. Financial and institutional arrangements were made to handle the expropriation, reacquisition and sale of oukalas, as well as rehousing loans that aligned with households' financial capabilities. Rehabilitation efforts were added to the project after ASM highlighted the ongoing deterioration of buildings and the need for revised rent laws. A special credit line was created to fund loans for the rehabilitation of 404 buildings.

Concerning the reconstruction component, the sites of demolished oukalas were sold in public auctions or reacquired by their former owners. The municipality issued construction permits, subject to approval by the ASM, and the new buildings were constructed in accordance with the medina's regulations. These regulations mandated courtyards with a minimum area of 24 square meters on the ground floor (or 1/4 of the land area). The new buildings were simple, lacking notable architectural features, but respectful of the existing urban fabric.

The rehabilitation work varied depending on the size and condition of the buildings as well as the capabilities and needs of the users. Rehabilitation plans were created on a case-by-case basis, with the ASM preparing loan applications that included a technical and financial evaluation of each building. Structural reinforcement was tailored to each building's requirements and sanitary installations were planned for every 40 square meters of living space. The ASM provided free technical assistance to all loan beneficiaries and supervised the interventions. They also conducted construction work if requested. However, finishes were not included in the loan and were left to the owners to complete. Typically, architectural elements such as stucco work and painted ceilings were repaired and restored by craftsmen, while existing features like painted tiles, doors, windows, and stonework were reused. New wooden doors and windows were crafted to resemble the original ones.

Thirteen oukalas of historical and architectural value were adapted for public use, with projects tailored to each building's unique features. For example, the 15th-century Medersa El Montaciriya was converted into a kindergarten, while Fort El Bsili, a surviving part of the city's wall, was converted into a workshop. The Saint Croix Church was slated to be converted into a multimedia library and theatre but came to be used by the municipality until 2016 (Medcities, 2018).

While the project allowed many oukala residents to become homeowners, independent reports have noted that relocation created pockets of poverty, as residents faced limited access to public services due to their new locations far from the city center. Nevertheless, the upgrading process in the medina, including the oukalas project, has raised public awareness about the preservation of old cities, attracted private investment and encouraged improvements in the neighborhoods.

Post-2011

After the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, the oukalas project reached its fourth phase and was eventually concluded. The ASM faced challenges related to a decline in the number of its employees, especially architects. Legal issues also arose, as the existing laws governing associations were not well-suited to the unique status of the ASM and created restrictions on its funding abilities. The long-term sustainability of the restored buildings came into question in 2012 when a loan from the Arab Fund for Economic Development ended, creating uncertainty over financial and institutional resources.23 Mdiniti, a corporation of investors and business-owners with projects in the medina interested in fostering heritage-related activities, has been growing as an advocacy group which works in collaboration with ASM.

Lessons Learned

The case of the Oukalas Project shows that specialized agencies dedicated to heritage preservation such as ASM can play a particularly positive role, especially in projects which involve a dual objective of meeting the socioeconomic needs of residents and preserving and rehabilitating urban heritage. ASM is deeply embedded within the medina, cooperating closely with residents and carrying out regular surveys to assess the progress of the project. ASM's technical expertise was also important for carrying out the project with the least number of demolitions possible.

However, the case of the Oukalas Project also illustrates the special consideration that should be given to relocation processes so as not to cut off beneficiaries from their social support networks and access to public services. Furthermore, the challenges that befell the project after the political changes of 2011, highlight the importance of providing adequate financial support to heritage preservation agencies so that they can retain the necessary number of employees needed for the proper upkeep of restored and rehabilitated buildings. When it comes to agencies with special non-governmental status like ASM, there is a real need to also create legal frameworks that can accommodate their unique status and support their activities.

Finally, the emphasis on housing rehabilitation is a highly commendable practice that should be followed in other Arab cities. Tools such as credit facilitation are vital in such efforts as they empower communities to take ownership of conservation efforts based on their specific priorities.

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CASE STUDY

BYBLOS (JBEIL), LEBANON

Byblos, also known as Jbeil, is believed to have been first settled between 8800 and 7000 BCE, and continuously inhabited since 5000 BCE, making it one of the oldest cities in the world. As one of the oldest Phoenician cities, Byblos is directly associated with the history and diffusion of the Phoenician alphabet. This history has attracted generations of archaeologists to the ancient sites spread around the city. Because of their archaeological and architectural value, the city's ancient sites were inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1984 (UNESCO-WHC).

Jbeil Sea Fort
Source: Véronique Dauge | UNESCO

Introduction

Byblos, also known as Jbeil, is believed to have been first settled between 8800 and 7000 BCE, and continuously inhabited since 5000 BCE, making it one of the oldest cities in the world. As one of the oldest Phoenician cities, Byblos is directly associated with the history and diffusion of the Phoenician alphabet. This history has attracted generations of archaeologists to the ancient sites spread around the city. Because of their archaeological and architectural value, the city's ancient sites were inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1984 (UNESCO-WHC).

Morphology, Topography and Context

Jbeil is a coastal city located on a cliff of sandstone 40 kilometers north of Beirut, surrounded by mountains and fertile lands. The city is set on a promontory, offering a natural harbor that made it a key maritime center for the Phoenicians. Its coastal element, providing sandy beaches, as well as its ancient sites, have long made Jbeil an attractive tourist destination, both nationally and internationally. Today, Byblos is a UNESCO World Heritage site, with its ruins and mediaeval town attracting archaeologists, historians and tourists. It remains an important site for understanding ancient urbanism, trade, and the spread of alphabetic writing (UNESCO-WHC: Byblos).

Significant Heritage type

The city's heritage reveals a wide scope of cultural influences, ranging from Assyrian, Phoenician, Hellenistic and Roman to later Crusader (Genoese), Byzantine, Mamluk and Ottoman. Its most ancient archaeological remains are dwellings from the Neolithic era. Bronze Age elements such as the Temple of the Obelisks as well as a Roman theatre have also been found on-site. Remnants from a later period bear witness to the beginnings of the Phoenician civilization, including its ancient port, the

99,388
Jbeil District (2017)[15]

40,000
Jbeil City (2017)[16]

43,020 ha
Jbeil District[17]

800 ha
Jbeil City est[18]

Phoenician Royal Necropolis and the Temple of Baalat Gebal. While the UNESCO-inscribed property comprises the Phoenician and Roman elements, it excludes the medieval town within the walls and the sector of the necropolis. The old town of Jbeil possesses all the elements characterizing a medieval town; this includes the old wall and a cathedral, as well as the Jbeil castle and St. John-Mark church, both built during the Crusader era. The city was later modified as an Ottoman-type town, characterized by its souqs, khans, mosque and traditional Islamic houses. Despite its exclusion from the UNESCO-listed site, this part of the city has been nationally listed as protected heritage under the Lebanese official list of Historic Monuments (UNESCO-WHC: Byblos).

Legislative and Regulatory framework

Lebanese legislation on heritage and antiquities preservation is based on the 'Ancient Antiquities Law' enacted in 1933 during the French Mandate. Since then, small amendments have been made, usually relating to specific circumstances and events rather than substantial modifications. The Ancient Antiquities Law of 1933 defines an antiquity as "a human-made object produced before the year 1700 A.D." An antiquity-like object, also included in this law, refers to immovable objects that were made after the year 1700, whose preservation serves the public interest historically and artistically, and which are listed in the 'General Inventory of Historical Buildings List'.

The Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), a technical unit of the Ministry of Culture is the most senior governing body responsible for Lebanese archaeological and architectural heritage. It is responsible for the organization and execution of archaeological excavations, the approval of excavation permits, the evaluation of project permits within and around protected zones, the upkeep of historic monuments, the conservation and management of the World Heritage sites in Lebanon and the general enforcement of current laws and regulations.

According to the 1977 Lebanese Law of Municipalities, local municipalities (appointed bureaucrats) along with their locally elected council have jurisdiction over all matters of public interest and work in their boundaries. According to this law, each municipality has the authority to set and balance its budget, collect certain municipal fees and taxes, manage local assets, deliver basic utilities such as water, sanitation and lighting and enhance infrastructure such as health and education facilities, wastewater networks, local transportation, streets and other public spaces (Cheaito, 2023).

The Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) is another significant actor in the implementation of major projects in Lebanon. Established through Decree No. 5 dated 31st January 1977, the CDR is a fiscally independent body accountable directly to the Council of Ministers and responsible for the expeditious planning, fundraising and supervision of postwar reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts (CDR, nd).

Issues

Lebanon has faced decades of political and economic instability, significantly impacting its cultural heritage and historic urban cores. This has alsoled to a lack of financial resources and a fragmented governance system, further complicating heritage management. While Jbeil was largely spared during the civil war, it still faced indirect impacts and continues to be affected by the recent conflict.

The pressures on Lebanon's governance systems significantly impact heritage management. Local municipalities are responsible for managing properties within their boundaries but face substantial limitations due to oversight by higher authorities. Decentralization has been more symbolic than functional. The lack of a permanent heritage management body at the municipal level causes projects to be easily impacted by political changes, further complicating preservation efforts. The 1933 law governing heritage management is outdated, creating a policy vacuum that hinders responsive preservation and urban development. In Jbeil, this has led to disputes with UNESCO regarding new constructions near the Phoenician port, as the law fails to clearly define buffer zones for the protection of ancient sites. Jbeil's status as a tourist hub also makes its urban cores and archaeological areas vulnerable to unregulated development. The medieval town suffers from deteriorating infrastructure, including inadequate water and sewage systems, pollution and a lack of public services, making heritage management even more challenging.

15 Jbeil Population, https://www.citypopulation.de/en/lebanon/admin/jabal_lubn%C4%81n/26__jubayl/

16 Hobeika, Mira, Victoria Dawalibi, Georgio Kallas, and Alessio Russo. (April 2024). "Evaluating the Landscape and Ecological Aspects of Urban Planning in Byblos: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Assessing Urban Forests." MDPI. https://doi.org/10.3390/land13040464.

17 Jbeil Population, https://www.citypopulation.de/en/lebanon/admin/jabal_lubn%C4%81n/26__jubayl/

18 Hobeika, Mira. et.al. 2024. Evaluating the Landscape and Ecological Aspects of Urban Planning in Byblos: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Assessing Urban Forests. Land, 13, 464. https://doi.org/10.3390/land13040464

Initial Conservation Efforts

The DGA expropriates a number of plots in the city old city, restores them, and imposes a review of restoration and construction projects within the limits of the medieval city

1970s

Sites inscribed as a World Heritage Site

Because of their archeological and architectural value, the city's ancient sites are inscribed in the World Heritage List.

1984

1977

Establishment of CDR

The CDR is established as a fiscally independent body responsible for the planning, fundraising and supervision of postwar reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts

2001-2003

Research consultation

The World Bank commissions an urban study fosusing on access and parking, the historic city center, and the harbour

CHUD project

The Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Project (CHUD) is initiated by the Lebanese Government in 2003 and funded through multiple sources, most notably a World Bank loan.

2003-2016



Case study 05

Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Project

Image: Byblos Historic Quarter | Source: Vyacheslav Argenber | Wikimedia commons

Efforts in urban conservation and revitalization in Jbeil began in the 1970s, when the DGA expropriated a large number of plots in the old city, restored them and imposed a review of restoration and construction projects within the limits of the medieval city. In the 1990s, a businessman initiated a transformation in the souq through the introduction of tourism facilities. Most recently, the CHUD project (2004-2010), with its holistic approach applied in the whole city, gave the heritage sector a push.

The CHUD project aimed to: A) create the conditions for increased local economic development and enhanced quality of life in the historic centers of five secondary cities in Lebanon; and B) improve the conservation and management of Lebanon's built cultural heritage. This was implemented through: (i) supporting local economic development and enhancing the quality of life of local communities; (ii) improving the management of cultural heritage; (iii) rehabilitating public spaces and infrastructure; (iv) enforcing regulations on land use and traffic in and around heritage sites, including the protection and landscaping of coastal and green areas; (v) developing studies for urban redevelopment adjacent to the sites; and (vi) enhancing the institutional framework through technical assistance and capacity building. The project funds civil works in the historic cities and sites of Baalbeck, Byblos, Saida, Tripoli and Tyre (Bigio & Licciardo, 2010). In brief, CHUD "treats Lebanon's cultural assets as economic assets and integrates them into the life of the community to achieve local growth" (Al-hagla, 2010).

CHUD was initiated by the Lebanese Government in 2004 and funded through multiple sources, most notably a World Bank loan. The project was run by the CDR. The DGA was responsible for antiquities-related actions. Lebanese municipalities and their elected city councils were responsible for urban actions under the supervision of the DGA within historic urban areas.

Although the project also had an archaeological component, aiming to promote conservation and the sustainable management of archaeological sites, only 23% of the budget was used for this purpose. 75% was dedicated to infrastructure and public services.

Stage 1 - Research consultation (2001-2003)

In 2001, in response to a request from the Lebanese State and in preparation for the project, the World Bank commissioned an urban study from a Lebanese consultancy firm. A project management unit was established. It recruited consultants who specialized in heritage conservation to produce a report to form the basis of the project (AUDI 2024). The study focused on three main areas: access and parking; the historic city center; and the harbor (UNESCO-WHC: Byblos).

Stage 2 - Implementation (2003-2016)

The implementation stage of the project saw large-scale infrastructure development pursued as a strategy for the improvement of deteriorated urban conditions. This included the development of water and sewage systems, the improvement of the quality of public space and its expansion (new benches, landscaping, and recreational spaces), pedestrianization, enhancement of mobility and transport links, facilitating parking and accessibility and reducing congestion and pollution. Local feedback was mostly positive, apart from shop owners who reacted negatively to pedestrianization, arguing that decreased vehicular access and parking created challenges for local businesses (World Bank 2019). The project also aimed to amplify the contribution of cultural heritage to local socioeconomic development and civic life.

Capacity training and institutional support

Capacity training was an important component of the CHUD project. It first conducted an institutional assessment of the DGA as a precondition for the negotiation of its project with the Lebanese Government. Later in the project, it provided technical assistance to help municipalities effectively revitalize and manage historic urban cores and sites, training DGA staff in specialist conservation activities. The DGA used project financing to hire and train local staff, and 15 of the 200 trained experts became permanent DGA staff. The project also worked with governmental partners to prepare detailed zoning regulations and to identify clearly determined borders to define the historic cities. New building codes and construction laws were implemented to regulate land use and urban interventions in the old city and its surroundings (World Bank 2019; Bigio & Licciardo 2010).

Results

The CHUD project faced a variety of issues, most notably the lack of regulatory tools and challenges in coordinating between municipalities, the DGA and the Urban Office (Tanzim). The success of the project varied from one city to the other depending on the level of cooperation between stakeholders, amongst other factors. Byblos was one of the more successful examples in that aspect.

According to the World Bank Assessment Report, the project increased the total amount of public space in the five cities from 9,840 square meters in 2006 to an estimated 27,4000 square meters at the project closure. Generally speaking, the CHUD project produced varying levels of citizen satisfaction. In Tripoli, Baalbek and Tyre, satisfaction was lower due to the redirection of traffic, the museification of historic centers, the narrowing of roads and the removal of service roads, as well as the installation of public spaces at the expense of parking. Jbeil had a "high satisfaction score" in the project assessment study conducted by the World Bank after the project, correlated with the provision of new public infrastructure including benches, landscaping and recreational spaces. In the case of Byblos, CHUD contributed to the development of cultural tourism. The city saw an increase in tourist numbers, overnight stays, and shopping visits. This was reflected in a boost in private sector investment in rehabilitation. For each dollar invested by the project, the private sector mobilized seven dollars (World Bank 2019). However, these developments were mostly geared towards tourists and visitors, as is reflected in the final museified aspect of the historic city center. In terms of institutional capacity building, the DGA has arguably benefited most from training. The CDR, on the other hand, suffered setbacks common to entities that are not rooted in permanent governmental infrastructures. It has seen cutbacks across many of its activities, and as such, did not benefit as much as it could have from the experiences gained from this project.

Lessons learned

Political and economic instability is a great burden that Lebanon has grappled with for several decades. This inevitably puts a large strain on the management of national cultural heritage. The institutional framework of Lebanese municipalities is illustrative of this issue. Institutional capacity building lacks continuity because of political instability and the fluctuation of financial resources. City Councils have the potential to become vehicles for effective governance but are bogged down in sectarian divisions and periodically derailed by political crises. The case of the conservation of Jbeil's heritage is testament of multi-sectoral financial and managerial cooperation. In the face of adversity, national and international cooperation succeeded in improving the quality of life in Jbeil by using its heritage as a vehicle for development. However, the varying degrees of success are indicative of the fragmented state of the Lebanese governance and political systems. While Jbeil provides a successful example of the CHUD approach, the project was less impactful in other cities. Additionally, the long-term financial burden on the state to repay the World Bank loan should not be overlooked. Countries considering project support in the form of loans rather than grants should first make sure that the output is a financially viable model that will generate enough revenue to pay off the debt.

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CASE STUDY

AS-SALT, JORDAN

Located in the Balqa highland in west-central Jordan, As-Salt was the capital of Trans-Jordan during the Ottoman period and thrived as a trade center between the 1860s and the 1920s. Distinguished by the high level of integration between its Christian and Muslim communities, it was inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site and recognized as a "Place of Tolerance and Urban Hospitality" in 2021 (UNESCO-WHC: As-Salt).

Panoramic view at Al Qal'a
Source: TURATH: Architecture and Urban Design Consultants | UNESCO

Introduction

Located in the Balqa highland in west-central Jordan, As-Salt was the capital of Trans-Jordan during the Ottoman period and thrived as a trade center between the 1860s and the 1920s. Distinguished by the high level of integration between its Christian and Muslim communities, it was inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site and recognized as a "Place of Tolerance and Urban Hospitality" in 2021 (UNESCO-WHC: As-Salt).

Morphology, Topography and Context

As-Salt is built upon the slopes and valleys of three closely located hills in the Baqla highland of west-central Jordan, north-west of Amman, and it is the capital of the Balqa Governorate. The city's hinterland is mostly rural. Al-Balqa region possesses fertile land, and a large part of its economy relies on agriculture. As-Salt represents a historic core or old city center in the midst of the larger city. The city's courtyard-style buildings adapt to the steep topography resulting in a dense network of interlinked stairways, alleyways, streets and public squares and spaces. (UNESCO-WHC: As-Salt)

Significant Heritage type

The historic core of As-Salt maintains a large degree of intactness and integrity, despite the presence of some newer developments and buildings. The city is characterized by its traditional three bay courtyard limestone houses. Its non-segregated urban quarters and traditional Dawaween guesthouses represent a centuries-long tradition of interfaith hospitality and social welfare. The Church of St. George in Al Khader, built in the 1600s in an ancient cave, is the most significant example of a network of churches which exemplify its spirit of tolerance.

164,303
As-Salt Greater Municipality (2023)[19]

7,480 ha
As-Salt

24.68 ha
Historic core of As-Salt (in addition to a 71.12-ha buffer zone)[20]

Legislative and Regulatory framework

As-Salt is primarily managed by the Salt Greater Municipality, which is headed by an elected official. The municipal council is elected every four years. Since its establishment in 2005, As-Salt City Development Planning Unit (ASCDP) has been the executive body in charge of urban heritage management. The municipality receives support from regional and national authorities such as the Balqa Governorate, the Royal Diwan, various ministries as well as local actors such as the As-Salt Development Corporation and As-Salt Chamber of Commerce. The municipality retains financial independence from the Balqa Governorate but depends on the governorate as an executive arm that aids in implementing and facilitating its decisions. The Municipality is subject to oversight from the Ministry of Local Administration.

The Cities, Villages and Buildings Planning Law (No. 79 of 1966) is the fundamental legislation controlling planning and building in all Jordanian municipalities. As-Salt's listed antiquities dating to 1750 and before are protected by the Jordanian Law of Antiquities (No.21 of 1988). The Law for the Protection of Urban and Architectural Heritage (No.5 of 2005) is concerned with preserving and protecting architectural and urban heritage dating after 1750. Both laws prohibit the destruction, disfiguration or unauthorized alteration of antiquities or heritage buildings and sites (Daher et. al., 2019).

The City Core Special Regulations (CCSR) for As-Salt were endorsed by ASGM, the Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs and the Higher City Planning Council of Jordan in 2014. A first volume of 16 articles addresses basic definitions, revision mechanisms, conservation issues, special conservation areas, interim provisions, development permits, city views and vistas, land use, volumetric guidelines for new constructions, designation of heritage buildings, special conservation areas, special development corridors, special urban places, and matters of expropriation and compensation. It is accompanied by four further volumes covering the following: 1) Implementation Action Plans; 2) Construction Guide for As-Salt; 3) As-Salt Design Guide; and 4) Public Realm Guide (Daher et. al., 2019).

Issues

Prior to the recognition of As-Salt as a heritage site and the establishment of a management framework, the historic area suffered from neglect and abandonment. Its historic buildings were dilapidated and uncared for. Its open spaces, infrastructure and services were inadequate. There was no clear framework for regulating construction and repairs (Daher 2019). Currently, the city is celebrated as a historical site and many of its structures and open spaces revitalized, but there is insufficient funding for pending work and the framework for municipal regulation has weakened, leading to infringement of the urban regulatory system. The most significant threat to As-Salt's heritage continues to be overdevelopment and modern encroachments (Daher et al., 2019)[21].

19 Jordanian Department of Statistics. (2019). Jordan in Figures 2019. https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/population/population-2/

20 As-Salt. (2015). City Population. Retrieved October 16, 2024, from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/jordan/cities/

21 Salim. L (2024, August 12). Coordinator and Project Manager, ICOMOS-Jordan [Interview]

1985
As-Salt Recognized as a Heritage site
Salt Development Cooperation promotes As-Salt as a heritage town and builds heritage management capacities. Jordan's Royal Scientific Society documents the city's urban heritage.

1998
Establishment of an Urban Heritage Conservation Department
The department is tasked with documenting As-Salt's urban heritage and re-evaluating the plans suggested by the Royal Scientific Committee.

2005
Royal Support Solicited for Conserving As-Salt
Local stakeholders request Royal support in implementing a more comprehensive revitalization effort of As-Salt's historic city centre

2007
Establishment of City Management Unit
The City Management Unit has financial and administrative independence and is tasked with managing the historic city centre.

2007-2010
World Bank Project
The Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Urban Development (CHTUDP) focuses on strenghtening as As-Salt's tourism industry, preserving its cultural heritage assets, and addressing urgent development challenges through a World bank loan.

2021
As-Salt inscribed on World Heritage Site List
Inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site and recognized as a "Place of Tolerance and Urban Hospitality"



Figure 4: Cross section of As-Salt through topography and building typology. Image: Daher et al, 2019



Case study 06

Municipality-led Consortium to Develop and Implement a Conservation Management Plan

Image: Al Jad'a Stairway | Source: TURATH: Architecture and Urban Design Consultants

The establishment of As-Salt Greater Municipality's City Development Projects Unit (ASCDP) in 2005 was a significant milestone in a 40-year journey to recognize, map, document, protect and revitalize the heritage of the city. This journey is characterized by the collaboration of an impressive number of actors coming from different sectors on the city as well as from national and international levels, a collaboration led by As-Salt Greater Municipality (ASGM) through ASCDP as its executive arm.

Recognition of As-Salt as a Heritage town

The first notable efforts were initiated in tandem by two actors, the first from outside the government and the second from within. Salt Development Corporation (SDC) is a community-led non-profit organization that has run cultural and capacity building activities since its inception in 1982. In 1984, it collaborated with a Jordanian architectural firm, Dar el-Handaseh, on the first step towards a map and master plan for protecting As-Salt's heritage. Parallel to these efforts, Jordan's Royal Scientific Society (RSS) was working with the Ministry of Planning to document Jordan's architectural heritage, starting with the heritage of As-Salt. SDC and RSS then joined hands to prepare a Plan for Action, published in 1990. This plan was adopted by ASGM, to be implemented by its Urban Heritage Conservation Section, established in 1989. Then, in the 1990s, the Ministry of Tourism, ASGM and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) collaborated on a project to establish the Historic Old House Museum of Abu Jaber and develop the urban spaces around it. Another Jordanian NGO, Cultech, was involved in the project implementation.

Royal support for Conservation efforts

In 2005, local stakeholders requested royal support for a broader and more long-term revitalization project. These efforts were coordinated by a Higher Steering Committee led by ASGM and the Royal Diwan. ASCDP was established as its executive arm, incorporating the Urban Heritage Conservation Section. The Ministry of Local Administration served as a point of connection with different ministries, while the Ministry of Tourism worked with the World Bank (WB) on developing As-Salt's tourism sector. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation was responsible for securing funding for infrastructure projects and building restoration. The Ministry of Public Works and Housing and Al Balqa Governorate were also involved, with the latter acting to smooth over issues arising with the implementation of different projects and initiatives. SDC continued to contribute technical and financial resources. Other stakeholders included the As-Salt Chamber of Commerce, representing merchants and business owners in the city center, and the makhatir or representatives of local tribes. The Higher Steering Committee was provided with progress reports every six months. Between 2005 and 2017, most of the mapping and implementation works were carried out within this framework. The Jordanian government covered around 65% of the total investment in heritage during that period; the rest of the cost was mostly covered by the World Bank and the EU.

Heritage Management regulations and inscription of As-Salt as a World Heritage Site

In 2008, a collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism and the World Bank was initiated to prepare special regulations for a number of historic towns within Jordan, including As-Salt. In addition to rehabilitation work, infrastructure interventions and institutional and capacity building to develop As-Salt's Tourism Sector, its most significant output was the 2014 city regulations (CCSR) referred to above (World Bank, 2020). Between 2012 and 2014, the EU-funded consortium Heritage 4 Development (with the NGO Cultech serving as the Jordanian counterpart) prepared an updated GIS map and developed the Manual for the Conservation of the Historic Centre of Salt (Fakhoury & Haddad, 2014). Another significant initiative was the Salt Heritage Fund, which provided financial incentives to property owners for restoring and adaptively reusing heritage buildings (Fakhoury & Haddad, 2014 & 2022). Finally, between 2018 and 2020, ASGM collaborated with USAID's 'Building Economic Sustainability through Tourism (BEST)' program to promote As-Salt as a tourist destination.

These inter-sectoral efforts culminated in major physical interventions, most notably the adaptive reuse of historic buildings for public services and private functions, the enhancement of street facades, the rehabilitation of historic stairs, extensive urban upgrade projects such as the Oqbe Project and increased accessibility through the construction of an improved bus terminal outside the city center. These efforts were recognized with the inscription of As-Salt as a World Heritage Site in 2019.

However, in 2022, ASCDP's operations ceased due to a lack of national funding and a waning of political support. This led to the slowing down of ongoing projects and has caused inefficiencies in the management of As-Salt's historic center, as key knowledge around the enforcement of preservation regulations was not transferred to the municipality. Efforts to control urban development and new construction have faltered and are struggling to cope with the pressure to add services that cater to rising tourism.

Lessons learned

The experience of As-Salt highlights the importance of sustained collaboration between stakeholders on the local, national and international levels. The initial push by local stakeholders such as ASG and SDC for the recognition and preservation of As-Salt's heritage, the long-term support and oversight of national authorities and the financial and technical assistance provided by international organizations were all vital in showcasing the significance of As-Salt's heritage and in building a robust tourism sector that supports the local community based on the city's rich heritage.

The case of As-Salt also highlights the importance of creating a relatable and inclusive narrative, in this case a narrative of tolerance and hospitality, to rally support on multiple levels and to secure the listing of previously unacknowledged heritage as World Heritage.

On the other hand, the cessation of the activities of ASCDP highlights the need for sustained national funding and political backing for heritage management activities, in support of municipal and other efforts. If and when units like ASCDP must be closed, there is a need to establish clear and sustainable procedures for the transfer of the necessary skills and knowledge to municipal parties. This will allow them to independently enforce the necessary preservation regulations and adapt to new challenges after the end of projects carried out in collaboration with non-governmental stakeholders.

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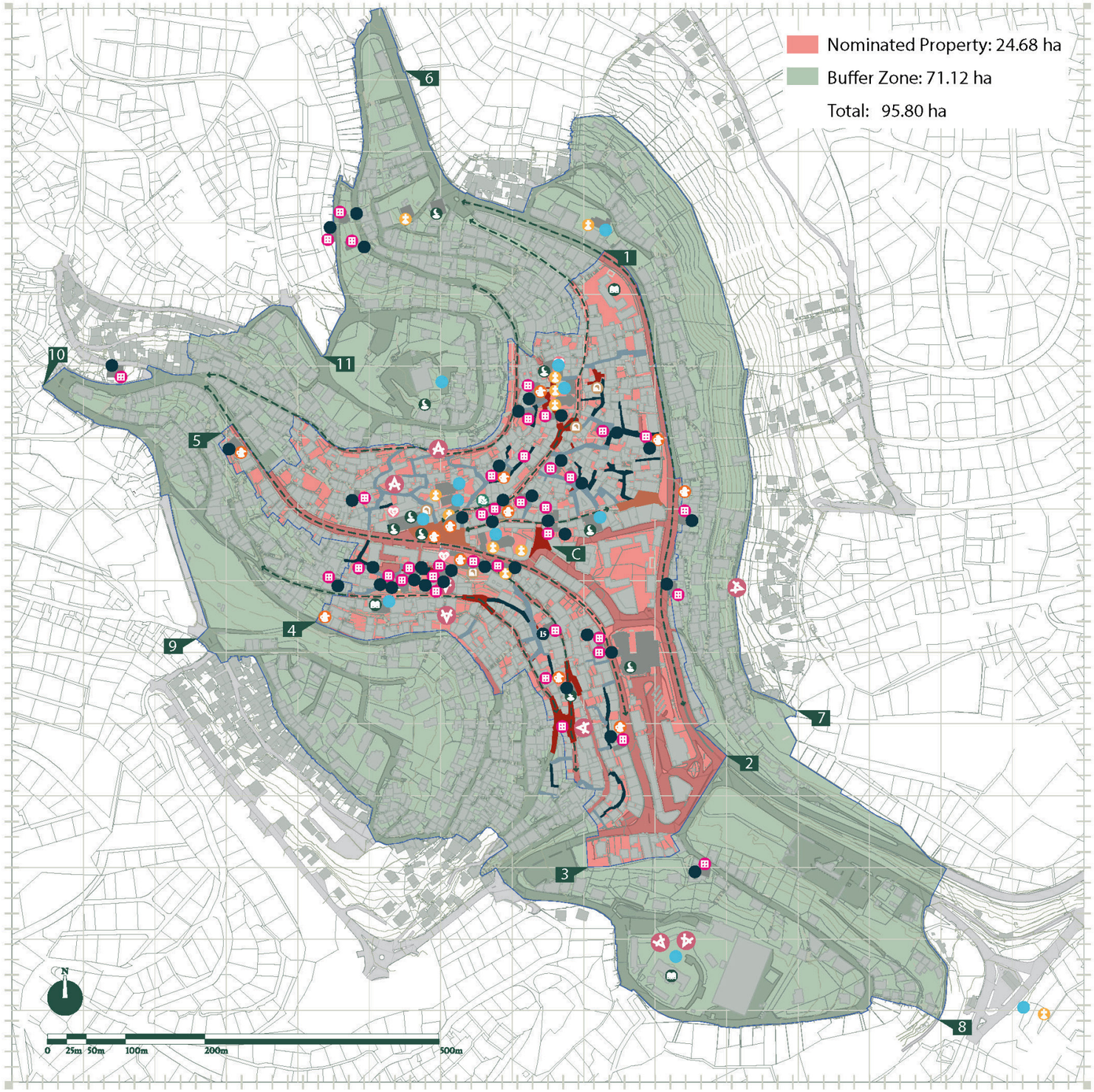

Map.17

Property Boundary & Buffer juxtaposed with Tangible & Intangible Attributes

Tangible Attributes Of The Property

Urban Typology

- Nodes
- Squares (Sahat)
- Stairs
- Alleyways
- Streets
- Panormic
- Significant Building- Public

Significant Buildings

- Significant Buildings
- Singificant Buildings (Public)-Mosque
- Singificant Buildings (Public)-Church
- Singificant Buildings (Public)-School
- Singificant Buildings (Public)-Hospital
- Singificant Building-Residential

Intangible Attributes (spatially represented examples)

A System of Urban Hospitality

- Madafat From The Golden Age

Tolerance Cohabitation Between Muslim and Christians Communities

- Urban Proximity Between Various Functions (Mosque - Church)
- Shared Urban Entrances or Stairs
- General Support System & Brotherhood
- Madafat From The Golden Age

Figure 5: As-Salt Conservation Management Plan 2019. Image: Daher et al, 2019.

CASE STUDY

MOSUL, IRAQ

Mosul was once an integral part of the Assyrian Empire, holding strategic importance on the banks of the river Tigris and providing the link between Eastern and Western civilizations. Al-mawsil in Arabic means the link, the junction or the bridge. The city's position along historical trade routes fostered a diverse and multicultural society and allowed it to become an important cultural and intellectual center in Iraq. The city has been influenced by ancient Assyrian, Arab, Seljuk, Ottoman and Kurdish cultures and empires.

Al-Nouri Mosque, Mosul
Source: UNESCO

Introduction

Mosul was once an integral part of the Assyrian Empire, holding strategic importance on the banks of the river Tigris and providing the link between Eastern and Western civilizations. Al-mawsil in Arabic means the link, the junction or the bridge. The city's position along historical trade routes fostered a diverse and multicultural society and allowed it to become an important cultural and intellectual center in Iraq. The city has been influenced by ancient Assyrian, Arab, Seljuk, Ottoman and Kurdish cultures and empires.

Morphology, Topography and Context

Mosul is the second-largest city in Iraq and the provincial capital of the Nineveh Governorate. It is situated in northern Iraq on the banks of the Tigris River, around 400 km north of Baghdad. It is close to the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh, the ruins of which lie just across the river to the east. The city is located on mostly flat terrain, though surrounding areas feature hilly landscapes. The Tigris River splits the city, with a bridge network linking the eastern and western districts. Mosul consists of eight sectors, one of them being the old city. The old city is located on the western bank and features narrow, winding streets and densely packed buildings, drawing influence from a blend of Islamic, Mesopotamian, and Christian styles. The eastern section of Mosul has wider streets and a more grid-like structure and includes many modern residential and commercial buildings developed in the 20th century.

Significant heritage type

Being at the crossroads of several trading routes, Mosul's significance as an Assyrian city is illustrated in the remnants of the ancient city of Nineveh, located on the eastern side of modern Mosul. The site contains ruins dating back to the seventh century BCE, including the Mashki and Adad Gates. A significant feature of Nineveh's remains is stone carving with decorative motifs. The city's importance is reflected in the fact that contemporary Assyrians still refer to Mosul itself as Nineveh.

1,792,000 (est)
Metropolitan area (2023)[22]

18,000 ha
Metropolitan area[23]

339 ha
Old City of Mosul[24]

Mosul's more recent heritage reflects the city's values of tolerance and co-existence through time. Old Mosul was distinguished by its medieval city plan, the concentration of Islamic buildings spanning the 12th to the 19th century, religious buildings of other religious communities (particularly Christian), Ottoman domestic architecture and an extraordinary multifarious ethnic and religious mixture of inhabitants. In contrast to other towns in Iraq, it has been little affected by modernization and retains much of its traditional ethnic and religious heterogeneity. The network of streets, alleyways and cul-de-sacs represents one of the best examples of the spontaneous growth pattern of historical cities in the Middle East. Al-Nuri Mosque, famous for its leaning minaret, is a defining symbol of the city. Before its destruction in 2017 amidst armed conflict in the city, the minaret – alongside the Clock Tower of the Dominican al-Sa'a Church, part of the Our Lady of the Hour Convent – dominated the skyline of Mosul (UNESCO-WHC: Mosul).

22 Mosul, Iraq Metro Area Population 1950-2024 https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/cities/21536/mosul/population#:~:text=The%20current%20metro%20area%20population,a%203.21%25%20increase%20from%202021.

23 Musee D'Archeologie Nationale. "Mosul and its Museum", https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/mossoul-museum/en

24 Azealdeen S. Al-Jawadi, Sabah H. Ali, Hadeer G. M. Adeeb (2002). "Engineering Investigation of the Geological Problems for Old Mosul City by Remote Sensing and GIS", 2nd Conference of Western Iraqi Desert Geology and Surroundings (IDGC-2021). https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1755-1315/1080/1/012018/pdf

Legislative and Governmental framework

Law no. 25 (2002) is concerned with the preservation of antiquities and heritage "for being a substantial aspect of National Wealth", highlighting Iraqi contributions to the history of civilization. It defines antiquity as "movable and immovable property which has been built, made, carved, produced, written or painted by man, whose age is not less than 200 years". It considers "movable and immovable property, less than 200 years of age, possessing a historical, national, religious and artistic value" as heritage material. It defines historical sites as "places where a notable historical event took place, therein, regardless of their age." Article 113 in Iraq's 2005 constitution declared antiquities, archaeological sites, cultural buildings and manuscripts as "national treasure under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities" and requires such property to be managed by the state in cooperation with the regions and governorates (Davis, 2015).

The Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) is the main institutional body responsible for heritage preservation in Iraq. It works within the legal framework established by Iraqi laws to ensure the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, particularly during reconstruction efforts. SBAH is responsible for creating an inventory of damaged heritage sites and assessing their conditions.

Issues

Iraq has suffered for decades due to a series of military conflicts, that have left large portions of Mosul in ruins, especially its infrastructure and cultural heritage. Several months of armed conflict in the struggle to retake the city left behind a devastated urban landscape, characterized by destroyed monuments, demolished houses, damaged buildings, destroyed infrastructure and extensive piles of rubble. Along the Tigris River, the historic urban fabric was severely affected. Estimates account for the destruction of 80% of old Mosul during this period (UNESCO-WHC: Mosul). Soon after the occupation, footage emerged depicting the destruction of Mosul's cultural heritage including both Islamic and Christian sites, as well as monumental statues on Nineveh's ancient Nergal Gate. The iconic Al-Nuri Mosque was amongst the many monuments badly damaged during the occupation, along with a series of shrines, historic mosques, churches, markets, traditional homes and several mausolea of the Mosul school. Thousands of rare books and manuscripts as well as artefacts from Mosul's libraries, museums, and collections were destroyed or looted. The large-scale destruction of Mosul led to the displacement of thousands of residents, leading to the loss of local knowledge and craftsmanship and so further straining the preservation of cultural heritage in the city.

2005

Heritage declared as national treasure

Article 113 in Iraq's 2005 constitution declared antiquities, archaeological sites, cultural buildings and manuscripts as "national treasure under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities"

2014-2017

Destruction of Heritage in Mosul

Extensive destruction during the conflict leaves an estimated 80% of old Mosul in ruins

2018

International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq

Event to address Iraq's reconstruction needs, estimated at around USD 88 billion to restore infrastructure, housing, and essential services.

2018

Launching of UNESCO's "Reviving the Spirit of Mosul"

Founded on three pillars: 1) reconstruction and rehabilitation; 2) stimulation and revival of cultural life; 3) provision of education and training.

2022

Traditional Music Festival

In support of the revival of music in Mosul, a traditional music festival in partnership with the NGO Action for Hope is followed with training local musicians and creating new ensembles



Case study 07

Reviving the Spirit of Mosul

Image: Al-Saa'a Church, Mosul | Source: UNESCO

In 2018, in the post-conflict context of Mosul, UN-Habitat and UNESCO published an Initial Planning Framework for the city. The plan aims to define recovery priorities and deliver a comprehensive reconstruction and planning approach for Mosul, with special attention to the old city. Along with recommendations for Greater Mosul, this framework established the protection of heritage from further destruction as a prerequisite for reconstruction in the old city. It also suggested tackling the reconstruction of the old city through an area-based recovery approach, known as the super block model. This framework is now used as a guideline, although it has not been officially adopted. A legal and logistical framework for its implementation is being developed by UNESCO, working in collaboration with the Municipality of Mosul and aiming to establish it as a legally binding document (UNESCO & UN-Habitat, 2018).

The International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq was held in 2018. It brought together international donors including governments, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector representatives to pledge financial support for rebuilding Iraq. The event was a significant moment in addressing the country's reconstruction needs, generating an estimated $88 billion USD to restore infrastructure, housing and essential services across war-affected regions. The conference led to UNESCO's initiative to 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul', a project that is founded on three pillars: 1) reconstruction and rehabilitation of the city's heritage; 2) stimulation and revival of the cultural and intellectual life of Mosul; 3) the provision of education and training. The project envisions that, by bringing back to Mosul a culture of singing, dance, reading and cinema, the city's spirit of dialogue and debate can be revitalized. While some sites such as al-Juwayjati, al-Khuzam and al-Basha Mosques were renovated, funded and carried out by religious endowments, 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul' has been the largest and most comprehensive post-conflict initiative for reconstruction and rehabilitation in Mosul since the city's occupation.

Urban Regeneration efforts

The reconstruction and rehabilitation works implemented under the 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul' initiative represent a comprehensive project of urban historic site management in a post-conflict context of urban recovery. A significant contribution is the large-scale urban intervention on two 'heritage roads' in Old Mosul. The project focused on restoring and reconstructing more than 100 heritage houses, facilitating the return of residents to the area. The concentration of efforts on one area facilitated the creation of a pathway that connects Al-Tahera church, Al-Nuri Mosque and the Tigris River. This has served to not only valorize heritage buildings but also enhance tourism.

Along with the 122 houses fully restored, the project included the restoration of Suliman al Sayegh and Zyada palatial houses. There are plans to convert Suliman Al Sayegh house into a museum about Mosul. These reconstruction efforts were undertaken in parallel to the upgrading of public infrastructure, including new paving, the development of water systems, improved electrical wiring and public lighting and the installation of septic tanks for the heritage houses. The reconstruction project was jointly monitored by UNESCO and a technical team from SBAH, both involved in processes of design and implementation.[25]

In addition to the residential restoration project, SBAH and UNESCO began the reconstruction of a series of historic buildings which feature on the heritage path, most notably the Al-Nuri Mosque and al-Saa'a Church. The pre-reconstruction phase followed the same methodology of the residential projects, including: 1) structural, geological, and archaeological studies of the various sites; 2) securing the area; and 3) identification and preservation of valuable fragments. The reconstruction plans themselves were developed collaboratively between several local experts and UNESCO through a series of consultations with local authorities and the local population. In the case of Al-Nuri Mosque, the reconstruction of the minaret was prioritized due to community demand. The final design for the intervention was decided through an international competition, and the results caused backlash in some Iraqi professional circles. This led to a second round of community consultation meetings. Al-Saa'a Church, on the other hand, was rehabilitated with a focus on valorizing its architectural elements and respecting vernacular architectural language, resulting in the adaptive reuse of the convent's 'House of Prayer'. The latter has become a multipurpose educational and cultural center for the local community.

25 Sorosh. J (2024, August 20). Chief of Culture Programme, UNESCO Iraq Office [Interview]

Reviving Arts and Culture

In parallel to reconstruction efforts, the project envisioned the revitalization of intangible heritage through the revival of cultural life and cultural institutions in Mosul. This initiative began in 2019 with the organization of a cultural festival on al-Najafi street, famous for its open-air book market and long considered a center of cultural life in the city. To support the revival of music in Mosul, a traditional music festival was launched in 2022 in partnership with the NGO Action for Hope and was followed up with the training of 24 local musicians and the creation of four new ensembles. In partnership with the Theatre of Ghent in Belgium, a new cinema department was established in the Fine Arts College of Mosul University. In the same vein, a new creative space called 'The Station' was developed as a hub for young people working in cultural and creative industries.

Capacity Building and Training

A key feature of the project was job creation, with skills development programs pursued in the form of apprenticeships and training in traditional crafts and conservation, targeting both professionals and artisans. UNESCO partnered with ICCROM, the University of Mosul and the Iraqi Department of Labour and Social Affairs to convene different programs that trained participants in documentation and damage assessment as well as implementation, with the ongoing interventions providing ample opportunities for on-the-job training.

At an institutional level, UNESCO assisted the relevant authorities with architectural and heritage guidelines for the preservation of historical houses, responding to a request from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Planning. The guidelines explored building technologies, building categories, architectural elements and good practices of conservation. UNESCO also trained several municipality general directorates (electricity, water, sewage and others) in the usage of a single GIS system, a tool that enabled the integration of different department interventions.

Lessons Learned

Heritage is one of the most significant foundations for nation-building after conflict and war. Reconstructing and restoring heritage buildings can bring communities back and revive community spirit. Culture and intangible heritage can bring life back to cities. All these actions are tools for job creation, with conservation being particularly labor intensive. Such approaches should, however, be linked to continuous participatory measures to make sure communities are involved in decision-making and are also capable of taking charge of local initiatives. Institutional and regulatory frameworks are as important and should be developed again through participatory actions.

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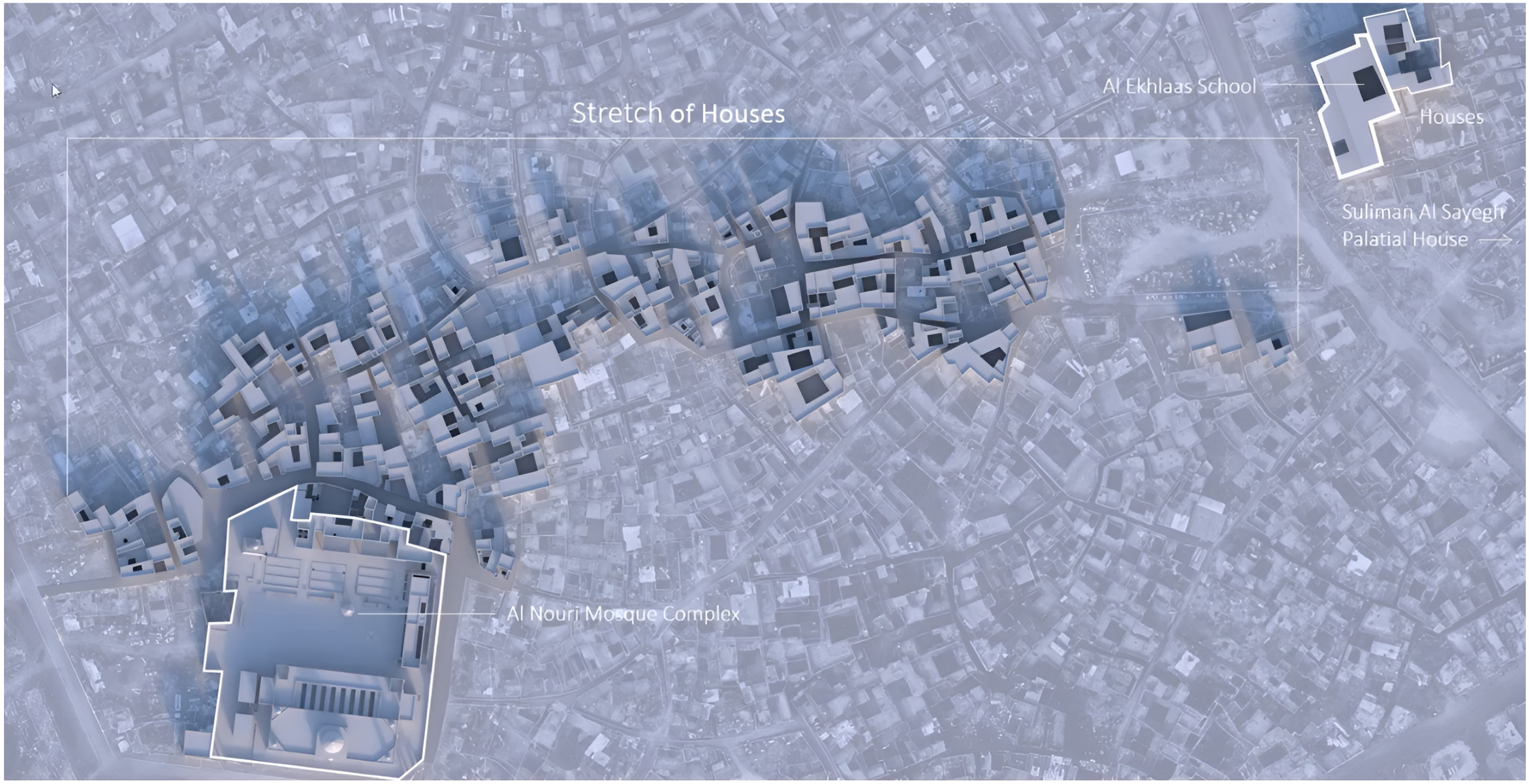

Figure 6: Heritage Road in Old Mosul, reconstructed and rehabilitated under the 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul' initiative | Source: UNESCO

CASE STUDY

MUHARRAQ, BAHRAIN

In the 19th century, Muharraq thrived as Bahrain's capital and as a prominent global hub for the pearl industry. Its status as an important trade center also made Muharraq a hub for Bahraini intellectual, cultural and political life until the mid-20th century, when the discovery of oil and changes in the natural pearling industry resulted in its decline. Nevertheless, this legacy has shaped the city's cultural and social identity. It provides a thread that guides Muharraq's contemporary heritage conservation strategy. In 2012, UNESCO recognized parts of Muharraq as a World Heritage site under the title 'Pearling, Testimony of an Island Economy', showcasing the architectural testimony of Muharraq's connection to Bahrain's historical pearling industry (UNESCO-WHC: Pearling)

Public square, Muharraq, Bahrain
Source: Cemal Emden | Aga Khan Trust for Culture

Introduction

In the 19th century, Muharraq thrived as Bahrain's capital and as a prominent global hub for the pearl industry. Its status as an important trade center also made Muharraq a hub for Bahraini intellectual, cultural and political life until the mid-20th century, when the discovery of oil and changes in the natural pearling industry resulted in its decline. Nevertheless, this legacy has shaped the city's cultural and social identity. It provides a thread that guides Muharraq's contemporary heritage conservation strategy. In 2012, UNESCO recognized parts of Muharraq as a World Heritage site under the title 'Pearling, Testimony of an Island Economy', showcasing the architectural testimony of Muharraq's connection to Bahrain's historical pearling industry (UNESCO-WHC: Pearling)

Morphology, Topography and Context

The city of Muharraq is located on an island of the same name, east of Bahrain's capital, Manama. Muharraq has an organic and compact urban fabric, reflecting the traditional model of Gulf urbanization, with narrow alleyways forming a network of houses, mosques and trade complexes. Districts or neighborhoods (Fareej in Arabic) have a spatial hierarchy and strong family or tribal identities. As a result, physical expressions of the social fabric reinforce territorial identity (Alraouf, 2014). While the city has preserved some of its traditional Islamic and Bahraini urban morphology and architecture, highlighting the use of vernacular materials, it also features constructions with new materials such as concrete (El-Rashidi, 2019). Moreover, similar to urban development in coastal environments in other Gulf states, land reclamation for urban growth and infrastructure projects is common in Muharraq. It was particularly prevalent in the 1970s, resulting in the historic core's loss of immediate contact with the sea.

293,462
Muharraq City (2024)[26]

6,674 ha
Muharraq City (Shubbar and Boussa 2018)

33 ha
Area covered by Pearling Path ha (El-Rashidi, 2019)

Significant Heritage type

Muharraq's architecture is a blend of traditional Bahraini and Islamic styles, reflecting local culture and the natural environment. The built environment includes mosques, trade complexes, souqs and traditional houses, often made of coral, stone, and plaster. Traditional houses range between one and three stories and include features such as wind towers (badgir) that enhance natural ventilation in homes. Many are pearl merchant houses, reflecting Muharraq's heritage as a pearling center. Houses are generally modular in plan, with several rooms surrounding a large courtyard, accessible through a bent entrance (El-Rashidi, 2019). Interior spaces within heritage buildings are often decorated with incised stucco decorative panels and upper-story spaces have colored glass windows. There is also a display of high-quality craftsmanship in timber and plaster work.

26 CEIC Data. Bahrain Population: Muharraq. https://www.ceicdata.com/en/bahrain/population-by-region/population-muharraq#:~:text=Bahrain%20Population%3A%20Muharraq%20data%20was,of%20289%2C155.000%20Person%20for%202023.

Legislative and Regulatory framework

Bahraini heritage is protected under Legislative Decree no. 11 (1995) which is concerned with the protection of movable and immovable antiquities. The Bu Mahir Seashore and individual sites in Muharraq are protected by this legislation. With regard to immovable property, this law limits the listing of heritage to archaeological sites and monuments. There is no legal heritage zoning, as each plot is named individually, and a multi-tiered grading system does not exist in Bahrain. Despite this, the Bahrain Authority for Culture & Antiquities (BACA), the main governmental entity responsible for heritage management and conservation in Bahrain, set an operational framework which established the original shores of Muharraq (before land reclamation) as the boundaries for heritage protection. It also has its own grading system, which is not enforced by law.

Despite the lack of legal protection for urban heritage clusters, the technical heritage management team under BACA has collaborated with the Muharraq municipality in its permit control system since 2010. The BACA team is responsible for the review of permits in historical Muharraq and the development of a criteria for demolition or preservation. It serves as the liaison entity between the authorities and contesting stakeholders such as heritage property owners. Recently, the issuing of Edict no. 56 (2022) promulgated zoning regulations for construction in Bahrain. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is preparing detailed urban zoning maps, establishing five classifications for historical areas.[27]

Issues

Unprecedented oil revenues have resulted in accelerated development in Bahrain's urban centers, often posing a threat to the traditional built environment. In the 1970s and 1980s, this led to the construction of modern housing projects on the outskirts of Muharraq and to large-scale demolitions in the historic center, leaving only around 30% of traditional stone buildings in place. A limited number of valuable historical buildings have escaped destruction, but they often face other problems like overcrowding, dilapidation and disrepair (Alraouf, 2014). Muharraq's 'modernization' resulted in changes in the demographic makeup of the city. The exodus of the city's local population left a rapidly deteriorating and partially abandoned older area available as cheap accommodation for the large influx of foreign laborers or 'guest workers', mostly from India and Pakistan. These demographic changes are viewed negatively by local families and authorities as indicative of a loss of social cohesiveness.

27 Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities. (2022). The President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities Commends the Zoning Regulations for Construction Regulations for construction in the Kingdom of Bahrain. https://culture.gov.bh/en/mediacenter/news_center/2022/Oct2022/Name,21126,en.html

2000s

Restoration of a cultural majlis

Sheikha Mai Al Khalifa reinstates a cultural majlis (salon) catalyzing an interest in the preservation of the city's heritage

2010

Initiation of the Pearling Path Project

The BACA management team begins the implementation of small projects

2012

Recognition as a World Heritage Site

UNESCO recognizes parts of Muharraq as a World Heritage site, showcasing the architectural testimony of Muharraq's connection to Bahrain's historical pearling industry

2014

IsDB Loan

A loan of USD 40,000,000 from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) allowed the initiation of the main projects designed to develop the Pearling Path



Case study 08

The Pearling Path

Image: Detail of Al Alawi House | Source: Cemal Emden / Aga Khan Trust for Culture

Before the late 1990s, there was relatively limited interest in the conservation of urban heritage in Muharraq. Until this period, the urban scene of old Muharraq was characterized by deteriorated old buildings and depreciated infrastructure and it was associated with a dramatic change in population profile. In the early 2000s, Sheikha Mai Al Khalifa reinstated a cultural majlis (salon) which had originally been initiated by her grandfather (Sheikh Ebrahim Al Khalifa) in his home. This initiative catalyzed an interest in the preservation of the city's heritage. Banks, financial institutions, and private sector investors contributed to a new development project of the Ministry of Information and Culture, led by Sheikha Mai and labelled 'Investment in Culture'. Under this initiative, the private sector was encouraged to sponsor the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of traditional buildings around the city's old center. The premise was that the reintroduction of cultural life into a neglected area, combined with an integrated program of restoration, rehabilitation and place-making, could reverse old Muharraq's decline. Culture was seen as a catalyst for economic development and profit (El-Rashidi, 2019). These initiatives have been described as successful in their reuse and revitalization of historical structures through both traditional and modern architectural languages. Yet, the "open museum-oriented policies" missed a holistic vision that would have effectively linked the project to the local community (Alraouf, 2014).

'Pearling Path, Testimony of an Island Economy' (2010 - present)

As part of the early efforts described above, a technical team under BACA began conducting surveys and research on Muharraq's urban heritage. They explored history, architectural typologies, construction techniques and materials. Through this research, a conservation strategy was established and a comprehensive plan for the Pearling Path project was developed, setting out a holistic approach for preserving the historic character of Muharraq and eventually leading to the site's inscription in the UNESCO-WHS list in 2012.

The Pearling Path project aims to build on urban conservation efforts to revive the city as a hub of cultural life, foster cultural heritage tourism and stimulate the return of Bahraini families to Muharraq. The BACA management team began the implementation of small projects in 2010, but a 2014 loan of USD 40,000,000 from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) allowed the initiation of the main projects designed to develop the site. The site itself consists of seventeen buildings, three offshore oyster beds, part of the seashore and the Qal'at Bu Mahir fortress on the southern tip of Muharraq Island, as well as a buffer zone. Ownership of these structures varies, with some properties held by the state and others by the Islamic endowments authority, the royal family or private individuals. To facilitate restoration efforts, BACA undertook the acquisition of several significant buildings while also engaging property owners in the renovation process. In some cases, private owners benefited from ceding control of their properties for restoration, such as in those instances that they were transformed into guesthouses, thus fostering a model of public-private partnership.

In line with the general aim to enhance Muharraq's attractiveness, the Pearling Path focuses on the overall regeneration of the area through a range of interventions to ameliorate pressures on public space, a practice hitherto uncommon in heritage-related activities in Muharraq. This included the conversion of the sites of demolished houses and vacant plots into a series of interconnected neighborhood public squares, the establishment of community spaces such as children's play spaces and improving the amenities available to local families and tourists – most significantly with the creation of the Pearling Path Visitor Experience Centre in 2018. Street lighting and a waste management system were also introduced, as well as four multi-story car parks to increase accessibility.

BACA has also been responsible for the establishment and funding of cultural venues and for their cultural programming, with the aim of enabling the neighborhood to both serve its community and attract tourists. A series of new buildings were constructed as part of the Pearling Path, including the Archaeologies of Green Pavilion (2015) and the Dar Al Jinaa Center for Traditional Music (2017). This was in addition to projects outside BACA, such as the Sheikh Ebrahim Center's House of Architectural Heritage, funded by the IsDB. These new architectural interventions were in a contemporary style that was respectful of the simplicity of Muharraq's architecture. They often make use of inventive design features, for example the use of chain mail to create a covering over the Dar Al Jinaa Center, allowing sound to resonate through the neighborhood. Design plays an important role in the Pearling Path project and more generally in BACA's contemporary interventions in the city, used to increase attractiveness and visibility. A continuous pathway guides visitors through the Pearling Path, beginning at the Bu-Mahir Fort and leading through Muharraq's historic core. Outside the Pearling Path, BACA was also in charge of the reconstruction of the al-Khalifiyah Library and the addition of a new building for Souq al-Qaysariya.

Lessons Learned

This project showcases the value that good design can add to heritage efforts and provides living proof that it is possible to preserve heritage through creative designs that will potentially become the heritage of the future. It is also an example of the advantages that political and financial support from the ruling classes can bring to processes of heritage conservation. However, this kind of support is dependent on political will and should be institutionalized. Despite the success of the project and the experience gained by the BACA team, because the Pearling path was envisioned as a project rather than an initiative, the process for institutionalization is unclear. The intention is there, but the precise mechanisms for achieving this have yet to be determined.

The Pearling Path has had a notable impact on heritage tourism and the preservation of Muharraq's cultural and architectural legacy. It has attracted visitors from other parts of Muharraq, particularly from wealthier backgrounds. Some local people have moved back, and the number of applications for demolition in Muharraq is decreasing, indicating that perspectives about the area are changing thanks to the project (El-Rashidi, 2019). The project is geared towards a wealthier class, and the upgrading of the area could potentially negatively affect its current residents. Gentrification has not yet become a significant issue in Muharraq: the private sector is not interested in investing in the historic core on a large scale and several commercial activities and spaces in the area are publicly owned, developed and rented by BACA. Still, shifts in commercial and cultural activities, particularly those geared towards upscaling the neighborhood, could lead to rising property values and potentially displace existing residents.

In terms of its scale, ownership, design approach and the level of political and financial patronage it has garnered, the Pearling Path is quite an uncommon project in the region. Institutionalization, participation and social inclusion are necessary prerequisites for it to become scalable and repeatable.

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CASE STUDY

JEDDAH, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

From the seventh century CE, Jeddah served as a major port for Indian Ocean trade routes, channeling goods to Mecca. The city flourished as a vital trading hub on the ancient Silk Road and became a global gateway for pilgrims to Mecca who arrived by sea from all over the world, transforming it into a thriving multicultural center (UNESCO). The second largest city after the country's capital, Riyadh, Jeddah is now considered the economic capital and the first tourist destination in Saudi Arabia. Historic Jeddah was listed as a World Heritage Site in 2014 (UNESCO-WHC: Historic Jeddah).

Jeddah Old City
Source: Abdullah Alallah | Unsplash

Introduction

From the seventh century CE, Jeddah served as a major port for Indian Ocean trade routes, channeling goods to Mecca. The city flourished as a vital trading hub on the ancient Silk Road and became a global gateway for pilgrims to Mecca who arrived by sea from all over the world, transforming it into a thriving multicultural center (UNESCO). The second largest city after the country's capital, Riyadh, Jeddah is now considered the economic capital and the first tourist destination in Saudi Arabia. Historic Jeddah was listed as a World Heritage Site in 2014 (UNESCO-WHC: Historic Jeddah).

Morphology, Topography and Context

Historic Jeddah is situated on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, and it expands along the coast from north to south. Inland, the terrain gradually shifts to more rugged, mountainous areas, part of the 'Asir and Hejaz mountain ranges. The city's urban fabric is characterized by a combination of traditional tower houses, the dense accumulation of lower houses and ensembles of structures that related to trade, religion and the accommodation of pilgrims, with a clear division into defined quarters. The old city has a concentration of centuries-old economic enterprises, retail shops, traditional souqs, small cafes, popular restaurants and street food vendors. Outside the historic core, Jeddah's urban form reflects contemporary planning with broad roads and structured districts. The city's expansion in newly developed areas has followed a grid-like pattern where residential, commercial, and industrial zones are clearly defined.

4,076,000
City of Jeddah (2017, estimate)[28]

176,500 ha
City of Jeddah (urban boundary); 84,658 ha (built up urban area)[29]

250 ha
Al Balad (Old Jeddah) (Saudi Vision 2030)

Significant heritage type

In 2014, Jeddah was added to the World Heritage List for its reflection of the Red Sea architectural tradition, a construction style once common in coastal cities on the Red Sea of which only scant vestiges are preserved. This style is defined by tower houses decorated by large, wooden roshan (projected windows), built in the late 19th century by the city's mercantile elites. The city's architectural heritage reflects its history, especially its significance within Indian Ocean trade. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 brought immense wealth to local merchants who built houses in Jeddah, resulting in a particularly lavish architectural style. The tower houses are an architectural typology born in Jeddah that spread to nearby Hejaz cities, from where it has since completely disappeared under the pressure of modern development.

Historic Jeddah is the last surviving urban site along the Red Sea coast that preserves the practices and typologies of a merchant culture, with its commercial-based economy, multicultural environment and coral masonry construction distinctive to the Red Sea (UNESCO). It is also directly associated with the Hajj, as reflected in its traditional souqs around Makkah Gate and hosting facilities for pilgrims.

28 World Population Review (2024). Jeddah. https://worldpopulationreview.com/cities/saudi-arabia/jeddah

29 UN-HABITAT. (2019). Jeddah, City Profile. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/cpi_profile_for_jeddah_2019.pdf

Legislative and Regulatory framework

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MoMRA) is responsible for urban planning in Saudi Arabia as a whole, with Amanahs (municipalities) acting as its implementing arms. Planning falls within the framework of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which includes a commitment to conserve and promote the Islamic, Arab and national heritage of the Kingdom as well as to develop the country's tourism sector (Vision 2030, 2016).

The Heritage Commission within the Ministry of Culture has jurisdiction over cultural heritage, antiquities, urban heritage and intangible heritage. It also coordinates with other stakeholders when it comes to heritage management. The Saudi legislation pertaining to antiquities and heritage is the 2014 Law of Antiquities, Museums and Urban Heritage. The law relies on a holistic definition of urban heritage that can encompass any component of the built environment. Individual sites are organized into Categories A, B, and C according to their level of significance, based on a classification system in the 'Executive Regulations for Antiquities and Urban Heritage'.

Certain areas can also come under the jurisdiction of Special Development Authorities, some of which are given a further designation as Royal Commissions. If present, the Development Authorities and Royal Commissions would be in charge of directly managing the site. They have their own master plans but they are expected to defer to the Heritage Commissions when it comes to regulations and policies related to heritage.[30]

30 Hamdan. B (2024, August 14). General Manager of Built Heritage at Heritage Commission, Ministry of Culture, Saudi Arabia [Interview]

Issues

Jeddah's heritage has been threatened by modernization and development pressures since the founding of the 'Third Saudi State' in 1902. Historical parts of the city were neglected and the historic city wall and many of its gates were demolished in 1947 with the aim of expanding and modernizing the city. The demolition of the historical wall led to an acceleration in the deterioration of Al Balad (old Jeddah) as its historical urban fabric began to be mixed with the urban fabric of the new areas. Changes in the old city's demographic composition – namely, the emigration of its original dwellers to more modern urban areas and their replacement by a class of foreign expatriate workers – have also contributed to this process. More recently, the Vision 2030 development program expropriated peripheral areas of the historic core. The declared reason for this was that it would better facilitate urban control and the urban development process (Aloshan & et. al., 2024). Other issues are related to capacity building as the number of trained artisans and professionals available are unable to keep up with the scale of heritage regeneration required on a national level.

1977
Efforts to conserve Al Balad

The old Jeddah municipality commissions a conservation master plan which declares Al Balad as a national heritage zone

1993
Establishment of the Historic Jeddah Protection Department

The Historic Jeddah Protection Department is established with the aim of protecting heritage buildings from demolition

2014
Added to the World Heritage List

Jeddah is added to the World Heritage List for its reflection of the Red Sea architectural tradition of which only scant vestiges are preserved.

2021
Launch of the Jeddah Historic District project

Jeddah Historic District project is launched under Royal patronage, aiming to establish Al Balad as a hub for culture and the arts and an international heritage destination.



Case study 09

Jeddah Historic District Project

Image: Jeddah Historic District | Source: Hamdan Yoshida / Shutterstock

Master Plan of 1983

Efforts to conserve the old city of Jeddah, known as Al Balad, began in 1977, when the old Jeddah municipality commissioned a conservation master plan. This was developed between 1978 to 1983 (Aloshan & et. al., 2024). The master plan declared Al Balad as a national heritage zone, classifying buildings into three categories based on their historic and heritage significance. The old quarter was preserved without any further development in terms of upgrading the area. Restrictions regarding rehabilitation led to the deterioration of many buildings in the area, and many collapsed as the master plan's recommendations for citizen participation, the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and tourism development were not followed (Bagader, 2014).

The Historic Jeddah Protection Department established in 1993

The Historic Jeddah Protection Department was established in 1993 with the aim of protecting heritage buildings from demolition. Further efforts included Prince Majid bin Abdelaziz's initiative to rehabilitate Nassif House as a museum, revealing parts of the old city walls and partially restoring 12 heritage buildings. Furthermore, King Abdulaziz's adoption of more comprehensive policies for dealing with heritage buildings represented significant advancements in the preservation of Jeddah's heritage.

World Heritage Site listing in 2014

In more recent years, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH), now the Ministry of Tourism, played a key role in the restoration of many heritage buildings. In cooperation with Jeddah Municipality, SCTH coordinated studies on the status of the area and determined implementation priorities. It revived tourist axes and paths in historic Jeddah, along which pedestrians can walk and discover local crafts and food. The commission was also responsible for enlisting international consultants to prepare a protection and management plan for the area within the framework of completing its file for registration on the World Heritage List, which was achieved in 2014 (Aloshan & et. al., 2024).

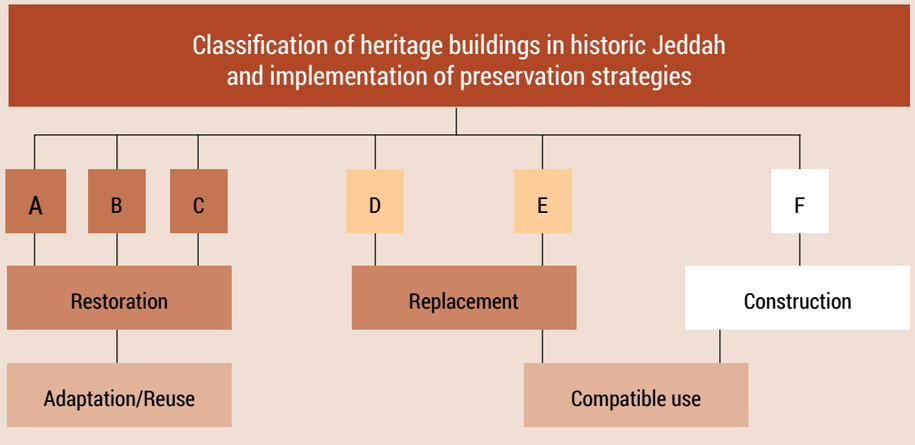

Figure 7: Classification of heritage buildings in historic Jeddah according to their structural and urban conditions and the preservation strategies | Source: Aloshan, et. al, 2024. (Visuals modified)

The Jeddah Historic District project as part of the Saudi 2030 Vision

In the context of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision program, the Jeddah Historic District project was launched in 2021 under Royal patronage. The project aims to establish Al Balad as a hub for culture and the arts and an international heritage destination. The project encompasses three critical interventions: 1) restoring the heritage buildings of the old city; 2) transforming the waterfront area into a vibrant marina; and 3) offering mixed-use spaces to support both tourism and local commerce. Through these interventions, the project aims to use the city's tangible and intangible heritage as a resource, preserving it in a modern and sustainable manner and transforming it into "an engine of the economy and a maker of opportunities" (Saudi Vision 2030).

Along with the launch of the project in 2021, a new master plan was approved for Jeddah. It covers 2.5 square kilometers and outlines the development of residential, commercial and cultural activities. The plan encompasses five historic markets, 36 mosques, over 650 historic buildings under restoration and 16 ribats, as well as other modern public facilities. It includes eight types of spatial interventions, including historic building restoration, the development of the historical Jeddah waterfront, a new 'culture square', a historic restaurants project, an archaeology and excavation project, an artistic sculptures project, a historic markets project and improvements to Al Balad's hospitality experience. The project is expected to attract over 20 million tourists annually by 2035. It also aims to expand its commercial facilities to include more than 770,000 square meters of gross leasable area for offices and retail, along with more than 3,000 hotel rooms. The development includes 1.2 million square meters of public spaces, roads and lagoons (Saudi Vision 2030).

The Jeddah Historic District project is a collaborative effort between the Municipality of Jeddah, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) and the Saudi Ministry of Culture, with ICOMOS as a contributing consultant designer. The project is funded by Al Balad Development Company (BDC), which is owned by the PIF and serves as the primary developer.

Lessons Learned

Political will and targeted investment can go a long way towards reviving historic city centers as assets that contribute to a city's economy. It should ideally be linked to a national vision in which heritage plays a significant role. Special mechanisms for the implementation of national visions are effective tools for getting the job done, but they should still work within established regulatory and legal frameworks. Finally, mechanisms for participation are integral to this vision, as is the need to prioritize social inclusion and historical sensitivity. Fast and overly ambitious interventions run the risk of upsetting the delicate balance between conservation and regeneration.

Further Readings

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CASE STUDY

NIZWA, OMAN

Nizwa is one of the oldest cities in Oman and in the wider Gulf region. The city has been a center of agriculture, trade, religion, education and art for thousands of years and has played a vital political and cultural role in Oman since ancient times. Nizwa was the birthplace of Ibadism and is considered emblematic of the golden age of the Ibadi Imamate, of which it was the first capital from the eighth to the 12th century. The city enjoys the title of Baydat al-Islam (seat of Islam) due to its status as a center of learning and scholarship.

Nizwa Fort, Oman
Source: Sabinoparente | Envanto

Introduction

Nizwa is one of the oldest cities in Oman and in the wider Gulf region. The city has been a center of agriculture, trade, religion, education and art for thousands of years and has played a vital political and cultural role in Oman since ancient times. Nizwa was the birthplace of Ibadism and is considered emblematic of the golden age of the Ibadi Imamate, of which it was the first capital from the eighth to the 12th century. The city enjoys the title of Baydat al-Islam (seat of Islam) due to its status as a center of learning and scholarship.

Morphology, Topography and Context

Nizwa is the capital city of Ad-Dakhiliyah region, in the north of Oman. The city is located at a crossroads of transportation routes. It is about a one-and-a-half-hour drive away from the Omani capital, Muscat, and it is also connected by road to the United Arab Emirates. Nizwa is an oasis located in the foothills of al-Hajar mountain range and is nearest to al-Jabal al-Akhdar, a 2000m altitude mountain. The area is known for its diverse architecture and agricultural practices that rely on aflaj, an ancestral water acquisition system that dates to 2500 BCE and channels water from underground sources to support agriculture and domestic use (Megdiche-Kharrat, 2019).

Significant heritage type

Nizwa's most notable heritage sites include Nizwa Fort, a fortified citadel built in the ninth century, and a stone and mudbrick artillery tower built in the 17th century. Nizwa is home to one of Oman's oldest souqs, selling fresh produce, spices and food specialties as well as traditional crafts. The city is home to some of the oldest mosques in the region, such as al-Shawadhna Mosque which dates to the 13th century but which is reputed to have been first established in the early seventh century.

134,744
Nizwa (2021)[31]

350,000 ha
Metropolitan area of Nizwa

The traditional urban fabric of Nizwa's historic core is distinguished by its narrow lanes and streets, interspersed with date palm groves, fields and orchards. Its flat-roofed, two-story houses are built out of mud brick and sarooj, a traditional lime-based mortar. Traditional houses in Nizwa are characterized by plaster mashrabiyya screens that provide ventilation, combining privacy with visual access to the street (Hobbes, 2017). Falaj Daris – a part of Oman's aflaj irrigation system distinguished by its range of building types and features – runs through Nizwa and is still in use to this day (UNESCO-WHC: Aflaj).

31 The National Center for Statistics and Information. (2021). Detailed Results: Population, Housing and Facilities. https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/Pages/LibraryContentDetails.aspx?ItemID=FLt1yRIrBjsAOtc4fgSgpA%3d%3d

Legislative and Regulatory framework

Omani heritage is regulated by the Cultural Heritage Law 35 (2019) which is concerned with the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The law stipulates the creation of a heritage registry, classifying heritage items or sites into three classes according to the values associated with them. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is responsible for the implementation of its provisions and for the management and development of all archaeological, historical and cultural sites or projects. It has also taken on the responsibilities of the now dissolved Public Authority for Craft Industries. The Ministry of Endowment (Awqaf) and Religious Affairs oversees the management of historical mosques, but their restoration and maintenance are the responsibility of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is responsible for the maintenance and development of the aflaj system. Municipalities have no direct authority over the management or protection of built heritage and when it comes to executive matters, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is more likely to coordinate with the governorates rather than the municipalities (Naima 2021).

Issues

In addition to standard issues related to insufficient resources for the regular conservation and maintenance of heritage, another challenge in Nizwa is the lack of experienced personnel in the field. There are only a small number of local, specialist firms, and yet there are a large number of heritage sites which need maintenance and restoration. This is in part due to the lack of heritage specialization within architecture departments at the Sultanate's universities. Official capacity building efforts – such as structured conservation and documentation internships for university students and extended onsite training for contracting and consulting companies – have yet to bridge the gap.

Another challenge for heritage management in Nizwa is the difficulty in finding sustainable materials and procedures for use in maintenance and preservation efforts. Most traditional houses in Nizwa are built out of mud brick and sarooj, both of which require regular maintenance and upkeep. Furthermore, their production is time-consuming and technically exacting. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has worked with researchers to develop cost- and time-efficient methods for the production of mud brick and sarooj, developing its own workshops and trying to get residents to invest in similar enterprises.

Many traditional dwellings in Nizwa have been abandoned by their original owners and have fallen into various states of disrepair. When they are occupied, it is usually by foreign workers, who often cannot suitably maintain them. One of the ways the Ministry has attempted to deal with this issue is by acquiring ownership of the dwellings and moving out foreign workers. In general, development within Nizwa's old town remains eclectic due to the lack of a master plan that properly regulates it.

Misfat Al Abriyeen Restoration and Rehabiliation project

One of the earliest attempts to develop old houses for tourism purposes in Oman was in 2003 with the Misfat Al Abriyeen Restoration and Rehabilitation Project, overseen by the Directorate General of Tourism, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

2003

2011

Establishment of Misfah Old House

The owner of a house in Misfat Al Abriyeen established Misfah Old House, a small accommodation facility. This offers a unique overnight stay experience in which visitors experience the traditional, rural Omani lifestyle

Development of a Heritage Management Plan

Based on the successful initiative in Misfah Old House, a heritage management plan was developed, dedicated to the sustainable development of the settlement, with the participation of the local community, represented by the Al-Misfat Development Cooperative.

2015

2016

Heritage Hotels

Six dwellings were converted into the first hotel in Harat al-'Aqr, which was inaugurated in late 2018, offering 22 rooms and a restaurant serving local cuisine



Case study 10

Local Participation through Community Cooperatives

Image: Nizwa Fort, Oman | Source: Ahmed Nasser / Unsplash

Though there is no formal structure for the participation of the local population in heritage management in Nizwa, residents have shown a great interest in investing in the city's cultural heritage through preservation and adaptive reuse initiatives. This interest has manifested in the formation of resident-owned and run community cooperatives or companies dedicated to the running of heritage sites.

Integrating the Local community in the restoration of Nizwa Fort

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is particularly encouraging of the local community's efforts in preserving Nizwa's cultural heritage and sought to include them in the management of Nizwa Fort after its restoration. Local craftspeople were invited to run workshops inside of the restored fort, where they demonstrated their craft and sold their products to visitors. In the early years of this collaboration, the ministry did not require any rent costs from any of the participating craftspeople.[32]

The Heritage Hotel experience

One of the earliest attempts to develop old houses for tourism purposes in Oman was in 2003 with the Misfat Al Abriyeen Restoration and Rehabilitation Project, overseen by the Directorate General of Tourism, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Misfat Al Abriyeen is an oasis and semi-deserted village located on the slopes of Jebel Shams, around 60 km from Nizwa. Initially, the government proposed renting the village houses to create a resort. However, residents opposed this proposal as they feared the intrusion of tourists into the private sphere of living quarters and homes in the village. They were also concerned that they would not receive adequate economic benefits.

Several years later, in 2011, the owner of a house in Misfat Al Abriyeen established Misfah Old House, a small accommodation facility. This offers a unique overnight stay experience in which visitors experience the traditional, rural Omani lifestyle. The owner at first encountered difficulty in registering his property as there was no heritage hotel category in the list of commercial accommodation types at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. However, within two years the relevant authorities established administrative legislation for the opening of a guest house in a vernacular settlement (Al Riyami et. al. 2021).

In 2015, based on the successful initiative in Misfah Old House, a heritage management plan was developed by the former Ministry of Tourism for al-Misfat. This plan, dedicated to the sustainable development of the settlement, was elaborated with the participation of the local community, represented by the Al-Misfat Development Cooperative. The plan was executed in 2018 with funding from Bank Muscat. Some of Al-Misfat's old houses were transformed: one into a coffee shop and information office at the main entrance; another into a restaurant serving traditional cuisine; and another into a traditional bakery. By 2020, there were three small hotels operating in Misfat Al Abriyeen, all owned by residents. The initiative has also resulted in the reinforcement of some collapsing gates and passages in the settlement and the addition of a new parking area (Naima, 2021).

Heritage hotels in Nizwa

The next heritage house developments began in Nizwa in 2016. Harat al-'Aqr, located near Nizwa's souq, followed a sequence similar to the previously discussed example. Despite its social, political and historical importance, this alley was progressively deserted from the late 1970s onwards and most of its houses were either rebuilt in cement or left to decay.

In 2016, two locally owned investment companies bought and renovated houses to provide heritage accommodation. Six dwellings were converted into the first hotel in Harat al-'Aqr, which was inaugurated in late 2018, offering 22 rooms and a restaurant serving local cuisine. The companies also performed small upgrades in the neighborhood, preparing adequate parking for residents and visitors and installing an improved sewage system. A noticeable set-back in international tourism in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic was ameliorated by an increase in local tourists. By 2021, four years after the first hotel's inauguration, the companies managed an additional 19 dwellings, used either as extensions of the original hotel or becoming part of other heritage hotels in al-'Aqr.(Al Riyami et. al. 2021 and Naima, 2021)

The restoration of Harat Al-'Aqr was accomplished through local efforts, local funds and local materials. This keeps the renovation costs relatively low compared to similar operations made by the MHT through national and international consultants and contractors. These cost-effective, income-generating initiatives have encouraged more people to renovate their old houses. However, one shortcoming of this procedure is that it often involves non-qualified builders and contractors, which can result in a loss of architectural identity and create serious structural and safety threats.[33]

Since 2016, there has been consistent cooperation between representatives of the government, public investors and local communities to encourage such initiatives in this field while avoiding similar issues. Efforts to encourage the establishment of companies and firms specializing in conservation are underway. Strict regulations for the use of traditional mud brick and sarooj in renovation work have been established, informing attempts to streamline production in Ministry- and privately-owned factories. These measures facilitate this process and make it economically viable, while contributing to the preservation of traditional building crafts.

Lessons Learned

Nizwa's experiences underpin the vital role local communities must play in the conservation of urban and cultural heritage, demonstrating how it can be used as a driver for local development. Such interest and drive from local communities can be directed effectively by having a clear-cut formal framework for the collaboration between local community cooperatives and companies, heritage authorities and investors. Development can be better regulated through a Conservation Management Plan which lays out the proper procedures for land use and new construction, as well as guidelines for preservation and conservation.

The case of Nizwa also demonstrates the importance of involving trained personnel with expertise in heritage management and conservation in initiatives focused on cultural heritage. It shows the advantages of experts working in close collaboration with residents seeking to upgrade their properties.

Finally, Nizwa offers an interesting experience of investing in traditional building materials like sarooj. It opens up the possibility that such materials may be used in regular construction, not just preservation and conservation efforts, providing sustainable building materials as well as investment and work opportunities.

Further Readings

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33 El Makhladi. A (2024, August 15). Director of Restoration and Maintenance, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman [Interview]

03

HOW CAN CITIES MANAGE THEIR URBAN HERITAGE?

Image: Ahami, Yemen
Source: Hamza Abu Bakr | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition

Cairo, Fez, Tunis, Byblos, As-Salt, Mosul, Muharraq, Jeddah, and Nizwa differ in terms of their setting, scale, heritage values, socio-economic resources and urban morphology. However, they are cities connected by culture, language, history and geopolitical frameworks. Importantly, they also face many of the same challenges to urban heritage management.

A common thread that weaves through the narratives of these cities is directly related to the role of municipalities in heritage management: namely, the task of identifying an effective framework for managing change at multiple scales and levels. This is reflected in a 2021 study of World Heritage Sites in the MENA region conducted by ARC-WH and ICOMOS. The findings revolve around the need for vision, administrative structures, human resources and administrative tools as prerequisites for the region's heritage achieving its full potential. In the words of the study:

It has been noted that the potential offered by the cultural heritage of the Arab States to provide a more complete picture of the legacies of past and living cultures in the region, and consequently significantly contribute to a more representative World Heritage List able to reflect the diversity of tangible cultural manifestations, is high. However, this aspiration may not be achieved, if States Parties do not actively build a comprehensive vision for their cultural heritage, supported by appropriate administrative structures, qualified human resources and adequate legislative tools (Soufan, 2021, p. 45).

Building on the ten case studies in Section Two of this report, the following reflections serve as a springboard for Arab cities seeking a role for heritage within their cities and looking to strike the optimum balance between continuity and change. They do not claim to be comprehensive, but they aim to address the contemporary aspiration of cities to be, as the World Bank succinctly puts it, resilient, green and inclusive. They also reflect on the six processes that impact most urban conservation, namely: 1) urbanization; 2) urban development; 3) climate change; 4) changing socio-economic roles of cities; 5) tourism; and finally, 6) changing perceptions of urban heritage values to be protected (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012, p, 113).

They also address the issues facing Arab heritage cities today as reflected in the case studies, namely: i) the lack of financial and human resources for heritage management; ii) the dual effects of tourism as both a vital economic resource and a potentially disruptive social force; iii) crafts as a form of living heritage that is dying out due to the inability to incorporate it into the culture and socio-economics of the contemporary city; iv) inadequate participatory frameworks grounded in the right to heritage; and v) inadequate regulatory and legal management frameworks. With regard to the latter, historic cities struggle to arrive at an integrated definition of heritage that incorporates cultural tangible and intangible heritage with natural heritage, while also setting up adequate mechanisms for protection against unrestrained urban development or for the provision of basic service and infrastructure. This is in addition to many cities struggling with natural and human-made disasters, be they the effects of climate change, conflict or war.

On the positive side, these reflections also address the huge potential of heritage as a community resource and as a foundation for socio-economic resilience. The reflections have been structured along three levels of city management:

- Institutional vision and policy.
- Strategies and tactics.
- Managerial and operational tools.

01
INSTITUTIONAL VISION AND POLICY

At an institutional level, cities should make sure that their vision and policies align. This requires a clear, well-articulated understanding of the role heritage should play in the city. Should it be protected for its intrinsic (non-use) value? Should cities tap into its economic value? And how much of the city's contemporary needs (roads, new developments, housing) should be sacrificed for the sake of protecting its heritage? These are not easy questions to answer. After a vision is agreed upon, it requires translation into policies supported by a clear legal framework, and even then, the vision and policies will require periodic revision.

Reflection 1: Which Heritage?

Heritage is a construct that is deeply rooted in communal and national identity. How do we reconcile this with different levels of conceptualization from the global to the communal? Or is it from the communal to the global? Finally, how old (or new) should heritage be to count as heritage?

At a national level, it is important that nations ask themselves about which aspects of their culture(s) are or should be designated as heritage. In cities, the decision to celebrate a specific type of heritage can reflect endemic inequities such as identity politics and economic inequality. It can also be a chance to rectify these inequities by making specific sorts of heritage more accessible and representative of social diversity. Institutionally, this starts with a vision of nation (and city) building that includes heritage as a cornerstone for a more inclusive and equitable society (ICOMOS, 2013). The choice of historical narrative is reflected in what a nation or a city chooses to designate as heritage.

That narrative is directly related to how it sees itself in the future (vision) and how it plans to get there (policy). If a city sees itself as inclusive and diverse, this becomes reflected in visions that conceive of heritage as a plural and communal resource, policies that enable communities to become custodians of their own heritage and laws that recognize the complexity and diversity of heritage, allowing for inclusivity in its governance [Box 1].

Box 1: Jordanian vs. Tunisian Heritage Laws

Jordan has two laws, the first for 'antiquities' and the second for 'heritage'.

Jordanian law no. 21 of 1988 defines antiquities as "a.) Any movable or immovable object which was made, written, inscribed, built, discovered or modified by a human being before the year 1750 AD including caves, sculpture, coins, pottery, manuscripts and other kinds of manufactured products which indicate the beginning and development of science, arts, handicrafts, religions, traditions of previous civilizations, or any part added to that thing or rebuilt after that date; b.) Any movable or immovable object as provided for in Clause 'a' of this definition which dates back after AD 1750 and which the Minister requests to be considered an antiquity by a decision published in the Official Gazette; c.) Human, animal and plant remains which date back before AD 600."

Jordanian law no. 5 of 2005 is concerned with the protection of architectural and urban heritage. The law defines a heritage site as "the building or site which has heritage value through its style of construction or its relation to historical figures or important national or religious events and that was constructed after the year 1750 A.D." The law separates between heritage buildings – "structures or units with architectural, historical or cultural characteristics related to specific events" – and heritage sites, defined as "urban fabrics, public spaces, residential areas, and sites which represent the longstanding principles on which the residents' culture has been built."

Tunisian law, on the other hand, does not ascribe to a binary between heritage and antiquities, but relies on a more integrated definition of heritage.

According to Tunisian law no. 35 of 1994, "archaeological, historical or traditional heritage" is defined as "all vestiges left behind by previous civilizations or generations, discovered or excavated for, on land or at sea, whether movable, immovable, documents or manuscripts, related to the arts or sciences, beliefs, traditions, daily life, or public events dating from prehistoric or historic eras, which can be proven to be of national or universal value."

The law also includes the designations of: i) historical monuments, "considered to be immovable property, whether constructed or not, private or in the public domain"; ii) cultural sites, "considered to be sites that bear witness to human actions or to the joint actions of man and nature, including archaeological sites"; and iii) historical and traditional ensembles, "considered to be immovable property, whether built or not, isolated or connected, such as cities, villages and districts which, because of their architecture, their uniqueness, their harmony or their integration into their environment, have a national or universal value." All three designations are considered worthy of preservation due to their national or universal value from a historical, aesthetic, artistic or traditional standpoint.

It is better to adopt an integrative heritage management system that includes all types of heritage under one umbrella, with sub-designations identifying protective measures tailored for different heritage types. Linking these laws and measures to a municipal management framework is equally important.

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Law 21 (1988); Law 5 (2005)
Republic of Tunisia. Law 35 (1994)



Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia
Source: Ayoub Chebbi | Unsplash

At a global level, frameworks such as the World Heritage Convention (WHC; UNESCO, 1972) have been effective in establishing the value of the inscription of sites as World Heritage. Based on a set of international principles to establish that a site is of value to the world, WHS inscription entails a commitment from the member state to manage it according to this universal value. These safeguards preserve the sites, but they come with their own set of problems. The criteria for listing (mainly authenticity and integrity) have been regarded as Eurocentric, leaving little room for alternative ways that cultures around the world might understand the idea of heritage and its conservation. The 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity was put in place to rectify this issue and advocate for a more culturally sensitive understanding of management and conservation (UNESCO, ICCROM & ICOMOS, 1994). It has also been noted that the WHC is less effective when it comes to identifying 20th century heritage, hence the emergence of new frameworks such as the Getty Conservation Institute's Twentieth Century Historic Thematic Framework for assessing heritage places (Marsden & Spearritt, 2021) [Box 2].

At both levels, national laws and international documents are indicators of visions and mindsets. In the MENA region, laws either identify antiquities and heritage in binary terms, or integrate them in one vision. Egyptian, Jordanian, and Lebanese laws are examples of the former, while Tunisian and Moroccan laws are examples of the latter. Both approaches have their ramifications, with the latter resulting in a more inclusive, integrated vision for heritage [Box 1; Case studies 1-6: Cairo, Tunis, Fez, Byblos, As-Salt].

Modern and more recent forms of urban heritage raise their own set of questions as to what is understood by heritage and how to deal with it, especially when it is linked to pasts that cities would prefer to forget or which are seen as utilitarian or ordinary. However, this kind of heritage is more flexible, easier to incorporate into the economics of everyday life and often tells a story of more relevance to the contemporary condition. For example, Beirut's iconic Holiday Inn Hotel still stands scarred and disfigured in central Beirut as a symbol of its brutal 15-year civil war (1975-1990) [Box 2].

Box 2: The Holiday Inn Hotel in Beirut and the Ahram Beer Factory in Cairo

The Holiday Inn Hotel in central Beirut is a symbol of what Beirutis refer to as "the events" (al-hawadith): the Lebanese civil war that started in 1975 and ended in 1990. Its scarred and battle-worn skeleton continues to stand tall over a city that has reinvented itself partially through forgetting its past, a collective amnesia that is alternatively viewed as a symbol of the pragmatically resilient nature of Lebanon and its inability to face its deep-set fractures. It is a monument to an important chapter in Beirut's history, in which the 'Battle of the Hotels' was a decisive moment. Others may argue, however, that the building is a city asset whose 'use value' should be tapped. It is all a question of what history(s) we choose to tell and what values we choose to preserve in our city. What use is a hotel for a city that never gets on the path of sustainable recovery because of its inability to face its inherent fractures?

Cairo's al-Ahram Brewery was built in 1898 through a joint Belgian-Egyptian venture. The former Pyramids Brewery is a sprawling, masonry fortress-like structure that housed an impressive beer-making operation. The building was abandoned in the early 2000s, and its future could only be determined if uncomfortable questions about Cairo's past and present were answered. Should beermaking, a practice that is perceived as haram by 90% of the Egyptian population be celebrated as a significant chapter in Egypt's cosmopolitan and liberal past? Or should the building's architecture be preserved and reused for other purposes, without necessarily referring to its past? Or should it simply be demolished and its precious land be used for whatever purpose fulfils the city's current needs?

The Getty Institute's Twentieth Century Historic Thematic Framework uses the themes in the diagram below to identify, survey and assess, connect and protect, and interpret, promote and record modern heritage. Failure to conserve certain types of heritage due to unexamined biases or simply a lack of vision or imagination will not be forgiven by future generations.

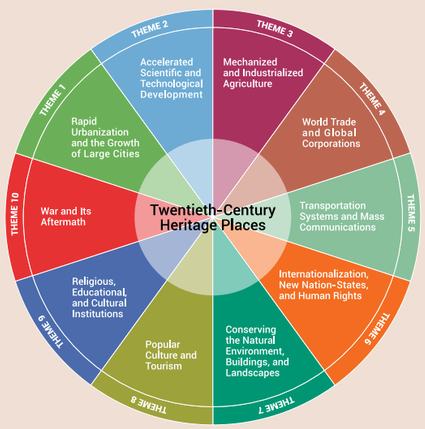

Figure 8: The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework: A Tool for Assessing Heritage Places. Source: Marsden, Susan, and Peter Spearritt. (2021) | Getty Conservation Institute.

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Reflection 2: Which Heritage for which Urban Future?

How can we preserve the heritage handed down to us from our ancestors, while making our own to pass on to the next generations? How can preservation accommodate progress and change, even contributing to sustainable urban development?

It has not been easy to incorporate heritage into visions of our urban future. With the spread of urbanization and the rapid growth of cities, historical neighborhoods no longer constitute the primary urban environment in which city dwellers live. Beyond the symbolic aspects of heritage discussed above, recognizing a neighborhood or an urban fabric as heritage raises questions as to the place of this neighborhood within the larger urban development of the city. What would heritage recognition mean for the city in terms of opportunities for tourism and economic development? How might it impact housing markets, transportation, infrastructure development, etc.?

Conversely, what sort of impact would recognition have on the neighborhood itself, its economic activities, social life, services and infrastructures? Questions can also be raised regarding the governance of these neighborhoods and their development, in the larger framework of governance of the city's urban development.

This is where the role of the municipality in heritage preservation becomes vital. While national visions, laws and regulations for heritage preservation are key, it is the responsibility of local governments to tailor these national visions and regulations to the needs of their cities. Municipalities are strategically placed to take the lead on this. However, this cannot happen without a well-formulated participatory framework that includes citizens as equal partners in this process. In Salt, Jordan, for example [Case Study 6: Salt], the municipality took the lead on reimagining their city as heritage and were keen to incorporate local partners in this process.

Box 3: How the New Urban Agenda sees heritage

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) "highlights linkages between sustainable urbanization and job creation, livelihood opportunities and improved quality of life, and it insists on incorporation of all these sectors in every urban development or renewal policy and strategy" (UN-Habitat. 2020. The New Urban Agenda Handbook. p. x)

Excerpts from UN-Habitat's NUA (2016).

45. We commit ourselves to developing vibrant, sustainable and inclusive urban economies, building on endogenous potentials, competitive advantages, cultural heritage and local resources, as well as resource-efficient and resilient infrastructure; promoting sustainable and inclusive industrial development and sustainable consumption and production patterns; and fostering an enabling environment for businesses and innovation, as well as livelihoods.

60. We commit ourselves to sustaining and supporting urban economies to transition progressively to higher productivity through high-value-added sectors, by promoting diversification, technological upgrading, research and innovation, including the creation of quality, decent and productive jobs, including through the promotion of cultural and creative industries, sustainable tourism, performing arts and heritage conservation activities, among others.

97. We will promote planned urban extensions and infill, prioritizing renewal, regeneration and retrofitting of urban areas, as appropriate, including upgrading slums and informal settlements; providing high-quality buildings and public spaces; promoting integrated and participatory approaches involving all relevant stakeholders and inhabitants; and avoiding spatial and socioeconomic segregation and gentrification, while preserving cultural heritage and preventing and containing urban sprawl.

124. We will include culture as a priority component of urban plans and strategies in the adoption of planning instruments, including master plans, zoning guidelines, building codes, coastal management policies, and strategic development policies that safeguard a diverse range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and landscapes, and will protect them from potential disruptive impacts of urban development.

125. We will support leveraging cultural heritage for sustainable urban development and recognize its role in stimulating participation and responsibility. We will promote innovative and sustainable use of architectural monuments and sites with the intention of value creation, through respectful restoration and adaptation. We will engage indigenous peoples and local communities in the promotion and dissemination of knowledge of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and protection of traditional expressions and languages, including through the use of new technologies and techniques.

UN-Habitat. (2016A). Habitat III. The New Urban Agenda. https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/

UN-Habitat.(2020). The New Urban Agenda Illustrated Handbook. UN-Habitat. https://unhabitat.org/the-new-urban-agenda-illustrated

UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda, released in 2016, provided guidance on how to incorporate urban heritage within sustainable urban development. Almost a decade later, it is worth evaluating the Agenda as a framework of good intentions that does not necessarily provide city managers with the tools or the binding mechanisms to put them to action [Box 3].

Reflection 3: Whose Heritage?

Cultural heritage is essentially an idea created by communities through the assignment of value to tangible objects and places or to intangible ideas and practices. Who gets to take ownership of these values and benefit from them? Is it better to think of ownership in terms of shared custodianship?



Graffiti on the wall of a building in Athens-Exarcheia, Greece
Source: Julia Tulke | Flickr

Box 4: Citizens fight to take back their cities from tourists

"Love Venice? Then don't come to Venice." An open letter published in 2022 by the Campaign for Living Venice implored tourists not to come to a city where "the places where you will sleep, eat and shop have behind them sad stories of families that, in the name of 'tourism', have been exiled from the place where they were born and raised."

After Greece saw a record-breaking 33.4 million tourists in 2023, anti-tourism graffiti and protests spread over Athens with slogans such as 'Tourists Go Home'. Housing shortages and rising rents due to the proliferation of short-term tourist lets were especially controversial, as was the dearth of economic benefits to locals. According to the Mayor of Athens, tourism in Greece isn't 'viable' anymore as each visitor only adds €0.40 EUR to the city's revenue.

In Bali, in addition to the socio-economic impact of gentrification, hotels consume half of Bali's water resources, seriously threatening the quality of life of ordinary citizens.

The picture is not necessarily black and white. In a reflection on the tourism industry, the World Economic Forum acknowledged the "imperative to embed sustainability and resilience into the design and management of the sector" while arguing that it should be balanced with the economic reality that 10% of global GDP comes from tourism. It reviewed six ways of curbing tourism: 1) taxes and fees, such as the entry fee Venice charges tourists; 2) bans on cruise ships in city centers, for which the residents of maritime cities such as Venice, Amsterdam and Barcelona have lobbied for years; 3) rewards for good behavior such as litter picking by tourists, as demonstrated in Copenhagen; 4) reservation systems to cap tourism, such as that set by Marseille for Calanques National Park; 5) marketing campaigns to encourage tourists to visit less-frequented destinations; and 6) blocking popular views, such as has been done around Japan's Mount Fiji.

Campaign for a Living Venice. (2022). https://campaignforalivingvenice.org/2022/04/23/letter-from-an-ex-venetian-love-venice-then-dont-come-to-venice/ (reprinted from La Voce de Venezia)

Foteini Doulgkeri. (8 August 2024). 'Overrun Athens: How the Greek capital is finding solutions to the tourist influx.' Euronews. https://www.euronews.com/2024/07/08/overrun-athens-how-the-greek-capital-is-finding-solutions-to-the-tourist-influx

Eva Yamamoto et.al. (June 2021). Impact of Rapid Tourism Growth on Water Scarcity in Bali, Indonesia. Journal of Limnology, 2(1), 1-16.

World Economic Forum. (25 July 2024). 'From blocked views to free food: How holiday destinations in Japan, Denmark and more are tackling overtourism'. Industries in Depth. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/07/destinations-overtourism-japan-amsterdam/

The first and second reflections made a case for an inclusive process to identify heritage on local, national and global scales. The question of the 'right to heritage' then arises and it is directly related to the question of benefit. If heritage is a resource, who gets to profit from it? Visions and policies should be economically viable. Cities, in their unending battle for economic sustainability, tend to view heritage as a tool for revenue generation through tourism and heritage industries. Can they also adopt policies that establish it as a foundation for social cohesion? Even better, can the economic resources generated by tourism and heritage industries contribute to social cohesion through targeting rooted communities as primary economic beneficiaries?

In most cases, due to the embedded power politics within cities, tourism tends to privilege higher income visitors over residents and local users, who don't get an adequate share of its revenue. It can also result in a rise in real estate value due to the reorientation of land use towards tourism-related functions and the introduction of a new, wealthier customer base competing for homes and businesses (Cocola-Gant, 2018). If rooted communities have not been allowed to take advantage of tourism to improve their economic status, they will be the first to go. Even seemingly benign strategies such as the Creative Cities approach – which builds on the 'three Ts' of talent, technology and tolerance (Florida, 2002) – have resulted in displacement. In some cases, the creative classes themselves end up being replaced with more affluent users and consumers (Zukin, 2010) [Box 4].

This is not the only way privilege and power come into play where heritage is concerned. Heritage is a political construct that can be fought over by conflicting claims that are powered by ideology, identity politics and cultural difference. The heritage of Palestine, particularly al-Quds, is a case in point but in other cases, less blatant examples can be found in the struggle between the needs of spiritual users and cultural visitors in religious sites, or between the needs of new wealthy residents and those of rooted underprivileged communities in historic neighborhoods. The solution here lies in governance through processes of participation. Effective channels of transparency, public debate and voting should be protected by binding legislation and procedures (Veirier 2008; UN-Habitat, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). On the flip side, this is a much slower, more tedious, process than top-down management.

02
STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Cities should ask themselves how this understanding of the role of heritage in a city's dynamics can be translated into strategies that are structured into short-, medium-, and long-term plans. They should also ensure that adequate organizational frameworks are in place to oversee the realization of these plans. Some of these needs are ongoing requirements that are not tied to specific historical moments but are part of the regular machinations of service provision and urban regulation. For example, heritage industries will always have a role to play in the economy of cities. Heritage will always be part of how a city sees itself, and as such, is a key aspect of urban culture that should be protected. Other needs are responsive and time specific. In the aftermaths of conflicts and natural disasters, as well as during ongoing crises such as housing shortages or political upheavals, heritage is simultaneously part of the problem and part of the solution.

Reflection 4: Designated or integrated heritage?

Protecting heritage requires special measures that set it apart from the city. This can result in a perception of heritage as a rigid obstacle standing in the path of progress and growth. Yet if governed well, heritage can become an integral part of a city's drive for excellence.

Cultural heritage conservation developed as a modern field in response to the threats posed by the rapid transformation of cities after the industrial revolution. Heritage designation became the basic foundation for protection, supported by regulations that created special planning provisions for heritage. Heritage grading systems, heritage protection zones and urban conservation areas all set heritage apart from the city, at the same 19th century historical moment when a developing 'urban' vs 'rural' binary set cities apart from their surroundings (Li & Tang, 2023). Both approaches are now being challenged [Case Studies 3 & 4: Fez & Tunis].

Barcelona's Metropolitan Commitment 2030 mobilizes multiple partners to run a metropolitan region of 36 municipalities. The concept of heritage has been expanded to serve this ambitious plan [Box 5]. This is in keeping with the constantly evolving conception of conservation management plans (CMPs) for historic sites.

Traditionally, CMPs manage change in historic cities through: 1) identifying heritage values and the attributes that embody these values (significance); 2) identifying factors that currently or potentially adversely affect these values or positively enhance

them (SWOT analysis); 3) assessing the situation as it stands; 4) developing a management strategy and process that ensures the protection and optimization of heritage as an asset; and 5) periodically reviewing its effectiveness (Bond & Worthing, 2016). What the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach does is 'break the walls' of separation between conservation and development (Bandarin & Van Oers 2012, p. 191). It directly links CMPs to their wider setting, not just of heritage but of the city. However, this blurs the lines of heritage designation, which since the birth of modern heritage management as a field has been an integral pillar of heritage protection.

This approach also links the different types of heritage together. The lines between cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible, and natural heritage are blurred, as they too come together under one management framework. Conservation, restoration and rehabilitation efforts serve to protect building crafts [Case Study 10: Nizwa]. The survival of other kinds of crafts is seen as necessary to preserve community cohesion and economic resilience [Box 6]. Nature within and around the city is re-incorporated in its vision of itself [Box 7]. Historically, this is how cities functioned, and heritage is the cultural manifestation of that history.

Box 5: Barcelona's 2030 Metropolitan Commitment

The Metropolitan Commitment 2030 for the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) aims to establish a collaborative form of metropolitan governance that overcomes the difficulties arising from administrative boundaries. Within this vision, a network of cities works together through a set of tailored governance instruments that transcend administrative borders and traditional governance structures. It brings its poly centric network of 36 municipalities and five million inhabitants together within a "quintuple helix" comprising government agencies, academia, the private sector, citizens and the media to address the challenges of the spatial management. Together, they contribute to the realization of eight missions: 1) innovative and inclusive economy; 2) sufficient income levels; 3) territorial cohesion; 4) adequate housing; 5) cultural vitality; 6) healthy food; 7) sustainable and safe mobility; and 8) environmental and climate emergency.

Within this wide framework, the heritage of Barcelona retains a special designation, but the concept has expanded to emphasize its "ordinary lived nature". Heritage is seen as an urban asset to be rehabilitated, not demolished to make room for modern urban developments. This approach aligns with the fight against climate change, aiming to reduce the carbon footprint of cities as much as possible, in this case through minimizing new builds. In the words of Carl Elefante, "the greenest building is [the] one that is already built" (Elefante, 2012).

Barcelona improved its control over demolitions, decreeing that "no building can be pulled down unless a permit has been obtained and a historical-memory report submitted, so that an assessment can be made regarding whether it has any type of heritage value. If the building is deemed significant, the City Council can have it listed and reject the permit application" (AMB Website).

The AMB also follows a regulatory framework for land use in that it "aims to protect, maintain and improve the fundamental values underpinning the urban landscape, as well as the image of the city of Barcelona." This includes the identification of around 200 'small landscapes' which are defined as "urban nooks and crannies and that add character to the city and preserve its collective memory". (AMB Website)

In the context of the Metropolitan Commitment, it is noteworthy that food heritage was a chosen focal point, again indicating a shift to blurring the lines between tangible, intangible and natural heritage.



Metropolitan Commitment 2030
Source: Compromís Metropolità 2030

UN-Habitat. (2016A). Habitat III. The New Urban Agenda. https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/

UN-Habitat.(2020). The New Urban Agenda Illustrated Handbook. UN-Habitat. https://unhabitat.org/the-new-urban-agenda-illustrated

Box 6: Crafts and the City

For traditional crafts to become relevant to our contemporary way of life and, in the process, to become economically viable, the prevailing view of tourists as the primary target for the sale of crafts must be challenged. The Japanese term mingei means 'the art of the people for the people', referring to affordable, relevant and functional products representative of their context and crafted by artisans. This is the kind of craft that can survive and thrive in the cities of today, to be consumed by locals and tourists alike. Countries like Morocco and India have successfully woven their artisanal traditions into their everyday habits and customs, and because of this, crafts have developed to reflect their contemporary needs.

The Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation, a pioneer in integrated approaches to heritage management, uses conservation primarily as a means of job creation in Palestine, training locals in the building crafts. In fact, almost all successful conservation and rehabilitation projects in Arab cities have been shown to work only when they effectively incorporate artisans both as experts and trainees.

The Daw'an Architecture Foundation in Yemen preserves traditional mud construction techniques and supports artisans through the rehabilitation of traditional mud buildings and heritage sites, both in the wake of conflict and as a way to fight endemic poverty.

Takween, Integrated Community Development, has successfully revived interest in the city of Esna in Upper Egypt through the architectural rehabilitation of a historic marketplace as well as the development and marketing of local crafts and traditions, from weaving to cooking.

Escuela Taller in the Philippines trains inner city youth in building crafts and employs them in conservation projects. When conservation work stopped during the Covid-19 pandemic, it turned this skill to producing crafted items which were sold to the local community.

The cultivation of customs and knowhow is directly linked to the preservation of intangible heritage. In traditional religious communities, such as in Timbuktu, Mali, the annual repair of the two main mosques is led by two mason families, with the community of the faithful, women included, contributing materials and labor. In Kathmandu, Nepal, the conservation project of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace was able to replace historic oiled bricks by referring to the knowhow of two, aging craftsmen.

Donkin. Lucy. (2001). Craft and Conservation: A synthesis report for ICCROM. ICCROM.

Escuela Taller de Filipinas Foundation, Inc. http://escuelataller.org.ph/

Riwaq – Centre for Architectural Conservation. https://www.riwaq.org/home

Takween-ICD. https://www.takween-eg.com/recha

Daw'an Architecture Foundation. https://www.dawanarchitecturefoundation.org/Default.aspx


An artisan of al-Darb al-Ahmar in Historic Cairo
Source: Christopher Wilton-Steer | Flickr

Reflection 5: The question of land- use

City heritage is not just beautiful buildings. It is a cohesive urban landscape for living heritage. But what do we do when we need services, housing and roads to connect one end of a growing city to another?

As cities expand, they develop new patterns of land use and mobility. Heritage areas find themselves at the center of struggles to improve mobility, provide additional housing and services and, most crucially, optimize land as a resource through real estate investment (Fu et al, 2023). Land use regulations are crucial tools for protecting the integrity of urban heritage. However, they are useless unless they are founded on vision and political will. Strategic visions that optimize heritage conservation range from giving preference to the rehabilitation of historic buildings over demolition and reconstruction, focusing on green mobility rather than extensive street networks for vehicular transportation and recognizing that the short-term profits derived from the sale of land deprives cities of critical long-term assets.

These issues are hugely urgent for cities like Cairo that continue to expand through horizontal sprawl, requiring more and more roads for private cars, many of them cutting through the urban fabric of the historic city and causing both urban and socio-economic disruption [Case Studies 1& 2: Cairo].

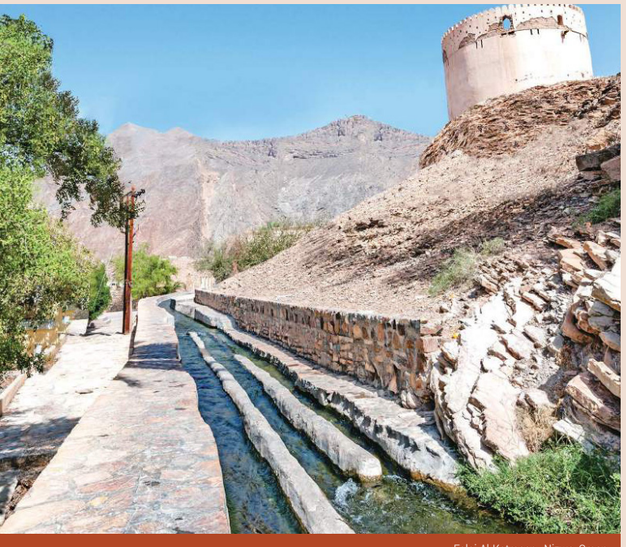
In such cases, management and conservation standards are irreconcilable with the needs of a contemporary city. Cities could even find themselves compelled to sacrifice a World Heritage designation in favor of new roads or urban developments that provide needed services or financial revenue. This predicament is especially relevant in the Global South, where financial resources are rarely there for the effective management of a site according to WHC standards and where there is a dire need for improved services and infrastructures [Box 8]. Even in the Global North, in a city like Liverpool, for example, Liverpool – Maritime Mercantile City was removed from the World Heritage List following concerns about the development of Liverpool Waters, a development that took place both within the designated site and in its buffer zone (UNESCO-WHC, 2021).

Within the historic city, smaller scale challenges include control over plot sizes, building height and building function, as well as the difficulties in providing services and public spaces within restrictively dense urban fabrics [Case Study 9: Jeddah]. Other issues are related to new infill buildings and the age-old question of contextual design [Case Study 8: Muharraq]. Approaches like New Urbanism, exemplified in Msheireb, downtown Doha, choose to adopt a contemporary version of traditional styles, proportions and building materials [Box 9].

Another approach is to opt for a completely contemporary style that harmonizes with the older context through sensitive contrast [Case Study 8: Muharraq]. For either of these approaches to work, they should be rooted in design principles best summarized in the 'La FRESH' approach, which takes 'Footprint', 'Roof', 'Envelope', 'Skin' and 'Holes' as contextual design factors, an addition to Landscape (Cassity et.al., 2009).

Box 7: The Heritage of water

Water is one of the most powerful connectors of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and natural heritage. In an exploration into the potential of water heritage in the Middle East and Maghrib, a 2015 ICOMOS study referred to six general heritage typologies: 1) the acquisition, management and control of water; 2) types of water use; 3) the management of constraints and the control of natural water; 4) water and health, water quality and the associated representations; 5) water and water-related knowledge, knowhow, myths and symbols; and 6) cultural landscapes of water.



Falaj Al-Katmeen , Nizwa, Oman
Source: Annual Report Al Omaniya Financial Services

Within these typologies there are recognized forms of water heritage, the most relevant to cities being: i) monuments to hydraulic technologies, such as the iconic modernist water towers of Kuwait City; ii) urban hydraulic techniques, such as the water catchment, transfer and storage systems in Sanaa, Yemen; iii) artificial expanses of water within monumental ensembles, such as the Aghlabid Basins in Kairouan; iv) the hydraulic development of a territory as cultural landscape, such as the aflaj irrigation system in Oman and the Arab Gulf; and finally, v) cultural landscapes of canals, lakes and rivers which are abundant in Arab cities.

Water heritage is linked to traditional knowhow, much of it rural, such as the traditional soil desalination practices of Chipaya Indians, in Bolivia. But there are also urban forms of water knowledge, perhaps most significantly, practices and materials of water catchment, transfer and storage. Roman water networks in cities such as Apamea, Syria, and Alexandria, Egypt, transfer water from rivers and springs to a system of underground canals, cisterns and water lifting apparatuses. In Mauritania, the World Heritage ensemble of the small desert towns of Ouadane, Chinguetti, Tichitt and Oualata, while famous for their libraries, would not have survived without their water infrastructure. This, in turn, can be linked to another type of World Heritage: the community system for transmission of traditional knowledge and oral expressions, or mahadara.

It is impossible to conceive of cities without water. Water is an excellent conduit to planning according to the principles of the HUL approach. It is a significant connection point between cities to the nature within them and around them. Traditional water knowhow is fast becoming a significant tool for climate change adaptation.

ICOMOS. (2015). The Cultural Heritages of Water in the Middle East and the Maghreb.

UNESCO:ICH. (2022). Mahadra, a community system for transmission of traditional knowledge and oral expressions. https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mahadra-a-community-system-for-transmission-of-traditional-knowledge-and-oral-expressions-01960

Box 8: Two mobility solutions in Historic neighborhoods

At the end of the 1980s, the city of Strasbourg, France, needed to find a solution for its traffic congestion issues. In order to combine public space rehabilitation with mobility solutions, it rejected the underground metro option in favor of a tramway whose route followed existing roads. These roads were then reorganized to accommodate pedestrians and minimize motorized traffic. In other words, the tramway was used as an excuse to convert traffic congested roads and squares into open spaces for the citizens of Strasbourg. It connected suburb dwellers to the city center. Pedestrians and cyclists gradually took over from cars. Pollution went down and commerce flourished in the historic city center. The project won a European Prize for Public Space in 2018.

The suburb of Heliopolis was established in 1905 in the northeastern section of Cairo, Egypt. The tramway connecting it to the city center was a fundamental reason for its success. A century later, the tramway continued to be an integral part of the suburb's identity, but its condition had badly deteriorated. A grassroots campaign to overhaul the metro followed, led by Heliopolis Heritage, a neighborhood advocacy group. In 2016, it was announced that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Ministry of International Cooperation signed a $250 million loan deal to overhaul and revive the tram line.

The European Prize for Public Space. (2018). Le Tramway. https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/w009-le-tramway

Global Atlas of Environmental Justice. (2022). Heliopolis Municipality Completely Removes Tram Line, Egypt. https://ejatlas.org/conflict/decommissioning-of-the-heliopolis-neighbourhood-tram-line1

However, in 2018, the tramway was completely removed. A series of road widenings and flyovers were introduced in the neighborhood, cutting into green spaces and impacting pedestrian safety.



Cairo Tram
Source: Hancock10 | Wikimedia Commons

Reflection 6: Who runs heritage?

Widening inclusivity in urban heritage governance makes it more relevant. It also requires strong vision and frameworks translated into policies that are integrated, nuanced and agile.

In order to effectively integrate heritage into the practice and governance of everyday life, its designation, interpretation and presentation should be a participatory process with equitable representation from different factions and strata of society (OECD, 2022). In many examples from Arab cities, the question concerning participation leads to uncomfortable answers that valorize 'getting the job done' over a democratic process with true representation from local communities. In many cases the management framework is established in the form of 'special' committees, companies or funds. Over the short term, this is a useful management framework to get projects done.

Over the long term, it does not result in systemic change and, as such, efforts often die with the completion of a project, due to a loss of funding and/or political will. The investment needed to radically improve management frameworks requires an infrastructure that includes a legislative framework with implementation tools and instruments, capacity building and adequate financial compensation for governmental actors, a working system for effective coordination between government sectors, adequate inclusion of citizens through political representation and direct participation, private-public partnerships that balance between small and big businesses and finally, an efficient, technocratic base to ensure continuity. This is a tall order.

The place municipalities might hold in this urban heritage management infrastructure would vary according to the specific national institutional context. However, municipalities definitely have a role to play in many aspects of urban heritage management, as a leading or supporting stakeholder. Most importantly, they must be able to ensure the alignment and synergy between their urban development strategies (priority areas and sectors of intervention, infrastructural development, etc.) and urban management processes (delivery of services, maintenance operations, etc.) on one hand, and the orientations and impacts of urban heritage management projects and initiatives on the other. Also, they should be able to ensure that the preservation or renovation projects in urban heritage areas do not have negative impacts on the residents and economic actors in these neighborhoods. All this requires a different strategic outlook and an attention to specific management and operational dimensions [Box 10].



Msheireb, Downtown Doha
Source: Hufton and Crow | Wikimedia Commons

Box 9: The New Urbanism of Msheireb Doha

A 3.1 hectare development close to the site of the old settlement around which the modern city of Doha grew, the new development of Msheireb Doha incorporates the few remaining historic buildings and paths into its design. It also opted for walkable public spaces and human-scale buildings in an attempt to create a space where modernity and tradition coexist. This mixed-use development uses passive climate solutions such as shading and natural ventilation to mitigate Qatar's harsh summer climate. Cars are relegated to an underground network of roads and parking spaces. An underground metro connects the development to the rest of the city.

The design seeks to "embody the qualities of the traditional Islamic city; the integration of shaded streets, active rooftops, courtyards and terraces by using the form of buildings, colonnades and overhangs to make walking around the neighborhood comfortable; and deep, layered facades which would minimize the impact of harsh sunlight, which in combination with natural ventilation and building systems would yield both internal comfort and minimize energy use" (Allies and Morrison). The project was built between 2006 and 2011.

Msheireb Doha is grounded in the principles of New Urbanism: Walkability; Connectivity; Mixed Use and Diversity; Mixed Housing; Quality Architecture and Urban design; Traditional Neighborhood Structure; Increased Density; Smart Transportation; Sustainability; and Quality of Life, However, the intended user of this sanitized cityscape is still unclear. Is it the consumer of the high-end goods and services offered in its shops, or the tenant of its relatively expensive residential units? Or is it the predominantly working- and middle-class expatriate communities that live in the surrounding neighborhoods?

Allies and Morrison, Elsea, D., & Westwood, M. (2021). A new urban model: Learning from Msheireb. Allies and Morrison.

Allies and Morrison. Msheireb Downtown Doha; https://www.alliesandmorrison.com/projects/msheireb-downtown-doha

Exell, Karen, and Trinidad Rico. (2016). Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula. Ashgate.

Box 10: HUL-based management systems for three European cities

Recent research has identified six key governance issues in dealing with historic urban landscapes. In this image, they are mapped along a sliding circular scale moving between two main subgroups: 1) working with institutional complexity; and 2) safeguarding a turbulent future.

This research also analyzed the management systems for three heritage cities – Edinburgh, Florence, and Porto – after they were modified to adopt the HUL approach for a "co-creative future in which heritage conservation and spatial planning processes are integrated" (Ferreira et. Al., 2023). These three, medium-scale cities all face problems of tourism and real estate pressure, mobility problems and demographic shrinking.

Porto's management plan was designed by the Management Office of the Municipal Council of Porto and was thus closely linked to the city master plan. It engages different actors (residents, technicians, experts, etc.) through a plan incorporating 40 actions and 81 projects within four strategic axes: i) Tangible Cultural Heritage; ii) Population and Housing; iii) Tourism, Culture and Economy; and iv) Environment and Mobility.

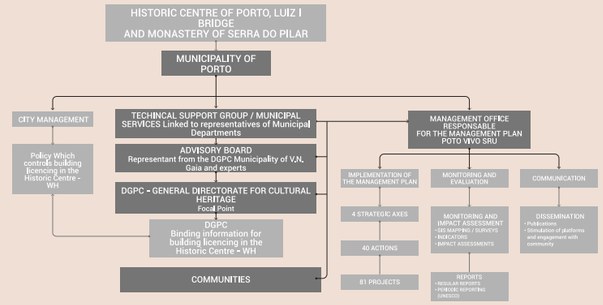


Figure 9: Porto's management plan

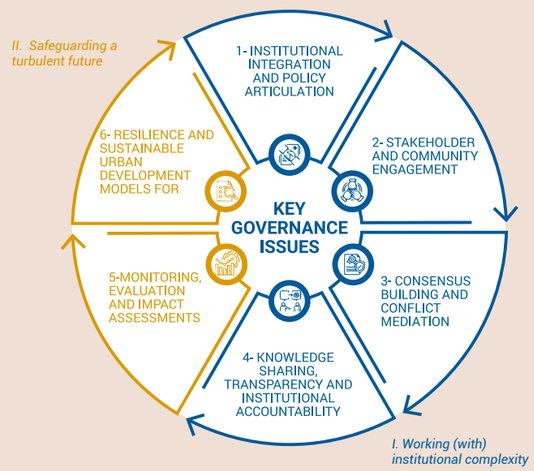


Figure 10: Key governance issues in dealing with Historic Urban Landscapes

Teresa Cunha Ferreira et. al. (2023). The Historic Urban Landscape Approach and the Governance of World Heritage in Urban Contexts: Reflections from Three European Cities. Land, 12(5),1020 https://doi.org/10.3390/land12051020

European ATLAS-WH Interreg Project. (2018). http://www.atlaswh.eu/

Reflection 7: What happens when things go wrong?

Heritage is vulnerable and it requires special measures for its protection. It can also be a powerful foundation for resilience.

Heritage management and conservation is a technically difficult, conceptually complex process that requires sizeable financial resources, a robust well-coordinated management framework and a pool of human skills and knowledge along multiple tiers of experience. In cases of nation-building, whether in the face of endemic issues such as poverty and reduced resources or events such as conflict and human and natural disasters, heritage is a pillar of resilience and strength (UNESCO, 2023). Cases in point include the Green Museum Project of Western Sudan, using museums as platforms of climate resilience [Box 11].

On the flip side, heritage is frequently a casualty of conflict. Sometimes it is deliberately targeted to break community spirit or to violently make an ideological point (UNESCO, 2023). In a time of conflict, the protection of heritage is, understandably, not given priority over urgent basic human needs such as the need for food or shelter. As soon as the urgency recedes even slightly, lost heritage is mourned, not simply as an irreplaceable asset for future generations but as an immediate pillar of regeneration and community-building (UNESCO, 2023). ICCROM's Culture Cannot Wait program was set up with that concern in mind, creating an ecosystem for disaster response that is capable of acting fast (ICCROM). However, post-conflict recovery should not prioritize quick action over healing processes that may take time. Post-conflict reconstruction is one of the most challenging aspects of city management, especially in heritage districts. It raises many questions on how to bring back to life urban areas that have known destruction and displacement, while at the same time engaging in the difficult and long task of mending the social scars of the war, dealing with the need to move on while not becoming amnesic to the sources of the conflict, and bringing in investment and economic development while protecting the rights of the pre-war owners and tenants [Case studies 5 & 7: Byblos & Mosul]. In the last decades, cities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Libya and Yemen have been confronted with these challenges with mitigated success [Box 12].

Box 11: Western Sudan Community Museum Project

The first phase of this project focused on the rehabilitation of three museums in Western Sudan into enclaves for community use and education: 1) the Khalifa House and Bramble House in Omdurman, Khartoum; 2) the Sheikan Museum in El Obeid, North Kordofan; and 3) the Darfur Museum in Nyala, South Darfur. This process included the extensive training and capacity building of museum staff, educators and heritage and education professionals.

After their soft opening in 2020, additional work focused on the role of these museums as community platforms of resilience, especially in the fight against climate change. The Green Heritage Program for education in all three museums raised the issue of climate change and its effect on communities in Sudan as well as on tangible and intangible heritage. The program included a study of the impact of climate change on the intangible culture of nomads in Kordofan and a major survey of the monuments of Darfur, also affected by climate change.

Unfortunately, the program's Sudan activities came to a halt with the start of the civil war in 2023. However, a new campaign called Safeguard Sudan's Living Heritage was launched online with the aim of "capacity building communities inside and outside Sudan and making Sudanese living heritage more visible and accessible" (SSLH). This new program continues to employ young Sudanese and is proof of the agility of heritage-based work in times of crisis, especially if practiced in an integrated manner that combines cultural tangible and intangible heritage with natural heritage.



Cover page of Western Sudan Community Museums Project

Mallinson Architects and Engineers. Western Sudan Community Museum Project. https://www.mallinsonae.com/western-sudan-community-museums

SSLH. Safeguarding Sudan's Living Heritage. https://www.sslh.online/en#about

Box 12: Reconstruction efforts in Aleppo

A 2024 survey of 1600 residents of Aleppo identified four key themes related to the 2016 post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Locals privileged security, basic services and employment over heritage reconstruction. They wanted local religious sites rebuilt as much as significant non-religious sites and preferred for these to be transformed into more useful structures for the community. They wanted control and agency over the future of their own heritage. The survey also showed that residents preferred that Syrian authorities or Syrian communities should take responsibility for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their heritage.

After 2016, UNESCO estimated that 60% of the Old City of Aleppo was severely damaged and about 30% completely destroyed. International agencies such as UNDP, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the ALIPH Foundation were involved with reconstruction work in collaboration with the Syrian Government. In addition to state-funded projects, support for rehabilitation efforts came from the governments of multiple countries including Japan, Switzerland, Russia and Iran. Much of this work focused on Aleppo's traditional markets, serving to combine heritage rehabilitation with infrastructure upgrades and economic revitalization. This was seen as a useful strategy for reconciling the focus on heritage preservation with the pressing needs of ordinary citizens.

The municipality of Aleppo did much work to facilitate the quick rehabilitation and activation of Aleppo's traditional markets. One tool used to expedite rehabilitation was the enforcement of land use restrictions on businesses that had relocated to pressure them to return to their original shops in the markets. Another more controversial measure was to issue reconstruction permits for buildings with multiple owners, even if only one owner submitted a request. After the fall of the regime in December 2024 and the potential mass return of political exiles, what are the ramifications of this policy on those whose property was expropriated in their absence?

قرار مجلس مدينة حلب رقم ٥٥ لعام ٢٠٢٠

Benjamin Isakhan and Lynn Meskell. (2024). Local perspectives on heritage reconstruction after conflict: a public opinion survey of Aleppo. International Journal of Heritage Studies, 30(7), 821-839. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2024.2342288

https://alp-city.sy/dataBank/show/11/1999



Souk Saqatieh-After Rehabilitation
Source: Dr. Ali Esmaiel

03
MANAGERIAL AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Heritage falls under culture and yet is indivisible from the politics, socio-economic conditions and ecology of the city. What kinds of skills and knowledge can cover all that? How can cities utilize community knowledge and ensure community buy-in? How can they turn strategies, policies and laws into operational tools? How do they pay for all this? And how can they act fast in times of crisis?

Reflection 8: Six operational how-to questions

Our understanding of heritage has widened to include the different types of tangible objects and sites, intangible knowledge and practices and natural sites. It has also become more diverse and inclusive. A historic urban landscape includes all of the above, and its management requires integrated efforts for sustainable development. This level of integration is difficult to achieve within the current frameworks of city management. It requires agile processes that are inclusive of all stakeholders while getting the job done. This cannot be done without taking the political and socio-economic dynamics of a city into consideration. Finally, and to complicate matters even further, the urgency of climate change action has put environmental concerns to the forefront, adding climate-related risks to the long list of factors endangering heritage and emphasizing the importance of heritage as a pillar of resilience in the face of natural and human threats.

How to know

The level of skills and knowledge needed by different actors in different sectors to deal with this level of complexity and urgency in urban heritage management is not easy to achieve. Tailored technical training and education should be provided by academic and vocational training institutions, particularly with regards to urban design, heritage management, site conservation and environmental sustainability. Digital technologies and digital tools for storytelling are key, as are tools for documentation, data management, data analysis and data-driven decision-making (Aburamadan et al, 2021). This is in addition to a grounding in interdisciplinary methods and the requisite soft skills to ensure effective collaboration, evaluation and learning by experience. Finally, monitoring and evaluation procedures should be in place to learn on the job and change track if necessary, and also to accumulate skills and knowledge incrementally. A number of heritage management programs have recently been established in Arab universities and the impact of these programs is slowly becoming tangible. There is, however, a dearth of architectural programs offering a technical specialization in architectural conservation and the retrofit of historic buildings. Most countries still lack conservators and artisans specializing in conservation. At a more fundamental level, work is needed to develop theories of heritage and conservation rooted in the cultural specifics of the MENA region (Daher, 2021).



ICCROM Regional Center, Sharjah
Source: www.icrom.org

Box 13: ICCROM Architectural and Archaeological Tangible Heritage in the Arab World (ATHAR)

The ICCROM regional center in Sharjah, UAE, aims to enhance the capacity of official heritage institutions to manage heritage sites and museum collections on a sustainable basis. It runs a postgraduate program in the Conservation Management of Cultural Heritage. This interdisciplinary program addresses emerging conservation challenges in the Arab region and integrated approaches to heritage management. Delivered in Arabic, it covers a wide range of topics, from disaster risk management to World Heritage. ICCROM Regional Centre in Sharjah.

https://www.iccrom.org/about/iccrom-sharjah-regional-office

How to be inclusive

Participatory tools for heritage management vary. Standard democratic tools of governance such as community consultation, participatory design and voting are not achievable or are not effective enough in many countries. Technological advances enable cities to use smart city tools for communication and decision-making, and communities can come together virtually to debate, discuss and decide (Shin, et. al, 2024). This can, however, exclude the 'digitally or technically poor', who do not have access to technology, or the 'digitally or technologically illiterate', who are unable to use it effectively. In all cases, participation is not truly viable unless there is a legally binding mechanism to act on its results. One effective process involves citizen consultation sessions during the design stage, incorporating key findings into a conceptual proposal that is then put to a vote in town halls or reviewed by an elected City Council (Rosenzweigova & Skoric, 2016).

Box 14: Play the City

Play the City introduces gaming into city-making to test the rules and constraints of complex urban questions and co-design with stakeholders.

Sustainable Tourism Game (2018), developed with NHTV- Breda University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, is a multiplayer role-playing game that assists policymakers in facilitating a more sustainable form of urban tourism. Within the framework of the EU-funded research project Smart City Hospitality (SCITHOS), teams representing Amsterdam, Belgrade, Darmstadt, Gothenburg, Stavanger and Valencia collaborated to build a hybrid (analog and digital) tabletop role-playing game. Game datasets included policies from around the world, public infrastructure investments, resident and visitor groups that are impacted and the six core SCITHOS values that contribute to a resilient city.

Play the City. https://www.playthecity.eu/



Play the City

How to manage change

Laws, policies and plans should aim to manage change in cities for the benefit of its citizens while preserving heritage as an asset. Implementation tools include, but are not limited to, bylaws, land use, planning and building regulations, conservation management plans, impact assessments and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These tools require trained personnel within a well-designed organizational framework to implement them. They also require periodic revision and assessment.

Box 15: Impact Assessment Studies

Impact assessment has been described as 'thinking before acting'. Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (sometimes called Heritage Impact Assessments, if the focus is on heritage) assess the impacts of a specific proposed action at a project level. Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments assess the impact of the preceding policies, plans and/or program that set the context for individual projects.

UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN. (2022). Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context.



Figure 11: Process of assessing the potential impacts of a proposed action on a World Heritage Site

How to work together

Any intervention on an urban scale requires a high level of coordination between different sectors within the government. It also requires public-private partnerships, in addition to coordination with civil society and community representatives. In cases of urban heritage, municipalities will work with the relevant national authority in charge of heritage. Together, they are the two main drivers of this process. To streamline this process, special governing bodies or steering committees are often set up with representatives of all the relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as members.



Casbah of Algiera
Source: Serge Maini | UNESCO

Box 16: Who runs the Casbah of Algiers?

The heritage of Algeria, including the historic Casbah of its capital, Algiers, is governed by Law 98-04 of 1998. The first text regulating the implementation of this law was issued five years later, in 2003. It specifies that the governmental body in charge of managing the Casbah is the Wilaya of Algiers.

Within the Wilaya, the Director General of Culture is responsible for the implementation of the conservation plan along with the relevant municipalities and in collaboration with the National Office for the Management and Exploitation of Protected Cultural Property. However, in 2011, the National Agency for Safeguarded Sectors (ANSS) was set up, and it too was given responsibility for the implementation of the conservation plan through the Cellule Casbah, an administrative unit within the ANSS. However, the laws and regulations were not amended to reflect this change. On the ground, there are even more governmental bodies with responsibility for aspects of the management process. In 2018, the International Meeting of Experts on the Conservation and Revitalization of the Casbah of Algiers was jointly held by the Algerian Ministry of Culture and UNESCO. One of its most significant recommendations was to streamline administrative procedures through creating a single, interministerial and interdisciplinary management mechanism for running the Casbah.

Hadji, Farah. et.al. (2023). Impact of legislative precision in the management of the Casbah., Built Heritage,7(8), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-023-00088-y

How to pay

Financial instruments for heritage management and conservation include grants and funding available at national and international levels, revenue from taxes (for governmental bodies) and tax incentives (for individuals and businesses), endowments and trust funds, heritage impact bonds, crowdfunding and heritage loans (Srinivas, 2015). Generally speaking, investment in heritage should not be the sole responsibility of local or national governments. Funding programs should incentivize public-private partnerships for the sustainable management of urban heritage.

How to act fast

Risk management encompasses everything we do to understand and deal with possible negative impacts on our objectives. In the case of heritage, this is through a process that includes: 1) understanding the context; 2) identifying, analyzing and then evaluating risk; 3) proposing solutions; and 4) monitoring and evaluating the impact of those solutions. In times of crisis, it is necessary to have a clear procedure for disaster response and first aid. The situation can be analyzed through a process of on-site damage and risk assessment. Based on the findings of this assessment, security and stabilization measures can be taken in preparation for the recovery process (ICCROM, 2016).

Box 17: Stadsherstel-Amsterdam

"The supply of good, rented accommodation in the old city is limited … it appears desirable to establish a society which, on a larger scale than has previously taken place, undertakes to provide for the aforementioned demand for housing through the repair, modernisation and management of old houses." (Stadsherstel)

In 1956, Stadsherstel-Amsterdam was established as a public limited company by a consortium of banks and businesses. Its aim was to save Amsterdam's historic houses by buying them, renovating them and offering them for rent at affordable rates. This initiative was in response to radical postwar plans to modernize Amsterdam by demolishing old neighborhoods and filling in canals to make room for housing and services. Today, it owns and operates 750 properties in Amsterdam, capping its profit and channeling revenue to add to its real estate portfolio. It is a model for similar enterprises such as Hifadhi Zanzibar and Stadsherstel Paramaribo.

Stadherstel. https://stadsherstel.nl/en/home/

Hifadhi Zanzibar. https://www.hifadhizanzibar.com/

Stadsherstel Suriname. https://stadsherstelsuriname.org/



The first building Stadsherstel purchased: Brouwersgracht 86
Source: Stadsherstel

Box 18: Models for Heritage Risk Management and First Aid to Cultural Heritage Processes

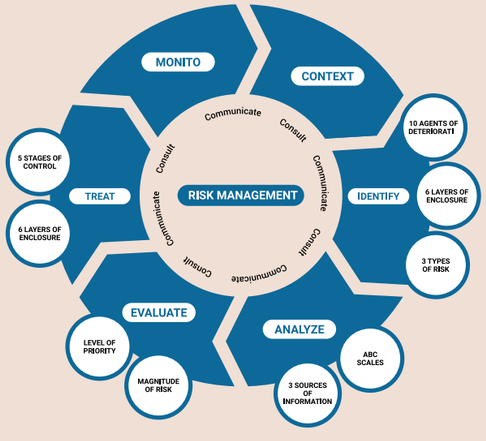


Figure 12: Risk management process
ICCROM. (2016). A Guide to Risk Management of Cultural Heritage. https://www.iccrom.org/publication/guide-risk-management

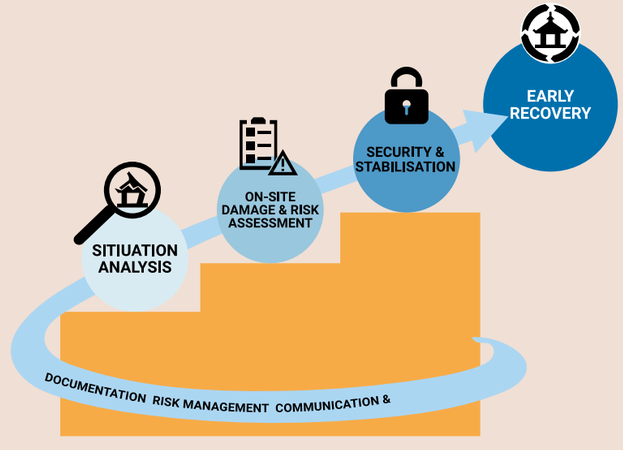


Figure 13: First aid to cultural heritage process
Source: ICCROM & Prince Claus Fund. (2018). First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis. https://www.iccrom.org/publication/first-aid-cultural-heritage-times-crisis-toolkit

Further Readings

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Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Source: Ahmad Alhamwan | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition

04
CONCLUSION

Image: Old Town Rabat, Morocco
Source: Abdullah Alshathri | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition

This study is intended to serve municipalities wishing to adopt an effective and sensitive approach to conserving and managing their urban heritage, one that views this heritage as an asset that serves the inhabitants and users of their cities. Rather than provide them with answers, it gives them the tools to ask the right questions.

After an introduction that addressed the main principles of urban heritage conservation and the challenges facing change management globally and in Arab cities, the report reviewed 11 case studies from 10 cities deemed representative of the Arab world in terms of scale, geographical setting, types of heritage and heritage policies and procedures. In the previous section, these case studies were supplemented with shorter accounts of the experiences of other cities with heritage, many of which are also in the Arab region.



Image source: Akram Ayoub | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition

Lessons learned from Case Studies

Challenges

With regard to challenges, the first are in the form of general issues around the designation of heritage, legislation for its protection and management, and integration of these policies into the general process of city governance and management. Generally speaking, integrative heritage laws coupled with conservation management plans linked to larger scale strategic plans are ideal frameworks that only a few heritage cities possess. Graded listing systems enable cities to tailor protection measures based on value and typology, and unfortunately, they have yet to be developed effectively in most Arab cities.

Another pivotal concern is related to funding for heritage and the channeling of resources to and from heritage. This process is, by default, linked to global, national and local funding policies and mechanisms, to heritage industries such as tourism and crafts and to the economics of land and real estate. While economic resources for investing in heritage are available, even in cash-strapped countries, thechallenge lies in managing these resources and allocating them efficiently according to a clear understanding of priorities. Frameworks to encourage private-public partnerships and non-governmental investment are also lacking.

Another critical lesson is related to bridging the gap between time-specific action-based pilot projects for conservation, rehabilitation, regeneration and capacity–building, on the one hand, and long-term institutional reform and foundational visions and policies that ensure continuity and growth, on the other. This means that, while political will and economic investment are necessary to start reform, continuity is predicated on a strong governance and institutional framework that is independent of the individual or organization that initiated the process. At the local level, this framework is the responsibility of municipalities.

The case studies highlighted the need for risk preparedness in the region, considering the political strife and conflicts plaguing many of its countries, the constant socio-economic pressures and the growing threat from climate change. They showed that heritage is at the forefront of these crises, targeted for symbolic and political reasons, often looted and trafficked for the illegal generation of funds, but also used as a foundation for recovery and as a rallying point for unity, regeneration and resilience.

The case studies pinpointed a general issue with the human and institutional capacities and operational tools needed to implement policies and procedures, run projects, and coordinate with other bodies. In many Arab countries, there is a dearth of educational and training opportunities in urban management and conservation. Contrary to popular conceptions of heritage as a niche field, it is in fact a growing field that is underserved by human capacities.

Furthermore, the case studies indicated that there is a focus on specific typologies of urban heritage, mainly monumental buildings and the public spaces around them. This means that other typologies, such as historic urban stock, are less represented, probably due to obstacles faced in the allocation of public funds for repairs to privately-owned structures. This is directly linked to another issue, that of including modern heritage as a priority focus, that is in need of tailored conservation and revitalization strategies and methods.

The case studies also showed a critical deficiency in participatory mechanisms, not just regarding decision-making and political representation, but also in terms of incorporating traditional knowledge and local knowhow. This is particularly important in private-public partnerships that should prioritize local, smaller scale businesses over larger corporations. In the case of heritage industries such as tourism and policies leading to a rise in land-value, it is always necessary to 'follow the money', making sure local communities are the primary beneficiaries. This reduces the gap between the rising cost of living and local incomes that potentially leads to gentrification.

The case studies also highlighted the need for risk preparedness and crisis management in the region, considering the political strife and conflicts plaguing many of its countries, the constant socio-economic pressures, and the growing threat from climate change.

Best Practices

On the positive side, the case studies highlighted innovative and local approaches to heritage management adopted by certain Arab cities and relevant to others. Approaches such as the integrated and participatory heritage policies and practices of Tunisia and Morocco, the use of heritage as a foundation for post-conflict regeneration in Iraq, budding practices to directly link heritage to climate action in the Sudan, the integration of local communities into the management of their heritage in Oman, the growing class of independent conservation professionals in Egypt, targeted investment in heritage management and revitalization in the Gulf and efforts to build consensus around the value of heritage in Jordan. It also pinpointed important studies on the economics of heritage, such as the Word Bank's assessment of its involvement in urban regeneration in medinas at the beginning of the 21st century. The more adept cities are at establishing agile implementation and management bodies with adequate organizational and participatory structures, human capacities, sustainable funding and an efficient coordination framework with local and national authorities, the better they are at urban heritage management and conservation.

Integrated approaches to Heritage

Tunisia and Morocco have a lot to teach other Arab countries about integration and participation in urban heritage management and conservation. Streamlining flow along different scales of governance and management starts with integrative heritage legislation. It relies on strong, specialized implementation bodies such as ADER-Fes in Morocco, whose scope has grown from the city to the national level. Meaningful inclusion of community representatives on an institutional and individual level is also key. Comparing ADER-Fes in Morocco with ASM in Tunisia raises a significant question concerning the optimal legal framework for management bodies. As an NGO, ASM is more inclusive and grassroots than ADER-Fes, which is a governmental body. Yet, the former proved more susceptible to changes in fortune due to changing political conditions. It is important to mention that these implementation bodies contribute to management and policy through strong, collaborative mechanisms with municipal bodies on the city level and heritage management bodies on the national level. From the perspective of economic sustainability, support for heritage industries such as craft and cultural tourism is also the most advanced in these two contexts, potentially requiring some planning ahead for future controls against overtourism and gentrification.

Heritage as a Foundation for Regeneration and Resilience

In current or previously conflict-ridden countries such as Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon, heritage has been used as a rallying point and a vehicle for community building through job creation, urban regeneration and healing through culture. Such countries are truly the pioneers in this approach and is arguably the most advanced in the Arab world in linking heritage to socio-economic resilience and community development. Integrative solutions that combine rural with urban, natural with cultural and tangible with intangible under one heritage umbrella have succeeded in creating a resilient and versatile network. This network is rooted in a strong alliance between civil society and local government, it utilizes its considerable diaspora and it is adept at tailoring solutions at different scales to address both long-term problems and sudden crises.

Building Partnerships and Capacities

Egypt and Oman have succeeded in building on community resources in different ways. The scale and wealth of Egypt's heritage is unmatched in the Arab world and deficient state capacities have led to the rise of a professional heritage community that is proactive in developing and implementing heritage solutions. The ongoing experiment in the small town of Esna in Upper Egypt is perhaps one of the most promising examples of a project led by a professional entity that is single-handedly changing a city's understanding of the potential of its heritage, both on a societal and governmental level. The professionals leading this enterprise are alumni of AKTC's al-Darb al-Ahmar project, reviewed here as a pioneering non-governmental project in integrated urban heritage regeneration in Egypt. This is only one of many long-term, professional-led projects in Egypt that contribute equally to heritage preservation and training and capacity building. In Oman, the state is actively encouraging the establishment of small-scale, community-led companies to manage heritage at an urban scale. Particularly in smaller towns

with tribal communities, this is a step towards true community custodianship of heritage through economic incentives.

Rediscovery and Reinvention of Heritage

This report also tells the story of the many ways in which heritage can be rediscovered and reinvented. As-Salt is a small Jordanian town whose heritage was long over-shadowed by Jordan's ancient and archaeological heritage wonders. It is being reinvented through a combination of support from homegrown business–owners and royal patronage, facilitated by academic and professional studies into the historical town's narrative of peace and tolerance. Sarooj, a traditional plaster used in Oman, is being reconceptualized as a sustainable finishing material whose production can be mainstreamed for general markets. After the end of the civil war, the heritage of five of Lebanon's towns was rethought as a driver for urban regeneration through infrastructure upgrades and tourism development. As part of Sudan's Green Heritage Program [Box 11], museums were the linchpin of efforts at the nexus of heritage, climate change action and community development. Bahrain reinvented the heritage of Muharraq within another nexus: heritage, design and culture. And finally, work in the affluent countries of the Gulf to refocus attention on their long-overlooked heritage is of significance. Their ability to pour financial resources and human capacities into the establishment of tailored heritage management and investment frameworks can create models for other cities to learn from. The fact that they are a magnet for professionals from the entire Arab World facilitates knowledge transfer.

Reflections and recommendations

In Section Three, this study synthesized the lessons learned from the case studies in Section Two into three sets of reflections along three levels of city management. At the level of **Institutional Vision and Policy**, it addressed the identification and ownership of heritage and its place in city visions. Second, at the level of **Strategies and Tactics**, it reviewed contrasting strategies for the designation versus the integration of heritage, and addressed crucial themes such as land use, governance, and crisis response. Finally, at the level of **Operational and Managerial Tools**, it addressed the operational challenges of capacity building, inclusion, change management, collaboration, funding and risk preparedness.

It is impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of the principles, challenges, and solutions for urban heritage management and conservation in Arab cities within the scope of one publication. However, it is possible to point to preliminary recommendations for municipalities, organized here along the three levels of city management referred to above.

01
Recommendations for institutional vision and policy

1. The right to heritage should be enshrined in the constitution and should emphasize the equal right of all citizens for representation through heritage, access to heritage, and the capacity to benefit from heritage, regardless of race, creed, ethnicity, class or gender.

2. The right to heritage is a complex, nuanced principle that is constantly being negotiated between different parties that represent different values and interests within a nation. Heritage policies should accommodate this process and integrate its outputs incrementally in a nation's vision for its heritage, taking note of conflicting claims to contested heritage and attempting to resolve them in an equitable manner. Independent advocacy and watchdog groups are integral to this process.

3. To reflect a coherent vision and urban policy, legislation for urban heritage should include all types of heritage within one integrative and comprehensive law that clearly enshrines heritage protection and management within city management policies and frameworks.

4. Urban heritage management frameworks should be based on UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape method (UNESCO, 2011). Global approaches should be tailored to local conditions. To this end, urban heritage sites should have an integrated management framework that incorporates all relevant governmental entities within one body and includes all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders meaningfully.

5. Policies for crisis management should not overlook heritage i) as a vulnerable target that requires protection and immediate risk mitigation, and ii) as a foundation for resilience and recovery. This is true for all types of crises, be they conflict, uncontrolled urban development, natural disasters, socio-economic crises or climate change.

While heritage vision and policy start at the national level, municipalities should not simply be at the receiving end of government decisions. As stakeholders, they are principal contributors to the process of assigning value. As city managers, they can facilitate participatory decision-making, particularly through elected bodies such as city councils. They are also responsible for the implementation of policies and the channeling of resources from and to heritage for the benefit of their citizens.

For municipalities to become key actors at this level, the process for setting vision and policy should be decentralized so that it emanates from local government to national government and not vice versa. This requires a stronger framework of political representation at the scale of local government. This framework should be supported by a strong bureaucracy that guarantees institutionalization and continuity. It also requires an efficient national mechanism to synthesize and consolidate representative voices at the local level into a clear national vision and policy. This national mechanism for synthesis is the safety valve against national vision and policy becoming hostage to factionalism and local interests. While the bottom-up process emanating from local government includes heritage within a larger set of issues pertaining to quality of life at a local level, the national mechanism for synthesis focuses on heritage (possibly along with related fields such as culture and tourism) at a national level and aligns it to a vision that is more long-term and holistic.

The mechanism for the implementation of vision and policies is discussed below at the strategic, tactical and operational levels.

02
Recommendations for strategies and tactics

1. Fundamentally, urban heritage management and conservation is about managing change. Cities and communities grow and evolve, and in the process create more heritage for future generations. A people-centered or narrative-based approach takes stakeholder interests into account, thus allowing cities to change and grow while preserving their heritage. It also enables cities to balance between material-based and values-based heritage management systems.[39]

2. Urban change management is the main concern of a heritage city's Conservation Management Plan (CMP). CMPs balance heritage protection with city needs. They link heritage areas to larger-scale strategic and master plans through a dual mechanism of protection and integration. They ensure development does not jeopardize heritage values while enabling the utilization of heritage as a city asset that contributes to development. Accordingly, CMPs play a vital role in core city management concerns such as land-use regulation and mobility. They are baseline documents that set the terms of reference for Heritage Impact Assessment studies (HIAs) that identify the impact of proposed urban interventions on heritage. In summary, CMPs (as planning tools) and HIAs (as decision-making tools) enable the inclusion of heritage within a city's cultural and socio-economic frameworks, therefore bridging the gap between the designation and integration of heritage.

3. Strategies for bridging the gap between the designation and integration of heritage should be politically backed, socially sustainable and economically viable. In other words, the economic burden of heritage conservation and management should be offset with clearly defined communal benefits derived from heritage as a resource.

4. Communal benefits are derived from the values that necessitated the designation of this particular aspect of the city as heritage in the first place. Strategically, these values should extend to include non-use values that are experienced by individuals but are not necessarily reflected in market processes. Tactically, measures to quantify and qualify these values and gains should be related to improving the quality of life in general, not just revenue generation. These values and gains should also be communicated clearly to decision-makers and stakeholders. This in no way means that financial gains should be overlooked. Innovative investment incentives such as cuts to taxes or utility bills could go a long way to encourage non-governmental investment in privately-owned heritage and will eventually lead to a rise in real-estate values in heritage districts.

5. Participatory needs assessments identify priorities that go beyond targeting endangered heritage. Priority actions should also target heritage that contributes to a city's general needs, such as historical housing stock rehabilitation or the reinvention of industrial heritage zones as catalysts for urban regeneration. Improved services, infrastructure and public spaces are priorities common to both heritage management and city governance. Synergizing actions and pooling resources between heritage managers and municipalities can go a long way in getting them done.

6. This also necessitates a structural shift in how cities are run. This is perhaps the biggest challenge, because it requires cities to look beyond their administrative boundaries and traditional governance scope and structure. This can be achieved through problem solving approaches such as systems-thinking or design-thinking. Strategies and tactics worth considering include alliances with grassroots groups, syndicates, unions and local development corporations, working at thematic or geographical nexuses (rural/urban or heritage/environment for example) and creating regional and global partnerships for resource generation.

34 See introduction

7. Heritage industries play a vital role in this equation. Cultural and historical travel counts for 40% of global tourism,[40] which in turn is estimated to exceed 9% of the global economy. Crafts play a dual role in preserving heritage and income regeneration. There is also untapped potential in digital and virtual heritage, whether for promoting heritage sites or for their digital commercialization. Conversely, strategies to develop these industries as resources should protect against overtourism and gentrification and should ensure a fair share for local communities in the profits.

8. It is also recommended that the understanding of cultural heritage in Arab cities extends i) in timespan to include its vernacular and modern heritage, and ii) in typology to include under-represented heritage such as industrial heritage, the heritage of water and the heritage of everyday life. Intangible cultural heritage is at the heart of a city's genius loci. Its role in city life should be celebrated and enhanced and it should not be overlooked in heritage impact assessment studies.

9. Developing synergies between other sectors is a pivotal part of this strategy. The fields of art, culture and design are inextricably linked to urban heritage management. These sectors can be inspired by heritage, produced through heritage-based activities (crafts, for example) and presented and performed in heritage settings. Even more significantly, they contribute to the continuity and relevance of heritage activities by creating the heritage of the future. The sector of spatial design is perhaps the most significant ally.

10. New infill within heritage should be harmonious but should not be limited to traditional styles. Municipalities should develop the knowledge and skills to work with designers to regulate infill without handicapping creativity and innovation. This requires a sensitive case-by-case interpretation of building and urban codes and regulations to produce a distinctively contemporary additions to the city that are compatible with its heritage and cityscape.

11. Linkages to the environment are equally relevant, particularly in light of the worrying effect of climate change on heritage and the growing role heritage is playing in climate change action. To the first point, heritage is especially vulnerable to climate change and should be prioritized in mitigation and adaptation efforts. To the second point, climate change is not a new phenomenon and there is much to be learned from historical adaptation and mitigation methods. Heritage sites and museums within the city are not just repositories of this knowledge. They are also excellent platforms for mobilizing for climate change action. Traditional building knowhow and materials are greener and less extractive alternatives to their modern counterparts.

12. Finally, risk management and crisis resolution strategies should be in place for quick deployment by municipalities. These strategies should include the identification, mitigation and monitoring of risk.

The management and implementation of urban heritage should fall within the scope of municipalities. They should contain within them a planning or executive body in charge of urban heritage sites. In turn, this body should include representation from all relevant governmental agencies. Urban heritage sites should not be divided over more than one administrative zone within the city. The heritage body within the municipality should be responsible for day-to-day management and also for planning, commissioning and overseeing projects for conservation and regeneration. Vision, policy and decision-making should be led by elected representatives – through the city council, for example – in alignment with national plans and policies. The municipality should also develop an effective framework for participatory governance, the pooling of knowledge and the pursuit of public-private partnerships. This can be done through multiple channels such as advisory boards, committees and partnerships with academic, professional and community institutions and organizations.

After addressing these issues on the strategic and tactical level, the next step is implementation and for that, municipalities need sufficient operational and managerial tools.

03
Recommendations at the managerial and operational level

1. A shortage of skills and capacities cuts across the Arab world. There is a need for academic and vocational training programs in heritage conservation and management in general, especially those that might focus on matters of architectural conservation, structural analysis and the repair of historic buildings, traditional building materials and crafts, infill design, practical conservation, planning, urban and landscape design, mobility solutions in historic settings and heritage economics.

2. Knowledge production in Arabic and the translation of seminal texts will facilitate skills development and capacity building. In addition to technical and skill-based topics, there is a need for theoretical and methodological texts derived from, and tailored to, the MENA region.

3. Cross-disciplinary knowledge of certain branches of other fields and their application in the field of heritage is also necessary. For example, digital technologies and digital tools for storytelling are key, as are tools for documentation, surveys and maps, data management, data analysis and data-driven decision-making.

4. Participatory frameworks such as design through consultation and participatory research and design should ideally be linked to city governance mechanisms but could also be project specific. These tools could link to grassroots networks and could also mobilize through virtual networks. Their outputs should feed into a mechanism that is legally binding.

5. Cities lacking effective democratic systems of governance can create their own frameworks for empowerment and trust building. They could link to grassroots networks, or other systems of mobilization such as professional syndicates or home-owners' associations. They could also mobilize through virtual networks, though this could exclude the 'digitally or technically poor', who do not have access to technology or the 'digitally or technologically illiterate' who are unable to use it effectively.

6. Tools for effective communication, participatory research, and co-design are varied and diverse and it is the responsibility of city-managers to choose the most suitable tools and tailor them to their needs. However, they should be aware of the inherent hierarchies in any process of co-creation, hierarchies that should be addressed and rectified as much as possible.

7. At the operational level, general policy and strategic frameworks such as laws, strategic plans, conservation management plans, and risk and crisis management plans are detailed through bylaws, land use regulations, building codes, and disaster-response action plans.

8. As mentioned above, HIAs are tools that facilitate decisions concerning large-scale interventions on a case-by-case basis. For smaller scale interventions, city architects and real estate developers negotiate solutions based on land use and building regulations and tailored to context, function and design-vision.

9. Other, case-specific tools for land management can include easements that retain private ownership while protecting heritage assets. A more extreme tool would be expropriation for public good, although this should be a last resort.

10. These tools require trained personnel within a well-designed organizational framework to implement them. They also require periodic revision and assessment using monitoring and evaluation tools. Crisis management and disaster response plans are the responsibility of special teams trained to mobilize quickly and work within the city's larger crisis and disaster management framework.

11. Any intervention on an urban scale is predicated on a high level of coordination between different sectors within the government. It also requires public-private partnerships, in addition to coordination with civil society and community representatives.

12. In cases of urban heritage, municipalities will work with the relevant national authority in charge of heritage and together, they are the two main drivers of this process. To streamline this process, special governing bodies or steering committees are often set up with representatives of all the relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as members.

13. Financial management requires its own set of tools, the most challenging being methods for the evaluation of non-use value that can translate non-monetary performance indicators into monetary value. For example, increased access to heritage spaces improves quality of life which in turn impacts health and mental well-being, one of whose indicators can be reduced spending on healthcare.

14. However, the fact that heritage sites are in essence real estate should not be ignored. Tools to evaluate the effect of listing and conservation actions on real estate value are indispensable, as are financial management tools to optimize real-estate revenue streams.

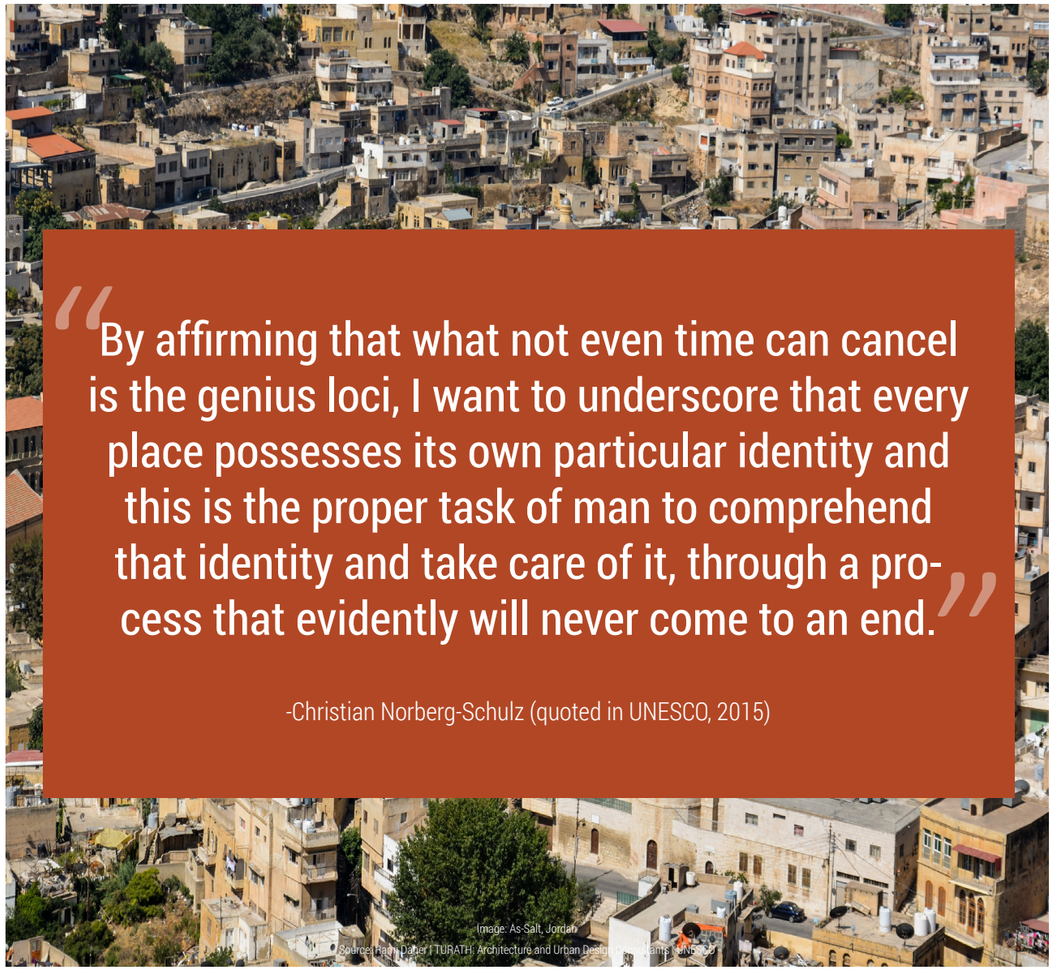
15. Incentives for investment are also crucial tools that should be designed to accommodate a sliding scale of investments. For example, tax cuts are effective incentives for larger investors, while micro-loans and exemption from utility bills may be more suited to homeowners and small businesses.

16. In addition to these tools, fundraising will continue to be an integral part of heritage protection, with heritage managers targeting grant programs, private philanthropists, and crowdfunding, and lobbying for larger shares of governmental funding.

35 https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/turning-tourism-into-development/#:~:text=Cultural%20and%20historical%20travel%20accounts,to%20ensure%20prosperity%20is%20shared

In conclusion,

The words of the Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz provide a fitting end to a report that is as optimistic as it is cautionary. They are a reminder of the complexity of heritage, but also of its intuitive appeal as a manifestation of what we, in our hearts, recognize as the essence of who we are. The heritage of Arab cities reminds us that we are part of a region that, despite its differences, is essentially the same from 'Ocean to Gulf'. This is what makes the "unending process" of taking care of our urban heritage worth the effort.



> "By affirming that what not even time can cancel is the genius loci, I want to underscore that every place possesses its own particular identity and this is the proper task of man to comprehend that identity and take care of it, through a process that evidently will never come to an end."
>
> -Christian Norberg-Schulz (quoted in UNESCO, 2015)

Image: As-Salt, Jordan
Source: Rami Daher | TURATH: Architecture and Urban Design Programme, UNESCO



Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia
Source: Mansour Mohsen | Arab Urban Development Institute 'Live the City' Photography Competition



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Image: Salma Yemen
Source: jovannig / Shutterstock

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