



Euromed Heritage التراث الأوروبي المتوسطي

Rabat Workshop (Morocco)

December 8 – 9, 2009

General Synthesis

Prepared by Rami Daher

Introduction

(Evolution of Concepts: Integrated Conservation and Urban Rehabilitation)

Today, and especially with the popularity of concepts of cultural diversity and sustainable development; urban rehabilitation is increasingly becoming a major concern and high on the social agendas of many cities all over the World. Heritage conservation theories and concepts witnessed an expansion in the definition of heritage since the beginning of the 20th century in terms of type, scale, and time frame. In terms of type, gradually, experts are becoming concerned with the "ordinary" and moderate works of art and architecture and not only with palaces, churches and mosques. In terms of scale, the attention progressed from valuing isolated monuments to addressing whole areas and urban neighborhoods. And finally in terms of time frame, we are paying attention to the more recent heritage sites and locations (e.g., heritage of *Modernity*).

The evolution of concepts of urban rehabilitation emerged in the 60s and 70s when the idea of integrated conservation, centering on addressing larger areas of historic cities and involving the local communities in the process, were starting to be practiced by several city organizations and urban heritage experts. Regulations concerning integrated conservation appeared in many European countries towards the 60s. For example, the emergence of *Protected Sectors* appeared in France with the putting forward of the *Malraux Law*, hence several urban quarters were protected such as *Le Marais* in *Paris*. Around the same time, Britain embraced the idea of *conservation areas* where also rural conservation became a priority.

The 1980s was instrumental in the way how urban rehabilitation was considered a fundamental component of urban and local development policies. The challenge became to incorporate and infuse urban rehabilitation and local development. The 1990s were crucial for the development of urban rehabilitation in the way how planners and environmentalists confirmed the urgent need to apply the principles of sustainable development in the context of spatial planning strategies within historic urban neighborhoods. Around the year 2000, and with the rising significance of cultural diversity and the celebration of urban culture, the urgency and importance of urban rehabilitation is taking on new grounds and meanings, specially how urban heritage and through rehabilitation could contribute to addressing the increasing demand for housing.



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Problems Facing Historic City Cores in the Southern Mediterranean Region:

Historic city cores and old urban neighborhoods encounter various challenges and face obstacles that stand in the way of implementing a more integrated urban rehabilitation process. First, there is a crucial need for a critical definition and appreciation of the urban heritage. Second, there is a lack of incorporating urban heritage conservation and management into planning processes; in addition there is a lack of leadership in urban conservation and rehabilitation. Even though, in many contexts, urban heritage regulations and laws do exist; yet, implementation falls short from achieving the desired outcomes. It is very obvious that several areas are not only suffering from deterioration, structural decay, and neglect, but the ones that do receive attention in the form of culturally-led urban rehabilitation do encounter different levels of gentrification and hence losing their functional and social diversity.

Critical Observations Regarding the Implementation of Urban Rehabilitation in the Southern Mediterranean Region

The following are several observations regarding the dynamics and politics of implementing urban rehabilitation in the Southern Mediterranean Region.

Observation 1: The importance of conducting preliminary studies prior to any urban rehabilitation efforts addressing significance assessment, area definition, and place understanding (identification of various place narratives). This very preliminary diagnosis and assessment should also address researching the local, financial, and management contexts in addition to typological and typo-morphological analysis for the urban architecture understudy in addition to accessing various place data (e.g., planning, socio-economic, demographic, and archival data). Achieving such an objective is different in the partner countries where obstacles center on the confidentiality of data, a lack of archiving culture, and the poor dissemination of analysis and studies on historic areas.

Observation 2: Involvement of heritage-minded and well-educated individuals in urban rehabilitation Projects through the proper coordination between donor agencies and local experts (the creative class) and powers (Municipalities). In several successful examples of urban rehabilitation (e.g. *Aleppo*, Syria and *Hebron*, Palestine), and after a critical evaluation, one realizes that the success of such endeavors can be sometimes credited to only certain passionate individuals who could make a big difference in any project.

Observation 3: Avoid the surfacing of urban rehabilitation projects that ends up in simply *urban cosmetics*. During the past decade several historic city cores (e.g., *Jerash*, *Kerak*, *Salt*, and *Madaba*, Jordan and *Byblos*, *Sidon*, *Tyre*, and *Tripoli*,



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Lebanon) had witnessed several donor agencies funded urban rehabilitation projects that ended up in simply addressing urban furniture, paving of tourist trails and general *urban cosmetics*. In most cases these projects never addressed genuine community involvement, capacity building, or actual conservation of the decayed urban fabric while millions of dollars were registered as debts for these countries.

Observation 4: Avoid the disappearance of functional and social diversity in Historic inner city cores which is becoming an outcome of many urban rehabilitation projects within historic neighborhoods for purposes of tourism-led functions and entertainment in places like *Damascus*, Syria, *Beirut*, Lebanon, and *Amman*, Jordan). While historic adaptations into restaurants, boutique hotels, and cafes do inject the tourism industry with new forms of cultural tourism, one has to be careful that many of these rehabilitated places are suffering from severe cases of gentrification. The challenge today, and through a more balanced urban rehabilitation plan, is to sustain social and functional diversity within these areas (mainly residential activities). Furthermore, the challenge today is to figure out how could urban rehabilitation contribute to solving the problem of demand for housing (e.g., mostly social housing) where it could be rehabilitated and created in old neighborhoods contributing to diversified urban environment and a more workable infrastructure.

Observation 5: Broaden the definition of urban heritage to include, for example, the heritage of Modernity which has been mostly neglected. The 1940-60s represent an interesting era for further investigation in terms of understanding and appreciating this most distinctive heritage manifested in cinema houses, banks, villas, and commercial areas to mention a few of the numerous examples that embraced *Modernity*.

Observation 6: Whenever we talk about historic city cores in the Arab World, most of times, the discourse is influenced by a *Orientalist* view on the Arab City. This *Orientalist* discourse marginalizes the non-conventional Arab City such as *Amman*, Jordan, *Manama*, Bahrain, and *Mascat*, Oman. There has to emerge critical urban studies about these non-typical examples and especially in terms of urban rehabilitation and understanding of their specific urban heritage and culture.

Observation 7: Address and implement genuine capacity building programs that goes beyond technical spheres of documentation and repair; but rather venture more into understanding of urban heritage and culture, urban heritage theory, and awareness building targeting decision makers and heritage minded individuals.

Observation 8: Development and adoption of both planning/heritage tools in addition to financial tools that are suitable for each context. This should be coupled with coordination and mediation processes between various involved agencies and individuals in the urban rehabilitation process, the linking of the heritage and planning



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laws with the broader legislative context within each country, and finally addressing the crucial issue of public space management.

Observation 9: Acknowledge and incorporate the role of urban activists, agents, and philanthropists in creative demonstrational projects at the scale of urban rehabilitation and historic building adaptation (e.g., *Bank Audi* in *Sidon*, Lebanon; *Khaled Shouman Foundation* in *Amman*, Jordan; others).

Observation 10: Be very careful and critical towards recent neo-liberal urban restructuring and various initiatives that even if these initiatives promote "conservation" and "environmental protection;" they are leading to more exclusive spaces in the City and to major displacement of the poorer populations from historic areas in favor of an extremely exclusive urban environment targeting the upper middle class, and thus creating more segregation and alienation within Cities. Examples are numerous and include downtown *Beirut*, Lebanon, certain urban rehabilitation projects in *Amman*, Jordan, to mention a few.