



Revitalizing the Old City

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Introduction

Since 1995, following the discriminatory Israeli policy of stepped-up ID confiscation against Arab citizens of Jerusalem, the city has witnessed an influx of Jerusalem ID holders returning to live in the city so as not to lose their IDs. The original and rightful residents of Jerusalem who live

and work in the outskirts or nearby areas of Jerusalem continue to be under threat of losing their IDs and their rights in the city as the Israeli Authorities contrive to invent and implement various laws to deny them these rights.

This sudden population increase has resulted in housing shortages for the lower income groups, who cannot afford the high rents and taxes of more affluent areas in East Jerusalem. The difficulties and obstacles the Palestinians face in obtaining building permits within the municipal boundaries as defined by the occupation authorities aggravate the shortage.

Consequently, thousands of Jerusalem ID holders are seeking shelter in the Old City where they can stay with relatives, rent cheaply, or even live as squatters in empty or abandoned historic buildings and monuments within the city walls.

There are no accurate statistics to show the number of people who have moved back to live in Jerusalem, but it is evident that the Israeli policy has backfired and resulted in an increase rather than a decrease in the Palestinian population of Jerusalem.

This increase, however, has intensified demand for accommodation and basic services. This demand has resulted in unplanned vertical and horizontal expansions and additions to existing buildings implemented by the residents without technical guidance or supervision. This trend is affecting the physical shape and condition of the buildings and in many cases inflicting irreparable damage to the historic and cultural value of Old City buildings.

Individual, unplanned intervention to adapt historic buildings to new uses is a universal phenomenon and not confined to the Old City of Jerusalem or historic towns in Palestine and other Arab countries. Nevertheless, the local prevalence of the phenomenon means that local professionals must join in the debate regarding the future of historic towns and buildings. During the second half of the twentieth century, many experts and organizations in the field of conservation began to be concerned about the future of cultural heritage sites within the context of new technological advances and the subsequent changeover to modern functions, priorities, and needs.

The question that they often asked is how should professionals or users adapt buildings, streets, and historic elements to receive and house new functions and services? How can they protect the shapes and splendid architectural styles of historic buildings while improving their capacity to provide modern functions and satisfy present needs?

Other questions concern what type of preservation is required for each building, what level of intervention is needed, and what limitations or restrictions should be placed on such intervention. There is also a need to consider the physical as well as the economic aspects of adaptive re-use before professional decisions for intervention are made.

This paper focuses on these general issues of adaptive re-use of historic buildings and cities as they relate to the specific case of the Old City of Jerusalem. In particular, it looks at the strategies adopted by the Technical Office of the Old

City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program (OCJRP) to meet the specific challenges posed by the Old City. Obviously, any revitalization efforts must address not only complex social, economic, and technical issues but also problems to do with the city's unique historical, religious, and political status.

The Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program

Background

In 1995, the Technical Office of the Welfare Association was established to implement a comprehensive program for the revitalization of the Old City of Jerusalem. The program is co-funded by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Welfare Association, and other Arab and International sources.

The program has the following five main components:

- Emergency restoration, which involves immediate and limited intervention for buildings that have structural and physical problems or that are targeted politically.
- Total restoration, which involves a more comprehensive approach to restore residential areas and historic monuments and to rehabilitate their services. This component includes housing renewal and adaptive re-use (see figs. 1 and 2).
- Revitalization plan for the Old City based on extensive sectoral studies and physical and historic surveys.
- Training program in conservation for professionals, contractors, and craftsmen.
- Community outreach program to ensure the participation of city users in defining their needs and priorities and to

promote public awareness of the value of cultural heritage preservation.

The Technical Office's small team gained diverse and extensive experience through the work implemented in the Old City in the last five years. The studies and surveys carried out by the planning team during the preparation of the Revitalization Plan enhanced the team's knowledge of the city and its priorities. The team coordinates with the community, local institutions, and NGOs acting in the Old City, which helps to improve performance and facilitate work.

Preservation and Revitalization of Historic Areas

Experience suggests the need for a comprehensive approach to preserving historic areas or centers that are considered part of the cultural heritage. A comprehensive approach means considering all issues related to preservation including restoration, housing renewal, adaptive re-use, rehabilitation of services, and social and economic regeneration to improve living conditions and standards, thus revitalizing a whole city or quarter.

To understand the revitalization process and what is involved, we need to understand the nature and characteristics of historic cities and to be able to analyze the various factors that have affected and shaped their development through history.

Such factors are both constant and variable. On the one hand, cities develop within the limits of constant physical factors such as location, topography, climate, and available local materials. On the other hand, variable social, economic,



Before Restoration



After Restoration

Fig. 1. Restoration work done on the Hosh al-Hillu. A hosh is a residential complex with a number of families living in it. The hosh traditionally receives its name from the family that is either the main tenant or trustee of the property, in this case the al-Hillu family. In this complex, located off Tariq al-Silsila, there are nine families consisting of a total of eighty people. Before the renovation, the complex lacked proper lighting, garbage disposal, and sewage. Moreover, the many additions made over the years were done in a haphazard way without any consultation.

and political needs and priorities as well as technological and security developments continue to transform the shape of cities over time.

In the course of history, cities change. From defensive bastions, some become commercial centers. From vibrant cultural and religious cities, others become dormitories and dilapidated residential areas and slums. As cities shrink and expand, as they change color, texture, and shape according to external and internal factors over centuries, they also develop their common and special characteristics.

Generally, the process that reshapes cities is affected by three main influences:

- Incremental and sporadic development through limited repair and rehabilitation projects, carried out according to individual needs.
- Sudden major events, whether natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods or human-made ones such as wars or civil disturbances. Such contingencies require

intensive redevelopment and reconstruction during a short period of time.

- Carefully planned initiatives by local and central authorities for a comprehensive program covering all sectors related to development of the city while focusing on preservation. This is a fairly recent practice.

Urban Renewal

Regeneration of inner cities and revitalization of historic centers have become part of the overall urban development program for towns, cities, and urban centers worldwide. To achieve sustainability, planners should take into consideration the long-term potential of the city, which includes all its assets and cultural resources.

Revitalization of these areas has become an integral part of the urban and economic development process. A dynamic and progressive approach is required to adapt historic buildings and monuments for modern uses and facilities while preserving



Before Restoration



After Restoration

Fig. 2. Adaptive re-use of Hab Rumman mill located in the Bab Hutta neighborhood. The Hab Rumman flour mill was built in the nineteenth century as a family waqf property of the Hab Rumman family. In the twentieth century it was converted to a stable and then abandoned for over forty years. The restoration work has converted it to a computer center for al-Quds University.

their cultural value. To integrate urban renewal of historic areas into the urban planning of a city, special attention should be paid to investigating and analyzing these areas before incorporating them into the overall development plans for the modern city.

Adaptive Re-use of Historic Buildings

Adaptive re-use is not confined to individual buildings, but can encompass a whole quarter or neighborhood. Due to legal, political, or economic constraints, however, it is not always possible to pre-plan the overall development of a historic city or neighborhood. It is easier to transform the use of one building rather than a whole block, and of one block rather than a whole street. Nevertheless, it is important to prepare an overall plan and to define the priorities before starting adaptive re-use and rehabilitation programs, regardless of their size and extent.

It is worth remembering that adaptive re-use is not a modern notion. Buildings have

changed hands and uses over centuries, and still do according to needs and trends and following external and internal factors. The remaining historic buildings and monuments of our heritage stand witness today to the fact that the change in their use did not hinder their survival.

The Revitalization of the Old City of Jerusalem through Adaptive Re-use of its Historic Buildings

The Old City of Jerusalem was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981 and listed as a "World Heritage Site in Danger" in 1982. The Old City is suffering from the deterioration of the social, economic, and housing conditions of its Palestinian residents as well as the deterioration of the physical condition of its buildings, monuments, and utilities. At the same time, there is a systematic and organized campaign by extremist Israeli settler groups to displace the Palestinian population in the Old City, undertaken with the covert and overt support of the Israeli government. In

addition to the political implication of these attempts, such actions pose a direct and indirect threat to the cultural identity and architectural characteristics of the Old City.

Over the years a number of ideas and proposals have been put forward by various Palestinian organizations aimed at halting the deterioration of the physical condition of the Old City and protecting its identity. A number of projects have also been implemented to restore and rehabilitate houses and major historical and religious monuments, to preserve the Old City's cultural assets, and to protect its residents and institutions.

A number of local, community-based organizations and groups have contributed to this heroic effort, each according to their technical and financial resources. However, the various efforts were not carried out according to a carefully studied plan that takes into consideration the different priorities for the development of the Old City and the many dimensions of its needs and problems. The attempts to restore buildings and houses were not always carried out with the appropriate technical skills or according to international standards and conventions for the preservation of cultural heritage.

The OCJRP has tried to address these problems. A number of areas were selected for both emergency and for total restoration according to special criteria. The criteria were developed after an extensive pilot survey of one of the most vulnerable areas in the Old City. This area known as Aqabat al-Khaldiyyeh suffers from economic and social deprivation and is targeted by extreme settler groups as a result of its

proximity to al-Haram al-Sharif and the Jewish Quarter. The findings of the physical, economic, demographic, and social surveys in this area indicated the need to prepare a comprehensive plan for the revitalization of the Old City. The plan is now completed and will be published this year. It is expected that the plan will create a scientific basis and coherent road map for intervention and required action to improve the living conditions in the Old City, regenerate the economy, upgrade housing and services, and protect the City's identity and heritage.

Through the surveys and studies carried out while preparing the revitalization plan and as a result of the experience accumulated from restoration and rehabilitation projects implemented in the Old City, the Technical Office has developed better understanding of how the city works and what the main factors are shaping its future. Most importantly, the team has become more involved with the community and local institutions that facilitate the implementation process.

The urban fabric of the Old City of Jerusalem is still generally intact in spite of years of neglect, natural and human-made disasters, and unplanned and sometimes unwelcome change of use. Many old *madrasas* (schools) have been converted to residences, mausoleums to houses, and palaces to schools and warehouses (see fig. 3). The structures of these buildings are generally sound, and although stone walls and façades have deteriorated due to dampness, humidity, and pollution, most buildings can be salvaged with the proper care and appropriate restoration techniques.



Before Restoration



After Restoration

Fig. 3. The Dar al-Aytam al-Islamiyyah, located between the neighborhoods of Aqabat al-Takkiya and Aqabat al-Saraya, is a Mamluk and Ottoman complex that has developed over 600 years. In 1922 it was made into an orphanage and school and is now used as an orphanage, an industrial school, and regular school. As late as the 1930s and 40s, it was financially self-sustaining through income from a furniture shop, a bookbinding shop, and a print shop.

The worst cases were found in the buildings that had been abandoned or remained unused for a long time.

It is evident that the continued use of the building (whether suitable or unsuitable, planned or arbitrary) allows for some form of maintenance and for ventilation and heating, which helps in protecting the building. While not ideal, this situation is far from disastrous.

The building stock that belongs to certain institutions (Moslem or Christian Waqf) has fared better in terms of quality of restoration work, as professionals generally have carried it out. However, it remains true that most of the repair and restoration work in the city is executed by users without technical guidance and supervision. In view of this, agencies involved in the revitalization process must ask what can be done to improve the quality of work carried out by the informal sector.

While one cannot control what others do

in the absence of Palestinian legislative and executive authority in Jerusalem, it is important to find the means to address the issue of "informal restoration." Public awareness can be improved through media campaigns, community participation in the decision-making process, and special training programs.

Accepting and welcoming the fact that people will continue to use historic buildings as places of residence, work, and recreation, the professional should direct that process and provide the community with the tools that will allow it to use these buildings without abusing them.

Experience has shown us that when people need a home desperately they will take whatever space is available to them and transform it to domestic purposes. When a family needs an extra room or toilet, they add it. The professional's role is to assist them in obtaining what they need without damaging the valuable container of that function.

Restoration and rehabilitation work in the

Old City of Jerusalem challenges the professional to preserve a delicate balance. On the one hand, there is the goal of preserving the city's heritage to the highest standards and protecting it from the user's abuse. On the other, there is the goal of encouraging residents to stay in the Old City at any cost.

Conclusion

Under normal circumstances it is difficult for any professional dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage to achieve this balance between protecting heritage and meeting modern needs and social priorities in historic buildings and towns. In the case of the Old City, however, the difficulties are compounded. For the heritage in need of preservation represents a whole nation's memory, history, and destiny. At the same time, the residents need not only daily necessities but also the tools that will enable them to defend their human rights and protect their identity and existence.

Today, in the Old City of Jerusalem, the resident, the user, the shopkeeper, the laborer, and the craftsman are united in their fight to maintain their residence and to protect their heritage. It is therefore imperative that professionals in this field should match these sacrifices by improving the quality of their work and joining in this battle of survival.

Our occupier implemented his "plan"—albeit wrongly, inhumanely, and unjustly—by relying on education, knowledge, and precision. It is our duty—we the wronged party—to use all our resources and expertise to fight this "plan" by the strength of our knowledge and to perform our duties

with skill and dedication.

Palestinians in Jerusalem have chosen to stay in spite of all the pressures and to persevere in spite of all the attempts to displace us. The picture may look bleak and the struggle too difficult to win, but every day brings new reasons for hope, new stories of steadfastness, resistance, and perseverance within the Old City walls, where Palestinians remain as deeply rooted as ever.

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