

Urban Conservation and Sustainability; Cases from Historic Cities in the Gulf and North Africa

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Abstract

Historic cities in the Gulf and North Africa are struggling to survive in rapidly emerging global environments. While many significant historic centers and districts are often demolished to pave way for alien environments, others just die out of neglect and dilapidation. When a few of them have survived, they face other issues such as, overcrowding, dilapidation and disrepair making them look like “urban slums” in the heart of the main cities. This situation raises important questions; what should be the future of these historic centers? Will they be demolished to provide more space for more ambitious growth or can they be conserved and sustained for present and future generations? Will the historic city, the heart of urban life and the main protector of our identities, survive and maintain its place in the emerging global city of today and tomorrow? Tensions over land use, changes in the nature of local economies, and the continued consumption of historic assets place considerable pressures on those distinctive values that make historic cities attractive places in which to visit, live and work. Such pressures have brought into focus the extent to which sustainable development policies can participate in managing rapid change in historic cities. This paper explores some of the conceptual issues raised by the sustainability/historic city discourse, and examines the degree to which sustainable development policy is emerging in the historic cities of the Gulf and North Africa.

In order to place this discussion and debate in a real context, two case studies will be explored from the Gulf and North Africa; respectively old Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, and the Casbah of Algiers in Algeria. These historic cities present clear experiences of dealing with urban conservation within their surrounding global environments. A comparative analysis between these two cases attempts to uncover the successes and weaknesses of each experience. Furthermore, this will set the ground to establish a number of guidelines to ensure “a future of the past” for these historic cities to survive and withstand the pressures of the globalization trends.



1. Introduction

Historic urban centres are the nuclei of the cities in the Arab World; they are the locus of residential, economic and cultural activities, in dense built-up areas. They are the containers of major monuments and buildings of architectural and historic significance, and they reflect the identity of the city. The marked physical deterioration of these centres has greatly mitigated the identity of the Arab city. Therefore, they need a particular attention to survive under the waves of the current globalisation era.

During the last 40-50 years the attention of most governments in the Arab world has been focused on creating the new. Most of the citizens and politicians were indoctrinated with the ideas that everything industrial was to be equated with progress and modernization. Anything old or in a traditional style was considered of little value and was left to decay and disrepair. Historic buildings were seen as signs of poverty, underdevelopment and misery that should be erased. Historic centers were often dilapidated and overpopulated and usually labeled as slums. They were either wiped out by a bulldozer or replaced by new modern developments.

Today, the requirements of modern life coupled with rapid development have been major influences in the destruction of our urban heritage. The relationship between heritage conservation and economic development is usually a complex matter to tackle. In most Arab countries modernization has been put at the ultimate expense of local social and cultural values. The latter have been dramatically erased and compromised for the sake of catching up to the world of modernization. In Algiers, out of 1,200 historic dwellings only 800 have survived and this number is continuously decreasing.

Through the conservation movement, citizens have tried to maintain a sense of a place, identity and continuity by saving what remained from their cultural heritage (Feilden, 1985). Large scale, inhuman building complexes and poor building technology have turned the public against these destructive influences. Conservation is a process involving the restoration of built heritage along with the cultural processes, which is fundamental for sustainable development.

In order to discuss the issue of sustainability in historic areas; a case study approach has been chosen as the main method for investigation and analysis. This approach provides a platform to understand how different historic cities tackled their problems of conservation; it is appropriate for detailed examination of specific cases which are under different circumstances. This makes it possible to see whether the same problems are being faced in different contexts, what are the similarities and differences and why? In addition, how should the urban conservation issue be approached in each case? A comparison and contrast



analysis can help achieve responses and explanations (Groat. Linda & Wang. David, 2002: 347-351).



Fig.1. Shows the Casbah of Algiers as an urban slum, in the heart of the city of Algiers.

Algiers and Jeddah present significant cases, in that they provide opportunities for comparison and contrast. The empirical investigation is based on fieldwork; extensive interviews held with the local heritage players, the different heritage associations and the larger community. In certain cases, follow up interviews and discussions were carried out through email and by phone.

2. The Paradox of Conservation and Development

Urban conservation is about improving and upgrading life of people in historic areas and not just a matter of restoring bricks and mortar. Its central aim is to enhance the city's cultural identity and sense of place while not undermining its inhabitants' daily needs. Urban conservation policies are usually area based, through the designation of conservation areas. Conservation of an historic urban centre is not an isolated and individual project; it includes a series of projects, which are physical, social and cultural (Orbasli, 2000: 18).

When the economic and financial conditions are prosperous through trade, job increase, general growth and wealth, people tend to improve their living conditions. People prefer to move out of neglected and impractical buildings to more comfortable amenities. The historic dwellings left behind are either demolished and replaced by modern structures or just left for the poor who cannot look after them. Eventually, they fall into decay and disrepair, to start vanishing through time.

In Algiers and Jeddah, for the sake of progress, and fast modernization,



buildings flourished in and around historic areas, without any link with the local cultural values and natural conditions. In these new hybrid environments, people cannot identify themselves and cannot be identified; they have become strangers in their own localities. Townscapes should be preserved for their role in everyday life rather than for their artistic or historic value only (Hubbard, 1993). Therefore, the integration of cultural and economic activities in historic areas will contribute to their sustainability while strengthening their distinctiveness.

New developments in the social and technological field have their merits and contribute to the quality of present-day life. This is to stress that a marriage between conservation and development may be capable of sustaining and improving the quality of life in our historic cities. New developments should be rejected, only if they form a threat to the existing historic townscape. Change urges a strong relationship with the past to integrate and harmonise old and new, rather than broadening the gap between them.

The main reasons and arguments to conserve urban heritage can be classified in two categories. First, urban heritage helps forge national identities, which enable people to define who they are and where they are. Secondly, urban heritage may have assumed economic importance, as people increasingly want to reuse their historic areas and buildings as resources for trade and tourism to increase their income. Urban conservation carries two main benefits with it: identity and utility, which refer respectively to conservation and development. A sense of identity needs to be enhanced to withstand the radical effects produced by rapid growth and change. Utility keeps the heritage resource sustainable by an adequate adaptive reuse program.

Adaptive reuse is a major vehicle of sustainable development in historic areas. This is because an appropriate functional usage in historic centres improves the maintenance of the area, delays its decay and maintains its life. Moreover, the restoration of the physical fabric alone cannot help conserve its meaning, but its usage and function which can withstand the various pressures of redevelopment. The continuous functioning of these areas makes them dynamic parts of the present urban environment.

There is a need to ensure an economic viability for a historic resource to survive. For instance, housing, offices, restaurants, tourism, commerce, crafts and small workshops, are various ways of adaptive reuse. While these activities give the opportunity for local inhabitants and visitors to experience a living heritage, they generate income by which the resource can be sustained. In addition to the already established commerce, crafts and trade. Heritage tourism can become a thriving heritage 'industry', especially in redundant historic cities



where economy is declining such as the Casbah of Algiers.

3. Urban Conservation and Sustainability

What is sustainable development? The 1987 report “Our Common Future” from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) set forth the most widely used definition of the concept: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The Brundland Commission lists food, water, clothes, shelter, work, energy and hygiene as examples of what is termed ‘basic needs’ (Brundland Commission, 1987: 8 & 44).

In a progressively competitive global market where spatial and temporal barriers are disappearing, the identity of a place – its character, history, buildings, culture and distinctiveness – becomes crucial (Boussaa, 2003). With a rapidly globalizing flow of resources, information technologies and know-how, the distinctiveness of a specific historic city assumes greater significance in attracting both financial and human forms of investment (Urry, 1995). During recent years, new policy mechanisms have emerged to reconcile the conflicting demands of conservation and development by applying sustainable development policies to minimise any further losses in cultural heritage resources (Strange, 1997: 229).

Sustainable development is a key aspect of local development and planning discourse. Recent interest in the sustainability of historic cities reveals a more complex picture than that of a development process. Rather, what is being witnessed is the rise of development agendas related to the desire for local policy makers to make historic cities look different from each other. This will enhance their uniqueness and distinctiveness, which can be used as a catalyst for the pursuit of economic growth through tourism.

In old cities and centers, history and heritage have become the dynamic assets that combine the local and the global. They establish the local specificity and distinctiveness so attractive to a global tourist market. This local-global dimension of exchange contributes to explain why the local heritage players seek a competitive advantage over similarly historic areas. Cities that demonstrate through promotion and marketing their historical richness are more appealing to those with capital seeking attractive locations, especially for visitors and tourists (Strange, 1997).

In many historic cities, a ‘local fatigue’ may result when over-consuming local infrastructure, historic buildings versus a demand on land, growing social conflict between visitors and local inhabitants, as well as the environmental impact of tourism (Glasson & al, 1995). These tensions between the demands



for development and conservation in historic cities have raised the issue of introducing sustainable development policies to counter the consequences of diminishing resources. Such an interpretation implies that there are limits to growth that must not be breached within a historic city as stated by Jacobs:

“A limit to the amount of development which an area can take over time, determined by its environmental characteristics...[and]...that if development exceeds a particular level, the loss of or damage to these features [environmental characteristics] will be unsustainable or otherwise unacceptable, and should therefore not be permitted” (Jacobs, 1997: 6).

Historic cities have unique characteristics that can guarantee their sustainability. On one hand this implies that development in these historic cores should be limited, while on the other hand the issue of maintaining local economic vitality is essential. Most of heritage players recognize that such places cannot reproduce themselves without some kind of intervention. These are meant to regulate and manage the physical and social fabric upon whom their local identity and economic success is predicated. In this way, it is possible for a range of sustainable development approaches to co-exist within and between cities- those which may be growth limiting, growth enhancing, or an integration of both (Strange, 1999).

Sustainable development can be seen today as a powerful motivation for urban conservation planning. Basically, it would consist of a process of urban development based on the constant reuse of existing built resources, associated with a low input of energy for adaptation to new requirements conceived in society. It is also viewed as a process founded in the local culture, in an equitable distribution of urban services, the use of democratic principles of management, and the regeneration of traditional social values and practices.

Cultural heritage is understood as a non-renewable resource, it encompasses some of the most important cultural values of society (identity, memory, self-consciousness and artistry). It is an asset capable of attributing value to new things through the creation of new processes based on established values. Conservation is the creative use and re-use of heritage buildings. It involves using the functional and economic values, which can usually be rehabilitated at far below the cost of demolishing, and rebuilding from scratch. From the sustainable approach, the city is understood to be a unique ensemble that needs to be conserved in its historical integrity. This means understanding the city as a dynamic process, a structure in permanent and continuous change.

Adaptive reuse is a phenomenon which has great significance, not only because



a symbiotic functional usage in historic buildings steps up the maintenance of the structure and as such delays its decay, but also because the resultant monitoring prevents cases of vandalism and scavenging of material heritage as is seen in buildings that are deserted and disused. The importance of integrating economic and cultural activity in historical areas cannot be overemphasized. Buildings represent such a great economic, social and cultural investment that it would be unwise for the community to waste. However, conservation does not mean that towns and villages should remain unchanged. Well, they will not according to Aldo Rossi (Rossi, 1982).

“The dynamic process of the city tends more to evolution than preservation, and that in evolution monuments are not only preserved but continuously presented as propelling elements of development.”

For a historic city to be sustainable, it must allow adjustment as circumstances change. This will enable historic centres to stay alive and not become fossilized “museums”. In this way there is no choice, and according to Dix “when talking about true conservation, it is the wise use of the resources of our environment, respecting but not copying the past: incorporating new and old to the best advantage” (Dix, 1995: 268). Historic urban centres represent a great economic, social and cultural investment that it would be unwise for the community to waste.

Housing is another key element in revitalising and bringing back to life a historic area. Any conservation approach should envisage maintaining a permanent resident population. This can be achieved by rehabilitating the existing dwellings, and providing public services and security. Any attempt to exclude housing from any conservation programme will mean the death of the historic centre or district.

4. Historic Cities and Sustainable Tourism

Recently, a new mode of development emerged in a way to reuse and develop historic cities and districts for tourism. To achieve this, there is a need to make funds available by developing heritage areas and buildings for tourism. Meanwhile and according to Orbasli “Tourism may become an important contributor to the economic realisation of a project, but there is the delicate balance between tourism being a support to conservation and tourism becoming a reason for conservation” (Orbasli, 2000: 12). While the former can be beneficial to conserve more historic sites, the latter may encourage the proliferation of inauthentic and fake heritage attractions. This may result in its own inhabitants starting to lose their pride, and being tempted to desert their historic centres.

Many cultural sites are being compromised because local authorities are not



aware of the value for conserving them. Developing historic areas for tourism and commerce requires the transformation of conservation from a political, cultural and social aspect to that of economic development. As Kuban points out:

“Tourism is a twentieth century phenomenon. You cannot put it aside. One must accept it as a phenomenon that exists, good or not so good. Millions of people travel. One cannot stop them. They will come, so let them be used as a source of development” (Kuban, 1978) cited in (Orbasli, 2000: 3).

Adaptive reuse of existing heritage buildings; residential, workshops, or public amenities for tourism may attract a large number of tourists which can strain existing systems of sewage, water and power services. The flow of visitors, if not well regulated can eventually disrupt local lifestyles. Moreover, there are cases where the tourists' tastes and habits have proved offensive to local population. In fear of such problems, the influx of tourists may not be welcomed by local residents and the facilities favoured by them may be different from those needed by the host community (Law, 1992: 605). Therefore, there is a need to apply a cautious approach, which does not undermine the local inhabitants' needs when developing tourism in historic areas.

At destination areas, tourism may produce a physical transformation through hotel and infrastructure development. Tourists need hotels and usually prefer to stay in modern comfort, close to the city centre. The result is that, in many historic cities such as Jeddah new hotels have sprung up in the middle of old Jeddah. High-rise buildings dominate and overshadow the existing low-rise townscape. For example, the Ahlia Bank in Jeddah rises adjacent to old Jeddah, with a massive volume of steel and glass contrasting and overpowering the surrounding low-rise coral stone structures.

Trade patterns in historic towns are changing quickly; small workshops and crafts are being displaced because they are seen as too noisy and unsanitary to be left in the heart of cities, which prepare to welcome tourists. In many historic cities, local crafts and activities are being replaced by “souvenirs” and “coffee” shops because these kinds of shops generate more income. Therefore, a strict management of heritage tourism should be established in order to maintain a balance between preserving local cultural heritage while allowing the city's economy to thrive and prosper.

The financial input that tourism can deliver to host communities can be the incentive for conservation work. Besides housing and other activities, heritage tourism can be a major catalyst of sustainable development, for historic centres.



Over-emphasis on the tourist function creates pressures for new services and associated development, sometimes to the detriment of the local population, and can lead to damage significant cultural assets. It is therefore important for the tourism capacity to be carefully managed and controlled in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, a strong management is needed to avoid the expansion of inauthentic structures, which can further erode the character of the historic centre that visitors have come to gaze.



Fig.2. View of the high-rise building of Al Ahli Bank adjacent to old Jeddah.

Sustainable development in historic centres is a delicate balance between creating attractive facilities for visitors while not undermining the local needs of the host community. Traditional souks and bazaars struggle to survive with the growing popularity of the shopping mall. Compared to souks, shopping malls are covered, air conditioned and provide enough parking areas and entertainment facilities for children. However, there is a need to sustain life of the souks by ensuring a permanent reuse program; while enhancing the inner environment by introducing appropriate shading and ventilation devices.

5. Conservation of Al Balad in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, the discovery of oil in 1936, and the beginning of its exportation in 1938 brought about an unprecedented pace of change. Economic changes resulting from the oil boom of 1973 joined with rapid development created new physical environments in Jeddah. As a cosmopolitan city, Jeddah



witnessed a colossal urban growth within a very short time span. While this was beneficial to the local population as it improved their standard of living, it was implemented at the expense of many segments of the city's cultural heritage.

The rush to modernise Jeddah and provide its citizens with educational, commercial, health and other modern services shifted the focus of development to its suburbs. This move occurred because unrestricted growth was more easily achievable than in the old city "Al Balad". The greatest challenge was how to maintain what survived from the past, the essence of the city's cultural identity while not stifling its rapid growth.

After the demolition of the city wall in 1947, Jeddah experienced a colossal rapid urban growth. The size of the city increased from 1.5 km² in 1947 to reach 1,200 km² in 1998, representing an expansion of 800 times in about 50 years. The massive destruction that occurred, threatened greatly the cultural identity of the city, and in order to stop this, attempts to save Al Balad started in early 1970s.

The rising price of land in Al Balad encouraged most of the owners to demolish and redevelop their houses with high-rise apartment blocks. To prevent further erosion of the historic fabric, Jeddah Municipality requested from the owners to have a building permit before undertaking any kind of repair or alterations. However, these regulations were not enforced and were rarely applied.

The municipality had to draw up strict regulations governing the historic district, to protect the remaining buildings, and to fight an enormous rise in land value. This was causing owners to tear down their old houses and build new ones. To avoid further erosion of the built heritage, in early 1970s Jeddah Municipality launched a conservation project to cover entirely Al Balad. The main intention of the project was that the peculiar qualities of Al Balad, its physical and functional characters should be sustained within the rapid waves of change and urbanisation. The municipality was aware of the hard task to limit the drift of people to the cooler suburbs outside Al Balad, by acting quickly to rehabilitate what remained of Al Balad. In this context, the conservation programme pursued two major tasks; to conserve a number of significant public and private buildings and to enhance the urban environment (Abdulac, 1986: 1).

The municipality's policy towards private owners was based on strong argumentative negotiation, rather than on legal weaponry. This is why it needed restoration models to demonstrate the value of conserving cultural heritage. In order to convince some owners of the value of the project, the municipality introduced a merchant-trader approach; it actively bargained with individual developers in an attempt to stop further erosion of the fragile fabric. Extensive



awareness efforts were launched to get the support of the rich families and the young members of Jeddah's community. Two key aspects were used to increase this awareness, the provision of efficient services such as piped water inside the old buildings, and the creation of a series of landscaped areas with plants, fountains, benches, and pavements. This contributed in enhancing the "image" of Al Balad. However, limited resources, along with the complex system of multi-ownership, made the results of these efforts insufficient to achieve a comprehensive rehabilitation of the whole area (Abu-Ghazze, 1998: 237).

The municipality offered the needed advice and a financial help was allocated for owners who wanted to restore their own houses. For instance, incentive grants amounting to 30,000 Saudi Riyals were provided for interested people, while local contractors provided the building materials needed for restoration work. However, with the new law permitting the local residents to reuse the ground floor of their houses for retail purposes, a large number of people returned and opened shops, which brought about more life to the area.

To implement the conservation plan; a merchant's palace, three town houses and a caravanserai were selected for a demonstration study. A number of rehabilitation projects were launched since 1982; these involved particularly, Jukhdar, Nassif, Ba Haroon, and Sharbatly houses. The decision of King Faysal with respect to rehabilitate Beit Nassif provided an enlightened and inspiring model for sustainability in historic areas. This was the first, major rehabilitation project in Al Balad, and when completed in 1987, it was reused as a public library. The flow of oil meant that more funds were available to restore a greater number of buildings. Another three buildings including the main Shafei mosque were rehabilitated by the municipal workers (Abdulac, 1986: 14).



Fig.3. Rehabilitation of Beit Nassif in old Jeddah.



In 1986, the municipality rehabilitated about 30 buildings, and private owners who received a municipality grant repaired about 200 houses. The restored structures were reused as public buildings, and were planned to serve as heritage landmarks for the local inhabitants and visitors. Moreover, several *souks* were revitalised, while shops and public cafeterias were reopened. Circulation of cars was also organised in order to prevent any conflicts with the safe pedestrian walkways. Despite the limits of this piecemeal strategy, Jeddah presents an interesting example of enhancing the image of the historic core through refurbishment of external façades and through beautifying the outside environment and open spaces. However, more work is needed to revive and sustain a new life in Al Balad. Following all these efforts, the local authorities are working hard to inscribe Al Balad on the UNESCO World Heritage List.



Fig.4. Reuse of the ground floor level for shops in *Souk Al Alawi* as a way of reviving Al Balad to be a thriving centre (Negada Advertising Company, 2005: 46).

Concerning the façadist approach, more concern was given to enhance the image of Al Balad, but with lesser emphasis on its sustainability. Therefore, the idea if continued will result in the creation of a lifeless open-air museum. While this is one threat, the other one comes from the desire to convert Al Balad to a large *souk*. This will force a large number of owners to transform their houses to shops, thus annihilating the original residential character and authenticity. Therefore there is a need to control changes that may occur in Al Balad. Therefore, a sustainable conservation- development approach between the two extremes, a lifeless museum and a large souk should be applied.

Engineer Sami Nawar from the Jeddah municipality considers Al Balad as a principal resource for cultural tourism development. Efforts are being made to transform Al Balad into a major tourist attraction. To encourage this trend,

recently a high national authority for tourism had been established to look after the heritage sites with the purpose of developing them for tourism. Given the resources and infrastructure of Saudi Arabia, while this was achievable, major efforts should be undertaken by the government to promote an open door policy to encourage people visit Saudi Arabia not just for performing *omra* or *hajj*, but to gaze through its rich cultural and religious heritage as well.

Old Jeddah calls for a more holistic approach than the “museum” oriented methods now implemented. Al Balad needs to be viewed firstly as a vehicle of social life for its inhabitants and secondly, as part of a living holly city of Mecca for millions of pilgrims annually from all corners of the world. To sustain Al Balad, diversity of reuse is essential while housing should remain the central activity. In addition, other restored buildings can be reused as public libraries, restaurants and hotels for pilgrims and visitors.



Fig.5. Enhancement of the urban space by paving the external sidewalks and through providing shaded areas (www.archnet.org/library/images).

6. Case of the Casbah of Algiers, Algeria

The Casbah of Algiers was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992. Since then there has been continuous degradation in this historic urban center. One of the complex problems facing the Casbah was high density, which reached a crisis point of 4,000 persons/ha in several areas. The population of the Casbah reached 70,000 people housed on an area of 50 hectares, often with 6 to 12 people in one room. In addition to high density and overpopulation, lack of services and poor sanitation has accelerated the dereliction of the Casbah. Low rents discouraged house owners from investing in the maintenance of their houses, thus leading to more dilapidation and disrepair. The present situation of



the Casbah is deteriorating rapidly; to the point it has become an “urban slum” in the heart of the capital city of Algiers.



Fig.6. Shows the Casbah at the background and the Ketchaoua Mosque at the foreground, located in the Marine quarter (www.ovpm.org/en/algeria/algiers).

The demolished structures are being replaced by new “modern” buildings, conflicting with the local traditional style and character. The lower part of the Casbah (*Basse Casbah*) in particular, is dwarfed by modern high-rise structures. The historical pattern, whereby all buildings enjoyed scenic views to the sea, has been distorted. Alien buildings, such as the high multi story parking facing the old mosque *Djemaa el Kebir* and the new music institute facing the *Bastion 23* monument have sprung up to create a hybrid environment.

Despite of all what happened, the Casbah is still historically significant and retains parts of its traditional character. The aim here is to seek an appropriate strategy to rescue this urban core from this critical situation, with the hope to retain its cultural identity and sustainability. It is important to stress that the residents of the Casbah have the right to live in a decent shelter, work and be proud of their historical setting.

The citadel was the first restoration project undertaken in the Casbah. This heritage complex encompassed the Dey Castle, the Beys castels, two mosques, gardens and annexes lying over an area of 11,000 m². Restoration work started in the late 1960s; however, it is not yet completed. Restoration of (Bastion 23) monument was the second major operation in the Casbah. This monument is an ensemble composed of three palaces, nine houses and defence batteries. It is the last testimony of the destroyed marine district and lying on an area of 4,000 m². With the help of Italian experts; restoration began in July 1988, and it is now reused as a museum. In addition to these two monuments, a number of new facilities were injected in the Casbah, namely 3 libraries, 2 kindergartens, and 16 open- air areas. Furthermore, two main streets in the Casbah (*Rue Rabah Riab*,

and *Sidi Driss Hamidouche*) were rehabilitated along with the reconstruction of five public fountains (Ministry of Culture and Communication, 1992).



Fig.7. Showing the few attempts to restore the Rue des Pêcheurs (Fishermen Street) at Bastion 23 (Ministry of Culture and Communication, 1992: 26).

A selective and piecemeal restoration was implemented in Algiers. It focused on physical repair of several monuments only, which ranged from palaces to mosques, forts and castles. The remaining houses were not given similar consideration, and this resulted in developing ‘museum areas’, in the middle of deteriorated and crumbling structures.

Unlike Jeddah, the Casbah of Algiers was not perceived as a potential resource that could have generated income to finance its conservation work, and this was another reason for inaction. Compared to Jeddah, the local authorities here did not undertake the work nor have they given any financial help for the inhabitants to repair and maintain their houses. Physical restoration was piecemeal and disparate, thus failing to arouse any confidence amongst the local community to support the work. While demolitions and collapses prevailed, no policies for sustainable development have been initiated so far.

Conservation of historic centres usually faces one significant difficulty, that of housing the existing dwellers and keeping a mixed socio-economic population. In other words, and as the common saying states: “it is easier to deal with stones than with human material”, there is little meaning in restoring historical buildings if these are not accompanied with strong social and economic efforts benefiting the local community as a whole. Social housing and heritage tourism



are only two amongst several means of intervention in historic centres. One should bear in mind that services, public safety and employment are essential conditions to sustain life in historic cities and areas.

During the last 40 years the Casbah inhabitants were marginalised and ignored to have a say in the future destiny of their quarter. It is believed, that without a strong collaboration between the inhabitants and especially the owners, the NGO's and the state players, the Casbah of Algiers cannot be sustained. The solution to the Casbah should be local and not dependent on the UNESCO experts only. It is essential to build self confidence amongst the local inhabitants, professionals, associations who believe in a sustainable development of the Casbah. Now that the Casbah is on the "World Heritage List", it should not be left to become on the "World Heritage at Risk".

7. The Historic City in the Arab World: What Future?

A selective and piecemeal restoration approach was implemented in Algiers and Jeddah. It focused on physical repair of several monuments only, which ranged from palaces to mosques, citadels and several houses. The remaining buildings were not given similar consideration, which resulted in producing 'museum areas', in the middle of deteriorated and crumbling structures.

In Jeddah, despite that, a few attempts were made to revive a number of historic buildings, such as Beit Nassif, a few souks, but more efforts are needed, to cover the entire historic centre, i.e. a shift from piecemeal to area-based conservation. This piecemeal restoration approach should give way to a more comprehensive conservation strategy that covers the entire centre and not just isolated monuments denied of their contexts, which forms one important pillar of sustainable development.

In Algiers, now that legislation, financial means and the political stability are all available, no more time should be wasted to conserve the Casbah. There is a need to tackle the issue seriously and holistically otherwise this world heritage site will vanish under our eyes; a loss to its inhabitants, local authorities and the whole nation. Lessons should be taken from the neighbouring cities of Tunis and Fez. It is astonishing to see that Morocco and Tunisia even though with lesser resources than Algeria, but were more successful in conserving their urban heritage. This concludes that money and resources are essential but not enough to secure a sustainable development for historic urban centres when there is a lack of a political support.

In Jeddah, while great efforts were made to restore the historic fabric, the



approach was more towards “museumification” and “beautification” rather than a real sustainable development. Streets were paved, shaded *sahas* with adequate urban fixtures, lights and benches were provided. All these, contributed to enhance significantly the “image” of Al Balad, but more work is needed to inject a beating heart in the area.

From the two case studies analyzed, the built environment should not be conceived as a physical entity, a functional container, an accumulation of goods and commodities, or a pattern of land uses; because it is also a setting for social actions, sensuous experiences and cultural expressions. It is well known that inhabitants are the catalysts of urban life in the city. They create and constitute the socio-cultural and economic systems, which bring life to the physical environment. It is therefore necessary to revitalize these historic cities. This should be done by conserving whole areas such as Al Balad and the Casbah together with the social life that is vital for their sustainability.

Historic cities survive by constantly renewing themselves, a small part at a time so that no stress is imposed on the citizens who strive to retain their sense of identity and continuity. The design of new buildings to fit into the environment of the historic center is a challenge requiring respect for existing street lines, a sympathetic silhouette and suitable massing. Large masses must be broken down and local volumetric values respected. There must also be suitable elevation treatment with harmonious materials that should express the local character and image. Just as they identify with the public areas, residents must identify with the character of their neighbourhoods, and in so doing; they become its principal defenders.

The character of a conservation area, a historic town center or even a single building, may be damaged or destroyed by ill-considered distant construction obstructing inward or outward views. There is often a proper and justified concern with the views of, or towards historic buildings but in many places more care should be devoted to views outwards from the historic heart of a town, where small-scale buildings of merit are often hedged in by new, over-sized and over-scale development, as can be seen in the historical centres of Al Balad and the Casbah.

Heritage players should bear in mind, that the historic towns are meaningful only if they are inhabited; it is the reflection of the past and the people who live and work there. As such, the Casbah, Al Balad and other historic centers in the Arab world must upgrade the living conditions of their inhabitants which form the basis for any sustainable development strategy. While tourism can be promoted, consuming and marketing heritage resources should be kept to the level of not threatening the identity and authenticity of the Casbah and Al Balad.



The right to work is another imperative of sustainable development; therefore there is a need to encourage the revival of the traditional crafts in both historic centres. These will give a new breath of life to the Casbah and Al Balad, and will contribute to their economic and social sustainability. This approach will enable the creation of jobs for a large number of people unemployed. Once the main heritage resources are conserved, and the cultural and economic activities enhanced, it is possible to present these heritage assets to visitors and tourists.



Fig.8. The public fountains, are a main element to encourage social sustainability.

The concept of sustainability in historic city centers is still under scrutiny. Further study and analysis is required for the application of sustainable development approaches in the Arab World. So far, no precise indicators have been developed in relation to the built heritage. Nevertheless, some general guidelines can be outlined that might be relevant to enable a sustainable future of the historic city centers in the Arab world:

- Respect community life, with specific emphasis on the local values and traditions;
- Improve the quality of life for the local inhabitants;
- Maintain identity, diversity and vitality;
- Minimize the loss of non-renewable heritage assets such as the built heritage;

- Involve different actors from both the public and private sectors in the conservation process,
- Empower community action and responsibility through participation;
- Provide an appropriate strategy for integrating conservation and development;
- Define the capacity by which change can be allowed in historic centers;
- Gentrification and authenticity issues should be taken into consideration when applying sustainable development in the historic city.

The above actions cannot be implemented without an active participation of the local inhabitants. Therefore, there is need to encourage community participation and involvement of the heritage associations and the larger community. This should be done in collaboration with the local authorities that have the duty to manage the remaining cultural heritage.

Urban conservation strategies should envisage discouraging static preservation, which attempts to “fossilize” the past and turn our historic centres and districts into open-air museums. There is a need to conserve and develop historic areas, to be thriving and bustling with life. To achieve this, sustainable development policies should be introduced through housing, tourism, trade and other economic activities.

Urban conservation with environmental concerns is also a key feature of sustainable development policy in historic cities. This implies that development in these historic cores should be limited, but not to the point of stifling their economic vitality. Most heritage players recognize that such places cannot revitalise themselves without some kind of intervention. These are meant to regulate and manage the physical and social fabric upon whom their local identity and economic success are predicated. The common policy to which these assumptions give rise must take into account four principles that determine the approaches to be adopted:

- Urban conservation, as an expression of sustainable development;
- Improvement of neighbourhood amenities: action on housing, public areas and environmental amenities (façades, streets, squares, markets and the wider townscape) which contribute to the feeling of belonging;
- Strengthening of the notion of diversity: upgrading the various central functions (shops, housing, neighbourhood and district amenities) - a balanced mix of functions helps to maintain vitality and harmony;
- Action to promote economic development of the historic centre;



We should bear in mind that what we do today will be the history of tomorrow and it is ultimately by history that we are judged. Sustaining the city through preserving its identity and life remains a vital cultural question for the present and future of our cities within the waves of globalization. The objective should be to rationalize the past with the present and future needs of the community. Historic centres provide an inheritance of the past and the product of change that society today leave its own mark on the environment for future generations. The most important issue is to have a long-term vision, plan the balance of permissible change, and ensure the rehabilitation and revitalization of the historic cities and centres in the Arab world in a sustainable manner.

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الحفاظ على التراث العمراني والاستدامة حالات دراسية من الخليج و شمال أفريقيا

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الملخص:

المدن التاريخية في الخليج و شمال أفريقيا تتصارع من أجل البقاء في ظل التأثير المتصارع للعولمة في تنمية المدن. في حين أن معظم الأحياء العريقة دمرت لتفسح المجال لبناء مباني وأحياء جديدة، فالقليل منها بقي ليتحمل ويلات الإهمال واللامبالاة ليندثر ويتلاشى عبر الزمن ومعظم هذه الأحياء التراثية أصبحت ملجأ للعماله والعائلات الفقيرة. إن هذا الوضع المأساوي لكثير من مدننا العريقة يثير تساؤلات عدة، مثلاً ما هو مستقبل هذه الأحياء العتيقة؟ وهل سيتم هدمها لاستبدالها بمباني وأحياء حديثة أو سيتم الحفاظ عليها للأجيال القادمة. هل ستلعب المدن والأحياء التاريخية دورها التاريخي للحفاظ على هوية وطابع مدننا حاضراً ومستقبلاً. النمو المتسارع لمدننا يؤثر على المباني والأحياء القديمة من حيث استعمالها سواء للنشاط التجاري أو السياحي يؤثر سلباً عليها أن لم يكن متوازناً، فقد يؤدي إلى اندثار بعض من هذه المعالم التاريخية تحت زحف التوسع العمراني. فهذه الضغوط أدت إلى البحث عن طرق إيجاد تنمية مستدامة لهذه المدن والأحياء العتيقة لتمكينه من التطور مع مراعاة لقيمها العمرانية، التاريخية والجمالية. إن هذه الورقة البحثية تحاول مناقشة محور التنمية المستدامة في الأحياء القديمة في الخليج و شمال أفريقيا. لمحاولة وضع هذا البحث في إطاره الميداني لقد تم دراسة مدينتين عريقتين منطقة البلد بجدة القديمة في الخليج وحي القصبة بمدينة الجزائر في شمال أفريقيا. لقد تعاملت كلتا المدينتين بأسلوب مختلف للحفاظ على أثرها العمراني، بمقارنة هاتين التجريبتين يمكننا تحديد نقاط القوة والضعف لكل تجربة، ويمكننا من استخلاص الدروس التي تؤدي إلى اقتراح بعض التوصيات لديمومة مدننا العريقة في خضم تأثيرات العولمة.

