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## Urban Conservation in the Islamic World The Aga Khan Trust for Culture

Given the complexity and the overwhelming size of the problem of historic cities in the Islamic world, it is not easy to cover the subject in a few pages.

However, generalising may also help bring into focus the essential issues: While the specific conditions may vary from country to country and from city to city, many common issues and problems emerge with regard to urban conservation and development. Historic cities in the Islamic world have in a way remained (or have become) villages in privileged locations, i.e., at the centre of rather anonymous, rapidly developing urban agglomerations.

Today, these «urban villages» are subject to all sorts of powerful pressures. Let me just mention some of the most obvious and ubiquitous factors:

- the impact of vehicular traffic and corresponding disruption of the physical and social fabric of the city;
- speculative real estate trends linked with vehicular accessibility which introduce new

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land-use hierarchies and disparities within the urban fabric;

- new standards of services, facilities and sanitation which usually are neither adapted nor integrated to the historic fabric;

- the demographic changes often involving the emigration of the wealthy local bourgeoisie from the historic centre to new residential suburbs, and, reciprocally, the immigration of a poorer rural population flocking in

to the cities and adopting the historic centre as a location of choice;

- crowding of a poor population in a partitioned historic housing stock with lack of maintenance;

- proliferation of uncontrolled semi-industrial activities in the historic city centre; and, perhaps most importantly,

- the loss of «image» and prestige of the historic centres vis-à-vis the glamour of sometimes misconceived «modernity». This attitude results in a dramatic lack of investment by the private and the public sectors, denying the historic city the means it would need to evolve and transform

from within, i.e., following its own premises and potentials.

Yet, in spite of their relatively small size and all sorts of physical and social decline, it is these «urban villages» which often remain the only custodians and dispensers of cultural identity in the metropolitan agglomerations mushrooming around them. Apparently a technology-driven development – regardless of the material progress it brought – has been unable to build upon (let alone replace) the cultural matrix from which historic cities have emerged and from which they drew their spiritual dimension, visual qualities and emotional comfort.

Facing this situation, we cannot avoid asking: why have historic cities – which used to be lively, creative and continuously evolving urban entities – suddenly become «historic»? What is the rationale for a rather sterile type of conservation, which would freeze still-functioning buildings and urban districts like museum artefacts in an arbitrary stage of their evolution? Is there an alternative to rampant decline, eventual wholesale demolition and alien replacement?

One could argue that the conventional conservation approach is nothing else than the shadow of a single-minded concept of modernisation and «progress» – or the logical response to it. Both attitudes are indeed interdependent – and even synonymous, inasmuch as they have equally lost sight of the wholeness of human existence and of culture as a primordial driving force of human life. This brings us right into the heart of the problem: the fatal dichotomy between «conservation» and «development», which acts like a dissolving agent in the complex, composite body of any living traditional culture, as soon as it becomes virulent.

Traditionally, culture always had a multi-dimensional quality because of its capacity to interweave material, emotional and spiritual concerns in successive loops of creative evolution. Its products thus had, by nature, the imprint of organic growth – similar to a beautiful garden, to use a convenient metaphor. Technological progress, in many cases, involves a reductionist ap-

proach based on abstract, rational procedures, isolated material concerns and exclusive economic considerations, which tend to ignore the richness of human potential and aspirations. If not inspired and balanced by other factors, technology-driven interventions can thus become highly destructive, particularly if they draw their energies and dynamics – as it often happens – from disintegrating the complex web of local culture. No wonder that such abuses often result in the emergence of economically striving, but spiritually lifeless «urban deserts».

Thus, through its very limitations and excesses, an aggressive type of narrow-minded, dogmatic development automatically calls for the antidote of an equally rigid conservation approach and the induced polarisation causes both sides to lose out. Excessive development – particularly if based on alien philosophies – finds it often impossible to set roots in the social ground and to acquire deeper meaning and truth, i.e., to engage people with their hearts and minds. Meanwhile, excessive conservation can suffocate and sterilise living cultural expressions, and can eventually become abortive to the creative impulses of a living community. Both extremes lead to a loss of real cultural presence: they deprive societies of the vital forces which could generate a self-reliant, «organic» spiral of internal evolution.

### Domesticated type of development

Finding the productive middle ground between two sterile extremes is therefore essential for any cultural development effort, if it is to become fruitful. For one can neither afford to dispense with the creative sources of culture, nor disregard the material benefits of an appropriate «domesticated» type of development. However, producing a creative interaction between culture and development is not just a matter of abstract strategies and procedures. It can only be achieved pragmatically, case by case, through empathetic immersion in concrete situations, i.e., through grounding actual projects in the realities of specific places and specific communities.

This means, on the one hand, promoting development by mobilising internal cultural processes, i.e., by designing projects which are rooted in the life of local beneficiaries and can be sustained by them. On the other hand, it also means strengthening culture through adapted development impulses which rely on appropriate (and affordable) technological tools, provided they can be absorbed and managed by the actual stakeholders, i.e., the people directly concerned. To be successful, the rehabilitation of historic cities therefore has to go beyond mere restoration of monuments and other physical interventions. It must help re-activate and release the vital inner forces of local cultures and local communities. It must strengthen their capacity to creatively bridge the gap between past and future – in ways which are coherent with their own traditions and make the best possible use of their cultural and environmental assets.

### The Historic Cities Support Program

After tracing the conceptual context within which any intervention in historic cities in the Muslim world has to place itself, let me now explain the operational parameters of the Historic Cities Support Programme (HCSP) within the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and the larger Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN):

While AKTC deals with many promotional aspects of architecture, culture and the built environment in general – for instance through the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, ArchNet, the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture and the Central Asian Music Initiative – it is also actively involved in the restoration of historic buildings and conservation of historic cities. Accordingly, HCSP was created to become the technical implementing agency of the Trust for all physical and social rehabilitation programmes in selected sites of the Islamic world, these projects being mostly funded by His Highness the Aga Khan. Funding and technical implementation being with the same organisation is a comparative advantage which has induced many other do-

nors to provide co-funding to HCSP projects. Through AKTC, HCSP is also part of the larger Aga Khan Development Network, which includes, among others, the Aga Khan Foundation and the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development. This means that it can rely on the interaction between culture and development by benefiting from the Foundation's track record in health, education and rural development projects, as well as from micro-credits and tourism investments provided by AKFED.

HCSP's most prominent feature is the integrated character of its projects, combining interactively many different disciplines and concerns. While conservation and restoration of monuments and landmark buildings are central concerns, they are never done in isolation. The adaptive re-use of restored buildings – wherever possible – is considered from the beginning, in order to keep the building alive, provide meaning to the physical intervention, make local communities «own» the building and generate income for future operation and maintenance. Planning the future development and improving the urban context of restored historic buildings is equally important.

Problems of land use, vehicular access, sanitation and location of economic activities have to be considered, and all sorts of interventions from conservation to modern infill and sensitive redevelopment need to be defined and controlled. In connection with the urban context, rehabilitation of private housing in the historic centres is an essential issue, in order to keep the city alive, maintain an active social fabric and sustain the residents' commitment to their place of living and working. Direct funding of private housing improvement is often impossible and hence appropriate technical assistance, financial incentives and replicable pilot projects are required.

Another important theme of HCSP projects is upgrading and enhancement of public open spaces, an important element in historic cities, which connect monuments, houses and public facilities, and can provide a focus for social and cultural activities and strengthen the sense of civic identity

## Fils succède père

### Colloque SSMOCI-EPFZ

Le 9 mai 2003 une quarantaine de personnes se sont réunies à Zurich dans les locaux de la Sternwarte, l'ancienne Observatoire, pour se pencher sur le phénomène du transfert de pouvoir dans les pays arabes à l'époque contemporaine. En effet, plusieurs pays arabes (Jordanie, Maroc, Syrie) ont connu récemment un changement de chef d'état. Par ailleurs dans trois pays arabes au régime républicain (Egypte, Libye, Iraq jusqu'en mars 2003) un dirigeant longtemps au pouvoir serait en train de préparer son fils à la succession. Le transfert de pouvoir dans les monarchies actuelles représente-t-il simplement la continuation d'une tradition? Comment interpréter le phénomène de «monarchisation» du pouvoir dans des pays comme la Syrie ou l'Egypte? Et le changement de chef d'état, signifie-t-il l'introduction de réformes politiques, économiques ou sociales?

Peter Sluglett a fait un tour d'horizon des monarchies dans le monde arabe d'aujourd'hui, soulignant que leurs structures avaient été élaborées au XXe siècle sous l'influence de l'Angleterre ou de la France et établissant des parallèles avec des monarchies ailleurs. Les interventions suivantes ont porté sur des cas spécifiques. Ainsi, Alan George a indiqué le peu

de marge de manœuvre qu'a le jeune président syrien Bashar al-Assad, dans le système politique et économique sclérosé qu'il a hérité de son père. En Egypte, comme Robert Springborg a montré, le Président Moubarak est en train de préparer la succession de son fils, garante de stabilité et de la continuité de l'équipe gouvernant, mais au prix des concessions en politique étrangère que les Etats-Unis demandent de lui. Mais quand en Libye l'ancien révolutionnaire Qadhafi destine son fils à lui succéder, ce serait selon Moncef Djaziri, un pas autant vers la genèse de l'Etat que vers la stabilité politique. Jean-Christophe Augé a relevé comment le roi Abdallah a choisi dans la période de crise actuelle de mettre l'accent sur le sens de l'identité jordanienne pour renforcer la cohésion de son pays. Pour le Maroc, Abdalhay Moudden a contesté la théorie traditionaliste utilisée d'habitude pour analyser la monarchie marocaine, relevant que le roi Mohamed VI a su donner à des gestes symboliques conventionnels une nouvelle signification. Enfin, Viktor Kocher a brossé un tableau plutôt sombre de la capacité de certains régimes de la région à s'ouvrir à une participation plus large des citoyens à la politique.

Hilary Kilpatrick

and pride. Investments in public open spaces and parks can reverse the «bad image» of complete districts and act as a catalyst for collateral private and public investment in historic areas.

Apart from physical improvement projects, HCSP in most project locations pursues associated socio-economic development activities and local capacity-building. Socio-economic projects may include revival and promotion of local skills

and crafts (sometimes as an offspring of restoration activities), vocational training, small enterprise support, placement of unemployment labour, micro-credits, projects in the fields of health, women and youth affairs, promotion of cultural tourism and corresponding events. In many cases, such projects are linked to the re-use of restored or rehabilitated buildings located within domain of the communities concerned. This

can also give rise to the formation of new local associations and NGOs which become actively involved in the sustainable operation and management of their heritage and their built environment.

Training and institution-building are also major concerns in the constitution of the Aga Khan Cultural Service Companies – local affiliates of AKTC and HCSP in important project locations which are entrusted with the implementation and management of project activities under the supervision of the headquarter staff from HCSP Geneva. They are also assisted by a roster of international experts in various technical fields whose prime task is to train capable local professionals and motivate them to carry on.

### The individual projects

Since its inception in 1992, the Historic Cities Support Programme is or has been pursuing revitalisation projects in seven quite different regions of the Islamic world, i.e., in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, Zanzibar, Samarkand, Cairo, Mostar (Bosnia), Syria and Afghanistan, including over twenty distinct projects, some of them interconnected and mutually reinforcing. In general, HCSP interventions are planned very pragmatically, and while they start from an overall vision, they do not proceed according to abstract, preconceived schemes. Rather, they are based on gradual incremental growth in response to actual

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needs, perceived opportunities and feed-back from field experience. Involvement in single project locations or regions tends to expand in order to constitute a critical mass for positive change, if the environment is found to be responsive. In all project locations, community participation, training of local professionals and local institution-building are essential components. While overall agreements with central government authorities are usually sought for HCSP projects, the actual work proceeds in close cooperation possible with local government and stakeholders. Many other institutions, such as the Getty Grant Program, the World Monuments Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Swiss, Swedish and Norwegian bilateral aid organisations and the World Bank have provided co-funding or collateral funding to HCSP activities.

In the Northern Areas of Pakistan, HCSP activities are focused on the high valleys of Hunza and Baltistan, in the Karakorum range. This whole area, a part of the old Central Asian Silk Route, was inaccessible to vehicular traffic until the construction of the Karakorum Highway in 1978. Increased accessibility, coupled with the impact of tourism, has induced a rapid transformation of local societies and economic patterns, which calls for strategic development visions and procedures capable of steering ongoing rapid change.

Projects in Hunza and Baltistan include the restoration of several old forts and palaces (such as Baltit and Shigar) and other landmark buildings in conjunction with rehabilitation of traditional settlements, as well as promotion of traditional crafts and construction techniques. Villages and neighbourhoods which were in danger of being deserted in favour of dispersed modern construction in the fields are now being rehabilitated through active efforts of residents – a fact which not only boosts cultural awareness efforts, but also helps preserve the precious terraced landscape and reduces costs for infrastructure provision. Preserving local identity and at the same time introducing contemporary living standards (including sanitation) has been the key to the ongoing cultural development process, which is undertaken

with the active involvement of the local population. Environmental planning strategies to preserve specific cultural assets in the light of growing tourism are now being implemented through new local institutions such as Town Management Societies and Cultural Heritage Trusts.

In Zanzibar, the focus is on the Old Stone Town, one of the few truly cosmopolitan cultural sites in Eastern Africa. It had its key days in the 19th century, when it became a meeting point between Omani, Indian (and, later, European) influences merging in the Swahili culture. Political upheavals in the 1960s resulted in major demographic and socio-economic changes. Many of the beautiful old houses from the Omani period have been partitioned and are in lack of proper maintenance.

Within the Old Stone Town, HCSP has completed the restoration of the former «Old Dispensary», the «Old Customs House» and the conversion of the former Extelcom building – formerly empty landmark buildings on the waterfront now being put to new uses, some of them related to tourism. In parallel, a conservation plan for the Old Stone Town has been prepared in cooperation with the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority. A number of community-based housing improvement projects are being carried out to demonstrate the feasibility of traditional low-cost repair and maintenance techniques – a key issue for the survival of the Old Stone Town. A new urban design plan and an economic strategy are currently being prepared for the rehabilitation of the complete historic waterfront as a significant civic open space which, once enhanced, would spark further rehabilitation efforts in the Old Stone Town.

The old city of Cairo is arguably the most important historic city in the Islamic world. While it has lost much of its pre-industrial urban fabric, its wealth of important monuments from various successive dynasties is unrivalled. The pressures emanating from the 18 million-persons metropolis on the historic city centre are enormous (particularly in terms of roads and vehicular access) and remaining green areas have become extremely

scarce.

HCSP's involvement in Cairo started with the conversion of a vast barren site (a hilly rubble-dump between the Fatimid city and the Mamluk cemetery) into a 30-hectare urban park with many visitors' facilities. This landscaping project will not only bring relief to the dense metropolitan agglomeration, but will also help transform the image of the adjacent old city and mobilise resources for its rehabilitation. As part of the grading effort on the park slopes, 1.5 kilometres of the formerly buried 12th-century city wall were brought to light and are now being restored. Near the wall and inside the district of Darb al-Ahmar, several mosques, old palaces and historic houses are being rehabilitated in an effort to revitalise the existing architectural heritage and make it accessible to the local community as well as visitors. In conjunction with physical upgrading, a wide range of socio-economic initiatives have been launched to provide residents with new opportunities, including training, employment, micro-credits for small enterprises, health centres and women's associations. Many restored buildings are being re-used for community purposes, in order to enhance the identification and solidarity of residents with historic buildings. Owners and tenants are also being provided with technical assistance, small grants and loans for housing improvement.

### Samarkand and Mostar

In Samarkand, another landmark city of Islamic architecture, the monuments have suffered from the stripping of their historic urban context and from their discontinued use (or conversion into museums) during the Russian period. Even the colonial and the modern city centre are in need of more convivial spaces.

In an effort to close these gaps through appropriate infill projects, HCSP has assisted the municipality in preparing a new master plan for the Timurid city, including urban design proposals for the revitalisation of both the historic and the modern city centre. In addition, a number of

pilot projects have been carried out in cooperation with local residents to demonstrate how the historic neighbourhoods can be upgraded without need for wholesale demolition and excessive re-development.

The war-struck city of Mostar is a rare example of a partly Muslim city in Europe, with a long tradition of inter-cultural exchange and cooperation which came to an abrupt end with the collapse of former Yugoslavia.

Projects here concentrate on the rehabilitation of the historic neighbourhoods adjacent to the famous Old Bridge (which is being restored by the joint efforts of UNESCO and the World Bank) and on the restoration of a number of key monuments destroyed during the civil war. Within the framework of a complete master plan for the old city, several historic buildings and open spaces have been restored in close cooperation with the local authorities and residents, reclaiming the unique character of this multicultural city.

### Syria and Afghanistan

The Islamic heritage of Syria is rich and complex, as it is often built upon (or re-using) pre-Islamic structures of Roman-Hellenistic, Byzantine or Crusader origins. Due to historic circumstances and topographic opportunities, Syria features a large number of citadels, some of them isolated, some of them now in the heart of historic urban agglomerations.

The Syrian Directorate of Antiquities requested HCSP to provide technical assistance and training for the conservation of three major citadels in Aleppo, Masyaf and Qalat Salah ed-Din. The ongoing conservation work on the monuments is now being complemented by the establishment of detailed site management plans, as well as by environmental studies aimed at controlling and enhancing development in the surroundings of the three forts, two of them being located within an urban context, and one in a pristine natural setting. In Afghanistan, an age-old cultural heritage has been under threat due to decades of political unrest, religious and ethnic conflicts, and inter-

ventions of foreign powers. In terms of Islamic culture, Afghanistan occupies a pivotal position, being an offshoot of Persian culture and a springboard for the Mughal accomplishments in India.

After the end of the civil war, an agreement was concluded by AKTC with the Interim Administration to restore, rehabilitate and upgrade a number of important historic buildings and public open spaces in Kabul. These include the Park of Babur (the oldest Mughal «paradise garden») and the Timur Shah mausoleum, an important landmark set in the midst of the old markets and adjacent to a former garden and the Kabul riverbanks. Rehabilitation efforts have also been initiated in the historic residential neighbourhood of Ashkan i-Arefan in cooperation with local residents. Similar efforts are being considered for the heart of the old city of Herat, around the Char Suq area.

### Conclusion

Having presented the current portfolio of the Programme, it should be said that HCSP has no ambition to systematically cover complete regions, let alone the whole of the Islamic world. Rather it proceeds by selecting a limited number of project locations in the expectation that they will enable the Programme to demonstrate how a small-scale but integrated project set-up can be brought to fruition by a number of interactive initiatives rooted in the respective local community – or, in other words, how mutually supporting efforts in various domains, focussed on a clearly identifiable site and group of people, can coalesce into a critical mass and spark a self-propelling cultural development.

While the initial investment often has an experimental character and involves heavy training components by external experts, everything is done to make later phases of the project as replicable as possible, maximising the use of local expertise and reducing project costs. Later phases of work also tend to show higher enrolment of local resources, as the demonstration effect has convinced people of the feasibility and can stir productive competition between local communities.

Anton Escher und Sandra Petermann

## Die Revitalisierung der Medina von Marrakesch

Die Altstädte des islamischen Orients verfallen und können nicht erhalten werden. Auch ihre Aufnahme in das Programm des Weltkulturerbes der Unesco änderte bis Ende der 1990er Jahre nichts an diesem Tatbestand. Internationale Hilfsprogramme und lokale Einzelaktionen können nur Weniges, vornehmlich religiöse Bauten und herausragende Monumente, erhalten. In diesem Zusammenhang fragen Gangler & Ribbeck (1994: 4) «Ist die «Medina» noch

zu retten?» und stellen dabei vielfältige Planungsvorschläge und Strategien zur Sanierung der islamisch-orientalischen Altstädte vor. Dabei spielen unter anderem die «elitäre Option», das heisst, die Verdrängung einkommensschwacher Bevölkerungsgruppen durch eine investitionsunwillige Mittel- und Oberschicht, und die «kommerzielle Option», das heisst, die Förderung von touristischen und kommerziellen Aktivitäten, eine tragende Rolle. Obwohl Wirth (2000: 452) deutlich «Tourismus und Fremdenverkehr» als Retter der Medina ausschliesst, kann bereits in der letzten Dekade des 20. Jahrhunderts ein Erneuerungsprozess der Substanz

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von Funktionsbauten in mehreren Altstädten des Orients beobachtet werden, der vom Tourismus induziert und getragen wird (Escher 1994 und 2001). Der internationale und regionale Tourismus hat die Altstädte für sich entdeckt und die Touristen hinterlassen als Künstler, Wissenschaftler, Reisende, Sinnsucher, Investoren, Pilger und Einkäufer in den Altstädten ihre Spuren. Inzwischen wählt sogar eine internationale Bevölkerung einige Medinen des Ma-

ghreb als Wohnsitz. Damit breitet sich auch an diesen Orten der Prozess der Gentrification aus. Ein herausragendes Beispiel für den Prozess der Revitalisierung einer Altstadt im islamischen Orient ist die seit 1985 von der Unesco als Weltkulturerbe eingestufte Medina der marokkanischen Stadt Marrakesch.

### Immobilienboom in Marrakesch

Bereits in den 1920er Jahren entdeckten europäische Künstler, allen voran Jacques Majorelle, in Marokko aufgrund der Faszination des Fremden, der leuchtenden Farben, der sonder-