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Ministry of Culture  
THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR URBAN HARMONY  
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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
**Euromed Heritage 4**

*Strengthening the institutional and legal framework*

**Workshop "Rehabilitation of Historic Towns and Urban Sectors"**

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*In Cooperation with the Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Morocco*

## **BACKGROUND PAPER**

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The National Organization for Urban Harmony

Egyptian Ministry of Culture

### **Introduction**

Rehabilitation is a major approach to preserving our heritage. It seeks to regenerate the society and economy as it is now, or as it recently was, and does not focus upon recreating the past. Unlike restoration, its focus is on whole areas, not just on certain individual buildings<sup>1</sup>.

It usually involves restoration of historic buildings, restriction of new development, infrastructure rehabilitation; improvement of public spaces; the promotion of new economic activities, and traffic management. In order to sustain such interventions, projects require significant financial and institutional resources, as well as a strong consensus between all interested parties<sup>2</sup>.

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1 Sutton, K. & Fahmi, W, The Rehabilitation of Old Cairo, Elsevier Science Ltd, 2001  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>

<sup>2</sup> Urban Rehabilitation and Heritage Conservation , [www.iadb.org/SDS/SOC/site\\_5224\\_e.htm](http://www.iadb.org/SDS/SOC/site_5224_e.htm)



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## Urban Heritage of Cairo: A Prologue

The Egyptian capital, Cairo, embodies accumulating layers of buildings constructed in different eras; Contemporary Cairo, European Cairo constructed in the late 19th and early twentieth century, and Islamic or Medieval Cairo (969–1863 AD) built up during the Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. The historic city centre, enriched by numerous monuments, retains a prominent physical urban character and a strong social identity.

### Inherent strengths and weaknesses

The Egyptian urban heritage suffers from ongoing problems and threats. These can be attributed to several intertwining factors; namely the lack of public awareness of and concern for the value of heritage, dilapidating environmental conditions (pollution, subsoil water level,..), poor conditions of sewerage systems, traffic congestion, and the weakening of economic activities as some activities have moved out and others have changed.

Also the lack of overall control or policy due to the multiplicity of overlapping authorities in charge of historic buildings and areas, limited resources, and the incomplete inventory of historic buildings.

Another main cause is the inappropriate governmental measures including lodging inhabitants in historic buildings in the 1960s (densification and decay of housing stock), and non-conditional renting of historic buildings to the private sector which introduced incompatible uses in these buildings. An evident example is the use of historic wekalas as warehouses, workshops and factories (Ref 2 pp 762-763). Also rigorous rent control laws, that resulted in negligence and lack of maintenance<sup>3</sup>.

Also, until recently, no legislation protected historic buildings from demolition, alterations, and misuse, especially those less than a hundred years old, and certainly maintenance laws were not respected<sup>4</sup>.

Marginalization of the local population and disregard for their attitudes, perceptions, and potential participation in any actions in heritage areas, is another veiled factor.

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<sup>3</sup> Sutton, K. & Fahmi, W, The Rehabilitation of Old Cairo, Elsevier Science Ltd, 2001  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>

<sup>4</sup> Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT), Egypt



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Despite the availability of the 1980 UNESCO Plan and the 1997 UNDP Plan for Old Cairo's rehabilitation, government policies remain insufficient and fragmentary with a tendency to favour tourist-orientated projects.

However, there is an increasing official awareness of the importance of preserving historic areas. The last decade witnessed the declaration of two new related laws and the inauguration of a dedicated body (The national Organization for Urban harmony).

### **Laws and Legislations**

Two main laws control urban development activities in heritage areas in Egypt; Law no. 144 for the year 2006 (control for building demolition and preservation of architectural heritage), and law 119 for the year 2008 (section 2- urban harmonization).

As an extension to the previous antiquities law 117 for the year 1983, the first prohibits violation of any listed historic building, whether by demolition or through any architectural additions. It assigns legal control to local municipalities in cities and districts.

The second states that the National organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH) is the responsible entity for heritage areas and buildings in Egypt. It sets specific principles and criteria for any development activities in heritage areas and buildings.

### **The National Organization for Urban Harmony**

The National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH) was initiated by a presidential decree (no. 37 for the year 2001). It was inaugurated at Saladin Citadel, Cairo in 2004, aiming at enhancing aesthetic values in the Egyptian urban space.

According to the law 119 for the year 2008, NOUH is responsible for setting the general policy for urban harmonization and proposing relevant legislation; also for outlining guidelines for future development in coordination with other related parties<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Law 119 – section 1- chapter 1- article 29



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According to this law, NOUH is responsible for identifying heritage areas and buildings and setting controls and principles for their preservation, and also for proposing necessary actions related to property rights<sup>6</sup>.

NOUH's supreme scientific council, composed of renowned Egyptian expertise, issued twelve guidelines for urban harmonization principles and criteria; namely for heritage areas, city centres and entrances, streets and pavements, external lighting, advertisements, green and open spaces, environmental quality, coastal areas, protectorates, villages, and quality control. These constitute an indispensable supplement to the Law 119 for the year 2008.

NOUH also undertakes the preparation of a value map which is a classified inventory for existing historic buildings. The project represents one of the organization's approaches to face the ongoing threats to the historic heritage. In addition, NOUH undertook numerous related projects including the restoration of a major historic commercial spine in Khedive Cairo (Kasrelnil Street), the urban design and harmonization of Ramses square, one of the three main squares in the area.

### **Rehabilitation Projects in historic Cairo: major challenges**

Since the early seventies, the structural master plans for Cairo stressed the need for upgrading the central historical area through its pedestrianization, reallocation of polluting activities, restoration of monuments and upgrading their surrounding buildings and spaces.

The 1980 UNESCO plan for Old Cairo followed its designation by UNESCO as a World Heritage site in 1979. Although this 1980 plan remained a 'paper project', and was not implemented, subsequent projects tended to be based on it.

The 1997 UNP Rehabilitation Plan for Old Cairo adopted a dual; tourism-based and community-based rehabilitation approach. Monuments would be restored and reused, and traditional activities in adjoining streets would be refurbished. Vacant lots would be developed as recreational activities and services. This would be achieved through private investment and cross-subsidization.

Squatters in historic buildings would be resettled and the local community were to be empowered by upgrading their built environment, housing and services, and improving their skills and education.

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<sup>6</sup> Law 119 – section 1- chapter 2- articles 32- 35



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In the Greater Cairo Region master plan 1988, the development and upgrading of the old city aimed to preserve the traditional fabric through building control regulations, development of open spaces, improvement of infrastructure and road networks, restrictions on vehicle access, and the development of public spaces.

Also commercial and handicraft activities were to be developed, and wholesale commercial and industrial activities reallocated outside the historic area<sup>7</sup>.

In 1996, a comprehensive urban rehabilitation program for Aldarb alahmar district was embarked. It focused on an integrated program of physical and economic revitalization; the physical upgrading of the building stock, and the socio-economic development of the community.

Preservation and reuse of historic buildings was seen as part of a comprehensive rehabilitation process where a residential core is enlivened and sustained by a system of small workshops and retail activities, supported by essential infrastructure and community facilities and well maintained monuments and surrounding spaces. This would be achieved by improving the economic context, encouraging socio-economic development and encouraging access to sustainable employment opportunities; also by better provision of facilities and the strengthening of civic groups and local institutions that will steer and sustain future actions<sup>8</sup>.

## **Rehabilitation urban heritage: Future Prospects**

1- Rehabilitation plans should be initiated on a basis of a profound and regularly updated database including a legal definition of heritage areas and their boundaries, and a classified inventory for historic buildings.

2- There should be a clear and well- defined organizational structure of executive and supervisory powers, and a strict organization and distribution of errands for both shared and exclusive responsibilities affiliated with urban rehabilitation activities.

NOUH, the authority in charge of drawing up regulations, approving the town planning or historic sector conservation document, and its application, must form a local committee in each

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<sup>7</sup> Sutton, K. & Fahmi, W, The Rehabilitation of Old Cairo, Elsevier Science Ltd, 2001  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>

<sup>8</sup> Siravo, F., Urban Rehabilitation and Community Development in Aldarb alahmar  
[www.unhabitat.org/bestpractices/2008/mainview.asp](http://www.unhabitat.org/bestpractices/2008/mainview.asp)



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governorate to be responsible for initiating rehabilitation programs. Members must include representatives of planning authorities, in addition to organizations responsible for construction and management of public facilities and housing, social policy and environmental quality.

3- There must be instant confrontation for any attempt to violate related laws in order to achieve strict control for new development in the traditional historic fabric.

4- Establishment of self-sustainable models of urban heritage rehabilitation and preservation, based upon the active involvement and full support of all beneficiaries and stakeholders involved in the process, including local residents, buildings owners, active NGOs, and private investors. There should be innovative institutional mechanisms to enhance and manage such cooperation. It is also necessary to build the capacities of participating stakeholders, to qualify them to address the environmental, economic and social dimensions of the problem in a holistic manner.

5- Establishment of an entity in charge of implementing urban rehabilitation schemes. It should include representatives of the affiliated ministries of housing and culture.

6- Promotion of public awareness about the inherent values of their heritage.

7- Innovative financing schemes to minimize reliance on public\governmental funds. These might include one or more of the following;

-Facilitating and enhancing public-private partnerships and cooperation in project execution and financing; Strategic intervention of the public sector, to induce private investors, property owners and tenants to participate.

-Tax mechanisms (tax reductions or exemptions for participating individuals or companies).

- Easement \ compensation schemes: Favorable tax treatment or land compensation outside the historic area, in return for the historic building or part of it (e.g. the façade). Easements are a potentially valuable means to both protect historic buildings and provide value to their owners<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Tyler, N., Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice, W.W. Norton and Company, London, 2000



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- Increased economic activities (developing vacant parcels, building additional floors, rehabilitating and selling deteriorated premises or other)<sup>10</sup>.

7- Rehabilitation programs and schemes must be delineated within an overall town planning scheme.

Finally, it should be noted that rehabilitation efforts should be built upon previous successful experiences in similar contexts.

*Presented by: Samir Gharib*

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<sup>10</sup> World Bank, Harvard University Graduate School of Design Association Sauvegarde, Unit for Housing and Urbanization de la Medina du Tunis, The Rehabilitation of the Hafsia Quarter of the medina of Tunis, Project Assessment Summary Document, 1994