

Revival of Birzeit's Historic Centre

Birzeit, Palestine

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| Architect | Riwaq - Centre for Architectural Conservation |
| Client | Birzeit Municipality |
| Commission | 2006 |
| Design | 2007 - 2011 |
| Construction | 2008 - 2012 |
| Occupancy | 2009 |
| Site | 40'640 m ² |
| Ground Floor | 10'191 m ² |
| Total Floor | 8'411 m ² |
| Costs | US\$ 2'199'263 |

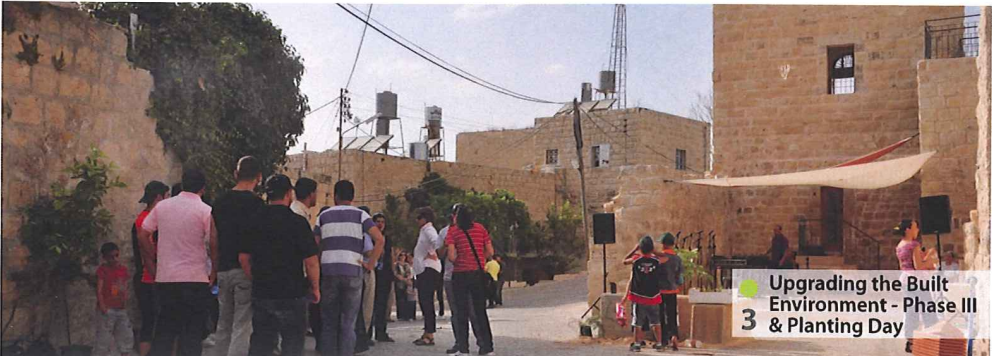
Programme

This five-year project has transformed the decaying town of Birzeit and revived vanishing traditional crafts in the process. Community involvement was encouraged from the start, including local NGOs, the private sector, owners, tenants and users. Both historic buildings and public spaces have been rehabilitated into community activity hubs. Replaced sections of wall remain distinguishable from the original structures, without harming architectural coherence. Lost features were replaced where there was clear evidence for their former appearance, such as floor tiles with Palestinian motifs. Affordable traditional techniques and local materials were used throughout.

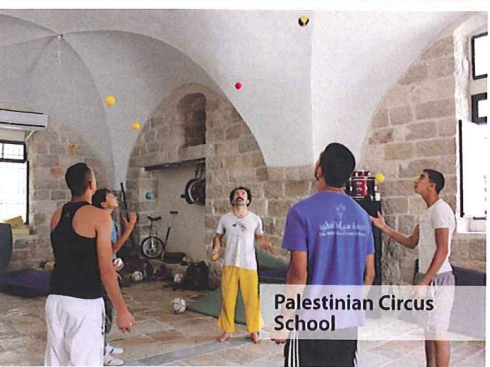
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| Building Type | Area Conservation |
| 2013 Award Cycle | 4022.PAL |

The vision of Birzeit historic center, put together with the community, the municipal council, and civil society institutions was, “a lively centre, attractive to its residents, investors and visitors, for a mixed land use, respectful of its identity and cultural heritage.”

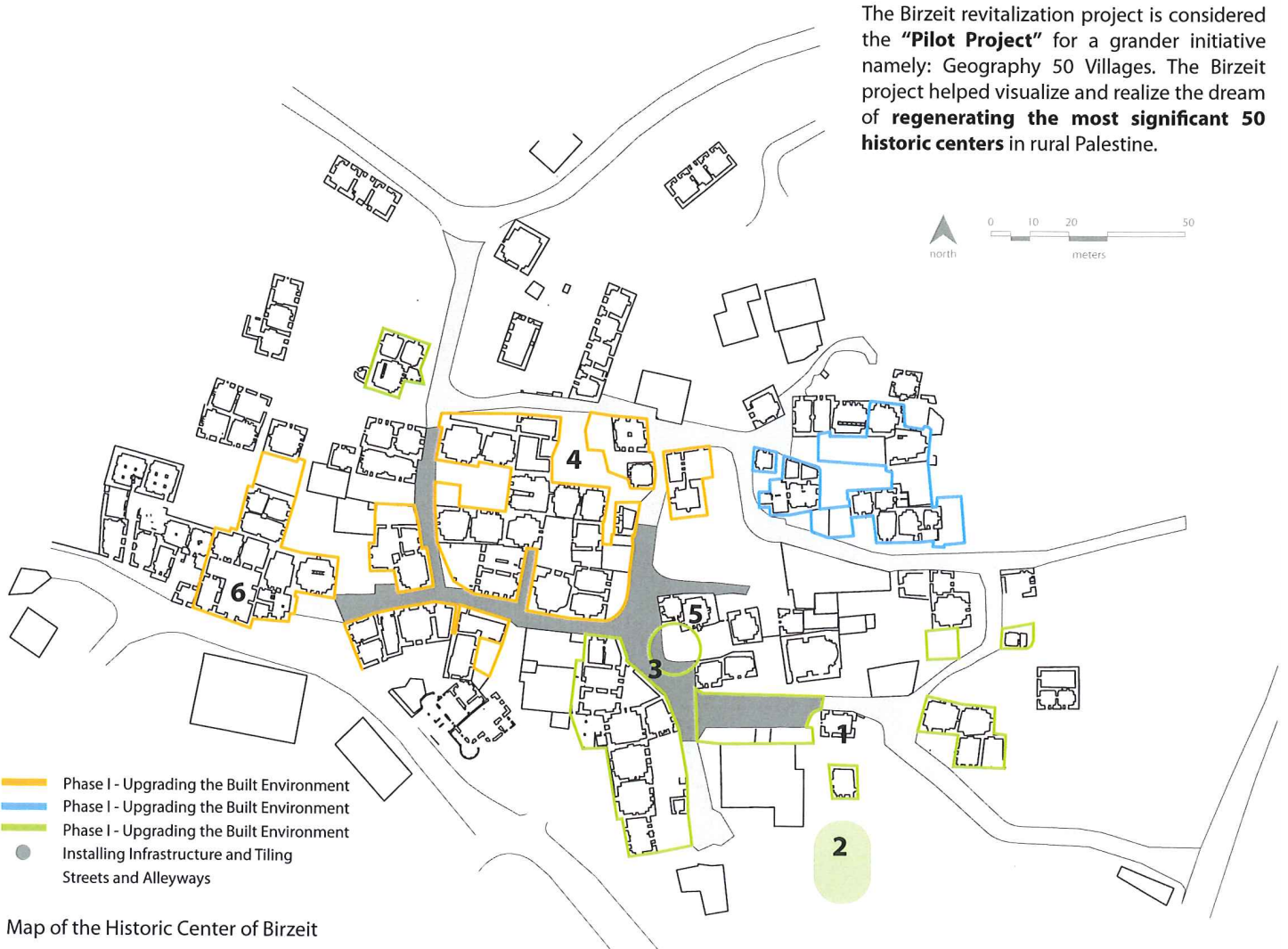
The development principles consist of: the **improving of the quality of life** for the inhabitants and the users of the center, and **the protection of the tangible cultural heritage** as a space for socio-economic and political development. In addition, the principles **encourage investment**, promote the historic center as a cultural and touristic center, and develop the institutional framework for the rehabilitation processes. The regeneration process of Birzeit historic center showcases that planning goes hand in hand with the **implementation of key projects** to alter the stigmatized image of historic areas as backward, out of date places unsuitable for contemporary life.



According to Riwaq's Register of Historic Buildings (2006), the historic center encompasses **108 historic buildings**, 63% of which are one-story buildings. Most of these buildings date back to the **Ottoman era**, with the exception of the caravanserai; located to the north of the historic center, which dates back to the **Mamluk period** (1291-1516 A.D.).



REVIVING BIRZEIT HISTORIC CENTER: HERITAGE FOR DEVELOPMENT



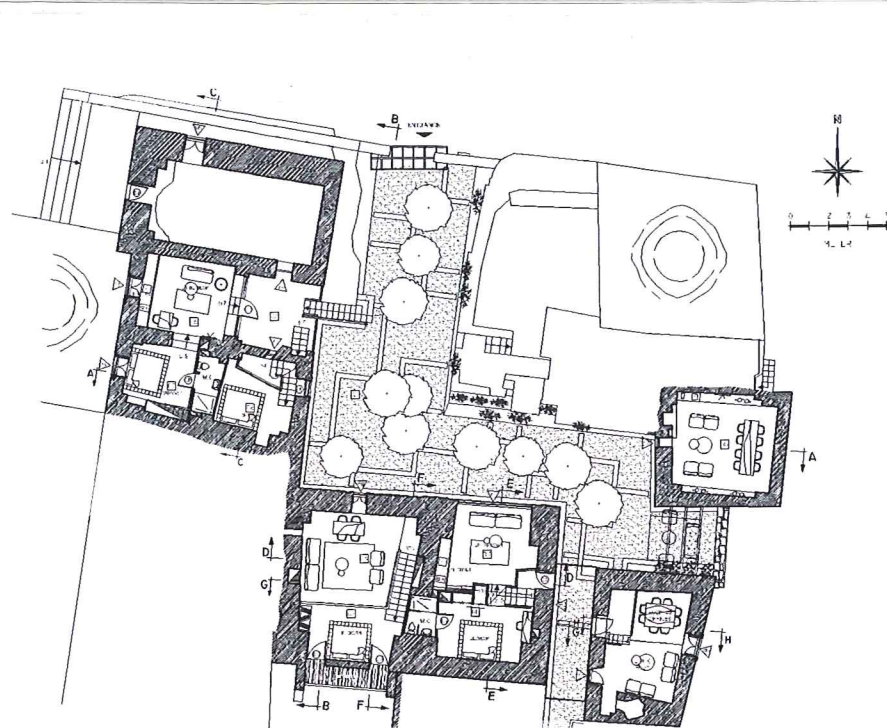
The Birzeit revitalization project is considered the “**Pilot Project**” for a grander initiative namely: Geography 50 Villages. The Birzeit project helped visualize and realize the dream of **regenerating the most significant 50 historic centers** in rural Palestine.

Map of the Historic Center of Birzeit

التحديات

- التوسع العمري
- غير المنظم
- تحويل الاهتمام
- العشوائية للأهل العالم الثانية
- استقرار هجران المباني
- تحويل حنايع الأحياء
- سبب تمت المذكره
- انخفاض السائد دعم المارة
- البلدية القديمة احياء المدينة
- تفاهت الحالة الانشائية/البنائية
- المباني سبب عدم كدود بنيت ختم
- تحويل البلدية القديمة الى
- مخفف سياحة/مزايا فيزيجي

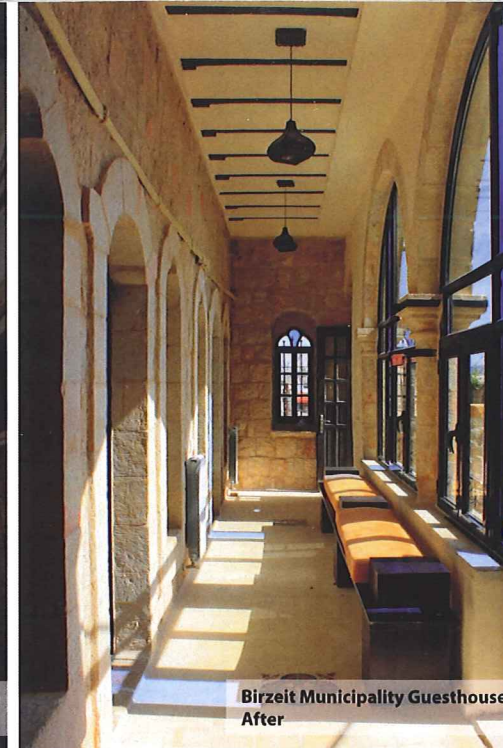
Threats - SWOT Analysis
Strategic Planning



The general framework of “**Strategic Planning**” for Birzeit has been adapted to **guide the historic centre regeneration process** through the years 2007 and 2012. With a multidisciplinary approach, a vision was formulated and got translated into goals and objectives. General and specific strategies were designed and a tentative five-year plan was put together.

In the Integrated Analysis (SWOT), the **built heritage** was considered as strength for local development rather than an obstacle; so was the involvement and commitment of the local authorities and the local community. Both were **perceived as opportunities**.

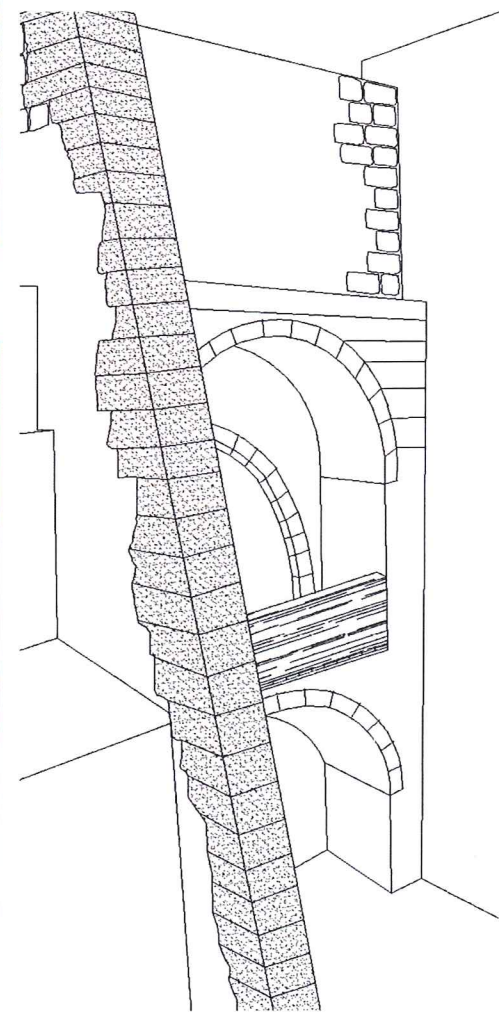
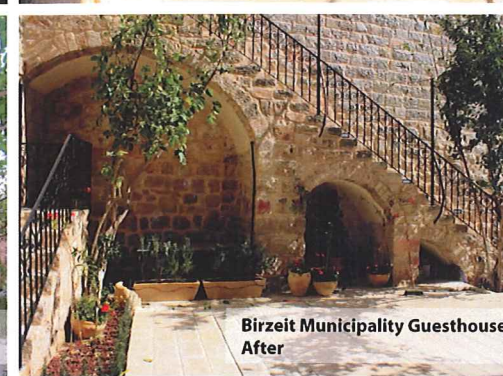
REVIVING BIRZEIT HISTORIC CENTER: HERITAGE FOR DEVELOPMENT



The conservation projects in Birzeit led to a methodological approach focussing on two essential aspects: one architectural and functional in nature, the other technical, both aimed at **respecting the authenticity of the historic structures and the spirit of the historic center.**

The spirit of the projects also aimed to restore the entire structures to its former character, namely to regroup living quarters around a convivial courtyard in a similar way as to when this type of closed complex represented **the family home.**

This approach towards the built cultural heritage in Palestine takes into consideration three main factors: **authenticity**, **environment**, and the capacity to carry out restoration projects at **reasonable cost**. These factors translate into practice through the minute selection of materials as well as the choice of technique.



The regeneration project seeks to revitalize the abandoned structures and spaces through innovative uses and activities.

The outputs of the project were not only the restoration of projects or **rehabilitation of public space**, the project also served as a medium to rethink the future, a tool **to rethink heritage anew**, and as a frame that encourages and facilitates local initiatives to take place.





JOB CREATION THROUGH CONSERVATION



The **technologies** and **materials** used in Birzeit are meant to encourage the revival of **vanishing traditional crafts** and the disseminating of the Know-How, as well as the use of local materials or locally produced supplies, contributing to the **national GDP**.

A long process of modernization and mass production found its way to the Palestinian labour market. The new generation of labourers are not familiar with the traditional building related crafts. From this point of departure, one of the most important missions that Riwaq strive to achieve is **the training of Palestinian craftsmen** in the field of cultural heritage. To achieve this goal Riwaq has been implementing conservation workshops for architects, engineers, contractors as well as craftsmen, almost on yearly basis.

The implementation of the Project as **on-site restoration school** was part of this endeavour. Throughout the Project, tens of craftsmen were trained in all restoration techniques including vaults and walls consolidation, stone repair, rendering and plastering, joint filling, traditional blacksmith, carpentry, damp insulation, electrical and mechanical networks.

In addition, architects and engineers closely worked with traditional tile producers, carpenters, and blacksmiths in their workshops to produce the floorings, wood and iron works needed for the project.

