

## *Revitalise to Survive: the Old City of Jerusalem*

SHADIA TOUQAN

### THE OLD CITY NOW

On the surface, problems in the Old City of Jerusalem seem characteristic and prototypical of problems shared in many historic cities in Arab and Islamic countries.

The dynamics of modern-day needs, rapid population growth, increased pressure on overloaded services, lack of technical and financial resources to enable appropriate rehabilitation and maintenance of the building stock, the replacement of the original community of the historic city by the influx of lower income groups, overcrowding, high unemployment and low expectations are all simply indicators of the serious sickness a historic city suffers from. Such indicators are usually representative of many historic cities; however, after the diagnosis of these symptoms in Jerusalem it becomes clear that an additional factor contributed to and accelerated the deterioration process. The political and security conditions prevailing in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem and more specifically in and around the Old City, have created an atmosphere of fear and despair resulting in a fierce fight for space, symbols of identity and in many cases mere survival.

In the past few years, and following the Israeli measures against Palestinian citizens of Jerusalem, the city witnessed an influx of Jerusalem identity card (ID) holders returning to live in the city. The original and rightful residents of Jerusalem, who lived and worked in the outskirts or nearby areas of Jerusalem, continued to be under threat of losing their IDs and subsequently their rights in the city. This sudden population increase resulted in housing shortage for the lower income groups who could not afford the high rents and taxes of more affluent areas in East Jerusalem. The difficulties and obstacles the Palestinians face in obtaining building permits within the municipal boundaries as defined by the occupation authorities aggravate the shortage.

Consequently, thousands of Jerusalem ID holders are seeking shelter in the Old City where they can stay with relatives, rent cheaply or even live as squatters in empty or abandoned historic buildings and monuments within the city walls. There are no accurate statistics to show the number of people who have moved back to live in Jerusalem, but it is evident that the Israeli policy backfired and resulted in an increase rather than a decrease in the number of the Palestinian population in Jerusalem.

The increase in the population in the Old City is accompanied by increased pressure for accommodation and basic services. This has resulted in unplanned vertical and horizontal expansions and additions to existing buildings implemented by the residents without technical guidance or supervision. Such a trend is affecting the physical shape and condition of the buildings and in many cases inflicting irreparable damage on the historic and cultural 'value' of their new homes.

The urban fabric of the Old City of Jerusalem is still generally intact in spite of years of neglect, natural and man-made disasters and unplanned and sometimes unwelcome change of use. Many old *madrasas* (schools) have been converted to residences, mausoleums to houses, palaces to schools and warehouses. The structure of these buildings is mainly solid and although stone walls and façades have deteriorated due to dampness, humidity and pollution, most buildings can be salvaged with the proper care and appropriate restoration techniques. The worst cases were found in buildings that had been abandoned or remained unused for a long time.

It is evident that continued use of a building (whether suitable or unsuitable, planned or arbitrary) allows for some form of maintenance, for ventilation and heating, which helps to protect it. The situation is far from ideal, but also far from disastrous.

The building stock that belongs to certain institutions (Muslim or Christian Waqf) has fared better in terms of the quality of restoration work as it was generally carried out by professionals. However, the fact that most of the repair/restoration work in the city is executed by users without technical guidance and supervision, poses the question to us agencies involved in the revitalisation process about what can be done to improve the quality of work carried out by the informal sector.

While one cannot control what others do, in the absence of Palestinian legislative and executive authority in Jerusalem, it is important to find the means to address the issue of 'informal restoration'. This could be helped through public awareness campaigns, community participation in the decision-making process and special training programmes: all should depend on the active participation of the media.

THE ROLE OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM REVITALISATION PROGRAMME (OCJRP)  
In 1995, the Technical Office of the Welfare Association was established to implement a comprehensive programme for the Revitalisation of the Old City of Jerusalem. The programme is co-funded by the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, the Welfare Association and other Arab and international sources.

The original programme had five main components: emergency restoration of houses and monuments under physical and/or political threat; total restoration, which includes housing renewal and

adaptive reuse; a revitalisation plan for the Old City based on extensive surveys and comprehensive sectoral studies which created a data base for the Old City; a training programme for professionals and craftsmen; and a community outreach programme.

The Technical Office approach involves all issues related to preservation and revitalisation, including restoration, of individual buildings, housing renewal for priority areas, adaptive reuse of historic buildings for priority areas, focusing on social and economic regeneration to improve living conditions and standards.

The Old City of Jerusalem was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1981. It was then listed as a "World Heritage site in danger" in 1982. The Old City is suffering from the deterioration of the social, economic and housing conditions of its Palestinian residents as well as the deterioration of the physical conditions of its buildings, monuments and utilities. On the other hand there is a systematic and organised campaign by some Israeli extreme groups for ethnic replacement of the Palestinian population by Jewish settlers. In addition to the political implication of these attempts, such actions are directly and indirectly threatening the cultural identity and architectural characteristics of the Old City and its cultural heritage.

The OCJRP tried to address these problems. A number of projects were selected under emergency and total restoration components according to special criteria. The criteria were developed after an extensive pilot survey for one of the most vulnerable areas in the Old City. This area, known as Aqabet al-Khaldyeh in the Islamic quarter close to al-Haram al-Sharif, suffers from economic and social deprivation. The findings of the physical, economic, demographic and social surveys in this area indicated the need to prepare a comprehensive plan for the revitalisation of the Old City. The plan is now completed and was published in Arabic in 2001 and in English in 2003. It is expected that the plan will create a scientific base for intervention and required action to improve the living conditions in the Old City, regenerate the economy, upgrade housing and services and protect the City's identity and heritage. The revitalisation plan will hopefully direct professionals and decision makers to jump start the redevelopment process in the Old City.

Through the survey and studies carried out while preparing the revitalisation plan and as a result of the experience accumulated from restoration and rehabilitation projects implemented in the Old City, the Technical Office developed better understanding of how the city works, and what are the main factors which may influence its future. Most importantly, the team became more involved with the community and local institutions who shared and assisted in the implementation process.

A community outreach programme funded since the year 2000 by the Ford Foundation established a much-needed link connecting the technical team with the end user, local institutions, and grass-

roots organisations in the Old City of Jerusalem. The programme created a platform for dialogue between the various actors and assisted in identifying priorities defining problems and subsequently overcoming them.

#### REVITALISE TO SURVIVE

The regeneration of inner cities and the revitalisation of historic centres recently became part of the overall urban development programme for towns, cities and urban centres. To achieve sustainability, planners should take into consideration the long term prospects and potential of the city, and that includes all its assets and cultural resources.

Consequently, revitalisation of these areas became an integrated part of the urban and economic development process. Therefore, a dynamic and progressive approach involving historic buildings and monuments is required to adapt them for modern uses and facilities while preserving their cultural value. To enable the inclusion of urban renewal within the urban planning of a city, special attention should be given to investigate, diagnose and analyse these areas before integrating them in the overall development plans for the 'modern' city.

To succeed in affecting a positive change in the life of residents in the Old City of Jerusalem while protecting its outstanding architectural heritage, a dynamic and flexible approach based on diverse and multi-disciplinary skills is required.

The Welfare Association is hoping to meet this challenge by continuously developing its programme and activities to respond to the urgent and growing needs of the city and its residents. Its mission in the Old City of Jerusalem with all its complexities is to preserve the monuments while protecting the human dignity of its residents and to revitalise this most valuable World Heritage city while restoring hope and faith to its community.

*For illustrations of projects in Jerusalem, the reader is referred to pls. 36-41 and 91.*





37.



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 36. Suq al-Qattaneen, Old City, Jerusalem.

37. Al Madrasa al-Ashrafiyyah, Old City, Jerusalem.

38. The Dome of the Rock (7th century), Jerusalem.

39. Dar al-Aytam Complex, Old City, Jerusalem.

40. Al-Aqsa Mosque (8th century), Jerusalem.

41. The Old City, Jerusalem.



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87.



89.



90.



88.



91.

87, 88. Saleh Lamei-Mostafa. Great Omari Mosque (late 13th century), Sidon, Lebanon, restored in 1986.

89, 90. Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (ISMEO; Eugenio Galdieri) and the National Organisation for the Conservation of Historic Monuments of Iran (NOCHMI; Bagher Shirazi), Ali Qapu (1660), Isfahan, Iran, restored in 1977.

91. Isam Awwad and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Al-Aqsa Mosque (14th-century paintwork), Jerusalem, restored in 1983.