Project Scope / Objectives

The scope of work included topographical, traffic, semantical, land-use and economical surveys as well as historical research of each component of the Citadel of Aleppo. The project development included the creation of a vast pedestrian area at the foot of the entrance to the Citadel, and an appropriately-ranked landscape suitable for the urban spaces located on its perimeter.

Condition of the Perimeter of the Citadel of Aleppo

The traffic situation of the Aleppo Citadel Perimeter was no longer suitable for the quality of such an exceptional site. An appropriate traffic management system supported the function of the central commercial zone created by the souks of the Old City. The optimization of traffic permitted the creation of the main public spaces as a representative cultural zone for the whole city.

The main objectives for the Old City comprise reorientation of the traffic in and around the Citadel area, including pedestrian issues, public transport networks and parking areas; the control of future planning and the protection of the physical and historical environment of the Citadel Perimeter; the control of the spread of commercial functions in ways that might jeopardize the comfort, economy and environment of residential areas; steering the commercial development in a direction that is most beneficial to the particular areas involved and the Old City in general as tourism activity; protecting the surrounding residential areas, especially from the pressure of commercial functions; adoption of a land-use
The Citadel Perimeter envelope is a conglomeration of attractive historic buildings and plain new structures, creating a façade unified only through the use of limestone as its main building material. Its open spaces were poorly defined and badly employed. A privileged zone of the Aleppo Citadel Perimeter was the southern area of the project and in particular the area between the souk entrance and Yalbugha Hammam. This newly created pedestrian plaza now serves as a recreational and pleasure outlet for area residents, and for those of the city as a whole. It also acts as an attractive tourist activity zone. The proper conception of the overall design, details of the surface treatment, urban furniture and other essential elements in a pedestrian public space for creating an amiable urban area were essential to the success of the project. Reference to the traditional urban landscape was a priority, but as a voluntary spirit of continuity and not as an effort to create facsimiles or copies. The project completes the signature of each historical building from the different eras in a real sense of local modernity. Preferences were always given to local techniques and materials with durable qualities implemented by local labour.

Implementation

The implementation of the traffic concept under existing conditions proved to be a complex exercise in its own right. Accordingly the execution of the whole project was divided into five phases. Zone 3, the plaza across from the Citadel entrance, was funded by AKTC and is now completed. Zones 1 and 2 were funded by the Directorate of the Old City and completed in 2010. Zones 4 and 5, car parks and the completion of the pedestrian zones, will be the subject of a tender procedure after final approval of the local authorities.

Background

BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE

The Citadel of Aleppo is one of the most remarkable examples of Islamic military architecture in the Middle East and one of the foremost visited sites in Syria. It is also a landmark of strong symbolic value for Aleppo’s two million inhabitants. Its parapet features buildings from a range of periods (13th to 20th centuries).

Challenges

PROJECT RISKS

The spread of commercial activities in the Citadel Perimeter may jeopardize the comfort, economy and environment of the adjacent residential areas, and therefore require planning and controls.

SITE CONDITIONS

The area defined by Aleppo Citadel and its periphery was a large open space subject to heavy vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Many of the buildings on the Citadel Perimeter were used for administrative functions unrelated to the Old City and with no positive impact on the area.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Drainage, water supply, electricity and telephone systems were inadequate in varying degrees and in need of upgrades. The quality of the water network was very poor, often interrupted, and leakage had damaged buildings, especially at basement levels. Replacing the visually disruptive power cables crossing the site with an underground network presented a major challenge.

Significant Issues and Impact

DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS

In addition to a detailed topographical survey, basemap data was collected for the demography and environment, existing traffic conditions, existing and future land use; definition of interesting buildings and houses; future functions of specific buildings and legal status of the lots.

MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

A study for a new concept of traffic in the Old City and in particular for the Citadel Perimeter was performed in cooperation with GTZ (German Technical Cooperation Agency) and the Directorate of the Old City. Based on the analysis of these data, the Master Plan was developed. The principal objective was to divert through traffic away from the Old City by proposing an efficient public transport system, providing appropriate parking facilities, offering an environmentally attractive design for the newly gained pedestrian areas between the Citadel and the New Serai, and benefiting both the spread of commercial activities around the Citadel Perimeter. The esplanade in front of the entrance to the Citadel would provide the only public open space in the Old City. The innovative urban concept was presented, with special attention paid to landscaping quality, and presented to the local authorities.

PLANNING ISSUES

Convincing the local authorities to suppress a major traffic area and replace it with a pedestrian area was difficult, but successful. Cultural development opportunities were generated by reviving existing historic buildings on the perimeter and steering tourist and commercial functions in a direction beneficial to the Old City. The project has resulted in an increased value of the site within the Citadel Perimeter and related commercial investment in the area.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS CONSERVED

The historical, architectural and cultural value of each building on the Citadel Perimeter was evaluated. Public administrative functions were relocated to the modern city centre and the buildings rehabilitated to serve tourist or cultural functions. The quality of both the stone available in the area and the stonework produced by local masons was outstanding and lent cohesency to the project.

NEW BUILDING FACILITIES

A tourist centre, exchange points and public toilets were integrated in the project as well as electricity substations to solve the lack of electricity supply in the area.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/PROGRAMME

Decisions regarding the rerouting of traffic in and around the Citadel area, developing pedestrian areas and creating controlled service roads were the result of meetings with the inhabitants, businesses and local authorities. Workshops with inhabitants and local authorities were organized throughout the development of the final design and during execution.

CONTRACTING METHODS

The choice of contractors was based on tender procedure after selected invitations. The sense of architectural reorientation was a constant issue of discussion with the contractors and their teams, in the expectation that the approach might impact future projects developed by the city.

RELEVANT CODES/STANDARDS ADOPTED

Local codes upgraded by international standards.

Partners

PUBLIC PARTNERS

Directorates of Old City of Aleppo, Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, Ministry of Tourism, Directorate of Electricity, Directorate of Water.

Donors

GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit).

Authoritative Framework

Protocol signed between AKTC and the City Council in 2003.