

TOWARDS DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE TOURISM AND CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN FOR IRBID'S HISTORIC CORE

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Abstract

Tal (mount) Irbid in Irbid city, Jordan, with its continuous human occupation from the Bronze Age until the present, demonstrates the main landmark that has guided the spread of the urban growth of the city. The outcome of studies carried out at Irbid's historic core, in relation to assessing the loss and degradation of the core's cultural heritage, shall be analyzed, investigated, and discussed, as also concerns, obstacles, and issues of sustainability to this urban heritage conservation and tourism planning. The paper starts by defining the urban heritage for the historic core, which tends to be set aside, in the city's rapid development. Actually, the remaining historic buildings can also provide the necessary inter-relationships between the historic core areas and the wider urban context to achieve a sustainable and integrated tourism and conservation action plan for the three heritage neighborhoods around the Tal, while building on tourism opportunities and taking into consideration the needs and the vital role of the local community. The paper concludes that urban heritage conservation and protection of the integrity and identity of the historic core city fabric can assist in its branding, promotion, and management in ways that could enhance the local community belonging, quality of everyday lifestyle, and visitors' experience.

Keywords: *Cultural heritage; adaptive reuse; collective memory; visual image and place image; sustainable heritage tourism; urbanization; modern use; integrated conservation approach*

INTRODUCTION

In many cities of the world, the historic cores are surrounded by modern urban structures. However, in the case of developing countries, like Jordan, and due to its rapid growth and fast transformation of its social structure and economics mainly due to population influxes, the whole land uses and the socio-economic activities have rapidly changed and deteriorated. As a result, these historic cores continue to decline, with their physical, social, and economic functions disrupted and their present potential contribution to the city's overall housing stock under-utilized (Steinberg, 1996). This unplanned rapid urbanization presents a real threat to their natural and cultural resources.

Cherchi (2015, p. 269) indicates how the reuse of abandoned buildings and comparatively open spaces "constitutes a significant opportunity for achieving more liveable and healthier cities through the regeneration of inner city areas". In the case of the urban historic Irbid core, the traditional houses are the most important evidence of the past lifestyle. In fact, Irbid's historic core, as in many historic cores, can be seen as "the physical manifestation of the social and cultural traditions which have developed to give the modern city and society its meaning and character" (Steinberg, 1996, p. 465).

This research discusses the study which was mainly conducted as part of the project launched by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan (MoTA), in conjunction with the Municipality of Greater Irbid, to propose regenerating Irbid city's historic core and revitalizing selected heritage buildings within the urban core that is heavily urbanized (Consolidated Consultants (CC) Reports 2005 and 2006, Abujaber, 2009). The Ministry's proposed project aims to provide special attention to significant locations within the study area. The project team for the study was formulated by Consolidated Consultants (CC), where the authors of this paper were the historian and architectural heritage experts. In brief, the study aimed at developing the key heritage buildings with a high cultural significance of the area and the main related open spaces. The methodological approach of this research is as follows:

1. Assessment of the traditional urban fabric of the historic core (study area) and its cultural significance.
2. Identification and assessment of the impact of current urbanization practices and policies on the area's cultural heritage in order to understand and analyze the existing situation. This includes the heritage buildings' degradation, land use practices, urban change detection and its fragmentation, the lack of connectivity between the modern and the historic city core, in addition to the evaluation of the existing urban infrastructure including the road network and traffic and the lack of a proper legislative framework.
3. Discussion and suggestions for developing a strategy for a sustainable urban heritage conservation and tourism action plan for the historic core of Irbid city, including the introduction of a safe pedestrian network between the Northern and Southern part of the core in order to link the Tal with the rest of the heritage city core and related open spaces.

In order to reach an acceptable policy in such urban historic core environments, a cautious process of decision-making is required which usually takes time and can be costly. Meanwhile, local participation is currently regarded as a key to conflict resolution and sustainable development (Siririsak, 2009); incorporating public participation into integrated conservation and planning policy should be beneficial to all parties (Yung and Chan, 2011). This while "co-operation and engagement with associated and local communities is essential as part of developing sustainable strategies for the conservation and management of settings" (ICOMOS, 2005, Article12).

However, the real challenge is "to be able to imagine uses which offer intellectually stimulating options, in the belief that the production and consumption of cultural goods, of art, could constitute business, could ensure adequate economic returns, changing and evolving the common commercial standards" (Giani and Carnevale, 2015, p. 45). On the other hand, traditions that evolve by the collective memory and traditional forms must be widely used in architectural and urban design with community involvement. This can assist to achieve a real cultural place identity, which is necessary for the continuity of culture and life, in addition to social cohesion (Chen, 2011).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF IRBID CITY AND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE STUDY AREA

Irbid is located in the northern part of Jordan, with an average elevation of 620 m. It is the capital of Irbid Governorate, which has an area of 1,572 km², with a total of about 1.137 million inhabitants. The province of Irbid Governorate has the second largest population and the highest population density in Jordan.

Historically, Mount 'Tal' Irbid was settled during the early Bronze Age, Iron, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic eras, involving a continuous history of 6000-7000 years (Figure 1). During the Islamic era, the city extended beyond the Tal, and it was on the trade routes connecting the Levant with

Egypt during the Mamluk era. *Khans* were constructed and a large water pool, which continued to exist until the fifties of the twentieth century, when the Municipality turned it into a public transportation station called '*al Aghwar*'. From the political and socio-economic point of view, Irbid played a major role in the creation and birth of the Jordanian modern state. Irbid has become the central business district and shares commercial and cultural activities with more than 300 villages. It is also bordered by two major archaeological tourists' destinations: Jerash and Umm Qais, where the most convenient access road to Umm Qais passes through it.

Understanding Irbid and its Urban Historic Core during the 19th-20th Century

The Tal (mount), actually, forms the cultural landmark of the city core (**Figure 1d**). In fact, the topography continues to have a noticeable effect on the urbanization process in Irbid city (Al-kheder et al, 2009).

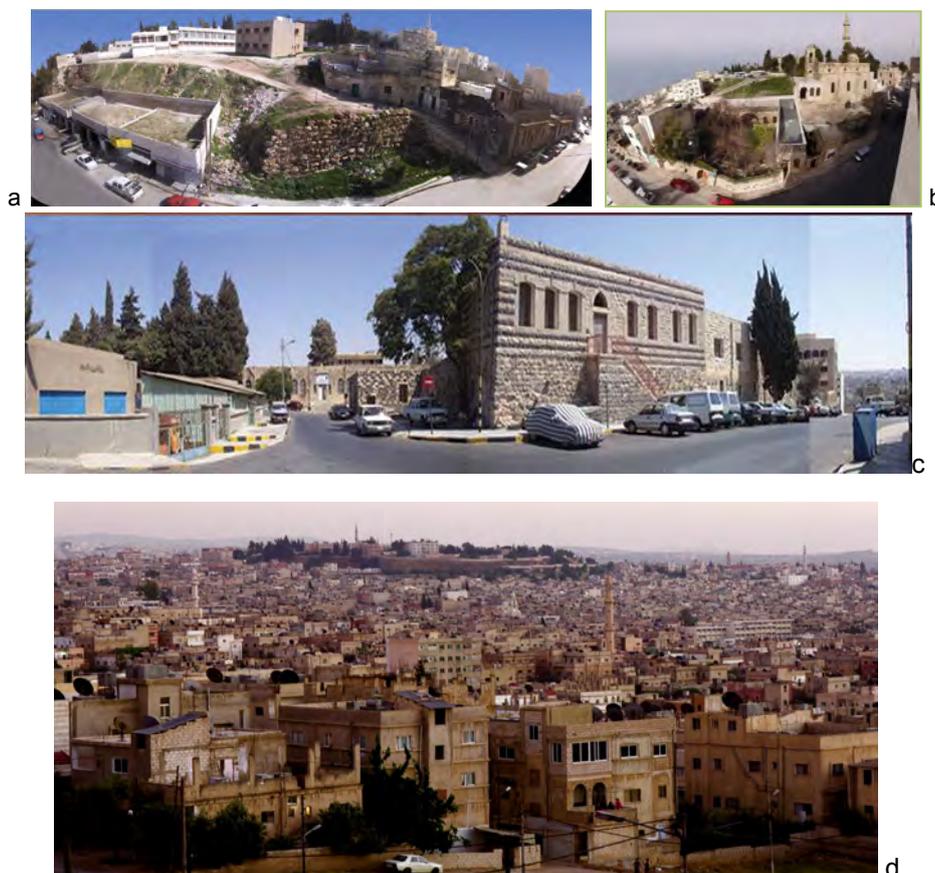


Figure 1. General views of Tal Irbid; (a) Tal Irbid with part of the city ancient wall, (b) with some religious buildings and new light industries within the heritage area, (c) the Saraya (1886) turned into a Museum for antiquities, (d) General view of the Tal in the background surrounded by the modern city (Source: Authors).

The historic core including the Tal, (shown in Figure 2, illustrated by the shaded area on the aerial photo) houses institutional buildings such as the *Saraya* (1886) (formerly an Ottoman prison and command center), which was turned into a Museum of Antiquities in the late twentieth century (Figure 1c) and other buildings established in the early to the middle of the twentieth century, such as religious buildings, educational facilities, police headquarters, large parking lots, and unused open spaces (Figure 1a and 1b).

Irbid city fabric and growth was formed at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century around one nucleus, the Tal. (Figure 3), along with the new city extended to the south. The property register of the late Ottoman era (1883-1884) documents three neighborhoods of Irbid (*Harat al-Qasabah*): *the Upper Harah* (it included 40 houses/ dar), *the Lower Harah* (it included 17 houses) and the *Middle Harah* (Abu Al Shaer, 1995) (see Figure 4). The number of shops at *al Qasabah*, in 1883, reached 23. Several perpendicular roads dissected these neighborhoods, such as; Dar al Hukoumah Road, Sultani road and Citadel road. The Tal, with an estimated area of 40 dunums, reflects the long history of the city and its occupation and houses the formal and administrative buildings, while the *Lower Harah* houses the vital commercial area.



Figure 2. Two aerial photos illustrate the rapid urban growth comparison between 1953-2000, with the areas of Irbid historic core understudy shaded (CC, 2005).

Residences of that era, by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, were mainly built of one floor and included a small planted garden (*Hakura*) and wells (*Kharazeh*) to collect rainwater. Interestingly, Irbid's core is preserving the 1920's and 1930's building styles of the region. Black basalt was commonly used as a building and paving material. The houses, especially those of the wealthy migrants from Damascus, were special. Steel sections-beams for roofing, in addition to the concrete roofs, became more popular in the construction industry, especially after the major earthquake of 1927. Figure 4 illustrates the present distribution of heritage buildings in the study area with a total number of 85 buildings.

The city constantly developed after 1930. After 1948, the migration of Palestinian refugees played a major role in the rise in population density. This was endorsed with the 1967 influx of Palestinian refugees, and thus the historic core was affected by establishing a refugee Palestinian camp directly north of the Tal, to receive 17,768 people. After the 1990 Gulf War, more than 17,000 people came back to live there.

Actually, Irbid city's population grew continuously over the past five decades and has imposed a high pressure on the infrastructure services and accelerates the urban growth process. Such rapid urbanization growth in the study area, between the years 1953 and 2000, can be obviously documented through comparing the two aerial photos as shown in Figure 2 and the phases of urban development of the city of Irbid around one nucleus, the Tal (Figure 3).

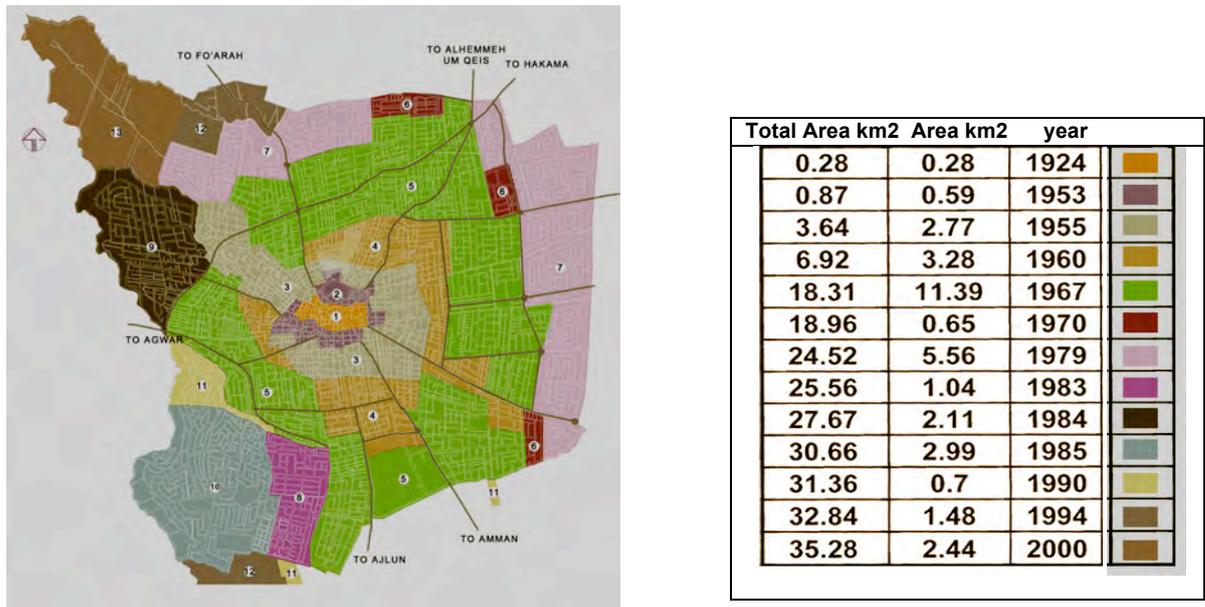


Figure 3. Phases of urban development of the city of Irbid around one nucleus, the Tal, from the beginning of the twentieth century to 2000 (CC, 2005, 2006).



Figure 4. Heritage buildings distribution in the study area with a total number of 85 buildings (left), the three neighborhoods of Irbid (*Harat al-Qasabah*) in relation with the Tal in 1876 (right). (Al-kheder et al, 2009).

Presently, the city core attracts the new poor migrating families and the working foreign labour force. The middle-class families have already moved to the southern part of the city towards the area of the University of Yarmouk. Thus, the old neighborhoods have become a transitional node, for its different newer inhabitants of different mix and origins. In addition, the recently political events and armed conflict in Syria have again seriously affected the city by the migration of more than 300,000 refugees to Irbid. Actually, the Governorate of Irbid is one of the key areas in Jordan which hosts the largest population of Syrian refugees, where the total population reported an increase by more than 20%. All these influxes had its toll on the old city neighborhoods where several old buildings have been deserted or torn down.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE URBAN FABRIC AT THE HISTORIC CORE (STUDY AREA)

A comprehensive site survey was conducted for the area under study forming the historic core, the Tal and the adjacent area, extending on an approximate area of 500 dunums, combined with a detailed photo survey of the relevant components in the urban environment. The well-documented photo survey of the main street elevations and places of interest facilitated a better understanding of the identified patterns and their locations (see Figure 5). The built-up area occupies 44% of the total surface area of the study area. Major arterial roads and streets run along its edges. Al-Hashimi Street is the only arterial road penetrating the mid-section of the study area (Figure 5). The area south of Al-Hashimi Street contains a combination of heritage and traditional commercial activities. Those commercial facilities are easily accessible throughout the site, where most of the commercial activities are abundantly distributed along Al-Hashimi Street and within the commercial district to the South of the Tal (CC Reports, 2005 and 2006, Abujaber, 2009).

In the southern area of the Tal, three buildings of heritage significance were expropriated by the Irbid Municipality for the purposes of restoration and reuse. Two of those buildings have been reused as per the proposed Consolidated Consultants study. Two of those buildings were also formerly residences. The two-storey Nabulsi house (Figure 6) demonstrates the dominant residential heritage building typology of Irbid that became common during the 1920's at the historic core and was selected for its location significance, its aesthetics, and building typology. The building offers a variety of spaces and rooms that can adapt to different uses. The house was later turned into a museum which features the traditional urban lifestyle of the Irbid society at the lower level, as per the conducted proposal for regenerating Irbid city (CC, 2005). The upper level was proposed to house a community facility that can offer local women the opportunity to produce pieces of traditional embroidery for sale to tourists visiting the lower level.

Meanwhile, Al-Sharairi house (Figure 7) dates back to the 1900–1920's era and was home to a famous local Irbidi iconic military commander during the Great Arab Revolt and a famous politician at the early years of nation building (Ali-Khulqi Al-Sharairi). The house was also later turned into a museum of local political history, although it provides modest size interiors that can handle exhibits and displays. The third building is Juma'a, a three-floor building dating back to the 1930's, located on Al-Hashimi Street. It is a mixed-use (commercial/ residential) townhouse structure where the upper two residential levels were used as an inn for a period of time (Figure 8), and will be invested as an inn as recommended by the conducted study.



Figure 5. Two characteristic examples of the street elevations' photo survey; Street elevation with a homogenous and identical architectural fabric, between 1884-1947 (up). Al-Hashimi Street elevation, with emerging modern large structures, such as the City Hall, visible in the center (down) (CC, 2005).

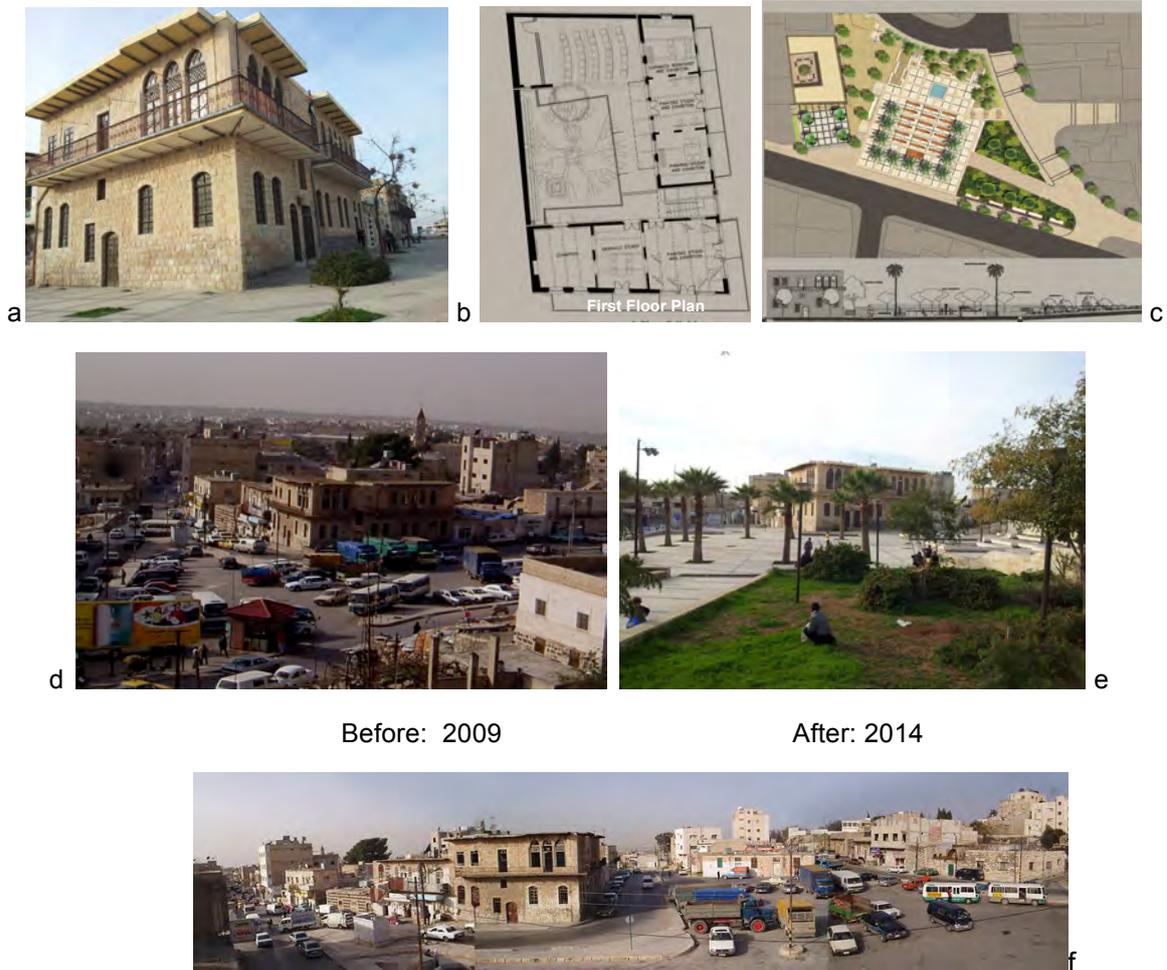


Figure 6. (a) Al-Nabulsi two-floor house, (b) plan of the first floor (CC, 2006), (c, d, e) *Fo'ara* square before and after the intervention, (f) a panoramic view of the site before the intervention (Source: Authors).



Figure 7. Al-Sharairi house, (a) the ground floor plan (CC, 2006), (b) the house before the intervention. (c) The house turned into a museum of local political history (2014) (Source: Authors).



Figure 8. Juma'a mixed-use Building (commercial-residential) townhouse, (a) Plan of the first floor, (CC, 2006) (b) Photo of the building within the surrounded area in 1950 (CC, 2006). (c) The three floors townhouse, where the ground one was used for commercial facilities.

The visual image of Irbid's historic core, in fact, provides dignity and diversity of values and meaning to the understanding of the physical space by the imagery it attaches to it. Taking into consideration the above points of view, one can identify the main culturally significant elements of the urban fabric and formation of Irbid's historic core as follows:

1- *The Tal* (citadel) as the main landmark and lung of the city: The Tal dominates the skyline of the city (Figure 1d), while the citadel played an important defensive and later symbolic role in the urban formation of the city, where Al Saraya was built in 1886 and was used as an Ottoman command center/ the governmental Seat (Figure 1c).

2- *The old neighborhoods (al-Harat*): The study area site includes the original town neighborhoods Irbid historic core and was formed from three main neighborhoods (Harat) (Figure 4). The neighborhood reflected the social fabric of the city and contains numerous urban heritage buildings such as al-Nabulsi house (Figure 6), Al-Sharairi house (Figure 7), and many large townhouses and buildings constructed to accommodate the main families of Irbid, leading the economic power of the city, such as *Juma'a* family house (Figure 8). The cultural significance also of the *old neighborhoods'* area is associated with several *Irbidi* leaders, such as Wasfi al-Tal (ex-prime minister), Ali Kholqi Al-Sharairi, and Arrar (famous poet) who played an important role in the political and literature fields at both the local and national scene. Arrar's (the poet) museum features some of the poets' belongings and displays verses of his poetry. It also presents other cultural components related to Irbid, including a library of local literature and scholarly works on Irbid and the region.

3- *Suqs* (Market) and *bazaars*: Two suqs existed in Irbid, the main one called Suq Irbid *al Qadim* (old) and the other Suq *al-Khamis* (Thursday) (see Figure 4).

4- *Mosques and churches*: Four significant religious buildings exist in the study area: The Tal Mosque and the adjacent Greek Orthodox Church in al-Tal Neighborhood, The Western Mosque (also called the Mamluk Mosque) (see Figure 1d) at *Al-Jame' Al-Gharbi* Neighborhood, and the Great mosque in *Al-Jame' Al-Sharki* Neighborhood. The oldest being the Mamluk mosque, which parts of it dates back to 1874 (Figure 1b and d).

5- *Paths, roads, stairs, and open spaces*: The old city fabric was dense with a meandering pedestrian network and carriages. Until the forties of the twentieth-century animals and carriages formed the main transportation system. The secondary paths were no more than 2.1 m in width.

Therefore, notably one of the unique characteristics of Irbid's historic core is that the main elements the old city core obviously follow the model of a typical Arabic and Islamic city pattern. In addition, these main elements represent and typify the place identity of Irbid's historic core. This while:

- The hierarchy of public and private spaces emphasize a high level of privacy of the extended family houses and its influence on the typological formations.

- There are different types of heritage buildings on the site that exhibit three main typologies. Al-Nabulsi house is an example of the Damascene courtyard house typology (Figure 6a and 6b). Al-Sharairi house falls into the traditional courtyard house category (Figure 7) while Juma'a Building represents a townhouse (Figure 8). The high symbolism in relation to the Tal, where the continuity of culture and life has been too dynamic, contributed to a high value of the visual image of the city until now (Figure 1).
- The skyline of the homogenous and identical architectural fabric (Figure 5) of the city, between 1884-1947, was also dominated with the minarets of religious buildings, while the visual and physical kinetic axis of the city and topography contributed greatly to the high aesthetic value of its visual image.

IMPACT OF CURRENT URBANIZATION PRACTICES AND POLICIES ON IRBID'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Changes to land use and the connection with the rapidly developing core enable us to understand and examine the different aspects of the currently adopted urban practices and policies and their impact on the existing urban heritage core. 41% of buildings on the site have a commercial use, 17% have a residential use, while 19% have a mixed use (residential and commercial) (CC Reports 2005 and 2006, Abujaber, 2009). The concentration of the different types of uses divides the site into three categories: commercial, residential, and cultural. 85 heritage buildings and houses were documented (as shown in Figure 4) and four clusters of heritage buildings can be identified. Two of the clusters demonstrate examples of residential use (in Al-Ahnaf and Al-Jame' Al-Sharki neighborhoods). The cluster on the Tal comprises presently of cultural heritage uses, such as museums in addition to religious use, while the central cluster has a commercial use in addition to the Great Mosque.

The condition assessment of Irbid's historic core monuments is determined mostly by their present function and use. It was observed that heritage buildings' condition ranges from good to derelict. 75% are considered in moderate condition and above, while 25% fall within the derelict or abandoned classification.

However, the buildings which have no further utilization tended to decay rapidly, while the buildings which are still in use have a better chance of being maintained. Also, there is a good chance that the buildings which have a new function through "adaptive re-use" are better maintained.

From the conducted survey and reviewing the current organizational plan of the city core, we are able to define three main constraints and challenges for the existing heritage fabric, for the local community quality of life as also for a tourism destination in the area, as follows:

1- Impact of rapid urbanization and change at the historic core: The excessive urban change between 1953 and 2000 is very noticeable at Tal Irbid at the northern part, as can be seen in Figure 2. By the year 2000 and later, the area has become fully occupied by modern out-of-scale structures dispersed around the heritage buildings (Figure 9). The southern part of the site is a heavily urbanized mix of residential and commercial uses (Al-kheder et al, 2009) with a heritage landscape, which is currently challenging to sustain.

Many of the heritage residential buildings are neglected and abandoned, and façades fronting onto streets and pathways in the commercial district are heavily covered by shop signs and advertisements of different size and colour varieties. Another critical problem is in the large majority of those traditional buildings which are poorly maintained and invariably with illegal top-floor extensions.

One of the most obstinate problems in the historic core concerns the connection between the traditional and modern physical forms and treatments. Modern developments disregard the heritage value and contribute to fragmenting heritage assets at the urban core.

Structures of enormous height and mass were introduced in recent decades (Figure 9) and

are grossly out of scale amidst one- and two-storey historical buildings fronting narrow streets (CC Reports, 2005 and 2006)



Figure 9. Examples of modern out-of-scale structures dispersed around and between the heritage buildings, disguising the Tal, heritage, and religious buildings' character (Source: Authors).

2- Poor planning and lack of urban policies for heritage protection: In the current city's master plan, the heritage areas are not taken into consideration, thus, resulting in the destruction of the image and authenticity of the historic area. Many of the isolated heritage buildings are threatened while they have become fully encircled by modern urbanite structures. This also reduces the connectivity between them and decreases their significance as landmarks, as they become very hard to view and reach, thus they have been abandoned. Figure 11 illustrates examples of the isolation concern, where the heritage building becomes buried within the urban area. On the other hand, the implemented urban laws and policies do not take into consideration the protection, the traditional uses, and the particularity of these heritage buildings. This encourages people to still remove some of the remaining existing heritage buildings and to replace them with modern multi-storey buildings (Figure 10). This issue represents a real challenge for enhancing the city core's urban heritage environment and needs urgent action.

3- Lack of public awareness: Actually, almost no actions, until the present study, existed to encourage the public to restore and reuse the existing urban heritage with certain positive activities, such as for a private grand family rest house (*Madafa*), a private museum, or art gallery, etc. This is a critical issue on why the owners overlook the need for carrying out proper and regular maintenance works on their properties. Though, the question is how can these traditional buildings affect Irbidi contemporary society and people who inhabit them? In addition, poverty is obvious, particularly in the inner city slum pockets, and should require urgent attention. The monetary obstacles and problems are reflected in the lack of maintenance at Irbid's historic core.

The great demand for land, also for commercial investment, as supported by the fact of increased land prices, has dramatically resulted in either destroying many of the existing heritage buildings or isolating them from the existing urban tissue (Figure 11). This also resulted in the destruction of the visual image harmony and integrity of the historic area (Figure 5b and 9). Several activities need to be planned to rebuild the sense of belonging to the place for the whole community and empower the romantic nostalgia towards the past, which could lead to the

conservation and reuse of Irbid's traditional buildings. More analytically, the following are the serious negative results of these practices and policies leading to Irbid's heritage degradation:

The Negative Results Due to Improper and Uncontrolled Urban Development Process

The problems inherent from rapid urbanism, at Irbid's historic core, stem actually from political, social, and cultural aspects, where the core now has lost its place identity which once promoted the visual image of the city. Furthermore, while most of the heritage buildings are two-storey, they are abused and harmed through converting the ground floor into shops and business offices.

This has resulted in abandoning and ignoring the original function of the first floor where the advertising boards and signage cover main parts of their original façades (Figures 8c and 9). There should be set regulations for this negative phenomenon.

Promotion of the visual image in relation to the heritage urban environment is a way in which urban residents interpret and use their traditional environment (Ebensaleh, 1998). The improper urban development process encourages the construction of many new commercial and residential buildings at the historic Irbid core, which increase many activities on the local streets, thus, causing many traffic issues such as parking wide trucks on narrow streets for loading and offloading goods for the commercial activities.

This also encourages many of the steel and carpentry workshops to function within the heritage area (Figures 1a and 7b), thus altering its unique identity. The undesirable by-products of these activities, such as solid wastes from some industries, are affecting the environmental equilibrium in the area causing threats and deterioration to their value. By allowing such commercial and light industrial activities to take place within the context of the heritage core, a major loss in the cultural heritage identity is caused.

The Negative Results of the Inner City Slum Pockets Due to the Permission for Multi-storey Buildings and Change of Land Use

Until 1976, buildings of one or two floors formed 94% of the building stock (Figure 5), while presently the number reaches less than 70%. Some of the new buildings are even constructed in place of heritage buildings after being removed (Figure 10). As a result, the historic area with one or two floors maximum started having new buildings with four, five, six, and even eight floors. These high buildings lead to fragmentation of adjacent heritage structures, due to scale variations and partial demolitions or complete blocking off street view and public open spaces.

On the other hand, the continuation of multi-storey structures has obstructed physical and visual connectivity as also walkability and pedestrian accessibility that once existed. This contributes to the isolation of such heritage pockets behind modern multi-storey façades. A good example is the old market area (Figures 11b, 11c, 11d and 11e) and the remaining abandoned buildings located within an urban pocket between the Al-Hashimi Street and the Farmers' market. Usually, these places are inaccessible, separated from the city core by high walls and insurmountable barriers (Figure 11).

Historically, "*Khan Hiddo*" (Figure 11a), of which some features of the original architecture are still evident, was a key landmark. As rapid urban growth swallowed this landmark, within an urban pocket, fragmentation led to the decline, neglect, filled with land waste, and later on abandonment.

Before destruction

After destruction



a



b



c



d

Figure 10. Examples of heritage buildings being removed and replaced by new buildings and activities which result in an enormous loss of significant parts of the city's cultural and social heritage character. (a, c) Multi-storey buildings constructed in place of the heritage buildings. (b) Al-Mahairi heritage building which was removed and turned into a parking lot. (d) The municipality building was constructed after removing the heritage buildings in the area (Source: Authors).

Risky Traffic-pedestrian Interaction and Managing Pedestrian Movement in the Historic Core

The poor road design and heavy traffic congestions taking place at some street segments reduce the system's accessibility. This is noticeable at Al-Hashimi Street (Figure 12), the major arterial road penetrating the study area and separating the northern Tal district from the southern districts, as it is a connecting component to the different commercial activities in its surroundings.

Meanwhile, the street provides access to the Jewellers market, Farmers' market (Figures 13 and 14), and the traditional crafts market sector, in addition to the continuous commercial strip along both sides of the street, offering a wide variety of retail and commercial uses. All these create extremely heavy traffic, making it an obstacle to crossing by any pedestrian. Still, improved pedestrian flow between the different districts of the study area is crucial to enhance the commercial and future touristic area's character. Actually, the road network system in the study area, in terms of its design and traffic planning, is currently ineffective to accommodate the daily increased huge traffic demand for the following reasons:

- The extensive traffic congestions, at major roads as in Al-Hashimi Street (Figure 12) passing close to the heritage buildings, raise problems related to the environmental and organizational condition that contribute further to the deterioration and decay of the heritage urban fabric and any future tourism investigation (Al-kheder et al, 2009).
- Many of the visitors arrive at the site by public transit. Buses tend to stop upon passengers' requests, not on bus stops due to the lack of strict regulations. This increases congestion and hampers proper vehicular flow in the streets, especially along Al-Hashimi Street. Essentially, there are no bus stops' signs and stops on the streets.
- The existing roads are very narrow and are not designed to consider the increasing traffic volumes and there is no way to widen their right-of-way.
- Lack of parking lots forces car drivers to park their cars on streets which result in reducing the road traffic capacity.

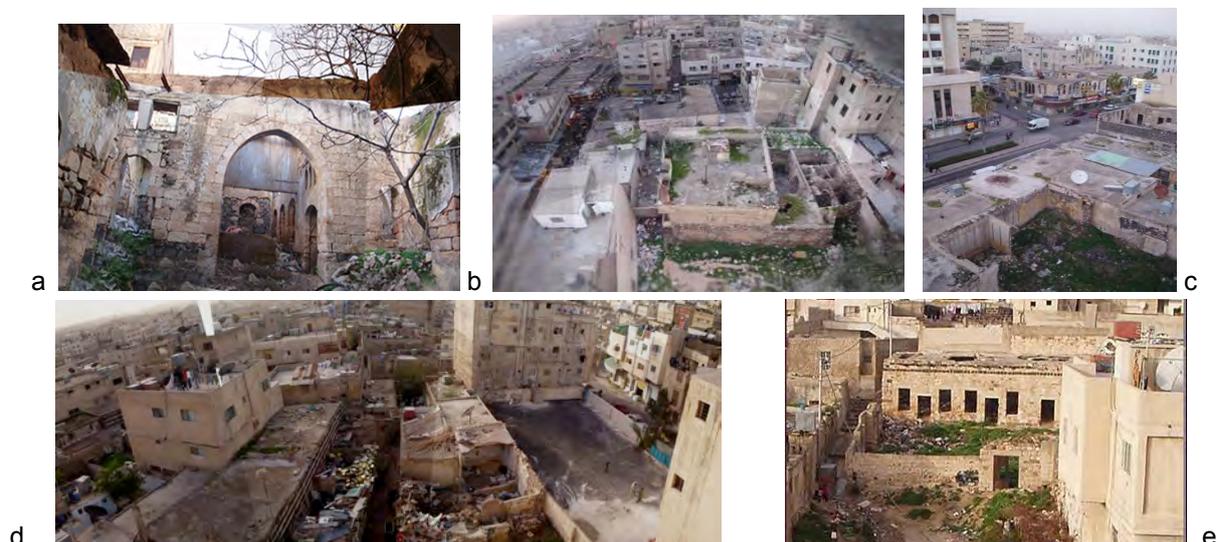


Figure 11. Examples of the phenomenon of the spread of derelict and abandoned heritage buildings in inner-block locations, (a) khan Hiddo, (b,c,d,e) isolated and hidden houses within the urban heritage pockets behind new residential buildings and commercial activities (Source: Authors).



Figure 12 The major arterial road, Al-Hashimi Street, penetrating the study area with traffic congestions (Source: Authors).

TOWARDS DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE IRBID HERITAGE CORE

The question was and still is if, through preservation and adaptive reuse of Irbid's historic core including the Tal, we can create a civic landmark for a cultural and social meeting place capable of strengthening the civic character and at the same time enabling dynamic relationships in the lives of city citizens. As shown, living in Irbid city is stressed beyond imagination and what is needed is direct intervention in the physical structure of the historic core to convince people and especially decision makers that there is a serious attempt to stem the decline of the urban fabric, to make Irbid a city for people.

In addition, the vernacular architecture has changed and transformed, according to the socio-economic conditions of each era as, "a living organism that grows over time and it cannot be put on ice during conservation" (Philokyprou, 2015, p. 120).

Urban heritage, if considered as a basis for urban planning and regeneration projects at the historic core of Irbid and not ignored and neglected as has been done, the recovery of the historic abandoned buildings and the beginning of a new regenerative program, according to Cherchi (2015, p. 270) "contributes to the improvement of the sense of belonging and identity of a community".

A compatible and sustainable use of the historic Irbid core is only possible by means of infusing the historic core with its full role as a place of socio-economic and cultural creation, shared enjoyment, and memory; a leading strategy, for example, encourages local heritage building owners to maintain also the commercial uses at the street level, such as in the proposed case of Juma'a building (Figure 8) that illustrates a good example of rehabilitating the heritage structure without displacing businesses.

On the other hand, the existence of many open spaces and derelict abandoned buildings in many inner block locations throughout the study area, accessed through narrow indirect paths within old city blocks, have the potentialities of creating public open spaces or enclosures within the blocks. Thus, it can improve the quality of life in the heavily urbanized derelict quarters and create new places of interest for residents and tourists' routes and activities. In this way, Cherchi (2015, p. 257) states that "the potentialities of the reutilization of forgotten urban spaces are remarkable: covered spaces offer new opportunities for regenerating a city, engaging in new relationships, building new squares, and activating new unexpected connections between the different parts of a city".

Irbid's historic core, actually, can play a genuine role as an emerging place of interactions between the modern fabric and urban heritage sites. Any proposed conservation strategy, however, should start from the Tal area. This strategy should be based on an integrated urban

conservation approach and reinstating and strengthening the cultural identity of the city core. Therefore:

- It is of great importance that the association between the conservation process and urban renewal takes into consideration the demands of the local community about the economic value of the historic assets and heritage tourism opportunities at the historic city core.
- The linkage between the old and new is the key issue for Irbid's historic core; the traditional existing fabric and the different historic layers of the Tal area are to be linked within the three mentioned neighborhoods.
- While the built-up area occupies 44% of the total surface area of the study area, the public open spaces and parking lots occupy 20% and roads, streets, and pathways comprise the remaining 36%. This configuration indicates the opportunity for different options to the pedestrian network. Hence, introducing a new plan that incorporates a tourist-oriented pedestrian network can benefit the quality of the local community's everyday lifestyle and visitors' experience.
- The continuity of the pedestrian network, services, and safety need major rehabilitation in order to support the use of such heritage buildings in activating any user or tourist's experience, at the historic core. Even if the commercial activity is hampering the proper flow of pedestrian movement, it has brought a genuine character to the center of the city. However, certain pathways and intersections have the potential to elevate the heritage and aesthetic experience of the locals and tourists.
- A comprehensive traffic study should be conducted to determine traffic flow directions and diversion in the core and the surrounding region to resolve present and anticipated problems.
- To improve the quality of the built environment and elevate the site's appeal, Irbid can be promoted as a tourist destination and bringing tourists to the site can enhance the economic status of the business there. For while the city is bordered by two major archaeological tourists' destinations, Jerash and Umm Qais, and where the most convenient access road to Umm Qais passes through it, tourism at Irbid city is not invested in.

On the other hand, the historic urban area will continue to grow, as will the related financial, social and other problems. To treat the physical manifestation of the problems in isolation increases the danger that the impact of a conservation policy will be in conflict with local needs, expectations, or resources (Steinberg, 1996). In general, there is an incredible shortage of funds for the upkeep and maintenance of the government owned, registered monuments according to the municipality. The following is an investigation of the main concerns and constraints for the implementation of any conservation strategy:

- *Private ownership constraints:* As most of the heritage buildings are privately owned, owners may consider the maintenance of a (registered or unregistered) monument a burden due to their inability to afford the necessary maintenance. In addition, they may be unable to establish other forms of use or innovative mechanisms for the financing of the required conservation.

- *The discourse of conservation for local community development:* There is a need to ensure proper participation of the local stakeholders in the protection and conservation of their architectural heritage. However, technical guidance should be given to the local community and any new intervention on their heritage assets including related maintenance works. A dialogue with the local community about the benefits from tourism revenues and that tourism facilities and activities and trails are planned with them and for them should be given higher priorities. In fact, the three selected key buildings (Figures 6, 7, and 8) were sought as pilot projects to emphasize the importance of creating alternate uses for heritage properties and to encourage further private heritage property owners to act accordingly.

Besides that, a private and public coordination mechanism is of high priority; the local government should create other convincing tools to engage the public and attract the middle-class families and university students to come back to the city core. Adopting and encouraging small to medium investment projects and not seek any "urban mega phenomena of investment" as the stone corner for success. Incentive programs encouraging the local community to invest in this transformation, while reinforcing the sense of ownership and belonging are key issues to increase the sense of belonging and encourage Irbidi citizens to contribute to their city through investing, upgrading of heritage properties, and initiating community development projects. For example, reintroducing the original Irbidi family names back to the streets, squares, and neighborhoods reinforces the association of the local community to their city core and enhances a sense of ownership to public spaces, thus strengthening and revitalizing the collective memory of the city core.

- *Accessibility enhancement concern*: Regarding the traffic problems at the historic core, there is an urgent need for enforcing measures to reroute the traffic, in order to reduce the pressure on the historic core. Actually, actions for altering some streets to pedestrian-only streets are not enough solutions (see Figure 13), if there are no inner ring roads, constructed to redistribute the traffic away from the historic core. This should be the first measure that can contribute significantly to solve the traffic, air, and sound pollution problems as also the social costs of individual transportation and automobile dependency at the historic core. Moreover, all this should help to increase the sense of belonging to a place including a sense of community according to Cherchi (2015, p. 256).

- *The physical and landscaping concern*: Balance between the needs for urban development and maintaining the landscape morphology of the old city should be sought. Meanwhile, the topography and slope indicate that the remaining parts of the study area around the Tal are relatively flat and do not present any problems for pedestrian accessibility and tourist's trails/routes. Conservation measures for the protection of the remaining patches of vegetation located on Tal Irbid are also a must. The vegetation is mostly large year-round green trees such as pine and cedar. There are also trees that run along the northern edge of the Tal (Figure1). Other patches were planted close to buildings and have grown to exceed the height of adjacent structures (Al-kheder et al, 2009). Creating buffer zones, including green areas, to protect the threatened heritage from unplanned urban growth is also of high priority. Placing Irbid on a natural heritage tourism map also necessitates linking Irbid to its surrounding agricultural lands and landscapes.

However, any network of pedestrian routes will not be continuous throughout the site and between the different neighborhoods and districts due to Al-Hashimi Street. It is obvious that the discontinuity of the pedestrian flow would hamper the tourist experience. On the other hand, altering some streets to accommodate pedestrian use as tourism routes is essential, especially at high-density pedestrian areas, to maintain problems related to traffic congestions, road accidents, and severe pedestrian-traffic interactions (Figure 13 presents the proposal).

In addition to the above-mentioned concerns and constraints and recommendations for strategic measures, where the overall urban heritage environment and the accessibility to the heritage areas need improvement, the following two main issues and measures need to be addressed, especially in light of the absence of a city or a national register with related legal protection measures or policies:

1. Declaring the entire site and related buffer zones as a regulated heritage district. Regulations aim to prevent further fragmentation of heritage buildings within blocks by preserving existing pathways, restricting large-scale developments, and specifying preservation mechanisms to heritage assets.

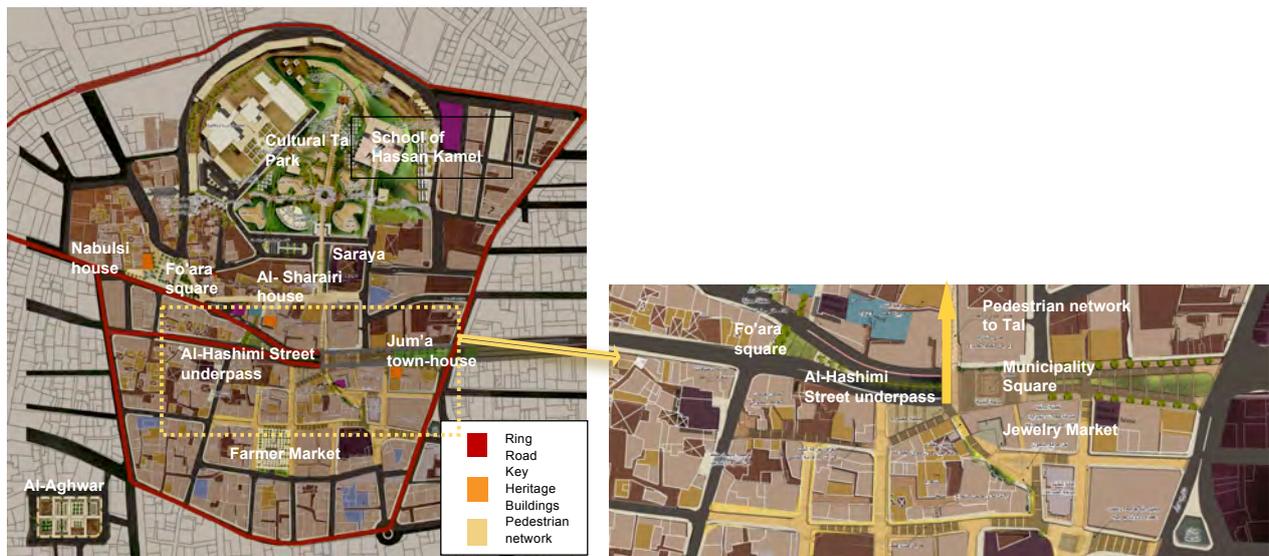


Figure 13. Proposed areas for intervention at the historic core of Irbid including open spaces in the proposed development plan, introduction of a safe pedestrian network between the Northern and Southern part of the core, and underpass at Al-Hashimi Street; a solution to heavy urban traffic problems while linking the Tal with the rest of the heritage city core (Source: Authors).

2. Establishing a GIS-based documentation system at Irbid Municipality and conduct a comprehensive land use plan and create buffer zones using the overlays of the GIS system. This plan should include all the heritage buildings, the plants, and street furniture, in relation to community development.

In conclusion, three points arise from the above discussion that may lead towards a more progressive approach to developing a sustainable heritage conservation and tourism action plan for Irbid's historic core. These involve rethinking about the role and intentions of conservation and restoration, the shift in the role of governmental assistance and the importance of housing in the conservation and tourism action plan process. This is a move away from the municipality's current piecemeal approach of identifying singular buildings for preservation. A holistic approach for protecting, regulating, and retaining the built, economic, and social fabric of the Tal, with its collective memory based on the three neighborhoods (*Harat*) particularity, should be accepted now by the Irbid city decision makers.

DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE URBAN- HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND TOURISM ACTION PLAN FOR IRBID'S HISTORIC CORE

First, to enhance the overall urban system in the study area, a balance between the preservation of the existing heritage and sufficient planning to accommodate the modern urban fabric and growth is urgently needed. A "sustainable urban heritage conservation and tourism action plan" should be integrated within the proposed master plan for Irbid city and Irbid Governorate (Irbid Growth Strategy, 2010, p. 33).

Second, Tweed and Sutherland (2007) argue that areas which are not considered worthy as conservation areas, but 'urban fragments', could usually also have unique population density or cultural features. Therefore, exclusion of such urban fragments in Irbid historic core would lead to the loss of integrity and urban compatibility.

However, there are two main contradictory aspects that directed the proposed framework for the historic core and the Tal action plan – those of economy and culture.

The proposed action plan took into account the following indicators upon understanding their significance and in relation to opportunities for development, improvements, and upgrade in order to protect the existing heritage core. These indicators revealed both limitations and opportunities to build upon. The main physical indicators were derived from the existing situation: the existence of large plots occupied by temporary or vacant structures and the existence of a good percentage of road networks and paths, including stairs and open spaces connecting to a main trail from the Tal. This requires treatment and upgrade to serve and provide better connections. The southern portion also of the pedestrian network requires adornment measures and infrastructural treatments. Meanwhile, the street leading to the old Saraya (Figures 1c and 13) and Fo'ara square features pleasant heritage façades, while the heritage buildings surrounding Fo'ara square create a pleasant enclosure to the public open space (Figure 6).

Third, the main social and economic indicators, based on a questionnaire targeting 502 samples, out of which 70% are from the local residents and 30% are traders (CC Reports, 2005 and 2006, Abujaber, 2009), indicate the following:

- 91% believe that city core development is necessary for social and economic development. 91% believe that providing job opportunities for males is a priority. 70% believe that the area can accommodate residences for living and is a suitable area for living. 57% believe that the development of the core is necessary to attract tourists and provide comfort for the citizens of Irbid including job opportunities and appropriate level of services.
- The majority of residents are classified under the low-income groups' category. Many unemployed females are skilled in traditional tailoring and embroidery.
- Preferences to future uses of significant heritage buildings at the site include museums, boutique hotels, traditional crafts workshops, and traditional restaurants and coffee shops.
- The urgent need for public open spaces and outdoor recreational spaces and the need to upgrade and improve the quality of pedestrian pathways for better connectivity and continuity.
- The services and location of the Farmers' market (Figure 14) satisfy the community needs, but the vast majority indicated the necessity for urgent rehabilitation and upgrade measures.

Thus, maintaining the Farmer's market, for example, while providing open and recreational spaces, to respond to residents' needs, was reinforced. Two main heritage indicators were also derived:

- The area under study represents a bridge, that of linking the present time with the area of continuous history of settlement and occupation (represented in the Tal). It represented the interactive cultural, social, and commercial arena during different eras, especially during its golden age (1920-1930).
- The cultural significance of the area is associated with several *Irbidi* community leaders, associated with several traditional buildings, while the existing condition of many of those buildings indicated low maintenance status.

Ultimately, the collective memory, adorned with the main social figures, points out to some recommendations and sustainable solutions to current urbanization problems of the study area. Meanwhile, to create a place identity, we have to start from the collective memory of the historic core in its most modest form, including even the preservation of the trees and natural greenery of the Tal. The collective memory is a repository of culture and because of its social nature, it can be used as a suitable driver for sustainable conservation in historic cities, like Irbid (Ardakania and Oloonabadi, 2011). Ardakani and Oloonabadi (2011) discussed the role of collective

memory in linking the old parts of the city. They confirm that collective memory is an element that can be used as a driver to achieve these objectives. Thus, paying attention to it will inspire a lively spirit in the historic city core of Irbid as well as restore its urban identity. However, the 'loose fit' areas within the fabric of the city core do not necessarily have to transform into well-arranged open spaces, instead, they can offer informal venues for minorities and the unprivileged to reinforce their sense of belonging and freedom (Ardakania and Oloonabadia, 2011, Thompson, 2002).

Therefore, in order to enhance the visual image of the historic core, the task for architects, planners, and municipal administrators is not only to preserve prominent elements, especially the façades of the traditional built environments and adapt them to conform with the more positive aspects of modern life, but also preserving the integrity and values and collective memory of the community itself, while upgrading the elements to comply with modern life standards and expectations. Also, introducing green landscapes and public open spaces to serve the local community and enhance tourism pedestrian connectivity, in addition to the new uses for heritage buildings to initiate community development, are critical and essential issues for the action plan (shown in Figure 6e, 7c, and 13).

However, the demand for heritage buildings by private entrepreneurs in the core, together with the support provided by the urban planning authorities, indicates that there is a conflict between urban renewal and the necessity for heritage preservation; the historic and architectural values of buildings are subject to the laws of the market (i.e. the law of supply and demand). This also reflects that the reality behind the conservation discourse is one of continuing poverty and increasing disempowerment of the local residents due to the processes of change.

For that, our recommendation for conservation and continuity of the traditional environment of Irbid's historic core should deal with the traditional house, settlement forms, and adopted activities. Chang and Teo (2009, p. 364) conclude that "the urban vernacular created in the past met the needs of an earlier generation; retaining the vernacular today requires continued creativity to adapt old forms to new uses, users and needs".

However, according to Philokyprou (2015, p. 112), "the image of an existing building or historic center is not something static but is constantly subject to changes". Where building replacement is necessary, as it sometimes is on structural or health grounds or both, this should accord with the existing character of the units. It is essential that replacement buildings are of appropriate scale; otherwise, the units will lose their identity even if the street lines remain unchanged (Whitehand et al, 2011). In addition, the features of the selected places should be thoroughly analyzed, consequently, their particular characteristics should be determined by considering their role in the traditional context (Dincyurek and Turker, 2007).

The Tourism and Conservation Action Plan for Irbid's Heritage Core

The suggested action plan proposes areas for intervention at the historic core including open spaces in the new development plan, introduction of a safe pedestrian network between the northern and southern part of the core, and underpass at Al-Hashimi Street providing a solution to heavy traffic urban problems while linking the Tal with the rest of the heritage city core. (Figure 13 presents a site plan of this concept). Taking into consideration the following factors:

- The major issue affecting continuity is the heavy traffic along Al-Hashimi Street, which separates Tal Irbid from the southern urban core (Al-kheder et al, 2009),
- For developing a sustainable heritage tourism action plan for Irbid's historic core, reinstating the traditional and cultural identity of the core, activating the collective memory and the view image are of equal importance, and not so much an attempt by the elite to create a nostalgic theme park or isolated protected areas, but a living and essential urban space in which citizens can participate in the rehabilitation of their city.

- Heritage buildings would be restored over a long period of time, according to the needs and means of the residents, meanwhile, rehabilitation and even maintenance remain beyond the means of most of the people in Irbid. Thus, encouraging the rehabilitation of traditional residential complexes such as the Mamluki mosque neighborhood was one of the main recommendations but was not a priority for the municipality.

Elaborating on the above points of view, the following are the suggested components of the conservation and tourism actions:

1. Developing an archaeological park at Tal Irbid after conducting the required excavations (Figures 1 and 13).

The vital issue, regarding the Tal Irbid, the main landmark and lung of the city, is in responding to the local ecological and cultural circumstances for managing and planning such a significant eco-historical component of the city. Further archaeological excavations are required to determine its archaeological and historic significance that can help to identify other tourist trails. Interpretation and management of the archaeological park of Tal Irbid should ensure the participation of the community for whom the place has special associations and meanings, or who has social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities for the place (Australia ICOMOS, The Burra charter, 1999, Article12)

In fact, the ratio of the built-up area to the void spaces on the top of the Tal is low and has enormous potentialities to contribute to the larger objective of the study area by reusing the rest of the Tal as a public and cultural park. This can be enforced through planning and adequately connecting the Tal for pedestrians with the other surrounding parts of the urban core. The Tal possesses physical advantages which would allow introducing natural landscaping on some parts of it, with panoramic views in most directions. It also has the rich heritage and historic characteristics, boosting its high potential to couple heritage and archaeological protection and conservation with an open space network that can serve both visitors/ tourists and the local community.

2. Reinstating the traditional and cultural identity of the upper and middle Harah of the Northern area (Figure 13) by:

- Developing the *upper and middle Harah* surrounding the Tal as a center for cultural and edutainment activities. Rehabilitation of all the traditional buildings on the Tal including the Saraya, churches, School of Hassan Kamel, as also other heritage assets in the site, such as Arrar (the poet) museum and the old Saraya museum can complement the proposed museums at Al-Sharairi and Nabulsi buildings. The close proximity of the museums offers a unique visitors'/ tourists' experience along the trail/ route leading between the old Saraya and Al-Nabulsi. Each museum demonstrates a different theme: the old Saraya for archaeology, Arar for poetry and local culture, Al-Sharairi for political history, and Al-Nabulsi for residential heritage and traditions (CC Reports, 2005 and 2006, Abujaber, 2009) (Figures 6, 7, and 13).
- Develop the public square in *Fo'ara* (Figures 6c and 6e) to complement the heritage value of the Al-Nabulsi house and reinforce the pedestrian connection with the cultural heritage assets on the southern slopes of Tal Irbid. The set of steps near Sharairi house also offers a unique experience; they run through narrow corridors of heritage properties.

3. Reinstating of the commercial character for the Lower Harah, south of Al-Hashimi Street (Figures 13 and 14) by:

- Rehabilitation of the specialized Suqs (Market) (Figure 13), such as the Jewellery suq. The Jewellers' market area is the only portion of the visitors'/ tourists' trail which is not clearly visible from the public street, therefore enhanced security measures are required,

- such as surveillance cameras feeding into the closest police kiosks.
- Organization of the unplanned and informal commercial activities taking place on the streets.
 - Enforcement of the use of the abandoned buildings, instead of being nodes for waste collection.
 - Shifting the Vegetable or Farmer's market (Al-Hisbeh) by utilizing the slope and reinstating the public plaza for social events (Al-Afrah) on its roof (Figure 14).
 - The introduction of a safe pedestrian network between the northern and southern part of the core (see Figure 13). While altering the existing street network to enhance pedestrian connectivity and introducing new pedestrian paths can obstruct proper vehicular flow in streets and worsen traffic congestions, it is also necessary to propose new street directions that guarantee adequate circulation within and around the core, such as a ring road.
 - Providing an underpass for the vehicular traffic at Al-Hashimi Al-Shamali to strengthen the pedestrian links between the southern commercial area and the cultural Northern area of al-Tal (Figures 1 and 13).
 - Providing new attractions such as refurbishment of plazas and providing public halls and inject appropriate activities at night to engage the public. Fo'ara square (Figures 6 and 13) provides an introductory open space to the residential cluster and ensures easy pedestrian accessibility and flow.



Figure14. Panoramic view of Al-Hisbeh district (Farmers' market). The activity extends beyond the existing buildings to occupy the entire pedestrian street (left). Proposal for a festive open space, above Al-Hisbeh, with pedestrian tourist accessibility while maintaining the appeal of everyday local lifestyle (right) (CC, 2005).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The previous comprehensive analysis connects different data to frame specific solutions within the study area. It represents the perception methodology at which alternative schemes have been formulated. Like other cities in Jordan, Irbid's historic core has a stock of built heritage assets which lies at its core (Figure 4) and where the majority are still under the ownership of the main local families, untouched by the restoration efforts. However, the majority of the population does not continue to live in these old buildings. They have migrated mainly to Amman, the capital. The families and communities living in are often too poor or ignorant to restore these heritage stone houses.

In Irbid, the key issue is related to the adopted urban policies and the absence of a comprehensive master plan to organize the various land use activities and their heritage properties. This is actually causing an excessive negative urbanization and fragmentation process at different levels, where some significant heritage buildings and units are replaced with modern structures with inappropriate scales. Thus, the units lose their identity, authenticity, and collective memory. This should be stopped. While it is difficult to reverse the changes at the urban historic core fabric, there is an urgent need to avoid further fragmentation caused by modern structures. Any exclusion, however, of the "urban fragments" in Irbid's historic core would lead to the loss of its integrity.

Irbid core including the Tal and the traditional urban fabric safeguard many historic values that can be used for tourism purposes, while considering the urban socio-economic and cultural development, thus leading to a modern city and maintaining its uniqueness. The Tal stands as an asset on its own and has been identified as a preferred location to introduce a public park, featuring an eco-archaeological site and to introduce a green community and series of open spaces to serve the local community and visitors/tourists.

Urban conservation and protecting the integrity of the historic fabric core can assist in its branding, promotion and management in ways that could preserve and protect its aesthetic, historic, and cultural values, collective memory, visual image, authenticity, and enhance the sense of belonging to a place for the whole community and for the visitors' experience. In terms of monuments, it is stressed that these need to be seen as part of 'conservation and tourism areas', and not fragmentary, while their sustainability and revival will be most feasible if they are integrated into new creative concepts of use in the city's master plan.

Unfortunately, the urban heritage of the historic core is neglected and cannot guide the inter-relationships between the historic areas and the wider urban context. The study shows that commercial uses overtook residential zones in inner areas where in some blocks the decline of residential uses is clearly manifested. Most of the discussed urban problems and their role in heritage area degradation are either directly or indirectly related to problems in designing and implementing the master plan and related urban policies. Lack of planning and of public awareness about the core's cultural significance also causes major drawbacks at Irbid's historic core.

Conserving the original zoning of the heritage blocks can help avoid further residential gentrification, which in part keeps heritage buildings within blocks inhabited and protected. Actually, the present adopted planning policies are lacking the vision of urban integrated conservation to achieve sustainable interaction with the existing heritage and are more focused on the modern urbanization process. Enforcing by-laws and regulations that deal with scale, height, and setbacks for the new buildings should avoid further negative effects on heritage buildings and assets.

A sustainable tourism action plan and programs for the historic buildings erected mainly in the golden age of the city (the 1920's and 1930's) need to activate public participation. The success of urban conservation measures at Irbid's historic core can play a vital role in its socio-economic development, where the development of local community needs and benefits should be given higher priorities. There is a need to create and implement a practical mechanism to ensure public involvement in conservation measures. Further research is required to develop policies that facilitate and encourage restoring and reusing the privately owned heritage buildings.

The suggested conservation strategy is directed and focused as a solution to the existing problems of the historic core of Irbid. It emphasizes the need to create certain tools to engage the public and attract middle-class families and youth to come back to the city core, while adopting and encouraging small to medium investments in tourism projects and not think only of an "urban mega phenomena of investment".

The proposed conservation and tourism action plan addresses a set of principles by introducing pedestrian trails/ routes and upgrading pedestrian infrastructure within green landscapes and public open spaces. It suggests a visitor/ tourist trail that satisfies the tourists' experience as also the local community needs and enhances pedestrian connectivity. Ultimately, a balance needs to be struck between the "conservation loom" and local community involvement, while consideration of the collective memory can contribute to the sustainable urban conservation and will highlight the social features of this sustainability.

Actually, the action tourism and heritage plan is not only needed for proper conservation but foremost to raise public awareness. To enhance the existing urban system, there is an urgent need to develop an integrated urban conservation plan within a comprehensive master Plan to identify the specific land uses and prevent more kinds of negative mixed-use activities at the heritage areas. However, increasing the number of open spaces and integrating transportation planning with historic and heritage trail development by constructing new ring roads and adapting modern transportation planning techniques such as underpasses and traffic rerouting, can enhance the road network for both local community and touristic purposes. The restoration, also of some façades to re-expose original stonework, of high quality, would affect significantly streetscape, where the visual perception of heritage buildings in Irbid, especially in commercial districts, is hampered by large commercial shop signs and advertisements. Special regulations and policy recommendations are needed to resolve signage and panels that pollute heritage building exteriors.

In conclusion, the Tal already provides an excellent opportunity for Irbid to embark on a bold conservation strategy for the main pilot project. If this pilot project is successful, the Tal conservation strategy will put the city on the map of innovative city planning of the 21st century. The Tal collective memory will become an agent for linking generations to the place where the events are unfolded. The success of conservation, however, still depends on the political will. The historic core awaits the action of relevant stakeholders, especially the government, to revisit this proposal and to collaborate with other parties. There is an urgent need for the core area rehabilitation and revitalization approaches that maintain the collective memory, visual image and identity, authenticity, and the life quality of the historic core where the community was and can be residing.

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