



2019 On Site Review Report

by Tomà Berlanda

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Palestinian Museum

Birzeit, Palestine



Architect

Heneghan Peng Architects

Client

Taawon-Welfare Association / Palestinian Museum

Design

2011-2013

Completed

2016

Palestinian Museum

Birzeit, Palestine

I. Introduction

The Museum is located in the Palestinian town of Birzeit, where it occupies a hilltop plot on the edge of the local University campus. Initiated in 2009 and completed in 2016, the project is a flagship initiative of Taawon, Palestine's largest NGO, and has benefited since the beginning from the support of Birzeit University and both local and international stakeholders.

The institution's objective is to be the leading, most credible and robust platform for shaping and communicating knowledge about Palestinian history, society and culture. The building's position, shape and lithic materiality draw on the terraced landscape of the site, embedding it into its immediate surroundings.

The remarkable integration between the building and its vegetable gardens presents a symbiotic topographic arrangement. This both enhances the architectural quality of the design, and holds a deep symbolic value, stressing the link between the institution and the land on which it stands, as an act of resistance to the ongoing military occupation of the West Bank.

II. Contextual information

A. *Brief historical background*

The town of Birzeit (two Arabic words that taken together mean "oil well") is located roughly in the middle of the West Bank, a few kilometres north of Ramallah, the current administrative centre of Palestine. Records of the settlement, which dates back to the Byzantine era, first appear when Palestine was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1517. At the turn of the 20th century, successive waves of migration and the first world conflict deeply affected the region's demographics. Later the town was a vital revolutionary base for Palestinians during the uprising against the British Mandate (1936–1939), and it was also an important base for Palestinian resistance between 1947 and 1949. Today it has become one of the primary growing poles of urbanisation connected to Ramallah's growth.

Its current importance is intrinsically linked with the eponymous Birzeit University, the first Palestinian institution of higher education, originally established as an elementary school for girls by the Nasir family in 1924. With the growth of its operations, and transformation into a University in 1975, the institution moved out of the historic old town, where RIWAQ – Ramallah's Centre for Architectural Conservation – has been performing upgrade projects recognised by the 2013 AKA, into its present location, on a hilltop a couple of kilometres to the south.

Within the tenuous legal framework established by the 1995 Oslo Accords, Birzeit is currently located in Area B of the West Bank, an archipelago of towns and villages under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli–Palestinian security control. It would be a euphemism to describe this as a working situation, since it effectively limits the movement and safety of all Palestinian nationals, as well as creates a condition of oppression that does not appear to have any end in sight. This has had detrimental effects on all aspects of living. The restrictions on mobility and the de facto impossibility of being in full control over the land is a condition that has also deeply impacted the project under review.

B. *Local architectural character, including prevalent forms and materials*

The main material of the region is the local limestone. This is immediately perceivable as the gaze wanders around the hilly landscape and the densely established settlements. As Palestine has been at the intersection of many different civilisations throughout the ages, its architectural heritage is a reflection of many histories. Birzeit is located in the central part of the West Bank, where one witnesses the different traces of the Ottoman and Arab influences, as well as a more recent nondescript and anonymous global style. The ubiquitous stone cladding operates as some sort of unifying trait, almost as if it could mask the scars that military occupation has inflicted on the territory.

C. *Climatic conditions*

Birzeit enjoys a Mediterranean climate of mild, wet winters and dry, warm summers. The average rainfall is around 615 millimetres per year, with most of the precipitation occurring between November and January. Average temperatures range from a low of 9°C in January to a high of 34°C in August.

D. *Immediate surroundings of the site, including architectural character, access, landscaping, etc.*

The terraced grounds of the hill on which the University sits were traditionally formed by dry-stone walls, called sanasil in Arabic, erected by local villagers, which transformed the landscape into graduated steps more suitable for cultivation. The territory alternates vegetation with concentrated settlements. Their form, siting and presence speaks to the manifestation of the spatial segregation and economic control of the occupation.

E. *Topography of the project site*

The Museum is located on a 4-hectare plot located on the northern edge of the Birzeit University campus. It is roughly rectangular in shape, some 300 by 150 metres in size, with an altitude differential of 40 metres from the lower north-west corner to the upper south-east one, which culminates at 785 metres above sea level. The west-facing slope offers unhindered views towards hills and valleys punctured by Palestinian villages and colonial settlements, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, 40 kilometres away. The soil is primarily rocky.

III. Programme

A. *History of the inception of the project; how the project was initiated*

Taawon (a word that means “welfare” or “cooperation” in Arabic) is a Palestinian NGO established in 1983. From its inception it has dedicated its energies and resources “to promoting the steadfastness of Palestine and Palestinians”, through a range of programmes that are not limited to charitable initiatives and humanitarian aid, but also embrace and integrate development-oriented cultural projects. Its multiple initiatives are focused on three core pillars: one which invests in human capital through education and youth empowerment; a second which facilitates access to quality social services; and a third that provides support to cultural initiatives, such as the Old City of Jerusalem Revitalisation Programme (recipient of the AKAA, 2004). As part of this last thread, its Steering Committee decided in 1997 that it was important to invest in the establishment of a Palestinian Museum, originally with the idea to commemorate the 1948 Nakba, the “catastrophe” of the expulsion of Palestinians from their own land. In 2009 some more focused work ensued, with the appointment of Dr Beshara Doumani as first director. His Vision, Structure and

Content planning document outlines the steps to develop and achieve the Palestinian Museum, which he called “potentially the most important cultural project for Palestinians in their modern history. It can serve as an agent of change and integration at a time of fragmentation and despair”. Changes were brought to the original idea, and the concept became one of a “museum without borders”, a venue, a hub in which to discuss new ideas and think about the future. Acknowledging the fact that not many people or Palestinians could come to Birzeit, and the fundamental challenge of proceeding with the construction of a museum as a container of a non-tangible collection, a reliance on the digital world was suggested. Following his lead, in 2010 Taawon established the Palestinian Museum Task Force to develop a Strategic Plan for the Museum.

B. *How were the architects and specialists chosen?*

The Task Force was assisted by the consulting firms Projacs and Cultural Innovations as client representatives. They effectively managed the process which, following 12 months of detailed activities, resulted in May 2011 in a pre-qualification phase involving over 40 invited architects. Five firms/consortia were eventually shortlisted and submitted a full design proposal. These were:

- Moriyama & Teshima Architects, Canada
- Henning Larsen Architects, Denmark
- Consolidated Consultants / Jafar Tukan, Jordan
- heneghan peng architects, Ireland
- Edward Cullinan Architects, UK

A jury, chaired by Dr Nabil Qaddumi, comprising the members of the Taawon Steering Committee and an Advisory Panel of invited experts, made the final decision on 2–3 December 2011. The jury found the advantages of the winning scheme relied on its simplicity and effectiveness, the optimal location of the building, and the high degree of flexibility. It is interesting to note how, whilst appreciating the strength of the concept of making the land the primary exhibit of the Museum, the jury raised concerns about the possible over-shaping of contours and having too much managed landscape.

C. *General programme objectives*

The vision for the Museum proposed “a mobilising cultural project that (would act) as an agent of empowerment, integration and international solidarity”. Hence its programme “would reflect the transnational nature of the Museum’s mission”. The main objective was to realise a sort of cultural “mother ship”; a building headquartered in Birzeit with links to Palestine’s many satellite communities around the country and globe, enabling the sharing of the Museum’s programme, the exchange of resources and communication via an online platform. The programming document stressed an emphasis on the landscape, both as a locus for the design and as an element to “develop both physical and conceptual links to the wider Palestinian land”.

D. *Functional requirements (i.e. architect’s brief)*

The original competition brief called for a phased approach to the development of the Museum. The first phase, initially scheduled between 2011 and 2013, would consist of building the operational core – its research and public programme teams. Architecturally speaking, the client was looking for a “powerful and memorable experience that would engage and inspire visitors to research and learn more”, as well as an operationally efficient, flexible structure that could accommodate and allow for change. This is also a stance derived from having to operate from a restricted spatial condition, without the benefit of having previously acquired a collection of artefacts that could be curated and displayed.

It was initially envisioned that the following phases would be developed in conjunction with the growth of the Museum's collection, its establishment of a research agenda, and the assessment of future needs. Both the competition brief and evaluation considered this point with the necessary flexibility. At this stage it is not clear what a second phase will effectively entail.

IV. Description

A. *Building data: volumetry, massing, number of units, surface in square metres, etc.*

The Museum is one elongated building, with a double wedge shape. It is 132 metres long by at most 23 wide.

The gross internal area for the project is 3,085 square metres, distributed as follows:

<i>Gross Internal Area</i>	<i>m²</i>
Ground floor	1,955
comprising:	
Lobby	230
Main exhibition space	480
Glass gallery	190
Offices	550
Cloakroom	63
Café / Gift shop	125
Services	230
Mezzanine	77
Lower ground floor	1,053
comprising:	
Classrooms	180
Stores	154
Collections	123
Facility management	331
Building management	112
Total	3,085

The external services areas include the energy centre with its pumping stations area, fire pumps, generator room, main electrical room, company electrical room, maintenance stores and recycling bin store, in addition to the chiller compound and the water reservoirs.

The exterior café terrace and educational amphitheatre directly on the west of the building offer visitors 1,800 square metres of paved surfaces, and the terraced gardens cover 26,000 square metres. A paved parking area to the east of the site, where the main entrance to the Museum is, offers a total of 74 parking spaces.

B. Evolution of design concepts, including:

1. Response to physical constraints – siting, climate, plot ratios, etc.

Already from the competition phase Heneghan Peng's intention was to place the building at the top of the hill and then move down. They did not want to overbuild the site, but rather work from its constraints and what it offered, by embedding, quite literally, the Museum into the topography and drawing from it to tell a larger story of a diverse culture. The traditional stone walls were what existed on the site. Where the water was captured in a certain way, they found both indigenous and imported plants. Every simple piece of ground seemed to have been touched, marked, farmed, used in some way.

As an overall formal design strategy, and as a way to resist the temptation of producing simply a box, the vocabulary of the terracing walls was interpreted and morphed by incorporating an abstract representation of the contour lines into the geometrical generators of the double wedge shape of the building, that also extends to the gardens. Overlapping this planimetric configuration is the environmental concept. The idea of offering visitors the west-facing view of the Mediterranean was combined with the proposition of taking advantage of the afternoon sun, in order to reduce energy consumption. Hence the decision to propose a sophisticated stereotomic envelope that would be perforated along the elevations to utilise natural light yet minimise solar gain, and cooling loads, through shading.

2. Response to user requirements; spatial organisation

Coming from abroad the architects were curious to understand, and be involved in, the project for a Palestinian Museum. They engaged with Taawon's intention to create a platform that would become a museum, trying to make a place, and architectural space that would be open enough so that people would come in and engage with it. Not being sure if a collection was going to be hosted in it, they felt it was important to allow multiple ways in, and see the Museum more as an enabler of discourse rather than a repository of objects.

Past the entrance gate at the north-west corner of the site, the access road winds up the hill and leads the visitor around the north end of the building to the parking area and main entrance, which sit on the ridgeline of the hill. Coming in from the east, one crosses the lobby attracted by its transparency, which already reveals the stunning views towards the west. In order to minimise the vertical circulation, and create a horizontal – and inclusive – structure, the largest portion of the programme is placed at ground level. The café, office spaces and Museum administration are located in the north wing, opening out directly to the terrace overlooking the gardens, whereas the galleries and screening room are in the south wing. From the lobby a staircase leads down to the lower-ground floor where the public education and research centre classrooms and workshops are placed, in direct connection with an open-air amphitheatre. In the south-east corner are the back-of-house storage and service spaces, and to the south-west the delivery entrance, connected to a secondary vehicular and pedestrian access directly to the Birzeit University campus.

The entire site is completely ADA compliant, and the building's energy rating is LEED gold standard.

3. Purely formal aspects – massing, articulation of façades, decorative features, use of traditional motifs, etc.

The building appears as an hermetic and monolithic prism, low and horizontal, with a profile and angular geometry that is consistent in both exterior and interior spatial articulations. The light limestone cladding is the element that unifies chromatically and aesthetically all horizontal and vertical surfaces, from the exterior paving up and around the entire envelope. The 60-centimetre-wide strips are placed exactly along

the east–west direction and invariably meet at all the corners in zero joints. This is both a formal and fabrication tour de force determined by the architect’s intention to resolve the geometries of the folds not with a simple offset, but by recalculating all of the angular geometries in a BIM model prior to construction. The vocabulary of stone interfaces at every single joint offers precious insights in this stereotomic taxonomy which becomes the stylistic feature of the project.

The two large west-facing triangular curtain-wall glazed surfaces are punctuated by the vertical rhythm of the black supporting fins, which also act as partial shading devices. All other interior surfaces are white.

4. *Landscaping*

From the onset it was clear to both the architects and the landscape architect that the only way you can accommodate a large number of people is by extensive use of the outdoor spaces. Hence the whole site became the canvas for a meticulous project of constructing a landscape that would have the capacity to critically engage the message of the Palestinian Museum.

The narrative that Lara Zureikat developed for the landscaping concept is one that moves from the cultural to the natural, telling a story which might be subconscious for visitors. This was the result of the superimposition of different layers and their essences. Sixty-nine different species, mostly very common types and some quite dramatic native plants, are disseminated across ten different terraced gardens. There are specific plants, such as wild thyme, rosemary, wheat and chickpeas, that suggest familiar practices in daily life, but might not be expected in a museum. Both native and imported plants are carefully orchestrated, in a horticultural collection that has the ambition to eventually become a mini botanical garden, an outdoor collection of sorts. The approach has been to nurture a slow seasonal landscape, by adopting the strategy of irrigating it for the first few years and then backing away from it.

The challenge of working with such a varied collection of plants lies in the differing flowering seasons that are quite short. The overall result is a year-long landscape that has seasonal sequences such as in winter daffodils and almonds, in spring the wheat harvest, lupins, rosemary and lavender, in summer pomegranate flowers and in autumn pomegranate fruits and olive harvest. This further allows the cultural connection to the different traditional food recipes that have been lost over generations due to the forced migrations and dispossessions.

A set of paved pathways, fully accessible, crosses the different gardens and leads down to the perimeter of the site, where a metal fence has been recently placed as a response to the wild boards which were coming and eating the plants. The initial position to not have a fence – in order to underscore how, in a land so heavily characterised by military checkpoints and barriers, the Museum is an open place for all – did not last.

C. *Structure, materials, technology*

1. *Structural systems; in restoration projects, structural interventions*

The structure comprises several cast-in-situ large-span reinforced-concrete frames that create the overall envelope. Attached to this is a secondary metal frame that carries the stone cladding.

2. *Materials*

Structural members:

Cast-in-situ reinforced-concrete walls, slabs and frames. In order to maintain the overall angular geometry between inside and outside, the roof slab is supported by concrete upstand beams. For the two large triangular openings in the west elevation, vertical steel blades ensure the stability of the glazing. Above the large triangular entrance void, where the two wedges meet in a zero joint, 60 tons of steel carry the entrance canopy.

Infill materials:

Waterproofing, rigid board insulation, plaster/gypsum boards.

Renderings and finishes:

Natural white local stone slabs with high solar reflectance index (SRI), quarried from the Bethlehem area.
Tempered glazing.

3. *Construction technology*

The main building envelope is reinforced concrete. Outside come a waterproofing layer, rigid board insulation and the metal railing that carries the stone cladding. This is realised as a dry assembly with open joints – not very common in the area, where wet assemblies dominate the building market. Rainwater is captured through the joints and channelled to a harvesting system that feeds the underground cisterns.

4. *Building services, site utilities*

A strong effort was made to achieve the LEED gold standard, and this is reflected by the full set of high-end systems and utilities throughout the building and grounds. These range from the various firefighting solutions customised for the different functional areas to the two HVAC systems: chilled water system and VRF system, for sufficient cost control of operations, and two CRAC units.

Three 450-cubic-metre rainwater harvesting tanks and one 300-cubic-metre wastewater treatment tank are located underground along the west side of the building.

D. *Origin of:*

1. *Technology*

2. *Materials*

(responding to both points together)

Because of the high degree of quality required in the tendering specifications, aimed at achieving the industry's best international standards, the contractor had to import materials and parts from 28 different countries. This was very complex, since it meant having to go through technical and security checks from Israel on every single item. This required a lot of effort in solving logistics and following up on delivery, since security checks would imply up to a five-month delay. However, the most visible featuring element, the limestone, was quarried locally near Bethlehem.

3. *Labour force*

The building contractor was Tubaila, a family-owned business operating in the area since 1956. They invested heavily in the project and set up a dedicated operations room with 11 engineers and four architects on site. The average number of workers was between 50 to 60 labourers on site.

4. *Professionals*

Architects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Architects: Heneghan Peng Architects, Dublin Róisín Heneghan, partner in charge Conor Sreenan, project architectLandscape Architect: Lara Zureikat, AmmanLocal Partner (Structures, Civil, MEP, Cost): Arabtech Jardaneh Hassan Abu Shalbak, Suzan Abdel Ghani
Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Main Contractor: CCC Haitham JaberBuilding Contractor: Tubaila Feras Tubaila
Consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Integrated Engineering & Fire / Concept: Arup Francis Archer, Associate DirectorConcept Lighting: Bartenbach Lichtlabor Robert MuellerConcept Façade Design: T/E/S/S Tom Gray
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Project Managers: Projacs International Nasser Kanaan Emad ShaarStrategy Development: Cultural Innovations, London

V. Construction schedule and costs

A. *History of project design and implementation, with dates*

1983	establishment of Taawon
1997	first idea of a Palestinian Museum
2009	elaboration of concept for Palestinian Museum
2010	Advisory Committee, Strategic Plan and Development Options
June 2011	invited design competition with five teams
December 2011	winning team announced
11 April 2013	foundation stone
May 2016	building opening

B. *Total costs and main sources of financing*

The architects indicated a total cost of 24,300,000 USD. This was borne by Taawon and a number of Palestinian families and institutions, including the Arab Fund for Economic & Social Development, the A.M. Qattan Foundation, the Asfari Foundation and the Bank of Palestine.

The land is on lease from Birzeit University for a 99-year period for a total of 1,500,000 USD.

C. *Comparative costs (if relevant)*

Not applicable.

D. *Qualitative analysis of costs (per square metre, per unit, etc.)*

The cost per built square metre is 7,000 USD, which is relatively high, but is also a result of the incredible logistical complexity of building with such quality in Palestine.

E. *Maintenance costs (heating, cooling, etc.)*

F. *Ongoing costs and “life performance” of building, in terms of materials, maintenance, etc.* (combined response)

Yearly ongoing costs total 167,356 USD

These are subdivided as follows:

• Running costs	74,100 USD	(includes IT, safety, water, electricity and diesel costs)
• Vehicle expenses	6,200 USD	
• Museum operation expenses	42,229 USD	(includes security and cleaning, maintenance works, servicing to systems)
• Landscape maintenance	44,827 USD	

VI. Technical assessment

A. *Functional assessment (use)*

While conducting the review the Museum's third exhibition was about to be inaugurated. Aptly titled *Intimate Terrains: Representations of a Disappearing Landscape* and curated by Dr Tina Sherwell, it explores the changing representation of landscape by Palestinian artists, and their relationship to place and location through the themes of erasure, fragmentation, distance and belonging. The ontological connection between the Museum as a building, artefact, and its ground, is one of topographic symbiosis. Through the experience of the site, and the movement along the contour lines in the garden, the visitor is brought to understand and experience how topography, literally the "writing of place", holds a central place in Palestinian identity formation. This is true of the entire Museum grounds. From the lowest point of the compound, where the access road enters the site, to the top of the hill, the landscape serves as a synthetic and strategic art form.

There is ample evidence of the use of the complex as a whole. The Museum is free and open to the public six days a week. The plan is to host one major exhibition per year, and discussions are advancing to potentially use the glass gallery as a venue for smaller exhibitions that could fill the remaining time. An ambitious research programme has recently been granted support by the Arcadia Fund, in order to digitise a series of audio-visual records, as well as objects, documents and artworks from endangered collections, documenting Palestinian history from 1800 to the present day. This is a response to the constraint of operating under siege, and one of the Museum's flagship and long-term virtual projects.

Access to, and circulation within, the site are quite seamless experiences, with generous and easy-to-navigate spaces. The geometrical matrix of the double wedge is a recurrent element in every concave polygonal space one enters. This in a few instances creates very narrow corners which are more aesthetic than substantial, but the quality of the natural light and the views compensate the slippages.

B. *Climatic performance, lighting, natural and/or mechanical ventilation, sun control, insect control, acoustics, orientation, etc.; description of systems developed and utilised*

The Museum is the recipient of a 2017 LEED gold certificate. The following notes elaborate on a summary provided – at my request – by the Facilities Manager, Bashar Ammar, and reflect my own observations.

The architecture and orientation of the building are designed to achieve the maximum amount of natural lighting throughout the year. The west-facing exposure provides an ideal, well-lit working environment in the entrance lobby, office spaces and glass gallery. From the north and south short façades, the lithic envelope lifts up off the ground through large triangular areas of glazing. The curtain wall is stabilised against wind loads by vertical steel blades situated to the exterior of the glass plane. The fins are calculated in size and location to break the strong sunlight in the summer and allow for acceptable levels of sunlight for efficient thermal control.

For the optimal utilisation of resources and cost control, and to take full advantage of external air, the building is equipped with a sufficient ventilation system that controls fans, the HVAC equipment and automatic dampers, and regulates the provision of fresh air to each space based on occupancy and need.

The gallery is conceived of as a sealed box inside an outer box, which operates as an environmental buffer zone towards the west and the sky. This allows for reduced heat gain/loss, reduced air infiltration, as well as providing a naturally heated buffer zone. Two air handling units serve the exhibition space to achieve the required temperature.

C. *Response to treatment of water and rainfall; discharge of water, and retention and release system(s), if any*

Three large reservoirs with a total volume of 1,250 cubic metres are used to harvest the water from the roof terrace and educational courtyard, to be used for the irrigation and flush systems. The system is controlled and monitored daily. On the rest of the site the storm water runoff is captured through a planting bed and discharged to a natural valley off site.

There is one Waste Water Treatment Plant with a daily capacity of 5 cubic metres, enough to recycle all the waste from the building. The treated water is used for irrigation only.

Further, there is a filtration system for the clean water received from the water authority, to ensure the best quality.

D. *Environmental response; adaptation to the natural environment; adaptation to native flora and fauna*

In order to mitigate the impact of the building on the environment the following measures have been adopted:

- Water-efficient landscaping, with a reduction in potable water consumption and an efficient irrigation system.
- Efficiency of all the building's energy-related systems.
- High levels of insulation; low-energy-consumption systems; solar energy for water heating.
- High-performance façade and shading techniques.
- Waste recycling and construction waste management.

E. *Choice of materials, level of technology*

The choice of materials and finishes is of the highest quality. The desired level of technology represented a real challenge for the local contractor, who took that on board and rose to the occasion.

F. *Response to, and planning for, emergency situations, i.e. natural disasters, floods, winds, fires, earthquakes, etc.*

The entire complex is designed in accordance with the seismic loading of the region.

A complete firefighting system, differentiated according to zones, is fully operational.

G. *Ageing and maintenance problems*

The building has been constructed to the highest quality levels, and does not display any problems. The maintenance and upkeep of both the facilities and the grounds is meticulous, also to preserve ongoing compliance with LEED gold standards. Reported issues mainly concern a few leakages. The details for the waterproofing under the dry-stone roof cladding assembly were very complex, and sometimes make it difficult to intervene. That being said, nothing is visible that signals ageing problems. The gallery space appears to easily accommodate different curatorial choices and temporary partitions.

H. *Design features: massing and volume, articulation of spaces, integration into the site (topography and neighbouring buildings)*

The Museum is a topographical ensemble of the gardens and the building. The surrounding territory of the Palestinian hills clearly holds a structural significance, and the design team has succeeded in providing the visitor with the appropriate steps to discover its traces and witness its transformation and seasonality.

The decision to suppress the educational components below ground level, in anticipation of a possible second phase, is consequent with the initial idea of keeping as much as possible of the programme on one horizontal level.

The project architect has described the building as “a warped monolith, emerging from a skirt of sloped gardens”. The shape is pleasantly integrated with the patterns of the dry-stone walls of the garden terraces. Indeed, it represents a sort of welcome exception to the predominantly vertical and multi-storey imposing presence of the neighbouring built environment. In particular the faculty buildings in the Birzeit University campus display a far more conventional academic and institutional atmosphere that is significantly less integrated into the topography.

I. *Impact of the project on the site, in terms of increased circulation or vehicular movement, changes required for infrastructure (particularly for projects in high-density areas), etc.*

Negligible.

J. *Durability and long-term viability of the project*

The leadership of Birzeit University, under the chairmanship of Dr Hanna Nasir, has been forward thinking in providing land on a 99-year lease, and establishing an agreement to share and promote interdisciplinary research and other resources. At the same time nothing is safe. As Hanan Toukan has poignantly pointed out, the Museum’s “ability to survive its near impossible predicament of belonging to a ‘state’ that is not in a position to defend itself, will ultimately depend on the extent to which the transnational networks, including the financial ones, that it draws upon will allow it to experiment freely with different forms of knowledge production, narrations of memory and cultural heritage preservation”.

The emphasis on the archival work and digital presence is one of the forms that the Museum, under the directorship of Dr Adila Laïdi-Hanieh, is currently pushing, as one of the strategies to “impart meaning to the arts in a situation of scarcity and siege”. Overall the Museum appears to be trying not to monopolise the discourse on Palestinian culture, but rather to run public programmes in cooperation with other organisations. There is an open call for individuals or organisations to contribute to activities. Joint knowledge production programmes are about to start.

The financial viability of all the Museum’s programmes is ensured by Taawon, although in order to sustain the project growth of staff, programme and spaces it will have to engage in different fund-raising activities.

K. *Ease and appropriateness of furnishings; interior design and furnishing*

The interior of the Museum spaces is necessarily barren. The office and educational spaces have been provided with standard furniture. A few bespoke pieces have been designed, such as the entrance lobby reception desk. Everything seems very appropriate.

VII. Users

A. *Description of those who use or benefit from the project (e.g. income level, socio-cultural profile, etc.)*

A vast majority of the regular audience comes from Birzeit. Students and staff of the University stroll around regularly, both to visit and to enjoy the grounds. The Museum is engaged in designing different programmes in terms of audience, through a series of public and educational events, open days targeted at family activities, specialised workshops and public lectures. The virtual platform and the off-site events in Jordan and Lebanon contribute to the success in attracting new audiences.

B. *Response to project by clients, users, community, etc.*

1. *What do architectural professionals and the cultural “intelligentsia” think about the project?*

There has been widespread international coverage of the enterprise, which would indicate a growth in the legitimacy of the Palestinian narrative – or at least of the “safe space” in which it can be discussed. Besides receiving the WAF (World Architecture Festival) Culture Award and the MENA Green Building Award, the Museum was longlisted for the RIBA Award in 2018, and the Chair of the Board, Zina Jardaneh, was appointed a 2019 RIBA Honorary Fellow for her instrumental role “in driving the development of the Museum”.

2. *What is the popular reaction to the project?*

Positive; it is slowly gaining traction. There are major issues with mobility in the West Bank that limit physical access to it. Social media feeds are constantly registering an increase in numbers of followers.

3. *What do neighbours and those in the immediate vicinity think about the project?*

There appears to be a clear sense of excitement. Evidently the main neighbour and stakeholder is the community of Birzeit University. Its students, staff and faculty permeate the grounds on a regular basis. Although a fence has been set up, there is an open connection that allows for continuous access to the terraced gardens.

VIII. Persons involved

A. *Identification of project personnel and their roles in the project (e.g. client, architect, planner, consultant, craftsmen, etc.)*

See list at point IV.D.4 above.

IX. Bibliography

A. List of publications

This is a selection of articles appeared in print:

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The project has been the recipient of the following awards:

- 2017 LEED Gold Certificate for Distinguished Architectural Design and first Green Museum in the Middle East
- World Architecture Festival Award: Culture Completed Buildings Winner 2017
- 2018 MENA Green Buildings Award

Tomà Berlanda

May 2019

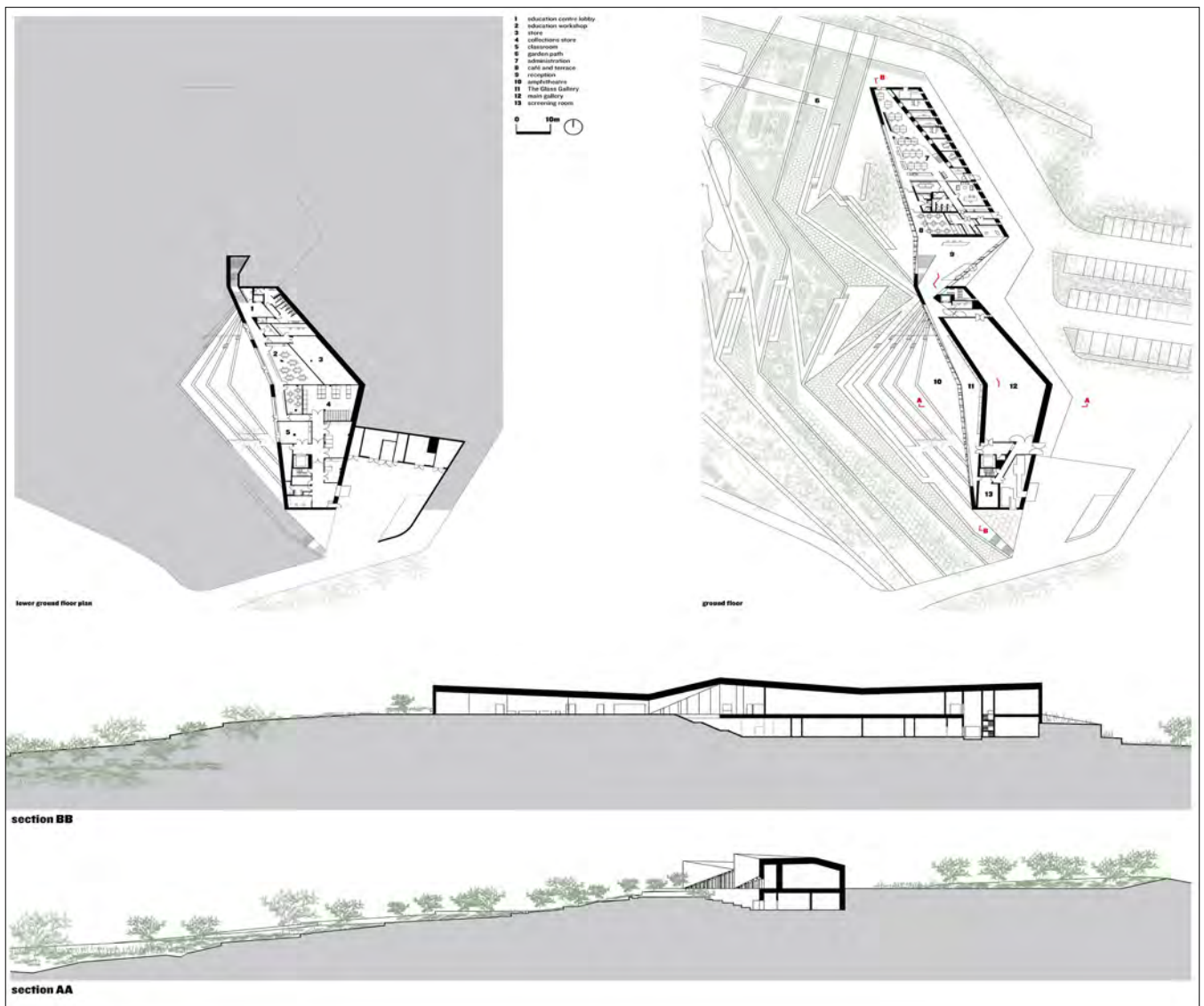




Aerial view



Site plan



Ground floor plan and sections



The museum is located atop a hill with terraced landscape, typical of the region. The agricultural terraces of the site inspired the architectural form of the building.



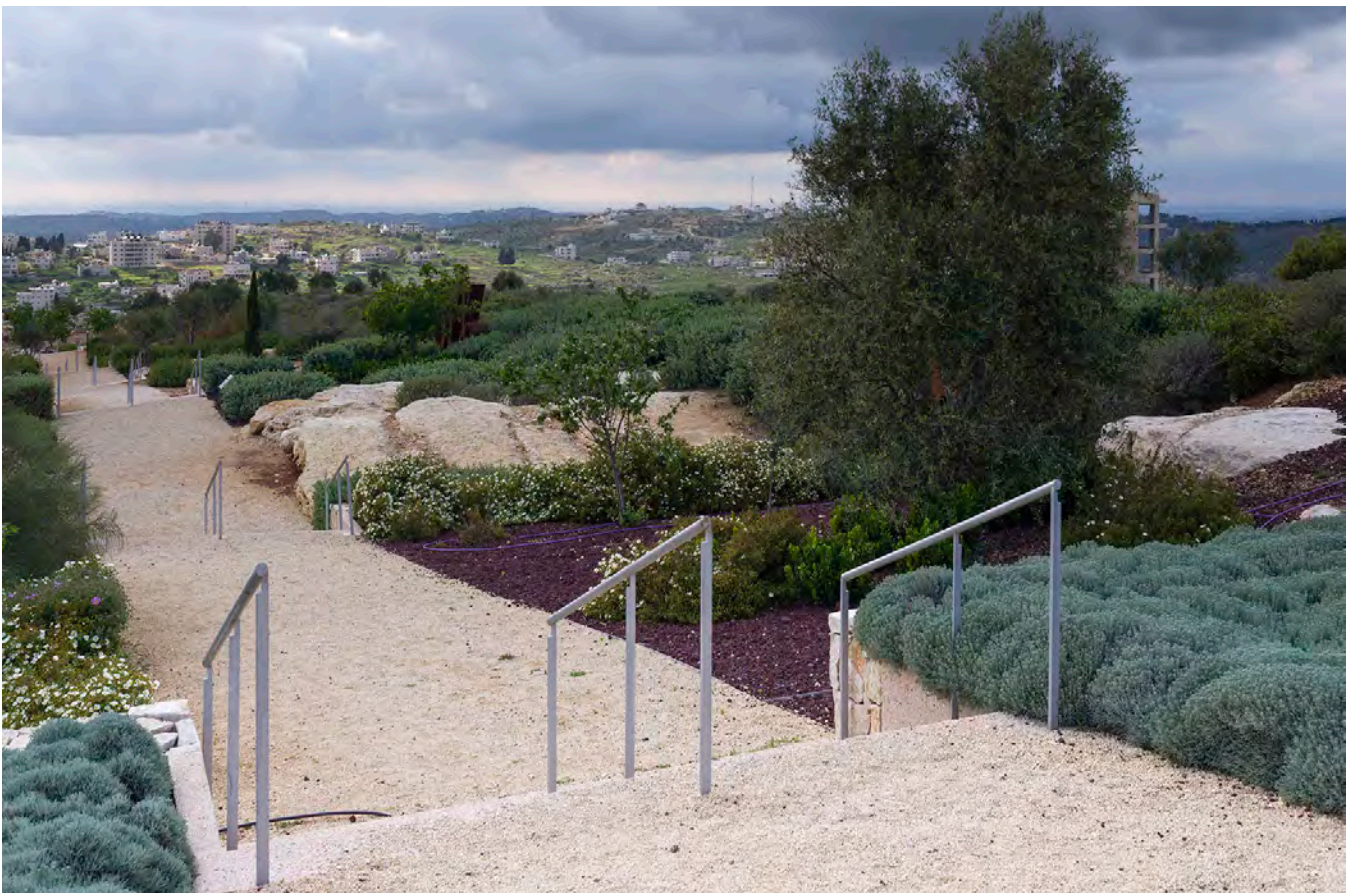
The museum is a concrete and elongated building clad in local limestone, the main material of the region.



The shape is integrated with the patterns of the dry-stone walls of the garden terraces.



The entire complex is designed in accordance to its natural environment and local context.



In the garden, both native and imported plants are carefully orchestrated, in a horticultural collection that echoes the cultural activities of the museum.



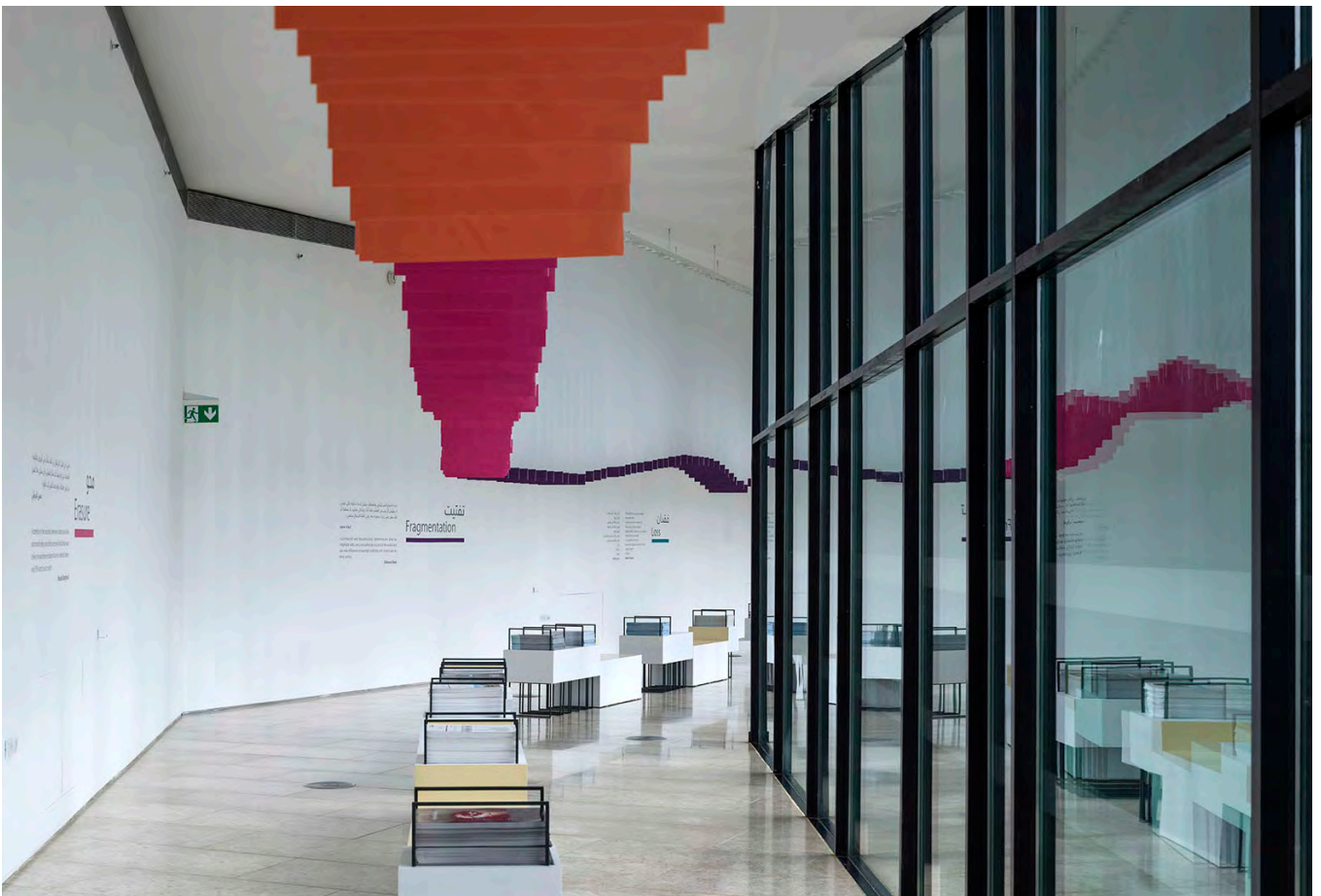
The café is located in the north wing, opening out directly to the terrace overlooking the gardens.



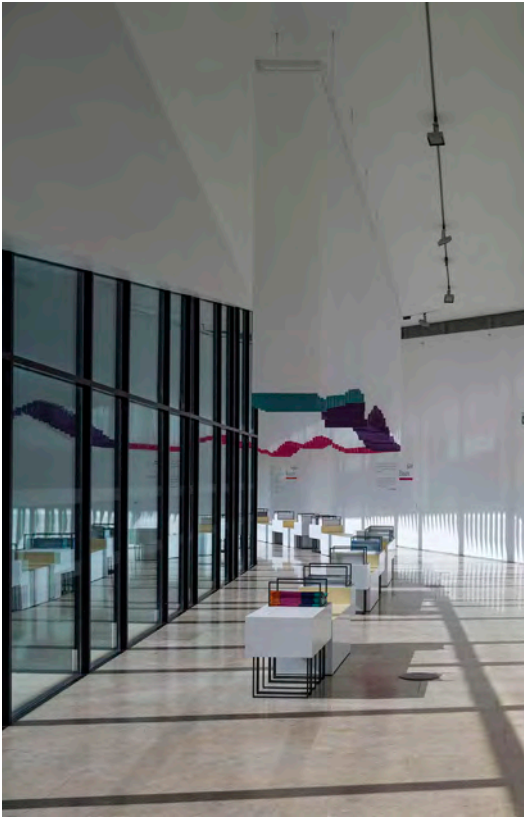
The light limestone cladding is the element that unifies chromatically and aesthetically all horizontal and vertical surfaces, from the exterior paving up and around the entire envelope.



The museum comprises galleries, educational facilities and administrative offices.



The architecture and orientation of the building are designed to provide natural light.



The galleries and screening room are located in the south wing.



The museum is free and open to the public 6 days a week. The plan is to host one major exhibition per year, and discussions are advancing to potentially use the glass gallery as a venue for smaller exhibitions that could fill the remaining time.