Baltit not only towers over Karimabad, but is also the sentinel of the Hunza Valley. Under the protective presence of the Fort, the houses of the traditional settlements of the old Baltit (now Karimabad) Village are gathered along the slopes beneath it. The Fort forms the backdrop and the focus to these settlements. Restoration and reuse of the 700-year-old Baltit Fort as a cultural and historical museum, and the conservation of its context, the historic settlement of Karimabad, are best seen within the perspective of changes that started in the second half of the twentieth century with the independence of Pakistan and accelerated from the 1970s onwards.

Many of the traditional social conventions that held the community together in the past had been weakened first with the abolition of the mir in 1974 and then when Hunza, which had remained largely insulated from external forces, was opened up in 1979 with the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) that links Islamabad to Kashgar.

It was recognized that if not managed properly, forces of change resulting from development could spoil the impressive natural setting and the cultural heritage that was Karimabad’s major resource. Preservation of the outstanding physical and environmental qualities was deemed essential to the well-being of central Hunza. The peaks of the Ultar, Rakaposhi and others, the terraced fields, the irrigation channels, the clustered settlements, the wealth of historic buildings and the rich cultural heritage needed to be protected and made to act as drivers for development.

The rapid change from a secluded rural area into a semi-urban one, with the attendant issues of infrastructure, traffic, commercial activities, tourism and new construction modes, all affected the physical environment and charm of Karimabad. These facts needed to be taken into account as part of the programme that had started with the restoration of Baltit Fort.

Baltit Fort had been abandoned in the early 1950s and a new palace constructed where the mir had moved with his family. In the 1980s the Fort was fragile and if it had been permitted to collapse Hunza would clearly have lost its major landmark and an important part of its cultural identity. However, before conservation work could be started, it needed to be transferred from private to public ownership. The restored Baltit Fort seen from the south-west.

Opposite page: A view of Baltit Fort’s southern facade from below highlights its early 20th-century wooden additions.

Project Scope / Objectives

The physical conservation of Baltit Fort was conceived to meet several interrelated objectives. The first of these was to restore and reuse the Fort as a museum and cultural centre and to protect and manage the built environment of Karimabad. A second objective was to train local people in conservation and related disciplines, establishing a pool of professionals capable of undertaking future restoration projects. Third, the project is meant to serve as a demonstration of excellence in conservation and to stimulate awareness and understanding of the significance of restoration and reuse of similar monuments.
public ownership. The Mir, on behalf of his family, graciously decided to gift the Fort and the land surrounding it to the newly formed Baltit Heritage Trust (BHT), enabling a physical programme of works to be initiated.

From the beginning, it was intended that the conservation should retain the historic character and appearance of the Fort. The restoration of missing features would be based on sound archaeological evidence. It was also realized that if the restored Fort were to enhance and promote cultural values of a living culture it needed to contribute to economic opportunities for the residents and to generate sufficient income to sustain operation and maintenance costs. Accordingly, the main uses selected for the restored Fort were those of a museum and active cultural centre.

While work started on Baltit Fort, a strategic framework for the orderly physical growth and development of Karimabad, and for the maintenance of its environmental and cultural assets, home to a population of around 5000, was developed, resulting from the analysis of its situation in 1992, and leading to the development of the ‘Karimabad Conceptual Development Plan’ (KCDP).

Although the plan for Karimabad, as conceived in the KCDP, is still not enforceable by law, it increased the awareness of the community about the issues at stake, leading to a participatory development process and the need for a community-based institution. In order to anchor this process in the local community, the Karimabad Town Management Society (KTMS), a democratically elected body, was formed and registered under the Social Welfare Societies’ Law. The KTMS promotes community involvement in planning efforts in Karimabad and also exercises influence on development projects that advance the KCDP land use, infrastructure and road planning components. The KTMS has also attracted donor funding for a sanitation project that has enabled full coverage to Karimabad and the lower village of Ganish. This was in line with the earlier pilot project of rehabilitation and sanitation project for a portion of Khunarkash Village that had succeeded in bringing people back to old settlements that were being abandoned.

With increased interest from the community and awareness about the need to plan for development and channel change, Karimabad is in far better shape now than it would have been without the KTMS. There is a new attitude towards the local environment that helps to preserve the farming terraces and encourages the introduction of improved standards of health and hygiene, while reviving sound traditional construction techniques.
Phasing

**1991 to 1996**

- Creation of the Baltit Heritage Trust (BHT) in 1991, transfer of Fort to BHT, beginning of survey work.
- Conservation plan consultative commencement of physical restoration work.
- Establishment of Karakoram Handicraft Development Centre.
- Restoration completed: inauguration of Baltit Fort visitors centre.
- Fort to BHT agreement signed in 1991 with the Baltit Heritage Trust for its future safekeeping and use.
- This being the first conservation and rehabilitation project of its kind ever in Gilgit-Baltistan, with the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services (AKPBS) as consultant.
- The Aga Khan Planning and Building Services (AKPBS) were contracted to carry out work on Baltit Fort under the supervision of AKPBS.
- Work on Baltit Fort and the rehabilitation of the historic settlements around it engaged over 280 full-time personnel.
- Quality of life: With support from the community, a modern sanitation system has been installed to cater for all the residents of Baltit as well as Baltit, covering 1000 households. Piped water schemes have also been implemented, while the local community is encouraged to move animals to their fields.
- Lessons learned: This being the first conservation rehabilitation project brought a wealth of learning to other projects that were taken up subsequently. One major development was the bringing together of the conservation and rehabilitation processes so that planning and implementation were further improved.

**1997 to 1998**

- Public Partners: Government of Pakistan, represented on the Baltit Heritage Trust.
- Community Partners: The community of Baltit.

**1999 onwards**


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The Karakoram Handicraft Development Project, which was set up to complement the Baltit Fort project, and since 1999 managed by the Karakoram Area Development Organization (KADO), produces small embroidered gift items, shawls (local woollen rugs) and hand-knotted carpets, allowing for increased incomes for thousands of women. KADO also operates a solid-waste disposal programme in central Hunza.

**Significant Issues and Impact**

**DATA COLLECTION/ SURVEYS**

A number of surveys were completed for the ‘Karakoram Conceptual Development Plan’ in the mid-1990s, in the physical and housing realm, as well as building surveys, demographics and economic conditions. For sanitation needs, surveys to determine routes and meet future needs were carried out. After restoration and its opening, Baltit Fort attracted large numbers of visitors (around 20,000), which, though, have declined sharply after 9/11 (11.09.2001). However, even around 2000 after 3500 foreign visitors and 8000 domestic visitors paid for access to Baltit Fort.

**MASTER PLANNING PROCESS**

The ‘Karakoram Conceptual Development Plan’ was commissioned in 1992, after it was realized that the traditional settlements were being abandoned, with the consequent implication of building new houses in the terraced land, resulting in the charm of the bowl of Baltit being staked with unsightly new constructions in concrete and the cost of the farming terraces and orchards. New road race and orchards were planned to be opened to all sorts of commercial exploitation, taking away its charm and balance. The multi-faceted planning process had a number of objectives, including establishment of a representative local institutional body – the Baltit Town Management Society – allowing for conservation of both the traditional settlements and the scenic environment and establishing an adequate road and service infrastructure to provide for appropriate land-use patterns while responding to a growth in population and changing economic conditions.

**SCHOLARSHIP**

Abolition of Hunza State in 1974 led to a governmental vacuum, as no proper authority took over the responsibilities of the Mission that had existed since then. Furthermore, the anomalous status of Baltit Village within Pakistan has not allowed for a system of governance that responds to local needs. This was all compounded by the fact that Baltit was not treated as a town or municipality, further affecting planning for its development. Thus, patchwork development projects implemented through annual development plans have been the norm. It is only in late 2009 that a deputy commissioner has been placed in Baltit Village, and a more formal planning process is expected to start.

**HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS CONSERVED**

In addition to Baltit Fort, five historic houses in its vicinity, two mosques – including the Hanging Mosque on the pathway to the Fort – and the historic waterfall that would be the ground of the watchtower, as well as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problems of the building were tackled as another watchtower, have been restored. For the Fort, remeasurement was found to be a temporary, protective cover on the roof, while structural problem...