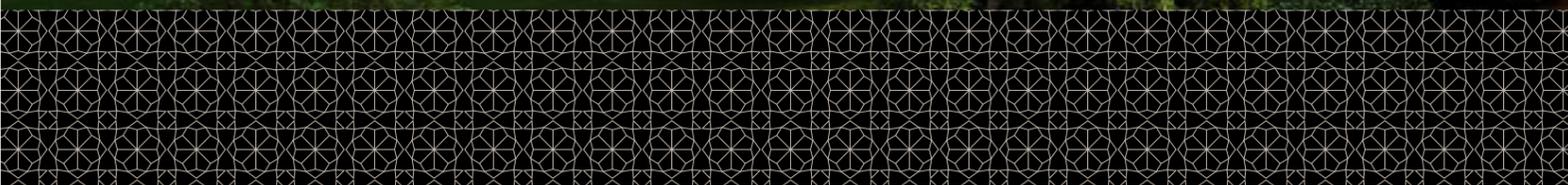




The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme

STRATEGIES FOR
URBAN REGENERATION



The Future of Historic Cities

LUIS MONREAL



Haussmann's modernization programme in Paris began in 1852 and involved the destruction of many narrow medieval streets in favour of broad boulevards.

Most historic cities in the Muslim world are witness to the ravages of human misery. They are often the first stop for transient populations making the leap from rural habitats to urban life. They have a rich cultural heritage but house communities that live in poverty.

What can be done to reverse such situations without making historic cities into museums, or subjecting them to a gentrification process that leads to the replacement of existing populations and activities? What new strategies can be applied to ensure a future for historic cities? What new methodologies, means and resources are required?

This is what this book is about. It intends to provide answers to some of these questions – answers based on the experience gained by the Historic Cities Programme (HCP) of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) during the past ten years.

The first premise for the survival of historic cities as we know them today is to give their inhabitants a real chance to improve their living standards and to break free from the constraints of poverty. The gradual development of a middle class, able to play a role in the collective effort to maintain a city's assets, its domestic and monumental architecture, infrastructure and public services, is key to this strategy. Traditional approaches to the conservation of a city's cultural heritage that do not address the social and economic dimensions of the problem are insufficient to ensure the survival of historic settlements that are irreplaceable witnesses to the development of human civilization.

At present, 242 cities are registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List. These historic cities naturally evolved over time according to specific geographic and socio-economic conditions. As the Getty Conservation Institute has made clear: "There is little question that exponential growth and uncontrolled changes put the integrity and authenticity of historic cities and urban settlements, and the values that are embedded in them, at risk. At a time of rapid urbanization and globalization, the conservation of historic cities is an urgent and difficult challenge." According to the Getty Conservation Institute, the task at hand extends beyond the conservation of architecture and the landscape. It requires the careful management of change through the adaptation of historic buildings and urban fabric to new forms of living, the creation of income and training opportunities, and real consideration for the intangible heritage that contributes to the city's cultural significance.¹

Urban planning, as such, existed in the distant past in the Indus Valley, China and the Roman Empire, but such concepts of order gave way to organic growth in medieval Europe, for instance. It was not until the eighteenth century and the thought espoused in Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751–72) that urban planning in a modern sense emerged. A more rational order could be imposed by demolishing large swathes of the cities that had evolved by accretion over the centuries, or so it was thought. The most stunning example of this approach is George-Eugène Haussmann's modernization of Paris, which began in 1852. Many of the narrow medieval streets of Paris were swept away in favour of



large boulevards for reasons of hygiene, traffic flow and, perhaps above all, security. A corollary of the broad 'modernization' of cities such as Paris was that districts unaffected by these major public works programmes were more obviously the subject of conservation efforts. The idea that the historic city could and should coexist with the modernity imposed by urban planning came to the fore, at least where some old structures were left standing.

New Delhi was the idea of the British, whose intention was to impose imperial control. The Rajpath, above, is the ceremonial boulevard in the design undertaken by talented architect Edwin Lutyens.

Colonial Rule and the Stamp of Authority

The use of urban planning to impose authority is, in fact, an essential element in the development of numerous cities under colonial rule. Thus, in both India and Morocco, colonial authorities decided to create their own capitals, leaving old cities outside the economic mainstream. Subsequent to the French invasion of Morocco in 1912, for example, General Hubert Lyautey decided to move the country's capital from Fez to Rabat, because of the rebellious population in Fez, and, beginning in 1913, the architect Henri Prost designed Rabat's new district, the Ville Nouvelle. Although King Mohammed V decided in 1956 to keep the capital in Rabat, strong forces obviously played on these cities as a result of colonial intervention. New Delhi, with its wide boulevards, was the idea of the English occupiers and the work of the talented architect Edwin Lutyens. Designed and built between 1912 and 1931, New Delhi replaced Calcutta as the capital of India. New Delhi was built to the south of the Old City. The point here was to impose British control through the creation of a new city and, above all, through what the architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock has called a resort to a "Roman scale."² The British again intervened in a historic city in Pakistan, where AKTC has ongoing projects. The twenty-hectare Lahore Fort is set in the north-western corner of the Walled City of



The Hazuri Bagh Baradari, made of white marble, is in the foreground of this view of the main entrance pavilion of Badshahi Mosque in Lahore.

Lahore. Though it was essentially built during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1556–1605), the origins of the Fort go back far before the sixteenth century. The English occupied the city in 1846 and turned over the Fort to the local Department of Archaeology in 1927, but not before they had accomplished one symbolic act that speaks volumes about the impact of colonialism on the heritage of historic cities. The occupiers demolished the southern section of the walls, creating a stepped structure that effectively obviated the walled nature of Lahore itself, the fruit of centuries of development and civilization. These wounds, in an almost literal sense, allowed historic cities to be drained of part of their substance, a scenario that in the worst cases leads to the creation of ghettos of a different sort than those in the new world.

The Historic Cities Programme (HCP)

AKTC, through its Historic Cities Programme, seeks to confront the very real and substantial problems faced by historic cities, in particular in the Muslim world. Although European countries, for example, have also faced these issues in the twentieth century, the process of decolonization and urbanization in the Muslim world has made many problems more acute in the period since World War II. Various multilateral initiatives have been aimed at ameliorating the situation of historic cities, beyond the efforts of individual governments or municipalities, but, until the programmes of AKTC came to their maturity in recent years, few have attempted to deal with the root causes of difficulties. The restoration of monuments, which in itself has proven to be of limited value in terms of sustainability, is but one part of the approach of AKTC. The goal is to create a global approach, which can be used with appropriate variations in many parts of the world.

International Organizations Come to the Fore

Interest in architectural heritage, particularly in historic cities, was not a matter of national concern until the twentieth century. Many European countries took national initiatives to protect their own monuments beginning in the late nineteenth century, and associations with such goals also came forward. In the developing world and former colonial areas, the need to build on national traditions to form a new identity also encouraged drives to preserve and restore historic monuments and districts.³ A more international approach did not develop until after World War I with the League of Nations and more significantly after World War II with the United Nations and UNESCO. The idea that cultural heritage is not just the property of one nation but of all of humanity emerged.

Questions have been raised for some time about the structures and policies developed by UNESCO. The Dutch sociologist Emanuel de Kadt wrote:

“Since 1970 a series of UNESCO-sponsored Intergovernmental Conferences on Cultural Policies has stressed the importance of cultural development as an essential component of the general development of countries. Even so, the cultural and non-material aspects of development are still often neglected by those responsible for making the crucial policy decisions both nationally and internationally. Growth alone may not suffice to overcome poverty within a reasonable time, and the distribution of the material benefits of development among the poorest countries and the poorest population groups within individual countries requires special attention. From arguments about the general effects of different development strategies on distribution of income, attention has come to rest on the staggering number of people, more than 900 million of them, living in absolute poverty. More than ever before, the development community is searching for means that will enable the poor to provide for their basic needs through more productive work, more widely available social services, and increased participation in political decision making. It needs to be considered whether the deliberate and large-scale development of tourism, conceived as a major net earner of foreign exchange, leads to results.”⁴

Coming to the Aid of the Ultra Poor

Having created the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in the late 1970s, His Highness the Aga Khan became increasingly preoccupied by the state of historic cities in the Muslim world, a concern that he expressed publicly in his opening speech at the Ninth Seminar in the series 'Architectural Transformations in the Islamic World' of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. On 11 November 1984, he stated: “When the World Heritage Convention listed 136 sites as being of major importance to the heritage of mankind, no less than one third were monuments of Islamic culture.” For the Aga Khan, it was clear that this remarkable concentration of cultural history was not receiving the sort of economic, social and academic support it deserved. The historic cities of the Islamic world, and no doubt others, were noted to be a concentration most often of the ultra poor in urban environments and, because of this, there was not only a social problem that had to be addressed, but also these ultra poor, due to their poverty, were further degrading these historic cities. He concluded that it was necessary for the Islamic world to try to harness new resources to protect these historic cities, and to bring relief to the marginalized people living within them at a time when there was no agency that was committed to these goals.



Once work had begun on Azhar Park in Cairo, HCP turned its focus on Darb al-Ahmar, the impoverished neighbouring district. On Darb Shoughlan, urban decay and lack of efficient refuse collection services are evident.



Top, an aerial view of Azhar Park in Cairo and the paved promenade along the Historic Wall.

Middle, an early 19th-century lithograph by David Roberts showing what is now the southern boundary of Azhar Park in Cairo.

Bottom, the Historic Wall on the edge of Azhar Park and Darb al-Ahmar, now visible following excavation and restoration.

AKTC's involvement in Egypt began with the Aga Khan's decision to donate a park to the citizens of Cairo, subsequent to an Aga Khan Award for Architecture international seminar entitled 'The Expanding Metropolis' in Cairo in 1984. Soon thereafter a thirty-hectare site on al-Darassa was selected, because of its enormous potential as a 'lung' at the very centre of the historic agglomeration. This hilly site is surrounded by the most significant historic districts of Islamic Cairo, all of which are major destinations for visitors to the city. The topography of the site, formed by debris accumulated over centuries, now provides elevated viewpoints dominating the city and offers a spectacular 360° panorama over the townscape of Historic Cairo.

Having begun the project with the clear intention of creating a new park for Cairo (today's Azhar Park), the Aga Khan and his organizations became increasingly involved in the surrounding district. The work can be said to have developed in a pragmatic way, progressing from the idea of the Park to the discovery of the rather well preserved remains of the Historic Wall of the Old City and going quite naturally from there into the neighbouring district of Darb al-Ahmar. Although it was not originally part of AKTC's scheme for Azhar Park, it became apparent during the course of the work that an effort to excavate and renovate at least part of the fortified walls would make good sense. A length of approximately 1500 metres from Bab al-Wazir to al-Azhar Street, forming the boundary between the Darb al-Ahmar district and the Park, was thus completely unearthed and restored.

A substantial effort has been made to reintegrate monuments as complex as the long-buried Historic Wall into the life of the community. This was done not only by opening connections into the new Azhar Park, but also by renewing housing and monuments that abut the Wall or even sit partially on top of it at one point. And rather than seeking to move residents and local workshops to some distant new location, this project has taken on the training of local craftsmen in the traditional arts of carpentry and stonework that they no longer fully master. Rather than being considered as a barrier between Darb al-Ahmar and the new Park, the Historic Wall has been reintegrated as a living part of the city, and a true sense of historic continuity has been created between Islamic Cairo's past and its future.

In his introduction to the book *Cairo: Revitalising a Historic Metropolis*, published in 2004 on the occasion of the opening of Azhar Park, His Highness the Aga Khan wrote:

"We stand today confronted with starkly different visions of the future of historic cities. At a time when our heritage, the anchor of our identity and source of inspiration, is being threatened with destruction, by war and environmental degradation, by the inexorable demographic and economic pressures of exploding urban growth, or by simple neglect, there can be no doubt that it is time to act. Will we allow the wealth that is the past to be swept away, or will we assume our responsibility to defend what remains of the irreplaceable fabric of history? My answer is clear. One of our most urgent priorities must be to value and protect what is greatest in our common heritage. Breathing new life into the legacy of the past demands a creativity, tolerance, and understanding beyond the ordinary."⁵

The generous impulse of His Highness the Aga Khan to donate a Park to the city of Cairo, which at the time had very little green space, has led in some unexpected ways to the creation of the model now being employed by HCP to intervene in historic cities. Once the idea of the Park was on the table, the Aga Khan quite naturally asked himself how this new facility could be maintained. It also became apparent that giving a Park located near one of the poorest areas in Cairo would not be enough: something had to be done for the Darb al-Ahmar district. The step into the socio-economic situation of the neighbourhood became evident.

Improving Standards of Living

An ongoing analysis of the situation in Darb al-Ahmar demonstrates the impact of AKTC's intervention. Declared household incomes doubled between 2003 and 2009.⁶ Although high levels of inflation nullified most of the gains that were made, there was still a substantial net increase in income during this period. This was manifested, amongst other elements, in reduced expenditure on food items as a percentage of the household budget. In late 2003 fifty-six per cent of the households surveyed reported using more than half of their income for the procurement of food items, which is an important indicator of poverty. Five years later, in early 2009, when the same households were again surveyed, fifty-one per cent reported spending more than half of their income on food. This five per cent gain was made in spite of the dramatic 2008 price increases of basic food commodities, following the removal of most subsidies. During the same period of 2003 to 2009, home ownership of those interviewed in HCP's project area increased from four to eleven per cent, while crowding (expressed as the number of people in the household divided by the total number of rooms) was reduced from 2.75 to 1.73.

It should be noted that from the first year of its operation in 2005, the Park generated an operating surplus, which grew to \$1.3 million in 2009, and a total of two million visitors in that year.⁷ In six years of operation, over ten million people have visited the Park. Taking into account its personnel and maintenance, the Park generates a financial surplus every year. The share of the surplus that is earned by AKTC is directly reinvested in Darb al-Ahmar.

Applying Lessons Learned in Cairo

Overpopulation, poverty and the physical decay of historic cities remain very much a part of the present in the Muslim world and beyond. Aggravated by urbanization or rampant speculative construction, these remnants of culture and civilization are threatened today as they never have been before. Despite the significant efforts of such organizations as



Azhar Park has become a highly popular destination for Cairenes. Here, the neighbourhood of Darb al-Ahmar provides a backdrop for a gathering of young people.



Left, commercial encroachments needed to be cleared away during the restoration by AKTC of the Chahar Suq Cistern in Herat, seen here in the background of a busy street scene.



Middle, a view at dusk along the central axis and water channel to Humayun's Tomb in Delhi.



Right, the restored facade of the Old Customs House on the Zanzibar waterfront.

UNESCO, neither lists of worthy monuments nor a reliance on foreign visitors are sufficient to tackle these problems at the root and to provide a sustainable alternative. Beginning with a pragmatic series of decisions taken in part in the context of the development of Azhar Park, AKTC and its Historic Cities Programme have developed a methodology and an expertise that is being put to use in other projects. The work in Cairo clearly underpins the methodology and approach of AKTC in other locations, but each set of circumstances calls for a different approach. The work of the Trust is forward-looking and dwells little on implicit critique of other systems. The methodology developed in the course of AKTC's projects in Cairo, although somewhat pragmatic in its origin, points the way to a more efficient and sustainable approach to the historic city than any practiced before. Indeed, the process was launched again, and the lessons learned in Cairo were applied, in cities such as Aleppo, Kabul, Herat, Lahore, Delhi and Stone Town (Zanzibar).

Essential Partnerships

It is in the unique context of Cairo that HCP first developed the use of a 'Public-Private Partnership Agreement' (PPP), as the juridical basis for a complex project involving multiple inputs and partners. The PPP is a useful tool to foster collaboration between stakeholders. It allows the coordination of various competencies and inputs to a project, and helps to structure the post-construction management and operations. In this scenario, the public sector can offer regulatory oversight, administrative support and investment in infrastructure. The private sector can offer project management, coordination of the multiple stakeholders involved and mechanisms to bring in third-party funding through grant-making bodies or loans. In the case of multi-input projects where HCP partners with sister agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), such as the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (AKAM) in the realm of health, education and poverty alleviation, the PPP is essential for a long-term vision of development. In the case of HCP, the mandate is to create financially self-sustainable projects in the realm of parks that are income-generating endeavours in which surpluses are reinvested in the project. In order to facilitate these enterprises, a legal framework with government partners and donors, such as the World Monuments Fund or the World Bank, are essential for AKTC, which is a non-profit entity.



The PPP system, which has emerged from the engagement of HCP in numerous projects, is one aspect of an overall commitment to create confidence in communities, where the often marginalized, poor inhabitants are initially not prepared to believe that something positive can occur in their lives. Their confidence may be won by implementing projects as quickly as possible, and offering some basic infrastructure improvements that will have an immediate positive impact on the daily lives of inhabitants. Some of these actions are the creation of associations of groups of common interest and empowering them; the establishment of vocational training and employment programmes; the development of opportunities for micro-finance to small merchants to spur economic opportunities; and providing technical assistance to populations in the form of housing, water and sanitation programmes.

The idea of the 'Public-Private Partnership' agreement is not yet common in the cultural sector; it is often not part of the existing legal framework in many countries, and it remains difficult to involve authorities in a project while still seeking to manage work in an autonomous manner. Where HCP has utilized the PPP model for cultural projects, in places like Egypt, India and Syria, a legal precedent has been set that could open the door for future investment in cultural assets by international organizations. However, it is clear that the public sector alone cannot regulate, legislate, establish norms and provide infrastructure, all of which are necessary for Area Development Projects (ADPs). The Historic Cities Programme has also partnered in a meaningful way with other organizations. Though essential to gaining the critical mass necessary in some instances, such partnerships may give rise to increased difficulties related to shifting political priorities, or complex



Above, Azhar Park in Cairo looks over the district of Darb al-Ahmar, where AKTC's intervention is having a significant impact through socio-economic activities and historic monument restoration.

Below, residents used all available spaces for rubbish. AKTC is forming partnerships in the community and with waste-disposal organizations to deal with rubbish removal.



Khorog City Park in Tajikistan, located in a bend of the Gunt River in the heart of the steep and barren mountain range of the Pamirs, provides an enhanced recreational facility for the entire city.

reporting and grant management structures. On the whole however, HCP has created a system where local populations, public authorities and other like-minded organizations have been shown to be able to work together for the common good. Close collaboration with local authorities, often rendered operative through a PPP agreement, technical expertise with presence on the ground and, above all, a broad-based approach with reference to economic sustainability and socio-economic input characterize HCP initiatives.

Influencing Urban Development

In Khorog (Tajikistan), AKTC and HCP have been called on to work on the urban planning of the city, acting as a technical agency in collaboration with the government. The truth is that many administrations in the developing world still view historic cities as a necessary evil, and are tempted to deal with them much like Haussmann did in Paris in the nineteenth century, only now using bulldozers. HCP's interventions seek to demonstrate that urban planning is particularly necessary in historic cities in order to enhance existing assets and to improve environmental quality. They are not closed to the value of modern urbanism, quite the contrary. If there is a new direction that the Programme may take, it is in terms of trying to influence the larger scale of urban planning in historic cities. By carrying out a few demonstrative projects in an approach that might be likened to acupuncture, HCP can establish the feasibility of its approach and attract the larger resources of organizations such as the World Bank or the European Community, for example.

The Best Way to Honour the Past Is to Seize the Future

What are the future prospects of HCP's approach to the rehabilitation, in material and social terms, of historic cities? The current work of the Programme gives some hint of a response. In 2007, AKTC joined the Government of the Punjab and the World Bank in support of a project for the regeneration, renewal and conservation of Lahore's Walled City. Here, all of the tools developed by HCP are being brought to bear: the involvement of the public sector, association with other competent organizations and, above all, the sense that local populations will be actively involved in the ongoing work for the sake of the improvement of their lives. In Lahore, there is a kind of poetic justice in this initiative, a sign that historic cities in the Muslim world have come a long way since colonial powers did their utmost to stamp these unique sites with their own cultural, economic and political imprint. This and other projects are explored in detail in this volume, together with the methodology and resources employed to develop a new vision of the future of historic cities.

This is by no means an exercise of self-satisfaction or a declaration of victory. The forces at work in the movement of populations and the almost inexorable degradation of historic areas associated with the onslaught of a certain vision of modernity are stronger than ever, and not likely to reverse in the foreseeable future. Rather, more modestly, HCP's initiatives seek to offer tools and examples that others can seize on, and to affirm



In the Delhi Gate bazaar of the Walled City of Lahore, a whirl of activity at the Chitta Gate, the entrance to the Wazir Khan Chowk.

the ongoing value of what has come before, even in a thoroughly modern context. These efforts advance in the spirit instilled in the Programme by His Highness the Aga Khan, "remembering always the Qur'anic commandment that humankind must take responsibility for shaping and reshaping our earthly environment, employing Allah's gifts of time and talent as good stewards of His Creation."⁸ There is an urgent need to combine a heightened respect for the traditions of the past with an understanding of what exists and what may come. "The best way to honour the past," states His Highness the Aga Khan, "is to seize the future."⁹

- ¹ 'Historic Cities and Urban Settlements Initiative Project Objectives', at http://www.getty.edu/conservation/field_projects/historic/ accessed on 26 November 2010.
- ² Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1958: "Not since L'Entant laid out Washington had a fiat city of such amplitude and grandeur been conceived, much less even partly executed. The Viceroy's House, finally finished in 1931, is official residence, centre of administration, and focus of the whole scheme – a *tour de force* for which, from the Queen Anne, the Neo-Georgian, and the Palladian, Lutyens lifted his sights to a Roman scale. The result is grand and broad, adapted to the climate, and even reminiscent of the Indian architectural past in some of its forms and features."
- ³ Luis Monreal, *Estrategias Internacionales para la Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural, 1945-1995*, Reial Acadèmia Catalana de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi, Barcelona, 1996.
- ⁴ Emanuel de Kadt, quoted in an abridged version of his introduction to *Tourism: Passport to Development?* (Oxford University Press, 1979), *The UNESCO Courier*, February 1981.
- ⁵ His Highness the Aga Khan, in *Cairo: Revitalising a Historic Metropolis*, edited by Stefano Bianca and Philip Jodidio, AKTC, Umberto Allemandi & C., Turin, 2004.
- ⁶ Data from the '2003 Darb al-Ahmar Baseline Survey' and the '2009 Post-Implementation Survey'. Both surveys were carried out by Dr Dina K. Shehayeb, of the Institute of Architecture and Housing of the Housing and Building National Research Centre (HBRC) in Cairo, Egypt.
- ⁷ Data collected by Aga Khan Cultural Services-Egypt (AKCS-E):

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total park visitors	807,000	1,073,000	1,315,000	1,820,000	2,000,000
Foreign visitors	24,900 (3%)	54,730 (5%)	104,000 (7%)	147,000 (8%)	160,000 (8%)
Total sales (USD)	\$2.7 million	\$3.8 million	\$4.8 million	\$5.2 million	\$5.7 million
Surplus (USD)	\$0.4 million	\$0.6 million	\$1.1 million	\$1.2 million	\$1.3 million

⁸ His Highness the Aga Khan, Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Doha, Qatar, 24 November 2010.

⁹ Ibid.