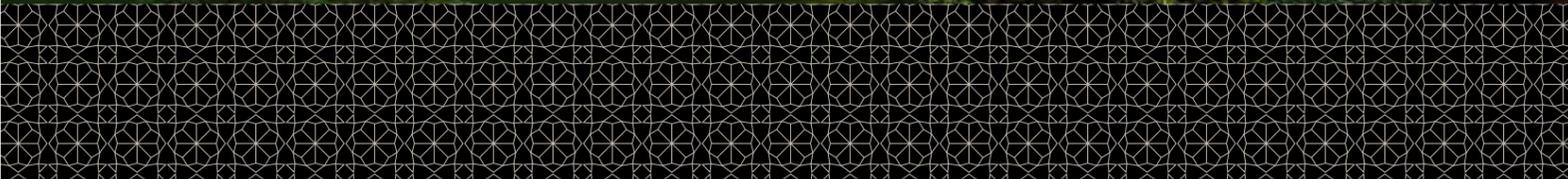




The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme

STRATEGIES FOR
URBAN REGENERATION





Urban Regeneration

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Urban planning has given rise in the recent past to the concept of urban regeneration as a process of change. It has become clear that there are hidden assets in historic cities. Defining physical action zones in historic cities, determining the needs of historic settlements and sites, and setting the role of municipalities, planners, communities and investors are all keys to the urban and physical rehabilitation choices that are being made today.

Overview

An overview of urban rehabilitation, in the manner in which the Historic Cities Programme (HCP) engages in this broad-based initiative to enhance the inherited urban environment in historic settlements, requires a brief summary of factors that have been influential during the last decades. Urban development worldwide has followed an irregular trajectory that has included disdain for the past in the early twentieth century, coupled with an almost unrestricted faith in industrialization and modernity. Dense cities (particularly districts with organic layouts) were not in favour,¹ and leading planners of the time² proposed that urban growth be based on a quasi-suburban model, often based on the model of the garden city. Bipolar decisions grounded on solutions either replicating the known past or sheer novelty in confronting the unknown future have given rise to urban environments that are difficult to read visually and, more critically, difficult to reside in.

Urban planning entered a period characterized by the abandonment or neglect of historic cities and their cores and the development of abstract, often radial central plans, with utopian underpinnings. In the first half of the twentieth century, regional planning³ enlarged the area of inquiry, bringing with it critical thinking on the topics of scale, hierarchy, access and environmental systems. In the process, fascination with regional scale prepared the ground for new towns that sometimes bypassed existing settlements altogether. The legacies of this movement have been numerous. Planners in the 1950s and 1960s were mesmerized by the new city movement (cities such as Brasilia, Canberra, Islamabad and Chandigarh being prime examples) with frequent reliance on the Corbusian super-block and open squares dominated by the automobile as regulating elements.⁴

In the second half of the twentieth century, in contrast to this brave new world of urban planning, a new awareness of finite resources began to make itself felt. It became apparent that a pattern of expanding environmental abuse and intensive land development or transformation, coupled with the pressure of increasing urban density, had undermined the equilibriums so highly valued in sustainable historic settlements.

More recently, while urban expansion in both controlled and uncontrolled form has continued at a rapid pace in many emerging economies, in the industrialized 'North' the cumulative inventory of urban fabric and infrastructure have been increasingly seen to



Urban development worldwide had been dominated by a disdain for the past in favour of formal quasi-suburban models, illustrated here in a housing development.

Opposite page:

By contrast, the Khayrbek complex in Cairo, restored by AKTC, is located in a busy and diverse, dense urban fabric.



Left, AKTC undertook a five-year restoration and rehabilitation effort in historic Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina.



Right, since 2008, as a result of building restoration and social interventions, student enrolment at the Municipal Corporation of Delhi School in Nizamuddin Basti has increased by more than one third and broadened to include various socio-economic groups.

represent a collective asset. Even when under private ownership, such assets have been understood to be extremely valuable, costly to remove and historically redolent with cultural and anthropological meaning. Existing cities have had to 'make do' with whole new districts⁵ created on their edges while emerging economies plotted new central business districts, typically endowed with mid- and high-rise blocks. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, reassessment of planning practices became commonplace. It dawned on many urban planning and design professionals that what they could point to as good practice was modest in comparison to the many problem areas of urban reality that they could neither confidently handle nor readily address. The discourse shifted in the process from urban planning to urban regeneration or redevelopment.⁶

The simultaneity of urban development and decay, in all its phases across the globe, highlighted starkly by modern communications and travel, has created a confusing situation for urban planners and redevelopment specialists. When facing an urban district or area in decline, what are the appropriate responses and remedial actions? There are a variety of considered approaches, amongst them: wholesale demolition and reconstruction; abandonment and construction of new centres elsewhere (mono-industrial business centres, suburbs, edge cities, etc.); replacement of low-rise with high-rise (higher-value and multi-use buildings); and re-densification, preservation and selective reconstruction within carefully prescribed guidelines. Inaction and combinations of these different strategies are found in practice.

The Historic Cities Programme Approach: Urban Regeneration and Urban Rehabilitation

What are the benefits of the more patient process of preservation and selective reconstruction, coupled with physical and environmental improvements, adaptive reuse and community development? Unlike certain other past and present approaches, the multi-disciplinary urban regeneration approach does not aim to reward a particular economic group, but tends to generate benefits across the range of stakeholders. Under this approach, externalities are not wished or abstracted away, but are taken into account in a



neutral way in major decisions. Relentless expansion is not a choice in historic districts. The remaining options are to reduce density, intensify with new open civic spaces, or to adjust density levels with new cores and buffer zones.

Urban rehabilitation, a variant of urban regeneration, seeks to practice in a mode that is inclined to spare existing buildings and community spaces wherever feasible. In so doing, it represents a summing up of the methodologies that HCP deploys in its initiatives in historic settlements. These activities and methodologies comprise: urban physical rehabilitation; conservation of historic buildings and monuments; community development; parks and environmental action and planning; adaptive reuse of existing building stock; and the development of museums and cultural centres. While this publication provides data on each of the processes employed in the urban rehabilitation of historic districts and cities, it is not the intention of the Programme to imply that any one process can be completely isolated from other valuable tools in the broad agenda of urban regeneration.

In many cases, the net effect of an initiative is boosted by the application of additional tools, in a 'multiplier effect'. Efforts by partner development agencies, municipalities, NGOs and private investors, when orchestrated within an adopted planning and conservation framework, add to this multiplier effect. It is these change processes and their physical, visual and socio-economic benefits that ultimately validate the planning investment of all concerned agents. HCP thus endorses urban rehabilitation as a proactive approach to realizing improvements in the physical and socio-economic environment of historic cities and settlements. An entity partaking in urban regeneration must assume that change is possible while avoiding the historicist notion of accommodating an evolutionary path of 'impending change' or predictive trends. History cannot be predicted but it is possible to make reasoned contributions to a better future. Ultimately, the key resources for urban regeneration are ideas and imagination.

HCP's projects seek out strong anchor communities that are tied historically to the urban terrain involved. More precisely, these communities are the best guarantee that the proposed redevelopment will remain relevant beyond the initial phase. The districts of Darb al-Ahmar in Cairo, the Old Cities of Kabul and Herat, the Nizamuddin Basti in Delhi and the Walled City of Lahore are examples of such project types.

The Centre for Earthen Architecture in Mopti, Mali, houses a permanent exhibition and also serves as a small museum, generating income for the maintenance of the local water and sanitation system.



Top, monument restoration is integral to the revitalization of Darb al-Ahmar in Cairo. Middle, the seawall at Forodhani Park in Zanzibar being stabilized and restored. Bottom, in Herat, physical rehabilitation includes street paving.

The Importance of Local Phenomena

While attentive to the global debate on the built environment, HCP's focus is on the local rather than the global aspect inasmuch as material, tangible heritage is local and space-specific, reflecting each site's local genius. Within the Programme physical rehabilitation is based on intensive field research aimed at identifying urban areas that exhibit physical or environmental distress. In addition to the relatively low percentage of urban environments meeting the definition of sustainable physical environments or micro-environments, the problems of improving stressed environmental, infrastructural, or general urban building stock are of such dimension that both governmental programmes based on funding from taxes and private entities funded by entrepreneurial investors are easily overstretched.

Historic urban or rural settlements, especially when populated by low-income communities, are typically the last areas to receive funding. Governmental agencies may propose a rehabilitation project, but poor prospects for a future surplus of community funds will often create the risk that useful improvements will be reversed due to lack of maintenance. The private sector often avoids low-income areas, because these are seen as involving a high degree of risk of project non-completion. This situation has often resulted in the demolition of older, dilapidated urban and rural fabric, followed by reconstruction. This has evolved into a perverse system that squeezes out low-income families, obliterating heritage in many cases, and offering opportunities for even more unsustainable development to take place.

The preservation movement that emerged in many instances during the twentieth century across much of the developed world was a response to this lack of an empowered base within historic areas that would be able to champion the value (real or potential) of its own heritage. In more recent decades, this movement has gained further adherents in arguing that buildings of historic value represent captured resources and energy that it would be foolish to discard in the new age of awareness of finite energy and resources. The preservation movement has thus been joined by the environmental movement in certain cases.

Heritage at Peril

The Programme, since its inception, has faced the dilemma of a profound imbalance between the number of historic sites and settlements that are in need of rescue and rehabilitation, and the number of sites and settlements in which it can meaningfully intervene at any one time, due to the required resources. The selection of projects has been further qualified by approaching the physical rehabilitation of historic areas not solely as a concern for 'matter' but also for the community that resides within or around historic sites. Physical rehabilitation in HCP's mode often involves a combined strategy of physical rehabilitation of heritage sites and areas, and preservation-based community redevelopment. Improvements to the physical state of heritage sites and areas are linked to improvements in the quality of life of the community. The potential for success implies that both the historic area and its associated community must be carefully defined, both spatially and demographically.



The Organic Development of Historic Settlements and Newer Patterns of Growth

Historic cities – unlike the vast metropolises of the automobile age, which often veer between collage and chaos – have tended to develop organically, sometimes as formal nodes and often as smaller micro-settlements with a nucleus of supportive public and community activities. While these smaller units have frequently fused into larger settlements or districts, it is often possible to identify the earlier constituents, which are sub-districts, and find these still functioning as small communities with a wide array of economic functions located within a compact, densely populated area. Community development initiatives tap into the energies of proximity, involvement within a community, trust, and incentive to engage in special programmes even when no private gain is involved. The organic integrity of such settlements is not guaranteed, but often requires repair or reconstruction in harmony with the overall pattern in order to endure. HCP often encounters cases where this reality has been ignored to the detriment of the original fabric.

An aerial view of Lahore, Pakistan, demonstrates how historic cities have tended to grow organically. Functioning and unique sub-districts can be found within the larger organization of the city.

An Integrated Approach

In responding to the physical rehabilitation needs of historic settlements, the Programme has found it advantageous to employ a wide array of tools, such as surveying, planning, research, conservation, open-space improvements and community-focused support services. This is done in conjunction with its sister agencies, extending micro-credit to coherent historic districts which have monuments or significant material heritage within their boundaries. Projects such as Darb al-Ahmar in Cairo, Asheqan wa Arefan in Old Kabul,



Above, surveying work being undertaken by women at Khaplu Fort in northern Pakistan.



Top right, Kabul planning issues are studied and discussed.



Bottom right, a view of Aslam Square in Cairo after its rehabilitation.

the Nizamuddin Basti in Delhi, the Seafront Area District in the Stone Town, Zanzibar, and the Shahi Guzargah district in the Walled City of Lahore are examples of such a district or Area Development Project approach. These projects are described in other parts of this publication by theme and often as case studies in their own right.

District Rehabilitation

The Area Development Project (ADP) approach presented in this publication relies on singular historic monuments, sites or complexes as focal points to mobilize international and governmental interest in reversing decades, if not centuries, of neglect. HCP's most frequent partners in the heritage dimension are national and state level conservation authorities, whose agreement for intervention is mandatory. Municipal agencies are approached for support and collaboration on the issues of infrastructure, such as water supply, wastewater and solid waste, and community health and educational services. In efforts to assist the concerned communities to attain higher household income, vocational training, small- and medium-business enterprises, micro-credit, heritage-supporting tourism and inward investment are emphasized. When viewed in its totality, physical rehabilitation is not a goal but a method aimed at reviving the nuclei of built heritage and surrounding communities.

Rehabilitated districts have been known to revert to abandoned or distressed areas as a result of larger shifts in urban and regional development, massive economic transformations or prolonged periods of economic recession. Urban systems do tend to decline and disorder to increase over time without appropriate intervention. Overcoming municipal entropy calls for local planning capacity.

Master plans, conservation plans, development control and strategic plans are different but related tools used to generate a set of guidelines for steady state conservation and managed growth or transformation. Carried out at the level of coherent districts with popular community support, planning tends to be more responsive to needs. This suggests that "micro-planning" is sometimes more relevant than "master planning" within the historic urban domain. In some cases, "piecemeal engineering" with incremental improvement is to be preferred to an ambitious, holistic approach which can be assimilated to "utopian engineering".⁷ Hence, what is 'local' is of critical importance. Without change, society would be less prone to value and preserve the past. Without preservation and the rehabilitation of our physical heritage as intermediating and stabilizing processes, change would become intolerably narrow and meaningless.

Today sufficient consensus exists regarding the value of urban rehabilitation, and both the public and private sectors have signed on to urban regeneration in the mode of Area Development Projects. Even in relatively large conurbations, space is limited and the ability to upgrade and reutilize existing building stock is usually less costly than expanding metropolitan areas and services. This has led to inspiring examples of the revitalization of inner urban environments and open spaces, and the adaptive reuse of buildings and districts with historic value. The lessons of many of the examples cited in this book have theoretical implications in terms of urban planning – but it would be more correct to state that these case studies show the power of pragmatic planning within a well-defined area and with creative attention to an area's needs and potential.



Drainage upgrading has been carried out in District 7 of Kabul, part of a wider programme of community-managed measures implemented between 2004 and 2008 in neighbourhoods close to Bagh-e Babur.

- 1 Cities at the time witnessed the increase of slum areas as land prices, transport and laissez-faire policies interacted with the meteoric growth of industrialization and rural to urban migration.
- 2 Raymond Unwin (1863–1940) and Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928) are leading examples, the latter in the 'city beautiful' movement.
- 3 Initiated by Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) and taken up by other professionals.
- 4 New Delhi, created in the early twentieth century, is seen as a different species of new town or capital as it is a restrained neo-classical composition that reflects the imperial values and self-image of the late Victorian age. Like many of its previous 'new cities', Delhi has since successfully assimilated this relatively recent urban intervention with its accumulated layers of earlier urban development.
- 5 Examples being La Défense (Paris), Crystal City (Arlington, Virginia), Canary Wharf (London), Diagonal del Mar (Barcelona), and so on.
- 6 The work of sociologists such as Jane Jacobs (1916–2006) revealed the faults in much urban planning at the time and refocused attention on the community scale.
- 7 See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston, 1957), for arguments of each approach.