

IS RURAL HERITAGE
RELEVANT IN AN
URBANISING MASHREQ?
EXPLORING THE DISCOURSE
OF LANDSCAPE
HERITAGE IN LEBANON

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At a time when more than half the population of the Mashreq resides in cities, this chapter inquires whether the study of rural landscapes is of relevance to heritage studies in the region, whether the discourse of rural culture can contribute to the evolving construction of place and identity and whether the concept of landscape is of significance to the patrimonialisation practices of designers and planners.

In seeking answers to these questions, I shall explore the concept of 'landscape', 'rural culture' and 'heritage', discussing their overlap in the context of Lebanon and the Mashreq. My aim is twofold: a) to propose 'landscape' as an expansive framework that can unfold the multiple meanings of heritage, breach the nature–culture dialectic and guide patrimonialisation practices beyond the current focus on product; and b) to call for the recognition of rural culture as a unique historical repository of the region, a natural and cultural heritage. I base my proposition on three arguments. First, embodying the co-evolution of people and their natural environment, rural landscapes embrace not only buildings but also open fields, woodland and extensive scrubland and rangeland. Their inclusion in the heritage discourse is more

likely to integrate current categorisation of ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ wealth and steer the patrimonialisation practices beyond the prevailing focus on ‘product’ to include socio-cultural processes of ‘production’. Secondly, the dialectic of people–environment, overlap of cultural and natural processes is more readily discerned in rural cultures than in globalised urban ones. Their inclusion broadens the heritage discourse beyond prevailing elitist, professional discourse to embrace community practices of everyday living, constructing a sense of place and shared identity. Thirdly, rural traditional practices, whether nomadic pastoral, sedentary or agricultural, are of value in themselves as cultural heritage, but also as embodiment of sustainable use of resource scarcity that is characteristic of arid lands. Rural cultures can serve as exemplars of ecologically responsive management practices that are as relevant in the twenty-first century as they were in the past.

To demonstrate these arguments, I shall draw on my engagement in Ebel-es-Saqi, a village in South Lebanon. Applying landscape design tools and qualitative research methods, I will discuss the discourse of rural landscape in the village, elaborating its relevance to identity construction and shared conception of heritage. I hope to demonstrate that landscape architects, inspired by the ecology of place and prudence of cultural practices can propose dynamic management practices that enable local community stewardship of rural landscape resources.

Background

‘Landscape’ implies the collective shaping of land over time. Landscape is a tangible product, the physical setting that results from the act of shaping, and intangible process of cultural production, entailing shared beliefs, collective values and meanings that inform and guide the production. Complexity of the dialectic discourse imbedded in ‘landscape’ has encouraged its use as a medium for an interpreting culture, identity and heritage (Bender, 1993; Hirsch and O’Hanlon, 1995; Duncan and Ley, 1997).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the concept of ‘cultural landscape’ was advanced in reference to the ‘unique patterns’ created as ‘landscape shapes and is shaped by that particular social organization’ (Crang, 1998). Cultural landscapes embrace virtually all our surroundings, extending along a continuum that has at one extreme what is perceived as wilderness, untouched ‘nature’, and on the other the overwhelmingly humanized environment of cities. Rural cultural landscapes can be located in between the two extremes to include the vernacular landscapes of villages and fields, pastures and woodlands that are shaped as much by natural processes as they are by cultural ones. Cultural landscapes, whether rural or urban, are

closely associated with vernacular and folk cultures, places that have not been designed or created by architect, engineer or planner, but that 'evolve unintentionally' as 'multiple layers of time and cultural activity, (that) are fundamental to our very existence' (Alanen and Melnick, 2000, 5). As the accumulation of physicalities and meanings superimposed over time in a specific place, cultural landscapes 'encode values and fix memories to places' that then become sites of historical identity and cultural heritage (Stewart and Strathern, 2003). Rural cultural landscapes are equally a heritage because they frame our relationship to the past and re-establish our connection to soil and, by extension, land, country and nation. Throughout, they serve as a medium for local/national/regional construction of identity.

Accepting that 'heritage' is a complex concept that can imply 'virtually anything by which some kind of link, however, tenuous or false, may be forged with the past' (Lowenthal, quoted in Harvey, 2001, 319), rural cultural landscapes qualify as heritage by virtue of the temporal (historical), spatial (geographical) and social contexts within which they are produced. Still there are several obstacles that have hindered their recognition as heritage. On the one hand is a rigid categorization into 'natural' and 'cultural' heritage (<<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>>). Only one criterion out of four designating 'natural heritage' applies to rural landscapes. Categorisation fails to recognise that rural landscapes are of value precisely because they are part nature, part culture, 'a sort of ecological-cultural unit' (di Castri and Mooney, 1973). They are at once a natural and culture heritage. In Lebanon and the Mashreq, a region that has been continuously settled for millennia, the 'natural' landscape has long been replaced by a diversity of cultural landscapes in mountain terrain, coastal and inland plains, river valleys and the arid rangeland. Morphological diversity and landscape heterogeneity are sustained through agricultural, silvicultural and pastoral management practices that can be traced to the ancient civilisations of the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. Nor is there a single state authority that is responsible for rural culture and rural landscapes. Their charge is split between various state agencies; for example agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry are the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, biodiversity and nature conservation of the Ministry of Environment, and education and health of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Academics have similarly a compartmentalised perspective of the countryside, divided between scientists, who are concerned with the classification of land and ecosystems and managing environmental resources, social scientists, who are concerned with culture, social and economic betterment, and architects, who focus on the built heritage, generally in villages. The uniqueness of the 'total', the exceptional environmental, ecological and aesthetic role it plays as a foundation of national identity remains

largely unrecognised. Rather, patrimonialisation practices in Lebanon follow the lead of international convention, where cultural heritage includes historical building and urban quarters (<<http://www.solidere.com/project/beirut.html>>), archaeological monuments and, more recently, vernacular buildings in rural culture (<<http://www.thesilkmuseum.com/>>). A recent proposal for cultural heritage development in the Middle East and North Africa, while conceding that the value of patrimony extends beyond its materiality to include cultural, moral, spiritual, political and economic facts, nevertheless adopts Unesco's three broad categories of 'material culture', namely, monuments, groups of buildings and sites (World Bank, 2001, 2).

The bias towards built heritage is also the outcome of a colonial legacy that came to identify heritage with those monuments and sites that corroborated the Orientalist perception of the Near East as 'biblical land' and the 'cradle of civilisation' (Daher, 2007; AlSayyad, 2001). Another reason lies in the tangibility of 'buildings' and 'sites' as products that are readily perceived by all, professionals and the public at large, which in turn reinforces current practices and reaffirms the professional role in conserving material heritage in the region.

The absence of a suitable Arabic term that corresponds to and embraces the complexity of the English word 'landscape' (Makhzoumi, 2002) is yet another factor that excludes rural culture from heritage practices. The accepted translation of 'landscape' is restricted to scenery, limiting the perception of landscape architecture to 'beautification' mainly of urban settings (ibid). In combination, these factors hinder efforts to realise the dynamic potential of rural landscapes as heritage.

In the following part, I elaborate the discourse of rural cultural landscape, shortcomings and potentialities with special reference to the Mashreq. In the second and third I draw on a case study, Ebel-es-Saqi village in South Lebanon, to elaborate methods and approaches adopted and demonstrate the claims made that rural landscapes, not only urbanised ones, can provide insight into identity and heritage in the region.

Heritage practices, landscape and rural culture: shifting paradigms

As discussed above, patrimonialisation practices the world over follow a predominantly Western discourse that interprets 'heritage' as a '*product* that can be mapped, studied, managed, preserved and/or conserved, its protection subject to national legislation and international agreements, conventions and charters' (Smith, 2006, 3). These practices reduce heritage to the product of an unchanging monument and suspend 'a whole range of

questions to do with process' (Ley and Duncan, 1997, 330). Such questions include the act of 'production', use, stewardship and meaning of heritage, which is as important as the product itself, but which expands heritage practices to include the communities whose heritage is being questioned. In the last few decades, post-modern, postcolonial and feminist thinkers have raised these questions challenging the prevailing heritage paradigm, proposing instead a dynamic, process-centred discourse (Bender, 1993; Hirsch and O'Hanlon, 1995; Smith, 2006). 'Landscape' has been at the centre of the new, process-centred discourse of heritage. On the one hand, the complexity and power of landscape makes it 'both spatial and temporal', a palimpsest of past activity, incorporating political action yet encompassing change, 'half imagined and something held in the memory' (Bender, 1993, 9). Landscapes are in flux, changing seasonally and over the years through geomorphic and climatic process and socio-economic and political ones. On the other hand, the specificity of landscapes as unique to the culture and place within which they evolve moves academic inquiry away from the 'universal, value-neutral' research model, towards recognition of the 'dialogue between one's data – other places and other people – and the researcher who is embedded within a particular intellectual and institutional context' (Duncan and Ley, 1997, 3). In short, 'landscape' is likely to sensitise researchers and designers to the local nature of the discourse on place, identity and heritage and to encourage a contextual interpretation of global guidelines and international conventions.

While geographers and post-processual archaeologists applied 'landscape' in the discourse of cultural heritage, landscape ecologists appropriated 'landscape' to the study of natural systems and resources, the 'natural heritage'. As a young science, landscape ecology 'deals with the interrelationships between man and his open and built-up landscapes' (Makhzoumi and Pungetti, 1999), its concern is with spatial and temporal processes that 'bind' the components, natural and human made/managed into functioning resilient systems. The framework of landscape ecology is holistic, integrating visual, aesthetic, use and chorological aspects, and hierarchical, exploring patterns and processes across different levels of the spatial and temporal scale (Naveh and Lieberman, 1990; Farina, 1998). Landscape ecology continues to inform and guide nature conservation strategies but has indirectly influenced design and planning, fostering holistic, probabilistic and expansive methods and objectives (Makhzoumi and Pungetti, 2008).

Bridging the disciplinary divide of the social sciences, science and design, 'landscape' is well suited to the study of rural heritage and the conservation of rural cultural landscapes. I shall demonstrate in the Ebel-es-Saqi case-study in Lebanon that a landscape framework draws on the methods

and interpretations of all three disciplines in the process of interpreting and protecting rural heritage. I would like here to discuss regional applicability, namely the rural cultural landscape of the Mashreq.¹

Spatial extent, the morphological, functional and cultural diversity of rural landscapes in the Mashreq makes them hard to conceptualise. Spatially, rural cultural landscapes stretch from urban peripheries to national borders and beyond. Geographical centrality, heterogeneous geomorphology and climate have over time formed natural enclaves, mosaics of habitats and ecosystems that shelter the region's exceptional biological and ecological diversity. Successive peoples have inhabited these enclaves, managing them through traditional practices, whether silvicultural, agricultural and/or pastoral nomadic. Rural landscapes include woodlands, scrublands, grasslands and arid lands, the desert, perennial cropping of olive trees and vineyards, fruit orchards, agricultural fields and villages. Rural communities are attached to the land, whether farmers or herders, sedentary or nomadic, stewards of the exceptional landscape they have shaped, as did their forefathers (Figure 9). They are custodians of the region's historical legacy and wardens of its resources, which they manage through practices that are honed by the scarcity of natural resources. Rural landscapes in the Mashreq as such are a tangible narrative of the interface of nature and culture, a repository of its natural and cultural heritage.

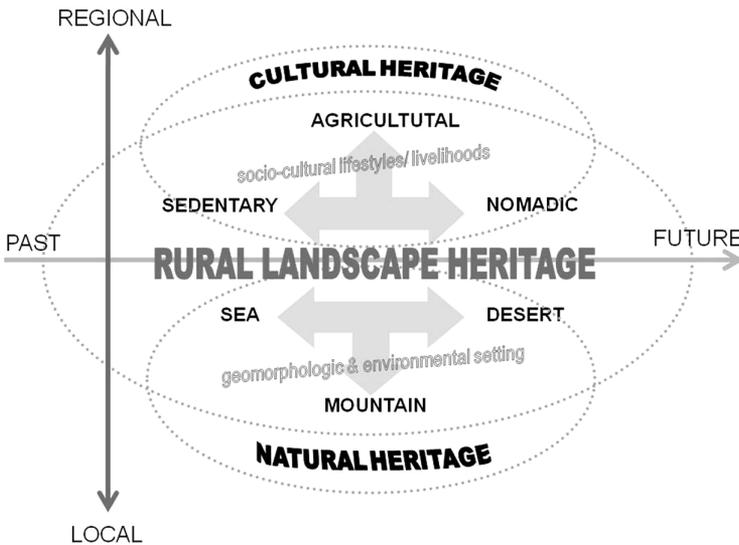


Figure 9. Conceptual representation of rural landscape heritage.

A landscape framing of the Mashreq makes for a complex, often contradictory reading of heritage. The spatial overlap between natural features, resources and processes (terrain, rainfall, natural vegetation) corresponds closely to the land-use map of the region (dry and irrigated farming, desert and oasis, villages and cities). Both lie in stark contrast to the arbitrariness of present day political divisions. This aim here is not to ignore the nuances within a broad mapping of cultural landscape in the region, but rather to de-privilege and overcome national boundaries. Reading the Mashreq through the perspective of the cultural landscape heritage of its countryside can lead to a number of challenging, long-term scenarios.

Politically, 'landscape' is a charged term because it relates to the way in which identities are created and disputed by individuals, groups or nation-states (Bender, 1993). Landscapes have historically served as a foundation for defining ethnicity, to mark cultural distinction and as a medium for forging national identities (O'Shea, 2004; Germundsson, 2006; Mattless, 1998; Tannous, 1949). I have argued that landscapes, habitual environments and traditional milieux serve as a basis for identity construction, that their 'disappearance spells not only loss of our natural/cultural heritage but threatens our very sense of being' (Lowenthal, 2006, 80). However, while recognising the importance of physical landscape as material heritage, a landscape framework also recognises that the material and physical is the arena within which communities negotiate who they are – their past and also their future, social and cultural meaning, memories and experiences. A community and culture inclusive approach to patrimonialisation practices is all the more relevant in the Third World, where rural communities are marginalised politically, socially and economically (Makhzoumi, 2011). Recognising rural heritage serves to legitimise rural–urban differences, to accept and celebrate indigenous knowledge, rural identity and experiences, if only to balance the rapidly increasing prevalence of globalisation and the neoliberal vision in the Mashreq (Daher, 2008).

Another scenario concerns the region's natural heritage, more specifically water and biodiversity resources. With climate change and global warming in the forefront of the global agenda on environmental sustainability, water in the Mashreq is a key resource for survival. The MENA region as a whole 'entered a phase of water deficit in about 1970' (Amery and Wolf, 2000). This implies a scarcity in 'water for drinking, domestic, municipal, and industrial uses' let alone water to grow the food which is tenfold the per capita consumption (ibid). Traditional management practices provide exemplars for prudent water management that range from residential and communal rain harvesting in villages to the multifunctional landscape of oasis and wadis in the arid Mashreq. The archaeology of irrigation, argues

Wilkinson (2003), has historically shaped the countryside in the Near East, forming alignments of water supply and irrigation channels making part of a 'natural' system of rivers. The tangible features of ancient systems (water wheels, canals and subterranean utilisation of dry water courses) and of traditional practices should be recognised, at times protected and in some cases re-conceptualised to suit contemporary needs.

Biodiversity, like water, is a natural heritage of the region. Current practices to conserve biodiversity endure the indiscriminate application of north European and American strategies, which generally disregard ecological and cultural context. Context here implies the habitats that harbour wildlife, which differ in structure and management in the Mashreq from those of tropical rainforests. Nature in the Mediterranean, which is recognised as a world biodiversity hotspot, resides in traditional rural landscapes, protected through vernacular management practices. An ecological landscape approach, I have argued elsewhere (Makhzoumi et al, 2011; Makhzoumi and Hasan, 1988; Makhzoumi, 1987), has as a starting point physical landscape in vernacular management practices, recognising and utilising their potential to contextualise global conventions and strategies on nature/biodiversity conservation. Adopting a 'landscape approach' is gradually being recognised as fostering sound long-term conservation in the region (see at <http://www.ibsar.org/index_updated1.php>). This is not to say 'that indigenous knowledge must always be uncritically accepted or that it must always take precedence', but rather to broaden the discourse of heritage, acknowledge and accept that different knowledge systems coexist and 'understand the extended political and cultural consequences that will occur when one knowledge system is given greater authority and legitimacy over the other' (Smith 2007, 163).

To conclude, my vision is for 'landscape' to engender a new reading of the Mashreq, one that is based on the regional heritage, and for such a vision to inform and guide current patrimonialisation practices to new paradigms that acknowledge rural culture, recognises the stewardship of rural communities and through it their particular discourse of heritage. The European Landscape Convention (<<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/Conventions/Landscape/>>), the first to focus specifically on landscape, 'dedicated to the protection, management and planning of European landscapes', provides an appropriate model for the Mashreq.

The convention defines 'Landscape' as an 'area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the actions and interaction of natural and/or human factors', highlights 'the need to recognize landscape in law, to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection,

management and creation of landscapes' and emphasizes 'procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies'.

The Ebel-es-Saqi case-study

Sea and mountains have shaped history, land and culture in Lebanon. The sea is open to commerce and cultural exchange, and inaccessible mountains are a refuge from foreign occupiers and persecution. People and environment co-evolved in mountain terrain through forest clearing and terracing to reclaim cultivable land and places of habitation. Ebel-es-Saqi, with 3,448 inhabitants, is a small mountain village, some 44 miles east of the Mediterranean coast in South Lebanon. Biblical in origin, the village's name (Arabic for 'camel watering place') reflects its role in servicing camel caravans moving along trade routes to the Mediterranean (Feghali, 2002). The village built-up area straddles one of two hilly peaks (684 metres above sea level), the other being occupied by the village woodland. Olive orchards cascade down from the peak to the Hasbani River valley that defines the south-eastern edge of the village. The rural landscape of Ebel-es-Saqi is typical of mountainous Lebanon, where people have reclaimed land by building stone terraces, domesticating the native olive, herded sheep and goats, and harvested natural plants for culinary and medicinal uses. The picturesque, distinctly Mediterranean landscape, however, has been riven by strife. Ebel-es-Saqi, as indeed all of South Lebanon, endured 22 years of civil war and Israeli occupation that impacted environment and people alike. Woodlands were burnt, orchards cleared and agricultural livelihoods disrupted. Women, children and the elderly fled, leaving behind ruined villages. However, the Ebel-es-Saqi woodland survived the war intact, maturing into a visually prominent landscape. In 2002, it became the focus of a post-occupation recovery project. The aim of the Ebel-es-Saqi project was to assess the site and to propose a master-plan that would protect the woodland as an amenity landscape (Makhzoumi, 2003).² The project marks the first phase in my work at Ebel-es-Saqi, namely as project leader and landscape architect. The landscape design approach, realised through the interdisciplinary project team, was instrumental in conceiving a dynamic master-plan that broadened project objectives beyond tangible woodland to provide for livelihoods and to address issues of identity and rural heritage, while expanding in area to include the entire village landscape, reconnecting its components into the regional ecology (Makhzoumi, 2003; Makhzoumi et al, 2011). The landscape master-plan was completed in March 2003 and launched with a

national/international campaign to secure funding for design and implementation. Mercy Corps provided funds for developing architectural and site implementation documents and construction, which was completed in 2005. The completed buildings, though somewhat overpowering, nevertheless served as a basis for promoting awareness of nature and environment. My involvement continued by advising on the implementation of the master plan but also as an academic and researcher.

In the course of assessing the woodland, informal meetings and focus groups were conducted. Considering the economic hardship that follows in the wake of war and occupation, the community was grateful that Ebel-es-Saqi was at the centre of postwar recovery, but they nevertheless questioned the choice of landscape, i.e. the woodland. Repeated reference to olive landscapes reflected that local perception of village identity differed from that of the design team as outsiders and professionals. To explore the local discourse on landscape and village identity, participatory research was planned. The method was based on a user-dependent, quantitative technique that asked respondents to rank photographs of five key landscape components (the Ebel spring; olive landscapes; agricultural landscapes; Ebel-es-Saqi woodland; degraded scrubland) according to their aesthetic preference (Selwan, 2004). The target population included respondents from Ebel-es-Saqi and two other villages, Rachaya-el-Foukhar and Hebbariye, which are within sight of it. The scale of ranking was set from 1 to 5, each photograph obtaining a relative score. The survey included questions on background characteristics of respondents (gender, age, level of education, income and employment in agriculture) and additional 'fringe' questions on biodiversity evaluation. The survey revealed that it was the Ebel spring rather than the woodland that was aesthetically favoured by Ebel-es-Saqi inhabitants, which is understandable considering both the significance of water to agriculture in a semi-arid region and the Arabic meaning of the village name. In second place, aesthetic preference was for the landscape of olive groves, justified by the positive correlation between aesthetic preference and respondents' background as farmers (ibid). Olive trees are not only 'productive', a valued source of income, but also claimed by the village as their heritage from Roman Lebanon. Although the woodland was increasingly associated with village identity following the UN-ESCWA project, it was far from being favoured aesthetically. This appears surprising, considering that the woodland was impressive to those from outside the village, but is explained by the fact that the state repossessed the woodland after reforestation, alienating the local community.

The quantitative study gauging aesthetic perceptions encouraged another survey, one that explored cultural nuances embedded in the village

landscape (Makhzoumi, 2004; 2009). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand local community conceptions of the village landscape. The findings confirm that the latter, far from passive container or visual backdrop, is indeed an enabling medium through which traditional cultural practices are preserved, local identities constructed – ‘a tangible expression of rural culture’ (ibid, 329). The absence of a single Arabic term was compensated for by myriad vernacular words and place names that reflected the geographical diversity of rural landscapes and traditional agricultural practices. This confirms that rural landscape heritage includes both product and production, an ongoing process of defining and redefining of place and identity in surroundings that are changing through various local and regional influences.

Landscape and the discourse of rural heritage

In this final section I explore whether the Ebel-es-Saqi case study supports the argument for rural heritage in the Lebanese context. Outcome and findings, respectively of the woodland project, photographic and qualitative surveys, are re-structured to reflect the three claims made at the beginning of this chapter.

Integrating natural and cultural heritage

As a conceptual framework, ‘landscape’ broadens the reading of heritage at Ebel-es-Saqi beyond the woodland – the project focus – to include the entire rural landscape, natural, semi-natural, managed and manufactured, respectively woodland, degraded scrubland, olive agriculture and built settlement. Maquis scrublands constitute 44 per cent of the village cadastral area, of which the wooded part is very small. ‘Maquis scrubland’, a remnant of the original Mediterranean Sclerophyll Forest, forms a biodiversity-rich vegetative cover that includes lentisc shrubs, degraded oak stands, carob trees and aromatic herbs such as thyme, oregano and sage. Olive-cropping along stone-terraced slopes makes up another third of the Ebel-es-Saqi cadastral area. The olive tree is native to the region, domesticated and cultivated within complex agricultural ecosystems that are multifunctional, environmentally sustainable and ecologically significant (Makhzoumi, 1997). These cultural landscapes are increasingly being recognised as a valuable habitat for terrestrial and avifaunal life. Olive agriculture is also integral to the cultural history of the region, a ‘sacred’ tree in Islam, referenced in biblical accounts alongside cedar trees (Stordalen, 2000). More than any other, olive landscapes embody the essence of Mediterranean

rural cultural landscapes as part nature, part culture, at once a natural and cultural heritage.

The vernacular codes and practices for the management of traditional rural landscapes are as much a heritage as the resources they aim to conserve. They need to be recognised and documented. The *bima* (Arabic, 'protected') of Ebel-es-Saqi comprises maquis scrubland and the village woodland. The concept of *bima* can be traced to the early Islamic period where it was used to ensure the sustainable management of tribal rangelands. The *bima* is a living example of community-based nature conservation that aims to secure equitable distribution and sustainable use of scarce natural resources (Dutton, 1992; Llewellyn, 1992). Reviving the Ebel-es-Saqi *bima* is of value 'not only because it is integral to Lebanon's rural heritage but equally because community protection serves as an alternative to prevailing, top-heavy state dictated and managed nature conservation' (Makhzoumi et al, 2011). Boldly marked on the old cadastral maps, '*bima* Ebel' was uncovered while researching the landscape in 2002. Revival of the concept was advanced by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL, 2005), who were commissioned to develop nature-conservation management for the woodland. Drawing on the Ebel-es-Saqi case-study, the concept of *bima* came to be recognised by the International Union for Nature Conservation as representing sound, site-specific and community-based conservation (see at <<http://www.iucn.org/where/asia/index.cfm?uNewsID=255>>).

From 'product' to 'production', process to network

The focus on process was key in contributing to the framing of natural and cultural heritage at Ebel-es-Saqi. The ecological basis for reading the village landscape and developing the master-plan ensured a dynamic reconfiguration of the nature-conservation agenda. Woodland and the entire village landscape was conceptualised by considering the potential of ecological linkages to the surrounding landscape. Through a conscious effort to network natural heritage, the master-plan vision acknowledges the spatial and temporal contiguities of rural landscapes, on the one hand, and on the other their hierarchic constitution. Local landscapes constitute regional ones, which in turn make up national and transnational landscapes. Networking village landscapes with the ecological corridor of the Hasbani River is at once expansive, embracing the regional landscape, and dynamic, ensuring the ecological integrity of the rural landscape heritage (Jongman and Pungetti, 2004).

The master-plan came to engender several offshoot initiatives. In 2004, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) in consultation with Birdlife International declared Ebel-es-Saqi woodland a bird migration

Miracle of Migration



60,000 cranes migrated over the 'hima' of Ebel es-Saqi, Lebanon.

Join us in watching and protecting them!



Figure 10. Poster celebrating the designation of Hima Ebel-es-Saqi as an Important Bird Area (SPNL, 2004).

'hot spot', recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA). Beyond woodland, it was the entire village landscape and the diversity of bird habitats it provides that made it a potential IBA (SPNL, 2004) (Figure 10).

Time limitations invariably pushed the Ebel-es-Saqi woodland project to prioritise the tangible landscape heritage. This was compensated by the participatory assessment of local landscape aesthetic preferences undertaken in the year that followed (Selwan, 2004) and the qualitative research (Makhzoumi, 2009) that focused on local community interpretation of rural heritage. Underlying the findings is the complex overlap between tangible landscape and intangible conception, product and production. 'Heritage' and 'identity' were recurring themes in the interviews, as components of the village landscape, as experienced through traditional rural practices and social customs and as memories of both handed down from one generation to another. Privately owned olive orchards or commonly owned maquis scrubland were valued as experiences and memories. For example, a young girl speaks of how she values the olive harvest: 'I loved going to the olive orchards with my grandparents. It is quiet and has clean refreshing air. *Astamakb* ['it is inspiring']' (ibid, 325). Another respondent values learning the skills and pleasures of harvesting wild plants: 'With the first rain

we go to the olive orchards to collect snails and *baqleb* ('cress') – this is *bindiba* ('chard') this is *habaq* ('basil'). This plant is poisonous, the other is not. Mother knows which is which. I often forget, but mother reminds me (ibid, 324). Significantly, the discourse of landscape was far from static. A perceptible shift was noted between senior community members, who associate village identity and heritage with agricultural landscapes, and young people, who associate village identity with the woodland. The shift is in part the outcome of declining revenues from agriculture but also the introduction of environmental awareness and biodiversity conservation in school curricula. The shift corroborates the view that, far from functioning merely as a passive container or visual backdrop, 'the village landscape is an active, enabling medium through which traditional cultural practices are negotiated, contested, modified and/or reaffirmed' (ibid, 330). The focus on landscape process therefore encourages an open-ended conception of heritage, one where product and production continue to interact and change.

Unfolding the community-based discourse of heritage

Landscape, it was argued earlier, is a framework for political empowerment and heritage a means for contesting community/human rights (Bender and Winger, 2001; Silverman and Ruggles, 2007). In Ebel-es-Saqi the landscape master-plan served as a platform for two fruitful actions by the village community. The first was to recover stewardship of the village woodland from the state, namely the Ministry of Agriculture. The article pertaining to reforestation of village *hima* states that transfer of stewardship to the ministry is temporary, for a period of 15 years, to ensure protection of reforested land. Excluded from the initiative, their authority undermined and rights bypassed, the local community lost interest in the newly established woodland.³ Upon completion of the landscape master-plan, members from Ebel-es-Saqi municipality followed up with legal procedures to recover local community stewardship of the woodland. Stewardship was also a criterion for funding by Mercy Corps. Eventually, the state conceded to relinquishing its authority and returning the woodland to the village community.

The village then pursued a further claim. They rallied for reconstruction of the *bayt al-fallab* (Arabic, 'house of the farmer'), a vernacular building that served as a museum of rural folklore. The *bayt al-fallab*, destroyed during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90), was of significance in itself but also reflected the Ebel-es-Saqi's status as a model Lebanese village in the 1960s. Reconstructing the *bayt al-fallab* was therefore a matter of village pride. The president of the municipality, Riyadh Abu Samra, negotiated on behalf of the community, successfully securing funding for design and implementation. Though the



Figure 11. Ebel-es-Saqi, *Bayt al-Fallab* Folkloric Museum.

original location was in the village built-up area, changes in land ownership during the war made the choice difficult. On the other hand, the landscape master-plan had proposed 'Ebel Market' at the entrance to the woodland, conceived as a gateway into Ebel-es-Saqi's cultural heritage and a venue for marketing local produce. The market was not implemented, but the location proved suitable for the *bayt al-fallab*, which was constructed reviving traditional building skills in stone, mud plastering and sod roofing (Figure 11).⁴

Conclusion

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: is rural heritage relevant to an urbanising Mashreq? I believe it is, not because of a romanticised view of shepherd and farmer, or quaint villages above terraced olive groves. Nor is the affirmation based on a conception that rural culture is 'traditional' – such culture changes much as urban culture does, albeit at a slower pace; it is relevant to the study and practice of heritage because of the dynamic heritage of discourse on place, identity and heritage.

I have tried to conceptualise 'landscape', 'rural culture' and 'heritage', the underlying themes of this chapter, with the aim of broadening patrimonialisation practices in Lebanon and the region, focusing mainly on designers (architects, landscape architects and urban planners). Discussing the method, approach and findings of the Ebel-es-Saqi case-study, I have demonstrated the discursive elasticity of 'landscape', a) as an interpretive framework that is likely to explain the co-evolution of people and setting, cultures shaping geographies and geographies shaping cultures;

and b) as a medium for action which is sustainable in that it addresses local and regional contexts, past as well as present and future, tangible, physical heritage and intangible community interpretation, needs and aspirations. By shifting position, from professional engagement to academic researcher, I have drawn on an eclectic choice of methods and outlooks, from the ecological sciences to consider 'natural heritage', and from the social sciences to interpret the 'cultural heritage'. Throughout, my training in design was a source of creative, integrative and action-oriented skills, but also a means for bridging the science-arts disciplinary divide towards a holistic conception of rural culture and rural landscape as embracing natural and cultural heritage.

Projecting these methods and findings to embrace the landscape contingencies that make up the Mashreq is a considerable task, but one worth exploring within the landscape vision proposed earlier. Such an undertaking becomes an opportunity to access the 'bank of cultural memories – some still in use, others as residues of past practices and knowledges' (Crang, 1998). More significantly, a landscape vision for rural areas is more likely to inspire alternatives to heritage management that address the underlying problem of rural heritage conservation: how can we conserve a dynamic entity that continues to evolve? How to address socio-cultural and political changes that impact rural heritage valuation by rural communities which invariably alter the physical landscapes? Drawing on the Ebel-es-Saqi case study and other scenarios in rural south Lebanon (Makhzoumi, 2011) I would like to advocate that the management of heritage should be open-ended and developmental. Financial, statutory and scientific/technical resource limitations in the region favour such an approach as the only sustainable one for the management of rural heritage. Heritage practice will need to consider strategies for empowering rural communities and providing for alternative livelihoods – for example, by propagating and using native plants in forestation (see at <http://www.ibsar.org/index_updated1.php>), through nature and agro-tourism, by linking agricultural landscapes to the production of traditional foods (Zurayk et al, 2008), and by promoting traditional culinary culture (Hourani, 2006; Batal, 2008). If rural landscapes prove to be of economic value, local communities will continue to serve as custodians of our rural heritage, as they have from time immemorial.

Notes

1. In this chapter, Mashreq is used to refer to the Arab countries of the eastern Mediterranean (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt), Iraq and the Arabian countries.

2. The project was initiated by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA). I was consulted early in the inception of the project, which enabled application of a landscape approach.
3. Exclusion of herders from the woodland, in essence communal lands, was another factor, and equally reforestation with non-native species that were neither of use nor of sentimental value to the local community.
4. Mercy Corps allocated funds for the *bayt al-fallab*. Architect Hana Alamudin was commissioned to prepare the design, which was based on documentation of the *bayt al-fallab*, before its destruction, by F. Ragette.

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