

WHEN HOME BECOMES WORLD HERITAGE: THE CASE OF ALEPPO, SYRIA

By

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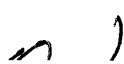


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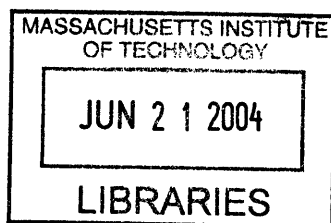

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ABSTRACT

Lists are valuable tools for conservation. One such list for the conservation of cultural heritage objects is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List. In this thesis, I seek to understand how this international device impacts planning at a local level, specifically in the context of development and under political constraints typical of the Middle East. I do this through the case study of Aleppo, Syria.

Since the end of the French Mandate, Aleppo's old city has undergone major transformation as a result of three main periods of planning interventions. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, a series of master plans called for the destruction of certain sections of the city's historic core. By 1978, the implementation of parts of these plans prompted a local and international campaign to safeguard the Old City of Aleppo, culminating in its designation to the World Heritage List in 1986 and the initiation of a joint Syrian and German rehabilitation project in 1992. This thesis discusses these different moments in Aleppo in an effort to understand to what extent UNESCO and the World Heritage List impacted change in planning priorities in the old city.

In order to do this, I give a historical background of planning in Aleppo from 1930s to the moment of World Heritage nomination in 1978. This section discusses the historical conditions that contributed to the old city's rapid decay. Next, I review the period of World Heritage nomination to illuminate how decisions were being made about the old city by local authorities in conjunction with professionals from UNESCO in order to halt master planning in the old city and move forward with a policy of conservation. I then discuss the influence of the List on the implementation of a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy for the old city by a well-known international development agency, the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). This section will exhibit how the project raised the standards of the planning profession in Aleppo, and even in Syria. I will also discuss the project's role as a force of political opposition. The thesis concludes by evaluating this cultural heritage rehabilitation effort's success within the context of a state that refuses political reform.

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Introduction. THE LIST AS A TOOL FOR CONSERVATION: THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Arguments have been made for the value of a list as a tool for conservation (Schuster, 2004). One such list for the conservation of heritage objects is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List. In this thesis, I seek to understand how this international device impacts planning at a local level, specifically in the context of development and the Middle East. I will do this through the case study of Aleppo, Syria. This section will discuss the World Heritage List and its attributes in order to introduce my thesis question in more detail.

The World Heritage List is a listing of worldwide cultural and natural heritage properties, updated annually by the World Heritage Intergovernmental Committee at UNESCO. (UNESCO, 2003) The List was founded on the principles of the World Heritage Convention of 1972. (UNESCO, 2003) This convention declared that there are certain sites across the globe whose survival is precious to the world community as part of our shared common heritage. These sites are of “outstanding universal value”, meaning:

...cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. (Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, June 2003, p. 5)

With regards to cultural world heritage sites, the List understands heritage as the following:

The cultural heritage may be defined as the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of

cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience. The preservation and the presentation of the cultural heritage are therefore a corner-stone of any cultural policy. (Jokilehto, 1999, p. 1)

This desire to protect heritage as a legacy for all humankind is constructed on the premise of universal heritage significance.¹ The notion of universal value in the contemporary heritage discourse stems from the idea that each cultural product in itself concurrently embodies the creative and artistic voice of a specific individual person or group, that person's or group's larger cultural environment, and the shared "universal" imaginative experience and creative processes of humankind (Jokilehto, 1999, pp. 295-296). It therefore becomes incumbent upon the world community to conserve these cultural artifacts because they form the repository of humankind's diverse creative energies and their sustainability will in turn promote greater cultural diversity (Throsby, 2001, p. 51). In essence, it is this preserved repository of cultural diversity that inspires us to continue to generate new cultural artifacts.² With this understanding then, surfaces the responsibility to ensure equitable access to these cultural resources today and to safeguard them for future generations (what David Throsby refers to as "intragenerational equity" and "intergenerational equity and dynamic efficiency", respectively) (Throsby, 2001, p. 56).

¹ In his examination of 'heritage' and 'history', David Lowenthal offers a more theoretical approach to conceptualizing heritage. He defines the concept in its relationship to history and differentiates the two in that "history is the past that actually happened; heritage the past manipulated by some present aim" (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 102). He posits that heritage uses the past to forward and promote a contemporary individual or political agenda, by "updating", "improving" on, or "excluding" pieces from history (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 148). He understands heritage as a "declaration of faith" in a specific past "not open to critical analysis" nor to "comparative scrutiny", like history (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 121). Furthermore, Lowenthal persists that heritage is inherently "exclusive" (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 227), and accordingly he questions the authority of concepts like 'world heritage' and 'universal legacy'. (Lowenthal, 1998)

² Throsby speaks of "maintenance of diversity" as one of his six criteria to measure the sustainability of cultural heritage. He argues that cultural systems can only be sustained through cultural diversity, which is greater than the sum of its parts and which has the power to create new cultural capital. (Throsby, 2001:57)

UNESCO uses the World Heritage List to safeguard and conserve the sites that it asserts are of universal value. As discussed in the tools of government action literature, the World Heritage List is first and foremost an information tool. The List aims to encourage preservation and conservation of the built heritage by specifying to the public which sites are highly prioritized. It does this by collecting and gathering information about the world's esteemed heritage sites. The List indicates to the UNESCO State Party members and to the world which sites transmit the most significant cultural value. It serves as an authority on world heritage, identifying to the international community those sites to which they can in turn begin to make financial and technical contributions and investments. More importantly, the List sends a message to local residents and users of the site that it should be protected, conserved and maintained. The expectation is that being on the List and recognized by the world community, as represented by the List, will change local perceptions of the historic site, encouraging a sense of pride and therefore inspiring accountability for its conservation (Australian Heritage Commission, 1995, as cited in Schuster, 2004, p. 234)

The List functions to achieve its goal in other ways as well. Communities nominate their local site for World Heritage designation seeking to take advantage of the benefits of the List. Two direct benefits of being designated to the List include potential, but by no means guaranteed, funding from UNESCO through the World Heritage Fund and technical assistance through ICOMOS. There are indirect benefits as well that provide an incentive for nomination. The information disseminated by the List results in increased exposure to, awareness about and appreciation of the site by local, regional and international audiences. As mentioned above, this audience often includes conservation professionals and organizations that can act to lobby additional financial support and technical assistance for preservation programs. This benefit induces communities to nominate their local site to the List. In addition, it is expected that

designation to the List will attract more visitors to the site, resulting in an increase in tourism revenue which brings income into local economies.

The List also influences local behavior *before sites are even designated* through the very nature of its application process. In preparation for such a prestigious designation, local professionals must take active steps to communicate their commitment to conservation by meeting the standards of the *Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention*. To nominate a site, State member parties must demonstrate that the institutional arrangements and necessary conservation plans are in place. For example, they must show evidence of a site management plan, protective legislation, and a definition of the heritage site's boundaries (Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, June 2003, p. 6) (The full responsibilities of the State Parties are documented in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.) By causing these activities to happen, the List functions to achieve its conservation goal before sites are even designated.

The World Heritage List with its *Operational Guidelines* can also be seen as an example of what David Throsby calls 'soft regulation' (Throsby, 1997). Soft regulations encourage behavior, though not through enforceable means. In this case, under the direction of the World Heritage Convention, cultural heritage objects across the globe are "protected", through State party agreements that the historic monuments, cities, and sites listed on the 'World Heritage List' will be safeguarded by the national government. While there are no outright enforceable penalties for this type of soft regulation, it promotes its agenda through strong political pressure and expectations set by UNESCO to meet the *Operational Guidelines*. In this way the Convention advances high standards for preservation set by experts at an international level. Such international standards are important given the diversity of institutional arrangements and

available financial resources from country to country. They are also significant because they exert international political influence to preserve the built heritage in countries where such programs are not prioritized by the government (Throsby, 1997).

In this thesis, I will narrow my discussion of the List to considering its impact on World Heritage Cities. Unlike monuments and sites, World Heritage Cities are an example of cultural properties that include groups of buildings. As examples of traditional human settlements and/or land use patterns, historic cities represent the diversity and achievements of cultures throughout history. According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) "Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas"³ these historic places also "embody the values of traditional urban cultures" (ICOMOS, 1987). The charter asserts that today these historic fabrics are being "threatened, physically degraded, damaged or even destroyed, by the impact of the urban development that follows industrialization in societies everywhere" (ICOMOS, 1987). The threat of their destruction therefore necessitates conservation. As defined by the Charter, conservation with regards to historic urban areas is to be understood as:

...those steps necessary for the protection, conservation and restoration of such towns and areas as well as their development and harmonious adaptation to contemporary life (ICOMOS, 1986).

The Charter also spells out what ICOMOS understands to be the most critical principles, objectives, and methods towards this end. One such principle speaks to citizen involvement in the conservation process:

³ This charter is the urban fabric complement to the "International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites," usually referred to as "The Venice Charter."

The participation and the involvement of the residents are essential for the success of the conservation programme and should be encouraged. The conservation of historic towns and urban areas concerns their residents first of all (ICOMOS, 1986).

Significant for the conservation of historic cities then are opportunities for development and assertions for social inclusion.

As discussed above, the designation of Heritage Cities to the World Heritage List is based on a number of assumptions that are critical to its role in conserving built heritage. The first set of assumptions is based on the notion that conservation of the built environment is in fact a definable endeavor, including preserving entire urban fabrics. Furthermore, by asserting that urban conservation management plans must consider the socio-economic context of the area, including residents and users of the area in the planning process, UNESCO takes for granted that participation is an inherent planning principle.

The second set of assumptions that the List is based on is fundamental to its role as an information tool. The List presupposes the provision of good and accurate information and communication between government and civil society that is widely available and trustworthy. It also presumes a certain level of faith and trust in both directions between government and civil society. In addition, UNESCO takes for granted that people will recognize the List as an important and prestigious international marker.

What value then does the World Heritage List have in developing countries where historic city centers are perceived negatively as traditional (i.e. backward) and where there is no public consensus about the value of preservation as an actual planning policy? Take the Middle East for

example. In so many ways, historic cities are no longer conducive for residential use because they have such low standards of health and sanitation. These areas have poor water and sewerage infrastructure that desperately needs to be upgraded, inadequate waste management systems, and roads that need repair. In addition, the roads are narrow in many places making it impossible to access residential areas by motor vehicles, including fire trucks and ambulances. Many of the buildings are structurally unsound. With these conditions, more often than not, the residents of the historic centers are of the poorest sectors of society. They live in the old city because they cannot afford to leave, or because they have just migrated to the city from the rural hinterland and the historic core is one of the only places where they can actually find housing. Given the opportunity, many would seek to live in more modern living conditions, so how do you encourage them to conserve their homes and neighborhoods when they have little interest in staying? How do you change their perception of their environment when the old city has such a negative stigma?

Furthermore, what role can the List play in countries that are authoritarian in rule, where there is an avid distrust and fear of the government by the people and vice versa? What value can an information tool have in a place where there are no civil-society groups, where there is no contemporary tradition of public debate, and citizens are not empowered to engage in political processes, never mind participatory planning? Can the List function to promote conservation if residents living in historic quarters distrust any type of government intervention because they assume that the government is acting in its own self-interest?

If many of the premises that the List is based on are not in place in the location where a historic urban fabric is designated, what impact can the List have on urban planning in such a context? The case of Aleppo, Syria illustrates these conditions. Designated in 1986 as a World Heritage

City, the “Old City of Aleppo” has undergone significant changes in planning policy since the French Mandate. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, a series of master plans in Aleppo called for the destruction of certain sections of the city’s historic core. By 1978, the implementation of parts of these plans prompted a local and international campaign to safeguard the historic city. Today, the old city is the subject of a joint Syrian and German rehabilitation project. **To what extent can these changes in planning be attributed to the World Heritage List?** In this thesis, I aim to explore this question in order to understand what value the List had as a tool for conservation in Aleppo, given the constraints of development and the political restrictions of authoritarian rule in Syria.

In order to do this, I will give a brief historical background of planning in Aleppo from 1930s to the moment of World Heritage nomination. Next, I will review the nomination process to illuminate how decisions were being made about the old city by local authorities in conjunction with professionals from UNESCO. I will then discuss the impact of the List on the implementation of a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy for the old city by a well-known international development agency, the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). This section will exhibit how the project raised the standards of the planning profession in Aleppo, and even in Syria. I will also discuss the project’s role as a force of political opposition. The thesis will conclude by evaluating this cultural heritage rehabilitation effort’s success within the context of a state that refuses political reform.

Chapter I. PLANNING IN ALEPPO: FROM DENIGRATION TO CONSERVATION

In this section I will give a brief overview of planning in Aleppo from the end of the French Mandate to the late 1970s. I will then review a report published by UNESCO in 1980, which detailed alternative planning strategies for the city. This discussion is important in order to understand the planning environment in which Aleppo became designated to the World Heritage List. First, however, it is necessary to understand Syria's political climate under the authoritarian rule of President Hafez al-Asad, as he was the governing power both directly before and after the period of Listing. I will also provide a concise overview of the physical and socioeconomic conditions in the old city.

Syria: A Climate of Fear

From 1971 to 2000, the same authoritarian Ba'ath Party ruler, President Hafez al-Asad (former air force commander and Defence Minister) ruled the Syrian Arab Republic. Under his regime, the country remained in a state of emergency due to its war with Israel, its neighbor to the south (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2002). The president manipulated the government system using the state of emergency to legitimize an ongoing oppressive security system. Under the Syrian Ministry of the Interior, general security, state security and political security divisions were created, including secret police organizations. Supported by legislation, these agencies were empowered to suppress the political rights and civil liberties of Syrian citizens by preventing any individual or organized political opposition. In other words, this was a country that prevented any form of dissent by denying freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of association. It did this through gross human rights violations. People lived in fear of violent repercussions if they opposed the government, from losing their jobs to becoming political prisoners, to being tortured and even killed. In this

“atmosphere of intimidation” (Human Rights Watch, 2002), there was a profound distrust between the government and civil society.

In this same political climate, the economy was dominated by the public sector, with up to 40% of Syria’s labor force working for the military, as civil servants, or in state-run economic activities (Gambill, 2001). Syria is one of the poorest countries in the Middle East. This can be attributed partly to the fact that the majority of women in Syria do not work and over 40% of the population is under the age of fifteen (United Nations, 2004). This results in a high dependency ratio that has generated additional pressure for those individuals in the labor force to safeguard and secure their employment. Such a heavy reliance on government wages in this climate of fear only serves to emphasize the government’s power.

Syria is the home to a diverse group of people representing a variety of religions. The majority of its population is Sunni Muslim. Other Muslim groups include the Alawi, Shi’a, and Druze. There is also a large Christian population and a tiny Jewish community. Among these religions, one finds many ethnic backgrounds, consisting of Arabs, Armenians, Turkoman, and Kurds. Arabic is the official language of the country. Although a minority, the government is run by the Alawi.

Syria’s poor economic status and low social development indicators make it a prime candidate for international aid. However, its political climate discourages many international development agencies from working there. In addition, Syria has a resolute history of import substitution policies⁴. It is a country that has repeatedly turned down international resources of development aid or foreign direct investment.

⁴ Import substitution refers to an economic policy in developing countries whereby products that are typically imported are substituted for local one.

Aleppo and its Old City

Syria has two major gateways to the regional and international community: its capital in the south at Damascus and Aleppo to the north. Aleppo is an ancient city, settled continuously from as early as the 2nd millennium BC. Its prime geographic location on a high plateau halfway between the Mediterranean coast and the Euphrates River marked it as the crossroad of several important trading and pilgrimage routes, including the Silk Road. It has been ruled by many, including the Romans, Hittites, Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Mamelukes and Ottomans (UNESCO, 2000).

The “Old City of Aleppo” is Aleppo’s historic core (Figure 1). An impressive sight, it occupies 400 hectares packed with courtyard houses, *souks*, mosques and madrasas with its ancient 13th century citadel rising at its center (Figures 2 and 3). Like many historic cities in the Middle East, the urban fabric is dense, with tight passageways usually permitting only limited access to vehicular traffic (Figure 4). The courtyard house is the prevailing typology as it promotes flexibility in use by integrating outdoor and indoor living, a feature that is conducive to the semi-arid climate in this region of Syria (Figure 5). These courtyard houses are organized adjacent to each other and share supporting walls creating an organic pattern of form in residential areas. Residents pass through these districts through tight semi-private spaces that lead to individual homes (Abu-Lughod, 1987). These semi-private spaces open up to wider passageways that lead to the commercial and public service areas of the *souks* (Figures 6 and 7).

As late as the 1950s, the old city remained the social, cultural and business center with the majority of Aleppo’s population still living within the historic fabric (Qudsi, 1999). However, today, much of the old city is in a state of disrepair, suffering from the development pressures of overcrowding, disintegrating infrastructure, structurally unstable buildings and poor sanitary and

health conditions. As the country began to industrialize rapidly, residents with economic means abandoned their homes for more modern and amenable living conditions outside of the historic district. Consequently, buildings were left to decay and much commercial activity expanded into residential areas. Many private properties in the old city now suffer from structurally unstable conditions and inadequate water and sewerage infrastructure.

As these structures disintegrate, owners are reluctant to invest in property maintenance. One main reason is the fragmented property ownership in the old city. With the onset of the French Mandate period in Syria, the legal system in Aleppo experienced drastic reform, with significant implications for the built environment. As property records became formalized, multiple heirs could each document their percentage of property ownership. Over time, this produced fragmented property ownership in historic areas (SURADEC, 2001) indicating that a house might be owned by many members of an extended family. While today a large proportion of homes in the old city are owner occupied, this may mean that a particular house is only occupied by one of its many owners. Having to negotiate the terms of home improvements with such a fragmented real estate base is a major deterrent for owners to invest in basic maintenance and/or rehabilitation work on their homes.

Currently, the old city houses almost 110,000 residents and is the destination for over 35,000 daily workers. There are approximate 14,500 households in the old city. About 60% of the houses are owner occupied and the average household size is 7.3 persons. Average annual household incomes range between 2,700USD and 4,620USD (Holst, 2002). Although not the poorest of the poor in the city, the residents are of the lowest income range in Aleppo with illiteracy rates of close to 35% in some sections. The education levels are low, particularly within the female population (SURADEC, 2001)

Master Planning

There have been three main periods of planning for Aleppo's historic core since the French Mandate. Each one is influenced by a foreign entity. Each period can be characterized according to the particular attributes focused on in its analysis of existing conditions in the old city. The first period of planning relies heavily on internationally-inspired, modernist urban-renewal type master plans that exhibited little regard for formal or socio-economic analysis.

With the onset of the French Mandate (1914-1946) in Syria, Western-style municipal administrative arrangements emerged, including a city-planning department, the Service D'Urbanisme (Bianca *et al.*, 1980: p. 27). The first master plans to control the expansion and growth of Aleppo were created during this period by French architects, one by R. Danger and another by Michel Ecochard. These plans, dated to the 1930s, recalled modernist and urban renewal planning principles that valued the grid as a pattern for organizing urban blocks. The grid prototype was to be used for new developments and for reorganizing the organic pattern of the old city fabric. However, various factors inhibited the fruition of these plans, most significantly the fact that the automobile was not yet a major means of transportation in Syria and that there was a significantly high level of resistance by local residents (Bianca *et al.*, 1980). While it would take another twenty years for any destruction of the old city fabric to be realized, the prospect of its ruin began to be internalized by area residents.

By 1954 another French architect, Andre Gutton, had created a new master plan for Aleppo. The plan aimed to reassert Aleppo's position as a major local, national and international transportation hub (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, p. 28). It called for the creation of two ring roads, one that would run around the outer limits of the metropolitan area and another encircling the

intramural historic city. These rings were to be connected by two axes that would run parallel on a west-east axis directly through the old city, one to the north and one to the south of the citadel. As a result of the partial implementation of this plan, approximately one-tenth of the old city's intramural urban fabric was supplanted by transportation infrastructure, including a road through the Farafrah neighborhood that connected the Umayyad Mosque to the citadel.⁵ This plan also led to entire neighborhoods being destroyed in the extramural historic quarters.

As a result of this intervention, the fluid organic fabric of the old city became isolated into islands of discontinuous activity divided by four-lane thoroughfares (Figure 8). High rise apartment buildings were constructed at the edges of these thoroughfares creating buffer zones to the neighborhoods. In addition to being structurally incompatible to the surrounding urban fabric, these buildings created a detrimental effect to the overall functioning of the old city. They rendered the visual privacy function of the courtyard house completely useless as users of the third floor and higher in the multi-story structures could gain visual access to the private domains of families living in traditional courtyard houses. In these homes, the courtyards are used during the day as an extension of the inner house. They are also occupied predominantly by the women of the family (Figure 9). In a religiously conservative environment where women cover in public, which is the case in much of the old city of Aleppo, to afford public visual access to private domains of the home can compromise the social integrity and reputation of a family. Consequently, the original inhabitants subsequently abandoned most of the homes adjacent to these high-rises.

⁵ This road was planned for both vehicular access and to create an open square in front of the mosque to expose this great religious monument. Today this space is used as a parking lot. (Qudsi, 1999, p. 2)

As mentioned above, original inhabitants were leaving the old city for other reasons as well. After the French Mandate period, Syria began to modernize at a rapid rate. Many middle and upper class old city residents were leaving their traditional homes to go live in residential suburbs that could provide more modern amenities than the old city. As more and more people moved from the old city to new developments, houses were abandoned, rented out to lower-income families, or subdivided into smaller units and sold. In turn, some homes became occupied by migrants from the city's rural hinterland. Other houses became used for commercial activity such as industrial workshops and warehouses. Many lost their courtyards when more than one family would come to occupy a house and in turn partition the central courtyard to create more indoor living space (Figures 10 and 11). Furthermore, some property owners built up their homes an extra story (residential densities can be as high as 900 people per hectare) (SURADEC, 2001, p. 2). As a result, many private properties in the old city suffered from cracked foundations and inadequate water and sewerage infrastructure (Figure 12). This not only compromised the original function of the courtyard house but contributed to accelerating its decay, as these houses were not constructed to withstand such demands. In addition, former *khans*⁶ were being transformed into spaces for storage, many becoming hosts for small-scale industrial activity (Figure 13). This commercial activity coupled with increased traffic congestion also led to an increase in noise, air, and water pollution for the residents of these neighborhoods.

Even though only ten percent of the urban fabric in the old city was lost, the old city dramatically changed both formally and functionally as a result of the 1954 master plan. The social coherence of the old city was compromised and the real estate base devalued as a result of the old city's decay and the uncertainty of future interventions. The limited municipal funds designated for development in the city were earmarked to construct new modern districts

⁶ "Building which combines the function of hostel and trading centre. Standard features which one might expect to find in a khan are stables, store rooms, sleeping accommodation and a mosque." (Petersen, 1986)

planned according to contemporary international design standards. With these factors prevailing, the historic fabric remained at great risk.

By 1974, efforts to modernize Syria had become a national agenda under the rule of President Hafez al-Asad. This program was reflected in urban planning policies across the country, most specifically in Damascus, it being the capitol, and in Aleppo, it being the commercial center of northern Syria. In Aleppo, a new master plan was conceived by a French/Japanese architect by the name of Banshoya, in collaboration with the central government. This plan called for additional transportation axes to intersect the old city. It aimed to connect the main highways to the west and east of Aleppo, through the old city, which would in turn destroy additional historic fabric. Again, parts of this plan were implemented, further exacerbating the conditions discussed above.

This ongoing destruction of the old city fabric set a precedent for continued demolition throughout the decade of the seventies, sending a direct message from the government to residents that the old city fabric and community were less valuable than the city's new modern developments and middle and upper class citizens, accelerating the already extant physical and socio-economic division between the members of the old city community and the rest of the population. In less than thirty years, this division had marginalized the historic center from the rest of the city. However, while the majority of the population and the local government rejected the value of the old city as a residential destination, dismissing it as a "traditional" or "backward" place, it still sustained a population of well over 150,000 people (Bianca et al., 1980, p. 24).

A Change in Policy

By 1977, the Governorate of the city had plans in the works to construct a 14-story tower adjacent to the existing Governor's office directly across from the entrance to the citadel (Figure 14). At this time, a local architect by the name of Adli Qudsi and City Councilman Najji Otri, supported by the Department of Antiquities, lobbied the municipality to prevent construction of the high-rise structure. Qudsi published an article in the *Arab Engineer* magazine of the Order of Engineers in Syria, revealing the shortcomings of the Master Plan with regards to the old city. The article argued for its eradication as the main planning guide for the old city in exchange for a plan that promoted conservation in the district (Qudsi, 1999, p. 3) By 1978, a team of conservationists, including Qudsi, the local and national members of the Department of Antiquities, and a French geographer, Dr. Jean Claude David, were successful in convincing the Syrian Ministry of Culture to list the intramural and parts of the extramural old city as a registered national monument, theoretically preventing further demolition of any part of the site by the Master Plan. Firm to move ahead with their master plan, the City administration saw the decree as a serious impediment to its master plan. In response, they immediately appealed for the decree's removal. An ensuing debate developed between the City and the Syrian Ministry of Culture over this issue. In order to reconcile their differences over the national decree, a committee was created consisting of members from the City, the Department of Antiquities, and other concerned professionals.

The creation of this Committee did not help to resolve the dispute. Members from the City were still not convinced about the necessity to register the old city fabric as a national historic monument. The conservation constituents on the Committee accordingly suggested that they invite UNESCO to Aleppo to offer its insight about urban planning policies for the district.

UNESCO in turn accepted the invitation and commissioned a team of professionals to generate a report on the historic district. The report was published in 1980 and included an assessment of the current situation and outlined alternative planning opportunities to those detailed in the Master Plan. Significantly, the report reasserted the importance of the old city as a registered monument and as a result the national decree remained in effect.

It is against this background that we must consider the different interests of the stakeholders acting in the old city during this period of nomination. Using French modernist principles as their model, the municipal planning department was engaged in programs inspired from a completely alien and uncomplementary urban context. The modern high-rises and four-lane thoroughfares were inappropriate interventions for the formal scale of the old city. In opposition to these destructive interventions, a group of architects, geographers, engineers and historians initiated a conservation campaign that rallied for a new type of formal intervention in the old city. In order to assert their conservation agenda in the historic center they bypassed the local administration and allied themselves with a national agency, the Syrian Ministry of Culture. Through the Ministry of Culture, this group could then reach out to the international conservation community as represented by UNESCO. With a UN agency supporting their claim in the debate and applying international political pressure on the City, the conservationists finally achieved their conservation preferences. This resulted in Aleppo's old city becoming registered as a national monument through the Syrian Department of Antiquities. This intervention set limitations on the type of development that could occur in the old city and, in theory, would protect the fabric from being destroyed.

By 1978 then, we see UNESCO being invited by a group of local constituents to employ international pressure on the City in order to assert a conservation program for the historic urban

center. These local professionals would not have been able to shift the direction of planning so dramatically had they not been endorsed by the international preservation community, as represented by UNESCO. This reveals that without UNESCO's support, and intervention through the 1980 report, more of the old city would have been destroyed by the implementation of the master plan. In addition, at this same time, the Syrian Department of Antiquities prepared an application for nominating the old city of Aleppo to the World Heritage List⁷. This suggests that with the national decree, the conservationists might have been preparing for List designation? If so, what did they expect to gain from having Aleppo listed as a World Heritage site? Another way to interpret the nomination to the World Heritage List is that it might have been the only way to get UNESCO to send consultants to apply political pressure on the City. One could make the assumption that UNESCO would not have sent consultants if the country had not committed to the conditions to prepare the site for World Heritage designation.

Whether the intentions with the decree were connected to ambitions to nominate the old city as a World Heritage site is difficult to determine. Either way, this group of conservationists demonstrated a local commitment to conservation. They appealed to UNESCO and UNESCO responded. What we see here is UNESCO, and maybe the List, being used as a political tool. In addition to being used as a political tool, UNESCO, and again potentially the List, functioned to conserve the historic center. By reaffirming the national decree, UNESCO helped to prevent further destruction of old city fabric by the master plan.

⁷ At this time, UNESCO had not yet institutionalized a set of Operational Guidelines for the List. Even though the Operational Guidelines of today are not strict regulations, they do help the nominees to understand UNESCO's expectations. In this period, those wishing to nominate a site had only the questions from the nomination application to follow as a representation of UNESCO's expectations; one of the questions on the application requested information about protective legislation for the heritage property. (UNESCO, 1978)

This shift in priorities towards conservation marks the second period of planning in the old city. Even though the priorities were rooted in a conservation agenda, the analysis of existing conditions during this period overemphasized the formal characteristics of the historic fabric, with little regard for the circumstances of the people that live in the district. Like their French predecessors whose policies they opposed because they believed them to be foreign and incompatible with the nature of the old city fabric and lifestyle, the group of local conservationists espoused a plan that was based in a conflicting and exotic perception of the historic center and its residents, as informed by the UNESCO consultants in the 1980 report. The report illuminates the planning climate in the old city at the time and reveals its limited understanding of the actual conditions in the old city.

1980 UNESCO Report

The team of professionals who authored the 1980 UNESCO technical report for the conservation of the old city included Stephano Bianca, Giovanni Rizzardi, Bruno Chauffert-Yvart, Yves Beton and Dr. Jean-Claude David. Yves Beton and Dr. Jean-Claude David (the same French geographer who had initially pushed for the registration of the old city fabric in 1978) both represented French cultural institutions in Syria: the French Institute of Archaeology and the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in Damascus. Two aspects of this team are interesting to note here. Not only did the team not include a local representative from Aleppo, but all the team members were from Europe. While this may not seem alarming at first, its import becomes apparent as one reads the text of the report. Pervasive throughout are stereotypes about historic city centers in Islamic countries.

The report begins by giving an overview of urban planning in Aleppo up to the date of the report. In a section titled, “The Impact of Western Planning Ideology in Aleppo”, the report comments:

Today Aleppo, unlike many other *Islamic* cities, is still in a position to maintain the unity of its old urban fabric. The *unique* qualities of its historic urban environment are a most valuable asset for future development, and its *timeless* values can inspire modern city planning. All this should not be sacrificed to an obsolete concept of progress and to out-dated planning methods, which would destroy the very possibility of an *organic* urban evolution [emphasis added] (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, p. 26).

The first part of this statement reveals that the authors of this report understand the old city of Aleppo to be unique and timeless; two qualities they recognize as being attributed to its identity as an Islamic city. These characteristics are seen as assets that can be built upon for contemporary urban design interventions.

This type of reasoning is indicative of a contemporaneous trend in the Arabian Peninsula, where according to Janet Abu-Lughod, urban planners were attempting to “find an operational definition of the Islamic city in order to build contemporary ones”(Abu-Lughod, 1987, pp. 172, 175). In order to create this ideal type, these planners were looking to definitions of Islamic cities by Orientalist scholars who extracted generalizations about the prototypical Islamic city from only a handful of cities in the Islamic world. She insists that conceptualizing an ideal model is dangerous because it denies the dynamism inherent to cities: that cities are generated by a variety of forces, and that “the forms that evolve in response to these forces are unique to the combination of these forces” (Abu-Lughod, 1987, pp. 161-162).

Abu-Lughod also questions outright the notion of an Islamic city. She asserts that Islam could not have been responsible for architectural form as styles differ dramatically from region to region. However, she does maintain that Islam contributed to shaping cities in three significant ways. First, residents were spatially segregated according to their relationship with the *Umma* (community of believers), the governing religious power. In addition, because the State accomplished little in the way of providing public services, neighborhood units absorbed this role, thus strengthening the social ties in these already spatially segregated areas (Abu-Lughod, 1987, p. 162). Her second claim speaks to gender segregation. She insists that because Islam endorsed gender segregation at all levels, it “created a set of architectural and spatial imperatives that had only a limited range of solutions” (Abu-Lughod, 1987, p. 163). Lastly, she speaks to the impact that property law had on replicating a “pattern of space”. In pre-modern Islamic society, private property rights were more important than those of larger administrative bodies, such as the State. Accordingly, public space or main roads, for example, did not receive the priority that individual resident entryways did (Abu-Lughod, 1987, p. 163). She concludes by contending that today these three conditions are “retrogressive” and, accordingly, urban planners living in Islamic societies should not aspire to recreate them.

Accepting Abu-Lughod’s argument, we understand the threat of planning for “Islamic cities” and, in this case, planning for their conservation. The type of language used in the above quote perpetuates stereotypes about traditional cities and traditional Islamic cities. It is unfortunate if conservation policies are being fashioned according to these stereotypes, as it forces a local situation into a mold based on an ideal type. In other words, conservation policies become based on imagined constructions. An example of this is illustrated above in the argument that the old city of Aleppo embodies timeless values. This implies that the old city is somehow ahistorical, out of time, and devoid of change, rejecting the historic richness of the fabric and the

lives of its residents from its earliest periods to the present. By denying the old city of its historicity, one also denies the contemporary residents of their relevance and agency in the modern planning of their homes.

In the second half of this statement, Aleppo's timeless, Islamic characteristics are being juxtaposed against European planning principles that privilege the automobile. When referring to an "obsolete concept of progress", the authors are speaking about European planning trends of the mid-twentieth century to construct wide streets and boulevards through city centers in order to accommodate vehicular traffic. The authors argue that while such measures were deemed progressive at that historical moment in Europe, contemporary developments were encouraging pedestrian zones and public transportation in downtown areas. They discuss examples of recently implemented large pedestrian zones in Paris, Vienna, and Munich to illustrate their point (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, p. 26). Eager to illuminate the progressive ideals of traditional urban environments, the authors then maintain that while pedestrian zones might be a new lesson learned for European planners, these ideas have a longstanding tradition in Islamic urban environments. They write:

If the idea of a human scale pedestrian environment may seem a "discovery" to Europe, it certainly is not in Islamic countries and in cities like Aleppo [emphasis added] (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, p. 26).

Again here, they make broad sweeping statements about what they perceive to be Islamic urban environments. They portray them as being constructed at a human scale and pedestrian in nature. In the Islamic country of Yemen at the southern base of the Arabian Peninsula, much of the traditional stone and mud brick architecture is often built to heights of seven to eight stories, certainly not human-scale construction (ArchNet, 2003). Some palaces are even constructed up

to eleven stories (Figure 15). Moreover, as stated in the previous quote, these authors call for an “organic urban evolution”, but true “*organic* urban evolution” would imply the absence of planning. This would quickly put the authors out of a job, and, in the absence of conservation planning; market forces would contribute to the rapid destruction of old city fabric.

In another section of the report about suburban expansion from the historic core, the authors speak to the contrast between the modern apartment-style suburbs and the traditional houses in the old city.

Apartment buildings of better quality, most of them surrounded by a narrow stripe of garden, are inhabited by the lower middle class. In these more airy and cheerful districts, also, the use of space is not adapted to the *traditional way of living*. Inhabitants coming from the old quarters have first to get used to the *extraverted* European type of house, which does not protect the *intimacy* of family life [emphasis added] (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, p. 22).

This statement emphasizes that apartment-style homes are not conducive to traditional living, because residents moving there from the old city must adapt to these new conditions. Again, this statement exposes these authors’ assumptions about traditional cities. First, they make a parallel between “traditional way of living” and traditional urban fabric, suggesting that somehow one’s house type dictates one’s way of life, traditional or modern. In reaction to this quote, I do not understand in what way people living in the old city must get used to living in modern European houses. Certainly their behaviors do not change immediately and entirely just because they move into an apartment building. It is unclear to me why these authors assume that houses without courtyards cannot afford privacy.

Additionally, the traditional way of living is characterized as introverted and intimate. They propose that although airy and cheerful (a highly subjective representation), the modern suburbs somehow fall short of providing adequate housing because essentially European houses do not afford people the opportunity for intimacy, or in other words privacy. Again the authors here make generalizations about what they perceive to be normative standards for residents who originate from the old city, that they are first traditional and by virtue of being traditional they highly prioritize privacy.

In a provocative article about eighteenth century Aleppo, Abraham Marcus provides insight about the notion of privacy in traditional Muslim civil society. He asserts that while today, “Muslim societies enjoy a reputation for attitudes and conduct exceptionally protective of privacy” (Marcus, 1986, p. 165), this perception could not have been rooted in traditional behavior. According to Marcus, in eighteenth century Aleppo there was a strong distinction between physical privacy and privacy of information. He makes the case that the protection of physical privacy was the overarching concern of citizens, not the protection of personal private information (Marcus, 1986, p. 167). The dense living arrangements of the traditional fabric, with no space separating the residential houses except narrow streets, afforded little privacy of information as neighbors could overhear conversations in the inner courtyards as they passed by. This is one reason why, he argues, residents “expected intense physical proximity and social familiarity with others” (Marcus, 1986, p. 175).

Marcus also uses accounts documented in the city’s judicial records to exhibit that privacy of information was not a paramount concern. One case illustrates an uninvited group of residents dropping in on their neighbors to find women and men seated together; the women were unveiled. The very next day these residents had their neighbors barred from the neighborhood

(Marcus, 1986, p. 165). This example is indicative of the mechanisms for social control used by the authorities. He writes:

The authorities held each neighborhood responsible collectively for behavior within its precincts. Residents were expected to make local misdeeds known and find the offenders. The entire locality suffered a heavy fine for crimes which it failed to report or discover, including even illicit affairs and premarital pregnancies (Marcus, 1986, p. 177).

Through these examples, Marcus dispels myths about the perceived importance of privacy (as we understand it today to include physical privacy and privacy of information) in traditional Muslim societies. While a discussion of eighteenth century Aleppo, his research exposes traditional Islamic society as something very different from the assumptions that contemporary stereotypes are created from.

Furthermore, accepting Marcus' claim that traditional Muslim civil society in Aleppo did not hold conceptions of privacy of information, or rather if we accept that the dense living conditions in the old city did not facilitate privacy of information, then we could make a counterargument to the one made by the authors of the UNESCO report. If we were to accept their suggestion that people living in the old quarters actually needed privacy to continue living their lives shaped by traditional values, we could argue that the modern apartment buildings actually afforded residents more privacy from their neighbors than the dense urban fabric and courtyards of the old city. In a discussion with a social worker in Aleppo, she revealed to me that many of the women residents of the old city today are eager to move to apartments where they do not have to live under the same roof and share the common living space of the courtyard

with their in-laws.⁸ They are eager to lead private lives separate from their husband's extended family, especially their mothers-in-law.

While the stereotypes in this report reveal the authors' misunderstandings about the old city residents, so do the plans that they proposed for future intervention. Together with the local conservationists, these authors had belittled the master plans of their French predecessors for being inappropriate and foreign inspired. However, their recommendations were also based on stereotypes informed by foreign perceptions of Islamic cities and modern perceptions of what it means to be traditional. Moreover, their proposals were motivated by strict formal considerations with little mention of the over 150,000 people that resided in the old city at the time. The residents are simply used as evidence of the value of the historic fabric to preserve a traditional way of life, as I discussed above. In turn, the authors' recommendations call for transportation and programming improvements that are conducive to easing the formal transition between the historic center and the more modern-style construction of the new city.

Their recommended policies were the following:

1. To improve existing ringroads and make maximum use of them as protective devices for shielding the old town.
2. To establish a "barrier" to channel west-east traffic flow into north-south arterials.
3. To shift the centre of gravity of the new town so as to avoid conflicts and to offer a larger development potential to the new city centre.
4. To articulate transition zones and "filters" between the new central area and the pedestrian area of the old town.
5. To reorganize and/or relocate the activities of the central area according to their requirements in terms of space and vehicular access.
6. To create well-balance points of access to the old town from the periphery.

(Bianca *et al.*, 1980, pp. 38-42)

⁸ Many households in the old city are comprised of three generations of inhabitants: an initial couple, their children, and if they have sons, their sons' families. Sometimes a daughter will live in the house as well with her children if she is single or widowed. Each family unit inhabits one room of the courtyard, using the courtyard as the shared living space.

Throughout the report these authors consistently referred to “development” in the old city. However, it is clear that they were referring to strict physical development with no reflection on the importance of socioeconomic development for the improvement of the conditions in the old city. Their only mention of the socioeconomic context of the old city was a section in which they assert that the preliminary nature of their report should be supported by future studies, including an economic survey which would record and evaluate the needs of the commercial and industrial activities in the old city (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, p. 59). They also refer to “rehabilitation” in certain areas of the text, yet with no clarification as to what that would entail (Bianca *et al.*, 1980, pp. 9, 71).

These examples illustrate stereotypes about traditional Islamic cities and a lack of understanding for the necessity of social inclusionary planning principles in the 1980 UNESCO report. This demonstrates a limited appreciation of the existing conditions in the old city during this period of planning in Aleppo. This is alarming because this report became the foundation for a complete change in planning policies in the old city towards conservation. If the report is infused with stereotypical presumptions about the people living in the old city, then the intent to conserve the old city becomes confused. Is the intent to conserve a lifestyle that exists in the minds of the European professionals who authored the report, and the local elites who have nostalgia for a way of life that they think once existed in the old city? Or rather is the intent to conserve to simply safeguard these physical cultural architectural artifacts? Should we be surprised that UNESCO would issue strict formal recommendations for the improvement of a historic district? After all, it is an organization whose goal is to safeguard the architectural heritage. Or should we question why there is so little reference to social inclusion in the policy proposals?

These questions are critical and they help us to understand the complexity of heritage conservation, specifically in the context of urban environments and under the power dynamic of development. For the authors of the UNESCO report, the residents of the old city represent the underdeveloped world, one that is exotic, because it is perceived as traditional. For the local conservationists, the residents of the old city are the contemporary link to an imagined past. They provide the necessary ingredient to authenticate this heritage.

This period of planning in Aleppo demonstrates a commitment to conservation, yet not to a conservation policy that incorporates social inclusion. Up until this point in Aleppo, we see UNESCO and maybe the List, being used *effectively* only as a political tool, rather than one for conservation. UNESCO used its authority to ensure the continuation of the decree that made the old city a national monument. In this way, it did not contribute to improving the socioeconomic conditions of its residents, and accordingly failed to meet the emerging international conservation standards for historic cities.

By 1986 and the World Heritage designation, what we observe in Aleppo's old city is a history of interventions that have had little consideration for the significant population of people that actually call it home. It is at this moment that UNESCO and the List began to have a positive role for the residents in the old city. As a result of being listed on the World Heritage List, the historic center gained a new type of international exposure. That exposure seems to have made it attractive to foreign investors and development agencies. As a result, the old city has become the subject of a large-scale international rehabilitation project. A discussion of this project follows.

Figure 1. The Old City of Aleppo



Figure 2. Aerial view of the 13th century Citadel



Figure 3. Dense urban fabric of the old city



Figure 4. Semi-private residential passageways



Figure 5. Courtyard house



Figure 6. Olive oil soap business in the *souk*



Figure 7. Gold shop in the *souk*



Figure 8. Four lane thoroughfares in the old city as a result of master planning



Figure 9. Women using inner courtyard



Figure 10. Divided courtyard to afford more indoor living space



Figure 11. Closed structure constructed inside courtyard



Figure 12. Foundation damage to private home as a result of inadequate water and sewer infrastructure



Figure 13. Former *khans* being used as storage area for the *souk*



Figure 14. Location for the proposed 14-story high rise tower next to the governor's palace



Figure 15. High-rise stone and mud brick architecture of Shibam, Yemen

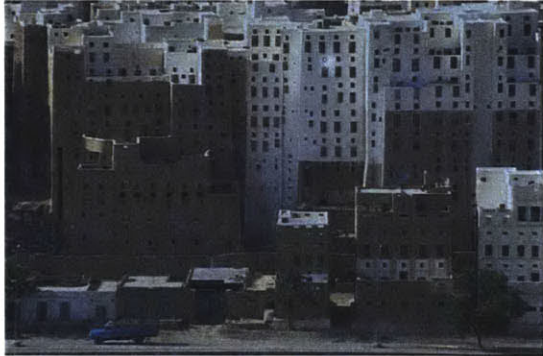


Figure 16. Project Action Areas

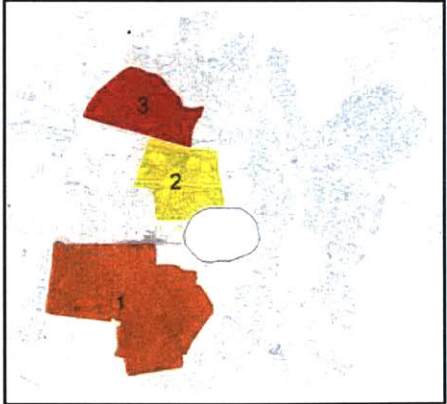


Figure 17. Upgrading sewer and water infrastructure



Figure 18. Way-finding signage



Figure 19. Streetscape improvements



Chapter II. CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT

Soon after being listed as World Heritage, in 1992 the old city of Aleppo became the subject of a comprehensive rehabilitation project by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, or the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). It is not entirely definitive that the act of listing attracted the GTZ to Aleppo. However, it is very likely that Aleppo's designation to the World Heritage List was a major factor in the GTZ's decision to undertake such a wide-scale development project in Syria. Instead of being a symbol of local heritage, the old city was now a source of universal cultural heritage and its conservation now the responsibility of the international community. Working with the Municipality of Aleppo, the GTZ created a plan to promote the physical and economic sustainability of the old city, *The Project for the Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo*.

The project's goal was twofold: it aimed to promote social and economic development and upgrade the environmental conditions of the old city while conserving historic fabric and monuments where possible (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit, 1998, p. 19). Towards this end the GTZ gave foreign aid and technical assistance to the municipality and shared in the plan design and implementation of the project. With its formal and socioeconomic analyses, the development plan for the rehabilitation project indicates a third period of planning priorities in Aleppo's old city.

This chapter will discuss this rehabilitation project giving specific attention to the ways that it contributed to socioeconomic development in the old city and to how it raised the standards of performance in the planning profession in Aleppo. It will begin first with a debate about the nature of cultural heritage conservation projects in the context of international development.

Cultural Heritage Conservation in the Context of Development

This experience in Aleppo is typical of cultural heritage cities in developing countries. Many conservation agencies do not have the resources to assume large-scale urban rehabilitation in historic cities. Instead, development agencies and banks have begun to support these types of programs. This increased attention to the role of cultural heritage in development can be attributed to a paradigm shift in development thinking in the past decade, from an economically motivated strategy to today's more holistic human development focus with its better understanding of the value of economic, social and environmental sustainability in development projects. The World Bank's *Comprehensive Development Framework* initiative embodied this new thinking by placing the "inducement of economic growth within its social context." In a 2001 report on its policies on cultural heritage in the Middle East and North Africa, the World Bank positioned cultural heritage as a central component in its objectives of poverty alleviation, economic reform, and political participation. In fact, it asserted that investment in cultural heritage programs generate greater employment opportunity and a higher economic rate of return than many manufacturing industries (World Bank, 1998).

While the World Bank asserts that cultural heritage is a key factor in alleviating poverty, reforming economies, and greater political participation, there are critiques to this type of strategy. In his essay, "Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism: Manufacturing Heritage, Consuming Tradition", Nezar AlSayyad maintains that in this age of globalization and global tourism, "there is an increasing demand for built environments that promise unique cultural experiences" (AlSayyad, 2001, p. 2). Organizations, corporations, and individuals from the developed world are eager to promote and finance programs that preserve the cultural heritage in underdeveloped countries, cultural heritage that represents these unique and authentic cultural experiences. In their efforts first world agencies and individuals act as the custodians of

this universal heritage because the local population often does not recognize its important cultural value (AlSayyad, 2001, p. 4). When developing or underdeveloped countries do not have the economic security and/or the political stability (like many of the countries in the Middle East) to attract much needed direct foreign investment, opportunities to do so through the production of cultural products and experiences (such as those one might find in a World Heritage City) are quickly taken advantage of. AlSayyad speaks to the contradictions that characterize many of these types of interventions. He writes,

...the First World has also tried at times to maintain or assist in preserving the dying or disappearing lifestyles and traditions of underdeveloped people and places. Yet it is also often the case that First World organizations, foundations, and governments have engaged in such efforts while at the same time condemning or rejecting much of the social and political practices of the societies whose traditions they claim to want to preserve - especially when it diverges from Western standards of human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (AlSayyad, 2001, p. 4).

This dichotomy is critical to consider when an entire urban fabric, inhabited and used by real people, becomes monumentalized under the rubric of the “World Heritage” designation, as happened in Aleppo. This is especially significant since the project to rehabilitate its old city was planned and implemented by an international development agency. With AlSayyad’s comments in mind, we might ask, should urban cultural heritage conservation projects stand outside normative development processes when historic areas are protected by the government from being supplanted by other urban forms? If they should, should they only in physical terms or in socioeconomic and cultural conditions as well? In other words, are development and cultural heritage conservation incompatible? While the intellectual elites who originally sought a formal conservation agenda might argue that they are, the GTZ certainly would not. As an international development agency of Germany, the GTZ has political obligations and responsibilities. To

justify investment in this project, its programs had to encompass poverty alleviation, environmental and financial sustainability, and gender equality.

The Project for the Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo

In this section, I aim to illustrate how the World Heritage List has transformed planning in Aleppo, and even in Syria. By virtue of its heritage being on the List, Aleppo began to receive international development aid from the GTZ through the *Project for the Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo*. This project had an impact on urban planning in Aleppo, and even in Syria, in two significant ways. First, it improved the standards of the planning profession by introducing new technologies and planning programs into the country and by raising the level of professionalism in the field. Second, politically the project has had a subversive role through its management and planning processes.

Raising Planning Standards

After four years of developing the rehabilitation plan, in 1996 the GTZ and the municipality of Aleppo began implementation. An independent and financially autonomous rehabilitation department, the *Directorate of the Old City*, was created to oversee the plan. Central executive power remained in the hands of the GTZ, as it contributed the greatest financial resources to the project. The rehabilitation effort encompassed both top-down and bottom-up approaches to the development process by combining long-term planning with immediate action projects. (Figure 16) While the municipality prepared a new Master Plan (different from earlier ones that had proposed to destroy large sections of the old city), the project team organized the development plan for the old city and simultaneously declared Action Areas in which 'subject plans' were prepared to address specific issues in each area, such as housing, or transportation (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit, 1998). Implementation began in these Action

Areas. Work executed in the Action Areas integrated a variety of programs and created a standard for preservation and restoration for anticipated future private sector intervention.

The rehabilitation work in these Action Areas had a notable impact on the old city fabric and the quality of life for its residents. Manufacturing uses became restricted in residential areas reducing the negative impact of industry on residents. Public water, sewerage and transportation infrastructure was renewed (Figures 17, 18, 19). However, while much work was accomplished towards upgrading public infrastructure and urban spaces in these areas, very little progress was made in rehabilitating the private residential fabric in the old city. Towards this end, the project initiated housing micro-financing programs to assist residents in the maintenance and restoration of their homes. These programs were the first of their kind in Syria.

Housing Micro-financing

There were two types of housing micro-loans available through the project to residents in the old city: the *Emergency Fund* and the *Rehabilitation Fund*. The Emergency Fund was a revolving fund initiated in 1994 with 100,000 USD from the GTZ, the municipality of Aleppo, and a private group in Germany, the *Friends of Aleppo*. The loan afforded residents up to 800USD to be paid back in full within three years. This money was earmarked to assist home owners with emergency structural repair work on their houses, such as repairing cracking walls or unstable roofs (Sustainable Urban Rehabilitation Architectural Design and Engineering Consortium, 2001, p. 3). To make them more attractive, the loans were interest free and exempt from permit and other municipal fees; however, there was a 3.5% financial fee that was due upon receiving the loan. Recipients of the loan also received technical assistance from project engineers.

The Rehabilitation Loan was a revolving fund that provided home owners in designated Action Areas up to 3000USD interest free to be paid back in full within four years. The greater amount was to attract residents who wanted to implement more complicated interventions on their houses in line with the preservation directives of the project. As an additional incentive, if historically architectural significant details of the house were restored with the loan, a 25% grant was guaranteed to the loan recipient. The Rehabilitation Fund also offered free technical service and had the same one-time financing fee of 3.5%. It began operation in 1997 (Sustainable Urban Rehabilitation Architectural Design and Engineering Consortium, 2001, p. 3).

The loans were dispersed through a lengthy bureaucratic process, including inspection and documentation, technical review, contracting, implementation with technical support, and archiving the case (Holst, 2002, p. 7). The highest demand for loans occurred just after the winter months, from March to November. By 2001, the Emergency Fund had revolved 2.8 times processing about 35 loans per year, while the Rehabilitation Fund processed a sum total of only 25 loans. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the rehabilitation loans were only available to residents in specific Action Areas that were strategically located adjacent to sections within the old city with the most commercial and tourist traffic. Furthermore, these loans were less popular because the 3000USD amount of the loan was more than what residents could afford, even with the potential for a 25% grant,⁹ and because the desire to restore architecturally significant features on their homes was not a high priority for the low income residents of the old city.

Overall, the two funds had minimum impact on upgrading the historic fabric. Out of the 14,500 households in the historic core, only 360 houses were stabilized through the Emergency Fund.

⁹ It was unclear to residents that they did not have to borrow the full sum.

Keeping in mind that residential property covers 40% of old city property (approximately 16,000 plots of land) (Holst, 2002, p. 2) with a 10% vacancy rate (Hallaj, 2002, p. 8), the two funds impacted less than 1% of the total property in the old city. With an 11% default rate and the devaluation of the currency, today the funds are being exhausted.

If a main goal of the project was to upgrade the physical conditions of the old city, why then would the GTZ and the Syrian government invest in programs with such little impact towards that end? These loans were important for other purposes. For one, residents in the old city had few alternatives for accessing capital to invest in their homes; the Syrian Real Estate Bank dictated strict rules about offering loans for the rehabilitation of historic homes: houses had to possess a concrete roof and be immediately accessible for resale in order to be sufficient collateral (Holst, 2002, p. 10). It is unusual for both circumstances to be satisfied in the old city due to the fragmented real-estate base. Having access to credit through the funds in the project affords residential property owners the opportunity to implement structurally stabilizing measures in a timely manner. In addition, because recipients had to meet the high technical standards of project engineers, the funds helped to set guidelines about best-practice intervention in historic homes. This had a multiplier effect as well, as it contributed to raising the standards of construction laborers working in the old city.

Information Management System

In addition to introducing new financing programs, the project launched a management information system. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the 'Old City Information System' (OCIS) scanned the cadastral surveys from 1929 to create a base map of the old city. Additional plans for the area were detailed on another multilayer base map. Through the use of this system, project engineers gained access to a valuable tool for making and implementing

plans in the old city based on more effective spatial analysis. In addition, the use of GIS provided the opportunity for city officials to better understand planning issues in the old city, as they could better visualize them through information maps. Through these information maps, policy-makers could make better-informed decisions about the old city (Ramadan, 2002).

The project staff argue that the use of an information management system created a “framework of information dissemination” that made “urban data available to the widest possible set of users” (Ramadan, 2002, p. 3). In a political climate where information is often manipulated by the government, the use of GIS was an invaluable tool to establish a sense of government accountability and to help deter government corruption. Moreover, it served to better inform local stakeholders about the planning process, including the residents and users of the historic center.

Higher Professional Standards and Democratic Hiring Principles

Through its introduction of new planning procedures and technologies and international exposure, the project became one of the most sought after and prestigious places to work for architecture and civil engineering students and professionals. Through professional workshops, training sessions, and high standards of professionalism in the office, the project has succeeded in advancing the planning profession in Aleppo. Many of the architects and engineers that have worked with the project over the years have gone off to either start their own urban management consultancy firms or to work as consultants advising other cities in Syria and the Middle East on urban heritage management issues. Some have even gone on to serve as elected public officials. In fact, today the Mayor of Aleppo is an architect who worked closely with the project on environmental issues.¹⁰ In this way, the project has played a politically subversive role

¹⁰ Dr. Maan Chibli is the current Mayor of Aleppo. He worked as a Local Expert for the GTZ on the Project.

promoting a democratic agenda in an overtly authoritarian and politically oppressive environment.

By deviating from normative standards of hiring, the project has also acted as a force of political opposition. The project staff includes professionals that reflect the diversity of ethnicities and religions in Syria. Both women and men from Syria's Armenian Orthodox, Catholic Maronite, Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite backgrounds all work together under the same management. Indeed, one of the managers on the project was an engineer of Kurdish origin. Such a position is a rarity in a country where the Kurds are treated as second-class citizens.¹¹ In addition, staff members were hired on a merit basis, not through familial connections or through political party affiliation.

Participatory Planning Principles

In addition to deviating from conventional recruitment practices, the project introduced participatory planning in a country where there is historically an avid mistrust and lack of communication between citizens and the government. By promoting transparency of information through a social survey, and community meetings, the project helped to build trust in a public institution and it also empowered residents to participate in and voice their concerns about initiatives in their neighborhoods.

The social survey was conducted by a female team led by a German sociologist, Nina Corsten. Residents of two neighborhoods of the old city were chosen as respondents in a total of 335 homes with 472 households (Corsten, 1995, p. 11). The questionnaire addressed six subjects:

¹¹ The good proportion of Syria's Kurdish population is denied citizenship, and the Kurdish language is prohibited in Syria. (Washington Times Editorials/Op-Ed, 2004)

domestic circumstances, the relationship of inhabitants, mobility, the state of repair of the house, the economic and educational conditions within the household, and women's freedom of movement given the social condition of the neighborhood (Corsten, 1995, p. 8). Typically an interview would encompass a meeting in the courtyard with the female head of the household with several of the other female members contributing throughout the conversation. If men were present, they were encouraged to participate. However, to ensure reliable answers and to reduce bias, certain inquiries were only asked in the presence of women, such as any question relating to mobility or concerning relations between neighbors. For the same reason, daughters-in-law were only asked certain questions in the absence of their mother-in-law. The team often filled out the questionnaires themselves, as many residents in the old city are illiterate.

Through this process, valuable information was gathered to assess the needs and desires of the old city residential community. As a direct result of open communication between women in the district and the project staff efforts are now being made to find locations for new educational facilities, including schools, kindergartens, and playgrounds for area children.¹² In addition to the social survey, other community outreach initiatives were launched, including pre- and post-implementation meetings and awareness campaigns to aid in disseminating information about the project and mobilizing community cooperation.

These efforts to raise the standards of the planning profession and to ground the project in democratic principles proceed towards what economist Amartya Sen proposes as "development as freedom". In his book of the same name, Sen argues that development interventions should be measured by their impact on enhancing personal instrumental freedoms specifically,

¹² Overall, within the old city, the majority of residents lack access to appropriate health and educational services such as family planning, vocational training, and opportunities to reduce illiteracy, and there are only two kindergartens and 16 elementary schools for over 110,000 residents. (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit, 1998, p. 73)

“economic opportunities, political freedoms, social facilities, transparency guarantees, and protective security” (Sen, 1999). Furthermore, development should eliminate the “various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency...unfreedoms such as poor economic opportunities, neglect of public facilities, intolerance or overactivity of repressive states” (Sen, 1999, pp. 3-4). Through the rehabilitation project, these “unfreedoms” are slowly being addressed. However, the fact that they are being addressed through a cultural heritage rehabilitation project is interesting and even ironic as it is Aleppo’s past that is providing it with opportunities for a better future. My conclusion will shed more light on this issue.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued that the World Heritage List has impacted local planning in Aleppo, Syria. There have been three different moments in the history of planning in the city. Each of these periods had a defined vision for the old city and each was directly informed by a foreign presence. From the end of the French Mandate to 1978 interventions in the old city were direct results of master plans inspired by urban renewal planning principles and designed by foreign architects. With their out-of-scale interventions these master plans were inappropriate because they did not demonstrate an understanding of the existing formal and socioeconomic conditions in the old city.

In the aftermath of the destruction caused by the partial implementation of sections of these master plans, a group of conservationists initiated a local campaign to conserve the old city and put an end to the master plans. Unsuccessful in their efforts to convince the city administration, they circumvented local authority and rallied the national Ministry of Culture to register the old city as a national historic monument. To further substantiate their agenda they then invited UNESCO to recommend alternative proposals to those of the master plan.

This second period of intervention marks a major change in priorities for the old city, from an undervalued and marginalized position to one of prominence as a symbol of Syrian heritage. However, this period demonstrates a limited understanding of the socioeconomic conditions in the old city. Its policies for intervention focus on strict formal recommendations with little concern for the impoverished living conditions of the over 100,000 residents of the area. Moreover, what consideration is given to the residents is based in stereotypical perceptions and assumptions that they are traditional, i.e. not modern. This misinformed position is used to build the argument to justify conservation of the traditional architecture.

At this moment in Aleppo's history, UNESCO has a powerful role in the transformation of policies from master planning to conservation. The local conservationists were successful in advancing their vision of conservation in the old city through the creative use of an international vehicle. The recognition brought about by UNESCO functioned to apply political pressure on the City administration. This had a critical impact on changing the direction of planning in the old city.

However, the conservationists' visions for a preserved old city were not aligned with emerging international standards for the conservation of historic cities at the time, which called for social inclusionary planning principles. We do not see evidence of social inclusion until the third period of planning, that of the rehabilitation project. The international exposure that Aleppo gained from being designated to the World Heritage List helped to make the old city the subject of an international development project by the GTZ. This project sought to both preserve the historic fabric and advance the socioeconomic conditions of the residents and users of the district. While this project is limited in its impact to conserve the entire designated historic city fabric, it does display impressive results in defined Action Areas. These Action Areas are isolated near the commercial areas of the old city and those areas that tourists would be more willing to frequent. This is another way that the World Heritage List achieves its goal of conservation in the old city.

However, we also observe two other noteworthy indirect consequences of the old city being listed. The implementation of the project in Aleppo contributed to raising performance standards in the planning profession in Aleppo, and Syria. It accomplished this through the infusion of new technology, including an information management system; introducing new socioeconomic programs, such as housing micro credit schemes; and professional training. In

addition, it contributed to knowledge diffusion to other planning projects throughout Syria and the Middle East as engineers from its staff went on to consult on related planning projects. We also see the project advancing democratic hiring principles and participatory planning processes in its various programs. In these two ways, the World Heritage List and the events that flowed from it have indirectly contributed to improving the planning profession in Aleppo and challenging the limits of political norms in the country.

What are the implications of the World Heritage List contributing to the advancement of democracy in such an authoritarian political environment, one that shows little promise of reform? When a country receives international development aid, it usually means that it has demonstrated a commitment to political and economic reform; either this reform has already begun or it will happen as a result of the aid. In this case, we see no commitment from the Syrian government to reform and yet the government is still receiving aid. Is this because cultural heritage is something that everyone can agree on, international community and authoritarian government alike? Or does Syria receive this aid because the international community has asserted its interest in this property through World Heritage designation? Does this lead to an overemphasis on culture and heritage, in which heritage becomes the vehicle for change and reform? As I mentioned above, Syria is a country that has a staunch history of import substitution policies. This is a country that historically has turned down international resources in the form of development aid or foreign direct investment. If becoming designated to the World Heritage List becomes a vehicle for attracting desperately needed international investment, to what extent then does the List channel local financial and technical resources into heritage projects and away from other types of planning priorities?

In the case of Aleppo, I would argue that the List does lead to an emphasis on cultural heritage programs in the city. The presence of an international planning agency has many implications for the profession. As previously mentioned, some of the most sought after positions for architects and students of architecture and planning are those with the GTZ or with consultants who work directly with the GTZ. Architects and/or engineers see these positions as an opportunity to get ahead and advance themselves professionally. They want to gain access to the international workshops, conferences and travel opportunities that are associated with the project. Accordingly, professionals and students focus on historic preservation or heritage management to access opportunities to work or be affiliated with them. In addition, with an international agency channeling financial and technical resources into heritage planning, the City is pressured to do the same. If designating historic areas as World Heritage does then result in an emphasis on heritage, does this then lead to an overemphasis on heritage and a commodification of culture? The anthropologist Arturo Escobar reminds us, “Not infrequently, what looks like authentic practice or art hides the commodification of types of “authenticity” that have long since ceased to be sources of cultural insights” (Escobar, 1994, p. 219).

If we accept that heritage is a vehicle for change in Aleppo, and that as a result it drives desperately needed resources into the city, then this begs the question, to what extent is international development aid through the rehabilitation project accidental or purposeful by the Syrian government? It might just be that the Syrian government purposefully chooses to engage heritage as the vehicle to channel resources that it cannot provide into its cities. In this way, Syria can participate in the global marketplace while still circumventing greater political reform.

This experience of World Heritage listing in Aleppo reveals the complexity of international interventions based on notions of universal heritage value. As international development

agencies strategize to manage heritage projects in World Heritage Cities in developing countries, they should understand the importance of a balanced vision for the historic center, one informed by the international community, the national community, and, most important, the local residents who call these World Heritage Cities home.

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Figure 1. From: The Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo (2004), [online]. http://www.gtz-aleppo.org/aleppo_map.htm

Figure 2. Photographed by Michel Ecochard, 1930, courtesy of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

Figure 15. Photographed by Tim Bradley, 1997, courtesy of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

Figure 16. From: The Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo (2004), [online]. http://www.gtz-aleppo.org/action_areas.htm