



## Urban Conservation in Historic Cairo:

# An analysis of challenges and opportunities, and lessons learned from urban conservation in Historic Cairo and the UK

Report by

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*This report was produced in the framework of Urban Regeneration project for Historic Cairo – UNESCO, World Heritage Centre*

The report outlines the challenges and opportunities that the management of Historic Cairo implies, the analysis is based on the experience of the consultant in his work for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture between 1998 and 2008 and on the experience of coordinating Durham Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site since 2008, including the review of the Management Plan for that site.

يحدد التقرير التحديات والفرص المعنية بها إدارة القاهرة التاريخية. يستند التحليل إلى خبرة الاستشاري في عمله بصندوق الأغاخان للثقافة في الفترة ما بين 1998 و 2008 وكذلك تجربته كمنسق لموقع التراث العالمي "كاتدرائية دورهام وقصرها" منذ عام 2008، بما في ذلك استعراض خطة الإدارة لهذا الموقع.



Cairo has been a dominant political, cultural, commercial and religious capital throughout history playing a prominent role during Fatimids, reaching its golden age during Mamluks, and sustaining its cosmopolitan significance during Ottoman times. Due to its unique peculiar skyline, it has been known to scholars and historians as “City of the thousand minarets”.

Historic Cairo was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979 recognizing its “absolutely unquestionable historical, archaeological and urbanistic importance.” Upon ICOMOS recommendation, the inscription was based on the following criteria:

1. Several of the great monuments of Cairo are incontestable masterpieces;
2. The historic centre of Cairo groups numerous streets and old dwellings and thus maintains, in the heart of the traditional urban fabric, forms of human settlement, which go back to the middle Ages;
3. The historic centre of Cairo constitutes an impressive material witness to the international importance on the political, strategic, intellectual and commercial level of the City during the medieval period.

URHC Goals and Objectives In July 2010, UNESCO-WHC launched the Urban Regeneration Project for Historic Cairo (URHC) in the framework of a larger program of technical assistance to the Egyptian Government concerning the management of the World Heritage Site, focusing on the following objectives:

1. The preparation of a Conservation Plan for Historic Cairo’s “Core and Buffer Zones”, which would include the Management Plan required by the WH Operational Guidelines;
  2. The establishment of an institutional framework to undertake and develop a sustainable urban conservation policy, promoting coordination and collaboration amongst different institutions, administrations and agencies concerned with the management of the World Heritage Site;
  3. The creation of an appropriate and shared information platform for urban conservation.
- To achieve these goals, an interdisciplinary team of local and international consultants are collaborating with the concerned bodies to develop a set of protection measures in order to uphold the site’s Outstanding Universal Value, to prevent further decay of the historic urban fabric and to enhance the socio-economic conditions of Historic Cairo.

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## 1. Introduction:

The aim of this intermediate report is to inform the development of a Management Plan for Historic Cairo, to be developed by UNESCO's Urban Regeneration Project for Historic Cairo, (URPHC) in collaboration with the relevant Egyptian government authorities, including the National Organisation for Urban Harmony (NOUH).

The reports draws upon the author's experience working in Historic Cairo for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture between 1998 and 2008 and on the experience of coordinating Durham Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site since 2008, including the review of the Management Plan for that site. The views expressed in this document, however, are solely those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, or Durham Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site.

More specifically, in accordance to the terms of reference upon which this document has been written, this report sets out to:

- 1) Present in brief the experience of management of the Durham World Heritage Site and analyse other best-practise cases in the management of historic cities and complex cultural sites.
- 2) On the basis of analyses of the local institutional and legal set-up, of previous studies on Historic Cairo, and of the results of the first sector studies carried out in the URHC project, identify the key critical issues for the definition of a feasible management system for the Historic Cairo WH site in the current situation.
- 3) Contribute to outline a strategy for an integrated conservation policy based on rehabilitation and regeneration;
- 4) Contribute to outline the contents of a realistic management system for Historic Cairo, specifying the questions related to the institutional set-up and the implementation of the conservation strategy.

Further work based on this intermediate report will:

- 5) help identify priority action areas to be developed, and
- 6) provide advice on possible available or additional data and sector studies necessary to complete the setting of the management system, as well as further develop the points listed above.

As this report should be read in conjunction with URHC's 2011 final report, it does not include definitions, boundaries, and descriptions of Historic Cairo, but is an analytical tool to help develop an effective Management System for Historic Cairo.

## 2. UK World Heritage Sites as a Frame of Reference:

The UK provides a good opportunity to critically examine policies for urban conservation, given that it:

- a) successfully manages a balance between conservation and use in historic urban environments, and
- b) provides an exemplary model of heritage being effectively managed by government authorities, yet owned by private individuals, and monitored by civil society organisations with a strong voice that often act independently to ensure that heritage is preserved.

The UK also has a nuanced understanding of heritage value, recognising very different types of heritage, and acknowledging everyday buildings as being valuable components of the historic environment.

This section outlines some of the structures used to manage world heritage sites in the UK, and reflects on the process of working with a management plan for a World Heritage Site, as well as reviewing such a plan, based on the practical experience of having dealt with it for several years.

Taking Durham World Heritage Site as a case study, this section critically examines the relationship between a Management Plan and the actual management of a site. It looks at the review of the World Heritage Site Management Plan at both Durham and Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Sites, and then examines some of the issues in larger urban UK sites such as Liverpool and Edinburgh, both of which must juggle conservation issues with urban development issues, and have done so with different levels of success.

### **2.1 A brief summary about Durham World Heritage Site and its Significance**

Durham is a small urban site, in the North East of England, comprising a peninsula in the River Wear upon which were constructed a Norman Cathedral and Castle, recognised as being among the most important Norman buildings in England, and in the case of the Cathedral, being one of the great Cathedrals of Europe. Surrounding these two buildings are the administrative buildings of the Prince Bishopric of Durham (which functioned as a 'State within a State' from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century), numerous historic residential buildings, many of which are now owned and occupied by Durham University, which uses them both for academic and residential purposes.

Durham was inscribed on the World Heritage Site in 1986, one of the first UK world heritage site to be added to the list.

The site is significant because of:



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- I. Its exceptional architecture demonstrating architectural innovation;
- II. The visual drama of the Cathedral and Castle on the peninsula and the associations with notions of romantic beauty;
- III. The physical expression of the spiritual and secular powers of the medieval Bishops Palatine that the defended complex provides;
- IV. The relics and material culture of the three saints, (Cuthbert, Bede, and Oswald) buried at the site.
- V. Its role as a political statement of Norman power imposed upon a subjugate nation, as one of the country's most powerful symbols of the Norman Conquest of Britain;
- VI. The importance of its archaeological remains, which are directly related to its history and continuity of use over the past 1000 years;
- VII. The cultural and religious traditions and historical memories associated with the relics of St Cuthbert and the Venerable Bede, and with the continuity of use and ownership over the past millennium.
- VIII. The continuity of use and ownership over the past 1000 years as a place of religious worship, learning and residence;

#### Parallels to Cairo:

Point II – *the visual drama*, refers to the visual appearance of the site, similar in some respects to the distinct skyline as the ‘City of a Thousand Minarets’ used to describe Cairo.

Point VII, *The cultural and religious traditions*, which are of the utmost importance to both world heritage sites.

Point VIII, *the continuity of use* is, again, a strong parallel with Historic Cairo in that both of these are living sites, where history is preserved in the context of a site in use, and where the use itself contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value of a site.

Although the scale of the two sites is completely different, they are the same *type* of site, in the sense that apart from their buildings, part of their Outstanding Universal Value comes from the visual impact of the sites, the fact that they continue to be used, and more specifically, that many of these uses are deeply rooted cultural traditions that are intrinsically linked to the built fabric itself.

Part of the problem with historic cities is that, oftentimes, the full extent of what makes them valuable is not kept in mind when plans are drawn up, and consequently, some of the factors contributing to a site’s value are compromised.

The ways in which the visual impact, cultural traditions, and intangible values of World Heritage Sites in the UK have been dealt with can provide good points of reference for Historic Cairo, where the multitude of urban challenges often leads to these aspects of their value being overlooked.

#### **2.2 Ownership and Stakeholders of Durham World Heritage Site, and how these affect its management and conservation**

Durham World Heritage Site is owned by two principle landowners, Durham University, the third oldest university in the United Kingdom, currently also ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> best university in the UK, and



Durham Cathedral, an institution founded in 1093 AD, and seat of the Bishop of Durham, the third most important figure in the Church of England after the archbishops of Canterbury and York.

#### The impact of ownership:

Durham World Heritage Site's two principle landowners are both institutions with a long and venerable history. More importantly for the purposes of this document, they are both institutions that *value* their history. Although neither the Cathedral nor the University are institutions for which the preservation of heritage is a primary focus, both recognise the fact that their history and heritage adds a lot to their value and appeal. Around 600,000 people visit Durham Cathedral every year, many of these are tourists, and Durham Castle, (in use as one of the colleges of Durham University) is accessible by guided tour, and visited by 45,000 people on tours a year. 125,000 people visited the Durham World Heritage Centre in 2011-2012.

#### Other stakeholders:

Although actual ownership of the site is limited, Durham World Heritage Site is a key cultural asset for the city and county of Durham, and indeed, for the whole North Eastern Region of England. As such, the World Heritage Site is of key importance to local authorities, such as Durham County Council (the regional municipal authority for the county of Durham, equivalent to the Cairo Governorate) and Visit County Durham (the regional tourism agency). The extent of this importance to stakeholders other than its actual owners is demonstrated by their recent investments in it – for example, Durham County Council funded the relighting of the exterior of the Cathedral and Castle (to be completed in October 2012 at a cost of £600,000), even though neither of these are buildings that they own. The County Council also recently funded Lumiere, a spectacular bi-annual lighting festival, which centres around the World Heritage Site, and, in 2011, was seen by around 100,000 people over four nights (double the population of the city) (See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/interactive/2011/nov/21/lumiere-festival-audio-slideshow>). The County Council's interest in supporting an event like a lighting festival in a difficult economic climate in the UK indicates that it recognises the value of the site as a driver of the economy, not just through everyday tourism, but through large scale cultural events.

Thus, the organisations involved with Durham World Heritage Site, although different both in terms of their natures, their aims, and their priorities, all see the site as an asset that can be used to raise their profiles, as well as, of course, generate income. As such, an incentive for the preservation and management of the site exists. That said, it is only in recent years that the potential of the site as a single, unified entity with a globally recognisable brand has begun to be recognised.

#### Parallels with Cairo:

1. Until recently, the lack of recognition of the 'World Heritage Site Brand'. In Durham, it has only been in the last five or six years that a concerted effort has been made to make more out of the site's World Heritage Status.
2. The recognition that heritage can bring tourists, and tourists are of benefit to the local economy. In fact, with respect to both Durham and Cairo, the benefits of economic prosperity brought in by tourism have been among the key driving factors behind government investment, and affect governmental attitudes towards the historic urban environment.

### Differences:

1. A much greater sense of the value of heritage in Durham than in Cairo, (partially because in Cairo, Historic Cairo is overshadowed by other attractions like the Pyramids and the Egyptian Museum. Furthermore, in Cairo, 'Historic Cairo' for all intents and purposes is represented to the tourist, and, consequently, to the government, by the following sites: The Citadel, (third most visited attraction after the Pyramids and the Egyptian Museum); Sultan Hassan & al-Rifaii Mosques; Khan al Khalili & al Muizz Street; and so called 'Old Cairo' (the Museum of Coptic Art, the neighbouring churches and the Ben Ezra Synagogue). In Durham, the World Heritage Site is the key cultural asset for the city, and one of the key cultural assets for the region.
2. Clearly defined stakeholders in Durham and a relationship between the landowners and the broader stakeholders that recognises the responsibilities and authority of each.

### **2.3 Durham World Heritage Site and Its first Management Plan (2006)**

The First Management Plan for Durham World Heritage Site was drawn up in 2006 by a heritage consultancy firm, Chris Blandford Associates, through a process of consultation that involved the site's landowners and other key stakeholders. Among the key components of the Management Plan was an action plan for future activities related to the management of the site. This action plan was divided up into several sections, namely a) General Site Management, b) Conservation, c) Use of the site, d) Enhancing Understanding of the Site, and e) Improving Access. The action plan also identified the responsible entities against each required action, and because of the way that it was structured, progress could be measured against each item on an annual basis. This helped make it clear the items where little, or no progress had been made. See Action Plan Review Document excerpt on the following page.

Among the first over-arching actions recommended by the Management Plan was the creation of the World Heritage Site Management Committee, and the appointment of a World Heritage Site Coordinator - a set-up that exists in some form or another at all UK World Heritage Sites, and has proven its effectiveness.

THEME 1 MANAGING THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE	Action	Agencies	Target for Implementation	Status August 08	Priority
Objective 1: Establish a WHS Coordinating Committee	1.1 Formally establish the WHS Coordinating Committee	DCMS, DC, CoD, DCC, EH, ICOMOS, STJ, UD, ONE	Short term	DONE	DNA
	1.2 Endorse the WHS Management Plan as the overarching document to guide the actions of the WHS Coordinating Committee	WHS	Short term	DONE	DNA
	1.3 Consider the appointment/nomination of a WHS Officer for the Site	WHS	Short term	DONE	DNA
Objective 2: Recommend that DCMS invite the Unesco World Heritage Committee to approve a revised statement of significance, and the extension of the site to include Palace Green	2.1 Recommend to DCMS that they propose to the World Heritage Committee that the inscribed WHS is expanded to include Palace Green and that a revised Statement of Significance be adopted.	WHS, DCMS, WHC	Short term	DONE and WHS boundary modified in accordance to the recommendation	DNA
THEME 2 CONSERVING THE SITE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCES					
	2.2 English Heritage and University of Durham to agree the schedule of works required for removing the Castle from the Register of 'Buildings at Risk'	EH, UD	Short term	DONE	DNA
	2.3 Funding to be sought for the works to the Castle and the works to remove the Castle from the "Buildings at Risk" Register to be implemented.	WHS, HLF	Short term and ongoing	DONE	DNA
	2.4 Support the implementation of the Durham Riverbanks Management Plan and the projects it contains (see Appendix 8 and Objective 3).	DRMG	Short term and ongoing	ONGOING Riverbanks Committee. Riverbanks Gardens Project one of key capital projects for DCV. COD commissioning further studies aiming for HLF bid via DCV late 2008.	High

## **2.4 The context of the first Management Plan for the site: An initial lack of conviction in the value of World Heritage Status.**

The first management plan for the site was drawn up *before* the landowners and other key stakeholders had started appreciating the fact that World Heritage Site status was a valuable asset. As such, there was some reluctance about the value of the World Heritage Site as *one, unified* site, and a feeling among certain key members of staff that World Heritage Status was a liability and brought no clear benefits (and certainly no financial benefits from UNESCO). This attitude manifested itself in a strong reluctance to make a case for the expansion of the World Heritage Site boundaries (The boundaries of the site, when it was inscribed in 1986, were felt by ICOMOS and other technical specialists not to encompass all of the elements (buildings and spaces) that contributed to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site). In fact, the boundary was finally modified in 2008, but the modification approved then was the smallest possible expansion of a number of various options proposed.

The fact the Durham did not immediately embrace the idea of World Heritage Status is quite relevant for Cairo, which is affected by a similar mindset on some levels. Arguably, the transition in Durham from a place that did not see a benefit in World Heritage Status to one that strives to make the most out of it, is one that can provide a reference for Historic Cairo.

## **2.5 Lessons and challenges learned from working with the original Durham Management Plan:**

1. It was a document that the key stakeholders did not seem to see as a practical document, nor as a document that they were required to use. As such, there seemed to be an implicit sense that producing a management plan was an end in itself, and not a means to an end. This was especially true immediately after its completion, when the view towards World Heritage Status was that it did not mean much, and the completion of the Management Plan was something that may have been achieved to fulfil UNESCO requirements, rather than out of a strong sense of conviction in its usefulness.
2. Reviewing what had been achieved in the action plan set out for the site indicated that, while many things had indeed been accomplished in the first few years after the completion of the Management Plan, many of these had been implemented for reasons other than them being included as actions in the Management Plan. In other words, the Management Plan was not initially the driving force guiding intervention policy.
3. It was a document that had been drawn up and approved, yet for the first two years after its creation, there had been no system of ensuring it was implemented. It was the creation of the WHS Coordinating Committee, and the appointment of a coordinator, as two entities designated to ensure the implementation of the Management Plan, that set the ball rolling to ensure that partnership working and the joint management of the site became something that was dealt with on a day-to-day basis.
4. The way that the Management Plan had been written included a lot of description, and it was therefore not a document that could be seen as a manual for how to approach the site, which was what was required more than detailed descriptions. This made the plan somewhat inaccessible and, in reality, of little relevance to most of the people dealing with the site on a day to day basis.

5. Despite the skepticism that surrounded the value of the site as a unified whole, there were some aspirations included in the action plan that were: a) too idealistic, or b) a very low priority on the list of stakeholder priorities, or c) 'ownerless' and, were therefore effectively unattainable. These were kept as 'long term aspirations', without any means of getting closer to realizing them. Some examples of these are highlighted in an excerpt from the Action Plan shown below:

Objective 23: Improve access to the WHS for non-vehicular users and promote pedestrian and cycle modes of transport	23.1 Support the implementation of the County Durham Cycling Strategy	WHS, DCC	Ongoing	
	23.2 Encourage the implementation of the Durham Riverbanks Management Plan review of cycle access, and ensure that any physical improvement respect the Outstanding Universal Value and related significances of the WHS and its setting, subject to proper safeguards for safety on the riverbanks.	WHS, DRMG	Ongoing	ONGOING No major further successes here, but general footpath access much improved.
	23.3 Encourage the implementation of the Durham Riverbanks Management Plan Pedestrian access improvements, and ensure that these respect the Outstanding Universal Value and related significances of the WHS and its setting.	WHS, DRMG	Ongoing	ONGOING see 2.4
	23.4 Encourage the provision of "safe routes to school" within the WHS.			

9. Examining the original Management Plan document in light of the institutional mindsets of the stakeholder organizations, the author's overriding sense was that some components and decisions in the Management Plan and in the action plan had been agreed too quickly, without adequate discussion about whether or not these were attainable, and whether are not the stakeholder institutions would actually strive to implement them. This links to the notion of the plan implicitly being seen as an end in itself. In other words, some of the proposed actions were not very SMART. (Specifically, they were not especially *achievable*).

### Informing the Management Plan for Cairo

All of the previous 6 items faced by Durham are potential obstacles that Cairo could face as well. Especially 1, 3, 5 & 6.

There is definitely the risk that the Management Plan could be produced 'just to have produced it', and therefore at least one of the Egyptian Government partners involved in the process needs to see this as *their* plan. However, because the Management Plan will need the support of other partners, the development of the plan needs to involve extensive discussion and debate in order to reach some sort of consensus. If things are not discussed thoroughly in the process of developing the plan, it is likely that there will be a substantial number of actions which have been agreed in principle but stakeholder organisations will be reluctant to implement in practice. As such, the more discussions and differences of opinion resolved in writing up the Management Plan, the more effective it is likely to be as a document.

### 2.6 Changing attitudes towards the World Heritage Site and its Value in Durham and how these came about:

It was a gradual change of key staff in the stakeholder institutions of the World Heritage Site, who were more forward thinking about the fact that world heritage status could be an asset *if you proactively* made something of it, that led to a marked change in institutional culture.

Durham University's new vice-chancellor was an especially strong force of change – eager to propel the University to the highest rankings, he was keen to brand it as a 'World University', and recognised the value of World Heritage Status in helping to promote this.

*Thus, the experience of Durham indicates that 'heritage champions' can make a big difference with respect to the political buy-in of a World Heritage Site.*

Apart from distinctly global aspirations, in practical terms, *it was the creation of a committee to coordinate the management of the site (not just a management plan) and the appointment of a Site Coordinator as a shared human resource between the owners and the stakeholders, that meant that more progress began to be made with respect to the World Heritage Site.*

The appointment of a World Heritage Site Coordinator for Durham reflected the fact that the stakeholders agreed to co-fund a position whose responsibility *was to bring them together* to work on issues related to the World Heritage Site as an entity. In itself this demonstrated commitment.

The WHS Management Committee therefore had somebody who could feed them with information, request responses from them, and create some kind of loose structure that could deal with joint site issues. It also created a joint entity that transcended the boundaries of each individual organisation on a World Heritage Site front.

*In short, the lesson for Cairo is that there needs to be someone to champion the Management Plan as a tool for urban conservation, a body that represents the different stakeholders, and a person/team that can facilitate and follow up.*

## 2.7 Management Committee Structure

The identification of an appropriate structure of the Management Committee for Historic Cairo is something that needs to be developed thoughtfully, to include the right representatives from the right organisations, and to be able to get things done, not just be conceived as a steering committee of sorts. By way of reference, the current structure for the Durham World Heritage Site Management Committee is identified below:

### 2.7.1 Durham Management Committee Structure

The current membership of the Durham World Heritage Site Committee is as follows:

1. A high ranking member of Durham Cathedral Chapter (the equivalent of a board of Governors, an entity that takes all key decisions related to the Cathedral).
2. A high-ranking member of the University (in this case, the treasurer, who is a member of University Council, and has executive authority, and the ability to *make funds available* for the purposes of the World Heritage Site).
3. A high-ranking representative from Durham University's Estates and Buildings, who are responsible for the maintenance of numerous listed buildings in and around the World Heritage Site, and for the University's property holdings in general.
4. A high-ranking representative from English Heritage. (The regional office, and therefore with good knowledge of the region).
5. A high-ranking member from the County Council whose responsibilities include the built environment and/or heritage. (In the case of Cairo, most organizations on the committee will represent government agencies. Durham is slightly different in this respect as the site is privately owned).
6. A project manager from the 'projects' division of the County Council, whose remit includes delivering projects in the historic core of the city.
7. A representative from the city of Durham Trust, a local NGO whose mandate is to ensure that no transgressions are made to the built environment and heritage of the city. This is a small but powerful organization – much of its power stemming from the fact that it:
  - a. Is vocal
  - b. Is knowledgeable about the laws and policies related to the built environment
  - c. Is active, and takes it upon itself to check up on projects gone all over the city, and to object officially and rally the public, when it feels that transgressions have been made.
  - d. Exists in a context where people have a sense of pride/ownership of their environment, and the belief that it is their right to object to things they do not like.
8. A representative from ICOMOS-UK (in this case, a local expert on the city – in the true sense of the word, meaning that he knows the city, its buildings, and their history, probably better than most other people alive).

9. The bursar of one of the independent colleges of Durham University, (who own a medieval church within the boundaries of the World Heritage Site). Again, College Bursars are responsible for many executive decisions within the context of a university college.

10. The Durham World Heritage Site Coordinator, who acts as the executive secretary of the committee, and who is responsible for identifying key issues to be discussed and dealt with by the Committee.

11. The Head of Visit County Durham, (The Tourism Arm of the County Council)

12. A representative from Durham University's Institute of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which has furthering research about Durham World Heritage Site as one of its institutional priorities.

### 2.7.2 Things to consider in creating a Management Committee in Cairo:

A committee is ineffective unless it has the authority, the initiative, and the means to take things forward and make them progress. The structure of the committee outlined above is one in which most of the different stakeholders and interests are represented, which is important, but it is effective only to the extent to which it has the interest in achieving its aims, and the tools to implement them. Financial resources are not the only tools required (though often given as a reason for things not progressing) – much of what is required for an effective management plan are well thought-out policies and ways of implementing them.

In Cairo especially, having the chair of the committee as somebody who has authority and is keen to take things forward will make a big difference. Committees are not, by definition, the entities that do most of the work – committees like the World Heritage Site Management Committee make decisions, flag up pressing issues, discuss policies, but then delegate things to other people.

A planner at the Cairo Governorate once told the author that in the selection of a committee, it was important to select a group of people that were important enough to have the authority to take decisions, but that they should not be too important to the extent that *all* they did was make decisions (which were then not implemented). In the case of the Durham World Heritage Site Management Committee, most members are of the decision making level, but they are also executors of their decisions. Also, there is enough specialized knowledge on the committee to ensure that decisions are taken with enough insight, and that issues are followed up.

With the case of Cairo, people like the Governor of Cairo are too high to be on a WHS Management Committee; however, Governor's executive secretaries, or deputy governors have enough authority to authorise things, and also to follow up to ensure that decisions are implemented. Of course, the selection of active individuals can make or break a committee – the last thing one wants is a committee whose members take a quick look at the minutes of the previous meeting on the way to the current one.

### 2.7.3 Frequency of Durham World Heritage Site Management Committee Meetings:





The Durham World Heritage Site Management Committee meets as a complete committee on a bi-annual basis, but when more frequent meetings are required, (such as during the review of the Management Plan), these are held as needed on an ad hoc basis. In addition, again during the review of the Management Plan – working groups have been formed to deal with specific issues related to the review. These working groups include some members of the committee, but also include other specialists as well.

The fact that the Durham committee's meetings are not very frequent underscores the importance of having people to implement decisions. It is likely that in the initial stages of the Historic Cairo Management Plan, much more frequent meetings will be required.

Working Groups are also an effective way of taking things forward, as officials that are too high ranking often do not have the time or the technical expertise to develop details but need to be aware of and approve general policies.

For example, for the purposes of the current review of the Durham World Heritage Site Management Plan, the following working groups were set up:

1. A group with the broadest possible membership to identify the attributes that feed into the World Heritage Site's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, including attributes which were felt not to have been given adequate attention in the previous Plan (in comparison to current requirements, which have evolved since 2006).
2. A group to look at issues related to the site boundaries and a buffer zone
3. A group to look at practical conservation issues
4. A group to look at the intangible values of the World Heritage Site, including education, interpretation, its spiritual value and the sense of community.
5. A group to look at audiences, access, branding, and use of the site.
6. A group to look at research about the site.

## **2.8 Management Plan Review**

The review of the Durham World Heritage Site Management Plan is based on the following realizations after working as a WHS partnership for five years. These can prove valuable as a means of informing the development of a Management Plan for Cairo, as they complement and affirms observations made earlier in this document:

1. For a Management Plan to be successful as a working document, it needs to be concise, user friendly and to the point – in other words the format needs to be **usable**.
2. It also needs to be realistic – not only in terms of what can be achieved, but also in terms of acknowledging the fundamental cultural approaches of the stakeholders and landowners – in a way, an understanding of both their aspirations for change, and what is *unlikely* to change. This can be summarized as the **reality of the situation**.
3. An understanding of the fact that personalities/ **individual job holders**, even in large, well-established organizations, affect the direction that these organizations take, yet, that there needs to be a **framework** in place to ensure that attitudes and approaches and aspirations can last longer than the presence of people that first develop them.

4. The importance of resisting the production of a beautiful academic document, i.e. The plan as a **vehicle for implementation** – and this is where many plans fail – can they really be implemented?
5. The process of producing a plan is as valuable as the document itself – it leads to the identification of potential avenues of joint working, but also brings different entities together, and helps **identify common problems** which are undoubtedly the best motivator for group action. (probably even more than common aspirations).
6. The process of producing a plan is **a good opportunity to evaluate and reassess** conventional ways of doing things, identifying things that could be improved, while also acknowledging what works. For Durham, the review process has been valuable in that it has helped the stakeholders reflect on what they felt was being done well, and what they felt needed to be done differently. Many of issues in the latter category were not issues for which one entity/organization was to blame, but external challenges that needed to be addressed, but that were hard to tackle on the level of an individual organization.
7. The easiest way to produce a Management Plan is for somebody (or a small group) to be assigned responsibility for each section, and to come up with a draft that is then circulated for the others to comment on. Large working groups cannot really produce a document, and people are more likely to take the initiative to comment on other people's work than to undertake the work themselves. Thus the process is one is based on **responding and reflecting on a proposal for action**. This helps to flag up the challenges and institutional reservations that can then feed into the production of a realistic plan.

Many of the above-mentioned items may seem really obvious; however it is surprising how many management plans suffer from the weaknesses listed above.

## **2.9 The experience of Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site Management Plan Review.**

Although not facing the same urban development challenges as Cairo, Hadrian's Wall does face some similar challenges in that it is an extremely large site, subject to the jurisdiction of a large number of local authorities with different perspectives, and has a multitude of ownerships<sup>1</sup>. What is common to any large site is that it tends to be owned by numerous landowners who have no specific interest in heritage – it just happens that they own part of a heritage site, or neighbour one. In the case of Hadrian's Wall, many of these incidental landowners are farmers, whereas in the case of historic Cairo, the largest number of private landowners is the owners of private residential or mixed-use property.

The experience of reviewing the Hadrian's Wall Management Plan revealed the following<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Hadrian's Wall (now officially part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire WHS) is one of the more complex sites on the World Heritage List: over its 150-mile length it crosses two government regions and 12 local authorities; it has over 800 owners and tenants and at least eight separate agencies (Senhouse Museum Trust, Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, English Heritage, The National Trust, Northumberland National Park Authority, Vindolanda Trust, Tyne & Wear Museums, Newcastle University) running different Roman sites open to the public alongside agencies running non-Roman sites, visitor centres and museums. Hadrian's Wall Website: <http://www.hadrians-wall.org/page.aspx/World-Heritage-Site-Projects/Managing-World-Heritage>.

<sup>2</sup> This information by obtain from Mr. David Brough, who was the editor of Hadrian's Wall Management Plan.

1. It was important to identify as many different interest groups as possible and involve them in the process.
2. Consultation was an important part of the process, primarily so that people/groups felt that they had the chance to express their point of view. (even though the response was actually small) – It avoids the question “Why weren’t we asked?”
3. The process itself gives legitimacy to the outcome. Like Cairo, Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site falls under the jurisdiction of many *well-established* organisations, and it was necessary to involve them in the process to give them a sense of ownership over the Management Plan.
4. Transparency is an important part of the outcome – that drafts of the plan should be consultable by others.
5. How things are done is sometimes more important than what things are done – people tend to object strongly to things that they feel have been carried out in the wrong way.
6. With a site of such complexity and very different interest groups, it is important to develop ways of managing issues so as to preserve what needs to be preserved, but also support different interest groups. If a Management Plan fails to take into account the interests of one of more groups of people, it is unlikely for it to be viable and implementable.
7. A Management Plan is less about every specific detail and more about how things will be taken forward. – **it needs be highly pragmatic.**
8. Tourism is essential and a management plan must be informed by the tourism industry.
9. World Heritage Sites tend to have shared ownership and with shared ownership comes shared responsibility. It is important to identify whose responsibility is whose. What people can commit to is important. What are the constraints, in terms of indicators?
10. The document itself needs to be kept short, and everything else can be put into appendices.
11. 90 % of debates and discussions about the Management Plan are about “The Management”.
12. For the process to be an effective one, the various institutions need to feel that the management plan is helpful and useful for them – not that they are doing it because it is imposed upon them.
13. The plan should not be too rigid/prescriptive – things change over time, unexpected things happen, and therefore although aims and identified actions should be clear, they should not discuss things in minute detail.
14. Time scales are usually much longer than one would expect – especially the coordination of different organisations, and obtaining political support/buy in, which can take a lot of time.

## **2.10 Urban Sites in the UK – the issue of Development and Preservation:**

The issue of urban development in urban World Heritage Sites is of course a key one, and one of great relevance to Cairo. In any historic city there will be tensions between conservationists and development projects, and political and economic interests sometimes mean that the balance is swayed in the favour of development. Edinburgh and Liverpool in the UK are cases in point.

### Edinburgh

In Edinburgh, recent development proposals within the World Heritage Site highlighted the need to examine height restrictions, but also *key views*, with a policy in the local plan of 2010 adopted to

prevent new buildings from exceeding the height of their neighbours, and ensuring that new development did not compromise any of the World Heritage Site's key views.<sup>3</sup>

This is an important consideration in a city like Cairo, where the skyline of the city and views to and from its key monuments are essential (and identified in the SOUV). The issue to consider about key views is that sometimes a buffer zone is not sufficient to preserve key views to and from a site. (For example, the proviso that a new building cannot exceed the height of buildings listed by the SCA or NOUH within a distance of 30 metres, is a beneficial one, but may not fully protect key views along some of the Historic City's major streets, where the historic views of key domes and minarets have sometimes been compromised by new buildings constructed at a considerable distance)<sup>4</sup>.

In the UK, conservation legislation is strict enough to mean that with policies like those developed in Edinburgh regarding views and building heights, the likelihood of the World Heritage Site retaining the character and elements that make it of Outstanding Universal Value is high.

The lessons to be learned from the policies developed in Edinburgh are that these policies and stipulations need to be *explicit* – for example, the caveat that any new development cannot be higher than its neighbours is one which is easy to assess. Similarly, the identification of key views, and, more importantly, the identification of these on a map, means that it is easy for developers to understand what is required from them, and it is also easy for planning officials to assess whether or not a proposed development risks compromising the Outstanding Universal Value of a site.

In other words, some effort is required: firstly, to determine *what it is that is valuable*, secondly, to pinpoint *the multitude of ways in which value can be compromised*, and thirdly, *to come up with policies that can mitigate this*. Testing draft policies to identify any potential loopholes is an effective way of ensuring that policies will actually prove effective.

### Liverpool

The experience of Liverpool is equally poignant, and in this case, rather less successful than the outcome of development pressure in Edinburgh.

In Liverpool's case – a reactive UNESCO mission assessed developments in the city centre since 2006, some of which had proven controversial but had gone ahead. The mission found that although, in some minor instances, some of the views of the site had been lost, the improvements in the city centre were significant, and offset, the shortcomings. These benefits included:

“The introduction of a mixed use scheme bringing visitors, residents and liveliness into this once empty, wind-swept corner of the city centre.” In addition, according to the mission, two of the controversial developments a “ferry terminal and (a) museum are much less intrusive in terms of massing, scale, orientation and architectural expression than was previously suggested, which is primarily due to their low heights (reaching only half the height of the iconic Three Graces), materialization (clad in natural Jura limestone resembling the Three Graces) and out-of-the-way orientation.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of recent WHS issues in Edinburgh refer to [WHC-11/35.COM/7B](http://www.whc-11/35.COM/7B) . For an illustration of key views and how these were identified/documentated please refer to:

[http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/1220/conservation/1273/edinburgh\\_skyline\\_study/3](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/1220/conservation/1273/edinburgh_skyline_study/3).

<sup>4</sup> URHCP report, 2011, P32, item b.

<sup>5</sup> From Liverpool UNESCO Mission Report, November 14-16, 2011, p2.

The mission was less encouraging about a proposal for the northern docklands, however, and expressed a very clear view that current development proposals would overshadow the essential elements of the World Heritage Site, compromising its Outstanding Universal Value.

As a result of the threat from this project, Liverpool World Heritage Site was added to the list of sites in danger in 2012, which is highly unusual for a western European site.

The lessons from this experience have much to inform Historic Cairo: namely, that not all development is necessarily bad, and that, in fact, some development can have great positive impact, but that there are limits, and not all projects can go ahead in the name of economic regeneration and development without compromising the Outstanding Universal Value of a Site.

### Parallels to Cairo:

The most reacted-to threat in Historic Cairo in recent years was a proposal to build a huge tower complex, 'the Citadel Financial Complex' in very close proximity to the Cairo Citadel. This would have dominated one of the city's most important landmarks. Initially, it was allowed to proceed given that the development was located just outside the Historic Cairo boundary, and, of course, in retrospect, this incident flags up the importance of 'key views', which need to be taken into account irrespective of where the boundaries of a site and its buffer zone lie.

Although the Citadel Financial Complex scheme was reacted to by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and UNESCO did get involved, the Cairo Governorate's reaction was a telling one: their main source of concern was that the scheme might cause traffic havoc in the area, and not that it was going to compromise the historic integrity of what is arguably the city's most iconic landmark after the pyramids.

There was also great sympathy within the governorate circles for the landowner and would-be developer, and a conviction that it was going to be a fantastic scheme, and that it would be "terrible to deprive the landowner of the right to implement his dream scheme"<sup>6</sup>.

In the end, the scheme was modified to ensure that the new buildings would not rise higher than a specific height, maintaining the pre-eminence of the Muhammad Ali Mosque. However, had Cairo been a better-preserved World Heritage Site in general, a scheme like the one proposed for the Citadel area might have elicited the same response to the development scheme for the Liverpool Docklands, and this is something to be kept in mind: the context of a Management Plan, and how much it can realistically achieve without the appropriate context to support it.

## **2.11 A Management Plan in Context**

### The UK experience

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<sup>6</sup> Author's discussion with planners at the Cairo Governorate when this project was being discussed.

It is important to look at management plans within the larger context of legislation governing heritage assets in the UK. In the UK, Management Plans for world heritage sites are one tool out of a whole range of tools developed to protect historic urban areas.

### The Building Listing System

A *graded* listing system (Grade 1, Grade II \* Grade II) that ensures that buildings are classified according to their value, and these different listed categories each come with a set of constraints that make it clear what interventions are feasible in each case.

The constraints involve the built fabric, and ensure that:

- a) Valuable buildings are preserved.
- b) Original fittings and architectural elements are retained.
- c) New elements are sympathetic to the historic building fabric (this affects for example, replacing doors/windows/roofs).
- d) Modifications do not adversely detract from the original building.
- e) Extensions or alterations to a building are subservient to the original building (meaning that the old/listed part of a building remains dominant, and is not swallowed by later extensions).

### Conservation Areas

Equally critical is the idea of a conservation area, in which changes even to unlisted buildings are controlled to ensure that an area's overall character will not be ruined.

Conservation areas are based on the understanding that the value of a historic area is more than just the value of its listed buildings (or perhaps does not need listed buildings at all). They also place a lot of stress on the importance of controlling incremental change, which, in the long run, can have a very significant impact on a historic environment.

Conservation area factors include ensuring that fittings remain original (windows and doors for example), and that modern interventions such as satellite dishes do not detract from the overall urban landscape.

### How the UK system works in practise:

#### 1. Listing Buildings: An Accurate Record

By having clear definitions of conservation areas, and a practical, concise document identifying what is valuable in each building/area (as well as what the building looks like and what its features are), conservation officers know what exactly needs to be preserved.

It is almost impossible to preserve an area or a building, if what is important about it is not recognised.

#### 2. Competent Staff

By ensuring that relevant staff are well trained, not just in architectural history, but in assessing what impact a change to a building or area is likely to have. Other than expertise, they benefit from being interested in what they are doing. In other words, they need to be champions of the preservation movement, not people who are indifferent or lacking in specialist knowledge.

### 3. A Conservation Department with *Authority*

They need to have the authority to say no. Part of the problem in Egypt is that the system is corrupt and officials are bribe-able (often the higher –up officials as well), meaning that the technocrats are at the mercy of their superiors. While this happens everywhere to some extent, the fact that the policies in England are clear, and that non-governmental ‘watch dogs’ are strong and vocal, means that in the UK, it is hard to get away with transgressions of conservation policy, and this helps to give conservation officers the strength to be firm.

### 4. Public Support

A common sense of heritage preservation being for the benefit of the society as a whole – meaning that short-term economic gains are not as attractive as they are in places like Egypt, where there is a failure to see the bigger picture, both among government officials and the public.

### 5. An Economic Value of Heritage

A common public belief in the *value* of heritage. This is best illustrated by the fact that the value of properties that are old and retain historic features is higher than a similar properties that are new, or are old but have been stripped of their historic integrity.

In Egypt, there is no additional economic value of old properties, and although hard to quantify, it would be feasible to say that old properties are considered less valuable and less attractive. Part of this is due to the fact that a) the nature of wall-bearing buildings means that they are perceived as less flexible, also walls are thicker (taking up floor space), b) that old buildings are more likely to tend to be run-down, and c) that it is part of the culture of newly married couples to move into a ‘new’ apartment, if at all possible, (and to stay in that apartment for the rest of their married life), meaning that tenure is not very flexible either.

## 3. Urban Conservation in Historic Cairo

### 3.1 Conservation Legislation in Cairo and its Shortcomings

Although, thanks to the efforts of UNESCO, Historic Cairo’s boundaries have now been defined, what remains is for adequate policies to be put in place to protect what is within the boundaries of the site, and ensure that developments outside the boundaries do not have a negative impact on the historic city.

One of the issues of relevance in the process of drawing up a management plan for Historic Cairo World Heritage Site is the absence of adequate urban conservation legislation.

#### 3.1.1 The Significant Buildings List

Although a list of buildings of architectural value, initially drawn up by the Cairo Governorate, and now under the mandate of the National Organisation for Urban Harmony (NOUH), marks a step in



the right direction, (and complements the list of monuments under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Antiquities), on its own, it is an inadequate means of protecting Historic Cairo (and urban neighbourhoods) for the following reasons:

1. There is a very small number of buildings put on the list

The way in which the list has been compiled is that buildings deemed to be of *exceptional* significance, usually architectural significance, (but sometimes also historic significance) have been added to this list. However, the following factors affect the compilation of the list, and result in the list being much shorter than it should be, and missing out more than it includes:

a) The legal and financial implications of listing buildings

Firstly, the knowledge that adding buildings to the list of buildings of architectural value creates a burden on the shoulders of the Cairo Governorate, who know that they will have to take responsibility for ensuring that these buildings are preserved means that there is a reluctance to list buildings. Other than the responsibility of dealing with these buildings, there is also the fear that building owners are likely to object and sue the government<sup>7</sup>.

b) The scale of the task

The sheer number of buildings of architectural/historic significance in historic Cairo is something that the listing committee found daunting when the list was initially drawn up. A first-hand account from one of the members of the listing committee for Historic Cairo mentioned that “When we started to look at the potential buildings in the historic city, we got to Bab Zuwayla, started looking at the buildings to put on the list, but then found that there were too many in the area, and decided that we should leave this area for some time in the future.”<sup>8</sup>

c) The approach to listing buildings

There are several shortcomings in the approach to listing buildings (and therefore in valuing them).

One of them is the methodology itself, which is that the listing process is one that has tended to take place only through an exterior appraisal of the building, thus overlooking valuable buildings whose exteriors are plain, but may have historically or architecturally valuable interiors – this is especially true of mid-late nineteenth century buildings, which tend to be simple from the outside, but can have extremely important interior spaces.

Moreover, there is a bias towards richly-decorated exteriors – meaning that buildings from the period of Muhammad Ali and his immediate successors (the late nineteenth century), which tend to have very simple facades, are less likely to be put on the list than later buildings which are less rare.

<sup>7</sup> This was relayed to the author by members of staff in the Cairo Governorate’s directorate of planning, who were members of the committee responsible for drawing up the list of buildings of architectural significance, at meetings held between 2005 and 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Meeting between the author and a senior member of the Cairo Governorate during the period of 2005-2008.



There is also a bias towards buildings that use expensive building materials – for example – the building at 5 Qirabeyya Street outside Bab Zuwayla, one of the most highly decorated buildings in that area, was not treated as being great value by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, (Now the Ministry of Antiquities) because its decorative elements were of stucco and not of marble, so it was seen as ‘cheap’.

There is also implicit view that architectural value comes only from ornamentation – not from spatial value, historic typologies etc. This is phenomenon is not a new one – and its impacts are quite severe in that it means that the middle-class housing stock of the historic city is lost, because attention is focused on preserving a few specimens of more lavish buildings.<sup>9</sup> Thus baths, *wikalas* (caravanserais), and commercial buildings (which are by definition more plain) tend to be seen as unimportant.

Additionally, as the early World Heritage Sites inscribed on the World Heritage List demonstrate (of which Historic Cairo, inscribed in 1979, is a good example) there has historically been a tendency to appreciate ‘monumental’ buildings more than anything else. In Egypt, with government agencies that are not incredibly up to date in their approach to heritage, this ‘monuments’ approach to heritage is still prevalent, and is also applied to the listing of more modern heritage, in that grand buildings are seen as more worthy of preservation than simple, average ones.

3.1.2 Conservation Policy fails to truly take into account factor in the notion that an area has certain urban/architectural character, that is the product of more than just the existence of a few ‘beautiful buildings.’

The current approach to conservation is that as long the most important buildings and elements are preserved, everything else does not matter. This is contrary to the approach that is needed, which is one that focuses on urban conservation – not the identification of a few ‘important’ buildings.

The best way to make a case for changing the approach to urban conservation in Cairo is by using successful precedents, and at present, the best example of an urban conservation approach is al-Muizz Street which demonstrates that an entire street can be important, even the buildings that in their own right are not particularly valuable. The advantage of al-Muizz is that it also has enough monumental buildings to show the approach to urban conservation as an evolution/development of traditional approaches to historic areas rather than as a fundamental shift, which should make it much easier to accept.

The author’s experience shows that many government officials who take decisions related to the historic city know little about it – and thus the best way to enlist their support is to show them an exemplar to help them imagine what an area can look like. In general, European exemplars seem

<sup>9</sup> A good example of this is the project to clear the buildings parallel to the northern walls of Cairo to expose the city wall, implemented by the ‘authority for the development of historic Cairo). Three buildings were retained in this unfortunate exercise – these were the three that the project team felt were the most ‘beautiful’, while everything else was destroyed. Information obtained through meetings with a project engineer.

to work best, as there is a sub-conscious Egyptian notion that Europe is civilized, and that any project that can make a bit of Cairo similar to a bit of Europe is a beneficial project.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.1.3 The current listing system is just a listing system, it does not adequately control new development or place controls on new development.

This is quite a big problem, as it seems to be overlooked that the experience and character of a city cannot be preserved simply by the preservation of old buildings, but by the appearance of its new buildings as well. Even at the best of times, the idea of what is historically appropriate for Cairo is very poorly understood (For example, arched windows tend to be seen as a common quick-fix solution to the historic city, even though they are not part of the Cairene tradition).

A striking development in the last decade has been the incredible proliferation of 'classicized' facades, even in the poorest areas of Historic Cairo. It is clear that these are inspired by new developments in the affluent areas of the city and thus the historic city is losing an architectural identity in favor of another one (becoming an imitation of new residential developments elsewhere). Looking at this phenomenon more positively, however, what also becomes clear is the fact that investment in the facades of buildings is something that has become commonplace, meaning that an investment in aesthetics is not as alien to Egyptian culture as is sometimes thought (and as was the case in the past). Hopefully, this means that channeling the investment into building exteriors towards creating buildings that fit in with their surroundings and the historic traditions of the area, is a realistic aspiration (and one that can have a major long-term impact on the historic city).

### 3.1.4. Building Heights

Probably the most alarming change in historic Cairo (and Cairo) since the 2011 revolution is the ability to break the code limiting building heights in the historic city, as this was one of the few policies that was almost always adhered to, despite the fact that it was extremely unpopular because it curtailed landowners' ability to maximize profit by building tall buildings thereby increasing the number of apartments they could build on any given plot of land.

Prior to the 2011 revolution, the main transgressions of this law were as follows:

Buildings on alleyways less than ten meters wide, (and therefore according to the law, allowed to be a maximum of 3 stories in height) being given licenses as if the street was more than ten meters wide (therefore allowing the landowner to build one extra storey).

In one rare case, off Port Said Street, opposite the Museum of Islamic Art, a much higher building was constructed, but when this issue was raised with the head of the Municipality, it was clear that

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<sup>10</sup> The author attended a presentation to the Cairo Governor at which a scheme for upgrading Saliba Street in Historic Cairo was presented. The scheme involved encouraging street cafes, an idea which the governor did not initially like. However, when the presenter compared the scheme to the ideas of Parisian cafes the governor immediately warmed to it, and expressed support for the proposal.

there had been some higher level politics involved, and that he was not going to halt its construction. However, this was a rarity.

Since the 2011 revolution, however, it is clear that control on building has been lax, (or perhaps bribery has become more commonplace), and the impacts are disastrous.

It is clear from the impacts of the last one and a half years of uncontrolled development in the historic city, that regulating the construction of new buildings is essential.

### 3.1.5. Conservation Policy does not make provisions for the fact that incremental change to historic buildings and areas can have a major impact on them in the long run.

This is a key weakness of the existing system - even at the best of times it does not control modifications to existing buildings such as: a) the preservation of original fittings such as doors and windows, b) the retention of the original dimensions and proportions of window openings (which are often reduced in size in the historic city), c) the use of historically-sympathetic exterior finishes. Even in much more prominent buildings outside the historic city (for example the Saudi Ambassador's residence in Zamalek, where an incongruously additional floor was added), detrimental modifications have taken place without the authorities seeing this as compromising the integrity of a building.

In fact, the list of buildings of architectural value lacks a code to clarify what the protection afforded to them entails. Issues such as whether it is permissible to extend the building, and what elements are integral to its historic character need to be determined. Part of the problem lies with the method of assessing buildings. Interior fittings and features are often very significant, but there is no stipulation that protects any of these. As long as a building is still standing in some form, it is considered to be adequately preserved.

### 3.1.6. Conservation policy does not put in place a system that acts as a deterrent to the demolition of historic buildings.

This is one of the system's greatest weaknesses – that if for any reason a building needs to be demolished, (for example, it is deemed to be in poor structural condition) it can be destroyed and replaced with a different building. This has often been a key loophole that has led to the destruction of buildings in the historic city in order to build new ones.

There are two main incentives for the demolition of the buildings in the historic city:

1. To replace them with higher buildings, (which has clear economic advantages) – and this is especially true in the current climate where the enforcement of building height restrictions is very lax.
2. To demolish buildings as a means of getting rid of long-standing tenants who pay low rents, are subject to rent control, and cannot otherwise be evicted. The demolition of a building that is 'under threat of collapse' is an effective way of evicting tenants from the property, as it overrides the tenancy laws which give tenants the right to occupy a building (as long as

the building, and the tenant (or a named heir) survives). In cases where the building is deemed to be a danger to residents, it is the Municipality's obligation to provide relocated tenants with an alternative residence, meaning that the landowner has no obligation and is, in fact, a beneficiary, as he/she has managed to get rid of tenants without having to compensate them financially.

The above two reasons summarize the main incentives behind building demolition in the historic city, and point to the fact that the motivation behind most building demolition is economic.

### 3.1.7 Key strategies to prevent the demolition of buildings in the historic city.

As such, for an effective system to be put in place, the following need to be considered:

1. A strict *enforcement* of building height restrictions, which ensure that the incentive to build higher buildings is eliminated in most cases.
2. A system whereby the landowner is obligated to rebuild a demolished property in the same form as what it was like before its demolition. (A policy adopted in the old cities of Damascus and Aleppo in Syria, for example). For this to come into effect, it would either need comprehensive documentation of the existing urban fabric (which certainly unrealistic in the short run) and probably also in the long-run, or vigilant action to ensure that nothing is demolished illicitly. Another system might be to fine the transgressor a fine which is at least equal to the value of the property. In the last four or five decades in Egypt, the fine payable to those that had exceeded the height limitations was nominal, and so the incentive to ignore building height restrictions was great. In other areas of Egypt, building code transgressions are dealt with quite harshly through the demolition of the offending structure, however this policy takes place more frequently for non residential buildings, which can be destroyed without major social upheaval.

Additional complications:

Additional complications exist because of the fact that some demolition orders carry a court ruling, and some of these rulings are far enough advanced for appeals not to be possible.

## **3.2 Stakeholder Organizations: An Analysis**

### 3.2.1 The Ministry of Antiquities

The Ministry of Antiquities, known henceforth as SCA, (Supreme Council of Antiquities, its former name) is one of the more powerful stakeholders in Historic Cairo.

Part of the SCA's power comes from the fact that its mandate is clear – its Inspectorate Department, (*Tafteesh*) which is the department that oversees historic buildings, has a clear list of buildings under its jurisdiction, has a tradition of dealing with these buildings, a set of policies it implements, and a specific conservation philosophy, which means that the same approach to buildings is taken that from one generation of antiquities inspectors to the next.

The SCA is therefore effective at implementing its policy and knows how to do what it feels it needs to.

The shortcomings of this, especially with respect to historic buildings that are not listed:

1. The SCA is not concerned with historic buildings that are not on its list – even if they are architecturally valuable – the list is their main point of reference – if a building is on their list, they are responsible for it, if not, then it is not their concern what happens to it. For example an Ottoman Zawiya on Bab al-Wazir Street in Darb al-Ahmar has recently been demolished and is currently being replaced by a modern mosque. Despite the fact that the old building was clearly from the Ottoman period, and a well-known building, the fact that it was not listed as a monument meant that the SCA did not see it as part of its mandate to protect it, and it was allowed to be demolished.
2. The SCA is concerned with new development taking place within the curtilage/precinct/immediate setting/buffer of a registered monument ( known in Arabic as *Haram al-Athar*), but this concern tends to relate to the proximity of a new building to a listed monument and little else.
3. The whole notion of *Haram al-Athar* is one of the key areas in which the SCA has to deal with non listed buildings – as the Antiquities Law states that a curtilage area can be defined around a monument or archaeological site, and it is a commonly held belief among SCA inspectors that listed buildings should stand apart from their urban context. In Historic Cairo especially, this is an artificial and historically inaccurate approach to conservation, but, unfortunately, it is one that has become one of the few canons of urban conservation in Historic Cairo.

The best reflection of the policy can be seen just inside the North Walls of Cairo – an area that was cleared to create a curtilage area along the historic wall. In contrast, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture’s project in Darb al Ahmar managed to obtain a dispensation for the buildings along the eastern wall of Cairo, meaning that these could be restored in parallel with the restoration of the Ayyubid Wall, rather than being destroyed because of it.

4. The fact that the SCA is financially responsible for the buildings on its list means that it is extremely reluctant to list additional buildings. In addition, the fact that the buildings on its list are, by and large, monumental in scale and built by very important patrons means that the SCA tends to view average middle class residential buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, (which constitute the bulk of the urban fabric of historic Cairo), as being unimportant.
5. The fact that new buildings are currently being constructed all over the historic city without any form of noticeable SCA intervention reflects (other than the volatility of the current political climate), general SCA indifference to the urban landscape of the historic city. Recent examples alongside the Ayyubid Wall overlooking al-Azhar Park, and outside Bab al Nasr, are indicative of this as well.

### 3.2.2 The National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH)

The National Organization for Urban Harmony can perhaps be seen in total contrast to the Supreme Council of Antiquities, since it is a new organization with an incredibly fluid mandate, and an especially challenging one given the distinct lack of 'urban harmony' in Egypt. Admittedly, NOUH has been given more and more responsibilities in the past five years, meaning that on paper, it is the guardian of much of Egypt's built cultural heritage, with the exception of listed monuments.

That said, many of the projects that NOUH has been involved with in the past have been 'beautification projects' and moreover, since its establishment, it has not been a particularly effective organization at safeguarding built heritage. Thus, the agreement recently signed between the organization of National Harmony and UNESCO, is one that takes NOUH to a new level in many respects.

What are the challenges that the organization like NOUH faces?

1. It is, relatively speaking, a new organization which has been superimposed on the existing government structure, and therefore still needs to assert itself and its legitimacy.

However, new organizations like NOUH are not an isolated example, as the Ministry of Culture's Historic Cairo Project was a similarly new initiative, which *did* successfully manage to make a name for itself by being behind one of Historic Cairo's biggest projects.

However, the difference between the Historic Cairo Project and NOUH is that the former had a much narrower mandate, and a very small and clearly defined geographic scope, and the budget to implement the work required.

In these respects, the two organizations differ quite strongly – as presumably, although NOUH may have some financial resources, these are probably insufficient to undertake regeneration/urban conservation at a large scale.

2. In the past NOUH has been an organization that has "thought good thoughts," but not seemed to have the strength and the means to implement many of them.

Although NOUH has the benefit of many 'experts' on different levels, there has tended to be an academic element to it – which means that the gap between its vision and the reality of what it has been able to achieve could sometimes be quite large, especially in terms of the scale of NOUH's intervention.

With the contrasted example of the Historic Cairo Project, its project manager had both the personal skills and institutional support to get things done. He also had a *specific* task to accomplish, and the ambition to do a good job.

It seems to be the case that the partnership between UNESCO and NOUH is one that could give NOUH a new level of authority, especially if it is clear from the beginning that any management

plan for Historic Cairo is a means to an end and not an end in itself. The Management Plan and further conservation planning and pilot projects also have a clearly defined scope, and thus, are potentially achievable. However, it would be a shame if UNESCO's work with NOUH culminated in a document which was never implemented. From the author's experience in Cairo, the best strategy for designing something implementable is to understand the existing parameters and organizations, and to try to develop an implementation mechanism that is realistic within this context.

### 3.2.3 The Cairo Governorate

The Cairo Governorate is critical in that it deals with both project planning and implementation.

It is also the organization that is responsible for the list of significant buildings, and in fact, it was the Cairo Governor that ratified the original list of significant buildings. Moreover, the Cairo Governor has a level of authority and resources that makes him an important figure with respect to urban conservation in Cairo. The governorate's mandate is broad though, and it deals with all areas of the city, with numerous large-scale projects going on simultaneously. As such, there is little specialization within the governorate itself, and certainly the sense of an organization having a philosophy towards conservation is much weaker than it is in the SCA.

In general, the person of the governor himself is one who also has little specialized knowledge of urban issues, but makes key decisions. From the author's experience, the way in which urban conservation projects are presented to the governor is essential, as obtaining the governor's support can help things progress substantially, and move the whole governorate apparatus in the right direction, while, conversely, failing to convince the governor of the merits of a proposed scheme usually means that his urban planning department is hesitant to collaborate.

In the author's opinion, some kind of link to the Cairo Governorate is essential, as, like the SCA, the Governorate has great weight as an institution. This link could be a link between NOUH and the Governorate, rather than through UNESCO directly, but it is certainly something to consider.

### 3.2.4 The Municipality

The Municipality (or Municipalities) are the Governorate's muscles. They tend not to do much of the thinking, but are essential as they deal with all of the interventions in the historic city, both positive and negative. They also act as the executor of the Governorate's directives. Although often misguided in their outlook towards the historic city, the Municipality, in the grand scheme of things, is an organization that gets things done. Unlike the SCA, the Municipalities have no ideology – as long as things function, and they are not being bombarded with complaints, they are happy to oblige.

However, as the Municipality issues permits and decrees and implements things, they can sometimes be corrupt and, in many cases, as long as they can get away with it, money talks.

The Municipality also have to deal with key maintenance issues, including waste collection, which has a major impact on the historic city and at the level of implementing a Management Plan for Historic Cairo, Municipality collaboration is essential.

### 3.2.5 The General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP)

The General Organization for Physical Planning, is, from the author's experience, unusual, in that, despite being the entity whose official mandate is to deals with planning projects since its foundation in 1973, in practice, much of the planning at the level of Historic Cairo is devolved to the Cairo Governorate. This is because the scale and complexity of Historic Cairo require a type of expertise that is much more specialized and less concerned with macro projects than what the GOPP usually deals with.

At the level of Historic Cairo as an entity, including a buffer zone, the scale is probably large enough for GOPP to have some involvement. However, their expertise is stronger at developing plans at a national policy level, rather than in dealing with a unique environment that by national standards, also only deals with a very small percentage of the population.

### 3.2.6 The Local Popular Councils

Any plan for a district of Cairo requires the approval of the local popular councils, which exist at two levels (at the level of the district, and the level of the Governorate). In the experience of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), it could be said that the local councils did not have a great interest in conservation planning itself, they tended to be more interested in the general activities of AKTC, specifically housing and job creation, which they knew would reflect on their success as 'councilors'. As such, the approval of a conservation plan for al-Darb al-Ahmar by the local councils was linked to their other interests in the project, and when it was felt to be an appropriate time to proceed with the presentation of the plan to the local councils; it was rubber-stamped with relative ease. The experience of presenting the plan to the local councils showed that the councils were possibly amongst the least interested in the fate of the historic city from a heritage perspective, despite all being from it, and supposedly representing its interests. During the author's experience of presenting an urban conservation plan to the local councils, the only councilors that were interested were those who checked to see that that what was being proposed did not adversely affect their own properties, and in fact, some of them found the conservation plan beneficial only because it included the revoking of old zoning lines that were hindering the development of vacant properties.

Overall, the local councils AKTC dealt with could be described as largely indifferent, and to a large extent interested in their own self-betterment over everything else.

### 3.2.7 The Ministry of Religious Endowments (Awqaf)



The Awqaf constitute an important land-owner in the Historic City, but are not particularly entrepreneurial when it comes to historic city properties, preferring to invest in their often much larger properties elsewhere.

Much of the Awqaf properties in the Historic City are either 1) vacant plots of land (which are often among the larger properties in the historic city or 2) old commercial buildings (including numerous *wikalas* from the late Ottoman period, many in poor condition, with their upper stories missing). In both cases, Waqf property tends to be strategically valuable, because of its nature (large tracts of land are rare, as are Ottoman *wikalas*).

Build, Operate and Transfer Projects have been implemented with the Awqaf, who, while not often taking the initiative to seek such partnerships out, are receptive to them.

A good example of the lack of entrepreneurial spirit in the Awqaf in the historic city is the Qasaba of Radwan Bey (the Khayyamaya Street). Apart from the ground level shops, which are doing thriving business, the superstructure of the entire complex is vacant, despite having been restored within the past ten years. In part, the nonchalance towards historic city properties comes from their relatively small economic value, and the fact that they require a greater level of complexity in their management.

### **3.3 Two Relevant Case Studies: An Analysis of Two Recent Projects in Historic Cairo, and Lessons Learned from them**

#### **3.3.1 The Historic Cairo Project (The Ministry of Culture)**

One of the most ambitious projects to take place in Historic Cairo in recently years has been the Historic Cairo project, spearheaded by the Ministry of Culture.

The project though, offers numerous lessons for any future projects to take place in historic city.

Its ability to proceed, in spite of its extremely ambitious aims and numerous challenges came from the fact that it was seen as a 'National Project,' meaning that it was both extremely large in scale and very complex, and a high priority for the government, which saw it as a national showcase project and was willing to invest the necessary sums of money to bring it to fruition.

Other than the restoration of numerous buildings in the historic city, it also led to the re-paving of Historic Cairo's most important street (al-Muizz Street). This required the lowering of the entire street level, pedestrianising an extremely busy commercial street, and turning what had been a street frequented only by foreign tourists and customers of its many businesses into a street that Egyptians began to identify with, visit, and immediately recognize.

The aim of including the Historic Cairo project in this document is not to go into details about its history but to analyze the mechanism by which it functioned. Above all, the project illustrates the value of high-level support. This made it possible to implement an extremely ambitious and, in some ways, radical scheme, which could not have taken place without the combination of a powerful patron (the Minister of Culture), and a forceful and ambitious project leader who managed to supersede all other stakeholders, and get them to work towards one common end. Given its complexity, this project could easily have run across stumbling blocks and not gone ahead. (For example, aspects of the project like lowering the level of the street). The fact that it did is remarkable, and emphasizes the importance of having the right management set-up and level of patronage to take things forward.

One driving force behind this project, other than the perspective of national pride associated with it, was the conviction that it would also be good for tourism. For the Egyptian government, tourism, given its economic importance, is a key driver of projects – and a ‘buzz-word’ that makes high level government officials listen. This has its impact on the choice of areas for a UNESCO pilot project – as pilot projects in areas with little tourist interest are less likely to attract attention than those where tourist potential is high.

### 3.3.2 Lessons Learned from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture Project

The Aga Khan project presented a different experience – as its aim was not a tourism-related one, but one linked very much to the preservation of the city for its inhabitants.

#### 3.3.2.1 Using Leverage and Working in Partnership

Among AKTC’s challenges was convincing government authorities, especially the SCA, that there was a more viable alternative to wide-scale demolition of old buildings abutting monuments (such as the Ayyubid Wall), and AKTC successfully used its leverage (gained from the fact that it was committed to the creation of al-Azhar Park, and to the comprehensive restoration of the Ayyubid wall), to make a case for a new approach to urban conservation in Cairo that was to act as a pilot project. The case for restoring buildings adjacent to monuments *as part of* the restoration process was initially a difficult one for the SCA to accept, but with persistence, and the considerations mentioned previously, it was allowed to go ahead.

It is worth noting that, with time, AKTC established a good working relationship with the SCA, meaning that in many respects the project was seen as a partnership project. SCA officials were also given numerous opportunities to learn from the experience of other historic cities (in Italy, Tunisia, and Syria) and one would like to think that increased exposure had some impact. However, arguably the greatest bargaining point that AKTC had was the fact that it had the financial resources and the intention to undertake a huge project. Also, the scale (and the attractiveness of the idea) of al-Azhar Park, and the importance of the project, again as a showcase project, gave AKTC credibility – which made it easier for the authorities to accept an approach to urban conservation that departed from the norm.

As was the case with the Supreme Council of Antiquities, the Cairo Governorate were willing to listen to AKTC because of AKTC's investment in a project that would make the Cairo Governorate look good. (The land upon which Al-Azhar Park was being created is owned by the Cairo Governorate), and it was clear to successive governors that it was a project that would reflect well on the Governorate, become a showcase project for the whole of Cairo, and of course, reflect very well on the governor himself.

It is a fact that the best partnerships are those where all partners benefit, and share the credit, and it would be naive to think that partnerships related to the urban conservation of Historic Cairo will take place without each stakeholder organisation (and sometimes individuals within it) thinking: "What is in it for us?"

### 3.3.2.2 Local Policy Superseding International Agreements

Among the most striking things related to AKTC's relationship with Cairo Governorate was the fact that the Urban Planning Department did not think feel that international charters such as the Venice and Burra Charters had any implications on them, even though Egypt was a signatory of both. The head of planning at the time explicitly stated (with no aggression or maligned intentions, or obstinacy) that the policies and laws that they had to follow were those of issued by the Governor (and not international organizations). Yet this does not negate the fact that UNESCO, as an organization is revered.

### 3.3.2.3 Understanding Partner Organizations' Attitudes, Concerns and Challenges

AKTC's project in al-Darb al-Ahmar was able to make substantial process once it understood the mindsets of the different organizations it was working with, and in some ways, adapt to their pre-existing structure.

Among the key observations about several organizations, for example, the Cairo Governorate's urban planning department, was that it was understaffed – having to deal with many major projects going on all over the city, undertake site visits and the like, with a very small team. It was therefore clear that any conservation scheme would be based primarily on the work of AKTC, with the Cairo Governorate acting as a facilitator, and a reviewer in some respects.

It is true that coordination meetings were frequent and that a good working rapport existed, but it was also often the case the external seekers of information from the Cairo Governorate would be redirected to AKTC.

This is certainly something that the UNESCO office will experience, if it has not done so already: in Cairo, government authorities are sometimes less interested in knowledge transfer, and often more interested in (or not bothered by) other entities helping them out, or just doing their work for them.

Unlike the SCA who have a strong ideology, many other government organizations, such as the Cairo Governorate, were much more amenable to a different approach to urban conservation (as long as the governor himself was supportive). However, recurring key concerns were issues of emergency access, and traffic bottlenecks, and there was a general sense that the urban character of the historic city was not really very important in comparison to issues like these (in other words, that traffic concerns justified altering the historic urban fabric as opposed to finding alternative ways of ensuring emergency access and improving traffic flow). As such, while there was no opposition to an urban conservation approach in the historic city, there wasn't an active desire to see it happen either. It can be described as an attitude of 'cooperative indifference'.

The extent of the Governor and his key assistants setting the tone was also clear (and this is true of most political systems – that politicians, irrespective of how little they know about technical issues, tend to lead technocrats, who are often willing to completely change their course of action in accordance to political directives).

In other words, unlike in the UK, where technical conservation officers would be willing to stand their ground and fight the conservation cause, the author's experience in Egypt shows that the urban planners in institutions like the Cairo Governorate will support the idea of urban conservation in principle as long as their superiors support it, but are equally quick to abandon the idea if instructed to do so.

#### 3.3.2.4 AKTC's Accomplishments with respect to Urban Conservation: Things to Build Upon

##### 1. A method for refurbishing old buildings in the historic city

The project was able to develop a system for the refurbishment of historic buildings in the historic city, thereby demonstrating that technically, it is possible and that it is also financially viable to invest in the restoration of residential buildings. Furthermore, it demonstrated that private investment in residential properties was not too difficult to achieve, and that local residents of the historic city saw themselves as long term residents, and were willing to contribute to improving what they saw as being their permanent home. Dr. Salah Zaki, in a previous project funded by the American Research Centre in Cairo, had also come to the same conclusion, but perhaps what set AKTC's project apart was its large scale which therefore confirmed what Dr. Zaki had realised: that residents' interest in investing in the historic city was not an exception.

##### 2. A precedent for not implementing the SCA's *Haram al-Athar* Policy

Secondly, AKTC was able to set a precedent for the restoration of unlisted buildings adjacent or abutting listed monuments, including some that had historically encroached upon the city wall, which was a radical departure from traditional SCA policy. This precedent is key to the aims of any Management Plan for Historic Cairo.

### 3. A non tourism-related approach

Thirdly, AKTC was able to demonstrate that monuments could be used for non-tourist-related functions, without threatening or damaging their historic integrity, and obtained the approval of the SCA to do this with monuments it restored. A good example was a health centre located in a restored (and partially reconstructed) Ottoman building on Bab al-Wazir Street.

### 4. Overturning Old Planning Schemes

Fourthly, AKTC was able to cancel the zoning lines which had been put in place as part of the 1973 plan for Historic Cairo, fortunately, only implemented in very limited areas of the city (usually with disastrous results- for example the street connecting the Mosque of Fatma El Nabaweya to Darb al-Ahmar Street).

The cancellation of these old zoning lines in the area where AKTC was working removed the long-standing threat of destruction to the historic street pattern, and presumably, zoning lines can therefore be cancelled for the rest of the historic city as part of the Management Plan.

#### 3.3.2.5 Initiatives that did not come to fruition

Although AKTC's plans to establish an urban planning unit as a joint initiative with the Cairo Governorate and the Municipality were planned and discussed for a long time, these never came to fruition, to a large extent because AKTC's investment in Historic Cairo waned, and so the drive behind this substantial initiative gradually vanished. As it had been the initiative of AKTC (rather than the Governorate or the Municipality), when AKTC became less interested, there was nothing to push the initiative forward. This sums up the nature of working in Historic Cairo – without an agency pushing for change, and a more dynamic approach to the historic city, things remain stagnant. It also raises the question of the level to which UNESCO wishes to commit to the implementation process. Although a planning unit specifically for the historic city makes perfect sense, it is unlikely to take place without external technical and financial support.

## 4. The Way Forward For Historic Cairo's Urban Conservation

It is intended that the previous analysis of the experience of projects like AKTC's and the Historic Cairo project, as well as the forces at play described in earlier sections of this report can inform UNESCO's future vision for urban conservation in Historic Cairo.

This leads to a critical questions and considerations with respect to strategies for the development of a management plan/urban conservation plan.

### 4.1 How can UNESCO's name best be used as leverage?

One of UNESCO's greatest assets (apart from technical expertise) is the weight of its organizational name, and, in Egypt, there is almost a fear of the organization – (which can also be seen as an eagerness to be in the good books of the UN). This institutional weight is something that needs to



*This report was produced in the framework of Urban Regeneration project for Historic Cairo – UNESCO, World Heritage Centre*

be managed carefully to ensure that it drives the urban conservation process forward as successfully as possible. It is an asset that needs to be used wisely and creatively. Few organizations have a name with as much weight as UNESCO, and, if used smartly, it can have a major impact on future urban conservation in Cairo.

There is an Egyptian saying that people “Act out of fear, not conscience,” and, with respect to urban conservation, this has certainly proven true – actions to preserve the historic city *as an urban environment* on the part of the SCA, the Cairo Governorate and most residents of Cairo have been minimal, and when they have occurred, have almost always been driven by external factors such as UNESCO requesting that the boundaries of the World Heritage Site be defined, rather than by any sense of innate duty towards it.

As explained previously, harsh as it may seem to point this out, there is not much dedicated interest in the historic city among government officials, even those whose mandate it is to preserve it, and therefore, it has tended to be external initiatives that have driven projects forward (with the exception of Muizz Street, which was a matter of national pride, and driven by both the project manager and the Minister of Culture). Although raising awareness and education are essential and indeed desirable long-term goals, for Historic Cairo to be preserved, there must be clear, enforced measures put in place in the short term to preserve the city in the long run.

Not to use UNESCO’s name would be a missed opportunity.

#### **4.2 Can a preservation model driven by civil society entities work in Historic Cairo?**

Organizations such as L’Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis have often been used as an example for a possible prototype for Cairo, but in the author’s opinion this is unrealistic in the short run, as it based on an unrealistically optimistic drawing of parallels between Cairo and Tunis as being culturally similar. Despite both being ‘Arab States,’ the parallels between the cultural mindset between Egyptians and Tunisians are few and far between. Moreover, education levels differ greatly between Cairo and Tunis, and part of Historic Cairo’s problems is that it has become an area of the city where many of the residents are very poor and so issues of cultural preservation are not very important to them.

This analysis may sound elitist, but, at the risk of making matters sound worse, Historic Cairo is also not a particularly important area of the city for people that do not live there, and even the minimal actions by Cairene citizens to save Cairo’s architectural heritage in the past, have tended to focus on the newer, wealthier quarters of the city, and to ignore Historic Cairo.

Although the post-revolutionary spirit in Egypt may indeed pave the way for civil society movements and groups that can effectively help preserve the built environment by acting as

watchdog organizations (as was the successful case to preserve the Villa Cicurel in Alexandria<sup>11</sup>, which marked a surprising and extremely positive departure from the norm), the reality is that civil society entities, on their own, will not be able to prevent the accelerating pace of demolition and inappropriate development in Historic Cairo. A clear, simple code dealing with the preservation of the historic city needs to be put in place, and at least in the short run, to be tailored to fit within the structure of the government agencies dealing with the urban environment on a practical level – ie it MUST include the Municipality and the Governorate.

#### **4.3 What changes in the perception of the value of Historic Cairo need to take place?**

In summary, what needs to be integral to the development of a management plan for Historic Cairo is the shifting of focus away from monuments towards the idea of *a historic city of remarkable value*.

To that end, the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is a document that can be used as a reference to justify the focus of the Management Plan and any conservation plans for Cairo.

The following sections of the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value are especially relevant:

1. The statement that:

“Due to its peculiar skyline, it (Cairo) has been known to scholars and historians as the “City of a Thousand Minarets,”<sup>12</sup>

This is important for two reasons – one is that it creates an attractive image – the reputation of the city as a remarkable, romantic place. Utilizing literary references of Cairo as a great historic city will certainly achieve political buy in. Although the political situation is unstable and there has been a lot of uncertainty, the Management Plan can be seen in the context of a fresh start for Cairo/Egypt, and billing the Management Plan as a plan that will preserve and reinstate the grandeurs of the City of a Thousand Minarets can make it into a document of national significance, and a blue print for action.

The reference to the City of a Thousand Minarets can also help flag up the critical issue of controlling buildings heights in the historic city.

2. References (in the statement of Outstanding Universal Value) to the completeness of the urban fabric/urban ensemble, reflecting different layers of history.

These need to be used as justifications for the preservation of the city as a whole, not just as a collection of monuments and significant buildings. These references need to be used to make arguments for the preservation of traditional urban blocks, the organic street pattern, and the

<sup>11</sup> See <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/32/97/40720/Folk/Street-Smart/The-demise-of-Alexandrias-historic-Cicurel-Villa.aspx> and <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/32/97/41671/Folk/Street-Smart/Alexandrias-Cicurel-Villa-survives-.aspx> .

<sup>12</sup> Draft statement of Outstanding Universal Value, 2011.

nineteenth century and early twentieth century buildings, even those that are small-scale and not at all monumental.

3. “Historic Cairo is an outstanding example of a historic urban environment strongly connected to its living tradition. The community life has ensured the survival of traditional markets, local craftsmanship and local know-how.”

From the point of view of most government agencies ‘traditional markets’ have tended to be thought of only as crafts-related markets, or markets that produce items of interest to tourists looking for souvenirs. Traditional markets of spices, day to day goods and services, though equally important both today and in the past have tended to be treated as encroachments on the historic city, and not been seen as worth preserving.

For example, the traditional market for the makers of sugar-based deserts, in Bab al-Shaariyya, an Egyptian tradition since the earliest founding of Cairo, have been threatened with demolition, and the lemon and onion market inside Bab al-Nasr was removed as part of the renovations of al-Muizz Street for being deemed ‘uncivilized’.

The Management Plan needs to explicitly build upon this statement in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Significance to ensure that the value of non tourist-oriented traditional markets is also recognized. (in other words that it is not just the buildings that are valuable, but the activities as well).

#### **4.4 What approach needs to be taken forward with respect to the implementation of a Management Plan?**

Ideally, the combination of the proverbial “Carrot and Stick”, for the following reasons:

As mentioned earlier in this section, the current political instability and state of flux in Egypt could be seen as an opportune moment to make more out of Historic Cairo – and try to initiate some kind of cultural renaissance. The experience of the Ministry of Culture’s Historic Cairo Project demonstrates that a scheme that is high level enough to be seen as a national project can garner the level of support required to push it forward. With an organization like UNESCO at the helm, the urban conservation of Historic Cairo can have the same kind of status of a ‘national project’, as long as UNESCO and NOUH are not just satisfied with producing a good report, and see this project as a milestone in the urban conservation of Cairo.

Media coverage in the Arabic press, using high profile figures like the UNESCO Director General should all be considered as ways to give this project the profile it warrants.

*However, apart from presenting and promoting the significance of this project as a national project – it is also important to be explicit about the many shortcomings in the state of affairs in Historic Cairo, therefore pointing out what it wrong with the way things are taking place, while presenting an attractive solution in hand.*





For example, in the current Statement of Outstanding Universal Value drawn up for Historic Cairo, the section on integrity is somewhat optimistic/positive:

“Nonetheless, the ongoing urban development in and around the World Heritage Site may represent a threat as (do)? the impact of traffic, land use, and environmental changes,”<sup>13</sup>.

In fact, the ongoing urban developments DO represent a threat.

It would be beneficial to identify some of the threats more explicitly, as the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, as it stands today, makes most things sound ideal, which is clearly not the case.

#### **4.5 How to tailor an approach to urban conservation that slots into the existing context and Government Structure?**

In the short and medium term – this is certainly essential and needs to tackle the following:

##### 1. Preventing the accelerated destruction of the historic city

To start with, there needs to be an investigation into the reason why the existing government legislation limiting building heights in the historic city is being ignored. Understanding where the loophole lies will inform the development of the Management Plan to ensure that there are checks on the implementation of the Management Plan.

The use of the media, as well as the use of the UNESCO name to deplore what is currently going on, should be an effective way of doing things.

##### 2. Augmenting the existing legislation dealing with the historic city

This needs to be in the form of a short, concise, and clear document that leaves little room for mis-interpretation in its implementation. It needs to be developed in such a way that the engineering department in the Municipality and Governorate, can use it as THE reference to issue building permits, request modifications to them, or reject them, based on this document. Using the existing government departments that deal with building permits to continue to do so, is the most efficient, sustainable and cost effective way of implementing positive change in Historic Cairo.

Using existing legislation as a basis is possibly the best way of proceeding since it uses an existing legislative framework as a precedent.

So far the legislation dealing with building heights (when it is being implemented) is probably adequate).

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<sup>13</sup> Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, from Urban Regeneration of Historic Cairo Project, Report of Activities 2011.

What needs to be developed is the following:

- a. A policy for new urban development, including clear stipulations regarding: Plot merging, building features (proportions of windows), building finishes, building fittings, (windows, doors, balconies).<sup>14</sup>
- b. A policy for the preservation of existing buildings and features.

Interventions that are necessary in the short term:

- c. A policy to preventing the demolition of existing buildings in Historic Cairo.

The demolition of existing buildings almost always precedes the construction of a new building. As such, a moratorium on the issuing of demolition permits in the area within the boundary of Historic Cairo should be put into effect. Following the earthquake in Cairo in 1992, a moratorium on building in Historic Cairo was put into effect until an appropriate building code could be developed for the historic city. Thus, there is a precedent for this type of control (moratoriums) taking place.

(Stopping demolition has already been identified as a priority in a report quoted in the URHCP 2011 Report of Activities p. 28, and indeed, in the short term, *before* a conservation management plan is completed any requests for demolition should be put forward to an appropriate committee. However, the committee itself need to have strong familiarity with the urban conservation approach to historic cities, and be knowledgeable enough to realize that it is not ornamentation that makes a building valuable).

- d. Providing technical support to ensure that new development is appropriate.

With respect to new building, it should not be too long a process to come up with a better developed set of building guidelines for Historic Cairo, but in the interim, UNESCO should consider providing some kind of technical support for all new building permit requests– which would essentially ensure that their facades were appropriate for the historic city (and of course that they do not exceed the legal building heights). This would be a good project to implement jointly with NOUH as it is very strongly related to the idea of Urban Harmony, and would provide a contribution that neither the Governorate nor the Municipality have at present.

- e. Interventions which involve a greater level of complexity

Among the issues that involve a great level of complexity are the following:

1. Buildings that already have a demolition decree, including those where the demolition decree involves a court order. These need to be looked into to see how a system can be out in place to undertake essential structural conservation work.

<sup>14</sup> A document detailing all of these things was developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture but never put into effect. One way forward might be to use some of the information from this document rather than starting anew.

Although not easy to implement, bringing about an end to the issuance of demolition decrees in the historic city would constitute a major step forward. At least the issuance of demolition decrees should not be something that is undertaken as a matter of course – it should only take place in very rare circumstances.

2. Reconstruction of demolished upper storeys of buildings – many of which could probably handle the loads of some of the additional storeys that were demolished.
3. Infrastructural improvements – these count among the biggest problems in Historic Cairo, and include not only maintenance and upgrading of the infrastructure networks, but also ensuring effective services such as waste collection – one of the most critical non-building related issues facing the historic city at present.

#### **4.6 How can a system continue without continued financial/technical support from non-government agencies?**

If UNESCO initiates some form of implementation office, it will need to secure the funding over the long term. The AKTC model was to think about bringing together representatives from the different stakeholder authorities who would then deal with building permits and the like on a case by case basis, taking into account the sensitivities of the historic city. This would have required at least a medium term investment not just to pay salaries of AKTC staff, but also to provide salary ‘top-ups’ to government officials involved in the process. To create some kind of system of secondment with some kind of monitoring from UNESCO would require the same level of commitment.

It is important to point out that the above mentioned model is quite a complicated one as it requires representatives from a multitude of organisations, each with different mandates and priorities.

AKTC’s main asset apart from technical expertise and an understanding of urban conservation (which was not really appreciated as something of great importance by most local authorities) was its ability to invest financially, both through its own resources, as well as very successfully leveraging funding, but as previously explained, without AKTC’s willingness to invest, it would not have been taken seriously.

The other option is for UNESCO and NOUH to work with other government stakeholders to modify legislation to reflect the challenges outlined in this document, and provide technical support, follow-up and monitoring to ensure that the application of policies for the historic city takes place as it should. What should be avoided if at all possible is a complex reporting system, as, in the

context of organisations trying to accomplish things on the ground, spending too much time reporting can often mean that little practical work gets done.

## 5. Comments on the Issues raised in section 3.2 of the URHCP report for 2011.

### 1. New Road Cuts/Street Widening

Most of the street widening schemes that have taken place over the last few decades have taken place as the result of the partial implementation of the 1973 plan for Cairo, which did not take into account the value of the historic city. The plan is now obsolete, yet it was never cancelled and the street widening schemes it proposed are still being partially implemented when the opportunities arise. However, AKTC was able to cancel the street widening schemes for Darb al-Ahmar, and it should be possible to do the same for the rest of the Historic City.

One note regarding urban planning in Historic Cairo:

A. Professor Nihad Toulan, who left Cairo to go to the USA in the early seventies and became a very well respected urban planner there, was the man behind the 1973 plan mentioned above. On a recent visit to Cairo, and to the historic city, he himself expressed a view that the plan had not taken Historic Cairo's value into account, and readily admitted that in retrospect, efforts to preserve the fabric of the historic city were extremely important<sup>15</sup>.

B.

### 2. Demolition of non-registered buildings.

The key issue for the body that is set up to look at the demolition of buildings in the historic city is for demolition not to be permitted except in *exceptional* circumstances. The current situation is that demolition is permitted except in exceptional circumstances. Stringent controls on new buildings will reduce the likelihood of landowners in the historic city aspiring to demolish their properties.

### 3. Demolition or partial demolition of heritage buildings

Provision also needs to be made to prevent adding to heritage buildings (extra storeys, for example), or modifying them extensively. This will require more specialist knowledge than

<sup>15</sup> Meetings with Dr. Nihad Toulan during a visit to Cairo in 2006.

that of a planning officer looking at guidelines for new construction, and could be an area where NOUH expertise could play an important part.

#### 4. No demolition without typologically appropriate reconstruction

“Typologically appropriate construction” needs to be identified very clearly. Apart from building heights, most of the inappropriateness comes from inappropriate window proportions, modern balconies, materials, finishes, and architectural ornamentation. Ideally, valuable building elements from demolished buildings should be incorporated into the new structure when possible. For example, stone ground storey walls and doorways often remain even when the rest of a historic building has disappeared.

#### 5. The application of basic architectural prescriptions:

Building techniques have changed since the 1900s when much of the traditional building stock in the historic city was built. Most notably, is the fact that buildings are no longer constructed using bearing walls, and that stone, traditionally used for the construction of the ground storey, is no longer used except as cladding in rare cases. Thus, the architectural prescriptions need to factor this into account, and come up with interventions that are applicable and affordable, and still sympathetic to the history of the area.

#### 6. Land Use Measures

In reality, the control of land-use is probably harder than building controls and this should be kept in mind. Fortunately, polluting industries are not very common in the historic city.

### 6. Developing the Criteria for Priority Action Areas:

The essential criteria for selection of actions areas needs to be the ability to set an example of how, with the correct intervention, things can be different. As such, actions areas need to embody the following:

#### 1. The potential for noticeable change

If an action area is only marginally different after intervention than it was before, then it will be hard to make a case for the value of intervention in the urban environment. Therefore, there needs to be a clear ‘before versus after’ mentality in selecting an area (or areas).

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture’s selection of Asaad Alley (see images below and on following page) as a first point of intervention, for example, came after a long and extended process of identifying areas that had potential and then finding the one where it was

possible to actually intervene. Asaad Alley, one of the most dilapidated and poorest alleys of al Darb al Ahmar, was a useful pilot project because it entailed dealing with nineteenth century buildings that abutted the city wall, a registered monument, often with unsightly encroachments into and onto the wall.

The selection was therefore one in which there would be a major impact, *which was easy to perceive*. Anyone who would have walked into the alley before restoration would clearly see poverty and dilapidation – anyone who saw it in the first few years after restoration, would see it as an attractive place to be – in fact, it sold the idea of urban conservation to the local authorities as it became clear to them that there was indeed potential in the historic city.



Asaad Alley immediately after the restoration of the houses along it (but prior to open space upgrading). (Photo courtesy of Kareem Ibrahim, former AKTC staff member).

URPHC's work in Cairo to date should provide a good basis for the selection of priority action areas – clearly areas with high urban heritage value (based on URPHC's parameters) need to be selected; however, the selection process also needs to take into account the fact that URPHC's project should be one that sets an example, and therefore the areas selected should ideally have high value *that is currently somehow compromised*, either by poor physical conditions, or social problems, or both.

## 2. The ability to actually intervene

Many pilot projects/action areas never come to fruition because there are too many obstacles to implementation– for example, that it is impossible to get government permission to proceed, or there are long standing feuds over property ownership that make potentially-successful projects practically impossible. As such, some understanding of the reality of the situation will save a lot of wasted resources on plans that are not implementable. (A common problem with architects and urban planners is that the oversight that just because a scheme looks good on paper does not mean that it is feasible). Striking a balance between developing a vision and identifying implementable projects is not an easy one – as, often, only when put to the test does it become clear whether an urban conservation project is implementable. However, it is important to discount attractive but unattainable potential action areas. The fact that implementation brings with it credibility is something previously discussed, and it cannot be stressed enough that the ability to implement a scheme will make a big difference in terms of public perception of the project. As URPHC will unquestionably be working in conjunction with government organisations, it is not only UN credibility that is at stake, but that of government organisations as well, and this is something to be kept in mind.

## 3. The prospects of change being long term

In Asaad Alley, mentioned previously, the massive short-term improvement eventually faded away to slightly-improved medium-term conditions, but, looking at the intervention in the long run, it would be fair to say that in this alley, the change was less successful than it originally appeared. This is because while it is easy to intervene physically, it is extremely difficult to change lifestyles, and attitudes towards waste collection, cleanliness etc. Thus the physical intervention in Asaad Alley was compromised by the fact that infrastructure

systems such as waste collection were not improved, and that there was no real long-term educational process in place to ensure that local residents treated their buildings or their built environment any differently.

A second example of a project that looked extremely good in the short term with minimal long term impacts is the scheme to improve the facades of Saliba Street. The outcome of this was excellent in the first few years, but given that the pollution in Cairo in general, and along that street, in particular, was still at the same level, it did not take long for the buildings to return to a condition similar to that in which they were in before the intervention.

One general observation about areas in which urban conservation took place in Historic Cairo is that while there was significant investment in the interiors of buildings (living spaces) on the part of local residents, the sense of community responsibility towards public spaces did not change much, meaning that public spaces, for the most part, continued to remain below standard. In addition, attitudes to waste collection and cleanliness have not markedly improved.

Long-term change seems to be most effective when the urban intervention *itself* involves a change rather than just an improvement of the status quo. For example, Al-Muizz Street seems to have changed primarily because it has become pedestrian (to a large extent), meaning that the urban environment itself has changed. (Had the street been paved and the buildings painted without any interventions to control traffic, it is unlikely that any real change would have been observed).

The countless numbers of restored monuments in Historic Cairo are a case in point – restored monuments that remain unused tend to make no long-term contribution to an urban environment. Thus, both introducing new life into disused historic buildings and/or changing some of the parameters shaping the urban environment seem to be among the best ways forward in terms of making medium or long-term change.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture's intervention in al-Darb al-Ahmar is a good example of how different initiatives can have different impacts (not just in scale, but also in duration). Al-Azhar Park for example, constitutes an initiative whose impact is major, and whose duration will probably last for centuries; on the other hand, some of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's other interventions, (such as Asaad Alley) may, in the long term, fade away into oblivion.

#### 4. The choice of an area of interest to outsiders.



This may seem like a superficial reason, but choosing an area that can attract the interest and attention of ‘outsiders’ is probably a good way of ensuring that an action area will have an impact greater than just the extent of the physical intervention. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture’s Asaad Alley fell short on these grounds – that despite being very attractive after restoration, it is a private, hidden residential alley, and therefore never really demonstrated to a wide public about how urban conservation could make a big difference.

On the other hand, Al-Harawi House, and the surrounding area, restored by the Ministry of Culture, demonstrated very successfully how intervention could change people’s perception of a place, and very effectively combined restoration with the introduction of new uses. It put the neighbourhood on the cultural map, generated other activity (the subsequent restoration of Zaynab Khatun House, and the opening up of a craft boutique all resulted from the selection of an accessible, attractive area where a few interventions in the physical fabric, and the introduction of a limited number of new uses, made a huge difference). The issue of uses is key. For example, Bayt al Suhaimy has almost the same proximity/centrality, is more impressive than Harrawi in architectural terms, but falls short on the intensity of use, and therefore has not witnessed a major change or been able to draw people into the area as significantly.

The historic city in Damascus is a good example of how interventions in the historic city intensified the use of the historic neighbourhoods of the city by a large segment of the population. Ottoman houses converted into good local restaurants are an especially notable example – as these cater to a local clientele (not just to tourists). Their existence has extended the use of the historic city by non-residents from simply being a shopping district to being a place where they can also socialise over meals, and spend an evening. In so doing, the economic value of the historic city has increased and its buildings are now seen as more and more valuable. Of course, this has led to some sort of gentrification, but in the case of Historic Cairo, which has witnessed a pattern of dis-investment and impoverishment, encouraging interest in the historic city by groups of people with slightly higher income is bound to have numerous positive implications.

##### 5. Solving a government problem/making the government look good

This could have obvious advantages – if action areas are selected to deal with issues of interest to the government, government support is likely to be great. In most cases, areas of interest to the government are those which involve activities that are seen as chaotic or detrimental. Therefore solutions to traffic/infrastructure problems, problems related to street markets that cause congestion, or problems of solid waste management are likely to encourage the government to listen more closely. Housing is another issue of concern to the government at a national level, and if housing solutions can be provided in the historic

city, the government might be interested. However, given the scale of the historic city (which is tiny in terms of Cairo's population), it is more realistic to focus on solving some of the government's problems with the historic city itself, rather than seeing the historic city as the solution for the problems of the city at large.

6. Being clear about the message(s) that one is trying to make

This should be a key criterion in selecting action areas: does an intervention proposed for an action area convey the message that one wishes to convey? If so, are these action areas representative, and is the intervention likely to be replicable, (at least to some extent)? Finally, to what extent does the implementation of a plan for an action area necessitate finding solutions to some key problems of the historic city? If a selected action area does not involve an element of problem solving that applies to other areas of the historic city, then the action area is not representative, or useful for the rest of the historic city, and its value beyond the scope of its own boundaries is limited.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture's interventions dealt with a range of issues, with some messages being carried across more strongly than others. For example, one message that the Aga Khan Trust for Culture managed to make was to get the Supreme Council of Antiquities to accept the fact that unlisted buildings could co-exist with monuments. This was a major achievement – because it led to an implicit reversal of a long-standing principle (demolition of buildings abutting monuments) that had had negative impacts on the historic city for decades.

The Aga Khan was somewhat less successful in setting an example for *private investment* in historic properties, leading to increased investment in the historic city at large. Although gentrification is generally disapproved of, it is probably a necessity in Historic Cairo, as it will demonstrate that the historic city is valuable. In terms of impact and positive change, it is probably more worthwhile to invest more money into the restoration and refurbishment of non-listed buildings, to show how much potential they have, rather than in monuments which are already protected. Aga Khan Projects like the restoration and reuse of the unlisted Darb Shoughlan School dating from 1911 probably set a more important example in the long run than the restoration of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Blue Mosque, for example. That said, one of the other messages that the Aga Khan Trust for Culture was keen to convey was that the re-use of restored buildings, even for 'non-cultural' purposes was valid, and that the *use* of historic buildings helped to preserve them, rather than destroy them, and this was conveyed both through the re-use of buildings like the Darb Shoughlan School and some restored listed

monuments like the House of Ibrahim Aga Mustfazan next to the Blue Mosque (which was used as a health centre).

Thus, action areas need to be chosen to provide the opportunity for URPHC to demonstrate its message --- and the better thought out this message is, the easier it will be to select an area that lends itself well to urban conservation.

#### 7. The importance of monuments

This may seem to contradict the previous statement, but in fact, monuments ARE important, as landmarks, and buildings that add value to a historic landscape. However, the point made above is that it is not the monuments that one always needs to invest in, but other buildings around them. An action area that includes one or more monuments would be beneficial, but perhaps what needs to be dealt with is the relationship between monuments and their surroundings, not just the state of monuments per se.

#### 8. The importance of making correct assumptions

Many of the projects in Historic Cairo are based on overly optimistic/naive assumptions, and this often leads them to fail.

Some examples:

##### A. Souq al-Fustat – an example of a commercial scheme that did not work as well as expected.

The Souq al-Fustat Development assumed that building a craft bazaar next to the historic churches of Old Cairo and the Mosque of Amr Ibn al As would generate substantial economic activity and transform the area, giving it more commercial life. The reality is that the bazaar is struggling to make ends meet financially. (One key indicator of this is that several shops share one shop keeper, as there is not enough business to pay several salaries). The shortcoming of this project is based on the fact that 1)many tourists come as part of a tour group, for whom the itinerary is set, and which invariably includes a visit to Khan al Khalili, where tour guides/operators will often get commission for taking tourists to certain shops. As such, there is no real incentive for tour guides to take their groups to Souq al Fustat, as, with a limited amount of time, they can often only go to one place, and for the aforementioned reasons, this is Khan al Khalili.

In this case, the intervention failed to assess the economic dynamics of Historic Cairo correctly, and was naïve in its assumption that putting shops into a well-visited tourist area would be a recipe for immediate success.

It is striking how important location is at a micro-level. Visitors to heritage sites tend to make a straight line to their primary destination, and so potential visitor attractions (including shops) that are even marginally off this track can often suffer very significantly. The general pattern seems to be that visitors go to see the primary object of their visit, and then, if and only if they have the time, they wander around afterwards.

#### B. Abdel Halim Ibrahim's Cultural Park for Children in Sayeda Zeinab

This scheme was based on a few key assumptions, firstly, design assumptions: that geometric forms and structures to climb would create an exciting park for children, which would inspire them. In parallel, that hardscaping the street running alongside the children's park (Abul Dahab Street) would provide an attractive space for community activities and festivals, and encourage those activities to take place.

The reality was very far from the truth, despite the best intentions. The operations policy of the park dictated that only children could enter, which meant that families never sent their children there. Also, the idea of community festivals, and using the street to sell 'locally produced items' seems to have been more the product of an idealized vision of Historic Cairo and its inhabitants rather than being grounded in reality.

Thus, in selecting an action area, it is essential that the potential of that action area is one that factors in the economic, social and cultural realities of the situation, and is not just a rose-coloured vision of what an area can be.

### 9. The advantages of selecting a definable, manageable action area

Choosing an area with definable boundaries is a good way to ensure that interventions in the historic environment are not too diluted by other things going on. The previously mentioned area around Harrawi House is an excellent example of an action area with clearly defined boundaries (a square), where there was little happening, and therefore, the Ministry of Culture's intervention was extremely easy to see and feel. Although that square is now somewhat more dilapidated than it has been over the past ten years, it is still noticeably cleaner and better maintained than most other areas of the historic city. The fact that it is a self-contained square is one of the elements of its success.

In contrast, perhaps the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's action areas were too big and complex *for the level of investment that was put into them*. Moreover, in some cases, for example,

the Bab al-Wazir Action Area, around the Blue Mosque, there were too many uncontrollable factors, which made AKTC's interventions seem less effective (for example, the incessant traffic on Bab al Wazir Street).

## 7. Socio-Economic Development in the Context of Urban Conservation

By far the greatest challenge in urban conservation is that of socio-economic development, as urban interventions are more manageable, more tangible, and a lot easier to assess than those that aim to improve socio-economic conditions in a historic city.

The key critical challenge in terms of socio-economic development is how to really make a difference.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture's experience is a really valuable one to analyze because it was so multi-faceted and included programs in health, education, employment, micro-finance, housing (and housing loans). In retrospect, in terms of community demand, what is clear is that there was much higher demand for tangible programs like microfinance, housing loans and employment, than there was for programs like education (and to a certain extent community health) where the benefits are less tangible, much longer term, and not immediately linked to clear short term improvements in physical living conditions and economic prosperity. Access to finance, the promise of increased income, and better housing conditions were clearly the carrots that made local residents interested in what was being offered. As such, the next section examines the strengths and shortcomings of the Housing and Microfinance programs, and some lessons learned from them.

### 7.1 Housing:

With respect to housing, there was a genuine interest on the part of al-Darb al-Ahmar residents in taking out housing loans to undertake work on their properties, even if they did not own them, and this indicates that, contrary to some perceptions, the residents of Historic Cairo, for the most part, enjoy living there and appreciate the amenities the district has to offer, not least of which is that it is a central area of the city, with good transport networks and facilities (in relative terms, of course). Local residents also valued some of the qualities of old apartments, such as the fact that rooms tend to be large, and ceilings are high, and so, even if it would be fair to say that there is not much architectural appreciation *per se*, there is a sense of value towards the quality of space that many old buildings offer.

Interest in housing loans was also grounded in a realistic understanding that Historic Cairo provided an affordable living environment, a familiar environment with many social ties, and that the alternatives, although perhaps better in terms of the condition of the physical environment, were lacking on the level of community spirit, amenities, and proximity to jobs, markets, schools, and the like.

Looking at the state of affairs in Historic Cairo, and indeed many areas of Cairo, today, it is easy to make the assumption that people don't care about their environment. However, the experience with projects like the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's shows that, in fact, people do care, have pride, and are willing to invest. (What is also evident, however, is that people are not so good at collectively investing in the public realm to put into effect long-term urban interventions, and that standards of cleanliness are low, and a propensity to collect junk is rather high.

One interesting observation that arose from the study of Historic Cairo, for example, was that rubbish tended to be thrown in vacant plots of land, or in front of derelict or unused buildings (i.e, nobody wants to have accumulated rubbish in front of their property, but that the effort that people are willing to make to keep it away from them is minimal, and thus, for the average resident of Historic Cairo, rubbish accumulated in a nearby plot is far enough away to be considered 'far away'. To summarize, it can be said that for the average resident of Historic Cairo, an improved physical environment is seen as a plus, however, asking a resident to make the effort of lifting the lid off a rubbish bin to put waste inside it, is considered a big demand.

What was also evident from housing rehabilitation projects in al-Darb al-Ahmar is that it was easy for local residents to slip back into old habits (like accumulating junk or throwing rubbish out of the window), and in general, one clear observation, stressed previously, is that it is much easier to implement projects than it is to change people.

## **7.2 Microfinance:**

The appeal for microfinance is easy to see: small businesses get loans which they would not normally be able to get, and which enable them to invest in income-generating activities, which mean that they get wealthier. It is not difficult to see why micro-finance schemes really take off. This is especially true when a system has been developed that assesses loan applicants effectively enough to ensure that only businesses with potential for growth receive loans, meaning that the economic impacts are bound to be positive.

However, what has not tended to happen in the past is to tailor microfinance loans to have a specific benefit to the historic city itself. An ideal solution would be to have a microcredit scheme that would take into account not just the economic viability of a scheme, but also its potential contribution to preserving the environment or enhancing the social environment of the historic city, thereby creating an incentive for people to invest *in improving the historic city*.

Adam Smith, the 18<sup>th</sup> century economist wrote of the “invisible hand,” whereby an individual acting in his own self interest, unknowingly could benefit the whole society. This is the approach that microfinance is most effective when it takes – when it has societal, or community benefit as well. A former manager of Europark, one of Europe’s largest shopping malls, sharing Adam Smith’s view, noted that the best way to get businessmen to undertake developmental initiatives was to ensure that these were linked to initiatives of interest to *them*. Thus, if businessmen and entrepreneurs were to see a financial benefit from investing in the historic city (even at a small scale), they would do so, and, in turn, if their investment in historic buildings would prove to be of economic benefit to themselves and their businesses, they would be very willing to do so.

### **7.3 UK Urban Conservation Grant Schemes.**

The United Kingdom offers the experience of two very schemes that have focused on investing in the historic urban environment as a means of stimulating the local economy, and these are outlined here.

The key difference between the two schemes is that the first was aimed at individuals (landlords) while the second targets institutions (including local authorities) and therefore focuses on large scale investments that are few in number.

#### **7.3.1 Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS)**

This was an English Heritage grant scheme that ran between 1999 and 2006. The HERS scheme dealt with “defined area problems in commercial and mixed-use areas which are important to the local urban and rural economy; neighborhood businesses and corner shops, employment-generating activities which form the focus for community life and prosperity, and where area-based assistance with building repairs and enhancement will help to tip the balance in favor of continued local employment, provide new homes and encourage inward investment. Experience shows that it is these mixed-use areas which are the most difficult in which to encourage take up of grant and secure the repair of historic buildings, but it is often these areas which are the public face, and set perceptions, of an area. Typical candidates are likely to be the High Street of the small town or secondary retailing streets in larger towns; inner city districts, redundant industrial sites, fishing ports, decaying sea-side towns and declining rural settlements. “<sup>16</sup>

The scheme focused on funding exterior conservation work and repairs to buildings, with the hope that improving the appearance of an area could lead to investment, and generate public interest. It was often used to reinstate architectural features that had been lost, or were dilapidated.

English Heritage’s assessment of investment in heritage led- regeneration showed that “Attractive local environments and quality of place are also important elements in investor confidence and

<sup>16</sup> [http://ihbc.org.uk/context\\_archive/61/HERS/antram.html](http://ihbc.org.uk/context_archive/61/HERS/antram.html)

public perceptions of quality of place and livability – careful intervention in the form of heritage-led regeneration can help create a virtuous circle of increased confidence, investment, economic vitality and care for the local environment. Research for English Heritage in 2009 demonstrated the positive and significant relationship between the historic environment and sense of place.”<sup>17</sup>

With respect to HERS, these grants were limited to conservation areas, and funding was only available for schemes that wished to invest in the following:

- General structural repairs (including timber or timber frame repairs) and consequential reinstatement, specialist treatments to eradicate established dry rot or beetle infestation, and damp-eradication measures where damp was causing structural damage to the building;
- Re-roofing and high level repairs (provided this was not considered maintenance work), including chimney repairs, leadwork and rainwater goods;
- Brickwork and stonework repairs for structural as opposed to cosmetic reasons, including render repairs and re-rendering.
- The repair of existing windows and external doors and other external joinery.
- The reinstatement of distinctive architectural features, such as particularly decorative ironwork and the reinstatement of shop fronts to the original design.
- Environmental enhancement, with priority given to the repair or reinstatement of historic surfaces. Other environmental improvements, which could be eligible included the installation of appropriate street lighting, permanent landscaping and the removal of unsightly clutter on buildings and other eyesores.
- Expenditure on fees for professional advisers was also eligible for grant.

However, funding was not made available towards the cost of conversions, alterations or adaptations, modernization, routine maintenance, the provision or renewal of services, or for redecoration.<sup>18</sup>

The important factor in the HERS scheme with respect to Cairo is that it focused on commercial/mixed-use areas – realizing that improving the appearance of a commercial area would increase footfall, and this would inevitably increase spending. One of the key advantages of investing in a historic environment that supports or can support commercial activities is that it creates a feeling of retail distinctiveness and ambience<sup>19</sup>, meaning that people actually enjoy the environment where they go shopping (in the same way, for example, that Khan al Khalili in Cairo

<sup>17</sup> English Heritage: Regeneration: The Full Evidence, p2.

<sup>18</sup> Review of the heritage and economic regeneration scheme in the south west quadrant of Bridport, March 2006. P2.

<sup>19</sup> <http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk/Previous-Reports/HC-Economic-Impact/>,P5



offers a distinct environment to buy the things that one could probably buy elsewhere with a lot less hassle).

There are several examples in Cairo where investment in the urban environment has been upgraded in commercial environments, with a great impact, notably, Alfy Street, in downtown Cairo, which was pedestrianized and the hard landscape improved – and this generated a great amount of social activity. Another valuable example is the area of the Stock Market in Downtown Cairo, which was also pedestrianized and upgraded. The scheme turned out to be a double edged sword from a commercial point of view: on one hand, some businesses were destroyed because their businesses had depended on people being able to access that quarter by car, or in fact, by the very fact that they parked there. On the other hand, the pedestrianisation created a space where coffee shops could thrive, and this led to an extraordinary growth of coffee-shops in the area. In the wake of Egyptian revolution, where sitting at down-town coffee shops has become an important forum for political discussions, these coffee-shops have thrived. Their informality, and the fact that groups can simply expand by adding more chairs on the pavement, when new friends arrive, has made such spaces incredibly well suited to social interaction.

### 7.3.2 Challenges faced by the HERS Scheme:

An analysis of the experience of the implementation of the HERS scheme in one area of Bridport, Devon, UK outlined the following initial obstacles:

- In some cases, the grants were not large enough to stimulate landowners into action, and there was a perception that the increase in rents/business income following the implementation of the scheme would not be large enough to warrant action.<sup>20</sup>
- The grant process was initially complex, and the percentage of grant (or subsidy) as a total of the sum required was not high enough to provide building owners with the incentive to invest their own money. Once the grant procedures were simplified and the grant percentage increased to 80% of the eligible works, there was a significantly higher take-up of the grant.
- As the scheme required landowners' participation, it was not possible to choose where to start implementing the scheme, and in reality, the buildings and areas where the scheme started were rarely those that were given top priority by the planners and heritage specialists, but instead to lower priority projects whose owners were willing to participate.
- In addition, the fact that many essential works, such as redecorating, for example, were not eligible for grants meant that the scheme excluded many people who would have otherwise been very willing to accept the grant scheme.
- One element factored into the low take-up of the grant was that there was no permanent staff member present in the area earmarked for regeneration, and thus just engaging local

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 7.

landowners was hard.<sup>21</sup> Finally, a high turnover of staff meant that it was hard to establish a long term relationship with either grant giving agency, or with landowner (underscoring the importance of the human factor in creating a successful financial relationship.

The issue of incentive is a key one to analyse in the context of Cairo; especially, what incentive a scheme can provide land or shop-owners to take up a grant offer, bearing in mind that they will need to make some form of financial contribution. The answer probably lies in the fact that owners will be more likely to participate if they feel that they are investing in a larger project that is of benefit to them, meaning that through a small investment, they will become stakeholders in a bigger initiative. The HERS scheme emphasises an important reality in the socio-economic development of any historic neighbourhood: that linking up to local businesses is advantageous, as business owners are always on the look-out for opportunities, and will jump to grab them, provided they feel that they are *beneficial*.

### 7.3.2 Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)

This is a scheme implemented by the Heritage Lottery Fund since 1998, aimed at ending “despair, erosion of quality and under use of structures in areas where historic buildings predominate”<sup>22</sup> by supporting “schemes led by partnerships of local, regional and national interests that aim to regenerate conservation areas across the United Kingdom.”<sup>23</sup> The scheme, which contributes between £500,000 and £2000,000 to the common fund set up by the project partners, requires at least a 25% contribution on behalf of the project partners in order to make funds available, again through grants, in deprived areas with heritage value. Schemes must run for five years, and THI supports between 8 and 15 schemes a year. THI gives highest priority to:

- 1) the structural and external repair of historic buildings which are still being used, and
- 2) the repair and conversion to new use of empty historic buildings.

Conversely, reinstating historic details, funding new buildings in gap sites and works to the public realm are the lowest priority within THI schemes.

The nature of the THI schemes is that they include some form of training in conservation skills, which can involve activities such as conservation skills days for local contractors, ‘property maintenance’ days for owners, or establishing links with local colleges providing conservation skills training. The aim is to tackle shortages in conservation skills by building a bank of skilled/qualified conservation professionals that can apply their skills on other buildings and projects.

There is also a component built into THI schemes related to the involvement of the local community, trying to raise their awareness about heritage, to widen their knowledge and understanding. Such activities, include, but are not limited to open days, school visits, town trails,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 13.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Shipley, “Townscape Heritage Initiatives Evaluation: methodology for assessing the effectiveness of Heritage Lottery Fund projects in the United Kingdom,” p524.

<sup>23</sup> From Townscape Heritage Initiative Application Introduction, p1.

talks and lectures and exhibitions.<sup>24</sup> Schemes are also expected to attempt to tackle local shortages of conservation skills and raise awareness for the importance of heritage through community participation.

The THI initiative addresses some of the pitfalls noted in earlier sections of this document, especially those related to the upkeep historic buildings (recognising that some form of management system needs to be put in place to maintain and up-keep interventions in the historic urban environment). It stipulates that grant recipients must produce a conservation area management plan for the area, which must be put in place for 10 years after the scheme ends.

Another key aspect of the THI is that the local planning authority must be prepared to maintain high standards of conservation *after* the scheme has finished and show a commitment to using statutory powers (to ensure that management and preservation of the scheme are fully maintained).

### 7.3.3 Analysis of the two English Grant Schemes

The key to the effective implementation of the THI and HERS schemes is a strong, competent local authority, that can ensure that funds given to conservation project to encourage heritage-led regeneration are suitably invested, and that work undertaken does in fact constitute a contribution to the heritage value of the neighborhood. The second key factor is the authority's ability to monitor the implementation of the conservation management plan, which implies commitment to following up on the project long after its initial completion. Unlike the HERS scheme, in THI this is a scheme given to institutional partners rather than to landowners, with the stipulation, of course, that landowners and other individual stakeholders will participate.

## 8. Conclusion - The Way Forward: Priorities for Intervention:

The English examples referred to in the previous section of this report are based on an effective conservation system, with local authorities being fully aware of heritage values, committed to protecting them, and given the authority to intervene and effectively stop any transgression in a conservation area.

Such an effective system is unfortunately lacking in Egypt, and it is my contention that no amount of socio-economic investment, community development, or capacity building will be effective without adequate (and effectively enforced) controls. The Townscape Heritage Initiative previously embodies within it the principles of community involvement and education; however, in reality these only make sense within the context of a well-protected historic environment, and where are people already aware to a reasonable extent of the value of historic areas.

In principle, it may seem that explaining a point of view (urban conservation, for example), getting people to agree with it, and then implementing it, is the best way of doing things, however, in a

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/faqstownscapeheritageinitiative.aspx>

place like Cairo, it seems much more effective to take decisions and explain them later, undemocratic as this may sound.

As such, the author's view with respect to priorities is the following:

**1. Use UNESCO's institutional name and international reputation to flag up the importance of preserving Historic Cairo.**

Unstable as the situation may be in Egypt, the fate of Historic Cairo is not something that should be too affected by who is in power and what people are demonstrating against on a particular Friday in Midan al Tahrir. As explained previously, as this is also a period of a much greater sense of national identity and pride, it is a good moment to raise awareness of the importance of Historic Cairo, as it is a cause that overrides the views and interests of political factions.

As such, UNESCO should seize the moment to gain support for the project and use the increased sense of pride in being Egyptian to the project's best advantage. It also needs to be the kind of support that transcends the politics of who is in power, so it is not thought of as being a project of a specific political party but of a nation trying to rebuild itself and reinstate its own glory. There is definitely a feeling of great nostalgia for Cairo's past as a beautiful city among many Egyptians, and a romanticised notion of what Cairo was like in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of these feelings are also worth taking into account. Simply limiting the Cairo project to a project with technical links might reduce the ability to have an impact in improving the situation in Historic Cairo as a whole.

The question of how much funding UNESCO is willing to invest, or how much funding it can leverage is quite an important one. If UNESCO intends to ensure that huge sums of money are available and are used to improve the situation in Historic Cairo, then perhaps the idea of increasing public awareness and concern for the historic city is less important (though still important).

However, if UNESCO's intentions are to undertake pilot projects with its institutional partners such as NOUH, then doing this within the context of raising public awareness towards the worrying plight of historic Cairo is essential. Using the press to UNESCO's advantage would be beneficial, especially the Arabic press. Little will be gained by preaching to the converted (conservation specialists who already agree with the cause, but have had little power beyond their ability to implement projects, often through the agencies that they work for).

**2. Ensuring that Current Laws are Enforced**

Whatever the inadequacies in the current laws and policies may be, they are more effective than no law at all, and what has been happening in Historic Cairo over the past two years is an example of lawlessness, with too many people turning a blind eye, or believing that they are powerless to do anything. Ensuring the enforcement of current laws to protect the historic city is essential and can also be used to garner valuable public support, which will be beneficial. One common perception of the state of affairs in Egypt at the moment is that it is chaotic, and, therefore, controlling rampant

urban development in Historic Cairo is a good way of demonstrating that there is a move towards the enforcement of law and order. In the previous section, the value of initiatives that would make the government look good was highlighted. This type of initiative is one that would make the government look as if it is doing a good job, and should therefore gain an appropriate level of government support as well.

The path of *least effectiveness* is for UNESCO to decide that there is nothing that can be done about the current situation, and that the best it can do is develop a scheme that can be put in place *once* there is law and order. Prevention is definitely better than cure in this case, and the way forward to ensure that laws are enforced is a combination of using institutional leverage, helping the government look good, and using the local press to report on transgressions.

### 3. Augmenting/ Improving Existing Legislation

One of the technical aspects that UNESCO could easily get involved in is improving the legislation protecting the historic city. An organisation like UNESCO is one that is important enough to be able to do this, and that it would be advantageous as it is a project related to strategic planning, which presumably would fit within UNESCO's remit, and would not cost millions to implement as it is related to expertise rather than huge operational expenses. Conservation projects, and institutions that fund them, may not have the institutional clout behind them to do more than just implement projects, but UNESCO certainly should be able to. In the long run, it will constitute an extremely significant contribution to the future of Historic Cairo as well.

### 4. Developing the Capacity of Local Institutional partners and Helping them to Develop a Plan of Action

Presumably, the institutional partner in question is NOUH. What needs to be done is to put in place a vision/develop clear ideas of HOW Historic Cairo can be preserved and managed, bearing in mind all the issues that have come to light in looking back at the successes and failures of past projects. It would be a pity not to build upon the experience of the past, repeating and benefitting from the successes of past projects and finding ways of overcoming their problems and shortcomings. The advantage that UNESCO has is knowledge and expertise from all over the world (of successful projects) and it would be valuable to think draw upon the references of other historic cities with similar challenges to Cairo, where the pressures of the historic city have been overcome through realistic but also enlightened policies. (Perhaps some Latin American cities might prove to be good models).

As explained with reference in the analysis of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's project, actual intervention gave AKTC credibility, and NOUH would benefit from this. Also, as a follow-up to the idea of building upon Egyptian national identity to generate interest in the historic city, there needs

to be an example of what it can be like and how. The UK examples mentioned with reference to the HERS and THI schemes draw attention to the fact that commercial areas lend themselves better to urban regeneration because they have a clear economic dimension which can easily benefit from improved physical conditions, and because commercial activity by nature deals with a client base, it means that a larger number of people can experience and benefit from investment into the built environment.

A well-selected action area or pilot project can do much to strengthen the case for the preservation of the historic city. There is also the question of local residents benefitting from the scheme – the Harrawi House and Square project, for example, was valuable because it created an attractive successful space that was frequented by Egyptians, including residents of that quarter of the city (not just the elite). This holds true not just of the physical intervention brought about by that project, but also by the social activities that take place (concerts and recitals of Egyptian music that could be appreciated by all). Similarly, part of the success of al-Muizz Street is that the upgrading scheme is of benefit to residents of Cairo, including those of Gamaleya, who make good use of the well maintained public realm.

The selection of an area or a scheme that would serve the local residents of the neighbourhood in which it is located, but also be of interest and value to residents of the city at large would probably be the most effective way forward. It would need to be a project with more than just the restoration of buildings involved; therefore, probably comprising either the improvement of a public space, the combination of restoration with cultural activity, or the revitalisation of an area with commercial activity would probably be ideal, or ideally, a combination of all of these.

The Citadel might be a good place to explore, specifically Sikket al Mahgar, (the back entrance to the Citadel), which would make a much more logical entrance to the Citadel complex, or at least a much more pedestrian friendly access point than the current entrance from Salah Salim Street, with the opportunity for some restoration of houses. As the Citadel is one of the most visited attractions in Cairo, especially for Egyptians, and hosts numerous cultural events, a scheme that somehow complemented the current offer that the Citadel provides would be unlikely to fail. In addition, it complements the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's projects in al Darb al Ahmar (while still remaining distinct from them), and would also provide the opportunity to harness the economic potential of investors. It could also provide the opportunity to think of public spaces such as the area in between Sultan Hassan and al Rifai Mosques, and has room for expansion to include the unused area of Bab al-Azab at the Citadel, or the street with the Samakhana and the Taz Palace, which itself has great upgrading potential. The drawback of this scheme is that it does not face the problem of new urban development in the historic city, nor of the demolition of the old housing stock, but on all other levels would be an excellent demonstration project, which would certainly generate a lot of national interest.



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