



# Heritage conservation in Rosetta (Rashid): A tool for community improvement and development

Dalia A. Elsorady\*

Department of Architecture, Pharos University, Alexandria, Egypt

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## ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the role of heritage conservation in contributing to community improvement, development and revitalization goals. It seeks to understand why communities conserve their heritage and their role in this conservation. The evolution of a heritage conservation ethic and its relationship with urban planning are subsequently explored, along with an explanation of the concepts of physical, economic and social revitalization. The role and significance of development within heritage conservation areas are also examined. The integration between urban planning, development and heritage conservation in Rosetta (*Rashid*) is investigated. Community improvement indicators are consequently devised to measure the success of heritage conservation and to determine progress toward community improvement. Finally, the impact of heritage conservation on community improvement and development is emphasized.

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## Introduction

Maintaining and managing heritage assets are part of a political and economic process. Effective conservation policy takes into account public involvement, public and private initiatives, the planning process, cultural and economic needs and the maintenance of public openness during the decision-making process (Cohen, 1999). Within these aspects, this research seeks to define the role of heritage conservation and the outcome of physical, economic and social revitalization goals. In addition, it attempts to provide a greater understanding of the successful integration of urban planning and heritage conservation. Three research objectives are thus established. The first is to explore the reasons for and values associated with the desire for communities to conserve their architectural heritage. The second is to define community improvement by devising a set of indicators for determining progress toward community improvement and development. The third objective is to determine the impact of heritage conservation on community improvement and development.

This current research reviews the relevant literature to examine key concepts such as heritage conservation versus preservation, the correlation between conservation and urban planning, and the role of heritage planning and legislation in Egypt. The practice of heritage conservation is explored in the present work because it is related to physical, economic and social revitalization and the significance of new developments within heritage areas such as Rosetta. Key findings from plans, policies and documents, informa-

tive interviews and field observations are also examined. Finally, conclusions outlining the effectiveness of heritage conservation as a tool and its role in achieving community improvement and development goals are provided.

## Heritage conservation

Heritage is defined not only through value and demand, but also the uses of historical buildings and sites in a society. Throsby (2001) considers heritage a capital asset. Graham (2002) defines it as a social construct that is defined within cultural and economic practice. In this way, it fulfills both capital and cultural functions. As such, heritage does serve an economic function, and can be considered a product or resource for consumption. Graham (2002) adds that heritage can be interpreted differently between and within cultures at any given time. A further complexity in defining heritage is that it exists as both a tangible (i.e., the built environment) and intangible resource (i.e., traditional or folk culture). From a practical perspective, heritage has been defined by Smith (2006) as a “process of engagement, an act of communication and one of making meaning in and for the present” (p. 3). Cantacuzino (1990) suggests that the act of preservation is often associated with individual buildings (Ashworth, 1991; Fram, 2003; Tyler, 2000). Graham charges the act of preservation with creating a rift between stakeholders because it leaves little flexibility for planning decisions (Graham, 2002). As opposed to preservation, conservation allows for more development options and fewer constraints. Tyler (2000) suggests that conservation can be defined as the process that maintains properties without significantly altering their existing condition.

\* Tel.: +20 122 350 8081.

E-mail address: [dsorady@gmail.com](mailto:dsorady@gmail.com)

According to Fram (2003), conservation refers to neighborhood or district planning. Khirfan adds “the spatial spirit becomes symbolic but free from nostalgia, contemporary but continuing from the past, collective but respectful of the individual, distinctively local but inclusive of the diverse” (Khirfan, 2010, p. 324). Thus an understanding of the various meanings and interpretations associated with heritage can contribute to providing an effective framework within which conservation decisions are made.

Moreover, heritage conservation is also recognized as an inherent development tool. Loulanski agrees with Graham’s theoretical framework to explain the role of heritage development. First, heritage is identified as “an economic sector in itself... using resources, producing products, and generating returns in profits, [incomes] and jobs” (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000, p. 155; Loulanski, 2006, p. 56). Second, it is also considered “one element in economic development alongside others, frequently exercising a catalytic or integrating role in development projects” (Graham et al., 2000, p. 155; Loulanski, 2006, p. 56) due to its capacity to attract economic activities and accommodate economic functions. Finally, it is considered as “an instrument in the management of economies at various spatial scales from the international to the local” (Graham et al., 2000, p. 155; Loulanski, 2006, p. 56). Heritage conservation in this context serves to solve urban problems and achieve development as well as bridge the gap between preservation, development and urban planning, as it seeks to resolve differences created by past decisions while moving forward into the future.

#### *Community engagement in conservation*

Through community engagement in conservation, communities address the importance of heritage conservation to the public. Elements of the past are essential components in promoting both an individual and a communal sense of identity (Graham, 2002). Individuals, local groups and grassroots organizations are often concerned with protecting their neighborhoods and active involvement in decisions made about their communities (Tyler, 2000). Moreover, Hodges and Watson (2000) emphasize the importance of group organization, communication, consensus and management when realizing heritage conservation goals. More recently, Smith (2006) acknowledges the growing body of literature regarding public engagement and community participation in heritage management and conservation work (Smith & Waterton, 2009; Waterton & Watson, 2010). Furthermore, capacity building appears as a means to successful conservation practices, and is defined as “the ability of individuals, organizations and societies to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner” (UNDP, 2006, p. 3). Key players who contribute to and benefit from conservation initiatives include interest groups that may have a stake in heritage buildings, whether for financial or personal gain (Teisdall, Oc, & Heath, 1996). It is difficult to pinpoint how a society determines what will and will not be conserved. However, it is important to note the passion and commitment that the public often demonstrates when actively conserving a heritage that best represents the unique characteristics of their communities.

#### *Integration between heritage conservation and urban planning*

By the middle of the twentieth century, urban expansion and renewal projects redefined the urban fabric of cities and towns. As a result, society’s reaction to the destruction of heritage assets laid the foundations for the contemporary conservation movement (Jokilehto, 2006). Thus, heritage professionals agreed that conservation, restoration and preservation should follow a set of principles and guidelines. This resulted in the recognition of international documents and charters that guide heritage protec-

tion (Fram, 2003; Venice Charter, 1964). This led to a change in global attitude and an increasing convergence between planning and conservation (Hamer, 2000). Moreover, Al-Kheder et al. and Al-Hagla acknowledge the importance of the presence of an urban system in a sustainable way, that balances the preservation of the existing heritage and the sufficient planning of the modern urban fabric (Al-Kheder, Haddad, Fakhoury, & Baqaen, 2009; Al-Hagla, 2010). Since then, it has become recognized that heritage planning cannot be treated in isolation from other aspects of heritage conservation (Fram, 2003). Heritage conservation should not be secluded from municipal plans; rather, it should be an integral part of land use policy and planning. As such, general planning strategies recognize the importance of the urban context, the coherence between the elements of a built environment, both old and new, and the need for all of these aspects to be thoroughly analyzed and understood before effective planning can be established.

#### *Heritage conservation and its role in achieving revitalization and development*

Heritage areas must be places that people want to use and invest in. This is achieved by means of both the revitalization and development of such areas. Tyler defines physical revitalization as the act of improving the condition of a built environment and the elements found within it (Tyler, 2000). According to Doratli (2005), there are several possible courses of action, such as refurbishment, adaptive re-use, and rehabilitation. Bullen and Love (2010) present a building viability process model that can be used by owners, occupiers and planners to meet changing commercial and regulatory demands required by buildings. Doratli (2005) develops the work of Teisdall et al. (1996) by means of providing three strategic approaches to achieving economic revitalization. These approaches are functional restructuring, diversification and regeneration. While economic development remains a key consideration in heritage areas, there is a shortage of models that explain the economic context of decision-making regarding heritage. This may prove to be an unattractive prospect for many developers who expect a swift return for their investments. Doratli (2005) suggests that there are two contextual elements, obsolescence and development dynamics that create a need for revitalization in historic districts. Obsolescence occurs when buildings are neglected or fall into disrepair. Development dynamics contribute to creating a need for revitalization. Proper identification of development dynamics and their associated needs would increase the likelihood of implementing revitalization projects successfully.

Although the values associated with heritage were once only cultural and scientific, planners must now consider social and economic realities and sustainability (Jokilehto, 2006). The integration of heritage structures with new development can be attractive and economically viable if proper guidelines are set in place. As such, urban policymakers must recognize heritage conservation as a form-function phenomenon that is affected by a series of intervention decisions (Ashworth, 1991). Wang and Lee (2008) draw attention to the importance of the local history, traditions and the unique cultures of cities in attracting tourists and promoting economy as a way of managing sustainable urban development. Therefore, to manage urban growth appropriately, heritage conservation, development, social and economic factors, and physical factors (e.g. forms and function) must be appreciated and understood by both planners and developers.

#### **Heritage conservation in Egypt**

Little attention had been given to the protection and conservation of the cultural heritage of later periods of Egyptian his-

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