

Local strategies for conservation architectural and archaeological heritage (Case study: Old Town of Gaza city - Palestine)

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Abstract

The article reviews the national and local heritage context, identifies some of the threats for the Palestinian heritage before suggesting key priorities and recommendations and this article explores the case study of the archaeological buildings of old city of Gaza that have deteriorated by the occupation in recent years were as a result of conflicts, siege and also negative attitude by the local and international institutions towards the management of cultural heritage sites of Gaza city and also this strategy focuses on areas where the institutions have a direct role or responsibilities and where it has influence in the decision making and management process through the planning system for factors influencing the physical security of the architectural and archaeological heritage of the old city of Gaza, including during the last war on Gaza 2014.

Keywords: *Local strategies, Archaeology, Conflict, Architectural Heritage, Historical development, conservation architectural.*

1. Introduction

Heritage buildings are part of human creation, which produces icons for a country, provides local identity, reflects the cultural values and background, represents a source of memory, historical events, and also contributes to the tourism business industry. [1] The dangers which increasingly threaten archaeological heritage in many countries not only need protective legislation, but also require policy interventions on a large scale if this heritage is to be saved for posterity.

Over the years, more and more advanced technologies have been developed for the protection of all kinds of archaeological heritage. However, in Palestine, threats to archaeological resources are still a reality despite protective legislation and policy measures put in place by the UNESCO to manage archaeological heritage in the country.

Palestinian's cultural legacy is one of the world's most diverse has been influenced by various cultures which left their mark on the region since prehistoric times. Its cultural heritage goes back to the 4th century CE. [7] After the many wars, which have been exposed to Palestine... Historically, Palestinians saw a full-scale destruction of their cultural heritage in the aftermath of the wars and also 'hundreds of archaeological sites have been looted and plundered during the years of occupation, and there has been an active illegal trade in cultural property' [3].

Some of the Palestine heritage sites are in poor state, while others lack the basic amenities and infrastructural network required to preserve and maintain the sites, especially in Gaza. Local communities at times destroy heritage to mine construction stones while others, remove them, and create new buildings. Many a times, these communities are oblivious of the damages their actions cause to archaeological sites, artefacts, monuments, and other cultural heritage in their midst. Because of this, valuable heritage which the country needs for its socioeconomic and cultural development has been lost.

It is on this basis that the study sought to investigate the protective legislation, policy and practice of Archaeological Heritage Management in Gaza. And recommend changes to improve protection, preservation, and use of archaeological resources in the Palestine for future prosperity.

This document is set in 10-point Times New Roman. If absolutely necessary, we suggest the use of condensed line spacing rather than smaller point sizes. Some technical formatting software print mathematical formulas in italic type, with subscripts and superscripts in a slightly smaller font size. This is acceptable.

2. The article goal

The objective of this strategy is to provide a framework for how we understand, preserve, manage, integrate, interpret and promote our heritage in the immediate and long term future. It is for everyone who is involved with and has an interest in the Gaza’s historic environment including residents, owners, organizations, applicants, developers and officers.

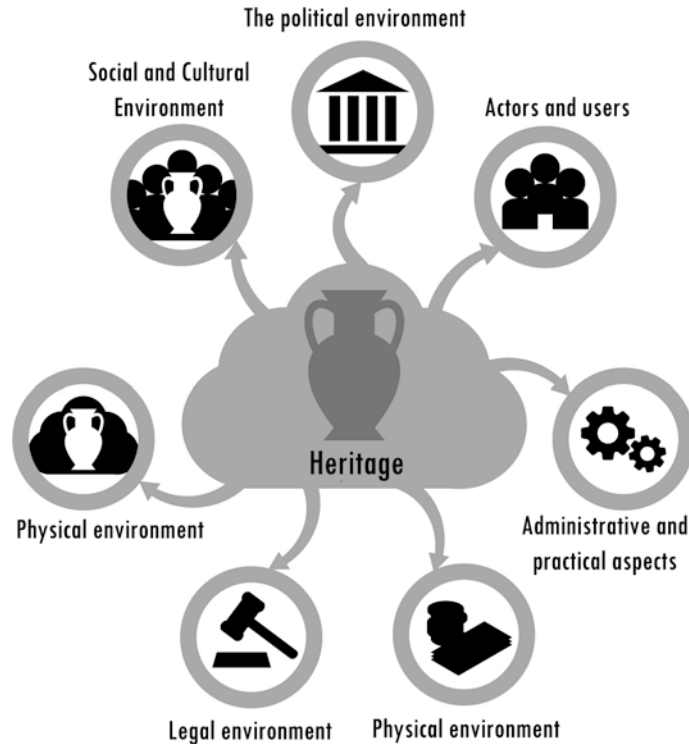


Fig. 1 Risk management procedures for heritage. [4]

3. Questions?

Why cultural heritage is attacked in conflict? ; Why people risk everything to save it? ; What the ways we save, protect and restore what is targeted? Architectural heritage Under Attack, why some try to erase or exploit culture, while others risk everything to protect, restoration and rebuild it.

4. Historical Background

Old cities are the jewels of any society or civilization. With their narrow alleys, houses, castles, worship places, and markets, old cities tell whoever walks through many stories, not only about the past, but also about the present, and the future. Indeed, these cities in every single part of our world are eternal histories that should be preserved and protected.

In historical Palestine, old cities received their share of suffering due to the ongoing occupation and conflict. In fact, old cities, like Jerusalem and Hebron are raging centers of conflict between religions, ideologies, cultures, and identities. I can understand that such conflicts can erupt due to ideological or religious tensions related to these places and lead to destroying parts of these cities, but what is completely not understood for me is how a city like Gaza, with no conflicts over its old city, had lost the majority of its ancient face during the wars. [3]

We will begin by explaining the historical development of the city of Gaza and its major archaeological sites. And the most important factors affecting the preservation of architectural heritage in Gaza city and identify all problems and challenges, and the findings and recommendations proposed by researchers to preserve what remains of our cultural and heritage resources.

4.1 The historical development of the ancient town of Gaza City

Gaza is a historic city with a 5,000 years old history, making it one of the oldest cities in the world [3]. The coastal city which overlooks the Mediterranean Sea witnessed continuous settlement from the Bronze Age [4]. Gaza is almost there when we read the history of every well-known civilization in mankind’s history. So, if Gaza has this long history with all these civilizations passed by. Where did the archaeological and ancient face of Gaza go?

Gaza is one of the richest crossroads of cultural history in the region, with many archaeological sites and historic buildings. The whole region has an exceptionally complex and rich cultural heritage and it is of greatest importance that all parties in the conflict take whatever precautions necessary to avoid destruction and damage to cultural heritage.

Table 1: Historical eras that passed through Gaza Strip – Palestine.

<i>Margin</i>	<i>Time period</i>	Historical Era
1	3000 - 1200 BC.	Canaanites period
2	332 - 65 BC.	Greek period
3	65 BC - 634 AD.	Roman and Byzantine periods
4	637-1517 AD.	Islamic period to the Mamluk.
5	1517-1917 AD.	Ottoman period.
6	1923 – 1948 AD.	British mandate.
7	1948-1967 AD.	Egyptian administration.
8	1967-2005 AD.	Israel.
9	1994-2007 AD.	Palestinian National Authority.
10	Since 2007 to now.	Hamas

4.1.1 Gaza’s Antiquities and heritage assets include: 145 Statutory Listed Buildings, these are designated by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Gaza and some local institutions. One of the oldest building, is the Omari Grand Mosque in Gaza city and there are of many important archaeological buildings such as ‘Pervirios Church, Hashim Mosque and Hamam Al-Samrah Etc.’. Only in the old town of Gaza city, but there are many sites and archaeological buildings in Gaza Strip, such as ‘the Monastery of St. Hilarion, in the Nuseirat area south of city, Castle Barqouq in the city of ‘Khan Younis’ south of city and the Byzantine Church north of city ... Etc. [6]

- The most important archaeological buildings that were destroyed by the owners during the recently:

- The demolition of the historic palace Sisalem archaeological (built in Mamluk era), House Al-Kateb archaeological (built in Ottoman era), which is the house of the Turkish army commander in Gaza, there are a lot of archaeological buildings that have been destroyed! Are examples of the inadequacy of the Palestinian laws to protect heritage buildings?

Nearly 300 historic buildings built between 1517 and 1917 throughout the Gaza strip which are worthy for preservation and conservation.

- Recently until 2019, only 170 heritage buildings (Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage - Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Gaza, 2019). We will lose more archaeological buildings in the near future.

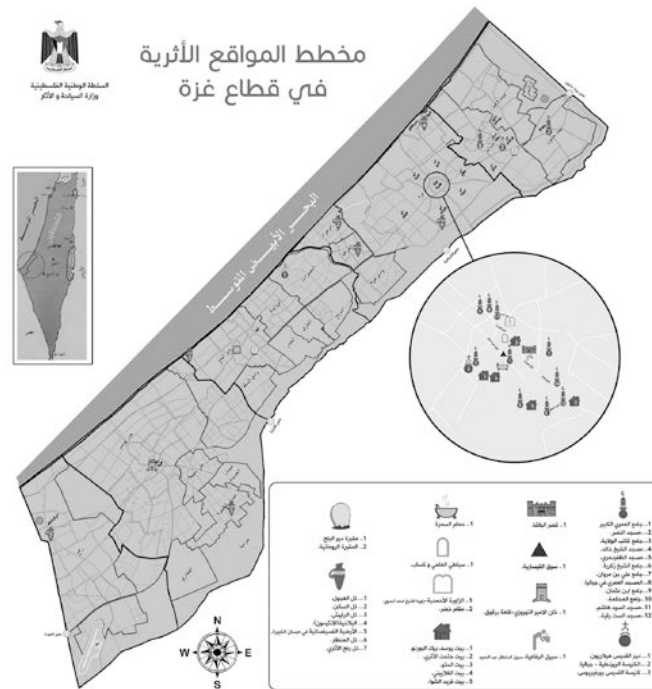


Fig. 2 A map showing the most important archaeological sites in the Gaza Strip – Palestine [6]

5. The importance of heritage for Gaza city

The case for heritage providing key economic, social and environmental benefits is well-argued and evidenced. Economy: In terms of the economy, heritage can act as a major catalyst and building block for attracting investment and businesses and supporting tourism and jobs. Social: The social benefits from understanding our heritage include protecting and building the sense of local identity, pride and community. There are wider education benefits both within and beyond the school curriculum when heritage activities offer opportunities for integration and life-long learning for all ages. In an increasingly stressful world, visits to and walks through a historic buildings, townscape or corridors Al-Sobats improves mental and physical health and well-being. Environmental: Among the environmental benefits of heritage is its sustainable credentials. Due to embodied energies it is more sustainable to convert and re-use a historic building than demolish it and build a new one. Heritage projects and improvements make the Gaza a more attractive place to live and work and a heritage based approach to asset management has benefits for ecology and nature conservation. Locally identified issues include:

- 5.1 Concerns from the local community over the lack of investment in the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities team resources to protect and enhance the Gaza’s heritage assets.
- 5.2 The need for more pro-active work, for the delivery of Conservation Area appraisal project work to build understanding and informed management of change and also to provide the finance to deliver the appraisal recommendations and support sustainable management.
- 5.3 Better support from UNESCO to support engagement and build community capacity.
- 5.4 Suggestions were also made for the promotion of heritage initiatives, of restoration of historic buildings.
- 5.5 The need for up-to-date evidence base information for most of the Gaza’s heritage assets. A “Buildings at Risk” survey was undertaken in 2019 but now needs a complete review. The Local Listed Buildings list was prepared in 2012 but this is incomplete. [Source: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities - Gaza 2019]
- 5.6 Concerns over the lack of financial support for Antiquities and heritage projects and initiatives.
- 5.7 Limited enforcement activities for monitoring compliance with planning conditions for the maintenance and management of historic assets, this reflects the staff resources available within the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.
- 5.8 There is an increased need to provide web-based information which is readily accessible, which is currently being done by the Canaan International Foundation in Gaza. [Source: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities - Gaza 2019].

6. Threats

- Organizations and their structures are changing, e.g. there are two Ministries of Antiquities in Palestine because of political differences, resulting reduce activities on protection of historic sites and buildings and heritage services are a luxury rather than a regulatory planning function.
- The lack of clear strategic priorities for the Heritage team and constraints on resources create a focus on short term reactive work.
- Limited budgets to support heritage initiatives and activities.
- Heritage responsibilities are spread between a wide range of external organizations and also internal parts of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities which can cause confusion over responsibilities and the dilution of expertise.
- The need for up-to-date records about historical buildings makes it difficult to guide and deliver appropriate sustainable development which effectively considers the historic environment.
- Different public perceptions of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities role, which can be seen as being too interfering by imposing unnecessary conditions for applicants or not being sufficiently pro-active and protective.
- Heritage can sometimes be seen as academic, re-active and elitist and it is particularly difficult to engage younger sections of the community.

7. Antiquities laws in Palestine

The Ottomans issuing increasingly more stringent legal instruments (Antiquities decrees of 1869, 1874, 1884, 1906) concerning excavation rights and ownership of immovable and movable findings. According to the 1906 decree, all antiquities found in or on public or private lands were state property and could not be taken out of the country. However, the Ottoman legislation did not define the nature of “antiquities” and was unable to prevent transgressions. As soon as they occupied Palestine the British authorities paid particular attention to the supervision of activities related to antiquities and issued an Antiquities (military) Proclamation in 1918. In 1929, an Antiquities Ordinance was adopted and was amended several times afterward. The Ordinance is still in force in the Gaza Strip. [8]

In a sense, the British Mandate era can be described as the era of antiquities preservation; Mandate authorities created a government supervisory department, protected existing sites, regulated excavations through professional licensing, and established the Palestine Archaeological Museum, also known as the Rockefeller Museum). However, it is difficult to estimate the loss brought about to the Palestinian heritage. Much more devastating than some aspects of the Mandate’s antiquities policy, was the Mandate’s sponsoring of the Zionist project, which has been an ongoing disaster for the Palestinian people and their land. [12]

Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip after the June 1967 war. Both Antiquities Laws (the 1966 law in force in the West Bank and the 1929 law in force in Gaza) were adopted by the Israeli occupying forces and amended several times by the “civil” administration through military orders.

After signing the Oslo Accord with Israel in 1993, the PLO revived the 1929 and 1966 laws. The Palestinian Authority has not prioritized the protection or the restoration of heritage; it has proposed no heritage legislation and has dedicated few if any resources to heritage preservation. [8]

8. List of international charters and conventions: [11]

- 8.1 The Ancient Monuments Preservation Ordinance No. 17 of 1927
- 8.2 The Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Paleontological Interest Ordinance of 1934
- 8.3 The Antiquities and Monuments Act, Cap 215 of 1983
- 8.4 The National Museums Act of 1983
- 8.5 The National Museums and Heritage Act No. 6 of 2006
- 8.6 The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice Charter) of 1964
- 8.7 Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage (ICOMOS Charter) of 1990
- 8.8 The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation of the United States of America of 1974
- 8.9 The Australian ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance of 1981
- 18.10 The Florence Charter on Historic Gardens of 1982.

9. The role of government and local institutions in the preservation of Palestinian heritage:

In the Gaza Strip, some of the most precious historical sites, dating back thousands of years, have been gravely damaged not only by repeated Israeli bombardments but also by construction over sites (for instance the Mamluk Barquq Fort in Khan Yunis) and from government neglect. Examples of the latter include the Anthedon Harbor in northern Gaza that goes back

to the Assyrian, Roman, and Greek eras from 1200 B.C. to A.D. 324; and Tallat Um ‘Amir, which hosts a third century Christian monastery, Saint Hilarion, in Nussayrat.

The creation of the Palestinian Authority on parts of Palestine created an environment for agencies and institutions to take action to protect cultural heritage. These include governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, semi-governmental agencies. These institutions have planned and implemented conservation strategies and tactics to protect Palestinian heritage.

Since 1993, many historic buildings and towns throughout the West Bank have benefitted from intensive restoration, rehabilitation, and revitalization programs. Huge restoration and regeneration projects have been undertaken for the historic centers of Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus, and Jenin. [8]

In Gaza, apart from small projects carried out by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Iwan Centre for Architecture Heritage in Gaza and Riwaq Centre, little has been done to restore cultural heritage.



Fig. 3 Omar al-Mukhtar Street in the middle of the old city of Gaza before and after the First World War.

10. Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict:

“When the civil administration collapses cultural heritage, such as archaeological sites, is in great danger of being looted. Stress that international humanitarian law also protects cultural property. It urges all parties concerned to be mindful of their responsibilities to respect the provisions of The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and its two Protocols, which calls on countries 'not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage' in the territory of other countries [3]. Gaza needs its cultural heritage to strengthen its identity and unity.

10.1 The role of international institutions in the preservation of Palestinian heritage:

What can international organisations do to preserve and promote cultural heritage?

There is a wide variety of transnational or international cultural heritage organizations (UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS, ALECSO, Aga Khan, Europa Nostra, Global Heritage Fund, World Historic Cities, world Monument Fund). These examples are either foundations based in a specific country and operating globally or a network of actors of the heritage sector that enables heritage professionals to interact globally and promote a certain vision of heritage preservation.

Beyond the local or national interests, some organisations try to promote heritage beyond state boundaries, either based on the assumption that cultural heritage is universal (like UNESCO or ICOMOS), or by supporting the heritage of a community that goes beyond national boundaries (like Aga Khan or Europa Nostra).

Generally, international organisations cannot impose their decisions on national authorities or local government. Rather, international heritage organisation’s actions create willingness to preserve and safeguard heritage by exchanging ideas and norms or by providing resources. [13]

UNESCO weighed in when it affirmed that the ‘Palestinian sites are cultural treasures that the Palestinian people wish to protect and share with the world’. UNESCO appealed to Israel to recognize its commitments as an occupying power and to recognize that ‘confiscation and developments of Palestinian heritage sites and cultural property by Israel is prohibited under customary international law’. [9] The world heritage committee of UNESCO is a rare case that has legally binding instruments as it operates through international conventions like the 1964 Venice Charter. Yet, it can be difficult for UNESCO to coerce states or local communities in their behavior related to cultural heritage. The only means UNESCO has to enforce the preservation and protection of heritage are either putting a site on the list of endangered heritage or to unlist it.

11. Conclusions

Heritage is more than old buildings, however beautiful - it is about the wider history, setting and associations of our buildings, that provide the sense of place and identity to our communities and that give places meaning for us. In every case they are more than just a sum of their parts and contribute at many levels to the social, environmental and economic life of the Gaza. However, they are irreplaceable resources which are vulnerable to gradual change from lack of maintenance as well as from more dramatic changes including development pressures that can cause them to reduce or lose their significance and place in our consciousness.

- Conserving the 'living' heritage, therefore, offers the potential ways of conserving a building.
- Conserving the unprotected architectural heritage and sites ensures the survival of the country's sense of place and its very character in a globalizing environment.
- This 'living' heritage also has symbiotic relationships with the natural environments within which it originally evolved. However, abandoned and ruined heritage buildings are still an evident generally in Gaza.
- The abandoned and ruined heritage buildings of Gaza city:
- No conservation works were carried out on these iconic physical building which were rich in Cultural Values Heritage Buildings heritage in Gaza city.

12. Recommendations:

We pleased to recommend this new Heritage Strategy which identifies some of the issues and makes recommendations for the immediate and longer term. It is aimed at everyone who is concerned with the historic environment.

- We think of our listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments as being the Gaza's "Jewels". They are important as individual entities but together they also help to create our unique historic environment. Whilst they add architectural, historic, artistic and archaeological value beyond their functional utility they also contribute towards the social and economic vitality of the Gaza.
- Our heritage defines who we are and what makes ourselves and our environment distinctive. It is also about our attitudes and changing perspectives. Conservation planning used to be seen as seeking to preserve sites "in aspic" but now the focus is changing to a more positive and integrated approach where heritage is seen as an asset rather than a constraint and where conservation is about a more informed management of change.

12.1 At the governmental level:

- As the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has a duty to care for its historic environment and the assets it contains.
- To deliver the objectives set out in recent planning policy guidance through the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Local Plan and Development Management Plan where heritage is seen as an the integral part of the decision making process and contributes to the quality of decisions.
- To build on the local support to protect the character of the area, the historic environment and its assets.
- To recognize the value and significance of heritage assets rather than seeing them as negative constraints to future development.
- To support and publicize local initiatives through the Ministry website and social media.
- To use the strategy to identify and agree the Antiquities section's objectives and priorities to develop an efficient and effective service with identified resources. Agree on work programmers and explore new sources to deliver some Antiquities related projects.
- Develop and expand partnership working with business men.

12.2 At the community level:

- The Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas 1987 (Washington Charter) clearly stated that: "The participation and the involvement of the residents are essential for the success of the conservation programme and should be encouraged. [10]
- The conservation of historic towns and urban areas concerns their residents first of all" (ICOMOS 1987, Article 3). The Burra Charter emphasizes that heritage conservation cannot be sustained without community participation (ICOMOS, 1999, Article 12).

13. Key priorities to preserve archaeological and heritage buildings:

Previous sections have identified some of the different issues and challenges which affect the historic environment and the shortfalls in our knowledge base and service delivery. These have identified key priorities for future work and suggested a number of recommendations to deliver them. The four key work priorities are as follows:

1. Deliver an informed regulatory planning service which maximizes opportunities for the conservation of heritage assets, including those most at risk through decay, neglect and other threats.
2. Work with our partners to co-ordinate a “joined-up” approach to delivering heritage services.
3. Work with and support the local heritage community.
4. Improve awareness and understanding of Gaza’s heritage assets and issues.

Conclusion:

There is a clear steer from national legislation and guidance for local authorities to set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. It is essential to recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and to conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. The presumption is to deliver sustainable development and heritage should play an important part in this agenda. This includes the re-use or regeneration of existing historic buildings which utilises “embodied” energy. The use of the words “historic environment” makes it clear that any strategy should be about more than just individual heritage assets. Successful implementation will depend on the effective and innovative use of existing and future resources, on joined up thinking, co-operation from other stakeholders and an acknowledgement of collective responsibility.

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