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A new comprehensive approach for architectural heritage conservation: The case of Al-Alami house in Gaza

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Abstract: Most traditional approaches of architectural heritage conservation viewed architectural heritage as a static bulk of stones that need technical interference. This view damaged the continuity of historical buildings and their urban context with its history and identity. There is a growing need for a new comprehensive approach for architectural heritage conservation that is capable to bring back this heritage to life and to restore its dynamics and continuity. This research presents a comprehensive approach for architectural heritage conservation. This approach engages all the important elements of conservation in one complete package. These elements are generative, responsive, adaptive, sustainable, participatory, and conciliatory. The research also aims to bring more attention to one distinguished applications of this approach at the historical Al-Alami house in Gaza, Palestine. Our research applies a qualitative approach with in-depth analysis, critical reflection, and synthesis of available literature. Each one of the elements of the comprehensive approach is discussed to show its theoretical development and practical applications through international projects. The case study of the architectural conservation of Al-Alami house in Gaza, Palestine is then discussed in detail. The literature review revealed that some of elements of the comprehensive approach have been individually considered. Moreover, the international applications of groups of these elements highlight the need for more comprehensiveness and inclusion. The case of Gaza shows that despite living under devastating conditions for decades, it was possible to implement some of the elements of the comprehensive approach in a determined and innovative way. The new comprehensive approach provides a good opportunity for the development of architectural heritage conservation practices. Still, it requires further elaboration to provide more extensive detailing and tuning. The research opens the door for future development and discussion of the approach.

Keywords: Gaza, Palestine, architecture, heritage, conservation, comprehensive

INTRODUCTION

The architectural heritage of historical cities is a manifestation of the relationships between the environment, society, and culture. The preservation of this heritage depends on how conservation projects respect these relationships. Doratli et al. (2004) argue that conventional planning approaches to conservation cannot provide suitable solutions for the problems of architectural conservation. They address technical-scientific issues concerning material aspects of historical buildings. They concentrate on site-specific recording, protection, and regulation. At the same time, these approaches deal with the historic environment as a static geometrical framework with fixed spatial-temporal boundaries. This contradicts with the evolutionary generative processes that shaped the historic environments (Eren and Keçik, 2014). Few innovative approaches tried to bypass these old-fashioned ones by using separated individualised concepts (Radosavljević et al., 2019). This research provides a brief review of these concepts before arriving at a new comprehensive approach that covers the principal aspects of architectural heritage conservation. The research provides a detailed original case study in which the author participated as the director of conservation for the Al-Alami house in Gaza, Palestine.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Several approaches have been applied for architectural heritage conservation. Some of them perceive architectural heritage as a static dead construction of stones that only need technical intervention. Others only addressed certain separate sides of the conservation problems leaving other important sides neglected. These approaches affect the liveability and continuity of architectural heritage and its connections with the physical and human contexts. This research is an attempt to outline a comprehensive approach to architectural heritage conservation that preserves the physical structure of the buildings and the social and cultural life around them with all its dynamics, identity and continuity.

The research aimed at:

- Highlighting the need for a new understanding of architectural heritage and the way it should be preserved.

- Pointing out the shortcomings of the traditional conservation approaches that only deal with the physical structures of heritage buildings.
- Providing a new approach to architectural heritage conservation that includes all the vital aspects necessary for the development of architectural heritage and its integration with the continuing life of people.
- Applying the comprehensive approach to the existing conditions of architectural heritage in the Gaza Old Town (GOT), Palestine raising the awareness towards its suffering and devastation. A case study from GOT is used: Al-Alami house which was one of the unique examples of residential architectural heritage in Gaza and went through a distinguished conservation project.

The importance of the research arises from its unique and novel consideration of the different factors affecting all sides of architectural heritage conservation. The importance of this approach (abbreviated as GRASP) lies in the fact that it looks at architectural heritage as a live entity that has been developed dynamically through the ages and needs to continue its contribution to the life of people. This is in addition to the unique application of the GRASP to the conservation projects in Gaza, Palestine.

The research depends on the systematic reviews and synthesis of existing literature. It uses the categorization of the different elements of architectural heritage conservation needed for the comprehensive conservation process. Conservation strategies were then developed for each one of these elements within each of the different sections of urban development which include society-culture, economy, environment, and urban structure. At the same time the research uses the case study analysis to examine the application of the comprehensive approach in conservation projects.

MODERN CONCEPTS OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Several concepts of architectural heritage conservation have been introduced in the previous decades. Hakim (2007) elaborated on adaptive reuse. Steinberg (2008) discussed participatory conservation which stimulates the public participation in the conservation process. Fister (2001) denoted to the concept of the Granada Convention in the 1970s: "integral protection". This concept highlighted the role of the built heritage not only as document of history but also as a quality part of the human environment. Rodwell (2003) emphasised the need for a comprehensive approach for architectural conservation to make the traditional environment a pleasant place for life. This research is an attempt to develop a comprehensive approach that considers the important elements of architectural heritage conservation. The new group of elements includes:

- Generative
- Responsive
- Adaptive
- Sustainable
- Participatory
- Conciliatory

The research explains these six components of the comprehensive approach hereafter.

Generative

Generative development processes are those processes responsible for the creation, development, and continuity of the "dynamic complex adaptive environments that embody the virtues of complexity and sustainability" (Hakim, 2007). They represent the complex interactivity of the different systems working together in the built environment (Ma, 2024). These processes are continuous and adapted by the whole community to the ever-changing spatial-temporal needs. The result is an organic dynamic liveable fabric of the built environment. On the contrary, pre-planned blueprints schemes produce static dispersed spaces disconnected from the actual dynamism of the community. They further impeded the community with dispersion and discontinuity. Generative processes that govern the development of historical cities have the following components (Hakim, 2007):

- Ethical norms derived from the history and value system of society.
- Private and public rights with equity and justice.
- Private and public responsibilities.
- Flexible system of control and management.
- Comprehensive sets of rules and codes.

The conservation of architectural heritage should therefore consider its generative nature. Its liveability is not the fixed images that only represent one phase of their continuous development (Radosavljević et al., 2019). The use and reuse of the traditional built environments respected the processes that generated them (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, 2016). Modern conservation plans cannot help to preserve the generative nature of historical areas through urban renewal plans. This would bring catastrophic deterioration and destruction to heritage areas (Tarkay, 2010). At the same time, the conservation of historic cities cannot be successful by reusing historical buildings for restricted activities (Pulles et al., 2023).

Radosavljević et al. (2019) argue that there is a need to reuse the generative nature of historical architecture to produce generative models for their surroundings. Urban planning and urban design projects must consider the generative nature of historical areas. They must respect the generative nature of social and cultural process in the built environment (Smith, 2024). Governments, non-governmental organisations, international bodies, and private sector should cooperate to preserve the generative development of architectural heritage. The generative approach helps to keep the process of morphogenesis development of the generative historical environment (Minervino, 2019). Minervino (2019, p. 74) in his study of the conservation of historical architecture in Calabria, Italy, outlined the important aspects for developing the generative nature of historical environments:

- Innovative attitudes and practices of local government institutions.
- Improved urban planning tools.
- Acceptance of generative programs by the local community.
- Development of research and education to raise the awareness of the community towards the importance of generative conservation.

Radosavljević et al. (2019) in their study of the heritage conservation of the town of Kikinda, Serbia, found that the generative approach was the best to be applied to preserve the resilience and continuity of the historical city through nodes and networks.

Tab. 1. A general outline of strategies that might be used in the generative architectural conservation process. (Source: Author, 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment	Conservation strategies of GRASP
Generative	Society-culture	Community engagement and participation. Dynamic social interaction. Continuous cultural development
	Economy	Flexible historical environment for resilient, dynamic, and circular economic activity.
	Environment	Progressive environmental development of buildings and spaces through generative architecture, urban design and landscape architecture.
	Urban fabric	Historical buildings should continue to be part of the generative context. Positively integrated within the surroundings. Flexible buildings and spaces that allow for dynamic change and development

Tab. 2. A general outline of strategies that might be used in the responsive architectural conservation process. (Source: Author, 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment	Conservation strategies of GRASP
Responsive	Society-culture	Analysis of problems, needs, and aspirations of the community. Public awareness, empowerment and engagement in the conservation process.
	Economy	Flexible conservation that respond to the changing market development. Upgrading the economic value of the historical environment to respond to community needs.
	Environment	Respond to environmental problems and climate change. Provide solutions to the environmental problems in the local urban context.
	Urban fabric	Taking care of the conditions of areas surrounding the conservation project. Provide suitable architectural and urban design solutions for surrounding areas.

Responsive

Architectural heritage conservation is a responsive process to counteract the decay and deterioration affecting historical buildings (Homaira, 2024). This process should not stop at the physical fabric of historical buildings. People constructed these buildings through complex responses to a wide set of factors that create the whole structure of the built environment with its social, cultural, and economic settings (Enotiades, 2004). The challenge is not to preserve historical buildings or to adapt them to new uses. It is how to make this preservation and adaptation respond to real problems, needs, and aspirations of the community (Hakim, 1991). This is an important measure for the success of architectural heritage conservation. It is vital to determine to what extent do conservation programs relate to the changing settings of the urban structure (Arif, 1992).

For example, consumers increasingly express their desire to purchase products and services from environmentally responsive companies (Buyukdigan, 2003). Historical buildings in this regard are environmentally wise in terms of their building materials and construction techniques. They are also wise in terms of their functions and uses. Such buildings provide good opportunity for the environmentally responsive companies to respond to their customer's needs. (İpekoğlu et al., 2007) Limiting responsive conservation to only incorporating environmental technologies like solar panels or photovoltaic cells is a misrepresentation of the abilities of these buildings (D'Amore, 1992). Prizeman (2015) outlined some of the important responses that heritage conservation should consider. They include the environmental, economic, social, cultural, and technological responses.

Gurnick and Lah (2019) in their study of the conservation project of Negova Castle, Slovenia, emphasized the need "to challenge the traditional object-based approach and its criteria". They argue that it is difficult for architectural conservation to be successful "without understanding and properly balancing its contemporary and sustained values and without meeting the current social needs." They discovered that the castle has been successfully transformed from fortress to residence in the past, to respond to the needs of the community. They demand that new conservation projects should also effectively respond to the different challenges of contemporary life.

Adaptive

Historical buildings represent high value resources in terms of their social, historical, and cultural wealth. Adaptation through privatisation and the economic reuse of historic buildings is not sufficient (Vafaie et al., 2023). Adaptation concentrates on preserving the quality of the historic buildings while at the same time adapting them to modern economic, cultural, and social settings (Steinberg, 2008). This adaptive reuse of historic buildings can strengthen their economic base and respond to the evolving social and economic needs. It is crucial to point out here that adaptation aiming only for economic benefits will be destructive for both the physical heritage and its social and cultural contents as well. Aspirations of the community in addition to their culture and social settings should be taken into consideration in addition to addressing the incredibly exceptional circumstances of historical buildings (UNESCO, 1976).

These suitable rules and guidelines should govern adaptive reuse to secure the historical built environment from harmful interventions (Itopia, 2009). Disli (2018) pointed out that many international organisations like UNESCO, ICOMOS, and others do not welcome the adaptation of historical buildings by adding new parts to them. Many charters, regulations, and directions have been published to guide the adaptation of historical buildings worldwide. In her study of adaptive conservation projects in Ankara, Turkey, Disli (2018) provided examples of compatible projects like the conservation of Cukur Khan which had several additions that wisely complemented the historical building. The building was transformed into a boutique hotel, preserving its historical function and continuing its role in the surrounding settings.

Tab. 3. A general outline of strategies that might be used in the adaptive architectural conservation process. (Source: Author 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment	Conservation strategies of GRASP
Adaptive	Society-culture	Addition of suitable forms and details. Careful removal of unrepairable parts. Suitable, flexible, and resilient reuse that fits within its context
	Economy	Adding new functions. Adapting to more suitable functions. Establishing more sustainable and resilient economic connections with the context
	Environment	Adding compatible renewable energy technologies. Using suitable materials and forms in new additions. Adapting buildings to modern water and energy supplies, ICT and transport
	Urban fabric	The adaptation should respect not only the building but also its relationships with the surroundings. The adaptation should preserve or suitably alter circulation pattern and pedestrian movement.

Tab. 4. A general outline of strategies that might be used in the sustainable architectural conservation process. (Source: Author 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment	Conservation strategies of GRASP
Sustainable	Society-culture	Equal access for all to all aspects of the project and its venues. İntegration of the project in the evolving cultural settings of the project.
	Economy	Support for the economy with innovation functional development of the project. Optimisation of resources including building materials and space. Minimisation of expenditure and maximisation of revenues.
	Environment	Pollution reduction. Water and energy savings. Increasing green and saving water resources. Encouraging pedestrian, cycling, and public transport. Reduction of private car use.
	Urban fabric	Minimal architectural and urban design solutions. Preserving the surrounding style and identity.

Sustainable

The term sustainability is new compared to the historical richness of historical architecture. Sustainability as a term and practice started to appear in the late 19th century. It can be said that historical architecture is originally sustainable. It gave sensitive considerations for the environment, society, and resources. Historical architecture represents the wise use of materials and spaces, the environmental considerations in building design and construction, and the social integration and cohesion (ICOMOS, 2021). It was not before the start of the 21st century when sustainability was related to the conservation of architectural heritage. The Budapest Declaration on World Heritage 2002 was the first international declaration to link sustainable development to architectural heritage conservation (Homaira, 2024). The main concern of the declaration was to insure the application of sustainability principles in the architectural conservation process, especially the environmental aspects. Examples of these include the use of renewable energy technologies, saving resources, and the wise management of the conservation process. There is a need to apply an integrated approach of sustainability in the architectural conservation process that includes all aspects of sustainability (Rodwell, 2003).

Sustainable architectural conservation should maintain the continuous intergenerational development of historical buildings with all their economic, environmental, and social components (ICOMOS, 2021). For example, sustainable conservation projects observing social sustainability should guarantee that the project provides access for all. Their benefits should be distributed to all. They should continuously contribute to the development of peaceful, integrative, and respectful culture. They should be contributing to the development and preservation of the social structure of the community (Bersani et al., 2015). In their study of the conservation project of the Musa Pak Complex in Multan, Pakistan, Bersani et al. (2015) highlighted the sustainable value of the project through its ability to preserve the complex and social and economic structures around it.

Participatory

Participation is one of the important drives for the development of historical architecture (Price, 2020). People used to help each other with the construction of their houses by providing workmanship, building materials, food, or monetary funding (Amiry and Tamari, 1989). Many cultures had special norms and social commitments governing this practice. Participation in architectural conservation projects is usually misunderstood. It cannot be limited to merely holding public relations programs to promote the conservation projects of public agencies (Mahimoud and Iqbal, 2021). Public participation is a process to engage public ideas, values, into the decision-making process of architectural conservation. Effective participation means empowerment, commitment, and dedication. (Dian and Abdullah, 2013)

Participation is a crucial drive to develop working relationships with all stakeholders. Owners, users, investors, and politicians are increasingly becoming important partners in architectural heritage conservation (Melic, 2019). These parties need attractive prospects to be involved in the conservation process and also need to preserve their legal rights. For example, architectural conservation policies should consider private market participation for boosting the economy of historic buildings and their urban context (Ashworth, 1997). The ideal aim of participation is that stakeholders will be promoted to finance, implement, monitor, and evaluate conservation activities in their areas as active players and decision makers, not as passive spectators (eCFR, 2011). Dian and Abdullah (2013) showed that public participation in Malaysia empowers participants to take part in the decision-making process and to be part of the architectural heritage conservation process. Han et al. (2024) in their study of the architectural conservation of Wooden Arch Corridor "Qiansheng Bridge", China, established the different factors that affect public participation. They include:

- Development of science, education, management, and private and public administration.
- Acceptance and empowerment of the local population.
- The cooperation and integration between public and private sectors.

Tab. 5. A general outline of strategies that might be used in the participatory architectural conservation process. (Source: Author, 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment	Conservation strategies of GRASP
Participatory	Society-culture	Public awareness, empowerment, participation, and engagement in the conservation process.
	Economy	Engaging the stakeholders in the economic activities of the conservation process with suitable incentives and clear legal rights.
	Environment	Public participation in the environmental development of the project and its surroundings. Continuous education and training.
	Urban fabric	Public participation of the private and public sectors in the planning, design, and construction of the building and spaces of the project and its surroundings.

Tab. 6. A general outline of strategies that might be in the reconciliatory architectural conservation process. (Source: Author, 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment	Conservation strategies of GRASP
Reconciliatory	Society-culture	Public awareness, education and training. Support and promotion of positive socio-cultural settings.
	Economy	Open and inclusive economy for all. Economic healing from past conflicts. Human capital development.
	Environment	Restoration of damaged areas. Green for peace. Exchange of knowledge, skills, and experience.
	Urban fabric	Architectural design promotes the culture of peace and reconciliation. Urban space to provide for indoor and outdoor public activities for peace and reconciliation.

Reconciliatory

Architectural heritage development is an act of peace and reconciliation (Saldin, 2018). Past communities around the world used to have special ritual, cultural, and special social norms for the construction of their buildings (Mahrok, 1995). Special values were given to the building activity. Community cooperation was considered a religious and cultural commitment (Rapoport, 1982). This also was supplemented by the social structure and its frameworks like kinship and neighbourhood (Amiry and Tamari, 1989). The construction process used to go peacefully and joyfully in a festival like celebration enhancing the integration and cooperation in the community. This kind of cooperation was an effective tool of reconciliation when animosity and antagonism existed (Nguyen and Duy Ha, 2024).

People need to reconcile because when they forgive and help others to construct their buildings, they will get help when they construct their own buildings. The survival of historical architecture is a sign of the peaceful reconciliation in societies. Historical buildings were destroyed wherever and whenever this peaceful reconciliation did not exist (Saldin, 2018). The concept of peace and reconciliation therefore should be present in modern architectural conservation practices. It is needed not only in post war regions as an artificial peace-making tool, but as an original and authentic concept of peace and development. Karthick (2025) provides a survey of main world conflicts through history and their destructive effects on the historical architecture. She concluded that "Architectural responses hold a crucial role in the post-war reconstruction process, significantly healing wounds, restoring communities, and rebuilding societies." Three approaches to post-war reconciliatory architectural conservation are identified:

- The Tabula Rasa (from Latin, it means a blank slate) approach that involves the total clearance of destroyed structures that cannot be rescued. This approach was applied in Warsaw, Poland after WW2.
- Adaptive Reuse and Preservation which was applied in Beirut, Lebanon after the civil war and Israeli invasion in the 1970s and early 1980s.
- Hybrid Approach which involves a mixture of the two above-mentioned approaches and other means of cooperation between different private and public bodies. This was the case of the development of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, Japan.

THE COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION APPROACH—GRASP

It is concluded from the above discussion that each one of conservation concepts concentrated on certain aspects of architectural conservation. Despite the recognised importance of each of them, it fails to sufficiently fulfil the required needs of historic buildings and their long list of complex challenges. Generative revitalisation by virtue implies the continuous adaptation of the built environment to the changing needs of the community. The adaptive reuse will never succeed without the full participation of the community in financing, managing, and administering the conservation process. Needless to say that the element of sustainability requires the existence of the other elements like participation, adaptation, and regeneration. Finally, the concept of peaceful reconciliation might be the most needed these days where conflicts and wars are affecting many communities around the world and have been seriously affecting architectural heritage. It is desperately needed for the safeguarding of all the other elements. The assembly of all the elements of GRASP and their strategies provides an extensive table that forms a general outline for the application of GRASP.

GRASP and the conservation of architectural heritage in GOT

Most of architectural heritage in GOT dates to the Ottoman period although it is believed that some structures are Ayobid or Mamlok. By the turn of the 20th century, it had a beautiful traditional Mediterranean townscape. It is distinguished for its splendid Ottoman architectural style with houses of courtyards, riwaqs and iwans (large halls and arcades) (Fig. 1). And it is yet another good example of the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians where mosques and churches shared the same walls for centuries (Fig. 2). It started to undergo serious problems with the deterioration of economic conditions during last years of the Ottoman regime which affected many of its structures. This deterioration escalated at the aftermath of World War One (WW1) due to the changes in economy and socio-political structure. Many buildings were damaged including its oldest and largest structure: Great Omary Mosque. The war also affected the behaviour of people and their attitude towards their historical buildings. The gradual decay continued and intensified through the following decades resulting in unprecedented damages to the fabric of GOT which has lost its traditional character.

Development in the built environment of Gaza was greatly disturbed with the consequences of WW1. It took some years before

the British mandate could bring order and stability. This substantial shift cut through the continuity of the traditional generative processes in the city. It produced new trends pushed forward by the British town planning system. New building materials and construction systems began to replace the heavy stone walls and vaulted roofs. The city began to creep westwards onto the sand dunes searching for wider spaces and modern urban facilities. Due to out-migration, many traditional buildings became abandoned with no intention or resources to maintain them. And those which remained have witnessed the introduction of huge modifications. Although the British mandate enforced Town Planning Orders since 1921 with some controls on development in the Old City (Mahrok, 1995), they could not face the great pace of change affected the society (Mahrok, 1999).

Fig. 1. Al Galayeni courtyard house with a riwaq, GOT. (Source: IWAN Centre, 2010)

Fig. 2. Breverios church and Kateb Al Wilaya Mosque share the same wall, GOT. (Source: IWAN Centre, 2010)

At the same time, the ruling class had no real intentions for such conservation and encouraged the development of new cultural styles in terms of language, uniform, norms, building materials and construction. The construction of the new municipal building in the heart of the old city represented a clear manifestation of this direction. After the end of the British Mandate in 1948, Gaza was subjected to another new traumatic disaster. It was cut from the whole Palestine, put under the military Egyptian administration and flooded with huge flows of refugees. Generative processes were deviated to alleviate the heavy burden of the new conditions of fear, perplexity, poverty, and siege. Moreover, the Egyptian administration stepped further to encourage the expansion of the city westwards with very few town planning controls.

Uncertain economic activities continued to exert more damage to the historic centre. The catastrophe reached its climax when the Egyptian administration decided to erase a large area of the historic centre to open a wide street (Fig. 3). As such, private responsibility towards the historic centre vanished while the deterioration of ethical norms continued consequently. This situation continued until 1967 when Gaza came under the Israeli occupation which aimed at furthering the deterioration of the whole Palestinian community (United Nations, 2002). Until recently, nothing has changed. Only few of old structures remain, most of them are mere collapsed stones (Fig. 4). The historic city is now overcrowded with ugly grey concrete structures with no character and identity (Fig. 9). From October 2023 to February 2025, GOT as well as the whole of Gaza Strip came under unstopping fierce bombardment of Israeli forces that left the built environment devastated in unprecedented destruction. Complete neighbourhoods were erased, and all historical buildings and sites were destroyed (Fig. 5).

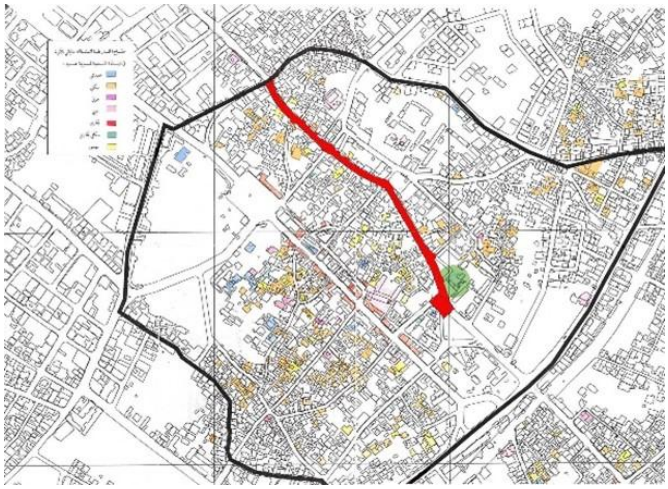

Fig. 3. Al Wahda street erased a large area of GOT. (Source: IWAN Centre, 2010)

Fig. 4. Collapsing traditional houses in GOT. (Source: IWAN Centre, 2010)

Fig. 5. Destruction in GOT after 7 October 2023 did not respect its historical buildings and religious structures. Destruction in Church of St. Porphyrius, Gaza Old Town. (Source: Nadim, 2024)

CASE STUDY: AL-ALAMI HISTORICAL HOUSE

In 2000, the IWAN Centre for Architectural Heritage Conservation was established in the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) as the first centre of this kind in Gaza Strip. IWAN has been struggling to rescue some of the historical buildings in the GOT and succeeded in few attempts. One of the recognised attempts was the conservation of Al-Alami historical house (2009–2010) (Fig. 6). The project was conducted with the help of The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). ICRC used to employ groups of unemployed Palestinian workers in Gaza for three months in doing some public jobs like road cleaning. During the assignment of the author as the director of IWAN he convinced the administration of ICRC to engage these unemployed workers in the conservation of historical buildings in GOT. Some of the workers were skilled building craftsmen. He also convinced the owners of the abandoned Al-Alami historical house to allow IWAN to conduct architectural conservation of the house and offer IWAN the management of the house for 5 years as a cultural centre.

Fig. 6. Al-Alami house under conservation 2009–2010, GOT. (Source: IWAN Centre, 2010)

It was the first time ICRC participated in such activity that got the full support of its general office in Jerusalem. They also contributed a little financial help to pay for some materials necessary for the project. Other materials like paint, steel, stone, wood, cement and the like were donated by the community of Gaza reflecting deep awareness and appreciation of the value of traditional Palestinian architecture. It was a miracle to finish the conservation with these very limited resources and to open it for use. Students of all ages from around Gaza Strip started to visit the house as an example of the distinguished Palestinian cultural identity. Employees of different governmental and non-governmental organisations also visited the house to experience its architecture, aesthetics, and cultural value. Many cultural and art festivals and celebrations were conducted in the house. The house also was used as a special education and training centre for architectural heritage conservation and Palestinian arts and crafts (Fig. 7). Not to mention the use of the house for outside broadcasting of special episodes of cultural radio and TV programs (Fig. 8).

Fig. 7. Students' art training in Al-Alami house, GOT. (Source: Ismail Al-Alami, 2020)

Fig. 8. Outside broadcasting of a special episode of a TV program in Al-Alami house, GOT. (Source: Ismail Al-Alami, 2020)

GRASP AND THE CONSERVATION OF AL-ALAMI HOUSE

Generative processes did not apply to the house as it was an individual building removed from the traditional urban structure of the historical city and the related cultural and social settings associated with it also disappeared. The project responded to the physical needs of the house itself and at the same time to the social and cultural needs of the community. This includes the needs of the schools, universities, public and private institutions, and the public. Likewise, the project responded to the Palestinian national needs for preserving national identity. It is true that the house adaptation was not complete neither to the physical urban structure around it nor to the current social and cultural settings, but the house was adapted in simple means to suit other uses and needs of the community as it was explained above. The project generally followed the principles of sustainability environmen-

tally, economically, and socially. Participation was truly manifested in the project by the cooperation between the different parties supporting the project and those who managed the conservation process. This is in addition to the different public sectors of the community that supported the project.

Al-Alami house represented a distinguished case of a conciliatory exercise. The project achieved conciliation between the different owners of the house to reach an agreement over its conservation and granting 5 years of its management and use to IUG. Many disputes also were solved between several parties involved like the Gaza and Jerusalem offices of ICRC, between the different administrations of IUG, and between the neighbours of the house and its owners over the planned public uses of the house. The important point here is that the traditional concept of architectural heritage conservation contributing to conciliation and reconciliation is usually applied to communities in post-war areas (periods) and post-conflict situations.

It is believed that this has a masking effect for the serious situations of ongoing wars and conflicts where the noise of bombarding jet fighters leaves no space for the voices of peaceful reconciliation through architectural heritage conservation. Israel never thought of using Al-Alami house and similar projects to reconcile for peaceful understanding of heritage in Palestine. The Israeli jet fighters have seriously damaged Al-Alami house along with other 68 historical sites that have been destroyed after 7 October 2023 (UNESCO, 2024, Fig. 9). Tab. 7 represents the GRASP assessment of Al-Alami house architectural conservation project. It displays the unique ability of GRASP to include all important elements of the architectural conservation in one table and the opportunity to examine them according to their effect on the four components of the urban development.

CONCLUSION

The GRASP concept of architectural heritage conservation provides a comprehensive framework for the planning and management of the conservation process. It provides an extensive list of the issues and aspects that need to be considered in the successful architectural conservation. The link between the elements of GRASP and the components of the urban development also strengthens its ability to make the necessary connections and assessments of conservation through a large spectrum of the built environment, historical and new. It has the potential for future development to provide for more detailed indicators, sub-indicators and measures for the elements of GRASP for each one of the urban development components. It is also possible to link this framework to GIS and similar geospatial applications. It also provides the potential to develop a special software for Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment (AHIA).

Fig. 9. Destruction of Al-Alami house, by Israeli bombardment after 7 October 2023. (Source: Ismail Al-Alami, 2024).

Tab. 7. A general outline of GRASP assessment in Al-Alami architectural conservation project. (Source: Author, 2025)

Elements of GRASP	Urban settings of the historical environment			
	Society-culture	Economy	Environment	Urban fabric
Generative	The project was an excellent chance for several public and private institutions in addition to the public to participate in the conservation process. The project represented distinguished projects that contributed to the development of Palestinian culture in Gaza.	The project was used by non-profit organisations for non-profit activities. Therefore, it indirectly contributed to economic development of the community.	The project only could have positive environmental impact through its own building materials and courtyard layout that reduced energy consumption. The house is the only remaining historical building in the neighbourhood. The deteriorated urban environment around the building did not help to provide any other environmental solutions.	The project is an isolated example of preserved historical architecture existing in a deteriorated urban context. One positive contribution was to be a benchmark for traditional Palestinian architecture. The second contribution was the innovative community functions.

Responsive	The project represented a strong response to the needs of the community. The emergent response of the administration of the ICRC was very exceptional and unprecedented. The response of the community by financial, material, and verbal support was great.	The project provided a chance to apply a unique economic model of architectural conservation with the response of the ICRC and other public and private institutions for the financial and material support of the conservation process. The project did not hold any direct economic contribution to the local economy.	The project responded to environmental problems with two contributions: First, the use of local and natural conservation materials. Second, the preservation of the traditional design elements. The size and location of the project could not provide a suitable chance to contribute to the deteriorating environmental problems in its context.	Although it was an isolated example of traditional houses within a deteriorated urban context the project responded with its distinguished architectural design and innovative functions to the existing historical buildings scattered around it.
Adaptive	The project was adapted from a house to a non-profit cultural centre for the community.	The conservation of the house to a none profit cultural centre was adapted to the very limited resources depending on the little fund of ICRC and donations from the community.	The conservation and the use of the house afterwards adapted to the environmental conditions in terms of ventilation and lighting, water supply and use, and energy consumption.	The project was adapted to the existing urban settings in terms of function, location, and style.
Sustainable	The project provided Equal access for all. The project was fully integrated with evolving cultural and social settings of its context.	The project provided an excellent example of optimisation of resources including building materials and space. The conservation work completely was done with the little funding of the ICRC and the donations of the community.	The project helped to reduce pollution by using local and natural materials and by its architectural form and design solutions. This greatly helped to save water and energy. The project existed in a car free pedestrian quarter. The project and its vicinity around had no open and green space and it was not possible to acquire any.	Although the the surrounding style and identity did not belong to the era of the project, it provided a great chance to revive the communal memory of Palestinian architecture and its qualities.
Participatory	Public awareness was strongly practiced in all phases of the project through the employment of ICRC workers, the relationships with the community and public and private organisations. When the project started its innovative functions, it became one of the landmarks of public awareness projects in Gaza.	IUG, ICRC, the Council of Palestinian Contractors, the business community of Gaza—all participated in a unique model for the economic support of the project.	IUG, ICRC, and government ministries participated in the management of the environmental quality of the project. The public actively participated in the different education and training programs on Palestinian architecture and its environmental qualities.	The project represented a unique manifestation of the participation of private and public sectors in the planning, design, and conservation of the project and managing its impact on the surrounding urban context.
Reconciliatory	The project contributed to the resolving disputes on the uses of the building and its relationships with the surrounding neighbours. The project successfully contributed to the reconciliation between several stakeholders during the conservation process.	The peaceful nature of the project as a non-profit cultural centre did not have any economic burden on any of the concerned parties.	The project managed to resolve different disputes on water and energy consumption.	The project actively contributed to the promotion of the culture of peace and reconciliation by reviving the peaceful characteristics of Palestinian architecture. The project created an exceptional urban space to provide indoor public activities for peace and integration.

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