

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION: A MISSING DIMENSION

By: Dr. Ashraf Mohamed Kamal*

Urban Training & Studies Institute "UTI"
Of the Housing & Building Research Center "HBRC" - Egypt

1. INTRODUCTION:

Practical interventions of concerned municipalities and central organizations within historical zones for rehabilitations and preservation purposes are currently forming a big challenge that confronts the whole world' governments. Most likely, considerations are being devoted and directed towards architectural dimension, with less vision of socio-economic, culture and environmental factors of the process, while the overall process constitutes all those dimensions of the community and its environment.

This paper would emphasize the crucial importance of economic factor as a main backbone that could stimulate and guide multi disciplinary development programs over historical zones, and further improve the functional performance of such zones so as to achieve human and development sustainability.

The paper highlights practical tools and instruments for local economic development of historical zones that can be adopted on the municipal levels by the concerned parties; local government, community, private sector, NGO's, ... etc., in order to promote public participation of all involved actors, and create sense of belonging for benefiting the whole community.

The research paper would also analyze some overview of cases of city development plans and recommendations for historical preservation and rehabilitation on various disciplines from the economic practical viewpoint, towards achieving or encouraging sustainable development. Possible implementation-wise guidelines would then be drawn via successful lessons for replicability on locations and sites with potential advantages.

2. TRADITIONAL EFFORTS TOWARDS HISTORICAL ZONES:

Concerned governments had carried out several efforts towards activating conservation and preservation programs of historical zones. Traditional perspectives tended and still focusing on the architectural dimension of preservation, as the monument or the cultural heritage is only foreseen from the very architectural point of view. Emphasizing the importance of the historical value of the monument/zone as a special element that is inhibited from early generations and needs to be preserved as a symbolic remark of the historical cultural heritage.

Dr. Ashraf M. Kamal is a lecturer of urban and economic development in the Arch. & housing dept., at the Housing, & Building Research Center "HBRC". He is also he is also a member of the board of UTI (Urban Training Institute of HBRC). In addition to that, he is the coordinator of the Urban Management and Planning training activities, in the Training & Research in Housing & Urban Development project; "TRHUD" which is a joint program between both the Egyptian and Netherlands governments for capacity building; that is within UTI programs.
UTI, 87 El-Tahrir Street, Dokki. Mail address: P.O. Box 678, Orman 12612, Giza, Egypt. Tel.: 202-3352385/3351649, Fax.: 202-3352397, E-mail: training@link.net.

This was the idea behind several cultural heritage projects all over the world, which started on the basis of building dimensions, such as the cases of Phiela Island, Abou Simble temples, Al-Darb Al-Asfar, ...etc. Initiatives were combined between governments and international organizations that are interested in world heritage to carry out such an important task towards the world heritage. The main concern of those initiatives is revitalization of the targeted monument, as a primary and only objective. However, it was still visualized that cultural issues can always revitalize cities, if the ideas were formulated or reoriented based upon the role of culture and historical elements in economic and social development of cities.

The current practice of Barcelona, Spain shows the revival of the city through an ambitious cultural program linking urban design, the creation of new cultural flagships and cultural festivals and events. On the other hand, Glasgow, an old industrial city of Scotland, reinvented itself as a stylish and pleasant destination through investment in culture and thereby attracted international companies to locate their activities. Also, in Sydney, Australia, when the city was approaching the 2000 Olympics, it has initiated a major program of investment to extend its cultural infrastructure and create new galleries, museums and interactive multimedia centers.

The success of these cities has led to recognition of the impact that the culture and arts can have. They can attract people and make the streets safer, revitalize the economy and create a stylish ambience¹. Overall, this cultural approach to city development has four types of impacts: 1) economic benefits, such as the creation of new jobs; 2) physical and environmental benefits; 3) social benefits, like creating safer places for public use; and 4) symbolic benefits relating to the image of cities.

3. MISSING DIMENSION THROUGH THE PROCESS:

Through several previous and recent trials and attempts that were carried out in Egypt, initial focus was only directed towards pure architectural and imaging the preserved building or district as a monument that needs special care regarding the building and construction conditions. This was basically the main intention of such program and projects.

These projects and programs on cultural heritage and preservation always neglect the issues of social and economical developments of the surrounding zone that accompany physical and architectural dimensions. Those missing dimensions have negative effects the process of cultural heritage and revitalization. It becomes obvious that stress on physical factors of the process result in allocation of financial resources towards the construction activities, such as the case of Rasheed city heritage² and Al-Darb Al-Asfar of Fatymied/Islamic Cairo. Attention towards buildings (fig. 1, 2, 3 &4) without an overall vision results in deterioration of the surrounding environment, like several cases of individual building revitalization in Rasheed city. Where, one can easily determine the absence of coordination with other basic urban services such as sanitation and floodwater disposal.



Fig. 1, Preservation efforts in Rasheed for individual buildings



Fig. 2, Good quality of preservation in Rasheed



Fig. 3, Preservation efforts in Al-Darb Al-Asfar for buildings. No economic activities exist.



Fig. 4, Good quality of preservation in Al-Darb Al-Asfar for buildings, but with no economic activities.

Despite the massive expenses that took place in preserving individual building, the lack of resource allocation towards improving infrastructure and services on one side, and on the other, the missing coordination efforts between municipal departments and public authorities within the city led to gradual deterioration that was unforeseen from the beginning of the process. Moreover, lacking a clear process for community awareness and participation

through different channels of the revitalization process had resulted in degradation of the aimed quality to be achieved. (refer to fig. 5 & 6 of Rasheed city).



Fig. 5, Revitalization of a building in Rasheed city without basic infrastructure delivery



Fig. 6, Streets of Rasheed city lack sanitation

In fact, the process of revitalization of historical buildings and/or districts has a specific agenda for preserving the invaluable cultural heritage on one hand. But, on the other hand, the absence of socio-economic and cultural awareness of the local community usually results in prevention from achieving sustainability of the said projects.

However, some other cases; like the case of Al-Darb Al-Asfar district revitalization, has that kind of coordination among concerned departments, which resulted in a pleasant restored district and buildings, only from the physical point of view. The problem here was the actual contribution and participation of the community and existing private sector. The problematic issue here was the absence of an environment or life as most of the original activities were removed from the area based upon a strange policy for reservation of the restored district.

On one viewpoint this action (of focusing development only on the physical conditions) was correct as it preserves the historical elements from other external factors that might lead to degradation of this element and deterioration of the valuable inherited cultural heritage. This was typically the traditional and theoretical one way thinking that was carried out through centralized decision-making processes.

But on the other practical viewpoint, where cultural heritage preservation is seen as a comprehensive process that aims not only on the first place to preserve valuable elements physically, but also on the second and most important place to upgrade the whole surrounding of the historical elements as a short cut to maintain the invested resources in a sustainable

mechanism of development that preserve the element physically and socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors of its surroundings.

4. ECONOMIC VIEWPOINT OF PRESERVATION:

In order that cultural heritage and historical preservation can take place effectively, a frame work of action on reality should be consolidated and confined so as to integrate different initiatives in a corporate management form. The difference is that despite the social welfare aim; a more realistic vision must consider the economic strength and impacts over any development-related decision.

The concept behind this idea is to stress upon improving the living conditions and preserving the cultural heritage items of a specific district depending upon a few things; like the use of local resources, both human and social, material and economic, heritage and environmental ones. But basically, intentions must go for the preservation and utilization of heritage elements, therefore, this should be the core to serve strategies made for local economic development on district levels. One would go wrong if thoughts went that the municipality as the entity to do everything related to development. Hence forth, involvement and active participation from the benefited stakeholders might be foreseen as a tool for mobilizing resources on the local levels rather than waiting for the central government transfers or donations.

The issue here is to change the vision towards the economic factor and foresee it as a tool for promoting development not just as a financial mean for it. By analyzing positive and negative impacts of traditional ways for preservation that focused upon physical elements only, and the new and practical ways that stimulates development as a comprehensive efforts-collection that spread actions towards physical and socioeconomic aspects.

4.1. Traditional ways; focus on physical aspects only:

On one side, the positive issues are:

- Focus of budget on preserving the historical elements, so it leads to better handling of construction efforts.
- Facilitate monitoring and evaluation of bidding and contractual issues of construction.
- Measurable results as it goes with physical and touchable achievements on the building and/or historical elements.

On the other side, the negative issues are:

- Not enough care about other features of the surrounding community. Therefore, the process remains as creating a diamond within a deteriorated informal zone.
- Possible degradation of the historical restored element as no community and public awareness is conceived.
- Does not stimulate local participation, so maintenance is only guaranteed when there are enough funds through the responsible authority.
- Relies on full support from the responsible authority(s), s no sense of belonging created.
- Coordination effort between concerned departments is not achieved.

4.2. Practical ways; have a broad and comprehensive approach:

The positive issues are:

- Clear considerations of local capabilities and available resources.
- Several ways/methods to obtain finance and support.
- Build up local belonging to cultural heritage projects.
- Raising community and public awareness is maintained.
- Maintenance of historical elements could be achieved through efforts of the local community.
- Improving the socio-economic and living conditions of the target community would raise the awareness with regards to cultural heritage and above all would improve the economic status of the community so as to positively participate within the process.

The negative issues are:

- Broadening the institutional base might result in a failure if coordination is not well handled.
- Capabilities of local municipalities are low, so they could not be qualified to handle such types of comprehensive developments.
- Strict organizational and institutional systems might hinder those efforts for development.

It is obvious that the handling cultural heritage and historical preservation actions through cumulative efforts based upon improving economic status of the surrounding community, and local municipalities work as coordinator of efforts would lead to a better treatment is achieved gradually. Optimizing the use of cultural heritage should then be utilized on the basis of cost benefit analysis that concerns with costs and financial means, and material and socio-cultural benefits as well. The following figure no. 7 shows the inter-relations between cost and conservation amenities of cultural heritage expenses and gains³. Utilization of resource is then foreseen as challenge for municipalities, as it constitutes possible fields of expenses, and potential areas where benefits could be measured either on material/money and revenues, or on socio-cultural basis.

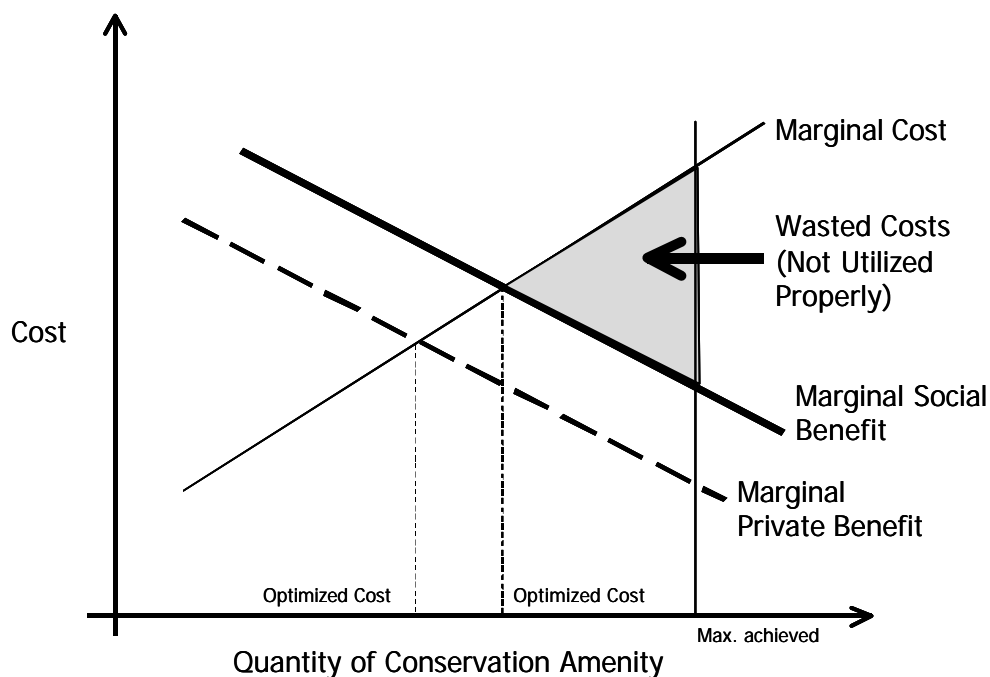


Fig. 7, Interrelations between cost & conservation amenity: marginal private benefits and marginal costs

5. TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Therefore, the challenge becomes to change the organizational culture of municipalities to work on the corporate basis that relate the market with a concern for public interests and overall benefits of cultural heritage and the environment.

5.1. Partnership as a tool for sustainable development

Experiences in other cities (that do not have heritage background) showed that city management could be applied rapidly and effectively, if all stakeholders were participated efficiently in the process of city management went on a corporate basis; meaning that the benefits and the losses are the same for all. The criteria are to involve stakeholders within the urban management strategy from the beginning to what is so called a participatory approach, till a later full involvement in finance, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects⁴.

This does not necessarily means that direct financial participation should be granted, but observing successful trials made and sustained due to direct and/or indirect participation of the preservation programs and projects. The important thing for municipalities is to carefully analyze the local resources they have and figure out possible interventions of all local stakeholders, so that whatever is put into improving the heritage conditions will be preserved and maintained by the local stakeholders themselves as far as they were involved actually⁵.

5.2. Institutional capacity building approach

In the cases presented in Rasheed and Al-Darb Al-Asfar, some key actions need to be carried out by the local municipal level to; first) perceive the importance of the valuable treasure they have on their territory, and second) to start preserving those buildings as a first priority instead of letting them decay due to lack of maintenance. Third), to identify local resources that exist within the city, through mobilizing the willingness of the investors of the city to participate within a transparent process of revitalization that will benefit all parties. Fourth), to start (by coordination with concerned parties) a public campaign to raise community awareness regarding preserving the heritage and maintaining the historical buildings of the city; where many of those buildings are already inhabited by local residents in some way. And finally; fifth), to promote the youth of the city/district to participate within the revitalization process during their vacations as a tool for income generation on one hand, and on the other to build up a base for community awareness.

6. CONCLUSIONS:

Efforts for preservation of cultural heritage and historical elements within an overall framework of massive urban development and growth of agglomeration became a very critical issue for governments and local municipalities. Developing countries; as known, in particular have many financial difficulties regarding the provision of budgets for carrying out such programs and actions. Old fashion trends where sole focus on the physical conditions and construction-wise elements of historical elements has failed to provide sustainability of those actions. The issue here for the concerned bodies, however, is to introduce new trends and directions towards promotion of stakeholders' direct involvement and participation,

which have been recognized as effective tools and instruments to go on with the aimed conservation and cultural heritage strategies and further on towards maintenance and sustainability of the settled programs and actions.

New movements of local governments and municipal agencies towards a participatory approach in managing cultural heritage and historical preservations through an economic-based viewpoint in order to achieve effective efforts, as it gives the municipalities other role in monitoring, coordinating and regulating the system⁶, while real actions and efforts could be then digested to local community and private sector to support programs and projects of conservation⁷, and left for them to bring and create liveliness towards the preserved areas and districts. Therefore, depending upon local resource mobilization with organized local and individual actions would result in a proper way of handling local preservation programs and projects, and this will ensure strengthening the local economy of those particular preserved districts as a whole.

And finally, insertion of economic based activities to encourage participation of the local community and bring a sense of life to the preserved districts is becoming a most so as to attract tourism and so forth the economic upgrading and improvement of the quality of life, and also to bring a natural sense of belonging and safety to ares of cultural heritage background.

7. REFERENCES:

-
- ¹ Landry, Charles; Revitalizing cities through culture, the Urban Age magazine, cultural heritage special issue, New York, USA, 1998.
- ² Kamal, Ashraf M.; Urban management of historical coastal zones: An analytical study of two experiences in Egypt; "Rasheed Mediterranean coastal city and Luxor City of the Nile", International seminar of small historical coastal cities, Saida, Lebanon, 2001.
- ³ Throsby, David; Seven questions in the economics of cultural heritage, of Economic perspectives on cultural heritage, pp. 13-29, Macmillan press ltd., London, UK, 1997.
- ⁴ Higgins, Robert; Analysis for financial management, 6th edition, McGraw hill higher education, Boston, USA, 2001.
- ⁵ Singh, Kavaljit; the globalization of finance: a citizen's guide, IPSR books, Cape Town, South Africa, 1998.
- ⁶ Giardina, E. and Rizzo, Ilde; Regulation in the cultural sector, Kluwer press, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1994.
- ⁷ Boyer, R; La theorie de la regulation: une analyse critique, La Decouverte, Paris, France, 1986.
- Throsby, David; Culture, economics and sustainability, Journal of cultural economics, vol 19, no. 3, pp 1-8, 1995.
- European Commission; Community involvement in urban regeneration: added value and changing values, E.C., Switzerland, 1997.
- Schuster, J. Mark et al; preserving the built heritage: tools for implementation, University press of New England, UK, 1997.
- Buchanan, J. M.; Cost and choice, an enquiry in economic theory, The university of Chicago press, USA, 1999.