

A planning & design approach for the rehabilitation of historic centres in Iraq

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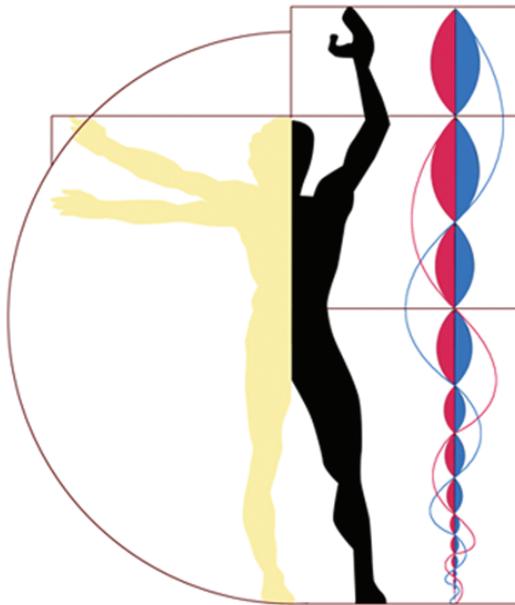
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Fabbrica della Conoscenza

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Le Vie dei
Mercanti

Carmine Gambardella



HERITAGE and TECHNOLOGY

Mind Knowledge Experience

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Carmine Gambardella

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Editing Manuela Piscitelli

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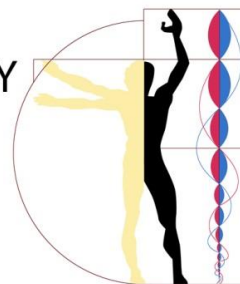
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A planning & design approach for the rehabilitation of historic centres in Iraq.

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Abstract

This paper deals with the proposal of a methodology for the Iraqi historical centres. Of course the paper assumes that the current war will end one day and outlines a project totally related to the heritage preservation in times of ideological and armed conflict. The paper starts by describing how in Iraq the revitalisation of historic centres is developing in a frame of great uncertainty, marked by a controversial notion of identity and by strong market-oriented operations. The paper argues that in a city under reconstruction like Baghdad principles and methods adopted in Western world are often of limited value when adopted in countries of late modernisation. Consequently, the proposed strategy is based on the implementation of two integrated operating modes. The first is centred on the definition of a technical and regulatory planning, oriented to organize the multiple operations to carry out in the ordinary urban fabric. The second deals with the design of five central places providing the spatial and functional focuses of Adhamiya neighborhood. As such, the proposed strategy rests on the design of a 'planning process' and the design of five 'urban projects' mainly addressed to developers. These two levels, although developing at different speed, are intended to help each other facilitating the meeting of public and private interests.

Keywords: Rehabilitation, Historic centres, Planning tools, Urban projects, Baghdad.

1. Introduction

The requalification of the great sites of worship in Iraq, now moving its first steps, has a significant strategic value because of its huge driver impact toward the other urban policies, be they for preservation or innovation.

In this regard, the lessons that can be taken from the best experiences on preservation and rehabilitation of historic centres, based on principles and methods put forward by scholars and professionals mainly operating in the Western world, are very helpful, but often of limited value when adopted in other parts of the world "where large parts of the economy have transitioned from the pre- to post-industrial in a few short years, such that notions of heritage have emerged, disappeared and re-stabilised in rapid and unexpected ways" (Winter, 2014, p. 565).

On the other hand, if we address the international charters, we find many conceptual and technical tools (ANCSA, 1960; ICOMOS, 1964, 1975, 1998, 2003, 2011) but also large unsolved questions. Between an updated outline of the various key concepts that underlie the text of the Venice Charter (Petzet, 2004) and a recent critical reading of it, championing for a more open interpretation (Hardy, 2008), lies a world of incertitude, especially when operating in times of armed conflict, as in Iraq.

Searching for a way to overpass this incertitude, this paper deals with the presentation of a methodology for the rehabilitation of a historic neighborhood and its application for a specific project in Baghdad. This approach is conceived in order to respond to the peculiar conditions and demands connoting the Iraqi old city centres. In particular, the project is developed with regard to the requalification of both a site of worship, the area of the Abu Hanifa mosque, and the surrounding neighborhood of Adhamiya - launched in 2010 by the Amanat (City Hall) of Baghdad with the 'Regional /International competition to revive and develop the area of Adhamiya'.

To properly explain the adopted methodology it is better not to specially focus on the design of the buildings neither on planning issues, though significant, but rather on the methodological and analytical framework, so

making more understandable the consistency among the two sides of the chosen approach (planning and design) and their expected practicality in the given context.

In fact, the condition of a city under reconstruction, like Baghdad, poses problems whose complexity and exceptionality requires exceptional solutions, accurately related to the strong operational limits consequent to this condition, today worsened compared to the past. Just think that the proposals and the critical approaches on the historic city, developed from the 1980s to the 1990s, while facing difficult conditions at all levels, showed an operating environment far more evolved than the current oneⁱ. Not to mention the careful *Conservation study for the Rusafa area* elaborated under the direction of Stefano Bianca, at last buried in the administration drawers (Bianca *et al.*, 1984). Aware of this situation, the project here presentedⁱⁱ takes into account some valuable experiences in terms of methodology, analysis and design, and tries to suggest appropriate solutions to come through the current remarkable difficulties.

As such, this project has been developed thinking also to a specific method of intervention for the historic parts of cities subjected to speed and heavy processes of urban reconstruction (Cinà, 2005). To this end two planning/design strategies have been put in place, encompassing both the conceptual and technical aspects:

- The consolidation of an inclusive identity (containing physical, functional and cultural aspects);
- The implementation of two modes of intervention, operating by regulatory tools and great projects.

2. The question of identity in times of ideological and armed conflict

Historically, cities identity is inherently all-embracing and the urbs, its physical counterface, gathers its multiple materials as the tangible evidence of a layering of identities. However, today in city transformation the identities are worldwide subjected in harmful processes of selection (Nagel, 2002), if not museumfication (Viqar, 2004; Saidi, 2012; Wang, 2012), reinvention (Mahgoub, 2007; Khechen, 2007) or almost ex novo production (Su, 2011).

The concept of heritage today widely acknowledged dates back to the *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage* (Unesco, 1972), that includes among others the notion of the French 'patrimoine' and the Italian 'beni culturali'. Between this Convention and the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, updates many times, principles and methods of conservation policies have reached an increasing shared definition at the international scale, specially pertaining an inclusive vision of heritage. However, their influence on practices of urban transformation remains alarmingly weak, mainly due to the persistence of different positions in terms of heritage, identity, preservation (Berque, 2007). In fact, a full awareness of the multiplicity of cultural identity emerges as a key factor in defining the necessary technical and cultural responses to the rehabilitation of the historic city (Cinà, 2010; Hastaoglou Martinidis, 2011; Abu Al Haija, 2012). The effect of a different notion of heritage provides a very clear example: the more you restrict the recognition of different cultural values, the less you feel the need to save them, so depriving their richness and diversity. Still, by their nature different identities are often in competition and frequently one affirms itself at the expense of another. We know that their coexistence can lead to results of great development and civilization, as in past Ottoman Istanbul (Mazower, 2004), but their opposition can lead to a social and cultural decline. Consequently, any planning and design practice in the historic city has a great responsibility to this regard.

Completely different is the situation when it concerns the reconstruction of cities traumatized by war or natural disasters. In the aftermath of these events the policies for the rehabilitation of historic sites are strongly related to the restatement of the greatest expressions of cultural identities. This restatement can be variously influenced: for instance by violence, mediatisation or discursive control over heritage questions (Hammami, 2012; Giblin, 2014). In the case of Iraq the several competitions and projects undertaken for the rehabilitation of the main sites of worship, together with the political discourse connected to them, can be intended as a significant attempt in this directionⁱⁱⁱ. Unfortunately, the approach following the inclusive vision of heritage above mentioned referring to international achievements has not been assumed as a leading one.

In fact, through the competitions and major projects two approaches to the problem are arising. One is trying to carry out an exit strategy from the present cultural isolation; differently, the other operates according to a merely real estate reconstruction strategy. In this situation, also characterized by a lack of debate, research and consolidated experiences, competitions are a major event at the political level, showing the limits and dangers of the ongoing operations, as they are handled by a government still not equipped to lead them to completion.

It should be considered that these projects are developed in a context where the few proposal granted by some political support have been heavily characterized by delirious real estate developments not making a difference between historical and modern city. One of these proposals comes from the project "Baghdad Renaissance", a gulf-styled huge intervention on a large area (900 ha) along both sides of Tigris riverfront

(4.5 km). Although not approved, the project shows the risks that loom over a city where the political class does not seem opposed to the idea of building a Dubai-like waterfront.

Besides, an increasing number of proposals for the rehabilitation of historic centers, driven by the recovery of the great shrines, it introduces a change full of potentiality. In this field, the rehabilitation projects for Al Kadhimiya district in Baghdad and Najaf's core city, both around a Shia shrine, are two eloquent examples. In both cases, the goal to consolidate the religious complex as a cultural and functional focus, and to revive the surrounding neighborhood, are stressed. Also, the updating of urban facilities and a strong push to the tourism development are foreseen. The resulting cityscape is a jump in a dreamed city where the connections with the historic city as well as with the present socio-economic condition are very few^{iv}.

On the other hand, the project for the rehabilitation of Mutanabi street and the development of Al Rasheed street and the Tigris river area, result more attentive to the character of the urban landscape and the recovery of the historical values. The former has been completed and also rewarded by a strong consensus, the latter is still under assessment. Although quite different in terms of goals, scale and conception, they seek for a way to conciliate the real estate interests and the conservation at least of the images of history^v. However, it has to be stressed that the problems like the relationship between authenticity and innovation, building typology and plot partition, are simply bypassed. Still remains a dichotomy between the historic buildings to be restored and the urban fabric of historical interest that is meant to be renewed completely, often in a "post -neo- Moorish" style performing uninhibited formal inventions. Furthermore, many local professionals, considered the present condition, think that this approach fosters an acceptable – although unconservative - compromise.

A different reflection deserves the "Renewal Project of Old Mosul" (2009), consisting in a master plan for the entire ancient city with some more in-depth projects. This time no big demolitions are foreseen and it emerges the attempt to start a planning and design process step by step. But even in this case, as in those above mentioned, the prohibitive operating conditions have led to a stalemate.

From this bleak overview of small progresses and great confusion it arises an anxiety of innovation that clears as a bulldozer any attempt to deepen the true nature of a conservation plan. In this climate, plans and projects requiring a more or less intense process of social interaction are meant as a hindrance to a mode of action that prefers the developments decided in a blind ministerial bureau and handed over to foreign companies. The knowledge of the context of action through rigorous analysis, the conditions of economic feasibility, the listening of residents, all of these issues remain largely unexplored. At the end, also in Iraq the trend follows the examples of a conservation strategy where the heritage is tailored as a commodity internal to a tourist and commercial package. Of course, such a result comes from one hand from the globalization of real estate markets and from the other from the limits of local conditions. Among the latter the ideological conceptualisation of the heritage meaning and values is the most serious.

In fact, in Iraq the problem of the protection of cultural heritage is affected by the fragility of the political system, the backwardness of the technical apparatus, the weakness of the legal framework, the shortage of civil and associative structures and the submission to the market. By this situation it emerges a controversial consciousness of the cultural identity bringing to a not inclusive heritage conceptualisation. Actually, the cultural identity backing the plans and projects that we are arguing is the result of a construction not adequately elaborated and layered in the time, and above all not sufficiently shared by national community. This is a problem coming from far away and common to the countries that suffered a 'modernisation without modernity' (Jellal, 2005). In this condition the system of the cultural matrixes is still subjected to a progressive selection that reduces it into a narrow nucleus of values, more capable to avoid further cultural lacerations. In such a regressive process many aspects of the Iraqi cultural world have gradually loose ground and relevance. Just think the religious buildings not belonging to the Islamic faith, although on the civil field the situation does not diverge much (Fales, 2004; Fethi, 2005).

In this context, the "Regional/international competition to revive and develop the area of Adhamiya" (2010) introduces a breath of fresh air. In listing its goals the announcement introduces expressions never used so far, as follows: to get the best emphasis on the social and spatial integration between Al Kadhimiya (Shia) and Al Adhamiya (Sunni) communities; to emphasize the integration between the two areas building a bridge

to connect them across the river, so that an united national feeling could be reflected in spaces including gardens and leisure spaces on both the Tigris river fronts; to achieve the best architectural solution for the urban cityscape of the four districts of Al Adhamiya.

Accordingly, the project here presented is highly oriented to the consolidation of the *cultural diversity* still present in Adhamiya, avoiding interventions that would dismantle the weak links still relating the existing city and its old remains. As a consequence the project doesn't provide high buildings around the Abu Hanifa Shrine, neither proposes huge new complexes breaking the existing medium density of modern urban fabric. On the contrary, the historical values of the whole neighborhood are highlighted by stressing the different identities they are bringing, from the ancient fabric near the shrine to the many facets of the modern one, from the first British works in neo-Moorish style to the regional modernist houses of Iraqi architects (Warren and Fethi, 1983; Marefat, 2007; Pieri, 2008; Al Sultani, 2010). It is in this inclusive vision, by combining the architecture and the Tigris Corniche, the low rising urban fabric and the 100 buildings and places of historical interest, then translating it into specific measures of intervention that the project assumes an innovative value, worthy of subsequent dissemination.

3. The implementation of a dual system of intervention, between planning and design

The operational strategy of the project is based on the implementation of two operating modes, integrated and parallel, running on two different speeds. The first one is based on the definition of a technical, administrative and regulatory system, addressed to lead and manage the multiple operations and interventions to put in effect on the ordinary urban fabric. Linked to it there is a set of analysis which leads to a set of choices in terms of urban planning: among these choices there is the identification of five central places. The second operating mode is based on the design of these five central places, defined in their physical and formal components, providing the spatial and functional focuses of the Adhamiya urban system. Consequently, a double range of measures is forecast: one for the areas of conservation (in the old town) and soft transformation (in the modern town), the other for the five special urban places, intended as gates of innovation. In this case the preservation of some urban values is associated with a significant transformation of their formal and functional components.

It follows the construction of a set of interventions that is in part linkable to the 'design of a process' and in part linkable to the 'design of five central places' (each one provided by some flag-buildings). Ultimately, the project aims at integrating in a united logic of development different places, actors, institutions and policies (see Table 1).

It is evident that the management of the operations for the design and the implementation of the central places, even if demanding large investments, is less difficult than that concerning the rehabilitation of the ordinary city. In fact, it affects problems more concentrate in terms of time and space and also it implies the mastering of a simpler set of social, economic and political issues. On the contrary, the rehabilitation of ordinary city requires a long term policy mastering a larger set of variables in order to implement the public works (for historic buildings restoration, urban maintenance, infrastructures, public spaces,...) and the 'plot-by-plot' developments carried on by the private building activity .

Table 1 - A dual system of places and tools

<i>CENTRAL PLACES</i>	<i>ORDINARY CITY</i>
Urban Projects acting as spatial and functional corner stones	Schemes, Regulations, Guidelines, Pilot Projects acting mainly as regulatory and planning tools
Selected upgrading	General upgrading
International and national entrepreneurship	National and local entrepreneurship
Centralised administration (Ministries, Governorate of Baghdad ...)	Decentralized administration (Amanat of Baghdad, Adhamiyia Authority...)
Centralized decision-making model	Participated decision-making model (local institutions, inhabitants, developers and stakeholders)
Implementation in a defined time	Continuous implementation (short, medium and long term)
Developments acting on selected areas, at medium and large scale	Interventions acting on the whole neighborhood, at medium and small scale
Landmarks	Ordinary landscape

We are aware that at present the political, technical and administrative bodies are not able to implement this process. Nevertheless, we believe that the simultaneous launch of the two policies above outlined, by both

regulatory tools and projects, is a compulsory gateway to start a true process of development. Such a strategy could release enormous energies because it would offer the opportunity to pass gradually from an emergency approach to a proper planning process, channelling these energies into an integrated development of the different urban components, without condemn the 'minor' residential fabric to abandonment.

Once established the methodological frame the project is developed following five goals, corresponding to five urban networks:

- Preserving identity and historical values;
- Rationalizing mobility and main connections;
- Providing a riverfront park system;
- Developing a system of cultural facilities;
- Organizing uses and functions.

It is noteworthy to point out that this dual approach was also adopted, albeit in different form, in the *Conservation Study for the Rusafa area* above mentioned. In declaring this cultural debt the present project wants to recall the lessons of that work, which should have been the starting point for an integrated approach to the historic city, but remained unimplemented and then ignored both in academic training and in research.

4. The issue of the preservation of historical values

Starting from the slant of historical values, a first problem to solve has been the definition of a procedure to identify the perimeter of the historic centre. In fact, the project was worked out in total absence of scientific references and without a proper technical survey of the site (for security reasons no permission was given). In this conditions the study of maps (1917, 1929, 1944, 1951-56, 1958), some of them possessing a true historical value (until 1917 the urban fabric was almost untouched by modernisation), has been fundamental for the definition of real historical borders of ancient Adhamiya, thanks also to some prudent photo surveys on the ground. As a result, the evolution of the whole neighborhood in its different stages of growth has been retraced, showing the mosaic of the two major components: the triangular historic area, which urban fabric contains mainly 'Transitional (intiqa'li) courtyard houses', and the Modern urban fabric, this latter containing in some parts prevalent 'Semi-detached regional eclectic houses' and in other parts prevalent 'Detached and semi-detached modernist houses'. To operate the reading of the urban texture a morpho-typological analysis, though in embryonic form, has been developed looking at the lesson of Italian approach (Caniggia, 1997; Maretto, 1999; Cataldi *et al.*, 2002; Marzot, 2005; Gauthier, 2006).

Hence the project followed two paths:

- a - the drafting of a 'Methodological scheme for a *Plan of rehabilitation and development*' (PRAD);
- b - the sketching of two 'Demo-projects' showing how some interventions can be designed and build-up in a first phase, following the principle of learning by doing.

3.1 A methodological scheme for a 'Plan of rehabilitation and development'

The draft of a methodological scheme for a PRAD responds to the need to design a broad framework for all the operations and operators entering the process of city transformation. Such a framework, characterised in terms of administrative, technical and managerial aspects, is intended to put every large-scale intervention from the very beginning within a consistent strategy of transformation.

It this sense, the project gives a set of tools to put in place a long-term urban policy, avoiding that only big urban projects, often resulting in ghettos for tertiary and luxury functions, could take advantage by the energies set off with the urban rehabilitation policies, abandoning to their fate the poorer urban components.

The methodological scheme defines a set of both conceptual and technical steps, showing the different matters to work out in order to implement the planning process in its main different phases. To this effect, the main methodological references taken into consideration are traceable in two fields: in some valuable plan linkable to the 'Italian school' of historic centres preservation, as developed from the early 1960s to 1980s (Astengo, 1958; De Carlo, 1966; Cervellati, 1973; Scannavini, 1973; Cervellati and Scannavini, 1973; Comune di Palermo, 1984; Comune di Palermo, 1990; Cervellati and Floris, 2004; Maccaglia, 2009) and in some valuable rehabilitation processes carried on in Islamic cities (Spiekermann and Gangler, 2003; Busquets, 2006; ADER-Fez, 1999; Radoine, 2008).

The matters considered are included in the following six sections:

- principles and general measures of intervention;
- analytical framework;
- measures of intervention for uses and functions;
- measures for the mobility system;
- measures of intervention for open spaces;

- types of intervention for urban fabric.

What follows shows a synthesis with a few comments on the contents of these sections.

3.1.1 PRAD – Principles and general measures of intervention

In this part the principles and the general measures of intervention are also conceived in term of goals to be achieved. They range from "Preserving traditional typologies, technologies and materials as true expression of architectural heritage" to "Saving the average height of Adhamiya buildings, to preserve its outstanding landscape and avoid more densification of activities and traffic". Of course, a more complete elaboration of this section should clarify more in depth the involved meanings, well distinguishing among principles, goals to be achieved and measures of intervention.

3.1.2 PRAD – Analytical framework

The current state of functional and physical degradation of old Adhamiya demands much more than a simple maintenance or a renovation with a façadist approach. In order to detect the proper answers to the required interventions a deep multiple analysis of the functional and physical context needs to be done. To this purpose, following a procedure diffusely experienced, the study of some major aspects of the urban structure is proposed. These aspects are identified among the most relevant in terms of formal and functional value:

- *morphological asset;*
- *typology of buildings;*
- *static condition of buildings;*
- *health standards;*
- *functional systems;*
- *mobility system;*
- *public facilities;*
- *open spaces.*

As such, the project is mainly referred to a standard set of analytical categories matured in a wide range of theoretical assumptions, plans and projects, already experienced in the Italian context. Perhaps, it is incomplete and not well matching some peculiar characters of the site, nevertheless it seems able to give a valid frame to the work of analysis. Even in this case the project aims at just address a more detailed framework to be provided during the implementation phases.

Yet, the major problem doesn't rest on the completeness of the list but rather in the capacity of local technical board to support such a complex system of surveys. We know that at present this capacity doesn't exist. So, how to proceed? By this impasse we begin to see the necessity to *invent* some solutions responding to the local difficult conditions, possibly some *shortcut* able to achieve even partial results without betraying the horizon of a scientific approach. In any case, the way to do it has to be found according to the present conditions.

3.1.3 PRAD – Measures for a balanced upgrading of uses and functions

In this section the main lines for a balanced distribution of activities, functions and uses within the neighborhood are provided. They are directed to ensure the complete insertion of all opportunities of upgrading and development of the historic city. To this end a set of basic principles are suggested, ranging from the "Preservation of residential function", tending to ensure the permanence of the actual residents in a future more socially mixed housing, to the "Enhancing the existing craftsmanship".

Besides, some 'admitted functions' are pointed out, excluding those that are supposed to contrast with the values of the historic city and increase the risk of gentrification (Abaza, 2011, Abu Al Haija, 2012). New functions are also provided, from those related to the Kulliye extension and facilities, to the others spread out in the old urban fabric (as the Centre for maintenance of heritage artefacts, the Museum of Adhamiya etc.).

3.1.4 PRAD - Measures for the mobility system

The proposal concerning the mobility system is articulated on three levels: the principles to be followed, the main proposals and some special measures to enhance the soft mobility.

The first ones are focused on the preservation of the present street network, potentially efficient, and on the upgrading of the mobility system, also enhancing the public transport. In this sense the opening of a metro line is the most relevant innovation. The second level establishes a functional hierarchy among principal and secondary axes, and short connections. The third level provide a set of measures limiting the vehicular accesses, from the creation of a "Zone 30" in the old centre to the implementation of a multiple mobility (ferry boat stations, tourist port, bus and metro stations, car-parks areas etc.).

3.1.5 PRAD - Measures of intervention for open spaces

The measures for the open spaces are conceived in terms of principles to be followed and main proposals. In fact, the development of the opportunities offered by the existing set of open spaces, usable as public facilities, is a primary step to improve the urban quality. More, the improvement of open spaces is a fundamental condition to trigger the private interventions. To this end the proposed interventions range from the "upgrading of panoramic river walks" to the "creation of public green squares" and the "maintenance of public and private gardens".

3.1.6 PRAD - Types of intervention for urban fabric

The relevant amount of works to be carried out on the urban fabric needs a clear definition of the different forms of intervention. Such an outcome is a fundamental one because it can result in a common technical syllabus in which skills, professional competences, knowledge and regulations find a proper reference. Thanks to this framework it becomes possible to avoid that different operators, acting in different times and positions, give contrasting names to a same concept, confusing among meanings, problems and solutions. To this effect a selected list of 'types of intervention on urban fabric', corresponding to the different conditions of buildings and fabric, is provided as follows:

1. Restoration
2. Conservation
3. Renewal
4. Protection of typical features
5. Functional rehabilitation
6. Maintenance / ordinary and extraordinary
7. Reconstruction
8. Volumetric completion
9. Removal of disturbing activities
10. Functional reuse
11. Demolition - Demolition with agreement
13. Protection of pedestrian road

Such a list should not be considered neither a vague set of indicators nor a rigid list of types of intervention. In reverse, it must be considered as a concrete technical field, to be worked out by the public technical bodies, giving to each item a proper definition explaining the modes and the fields of its use. More, it can be partially changed. The result should be performed as a regulatory platform, containing the *official* definition of all types of intervention, suitable to address planners and designers in a known and shared technical framework.

3.2 Two Demo-projects for an operational first phase

Besides the PRAD above synthesized, two *Demo-projects* are sketched in order to show how two relevant interventions can be designed since the first phase: the *National Museum of palm trees* and the *Revitalisation of the Adhamiya Corniche*. They can be implemented following the principle of learning by doing, because they don't need the prior implementation of the PRAD and, furthermore, they can help to draft it. In some way they act in between the scales of planning and design.

3.2.1 The National Museum of palm trees

We all know that the palm tree is an expression of the Iraqi national identity from the era of Mesopotamian Antiquity to the Islamic and modern times. More, it has always been part of the landscape around the Abu Hanifa Shrine of Adhamiya. Hence the idea to devote the empty area around the Shrine to a wide traditional palms garden. Such a solution also aims at answer an important demand stressed in the competition announcement: to seek for solutions favouring the dialogue between the Sunnis and Shiites communities, respectively located in the districts of Adhamiya and Kadhimiya.

According to this goal the project sketches some spatial solutions able to show the mains results to achieve, as follows: a) the preservation of a visual link between both river Tigris banks, b) the reduction of the impact of the cutting of Al Imam Al Adham str. by saving a pedestrian continuity near the Mosque and close to the river bank, c) the provision of both a huge shaded area and a permeable pavement to improve the bioclimatic conditions, d) the creation of a scientific collection of most relevant species of Iraqi date palm, e) the set up of a didactic section of the Museum in a restored building near the Abu Hanifa Square.

3.2.2 The revitalisation of the Adhamiya Corniche

The Adhamiya Corniche is the most relevant open space of the neighborhood. More, to save the Corniche means saving the most precious local landscape, bringing back the city-river symbiosis. Hence the project provides some proposals and measures of intervention thinking to a slow infrastructure able to heal the energies of the city along the riverfront.

The proposals range from "keeping the actual average height" to "providing a homogeneous design for the system of open areas", also in order to give new impulse to the tourist and commercial activities. To this end new skyscrapers along the Tigris are firmly rejected.

The various measures of intervention range from the "reshaping of façades" to the "reconstruction of ruined traditional building" and from the "removing of contrasting element and materials" (glass wall, red reservoirs, etc), to the "demolishing of buildings not legally built". According to these measures the project sketches some spatial solutions able to show the mains results to achieve.

3.3 The creation of a "Board for the rehabilitation of Adhamiya Historic Centre"

The implementation of both the PRAD and the Demo-projects implies a deep commitment of the local technical staff, at present not equipped with the needed skills. Then, the project suggests the creation of a dedicated local "Board for Adhamiya Historic Centre", possessing a trained and specialized staff, so that the

implementation of the project could be supported by local officials and advisers in all the administrative and technical proceedings.

Many and important tasks could be immediately assigned to this Board, beginning from the implementation of PRAD. Equally important has to be considered the setting of at least two Operational Guidelines, for private and for public interventions as well as an 'Operational plan for the Adhamiya Corniche revitalisation'. At a different level would be also important the launch of a 'Tender for public co-funding of private initiatives'. It is evident that both the Board and the connected tasks call into question a strong political commitment, at present seriously lacking.

3.4 Conservation of both monuments and current urban fabric in the modern city

Adhamiya enjoys a balanced urban structure with a consistent and modern morphological pattern (1930 - 1970) requiring an overall revitalisation not disrupting the existing fabric

As a consequence also in its modern fabric the project provides a light conservation strategy, though limited to some special buildings and conditions. In this regard, the project lists the following set of main interventions to be put in place:

- Restoration of 3 remarkable modern monuments (University Al il-Bayt, Royal Mausoleum, Sports Club -Nadi al-Adhamiya);
- Measures of respectful improvement of 100 Buildings and places of historical interest, listed by the Municipality;
- Moderate conservation of the existing townscape, linked to its three main characters: the rational morphological pattern, the moderate and quite uniform height, the types of plot exploitation (one of them is the sequence of villas provided by green courtyards).

Add to this the need of a set of "Guidelines for upgrading modern Adhamiya districts" is pointed out, as a necessary tool to technically address all the private conservative interventions of maintenance and upgrading.

In this case it is clear that the issue it is not just to operate a prudent renewal, within a framework of technical guidelines (Marconi, 1987), but to implement a planning process supported by a clear conservative approach. In that sense, to follow such a commitment would be in some ways revolutionary: because it would lead to recognize even in the modern city a distinctive identity value; it would follow the foundational principle of the urban maintenance and the prudent urban renewal (IBA, 1987; GTZ, 2003; Herle, 2003); it would preserve not only the monuments but also the modern medium-density texture of Adhamiya still miraculously intact.

5. Innovation and development in the modern city: the creation of five *Central Places*

Parallel to the policy of preservation, the project provides solutions for an overall development worked out by means of a deep urban innovation. To this end, according to the present potentialities, the creation of five Central Places is proposed as a strategy of integrated development, able to connect problems and solutions affecting different functional field, first of all the mobility and the functional networks.

The Central Places give multifaceted opportunities for upgrading the existing civic spaces and invent the new ones, by the mean of big projects acting as landmark.

They work as true by-passes, playing at both the spatial and functional level. At the spatial level, being distributed within the central area and along the border of the neighborhood, they connect its different parts ordering their physical relations. At the functional level, they provide new tertiary functions at the scale of neighborhood itself and in relation to the whole city and its outstanding role as capital.

Concerning the architectural design, the new buildings are conceived in order to meet with the regional and local characters and to perform innovative solutions not subjecting to global paradigms or post-moorish shortcuts.

4.1 The area of Abu Hanifa mosque square

This area is conceived as a central place to be restored and developed following the issues of identity. The requests of the competition for a new organisation of the area are resolved with the design of a continuous architectural system giving a formal/functional solution at different levels: defining a border along the rotten and undefined fronts of the square, separating the pedestrian and vehicular mobility, giving a double consistent function to the square: as a *piazza* and a garden. It results in an urban scene characterised by the plain monumentality of the built-front, not competing with the Mosque height; and by a green shaded square providing a sense of unity in the big empty space. The built system is based on some basic elements:

- a three storeys set of buildings running all around the square and maintaining the size and the scale proper to a *piazza*;
- a classical architectural partition, marked by continuous porticoes/terraces, here and there interrupted by some modern/ vernacular elements recalling the traditional *shanashil*;
- a wall apparatus in brick, reminding the architectural tradition of Iraq;

- a strip of panoramic terraces interrupted by semi-transparent volumes, to give shadow and to be used all day along;

- the 'gates' on the building frontline, leading to the surrounding urban fabric.

The counterpoint between classical order and traditional references is consistent with the requirements of bioclimatic function and results inter alia in a double facade with crossed ventilation.

4.2 The area of the crossing Nu'man street / Al Iman al Adham street

This area is conceived as a central place for urban services, exploiting its pivotal location, in the middle of the neighbourhood and Al Iman al Adham str. It is a focus of formal and functional innovation, mainly providing tertiary and commercial uses. The architectural apparatus is marked by the fluent movement of volumes, with brick facades breaking the flat uniformity of the existing straight built fronts. Here the new metro station becomes the major gateway to reach the core of Adhamiya and Al Bait University campus.

4.3 The Antar square area

This area is conceived as a central place for business and tertiary activities, located at the east border of the neighbourhood, so directly connected to the city centre. Thanks to this position, and to the fluxes passing through, the place is suited to become the nerve centre of the infrastructural network. As such, in order to gather and distribute all the city fluxes, Antar square is the most built and crossed central place.

The architectural asset is characterised by a round double set of buildings around the square (from 4 to 12 floors) hosting tertiary functions. The collection of the most rising building in this peripheral location produces the bigger urban landmark in the south-western neighborhoods.

The infrastructural asset is characterised by a ground level mainly devoted to vehicular circulation and a lowered square with multiple functions, settled according to the example of Tahir square in Baghdad. The square connects the double set of tertiary buildings and gives pedestrian access to the different part of the area as well as to the metro line.

4.4 The campus of Al il-Bayt University

This area is conceived as a central place for High Education. Here the central axe of the plan designed for the campus of Al il-Bait University (J.M. Wilson arch., 1924) during the English Mandate, is reinforced as a cultural Mall. The project acts at different levels: making denser the built front; adding new volumes for education and cultural leisure; upgrading the range of high educational functions; increasing the green areas while reinforcing the perspective of the Royal Mausoleum (J. Cooper arch., 1936). By this upgrading and extension the University is meant to achieve a primary role in the high education system of the capital.

4.5 The park on the riverfront of Al-Harra

This area is conceived as a central place for cultural functions, creating a district of public interest at local, national and international level. The location on the Tigris riverfront is suitable to host very high civic functions, playing the question of identity in positive counterpoint with the religious character of the Shrine pole and consolidating the Adhamiya cultural prestige.

The project sketches a spatial solution for a set of low buildings showing the aim to oppose the towers mushrooming along the riverfront, unfortunately ubiquitous in all recent great projects of urban renovation in Baghdad. The main new functions provided are the following: a Museum of National History of Iraq; a Library for 500.000 volumes (requested by the call); a Multipurpose Hall, hosting spaces for music, poetry, conferences, theatre, etc.; buildings for tourist facilities, respecting the riverfront's peaceful landscape. Lastly, a green park, especially equipped for athletics and sports facilities, a river promenade linking the Adhamiya Corniche to the south bank, equipped with other public amenities, and a ferry boat station.

In fact, this area is proposed as a pivotal one in the perspective of the construction of an urban/natural park along the riverfront on both banks, connecting the areas not yet urbanised.

6. Conclusion

The project tries to face the requests set by the competition announcement through a holistic approach oriented to an overall upgrading answering the need of order and urban quality of Adhamiya.. By this approach the following set of main goals comes out: valorizing all the historical values of Adhamiya; update and enlarge the network of urban functions (culture, , high education, tourism, commerce, leisure etc.); providing new central places; enhancing the landscape resources ;

To meet this scenario the project forwards a method based on two operating modes, expected to run in parallel and connect a broad set of interests, skills and energies at many levels. These two modes acts through a) a planning process providing a regulatory system for the interventions, mainly elaborated and managed by a public board; b) a set of large projects, mainly addressed to private developers. These two levels meant to interact and help each other, facilitating the implementation of public and private operations on separate and interacting fields. In short, a plan-project process is set up, promoting a development across all social and physical components of the neighborhood.

Such a process remains still difficult to implement. To overcome this difficulty it can be addressed by single parts, distinguishing those invariable from the variable ones. The former concern the strategy of intervention, in terms of method and goals, as the adoption of a planning process based on both regulatory instruments and projects. The latter concern the timing and the modes of possible solutions, especially at the scale of architecture. For example, the five central places can be significantly modified, after a deeper check on the operational conditions.

As a matter of fact, it is necessary to provide ample flexibility both to the modes of governance and the formal solutions. Thus, there are no fixed priorities. It is possible to start from any regulatory instruments or central places, providing that in each case an acceptable participatory process would be assured, supplied with proper technical tools, public and private participating actors, mix of final users.

To be honest, it is hard to imagine at present to which extent this process could be managed. Many of the key issues in point (identity and heritage, public management of planning tools, participation, slow mobility, urban landscape) may assume an operational value only after a strong political commitment. In many ways such a commitment today is absent.

More, considering the turbulent and in some way threatening process of reconstruction now underway in Baghdad, many of the key issues above mentioned appear to be revolutionary. It is so in the case of the identity, a concept that melts like snow in the sun face to the interreligious conflicts. Just consider how much this conflicts are fateful not only to the heritage related to religious minorities, but also to the very ground of Islamic culture, contested between Sunnis and Shia. Not to mention the modern architecture, today suffering a lack of recognition at all levels, the opposite of how it has been considered in the 1950s (Haytam, 2007).

Nevertheless, it is possible to detect some significant signs of change at various levels. New social figures and conditions are emerging and we must be prepared to offer them something better than the braised dishes of Dubai-like developments. The proposed solutions, establishing a strategy open to the intervention of a wide range of private and public operators, are looking just at this emerging civil society.

All in all, the project affirms the idea that it is possible to put in coherence a strategy of both participative rehabilitation and development, not limited only to hard interventions, but able to flow back through the 'city of all'.

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ⁱ In this period a more evolved social milieu, exploiting the contribution of foreign professionals, was active at cultural, academic and professional levels, both in urban planning discourse and in technical achievements. Thanks to it, along with the great themes of modernisation, some first attempts to rethink the traditional city were carried on (Warren and Worskett, 1983; Bianca, 1984; Chadirji and Carlfried, 1984; Parapetti and Ibrahim, 2000) as well as some critical readings on the theme of housing (Raouf, 1985).

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ⁱⁱⁱ Relevant projects have recently involved the historical centres of Samarra, Najaf, Mosul, Kerbela and Baghdad. The most important have been presented at the *International Conference Preservation and Rehabilitation of Iraqi City Centers*, promoted by the Mayorality of Baghdad in collaboration with University of Baghdad, College of Engineering, Iraqi Cultural Support Association, General Directorate of Physical Planning, Ministry of Municipalities & Public Works, General Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage, in Baghdad, March 21-27, 2010.

^{iv} The “Al Kadhimiyah Shrine's Integrated Conservation and Development Scheme” (2009) is an international competition whose goals are to renew and develop the area of the Shiite Al Kazimiyah shrine, the most important of the capital. The project provides the redefinition of the formal and functional set-up of the area surrounding the mosque for a radius of about 500 m, including religious schools, services for the sanctuary, public spaces, tourism and cultural facilities, improved accessibility. The urban scheme proposes a new urban set-up coming from the demolition of all the buildings within the area surrounding the shrine, so clearing a vast housing traditional fabric and the Souk Astrabadi here included. The “Najaf city redevelopment project” (Dewan Architects & Engineers, 2009) is a destructive project as well, but at a larger scale than that of Al Kadhimiyah. It proposes to solve the existing problems according to the most simplistic development strategy: to isolate the shrine from the residential fabric and rebuild the whole area around it: of course, in traditional style.

^v The “Mutanabi street rehabilitation project” (2007) concerns the street of Bagdadi booksellers, once the heart of the literary and intellectual Baghdad. Affected by heavy bombing of 2007, it was brought back into operation after a radical intervention of reconstruction and a few restoration which reconfigured the image and spirit of the place. Despite the redundant decorations of the new buildings the project became in some way a model to imitate, and a shortcut for a recovery approach. The “Al Rasheed street - Tigris river area development” (Consulting Group, 2009) covers an area of 18 ha and is a worth attempt to give a careful solution to the remaking of the historical district aligned on Al Rasheed street. The proposed renewal aims to reverse the decay of the area today, in terms of activities, public services and infrastructures, by adopting a strategy of allocation of new functions and new urban central places. Sure, it is an uncritical solution, following the speedy method adopted for Mutanabi street.