Conservation & Rehabilitation of
Alexandria's City Center
Gamal Abdel Nasser Avenue & Salah Salem Street
(Fouad 1st Avenue & Sherif Pasha Street)

Résumé
Ce projet d'étude préparé par l'Alexandria Preservation Trust (APT) en 1991 pour le gouvernorat a eu pour objectif de prêserver et revitaliser l'environnement bâti et urbain du centre-ville d'Alexandrie. L'étude se base sur la conservation de deux voies historiques et prestigieuses du centre-ville, la voie Canopic, existant depuis la fondation de la ville par Alexandre le Grand en 331 av. J.-C. (connue à travers les siècles aussi comme la rue Rosetta, la rue Fouad I, Fathallah Hermaya et Gamal Abd El Nasser), et son extension la rue Cherif (actuellement la rue Salah Salem). Dans ce cadre, la création d'une unité pour la gestion du patrimoine dans le gouvernorat d'Alexandrie avait été proposée, afin de prendre en charge l'implémentation du projet, et le futur développement et conservation du patrimoine alexandrin. Bien que cette unité n'ait jamais été créée, plusieurs projets de rénovation et de réhabilitation ont été réalisés. Quelques exemples sont examinés dans ce dossier soulignant les réalisations réussies et les défaits associés au processus de conservation du patrimoine et aux expériences d'Alexandrie.

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Conservation & Rehabilitation of Alexandria’s City Center

Introduction

Definition of the study area

The selected area has been chosen as a pilot project for the future redevelopment of the city center. The two kilometers of Gamel Abdel Nasser Avenue, which runs along the original Canopic Way, and its continuation along Salam Street, approximately half a kilometer in length, cut across the heart of the modern Egyptian city and contain some of the city’s most remarkable nineteenth and early twentieth century architecture. The ancient Canopic Way, existing since 321 BC when the city was founded by Alexander the Great, with its remarkable history and the few remaining archaeological sites, is visibly aging and is waiting to be conserved and reinvented in the city’s urban fabric. The importance of the chosen area is further emphasized by the activities of concentrations concentrated in the city center: administration, finance, commerce, leisure and habitat. The study area represents a traffic axis of great importance, acting as a link extending eastwards along Aboukrid Road and westwards to the port area.

The character of the street, despite its present condition, remains representative of the architectural style of the city’s belle époque. The Latin Quarter contains the city’s oldest residential buildings, which have been more recently transformed into commercial, government and administrative offices. Despite a few individual attempts to preserve some of these buildings, a more effective approach to limiting the rate of conversion of buildings and preserving their collective character is necessary. Preference for further deterioration of the highest priority in the urban context, the project aims to complement the architectural façades, providing a new modern twist to the traditional urban landscape through the creation of a heritage management Unit (HMU) in the Governorate of Alexandria with the participation of NGOs, such as the Friends of the Museum of Alexandria, Rotary Club and the Tennis Association of Sherif Street.

Project phases

1. The project design phase was concerned with the survey of existing historical and architectural materials, as well as architectural and urban conditions. The project aims and desired standards were set at the start of this phase. The whole process identified problems and areas of concern, which eventually led to policy formulations and guidelines for development. Open events and seminars presented the project in its survey and preliminary proposal stages to the public.

2. In the design phase, the revised preliminary proposals will be discussed with participants and potential developers prior to the preparation of final drawings and tender documents. This will be accompanied by the arrival of feasibility, finance and management project implementation in the form of a joint venture. The active participants, developers, and contractors are identified.

3. The post-design phase is related to the actual implementation and project execution for supervision and management to be developed through the Heritage Management Unit (HMU) to be created in the Governorate of Alexandria.

Survey and analysis

Historical analysis

The Canopic Way, today Gamel Abdel Nasser Avenue, ran from the port to was and the main street of the city as conceived in Alexandria’s original plan in 321 BC. From the city’s two main gates, that of the sun and moon, it was lined with statues and columns, and passed with.matching monuments. It is believed that at its intersection with a perpendicular street running north to south (today’s Daniel Street) was the Soma, believed to be Alexander the Great’s palace.

This ancient city, abandoned during medieval times, remained in ruins until the early creation of the city’s present form. The immense building activities during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Al Sa‘id, who succeeded his father on the Shami throne in 1861. Sultan Al Sa‘id eventually led to important project works undertaken by Mahmoud Al Faireri, the Khedive Isma’il’s architect, in the 1860s. El Farak records in his Carte de Chiras Alexandrie published in 1866, that the Via Canopica was the main artery to access for its important sites such as the Gymnasion, the Pantheon, the Soma, the Mouzioun, a temple of Sopha (replaced by the Church of Saint Anthanasus and later the Museum Monopole) and later the Museum of Alexandria’s Thousand Columns. These excavations were followed by Ferdinand Nau’s investigations at the end of the nineteenth century and Braccia and Ambrosetti’s work at the beginning of the last century revealed a few remaining water columns of the Canopic Way, possibly dating from the Islamic period.

The ancient road, called the Old Canopic Way, known by its name Rosetta during the second half of the nineteenth century with the expansion of the commercial port, derived the first part of the historical continuity of the growth of the European quarters. From the place des Consuls, later Mohamed Ali Square, towards suburban Ramlet. Among the important buildings along the road Rosetta was the Zizani Thot (1819) and later, the city’s first museum and the municipality in around 1850.

Yet the most characteristic feature of the project is the urban morphology that includes the development of a number of elegant apartments in the area including a recently opened apartment block (1924), the Al-Faruk Complex (1927) designed by Gustave Nahlmann, the Cordra Complex (1929) by Georges Paroz which included the Mohamed Al Thotier, and the elegant ensemble of buildings developed by Fumadell (1929). The latter together with the Canopy building received municipal awards for their
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**Figure 4** Map showing the ancient contours of Alexandria

**Figure 5** The Ptolemaic Gate at the turn of the century

beautifully rendered façades. The **IV**-**V** centuries were marked by important contributions from insurance companies both in Toulon and Alexandria. The **V**-**VI** centuries saw the close of the basilica and the abandonment of the site; the remaining structures of the church are exemplified by the entrance to the company of the **V**-**VI** centuries and the construction of the **V**-**VI** centuries. The **VII**-**X** centuries saw the abandonment of the site; the remains of the church are exemplified by the entrance to the company of the **V**-**VI** centuries and the construction of the **V**-**VI** centuries. The **V**-**VI** centuries saw the abandonment of the site; the remains of the church are exemplified by the entrance to the company of the **V**-**VI** centuries and the construction of the **V**-**VI** centuries.

**Figure 6** The Ptolemaic Gate at the turn of the century

The site of Kom al Dik

The site of Kom al Dik is located south of Gamil Abbol Street, as a part of the ancient necropolis, was recently unearthed in the west of the city during the construction of a new railway access to the port. The site is located on the outskirts of the city, near the railway station, away from the city center. There is a need to preserve the site, especially the entrance from Gamal Abbol Nasser Avenue, taking into consideration the scientific interest for the archaeological and architectural remains of the site. The site is a part of the ancient necropolis, as it is the burial place of many of Alexandria's most prominent individuals, including the Ptolemaic and Roman rulers. The site is located in the vicinity of the ancient city and the modern city, and it is a prime location for archaeological and historical research.

**Figure 7** The Ptolemaic Gate at the turn of the century

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**Figure 8** The Ptolemaic Gate at the turn of the century

Archeological survey

There are a number of historical monuments and archeological sites situated in the area. Some are still standing and constitute part of the contemporary city; the great archeological complex of Kom el-Dik with a Roman theater and baths, the Alabaster Mosque, and a dozen cisterns dating from the Islamic period. Others, despite having vanished, remain significant for Alexandria's legendary past; a temple of Serapis at the site of the Alabaster Mosque, the Museum of the Alabaster Mosque, the Ptolemaic city of Alexandria (Alabaster), and the remains of the ancient city of Alexandria (Alabaster). These sites are located in different parts of the city, and they are important for the study of the history and culture of Alexandria. The site of Kom el-Dik is one of the few areas where we can see the remnants of the old Turkish order and the hybridization of Islamic and European architecture. It is the birthplace and former home of Sayyid Danial, Egypt's most celebrated modern composer, and was formerly inhabited by the Egyptian working class society, to which his beloved. The site retains its local character of public spaces and narrow winding lanes; however, it is now a very depressed area and faces serious problems in terms of demographics as well as development. Sayyid Danial was born in Kom el-Dik, and he is a local hero to the people. The site of Kom el-Dik is an important historical site that should be preserved and restored for the benefit of future generations. The site is located in the vicinity of the ancient city and the modern city, and it is a prime location for archaeological and historical research.

**Figure 9** Map showing the ancient contours of Alexandria

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Architectural survey

The architectural survey of the two streets identified the two buildings that have been designated as: Abou Makkas, Nasser Avenue and Avenue de Salah Sait, intended for the development of a second floor building. The information concerning each building was compiled and was made available from the Alexandria Preservation Trust, which holds the historical mapping of the buildings. From 1895 was compiled from the archives of the Ministry of National Heritage.

The response building styles following the 1882 British occupation and the post-World War I boom that followed were Watchtower revivalist and edifice with the extension of the World War II, is identified as being less aridiculate in form than in the inter-war period. Two good examples displaying these characteristics are the fittings of the Alexandria. The two of which are the Mostafa El-Sabban building, designed by the Antone Lasco, in 1895, and the Corniche Damascus architect, designed by Hadri Menasseh, designed by N. Al-Nasser.

The eclectic revivalist styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century perfectly expressed an architectural pluralism and the pro-European cosmopolitanism prevalent in the city. Between the two worlds wars and in the immediate post-Second World War era, the most favored architectural expressions became the decorative styles of the late nineteenth century. The most popular eclectic style was the neo-Renaissance, with thirty buildings in the two streets. There are also, however, some rare examples for that period - the modern buildings that make the Alexandria Water Company building and the Arwa Hall School, designed in 1898 by N. Parsaie, and even of neo-Romanesque styles such as the Adriatic Firth apartment block by G. C. Longrigg.

Local revivalist styles are mostly present in the old part of the city. As seen in the rich and the grand architectural of the 1920s, the block of blocks on Nasser Street, Ramnue, neo-Islamic trends are also significant in mosque designs, as in the Alabaster Mosque (1901) and the extensions of the Abou Makkas, Nasser Avenue and Avenue de Salah Sait. The most visible threat to the architectural environment is the large-scale demolition of buildings, particularly in the suspension of commercial activities, usually found on the ground floor of buildings.

One of the specific features of Nasser Street is the mix of building styles and highlights by the diversity of architectural styles that dominate the area. Respecting this diversity, as well as the unified appearance of the facades, should be one of the main priorities for future development of the street.

The most important project for conservation is the preservation of the building stock due to the lack of maintenance and repair as a result of the freezing and deflation of rents (rents have been blocked in Egypt since the 1940s). Maintenance by the owner has taken on a role in the city as informal habitation spread across the center, and rooftops have been occupied by high-density construction. High density and crowding are also created by the subdivision of floor space and apartments. Many such spaces have been transformed for petty commercial activities and industries, contributing to the pollution and general environmental degradation of the city.

Moreover, the intensity of the traffic and the adequacy of parking facilities remain among the major problems that need to be addressed in a comprehensive preservation policy for Alexandria's city center.

Grundprinzipien für architektonische Konservierung


Implementation Phase

The architectural restoration and renovation process started in 1989. Involved initiatives were promoted by an initial study prepared by the Alexandria Preservation Trust (Award and Partners) for the Governors of Alexandria. The governor’s personal interest in renovating and upgrading the street façades was crucial to initiate public interest and private developers to participate in the development process. However, the Ministry of Culture’s interest was equally important in restoring the Mohamed Ali Theater to its former glory, in transforming the Bawabia residence into the city’s National Museum and the former Mohamed Ali Club into the Alexandria Innovation Center, known as the Helmy Cultural Center.

Other institutional developments included the renovation of the former Banco di Roma, presently the National Bank of Egypt, and the Palazzo Aghajr which now houses the Al-Ahram newspaper’s head office in Alexandria. Renovations undertaken by such institutions encouraged a further renovation process in adjacent buildings, notably banks such as the Central Bank and Bank Misr, and cultural centers such as the American Center and the Goethe Institute.

However, little effort has gone towards the improvement of lighting, pavements, street furniture and pavements, which are still derelict.

Selected examples of recent architectural restoration and renovation projects:

Villa Bayed – Alexandrian National Museum

The property was designed in 1926-31 by V. Erlander. The American Consulate bought the property from the successors of A. E. Bayed in 1960 and sold it to the Ministry of Culture in 1987 at a price of 12 million LE. The project of transforming the building into the Alexandrian National Museum started in 2001, and it was inaugurated in September 2003. The Italian architect Maurizio de Paoli was in charge of the museum’s interior. The renovation project is in the context of its new use as a museum, it’s certainly a good example of preservation, since its showcases and displayed objects didn’t interfere with the original setting and décor of the original building, which has remained well preserved.

Rehabilitation and Restoration of the Mohamed Ali Theater, included in the Cortahi Complex (upgrading and restoration)

The Mohamed Ali Theater, owned by G. Cortahi, was designed by architect G. Parigi in 1931 on the location where the old Opera Theater used to exist. The surrounding two apartment buildings were designed by the same architect (round the same time, 1926). In 2003 the whole complex was restored and additional structures were attached to the backstage area of the theater to provide better performance facilities.

The project highlights the importance of considering the urban context of the restored edifices, since the surrounding buildings, the street, the entrance gallery were all restored within the process of renovating the theater. However, incomplete pre-design inception, unrealistic initial budgeting and constant replacement of consulting services and related drawing and specifications resulted in the disruption of work and the inflation of costs from 3.5 to 25 million LE.

Mohamed Ali Club (renovation & reuse)

Originally known as Club Mohamed Ali, this building was erected about the 1890s for the Alexandria Exchange Company and was known as the Borneo Institution. Today it is a government property, called the Helmy Cultural Center. Various cultural events are held there including lectures, exhibitions, music concerts and seminars, etc. The original club was renovated in 2001 under the direction of Dr. Aida Kheir. The renovation process seems to have been more concerned with introducing familiarity with preservation. Additional features to the original exterior architecture have disabled the original character of this building, yet the more serious problems associated with the post construction phase seem to have been related to technical specifications and control of the execution of services, such as air-conditioning, acoustics, lighting, etc.
The branches of the National Bank of Egypt (renovation and restoration)

The National Bank of Egypt took the initiative of renovating two of its branches on Salah Salem Street, the former Sherif Street. The first, originally the Banco di Roma, was designed in 1905 by the architect H. Goma in neo-Renaissance style. The internal reorganization of the bank seems to have not disrupted the designs, since most of the original interiors were preserved, whilst most of the furniture was replaced and disposed of. The exterior restoration carefully researched the original features of the building which still remains one of the most distinguished buildings of Alexandria’s city center. The restoration work started in 1997 under the consultancy of Ahmad Faiz, El Taha and El Kholy, with an estimated budget of 8 million L.E., and the restored premises were inaugurated in 2001 at a final cost of 11 million L.E.

The second branch of the National Bank of Egypt, formerly the Bank of Athens, was designed by H. Pararos and P. Grigor in around 1918. It was restored and renovated under the directions of Mohamen and Beheadh Consultants, originally a civil engineering firm. Unfortunately the renovation process, though preserving the main features of the facades, resulted in a complete destruction of the original interior spaces and detailing within the newly introduced modern renovations. While both these examples belong to the same client and were renovated nearly simultaneously, it is obvious that the two approaches to conservation were quite diverse.

Palaestina Aghion (renovation and reuse)

Originally belonging to the Aghion family, the Palaestina Aghion was built in 1905, when the Aghions had to move to the Rosetta Gate district after the British bombardment of Alexandria in 1892. It was designed by the Italian architect Antonio Leopardo, following an eclectic Neo-Renaissance and Mamluk style. The renovation of the building involved later to the Talbi family. Nowadays the property is occupied by the Al-Ahram Newspaper, which added a new floor to the structure. More recently a study for the complete renovation of the premises was prepared by Avlidis & Partners. However, the actual execution of work not only required no professional supervision, but the client also exercised management of the renovation process, making changes to specifications and drawings with the aim of reducing costs. In this particular case most of the proposed works were discarded and the building only received some cleaning and a fresh coat of paint applied to its facades and interiors. Cinema-Ami: Twentieth Century Fox (transformation)

Cinema Ami is a beautiful example of the grand cinema traditions of Alexandria’s Art Deco period. It was designed by the American architects John & Drew Almenor for Mr. G. Groenewoud, the promoter and owner of several similar establishments in Alexandria. Managed by Twentieth Century Fox, the cinema was subletted into several smaller cinemas in 2002 by the Italian architect Violante Claudia. While the decorative original roof was protected and covered by a new false ceiling, the cinema’s interiors and elegant furniture in the basement were sacrificed to fit the new space requirements.

Proposal for the Implementation of a Heritage Management Unit (HM-Unit) at Alexandria Governorate

The aim is to create an Urban Heritage Management Unit (HM-Unit) in the Governorate of Alexandria. The intention is to upgrade the structure and function of the Governorate, in an effort to preserve and regenerate Alexandria’s unique architectural and urban heritage.

Donors and Participants

UNESCO — Beneficiary, provision of legal and political framework of reference, main financial support. UNICEF — Technical and financial support (library documentation, expert training, and project development programs). CULTIVAT (The National Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage) — Consulting partnership in capacity building and coordination. APT (Alexandria Preservation Trust) — Private consultants, providing databases, documentation, technical training, partnership and consulting for project development.
Selected interiors
The HM-Unit should aim at achieving the preservation and the sustainable development of the Alexandrian built environment by:
1. Surveying and documenting Alexandria’s historic, architectural and urban heritage:
   - Listing and surveying historic buildings and districts.
   - Retrieving archives.
   - Publishing architectural and urban conservation manuals.
2. Planning and resource management of the conservation process:
   - Formulating conservation policy, setting standards and development legislation.
   - Identifying threats (e.g. risk maps), constraints and opportunities.
3. Monitoring, evaluating and correcting the conservation process.
4. Implementing redevelopment projects:
   - Initiating pilot projects for conservation and redevelopment of historic buildings, streets, districts and parks.
5. Redeveloping programs for housing renovation and refurbishment.
6. Development and upgrading of historic sites and monuments.
7. Capacity building, technical assistance and training for conservation.
8. Training technical in the field of conservation, aimed at architects, contractors and specialists in conservation.
9. Experience sharing with educational institutions and research centers.

Goals and mission
- Resource financing and funding
- Within such a sustainable framework the HM-Unit may gather funding from such diverse sources:
  - Consultancy fees for developing guidelines for development, coordinating development projects, reviewing projects and monitoring their implementation.
  - Organizing training courses for professionals and other participants in the conservation process.
  - Providing lists of consultants, professionals and contractors in preservation.
  - Organizing exhibitions and promotion of products, techniques and services related to conservation.
  - Publications, manuals and documentation related to conservation.
  - Organizing professionally guided tours for tourists and the general public interested in heritage and conservation.
  - International organizations, donors and, and explore programs such as those of UNESCO, the European Community, and UNDP.

Legal framework
The HM-Unit needs a governmental decree for its establishment after approval from the Ministry of Local Government. The legal framework should include:
- Its relation with the ministries concerned, such as the Ministries of Tourism (development agency), of the Interior (enforcement of codes, standards and legislation), of Housing, and of Culture along with its Supreme Council of Antiquities.
- The promotion of the role and contribution of local committees, NGOs and businesses related to conservation.
- Allowing the active participation and collaboration of international organizations and agencies related to conservation including UNESCO, UNDP and ICOMOS.
- The hearing of salaries and consultancy fees from public sector bureaus, restrictions and regulatory processes.
- The HM-Unit proposal sponsored by a UNDP fund was presented to the Government of Alexandria and was introduced to the civil society and business community in a public hearing. No further implementation action has been undertaken by the Government.

Conclusion
1. Alexandria’s preservation experiences, while demonstrating the richness and diversity of its heritage, exemplify the fragility and the vulnerability of its conservation.
2. Many problems related to conservation arise from the socio-economic, political and environmental conditions prevailing in the society — good governmental practices, the rule of law, public awareness and poverty.
3. Alexandria’s most recent heritage remains unprotected because of the lack of legislation and effective management, hence there is an urgent need to develop mechanisms for its protection.