

## **The Regeneration of the Historic Market in Beit Jala (Palestine) using the tourist trail approach**

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Cultural heritage conservation and management becomes a real challenge in countries where extraordinary situations take place, including targeted destruction by ISIS in the Middle East. Palestine is yet located under another challenge conserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the West Bank and Gaza. Most cities in the West Bank though suffer limitation of normal urban expansion, lack of control and destruction of archeological, natural and cultural heritage sites, migration of local community and thus the deterioration of mostly abundant historic city centers.

Beit Jala, one of the cities located between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, is yet a clear example where cultural heritage deterioration is significant. The worsening socio-economic conditions in the historic center of Beit Jala resulted not only in the abandonment of the site, but also in the deterioration of the built heritage and image of the historic fabric. Renewal and revitalization projects in several urban quarters failed to secure the participation of the local community and ended in a worse situation, with these quarters completely abandoned. The absence of an appropriate framework of legislation and awareness of conservation issues has contributed to changes in the once-pleasant ambiance of the historic center.

The city is unique in its strong historical, cultural, and religious background derived from traditional agriculture. The local hospitality is famed and is another encouraging factor in developing the city as a destination for cultural tourism within the region. Based on the municipality's strategy for 2014-2016 to "enhance tourism and attract more tourists to the city", my master's thesis proposes a development initiative that takes into

consideration local views and needs. It proposes the urban regeneration of Beit Jala's old market by promoting cultural tourism that will enhance the economic and social structure, and will ensure the conservation of traditional buildings and the historic urban fabric within the market area.

The vision for the regeneration of the proposed market area is not confined to physical renovation, but is a step in a master plan that includes economic, social, cultural, and environmental goals. The analytical research has been used to formulate a robust plan that takes into account the needs of Beit Jala residents and the city's unique culture. Final proposal aims to insure urban and intangible heritage conservation but also the development of the city using a sustainable approach. It proposes the establishment of hospitality school and restaurant, crafts workshops, organic products factories and shops and other visitors' facilities. It moreover supports the revitalization of the organic harvest market redesigning the urban infrastructure so as to fulfill users' needs and revive the flow of tourism to the city.

The implementation of proposed project predicts comprehensive approach to various problems on both long and short terms approximating: the preservation and redevelopment of agricultural farmlands, reduce in youth migration, sustainable revitalization and conservation of historic center, upgrade in locals life quality, increase awareness in cultural heritage preservation and its use for development, and creation of unique authentic tourist experience within the Middle East and Palestine.

Keywords: urban heritage conservation, tangible and intangible heritage preservation, cultural identity and memory, urban regeneration, building reuse, tourism and historic towns, cultural heritage management in historic towns.

