

SESSION (A)
THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE HISTORICAL CENTERS:
THE CASE OF ROSETTE, EGYPT

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Historical centers of many Egyptian cities managed to survive as living cities in spite of physical decline and economic depression. Their fabric carries out the spiritual and cultural messages that communicate with their present citizens. The heritage of these historic city centers are not only Material character, but much more.

Generally, the conservation of historic centers is fundamentally different from conservation of single monument. While a single monument can be kept on a chosen state of evolution, the historic centers cannot be preserved in particular state “with exception of the small areas conserved for tourist purposes”. The historic centers, as living cities must meet the varying needs of citizens with sustainable transformations. The challenge is not how to preserve, but how to create dynamic living spaces and places that produce rich in cultural traditions that lead organically from the past to the future.

The research will study and analyze the historical center of “Rosetta”, which is one of the intermediate cities in northern Egypt that has a particular architectural heritage and many urban problems. The city of Rosetta (Rashid in Arabic) is located on the west bank of the Rosetta branch of the Nile, approximately 65km east of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast. Today it is best known for the Rosetta stone, which was discovered in the Qayitbay castle in 1799.

The city history passed over many periods of increase and decrease in its importance due to economical and political reasons. Its architectural heritage reveals the influence of various ages, but the most unique are merchant houses and mosques from the ottoman period. The city also has a particular suburban landscape of agricultural land and palm groves that are of great importance. Although Rosetta is no longer a leading commercial center, its citizens are employed in various typical activities, which are mainly agriculture, stocking and processing rice from the Delta, fishing and building ships and yachts.

The main problem that faces the historic buildings of Rosetta is moisture from the soil, caused by an excess of underground salt water. The historic merchant houses have been the subject of many restoration projects over the past 20 years, but many of them have regularly been re-damaged by water and humidity and are currently under re-restoration. Unfortunately, some have even collapsed or were demolished. However, there are a number of activities that may take place in the historic buildings no longer used, maintaining the characteristics, such as crafts centers, libraries and cultural places that serve the local communities.

Rosetta's historic center future must include renovation and modernization of basic infrastructure and development of traditional production sectors, based on the exploitation of this natural and cultural heritage to promote tourism locally and internationally. Physical restoration of the buildings is not enough to keep the historic center of the city alive, but a project for rehabilitation based on sustainability should be initiated. Not only to preserve and restore the outer shell, but inside the shell should inserted some activities, social and economic dynamics that can make best use of resources and potential.

The revitalization of Rosetta provides a mix of cultural, social, economic, technical and institutional, that need coordinated investments by the government. Must involve residents, landowners and all those have interest to ensure the careful maintenance and replacement of the elements of the built environment. This does not only depend on the availability of funding but also the specific technical and social skills that make up the traditional know-how. Unfortunately, many historical cities, especially the intermediate cities in Egypt suffer from lack of funds and local expertise. But the main problem is the lack of cooperation between the authorities who make the decisions.