

HERITAGE WITHOUT PAPER

RECOVERY EFFORTS FOR PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE HISTORIC CITY OF NABLUS, PALESTINE.

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Introduction:

Nablus, the uncrowned Queen of Palestine, situated 63 km north of Jerusalem between the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal, Nablus was founded in 72 AD by the Roman Emperor Titus in honor of his father Flavius Vespasian. It was called Flavia Neapolis, the “new City”, until 636 AD when the Arabs took the town, changing its name to Nablus. It is one of the Canaanites cities that came from Arabia to Palestine in 2500 B.C. Its geographical position on the trade roads made it an important commercial center for the most of the successive civilizations as Pharaohs, crusades, Mongols, Mamluks, Ottomans and others. The old town is built at the bottom of Mt. Gerizim where at the time twenty natural springs supplied the town with water. It is a large residential and market area featuring many old buildings and lively streets scenes and activities. The religious and administrative buildings are from the Ottoman period and a walk through its colored alleys will give you a pleasant historic cultural flavor. Nablus was the center of the Arab soap-making industry with over 30 factories in 1882. The abundant local production of olive oil explains why so many soap factories has been created.

Before the Israeli latest invasion in April 3, 2002, the old town of Nablus used to be well-preserved and home about 20000 persons. Nablus, the commercial heart of the West Bank, which was in continuous use since Roman times, had recently carried out renovation and restoration projects with international and local funds. Since 1995 the Municipality of Nablus has started taking measures to revitalise the urban environment of the Old Town. Efforts began by renewal of the infrastructure; sanitation work and street tiling were carried out. This was followed by stone cleaning of some street facades, repainting and repairing of windows and doors, and consolidation of dangerous or potentially unstable structures such as walls, street facades, or street coverings. Most of this careful cultural heritage preservation work has been under over the past two weeks.

Until April the third, the historic Old Town of Nablus, was one of the most beautiful, economically viable, and lively historic centre, unfortunately it suffered the most devastation. The Israeli Army bombarded the historic town for ten executive days using F16 and heavy tanks as well as Apache helicopters. The destruction in the Old Town is tremendous

and is expected to increase if urgent actions were not taken. The Old Town of Nablus has a very dense urban fabric composed of the main commercial streets and six residential quarters formed of clustered courtyard houses. Many monumental buildings in the old city were detected fully destroyed. Pin point missile air attack on Nablus targeted a 12th century mosque, 17th century church, Ottoman-era structures such as, *Khan*, and 18th century *Hammam* (public bath), number of traditional soap factories and exceptional historic family palaces.

Post-Disaster efforts:

Site investigations revealed that all buildings, which dated back to more than 600 years in the old city, were to different extent affected by the Israeli latest aggression. Damages, which were detected, ranged from light damages such as broken windows, doors, and fallen plaster to severe damages and total destruction.

The municipality of Nablus which is the main governmental body responsible for city has taken immediate operational and administrative actions to avoid further loss and damage in cultural heritage and to insure the safety of the residents of the historic city. The absence of risk preparedness strategy and management plan of cultural heritage reduces the efficiency of recovery attempts. The municipality in spite of the financial constrains and enclosure of the city succeeded to take in these actions

- A. Rapid installation of the infrastructure of the historic city. This includes the following
 1. Removal of debris and rubble from the destructed sites in order to allow access municipality', trolleys and rescue of people : in this process priorities were given to rescue people under the rubble, the pressure of time has affected the way in which debris has to be moved, unfortunately many historical evidences were disappeared during the removal. What makes the problem worse is that there are no details documentation on these historical buildings.
 2. Installing the infrastructure. This includes fixing the electricity and sanitation pipes and repairing damaged pipes.

3. Remove of garbage and trash from the streets to reduce environmental pollution and avoid any healthy crisis.
- B. Establishing a committee responsible for any action related to emergency repair and consolidation of the unstable structure. This committee is also responsible for giving permit to evacuate any building from its residents.
- C. Establishing a technical committee consists mainly of members of Engineering Department of Municipality of Nablus and other local organizations and academic institutions. The committee is responsible for providing any required technical advice concerning decisions to be taken by the Municipality related to recovery efforts. The committee depending on voluntary effort manages to conduct damage assessment report for the historic city of Nablus. This committee also provide the municipality with the following recommendations:
 1. Proper inventory and documentation are an invaluable tool in the event of disaster (Stovel 1998). A full inventory and documentation process for the damaged and the endangered sites is needed. This inventory should provide all the necessary information about the damaged site. This could be done using technology in recording and classifying information about the sites especially in historic areas. Several types of techniques may be considered either independently or in combination depending on the case.
 2. It is recommended to establish a council of conservation of heritage (Jokilehto 1994). One of the main objectives of this council is managing the cultural heritage in the city of Nablus. This council should benefit from historical, artistic, technical and craft skills of, academics and professionals. Taking this into consideration the management guidelines can be mobilized effectively.

Develop a comprehensive rehabilitation program and ensure an effective and active measures for the conservation and rehabilitation of the historic city. To make sure the mentioned objectives are achieved, one should keep an eye all the time on the ethics of conservation measures (Feilden 1993).

Damage Assessment Report

This section gives an idea about the damage assessment report of the Old City of Nablus. Based on 24-hour preliminary evaluation, there was a need to prepare a more accurate report that gives more information about the degree and level of damage. The historic city was divided into zones, where each zone was reported by specific inventory. The survey in each area was carried out by 20 groups of 4-5 persons committed themselves for five working days. These groups consist of architects and engineers representing professional offices in this field and experts from Nablus Municipality. The work was managed by a steering committee, which consists of the

Municipality of Nablus and representative of UNDP, An-najah University, the Palestinian Engineers Association and the Palestinian Contractors Union. An inventory for assessing the extent of building damage in the Old Town was undertaken using questionnaire surveys, interviews with residents and on site observations (see nablus.org).

3. Post-Disaster Field Investigation:

Following the preliminary Post-Disaster Damage Assessment Report that was submitted to UNDP, and the discussion held at Nablus Municipality with UNDP and representatives of international donors. The disaster field investigation assessment has been prepared according to the categories of damage evaluation adopted in the European Macro Seismic Scale EMS 98 as shown in tables 1 and 2. The green color represents grade I and II (light damage). The yellow color represents grade III (partial damage). Whereas, the red color represents grade VI and V (total destruction).

Based on the above investigation methodology, one survey form was filled in for each building. In case of light damage one survey form was used for group of buildings with the same degree of damage. Data analysis was carried out and the output was summarized and presented in tables.

4. Data Analysis:

It was observed that destruction caused by the Israeli invasion in the Old Town affected the whole area, damage was distributed in all quarters. It touched several building of different use. Results of the inventory carried out in the Old Town revealed that 64 Buildings or group of buildings were very badly damaged or totally destroyed (Grade 5 & 4). The total cost for reconstruction amounts to \$9,065,775.

Two hundred and twenty one buildings or group of buildings were partially damaged and need urgent repair and renovation. Urgent intervention is needed in many cases as the urban fabric of the Old Town forms one mass. Thus weak or unstable buildings will weaken and endanger other attacked structures in case of collapse. The total cost for repair reach to \$ 14,912,300.



Map of the Old City of Nablus: Classification of Zones for survey purposes, where grade 4,5 with red color are totally damaged and grade 3 with yellow color are partially destroyed

If not partially or totally damaged, buildings of the Old Town, suffered from light damages as a result of heavy and brutal Israeli bombardment. 6,288,155 US dollars is the expenses of the repair of light damages such as broken glass, smashed doors, fallen plaster, cracks, vandalized shop canopies and fronts, ... etc.

Kanaan Soap factory site:

The destroyed site consists mainly of two soap factory buildings (Kanaan and Al-Nabulsi that are totally destroyed) and a group of houses (shabaru, Istetaiyeh, shakhseer, Zatar, Khalili, Johari, Younis and Alfi families, that are partially damaged). The site with total approximate area of 8000 m squared lies at the western side of Old town.



Kanaan soap factory site

The two destroyed soap factories were among thirty soap factories used to be functioning in Nablus in late 18th century. The Kanaan soap factory was an exceptional example for soap factory buildings in Nablus because of its unique design. The destruction of the two soap factories endangered the adjacent buildings and influenced the structural stability of the whole surrounding residential blocks, where 17 families are living in 7 traditional courthouses. The still standing structures, of the surrounding because of its unstable conditions threatens the safety of people who are living and moving in and near the site. Families were asked to evacuate the building and were offered temporary accommodations. The destruction of the site has also damaged the existing urban fabric of the historic city and changes its visual spatial qualities. What used to be a narrow dark path walk becomes a wide street with large empty space that is filled with rubble and parts of damaged buildings around it. As a result of the initial evaluation of the structural and physical conditions of the site and its surrounding, immediate intervention is recommended.

Conclusion:

Because the unsettle political situation in Palestine, two

other Israeli invasions took place in the city of Nablus after the April one. Both invasions have added more destruction to the historic buildings of the old town. This has undermined the efforts taken by the Municipality to reduce the negative impact of the disaster. Examples include exhaustive recording prior to demolition of unreachable elements, efforts to stabilize structure and contents following a disaster, efforts to remove or undo negative consequences and provision of temporary housing to accommodate those who might have lost homes and challenge to adopt the highest quality of conservation standard.

Limited financial resources have shifted the priorities from protection of cultural heritage to more compulsory issues. Humanitarian assistance to provide shelter for homeless people, efforts to rebuild and sustain the social structure and financial aid for emergency repair were among these urgent demands. What makes the situation worse is the international donors' interest was not oriented towards protection of cultural heritage but only for reconstruction of the infrastructure and installing water and sanitation network.

In a case like this, there is a need to strengthen collaborative working habits and a more serious and professional attitude to preparedness by all those who work in the heritage field (Connally 1997). We can articulate our action in relation to disaster in three main phases: preparedness, response and recovery. It would be logical that the main emphasis in training should be given in the phase of preparedness (Assi 2000). During or immediately after disaster, actions must be undertaken according to plans involving properly trained teams of people. Nevertheless, in the phase of recovery, there is again the possibility to introduce training addressing particular target groups, at the same time, of course, the recovery phase should be seen as a preparedness phase (Barakat 1997). An important part of disaster preparedness is in learning from previous events, as well as improving and anticipating actions for the future. Preparedness should, however, go even further and be provocative.

The effectiveness of the recovery measures is in large part a function of measures planned and implemented in advance of the disaster. The quality of mitigation activities, focus on reconstruction, depend on the quality of documentation prepared for the building before loss. The framework should include concern for mitigation, for rebuilding and for reinstatement of enhanced preparedness measures.

Protection for cultural heritage can be legal, physical, or moral, and includes preventive measures as well as maintaining an appropriate use of developing cultural or educational activities (Assi 2002). It relies on a community commitment and as a result, raising public awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage is a condition of success as well as necessary action to ensure active and sustainable conservation of heritage place. Beyond awareness, conservation requires skills and resources, in particular

financial mechanism.

One final word, I do urge the international community to participate in the protection of this irreplaceable cultural heritage, and provide the local authorities with any means of technical and financial assistance. This will insure effective system in heritage conservation for the sake of the continuity of the common heritage of universal value.

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Post-Disaster Damage Assessment Report for the city of Nablus, prepared by technical committee, this report was published on the internet, web site (Nablus.org) May, 2002.

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