

The Local Agenda 21 for Old Aleppo: Towards a sustainable urban settlement

Maan Chibli PhD

University of Aleppo-Faculty of Architecture /GTZ/ SURADEC. P.O. Box. 8844 Aleppo. Syria. Phone: +963 21 2640599. Fax: +963 21 2640799.
E-mail: suradec@scs-net.org

1. INTRODUCTION

The City of Aleppo, with its two millions inhabitants, is considered as a metropolis for the northern regions of Syria. The core of the City evokes the long history in which Aleppo is proud to be one of the longest continuously inhabited city in the world. Modern interventions have introduced wide streets, cut across the historic urban fabrics that resulted in the demolition of a part of the Old City as well as a great loss of its residential units. In 1986, Aleppo's Old City was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Later, in 1992, the City initiated the Project for the Rehabilitation of Old Aleppo with the involvement of the German Government (GTZ) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development as partners.

The Rehabilitation Project has for objective to preserve the Old City as a living entity and to stop further deterioration. The *Development Plan*, adopted by the City, delineates integrative approaches and strategies for upgrading the historical urban tissue. The methodology includes various aspects of urban management that cover the following main tasks: planning, housing micro-credits, urban environment, urban economy, social development, information technology, traffic and infrastructure.

2. SUSTAINABILITY AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Sustainable Development has been suggested as a mean of integrating economic and social development with the fundamental protection of the environment. The major catalyst has been the UN conference in Rio in 1992 and the series of UN conferences that followed like "Habitat II" in Istanbul in 1996. The basic characteristics of sustainable development like: Environment, Social equity, Human economy, Futurity, Participation, etc. permit to investigate on the terrain the potential role that the local government, represented by the City Council and the Municipality, has to take part in.

The Municipality has a major role to play in promoting sustainable development, little can be delivered without its commitment and cooperation. To achieve sustainability, the Agenda 21 is considered as one of the most primordial tools, it is an interactive process in which the Municipality has a key role as an initiator and caretaker of its progression. There is a big need for partnerships and for consensus within the civil society at each stage of the process. To conclude, the Local Agenda 21 is a solutions oriented process, focus on action and committed to continuous improvement.

3. THE LOCAL AGENDA 21 ACTION PLAN

A Local Agenda 21 action plan is something different from all previous plans, it stresses the importance on integrating environmental with social and economic considerations, on having a vision to the long term and objectives and look beyond the time a horizon of most existing plans, on preparing programs to achieve these objectives and recommend steps to encourage

action and implementation, and on tackling simultaneously local and global issues at the local level. Moreover, the action plan shall involve the analysis of immediate priorities, a clear implementation plan and the development of a monitoring system as well as a communication strategy.

3.1. The Old Aleppo action plan

The urban management in historic sites acquire an additional level of importance and complication which the Local Government has to face in its daily work. Strategies should cover all possible levels of urban interventions and study the interaction between human and the traditional fabrics to be considered as sustainable. As mentioned above, the Project for the Rehabilitation of Old Aleppo has covered the main aspects of urban management, they correspond to several chapters in the Agenda 21, and presented with projects and activities in which the Rehabilitation Project is involved as well as planned activities to be undertaken for the future. They are presented as part of the respective chapters of the international Agenda 21 documentation.

3.1.1 Chapter 3: Combating poverty

Shibani School VOCCAD centre

This project constitutes efforts which are exerted to rediscover a large forsaken monument “The Shibani School” to improve social and cultural infrastructure and to integrate new functions in it to help revive the cultural spirit in Old Aleppo. The Objectives of the Project is to establish a centre for the training on the applied arts especially restoration techniques (VOCCAD). The method of this school is “learning by doing”, thus, the restoration of any adequate building can be done by the trainers themselves according to the stage of progress.

Traditional techniques of all kinds of crafts are vanishing slowly, because modern techniques of conservation are unknown among local professionals. There is an increasing demand for adequate renovation work, therefore, the purpose of creating this centre is to train young professionals on renovation works, push them to a higher level of technical restoration skills and consequently increase their job opportunities.

3.1.2 Chapter 4: Changing consumption patterns

Environmental Management in the Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME)

The project main objective, under a short-term perspective, is to help SMEs improving their environmental performance and management as a step with regard to the environment in the Old City. This will engage the promotion of new production process and might necessitate the introduction of new techniques. Likewise, under a mid-term perspective, the fund shall provide experience for future broader public support to SMEs, it intends, under a long-term perspective to sustain investments and measures to improve the situation of environment in the Small and medium sized Enterprises (SME) in the Old City of Aleppo.

In fact, this process will enable the Municipality to build experience in the field of public SME promotion as well as cooperation between the Municipality and the private sector in order to promote the idea of the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) between enterprises and local authorities. The grant of the SME promotion can be considered as a new tool for managing the environment and the economy. Through this fund we can: show the rationale of SME promotion within the context of the Old City rehabilitation, provide an orientation for the project team on how to manage the SMEs fund, and produce guidelines for urban SME promotion to be disseminated either to further SME promotion in Aleppo or to other interested Municipalities in Syria.

3.1.3 Chapter 5: Demographic dynamics and sustainability

Housing strategy

It is estimated that the Old City of Aleppo contains some 15000 residences of various types. The Project has undertaken some support measures to encourage the residents in stabilizing and modernizing their homes through various fund programs (emergency and rehabilitation funds). However, the Project's interventions have been limited in scope. The Project is concentrating on developing a multi-faced housing strategy that will encourage all stakeholders and concerned agencies and institutions to develop additional procedures to support housing. These will include the cooperation with several institutions as well as redesigning the existing already available funds.



Photo1 Example of a beneficiary case from the Housing Funds.

3.1.4 Chapter 6: Protecting and promoting human health

The Assadia School's Health point

Providing social services is one of the main objectives of the Old City Rehabilitation, it intends to provide social services to keep the inhabitants in place. Therefore; the emphasis has been put on the development of the social infrastructure in the Action Areas (AA's). In AA1, no health service was available for the neighborhood; after the survey and the participation process, the residents demanded a health point. So a house, which belonged to the Awqaf (the religious endowment), had been identified and renovated by the Project to set a health point in it, in cooperation with the Directorate of Health. This point has ensured the basic health services for the population of this neighborhood.

3.1.5 chapter 7: Promoting sustainable human settlement development

Future Land Use Plan

The general Land Use plan for the Old City of Aleppo has for objective to preserve the residential use and secure housing in the same direction develop mixed uses like commerce and tourism as they help keeping the Old City viable, as well as to preserve the Souk functions and improve recreational activities. The functions are subdivided into specified zones of activities. The future land use plan was set in a way to render the Old City as diversified as possible to keep it viable and sustainable.

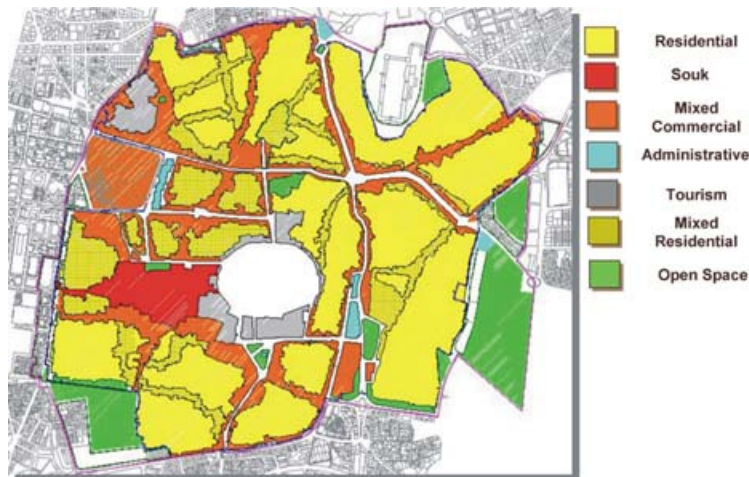


Figure 1 Future Land Use plan for the Old City of Aleppo.

Urban planning oriented towards ecological objectives: the environmental strategy of the Old City:

A strategy was delineated to handle the degraded environment from which the Old City of Aleppo suffer, the defined scope include present and future interventions. The work comprised fixing objectives, strategies and analysing the urban problems for the following topics: legislative framework, air and noise pollution, greening program, water and soil pollution, energy use in buildings and solid waste.

Sustainable Land-use: Noise map on GIS

The intention of this project is to tackle the noise problem and to ensure improvement of living conditions and development of economic viability and sustainability. The noise level are collected using field measurements then placed on a thematic map using the GIS. Availability of spatial analysis tools enable the overlapping of many thematic layers such as (demographic layer to have the ratio of the residents in dangerous areas), and hence to help defining areas where the inhabitants are exposed to excessive levels of noise. Representing this phenomenon clearly can aid the decision makers to focus their attention on priority areas and to model and simulate noise levels based on anticipated changes in conditions.

3.1.6 chapter 9: Protection of the atmosphere

Environmentally compatible transport systems

The Old City of Aleppo is suffering considerably form air pollution, which is an important issue to be tackled due to its intersections with other sectors of activities. Emphasize will be put on a future objective to have a “Clean air from Old Aleppo”. One of the objectives in the field of transport is to introduce environmentally friendly service vehicles such as the small electric cargo cars for the old Souks, which is under discussion with the French Agency for Energy Management (ADEME).

Low energy Buildings

This is a planned project which has a concept to improve the building’s performance in terms of energy consumption and to reduce pollutants’ emissions. This will contribute to an efficient use of energy by setting standards for energy saving and the use of environmentally friendly materials. Promoting the use of renewable sources of energy, like solar energy, will be a target in this field. Although, solar energy is not used, there are numerous possibilities for the installation of solar collectors for water and space heating. Furthermore, the work will

incorporate the elaboration of environmental indicators to set future policy of regulations. These indicators can include energy efficiency indicators, pollution rates and noise levels.

3.1.7 chapter 18: Protection of the quality and supply of fresh water resources

Modernization of infrastructures

The project's objective is to provide fresh water and to prevent water pollution caused by the old sewer system and the unauthorized slaughterhouses. This affects ground water, public health and cause damage to the sewer system by throwing the organic refuse into it. The modernization of the sewerage system will contribute to the upgrading of environmental conditions, the control of water pollution, and the improvements in drinkable water. However, the main strategy should be oriented to increase the awareness of people in this field.



Photo 2 Renovation of infrastructure in the Old City alleys.

3.1.8 chapter 30: Strengthening the role of business and industry

Tourist Trails in Action Areas

The objective of this project is to make the Old City attractive, of course for tourists but also for the inhabitants of Aleppo. To support tourism in the Old City, tourist trails has been developed to link Action Areas with the flow of tourists by preparing trails with maps and signs plus tourist services. Most of tourism revenue in Old Aleppo is concentrated around the famous historic monuments (the Citadel and Souks). So to distribute these revenues ,on a larger scale, and to reorientate the flow of tourists to limit negative impact, tourist trail has been defined, in accordance with the Land Use concept, to support the tourism industry in the Old City.

3.1.9 chapter 36: Promoting education, public awareness and training

Awareness raising campaigns

The Rehabilitation Project has carried out several campaigns in order to raise population awareness towards certain problems like the Cleanness and the Noise campaigns. The Cleanness campaign had for objective to raise the awareness of inhabitants about the importance to have a clean neighborhood to diminish pollution, to ensure the collaboration between them and the Municipality and to develop a sustainable mechanism to face the waste problem in the future. Whereas the Noise campaign was set to highlight a neglected noise problem and to demonstrate its bad effects. The Noise Campaign aimed to discuss the problem with relevant groups to share in promoting the objective of the campaign and adept suitable procedures. Both campaigns had been initiated after a participation process with the

inhabitants themselves in order to assess their needs and oriented to communicate with the target groups in coordination with relevant bodies and institutions.

4. CONCLUSION

New issues had been raised by the unprecedented growth in urban areas which gives concerns to subjects such as, the economy of the City, the social exclusion, the preservation of our natural built environment, the quality of life, the pressure on our natural resources and the negative impact on health. Consensus about future vision, programs and activities as well as the involvement of new type of partnerships and public participation could be reached under the umbrella of the Local Agenda 21 to stop the global deterioration of the environment and guarantee the sustainable use of natural resources.

The Local Agenda 21 of Old Aleppo's action program will permit to reach to a comprehensive analysis of problems, will contribute to develop a future vision and will orientate the formulation of objectives and indicators. It will also help initiating future projects and activities, which will be carried out by the City of Aleppo to promote sustainable development. Finally, the City of Aleppo should allocate money to the Agenda 21 activities to foresee its development, the lack of resources constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to the implementation of the Local Agenda 21. Consequently, we do not want our action plan to be end as a mere bureaucratic paper.

6. REFERENCES

Association of Finish Local and regional Authorities. 1999. *Local Agenda 21 in Finland*. Helsinki, Finland.

Blowers, A. and B. Evans. 1997. *Town Planning into the 21st century*, Routledge, London.

J. Breuste, Feldmann, H. and Uhlmann, O. 1998. *Urban Ecology*. Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, Germany.

The Project for the Rehabilitation of the Old City of Aleppo. 1998. *Development Plan for the Old City of Aleppo*. Aleppo, Syria.

P. Hall and U. Pfeiffer. 2000. *Urban future 21, a global agenda for 21st century cities*. Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing, Germany, E&FN Spon.

M. Jenks, and R. Burgess. 2000. *Compact Cities, Sustainable Urban Forms for Developing Countries*. E&FN Spon, London & New York.

D. Schwela and O. Zali. 1999. *Urban traffic pollution*. E & FN Spon: London.

UNCHS-HABITAT. 1996. *The Habitat Agenda*. Nairobi, UNCHS.