Sustainable urban development in historical areas using the tourist trail approach: A case study of the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development (CHUD) project in Saida, Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

Cultural assets are vital aspects for any urban development process. Their importance increases considerably in historical areas, where the richness of cultural heritage has the ability to motivate cultural tourism. This paper emphasizes the sustainable development of urban historical areas based on their potential as cultural tourism sites. It argues that to guarantee the sustainability of any development intervention in these areas, a master planning process must be undertaken to balance all of the aspects of development. It tackles the interconnectedness of these aspects as an approach to their simultaneous development. As a focus of study, this paper raises a question about the ability of a 'heritage trail'—an area of direct interactions between parties sharing in urban development in historic areas—to achieve the sustainability goals of the involved areas. To answer this question, the paper investigates three nodes of interaction stimulated by the heritage trail: conservation and rehabilitation, interpretation, and micro-economic development. To illustrate the validity of the proposed approach, this paper discusses the heritage trail as an approach used in the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development (CHUD) project in the historical core of Saida (Old Saida), Lebanon as a case study.

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Introduction

Heritage is a part of the cultural tradition of any society (Nuryanti, 1996, p. 249). In this study, heritage is taken to include architectural and historical values, in addition to people whose heritage is encapsulated in daily routines (Howard and Pinder, 2003, p. 58). This comprehensive vision merges both tangible and intangible dimensions, in what Howard et al. call 'fields of heritage'. The value of these fields of heritage as a capital stock is what makes them worthy of conservation.[1] This vision considers heritage sites to be assets in any development processes, and 'marketing' these cultural assets is seen as an important means to urban development. Tourism is seen as the major commodification force that is responsible for transforming culture into a product (Hewison, 1987, p. 139). However, the commodification of these cultural heritage

assets raises questions about the limits to their sustainability, and, accordingly, the sustainability of these areas' development. This development requires comprehensive revitalization practices to deal with all community aspects; it has to be tackled from many different perspectives in order to adequately involve social and economic dimensions, in addition to purely physical protection and enhancement measures (Doratli et al., 2004, p. 329).

Because development requires balanced coordination between its different aspects, there appear to be major defects in the project that is the focus of this paper, namely the 'Cultural Heritage and Urban Development' project (CHUD) in Old Saida. Joseph Saba, World Bank Country Director for Lebanon, states the project vision thus: "This . . . treats Lebanon's cultural assets as economic assets and integrates them into the life of the community to achieve local growth," (World Bank, 2003a). While sharing this same broad aim across all CHUD projects in five secondary cities in Lebanon (Baalbeck, Byblos, Saida, Tripoli, and Tyre) the intervention in each city varies according to local characteristics. In Saida, the distinctive physical morphology of the historical core (Old Saida) extends its heritage value beyond the importance of each building. To take advantage of this, the heritage trail has been developed as an approach to CHUD, based on the richness of Old Saida as a field of heritage. The main goal of the project in Old Saida has been to

[1] The term conservation is used herein to indicate all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance (ICOMOS, 1999). This understanding is known in North America as *Historic Preservation*.

achieve local community development, rather than just scattered tourism-oriented projects, but the CHUD project could not effectively expand its perspective to achieve these goals. A number of sub-projects related to local-economic development and rehabilitation of historical sites have been carried out as part of the CHUD project. These (mainly rehabilitating public places, such as town squares, pedestrian areas, and traditional markets), have mostly concentrated on physical renovation rather than urban regeneration, and have had only minor impacts on the economic profile of the old city. These unbalanced interventions are negatively affecting the local people living in the core, and are leading to an isolated ghetto, and might eventually lead to an empty center. This paper investigates the defects in the 'Cultural Heritage and Urban Development' project (CHUD) applied in Old Saida, in order to explain the role of the 'heritage trail' as an integrative and capacity-building tool of sustainable community development. The case of Old Saida offers a prototype of development that any similar case can emulate.

A heritage trail is one of the direct applications of the local 'bottom-up' approaches to the creation of heritage tourism. These approaches give a larger role to the visitors' imaginations in shaping the processes that underlie the development of these fields of unique heritage (Chang et al., 1996, p. 287). 'Interaction' is key to either bottom-up approach, whether it is the user approach or the actor-centered approach. Both of these are based on regulating the type of interactions between the three components of tourism in heritage fields: site, locals, and tourists (Middleton and Hawkins, 1998). A heritage trail is a domain through which all of these components, as the players in urban development in heritage areas, can interact (Galt, 1995). Each player adopts a set of needs that he or she tries to meet through these interactions. The sustainability of the resulting development is based on the ability of the heritage areas to meet and balance all of these multiple needs.

To examine the role of the heritage trail, this paper investigates the qualities of Old Saida that formulate its heritage richness. It reviews the character of the local people and their activities, the urban morphology of Old Saida, and the visitors' characteristics and interests. Next, it addresses the interrelationships found among three key areas of interactions linked along the heritage trail, those of conservation and physical rehabilitation practices, the interpretation of the historical core, and CHUD local-economic development, in light of sustainable urban development principles. In addition to discourse analyses, the paper follows a methodology that encompasses a number of inquiry approaches, as follows:

- The paper presents a review of the literature on the sustainable development of historical areas based on their cultural heritage value. In addition, it investigates the interrelationships between conservation and rehabilitation practices, interpretation, and local-economic development as locals and tourists interact in places developed along the heritage trail.
- The paper uses the findings of two questionnaires developed by the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI) as a part of its analytical study.[2] The first is used to shed light on the cultural artifacts of Old Saida that make it attractive to tourists. It also describes the characteristics of tourists and the cultural enrichment provided by their visit to Old Saida. The second questionnaire is used to assess the impact of the CHUD project from an economic point of view. It studies local-economic development as a parameter of the impacts the project has on the local community in Old Saida.

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[2] The questionnaires' findings are used under a permission of the CHUD project administration.

Interactions along the heritage trail and the sustainable urban development of historical areas

The available literature tackles cultural tourism and its interdependent activities mainly through two different but compatible perspectives. The first strand of literature studies two complementary but opposing perspectives, the details of which vary according to the specifics of the study. This includes, for example, 'Setting' and 'Visitor' (Moscardo, 1996); 'Production' and 'Consumption' (Nuryanti, 1996; Cohen, 1988); local and global, bottom-up as opposed to top-down, and user versus visitor perspectives (Chang et al., 1996); and 'Supply' and 'Demand' (Mazzanti, 2003). The second strand takes a different approach, focusing on the areas of intersections between these perspectives. It emphasizes the shared concerns of all participants, including that of the visitor, the host place, and the locals, as key players in cultural tourism (Pearce, 2001; Russo, 2002; Cheung, 1999; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998), and thus also in sustainable urban redevelopment practices.

A heritage trail is one physical manifestation of the interactions between tourists, locals, and the host place. It is seen as a direct application of the Krippendorf model of 'human tourism'. He builds his vision on an argument that 'animation' should have a central role in tourism. The role of animation is to help remove barriers and encourage the exploratory spirit, creating openness for new contacts (Krippendorf, 1987, p. 142). This model stresses the importance of learning, self-discovery, and exploration as motives for, and activities in, tourism. This implies a mutual relationship between tourists and heritage sites that the heritage trail is configured to fit. In view of this, a heritage trail adds value to cultural tourism in old cities. Furthermore, as a self-guided tour, it permits tourists to directly interact with locals within the built-heritage attractions. These direct interactions are the base upon which the tourist discovers, experiences, and consumes the cultural history (Hewison, 1987, p. 139). It is important to note that this perspective highlights tourism as a major force for commodifying history (Richards, 1996, p. 265), raising questions about the limits of their sustainability as cultural heritage assets. On one hand, Hewison offers cautions about the long-term consequences of commodifying history, as the preservation process might be shaped to meet political and economic, rather than cultural, ends, threatening the sustainability of cultural tourism (Garrod and Fyall, 2000, p. 683). On the other hand, Richards (1996) argues that postmodern forms of tourism, with their concerns for image and authenticity, have come to insure the qualities of heritage tourism assets as a guarantee of the sustainability of those assets and the tourism they generate (Richards, 1996, p. 266).

Nevertheless, dealing with heritage based on its definition as anything 'associated with the word inheritance; that is, something transferred from one generation to another' (Nuryanti, 1996) raises the dilemma of contradictions between preservation and development. While the aim of preservation is to maintain an historical legacy in such a way that it can be safely handed to future generations as a hereditary identity feature, 'development' aims to profit from the use of a community and its environment. Keeping these two contradictory perspectives in balance requires various degrees of revitalization (Nuryanti, 1996, p. 255). This involves the integration of the historic legacy, inheritance, and sense of place with the demands of contemporary economic, political, and social conditions (Doratli et al., 2004; Howard and Pinder, 2003; Pearce, 2001).

All of these aspects generate a 'vicious circle of development' in heritage areas (Russo, 2002, p. 165). This circle encompasses the development potential contained in the local histories, tourism as a domain through which these potentials are activated, and different related aspects of development (environmental, economic, and social) as prerequisites of holistic development. All of these aspects are dynamically related to each other. Meeting sustainability