A Project to Safeguard an Abandoned Heritage: The Revitalization of Golea (Algeria)

Dr. Madani, S; Diafat, A.
Laboratoire PUViT, Université Sétif 1, Sétif, Algeria,

Abstract: This paper presents a promising experience of revitalizing the historic village of Golea in Algeria. This village witnesses continuous deterioration and a social shift due to the migration of its local population.

The objectives of this project were to develop a comprehensive approach and implementation strategy that would lead to the economic and social revitalization and insuring a sustainable cultural development through the maintenance of the city components. The role of heritage and mountain tourism, their implications for urban conservation and heritage, as an essential element of sustainable development, will be discussed.

The methodology approach is based on a thorough analysis of the process concerning this collective product. There will be an investigation through the different steps from the project definition to its design.

This project for Golea as a source of lessons for contemporary architectural design is calling other similar projects claimed by the local community.

Keywords: Heritage, Golea Project, Community, Strategies, Design.

Introduction

This paper presents a promising experience of revitalizing the historic village of Golea in Algeria. This wonderful village witnesses continuous deterioration and a social shift due to the migration of its local population. In fact, Golea is facing a problem of depopulation; this heritage is deserted during the "black decay" in the Nineties due to the insecurity and the lack of basic needs necessary for everyday life, so that the villagers fled from the mountain to the lowlands. The concern of the local authorities seeking for an innovative solution for this historic heritage resulted in the project of revitalization.

The Golea project aims to restore some ancient customs based on faith and "self-reliance" and that led to the heritage in general and those of Kabylia especially to survive in a mountainous environment worthy of the sustainable development. This project is designed to contribute socially, economically, physically and aesthetically to regenerate the local urban environment and empowering the community ties.
Theoretical Framework

Urban conservation (preserving tradition, social and cultural aspects as well as the physical improvement of historic buildings) is often witnessed as an approach towards higher levels of sustainability. Concerning preservation and conservation of old monuments of historic value the international organizations are achieving great success. However, this often excludes historic residential areas and historic city centers which equally are representing the urban heritage. In addition, there are other cultural non-tangible elements of urban heritage such as: customs and beliefs. These non-tangible elements play a key role for the articulation of complex space use and the built environment. (1)

In historic districts, the development projects tend to attract a variety of economic activity and competition, therefore encouraging both new inhabitants and visitors to revisit and rediscover these restored vicinities. Moreover, upgrading the physical built environment, social fabric and urban spaces within the historical urban structure all contribute towards increasing their acceptance as public places for different activities. This consequently increases social interaction and cohesion between citizens. Furthermore, conservation and regeneration of historic sites most evidently located at city centers tend to re-affirm residents' feelings of identity and sense of belonging. (2)

The heritage is a factor of social stability as a sign of recognition and belonging to a territory. But heritage is not a dead object; it is marked by community ties, rich in meaning and usage, it is alive and holds an emotional charge that does not necessarily contain references or architectural aesthetics. The objective to value the heritage reveals the importance of respecting the cultures and the human activities that reflect the past and present values through the use and activities of a society. (3)

The economic implication of heritage is a challenge to create wealth, provide resources and generate added value for the social economy. The heritage could contribute to the socio-economic dynamics of the country by providing jobs, promoting income and reduce poverty. To involve successfully the Heritage in the dynamics of the sustainable development and the fight against poverty by focusing on two areas: tourism and the restoration - conservation industry. (4)

Methodology

The methodology approach is based on a thorough analysis of the process concerning this collective urban and architectural product. There will be an investigation through the different steps from the project definition to its design.

A team composed of three teachers of architectural studio and three students of fifth year architecture, in addition to the civil society in Golea were gathered for the project with the local Authorities assistance. A period of preliminary research, studies and design lasted from September 2012 till July 2013.
The team's proposals covered the following topics: legal framework, economic aspects as well as income generation, conservation areas, urban design and architectural issues, restoration, field surveys, social empowerment.

**Project Context**

Historic villages that need to be protected and enhanced begin to disappear gradually, there is a depopulation phenomenon. Due to the lack of primary needs and management, the villagers leave behind them the land of their ancestors and their heritage in all its forms; they prefer living in the valleys and cities.

Kabylia is a hilly region, where these villages are built and concentrated in a circle or lying on the peaks of mountains or peaks nipples separating valleys, with physical structures reflecting a conceptual image of the world and life based on beliefs and sociological values (see Figure 1 and 2). Inside the village there are several dead ends which open outwards by two or three streets. The villages are designed in a defensive manner, turning back outside, while opening on narrow paths. Their boundaries are well defined. Each village is composed of several units called Adroum, and it is a group of people who all have ties of kinship and descent.

Some Berber villages still exist and with a large number of people, others have disappeared over time for many reasons, including economic.

![Figure 1: The Golea site in 2013](source: the authors, 2013.)

![Figure 2: The Golea site in the sixties](source: the archives of the Golea civil society)

**Heritage of Golea**

Originally a center of worship and piety described as a small citadel. The history of the village seems to be mixed with this built entity for nearly six centuries. Golea which means in Arabic: small citadel, it is probably the Mount's name above which was rebuilt repeatedly the current mosque which is accessible only by the single lane alley designed as a rising street.

Before this designation is extended to the whole village and its region, the collective memory retains that around the fifteenth century, a Syrian-born worship man, namely Ahmed Abu Homs has chosen to establish precisely on the Mount.
The village has seen good times and sometimes serious crises with at least three periods of desertification around the middle of the last century. There were drought and starvation during the last years of the French colonization and the recent phenomenon accentuated by the "black decade" (1990-2000)

Golea was chosen as a case study regarding its specificity and, to a certain extent, because of the importance of the problems it raises:
- Difficult accessibility to the village, which looks very isolated.
- The activity of exchange and production of traditional type (carpets, oil, olives ....)
- The main characteristics of its historical heritage were intact and are vital reference points.

From a planning point of view, the main factor would be to reconsider the role of the village, due to the specificity of its fabric. But since it is the prime location of certain activities, it is necessary that intervention in the village reinforces these core functions, it provides the integration of economic activities and tourism facilities compatible with the characteristics of the historic village.

Project Principles and References

The cultural and natural context of Golea with its architectural appearance and cultural value could be one of the factors causing a sustained process of rehabilitation and upgrading of housing and urban fabric. So the preservation of this heritage, the restoration of houses, coupled with a policy of revalorization of the mosque and public spaces in the village can create favorable conditions for further development of activities.

This approach therefore focuses on the rediscovery of the potential of an urban structure with architectural and urban features that can be recovered through interventions in the short and medium terms. From this perspective, special attention was dedicated to certain elements that are fundamental to the organization of the historical fabric of the village: mosque, a small square at the entrance of the village, hill reservoir, Eldjmaa (public space), fountain and houses. (see Figure 3)

The first research step concerns the potential of these structures, purposes and forms that could be reused. The houses with their historical and architectural character must be saved and rehabilitated as part of the upgrading community life. We also studied some structural elements of the historic urban fabric, such as the fountain, the public space El djmaa which functions are now severely deteriorating.

The houses mark the residential fabric of different neighborhoods around the mosque, these buildings need to be rehabilitated, reclassified, revised as houses and allocated with cultural function. The shops in the central part of the village, around the public space (Eldjmaa), are decaying buildings. The intervention for the rehabilitation of this habitat provides an opportunity to convert these structures for commercial and craft activities and open them to the public. There is a progressive and widespread deterioration of housing and urban environment, deficiency in infrastructure and services weakens economic activities.
Program of the Project

It is possible to achieve a balance between tourism development, conservation and heritage preservation through the implementation of comprehensive rehabilitation policies that take account not only of the building or site heritage, but also of the natural and urban environment in which it is inserted and respect the lifestyle of its people, their culture, their identity and traditions (see figure 4). Investment activities that can be implemented in the architectural heritage and act in the built heritage sites are classified into two main groups.

The first group of activities that can be implemented within the architectural heritage:
- Housing: restore large houses that are inhabited to welcome tourists in rooms specially reserved to them, which will allow mutuality and a cultural sharing in the context of tourism solidarity. This will allow the inhabitants to consider their responsibilities towards their land, their customs and traditions and share them with others. (see Figure 5)
- Museums for exhibition the popular heritage.
- Restaurants (local food). (see Figure 6)
- The Mosque. (see Figure 7 and 8)
- Arts and Crafts House: this house is a place for exhibition, learning and sharing. It will be equipped with small shops selling handicrafts objects, with the integration of several activities that transmit local culture.
- Other activities: a large number of various activities such as reception and information center, reading rooms, open or closed theater for performances and religious, cultural, and scientific conferences.

The second group of activities that can be implemented in the surrounding area of the architectural heritage:
- Sites for folk practice.
- Ways for cultural activities, sports and some public services, other entertainment programs compatible with local traditions.
- A park and greenery: With a water source, a cafeteria and a restaurant representative of the local gastronomy.
- Commercial and leisure activities.
The objective of this urban project is the sustainable development. The project's approach is the interpreting and reading the old city through its past in an operational goal. This sustainable development approach is taking into consideration the cultural and symbolic aspects of the city; it is not limited only to the technical aspects.

**Place and Role of the Villagers**

The place and role of the villagers in the process to safeguard and revitalize this abandoned heritage must be defined or at least performed and associate them for the assessment, it is a political issue. Therefore we consider the most appropriate ways to encourage the presence of people directly involved in this urban project.

To facilitate the expression of the people, several methods were suggested such as surveys conducted by students, specific animated roundtables, the time devoted to evaluation in neighborhood councils or urban animation workshops for exchange between villagers, members of the technical committee (project manager and technicians) and local authorities.

Involving all partners in the process is necessary. This mobilization must be coordinated and carried politically. In this respect, the approach must deal with several challenges:
- Mobilize partners around a prospective vision of the Golea future;
- Bring together partners who were never involved before;
- Maintain an effective organization while designing the project to safeguard this abandoned heritage within a reasonable time and avoid dilution of the process.

The involvement of residents and users, through specific working groups greatly enhanced the work of diagnosis and identification of priority issues of revitalizing the historic village of Golea. An executive committee: this will make people aware and understand the value of their land and their heritage through seminars and symposia that will manage and continue the perpetual development in the touristic village. But it will also manage the organization of the village and ensure it meets the needs of residents and visitors.

Conclusion

The strengths of this promising project to safeguard and revitalize this abandoned heritage could be summarized as follows:
- Integrate the current economic environment.
- Enhance social cohesion and traditional customs; the programming of collective activities for the site will help creating a social environment that exists in Golea.
- Conciliate practices and values of cohesion and social aid with the demands of contemporary comfort. The design is responding to the mountain environment by bioclimatic comfort; the proposed elements creating a bioclimatic micro environment with shading circulation paths, protection against wind, green space.
- Attempt to improve the status of the traditional Berber habitat;
- The housing preservation is responding to the inhabitants’ needs, it is based on the traditional urban and architectural heritage.

In the Golea project, the self-reliance and the Touiza "voluntary", both ancestral values of the Berber region, associated with the local authority's participation could surely help to realize the project. The user's participation in the creation of their home environment is the best incentive for them to preserve it and give it a long life. Living the process of your own dwelling birth makes it a part of your memory and sustainability follows. Tourists have started again to visit Golea village and that contributes to its socio-economic dynamics.

References:

3- Rouxel, F. (1999). L'héritage urbain et la ville de demain. Pour une approche de développement durable, METL.