



Role of participatory process in the rehabilitation of an Ayyoubid public bath in Damascus, Syria

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Abstract Summary: *In 2005 a multidisciplinary research project on public baths in the Mediterranean region was launched with a grant from the European Union. The HAMMAM project "Hamмам, Aspects and Multidisciplinary Methods of Analysis for the Mediterranean region" is based on participatory process to encourage local dwellers and hammam managers to take an interest in their heritage.*

First visits to the Ayyoubid public bath, hammam Ammuna, have shown lots of deterioration. The hammam was rejected by local dwellers because of bad reputation. In 2007, as a result of the HAMMAM project and the work of the Syrian team, a new manager of the hammam started a rehabilitation work. Hammam Ammuna nowadays is open for local dwellers and could be considered as a starting point of a sustainable future of the neighborhood while reviving an historical building of social and economic function.

Keywords: *Participation Tools, Heritage Rehabilitation, Damascus, Sustainability, EU Project.*

1. An Overview

In 2005 a multidisciplinary research project on public baths in the Mediterranean region is launched for the period (2005-2008). The HAMMAM project is coordinated by "The Vienna Institute for Urban Sustainability – OIKODROM", working with 18 participating scientific institutions from 12 different countries. The partner institution in Syria is the (Institut français du Proche-Orient) (Ifpo), and in particular the (Atelier du Vieux Damas), one of the research units at the institute.

1.1 The Hammam, Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Most of the Mediterranean Islamic cities represent examples in regions with a tradition of Roman thermae. This tradition did not vanish with the decline of Roman civilization. In the Byzantine period a new typology of bathing came into being with the balneae, and they influenced the architecture of the Islamic bathhouses or hammams, (3).

The transformations of public baths developed slowly in the first centuries of Islam; they were modified in a process of assimilation. "In this process those features which correspond with the needs of the new society were retained, and those which did not, were allowed to disappear", (4).

1.2 The HAMMAM Project, Objectives and Approach:

A principal goal of the HAMMAM project is to understand and evaluate the function, the concept, the technology and the rules for the running of a hammam. It follows an interdisciplinary approach, giving attention to the tangible, architectural and technical aspects related to the building conservation and operation, and to the intangible social issues related

to societal norms and management (5). The project is based on an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach that assures the mutual collaboration between researchers and a participatory process with local dwellers and stakeholders.

2 The Hammam as a Case Study in Damascus

Hammam Ammuna is a Small Neighbourhood Hammam, it is located at al Uqayba neighbourhood, to the north of the Old City, and close to the modern centre (Fig. 1). This residential neighbourhood is one of the earliest historic neighbourhoods to grow and expand outside the City Walls. Built up areas in this neighbourhood is still forming a harmonic fabric and relating some important historical monuments.

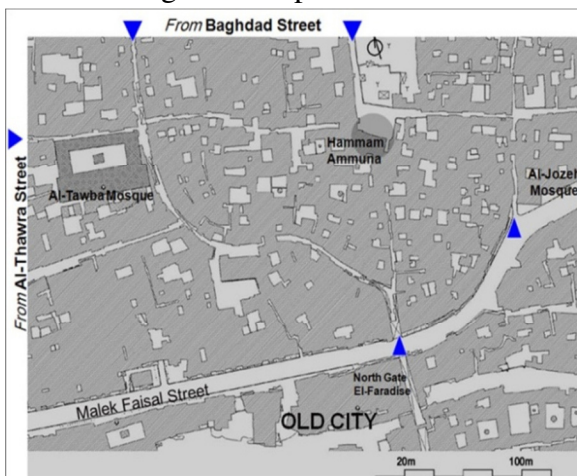


Fig. 1 The hammam in Uqayba

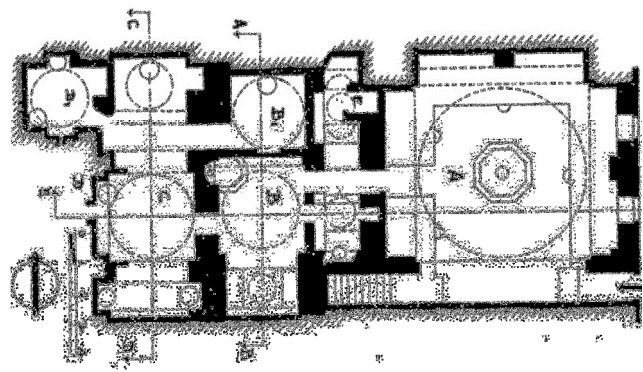


Fig. 2 Plan of hammam Ammuna, by Ecochard et Le Coeur 1942

Hammam Ammuna has been selected to conduct a model study in Damascus for many reasons. It is an important historic monument that is still conserving some authentic features, (Fig. 2). It goes back to the end of the twelfth century but its registration in the antiquities list is undergoing. It is the only hammam in Damascus working with traditional heating system by using wood shavings.

2.1 Hammam Ammuna and the neighborhood, integration or rejection

Hammam Ammuna is under the endowment ministry (*Awqaf*) and its owners pay annual rent to invest it. In 2005, the hammam was in bad physical and social situations. It has weak economic and social connection with the neighborhood. Most clients are not from the quarter. Some locals come only in feast days or to benefit of warm places and hot water in winter. The bad management, the bad reputation associating it to male prostitution and the lack of cleanness has excluded dwellers to use it. Women were even excluded a long time ago. The economic affordability which corresponds with the low and middle economic level of the dwellers is opposite to the social rejection by the community because of the bad reputation.

3. Major Steps of the Participatory Process in Damascus

Participatory process helps to get deeper information the hammam. It helps to identify concerns and establish a communication network with dwellers. In each local team a person is



assigned as a (case study contact person)¹. He/she leads the participatory processes during the whole project period. Its major role is to prepare the local community to be partner of the project, by establishing a critical reference group of local residents to collaborate with researchers during the study visits of the project consortium.

3.1 First Contact with the Community and Trust Building:

At the beginning of the project, the team started visiting the hammam to meet the staff and the manager. During first investigations of the neighborhood, it was necessary to inform the representative of the local authority in the quarter (*al Mukhtar*) about the aim of the project. The good relation with him has facilitated the work later in the neighborhood.

The bad reputation of hammam Ammuna has complicated the task to establish good connection with the staff and the local dwellers. But in the opposite this situation make it a good choice, because the project could give the opportunity to enhance the hammam management, and be therefore of good benefit to the community. Several meetings with shop owners, school teachers, and hammam managers were conducted (1). After that 28 persons (men and women) were chosen as a critical reference group including representatives of local authorities. Two focus groups were formed one for men and another for women and two community managers were selected to be the contact person from the community (1).

3.2 Intensive Contact

Women's group meeting: As empowering the disadvantaged groups of the community is one of the goals of a participatory process, meeting with women who were excluded from using hammam Ammuna for a long period was a major step of the process.

The intensive meeting with women focus group has taken place in the house of the community manager. Women from different categories came to this meeting upon invitation. After an informal introduction, the HAMMAM project was introduced. Then the objective was to know the reasons to go or not to go to the hammam. For those non users, the reasons of non going were religious reason, lack of privacy inside the hammam, unnecessary to go to public bath while having bath in the houses and finally the fear of disease transmission. For users, they go because of curiosity, for trying new things, for health benefit, having fun, an occasion to go out (1). When asked about what an ideal hammam is and what would enhance the hammam in general, the answers were: better cleaning, special places for unhealthy people, price suitable to the local economic level, adding other beautification services, health control, presence of private washing rooms, and finally well trained workers (1).

Men's group meeting: The men's meeting was held in a house in the neighbourhood. Same questions were discussed. The reasons for those who go to the hammam were: taking a bath in feast days, meeting friends, enjoy playing with water, enjoy the heat in winter and the steam and trying traditional way of bathing, for non goers: having private bath in the house, users' clothes do not conform to religious codes and fear of exposure to harassment (1).

The recommendations for an ideal hammam are: provide private bathing spaces, good management, workers of good reputation, decent behaviour of users and staff, clean hammam,

¹ The author is the Case Study Contact Person of the Syrian team in Damascus.



good services, keep traditional way of functioning, using clean energy, to preserve stones as building materials, good conservation of building and beautiful and spacious inner spaces (1).

Hamмам managers' meeting: Most of the managers are coming from families known as hammam manager or owner for generation (Tinawi, Mardini, Kubab, Hammami,..), they are still holding the business. They have inherited the work form their grandfather or father. The HAMMAM project was introduced to the participants, as a multidisciplinary project. They were interested to meet technical team working on heating, water supply, water safety and ventilation. The discussion was later about two questions: What are the criteria of an Ideal Hammam? What a good management means to you? (1).

3.3. The Field Study Visit:

To coordinate the field work and facilitate the work of different researchers during the field study, the local team has set up a field study office close to the hammam. It is also used as a place for meetings with the local residents. Group visits according to research interests and interviews with stakeholders were organized. The plenary sessions during the field study were established to inform others about general findings and collected data. Later teams were formed to conduct SWOT analysis and Cross matrix interdisciplinary assessment (8).

3.4 The Public Presentation: An Interactive Participation

The public presentation is the first visible step of raising awareness activity and a starting point for further collaboration in the neighbourhood. For the visitors, attending the public presentation allowed to check whether they have been understood correctly so far and how their situation has been perceived by the researchers. On the other hand, the public presentation were of great help for the progress of the process, people have met the foreign researchers and they have realized that there is a real interest and a real engagement from the project team on the subject (8).

To prepare the public presentation physically the participants had to condense results, so the visitors could actively take part in discussion and give feedback. Posters were bilingual, contained photos, diagrams, graphs, sketches and citations from interviews, were exhibited and discussed with the audience (Fig.4). Interactive elements were meant to encourage for feedback and comments by visitors, as the poster that encourage visitors to recommend actions in the open public place in front of hammam Ammuna (Fig.3) (7c).



Fig. 3 Proposition for public place design



Fig. 4 Poster in the public presentation

The public presentation in Damascus took place in the courtyard of the site office building and attracted about 120 people, from the neighborhood, representatives from the municipality and the antiquities, professors and students of the faculty of architecture, several hammams managers, representatives of NGOs, representatives of European commission,.. There was great interest of the media, TV programs and several newspapers were reporting on it (7c).

4 The Rehabilitation of Hammam Ammuna

Through the focus groups meetings people get more interested in the hammam. The public presentation and the active participation of the media helped to highlight the hammam as a valuable cultural heritage that is in danger, but it also opened the way for new possibilities to regain its role in the society. An added value to the hammam in general was the main positive aspect of the participatory activities of the project.

As for hammam Ammuna a new owner was interested in it due to the attention drawn to the hammam. The Kubab family known for their good management of hammams for many generations took the decision to rent it and to do renovation work. Later on, many meetings with the new manger were organized by the Syrian team to discuss maintenance and restoration issues and to inform him of the researchers' recommendations and especially the technical, social and managerial ones. The new owners started the restoration work on June 2007, few months after the Damascus meeting and the public presentation. The work was based mainly on their earlier experience in renovation of another hammam with only primary consultation of an architect. The Syrian team has had the possibility to advice the new manger on certain points. The resulted recommendations served as a guideline for future scenarios of the case study hammam. The table below compares the rehabilitation work with the recommendations resulted of the work conducted by several groups of experts working on different topics: restoration, socio economy with hammam focus, built environment, architectural typology, socio economy with neighbourhood focus (2a&b) & (7a&b).

❖ *This symbol signals an action that threatens the authenticity of the hammam or is incompatible with the recommendations.*

SWOT analysis - Recommendations:	Rehabilitation work of Hammam Ammuna
Socio-Economic group – Hammam focus	
Open for women (daily and at the evening).	-Open to women seven days a week in the morning, and only for men at the evening. Well trained female staff from the district is hired to run the hammam.
Establishing rules for usage.	-Respect of moral codes and behaviour and follow the traditional rituals.
Improving cleanliness and sanitary services.	-The interior halls walls were covered with marble up to 120 cm high for easy cleaning. -The sanitary services were improved and mechanical ventilation systems were installed.
Develop the reception hall as a relaxing and social place.	-New wooden benches and providing indirect lighting. -Lantern in the main dome is replaced by an octagonal one with openings for ventilation. -Two doors at the entrance are present.
Hammam operations should be in the interest of the neighbourhood.	-Many users are from the neighbourhood.
Keep the steam.	❖ Natural steam from hot water is canceled. ❖ Forced steam is added in a small room.
Add new services for beautification, smoking,..	-New buffet counter for serving hot beverages and "hubble-bubbles". -The new mezzanine in the reception hall allows for the provision of some private spaces and beautification services.
Reconciliation between demands of various groups.	❖ New modern facilities are introduced such as a Jacuzzi bathtub, a steam room, a sauna room and a shower bath. -Users respect moral codes
Sustain the economic equilibrium and good management.	Different services are offered to clients and women can choose between low price and VIP services offered in different time space.
Built Environment Group	
Architecturally sensitive overall of the technical service systems (water tank, wiring, piping, taps,...).	-Water and electricity installations are completely changed and hidden within the building walls in PVC pipes.
Waste water reuse	-No action is concerned.
Improve hygiene, cleanness and maintenance.	❖ Removal of traditional surface drainage system and reliance on floor inclination towards specific points for drainage.
Restoration group	
Remove all incompatible recent repairs and	-Removing all new cement additions as well as

harmful additions without harming historic fabric.	removing all the plaster and external coating to reveal the original stone.
Highlight and conserve architecture and decoration elements.	-The decoration stripe on the eastern façade was revealed. Missing parts are replaced using the same traditional technique. -The north blind façade is covered with stone.
Prevent water seepage from water tanks.	-The water tanks are replaced.
Monitor the preservation of surrounding fabric.	-Facades of the buildings on the open place are renovated with the participation of the local dwellers and the fund of the project. The southern wall is restored completely.
Oil paint should be cleaned. The original stones and decorations should be visible.	-Oil painting on the main façade is removed.
The original heating system should be well maintained. Develop an adapted technology to maintain the furnace.	❖ Replacement of the traditional heating system with a fuel heating system. -Maintaining both the old chimney and the ground channel (hypocaust) and the possibility to use wood shavings for heating
Garbage on roof surfaces prevents the rainwater discharge. Previous repairs with incompatible materials like cement, trees and biological growth on roof surfaces cause cracks and dampness. Heat loss and water penetration through deteriorated apertures and openings.	-Additional rooms are built on the rooftop over the furnace using wood as construction material and connected to the reception room. -The trees and plants are cleaned from the roof. -The roof and domes were restored. -Colored glazed apertures are reinstalled to provide natural lighting inside.

Table 1. Comparison of recommendations of groups and the rehabilitation work

Looking at the table (1) shows that almost all the recommendations were respected only some alteration in the typology of the building and some inappropriate functions are present. The restoration has included the exterior and all the interior parts thus returning the glamour of the huge space of the reception area (Fig. 5-8). But some results were not conform with the recommendations such as using a mortar mixed with cement for the domes and the walls, which will probably crack because of the humidity inside, most of the stone walls were left bare in the reception hall and this is not conventional in most traditional hammam (2b).

Hammam Ammuna Before Rehabilitation

Hammam Ammuna After Rehabilitation



Fig. 5 Main façade, oil painted



Fig. 6 Main Façade, revealing ornaments



Fig. 7 The reception hall (al barrani)



Fig. 8 The reception hall with new mezzanine

The restoration of hammam Ammuna and the surrounding areas helped to encourage the locals start using it again. The new owners relied on their skill in hammam management to provide the best services in a clean place where moral codes are respected (Fig.9). They hired trained women living nearby, thus contributing in developing new jobs for women. The new leaflets highlighting new services and the “word of mouth” had the role to announce the new modification. The hammam’s negative image has vanished. It is a real success story now.

5 Conclusion

Hamam Ammuna became a good example of a well functioning hammam. The main issue that has been revealed is that improvement of the image and the reputation of the hammam and raising awareness on its health benefits would increase the demand.

The raising awareness about several local experiences concerning energy saving and water recycling, addressed to hammam managers has a direct result, the installation of solar panels on the roof of hammam Ammuna. Hammam Ammuna is now the first hammam in Damascus to use solar panels for heating (Fig. 10).

A number of people have been engaged in efforts to revive traditional hammams may well benefit from the results of this project.

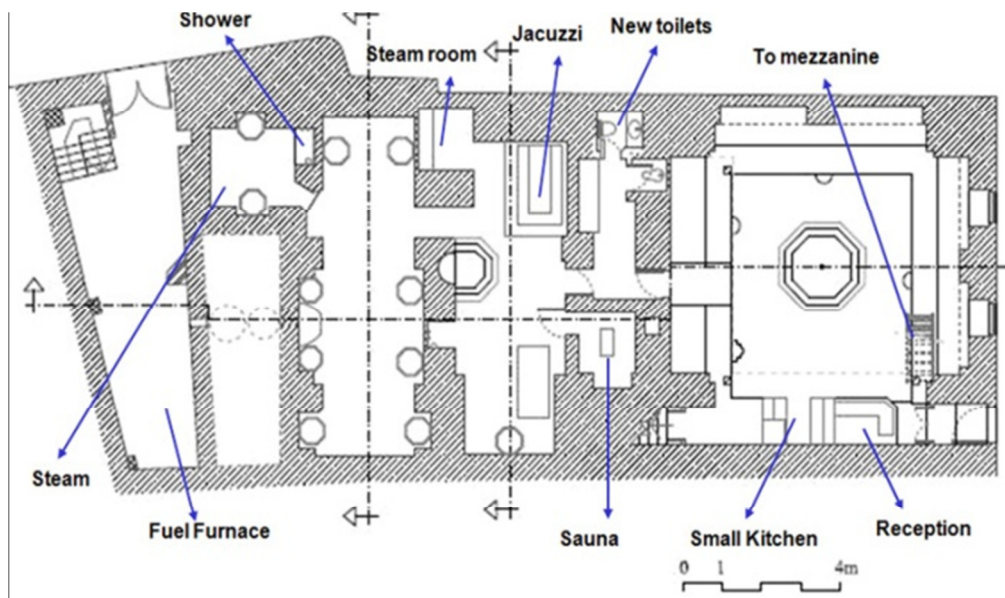


Fig. 9 Plan of the hammam with new services



Fig. 10 Solar energy installation on the roof

The important issue of the HAMMAM project is that it is not just a research project where researchers tend to collect their data and produce scientific output with no real return to the community subject of the study. The rehabilitation work, the activities and the realized small projects in the neighbourhood are tangible and sustainable results of successful participation. Hammam Ammuna became more integrated in the historic urban fabric and it corresponds to the local people's wishes. People are now proud of having it as a valuable cultural heritage in their neighbourhood. What happens in Damascus through the HAMMAM project was a first step and many lessons were learned concerning community participation in development projects. It is a good example on the effective role of participatory approach on rehabilitation of cultural heritage.

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