

Community based Urban Area Conservation Lessons from Pakistan

By

Shabnam Nigar Mumtaz

ABSTRACT

Pakistan has a treasure of historic cores as part of various cities that date back to Pre-Mughal, Mughal and post Mughal periods. Even those that were developed during the 19th century British rule have areas that are valuable as representative of a shared heritage with colonies of Britain. Since many historic cores have become part of the cities, these historic cores are seriously threatened.

Unesco World Heritage List includes many major historical monuments and sites of Pakistan but it is yet to list any historical town in Pakistan. The local legislation also does not list any historical town. In spite of their value most historical areas are deteriorated and many parts of this significant heritage have been lost over the years.

Community based conservation promotes the idea that the key to success of long term conservation lies in community engagement bringing the benefits of historical conservation to the local community. However, although community based conservation is practiced commonly world wide, it is not always successful.

This paper tries to answer the following questions:

1. Is community based conservation an effective tool in Pakistan for conservation of urban areas?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the success or failure of such conservation exercises?
3. What part does a project design and local community character play in the success or failure of an urban conservation project.

A multi sited case study method has been used to conservation project both similarities and differences related to review heritage conservation. Each site has been analysed for its unique local context and each project has been reviewed different project design which speaks about the multi layered challenges of heritage conservation.

The three cases presented here offer valuable lessons for the design and implementation of area conservation programs in Pakistan. One lesson is the need to put all values embedded in urban heritage into play, as they are the drivers that mobilize a diverse set of stakeholders. These values include socio cultural and social justice, historic, artistic, educational and economic factors that can mobilize community, Government, Elite, Philanthropist and Entrepreneurs. The premise of analysis here is that the more the variety of values the more sustainable the conservation.

The methodology used is literature review from secondary sources i.e. books, articles, academic papers and discussions with colleagues. The conclusion points towards the fact that In Pakistan community based conservation may not be the only solution to area conservation because only few groups can value it, like academia, groups from civil society and some government departments and communities at large need more motivation and awareness to become the major participant of urban area conservation exercises. The role of elite and private sector is also very insignificant. Any external agency can help only in advisory and financial capacity, but means to generate funds locally should be there.

The status of urban area conservation is described by an academic conservationist Prof. Dr. Anila Naeem from the Department of Architecture and Planning, NED University o Engineering and Technology in 2009 as follows:

“In Pakistan urban area conservation is not an established professional field and designation of historic centers is altogether a very new idea. Thus, conserving urban heritage areas may take many shapes and meanings and conservation of urban areas is more complex than conservation of individual buildings or archaeological remains.

Keywords: Urban area conservation, community, Pakistan, heritage, historic cores.