Abstract

Cultural continuity is one of the key aspects of sustainable cities and settlements. Jerusalem is a city whose continuity relies primarily on the preservation of its holy sites and the cultures around it. However, every century brings new requirements and lifestyles which have an impact on the physical organization of the sites. The main question is how transformation processes of the Holy Sites can be guided in order to meet the requirements of today while preserving the essence of the holy sites for tomorrow. Jerusalem is cradle and sanctuary to the three major faiths. Throughout a turbulent 3000 year history, major sites of veneration have emerged from numerous transitions and transformations of sacred buildings and spaces in the city. This process has created a unique phenomenon of religious and cultural continuity often transcending politics and planning. These sites are now facing social and environmental challenges such as mounting pressures by mass tourism and pilgrimage, increased cultural and ethnic diversity, ageing structures and more. To ensure their continuity and to safeguard them for future generations, further understanding of these issues is vital. Focusing on the Holy Sites within the Old City, the paper and presentation will identify, in brief, their physical and virtual transformations, and the processes which generated them. It will then outline proposals for ensuring their cultural continuity and sustainable enhancement in the future.

Keywords:
Jerusalem, Holy Sites, cultural continuity, tangible, intangible, heritage, transformation, sustainability, future.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definitions

Culture is concisely defined as the way of seeing, perceiving and believing. It is required for human survival and creates a sense of belonging. It enables self-actualization and patterning of behaviors and beliefs. (1) Culture is multi-faceted, including social organization, customs and traditions, languages, arts, architecture and literature, religion, forms of government and economic systems. Cultures are not static and are increasingly subject to evolution and change as a result of technological progress, environmental changes, innovation, mobility and diffusion. (2) Many of these components are manifested in the built environment and are particularly evident in the formation of sacred places worldwide, creating cultural heritage over time (3)

Cultural heritage is the legacy of tangible artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage includes tangible elements such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts, and intangible elements such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge. (x) These elements have been recognized as fundamental for sustainable development. (x) The relation between tangible and intangible heritage can be summed up briefly as two sides of the same coin. (10) i.e. that there is an interdependency between the tangible and intangible, such as a space which is tangible created for ceremony which is intangible. Virtual cultural heritage relates to use of information and communication technologies and their application to cultural heritage, such as the reconstruction of buildings based on archaeological finds etc.

Cultural continuity is defined as the adaptations and changes to the patterns through which people structure their relations with one another, define common goals, and allocate resources. In the built environment this can be achieved by creating a heritage i.e. a meaning and function for the conserved place, so that it becomes understandable and imaginable to the general public (as well as the local one). Cultural continuity requires relating to historic, economic, cultural, social, and/or political contexts. (5)

Social cohesion relates to the bonds that bring people together in a given society. It is a multi-faceted discipline covering various social phenomena. To achieve social cohesion it is necessary to address issues of material conditions, tolerance, social exchanges and networks, inclusion of identities and values, ensuring equal opportunities and quality of life. Cultural continuity is a fundamental element for creating and enabling these conditions.

Sacred spaces / holy sites are sites where spiritual sensations and awe are evoked, where man encounters the numinous and the sublime. (3) These sites create a separation of the holy from the profane, heaven and
earth, god and man. Sacred spaces may also be characterized by levels of sanctity i.e. a public area such as an altar for clergy, as well as the usage of non physical elements such as time and light. Many cultures devoted considerable resources to providing areas for cult, commemoration and pilgrimage. Religious and sacred spaces are among the most impressive and permanent buildings created by humanity, many are of Outstanding Universal Value such as the Holy Sites in Jerusalem. For a sacred/holy site to be recognized as of Outstanding Universal Value, it must also meet the standards set by UNESCO for integrity and/or authenticity and must have an adequate protection and management system to ensure its safeguarding (11).

The Holy Sites in Jerusalem form a unique inventory and composition of sacred sites of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There has been a long lasting physical and spiritual expression of sanctity in the city's appearance and it has always been a key element in its historical, cultural and architectural development, extending to present times. Two main sacred foci developed: the Temple Mount and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and an additional focus developed around the Western Wall. Noteworthy is the proximity, contest and tension between the sites, all of which contributed to their continuity. (x) Currently the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls are on UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger list. (x)

Cultural continuity and sustainable development: Preservation of heritage and sustainable development are converging issues and are now widely acknowledged as such. Saving and prolonging lifecycles of existing buildings enables the strengthening of cultural fabrics, while reducing waste and environmental impact. Cultural heritage tourism enables regional economic development. Additional sustainable components include long-term land use, reuse of buildings and building material, and use of natural passive cooling and ventilation.

1.2 Focus

Cultural continuity is one of the key aspects of sustainable cities and settlements. Jerusalem is a city whose continuity relies primarily on the preservation of its Holy Sites and the cultures around it. However, every century brings new requirements and lifestyles which have an impact on the physical organization of the sites. The main question is how transformation processes of the holy sites can be guided in order to meet the requirements of today, while preserving the essence of the holy sites for tomorrow?

1.3 Methodology

The paper is based on previous as well as current research carried out by the author on the Old City of Jerusalem and focuses on three Holy Sites: the Temple Mount / Haram al-Shariff, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Western Wall and Hurva Synagogue. First, transformations, modes and types will be identified, based on historical accounts and archaeological findings, (6, 7, 12). Then, tangible and intangible aspects and patterns of cultural continuity of the Holy Sites will be investigated according to chosen elements of holy spaces. Based on investigation of past processes and patterns of transformation proposals will be outlined for ensuring future cultural continuity and sustainable enhancement.

2. TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE HOLY SITES (The Temple Mount / Haram, its perimeter)

2.1 Transformations

The thousands of years’ long history of Jerusalem, its many layers, both physical and spiritual, as well as the vast amount of accumulated research and information, pose a challenge in any attempt to overview its numerous transition and transformations. In the following table and diagram, the transformations of the Temple Mount / Haram, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Western Wall and Hurva will be newly identified.