

Aga Khan Award for Architecture

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WINNING PROJECTS

Revitalisation of Birzeit Historic Centre

Birzeit, Palestine

Architects: Riwaq – Centre for Architectural Conservation, Ramallah, Palestine

Client: Birzeit Municipality, Palestine



Project Description

This five-year project, part of a rehabilitation master plan initiated by the Riwaq – Centre for Architectural Conservation and eventually involving 50 villages that have retained a high degree of historic integrity, has transformed the decaying town of Birzeit, created employment through conservation and revived vanishing traditional crafts in the process. Through focusing on towns and villages in the area under Palestinian civil authority where an estimated 50% of the surviving historic structures of Palestine are located and where most Palestinians live, Riwaq realised that it could save much of Palestine's remaining heritage, and at the same time have the greatest socio-economic impact. Conservation would create jobs, revitalise local workshops and, ultimately, spark interest and investment in historic village centres.



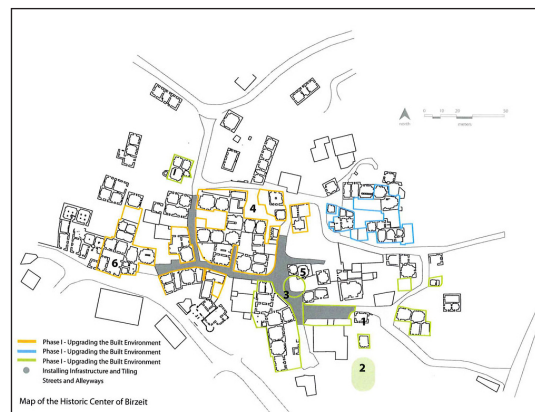
Community involvement was encouraged from the start, including local NGOs, the private sector, owners, tenants and users, all working with the municipality. Five years of work have yielded impressive results: streets have been paved, named and clearly signed; infrastructure upgraded (water) and added to (pipes laid for a future sewer system); facades have been

conserved; and public spaces have been created and rehabilitated. Riwaq pursued a policy of preventive conservation to upgrade the public realm and restore select public/community buildings to accepted international standards, coupled with a creative adaptability in replacing sections of wall remain distinguishable from the original structures, without harming architectural coherence. Affordable traditional techniques and local materials were used throughout. Both historic buildings and public spaces have been rehabilitated into community activity hubs. The successful social, cultural and economic revitalisation of Birzeit undoubtedly stands as an inspiring model for the other villages and rural areas in the “50 Villages” programme and beyond.



Jury Citation

“The Revitalisation of Birzeit Historic Centre is a dynamic project in which the NGO of Riwaq succeeds in mobilising stakeholders and local craftsmen into a process of healing that is not merely physical but that is social, economic and political. By reversing a process of neglect and erasure within a complex and difficult political context, the project manages to transform not only a neglected historic core but also people’s lives, and restores not only buildings but the dignity of their users. The project offers an alternative to “museified” historic cores and it pioneers the regeneration of Birzeit’s historic centre into cultural infrastructure. It facilitates the reclamation of heritage by the people involved while also allowing them to achieve their self-expressed aspirations. The project is an exemplary dedication to rural heritage that can serve as a model for the 50 villages in which Riwaq is involved, particularly the strategic interventions designed to stimulate long-term development.”



Project Data

<i>Client</i>	Birzeit Municipality, Palestine: Yousef Nasser, former mayor; Hasib Al Keileh, mayor; Musa Al Hajj, former director
<i>Architects</i>	<p>Riwaq – Centre for Architectural Conservation, Ramallah, Palestine: Khaldun Bshara, Fida Touma, co-directors, Suad Amiry, founder and former co-director, Nazmi al Jubeh, former co-director, Farhat Muhawi, Birzeit project director, Iyad Issa, Shata Safi, architect planners, Ruba Saleem, Ghada Mubarak, Bilal Abu Faza'a, Khalil Rabah, Lana Judeh, Sahar Qawasmi, Michel Salameh, Renad Shqeirat, Yousef Taha, architects; Tariq Dar Nasser, Nizam 'Owaidat, civil engineers</p> <p>Rozana Association, Birzeit, Palestine: Raed Sa'adeh, director</p> <p>Ministry of Local Government, Ramallah, Palestine: Shuruq Jaber, architect</p> <p>Birzeit Municipality, Palestine: Noor Khdairi, Rana Shaka'a, architects</p>
<i>Consultants</i>	<p>Birzeit University, Palestine: Yazid Anani, assistant professor; Samir Baidoon, chair of Business Administration College; In'am Obeidi, Media Studies Programme faculty member; Luna Shamieh, assistant to the dean of Public Policy and Administration College; Nazmi Jubeh, professor</p> <p>Golzari NG Architects, London, UK: Nasser Golzari, founder and partner; Yara Sharif, partner</p> <p>Ministry of Justice, Ramallah, Palestine: Walid Badawi, director</p> <p>Solution for Development Consulting, Ramallah, Palestine: Joudeh Iyad, director</p> <p>In'ash Al Usra Society, al Bireh, Palestine: Najla Barakat, assistant director of community research</p> <p>Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi Organisation, Jerusalem: Baha Jubeh, curator of Palestine Heritage Museum</p> <p>Friends Schools in Ramallah, Palestine: Farhat Muhawi, chief architect/planner</p> <p>Palestine Investment Fund, al Bireh, Palestine: Maher Saleh Hamayel, CRS supervisor</p>

<i>Funding</i>	Swedish International Development Agency, Stockholm, Sweden Birzeit Pharmaceutical Company, Birzeit, Palestine Institut du Patrimoine Wallon, Namur, Belgium Representative Office of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ramallah, Palestine
<i>Site area</i>	40,640 m ²
<i>Cost</i>	US\$ 1.45 million
<i>Commission</i>	June 2006
<i>Design</i>	January 2007 – November 2011
<i>Construction</i>	January 2008 – January 2012
<i>Occupancy</i>	January 2009 – ongoing

Riwaq

Riwaq is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation established in 1991, in Ramallah, Palestine. The main aim of Riwaq was, and still is, the documentation, rehabilitation and development of the architectural heritage of Palestine. This signifies the protection of all layers, styles and remains of all periods and civilisations that once existed in Palestine. The various strata tell us the story of the rich, varied and complex identity of Palestine; they also negate the “purity” of the politically charged one-layer identity. This approach signifies the protection of not only noble architectural and religious sites, but also the valuable and varied urban, peasant and nomad architecture. The main objective, challenge and dream of Riwaq, at this point, is to convince the public at large, and decision makers in particular, that historic buildings and historic centres can and should be seen as an important tool for socio-economic-political development rather than as a liability.

Website

<http://www.riwaq.org>



<http://www.akdn.org/architecture>