Cities, Heritage and Transformation

Fabian Thiel
Rahaf Orabi *Editors*

Reviving Aleppo

Urban, Legal and Digital Approaches for Post-War Recovery

Silk Cities

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Cities, Heritage and Transformation

Series Editor

Fatemeh Farnaz Arefian, Bartlett Development Planning Unit, Silk Cities, University College London, London, UK

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Editors
Fabian Thiel
Faculty 1—Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geomatics
Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences
Frankfurt, Hessen, Germany

Rahaf Orabi
Andreas Pittas Art Characterization Lab (APAC Labs)
Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center (STARC)
The Cyprus Institute
Nicosia, Cyprus

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Foreword by Prof. Dr. Maamoun Abdulkarim

The city of Aleppo endured the most arduous phase in its history during the Syrian crisis that commenced in 2011. Subsequently, acts of violence proliferated within the city, particularly between 2012 and 2016. During this period, the majority of neighbourhoods in the old city transformed into battlefields of intense clashes that unfolded within its ancient quarters. This resulted in catastrophic damage to historical structures, occasionally reaching the levels of near-total destruction. These actions had calamitous repercussions on the unique cultural heritage of this historically affluent city.

The infrastructure, along with hundreds of historical residential, religious, and market buildings, suffered severe damage, and, at times, complete destruction of certain architectural components. Aleppo, being one of the world's significant UNESCO World Heritage sites, found itself listed as an endangered site in 2013, along with five other Syrian heritage sites. The architectural elements not only incurred significant damage but also had disastrous negative impacts on the lives of the people who were compelled to abandon their homes, shops, and neighbourhoods. The city transformed into a ghost town during the clashes, causing profound damage to the collective memory and identity of Aleppo and its inhabitants.

The book *Reviving Aleppo* stands out for its comprehensive exploration and intricate analysis of various aspects related to the city's urban structure and architectural elements. It sheds light on the significant challenges endured by the city approximately six years after the cessation of military activities while investigating the prospects for revitalising a city to encourage residents to return to their homes and restore the collective memory of the city by revitalising life in its houses and markets. The challenges faced by rehabilitation and restoration projects for damaged buildings and neighbourhoods are also explored. These challenges stem from the loss of local resources and infrastructure, posing a significant barrier to the provision of services. The limited availability of external funding for recovery efforts is further compounded by the imposed sanctions on Syria.

One chapter of the book addresses a crucial topic—the future prospects of Aleppo and Mosul in rebuilding after the destruction caused by armed conflicts. It draws parallels and distinctions between the two historically significant cities. While Iraq

receives international support for its reconstruction, Syria is left to rebuild on its own due to international sanctions. The chapter envisions strategies, legal tools, and land management to address the complex challenges of preserving cultural heritage and housing in the reconstruction of Aleppo, Mosul, and other war-torn cities.

Additionally, the book delves into the sensitive issue of the aftermath of the conflict in Syria, which resulted in the loss of human life, substantial property damage, the loss of land registration offices, and the disappearance of crucial documents verifying property ownership. The exploitation of war by profiteers is explored through a case study of a neighbourhood in Aleppo, exploring possible solutions to the problems commonly found in war-torn cities. It proffers insights designed to inform policymakers regarding imperative considerations within the reconstruction processes. The chapter discusses ideas to assist policymakers in understanding what needs to be addressed in the process of rebuilding and reform. It also presents strategies for reconstruction and redevelopment in Old Aleppo, emphasising the balance between preservation and modernisation, and the importance of involving local communities in the planning and execution of urban planning initiatives.

The book further studies experiences and strategies implemented in cities such as Sarajevo, Beirut, and Nicosia, highlighting how these approaches can be leveraged in the restoration of Old Aleppo. It delves into the situation of refugee camps turned human settlements for those fleeing conflict, with a detailed analysis of the Neirab refugee camp on the outskirts of Aleppo, Syria, and proposes development strategies for the camp.

One of the key concepts introduced by the book is the importance of the identity of any unique city as a fundamental aspect in preserving its character, particularly in the aftermath of war, as illustrated by the case study of Maaloula. The later chapters of the book address the cultural heritage at risk, emphasising the significance of documentation, including 3D documentation, HBIM, and virtual reconstruction for historical cities, especially Baithlehm, Aleppo, and Northern Lebanon. The book concludes by highlighting the contribution of the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU) to the recovery of Old Aleppo in the post-conflict phase.

Based on our experience, we can summarise the valuable strategies presented in this book for post-war and post-conflict scenarios. The current status of Aleppo's cultural heritage needs to be evaluated in order to develop a strategic recovery plan for the region. To achieve this, it is essential to mobilise human, financial, and scientific resources both nationally and internationally within the framework of a national recovery plan. The plan should aim to preserve and rehabilitate damaged heritage sites. In addition, it is necessary to define the roles of various stakeholders in heritage preservation, collaborate with local communities, establish necessary coordination mechanisms, and resolve communication issues between different entities.

This will ensure that all parties involved are working towards a common goal of preserving the cultural heritage of Aleppo. Creating diverse opportunities for local communities to participate in heritage preservation, protection, and program development is also crucial. This will foster a peaceful environment that is conducive to the return of refugees to their homes. It is also essential to develop infrastructure

for future heritage and use land in a manner that supports comprehensive economic development. This approach will ensure that the region is sustainable in the long run. Finally, evolving laws related to heritage protection is crucial to respond to new conditions arising during years of conflict. This process should involve learning from past successes and challenges to ensure that future generations can enjoy and appreciate the cultural heritage of Aleppo.

We believe that protecting cultural heritage during and after conflict, through collaboration, partnership, and agreement among all stakeholders (from institutions to individuals), will play a crucial role in building future peace, providing a foundation for national reconciliation and tolerance. In conclusion, heartfelt thanks are extended to all researchers who contributed to this remarkable and insightful book, especially the editors, Prof. Fabian Thiel and Dr. Rahaf Orabi, for their architectural insights into the unfortunate fate of Aleppo, a city that suffered a catastrophe and unfortunately later turned into a forgotten victim due to the siege conditions and the continued repercussions of the Syrian crisis up to the present time.

Prof. Dr. Maamoun Abdulkarim
Professor at the University of Sharjah
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Former Director General of Antiquities
and Museums in Syria, 2012–2017

Foreword by Luna Rajab

In early 2012, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) took on the ambitious project named "National Agenda for Syria's Future" (NAFS). The project aimed to develop a comprehensive national agenda providing the Syrian planner with a scientific basis for identifying options and priorities. The agenda focused on three main pillars: institutional development, social reconciliation, and economic rehabilitation. As part of its mission to promote democracy and development in the region, ESCWA initiated the project's first phase, resulting in a comprehensive document titled "Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework". In the second phase of the project, ESCWA continued its collaborative approach with Syrian experts and stakeholders to reach a consensus on rebuilding Syria as quickly as possible. The national identity and pride in history, represented by cultural heritage throughout Syria, are crucial foundations for establishing national reconciliation and defending identity away from continuous political conflict. This has led to the necessity of restoring and rehabilitating cultural heritage, especially in the historical centres of cities in Syria. This effort will allow citizens to reconnect, strengthen the sense of belonging to the place and the nation, facilitating their return.

The New Urban Agenda and Its Applications on the Cultural Heritage of Old Aleppo City: Sustainable Development Plan 2030 and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and Their Objectives

On 25 September 2015, at the Sustainable Development Summit held at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the 193 member states adopted a new global program for sustainable development titled "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". According to the official statement from this historic conference, it "reflects international determination to free humanity from the tyranny of poverty, hunger, violence, and fear, and to heal and secure our planet

within a healthy and balanced environment". This agreement also signifies a global awareness of the need to create a sustainable world capable of resilience, justice, dignity, and equality without exclusion or marginalisation, establishing a new era of international cooperation, multi-party collaboration, and solidarity partnership for development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Sustainable Development Plan 2030, Habitat III, and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) have implications for Aleppo and other Syrian cities. The plan establishes standards and principles for planning, building, developing, and improving urban areas, based on its five main executive pillars: national urban policies, urban legislation and regulations, city planning and design tools, local economic development and municipal finance, and local implementation. These pillars serve as a source for all levels of government, from national to local, as well as for civil society organisations, the private sector, electoral groups, and anyone advocating for urban spaces worldwide to work towards achieving this vision. The plan explicitly recognises the connection between urbanisation and good development, job creation, livelihood improvement, and quality of life enhancement. It emphasises the link between the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Plan for 2030, particularly Goal 11, which focuses on cities and urban communities. The strategy execution framework falls into five categories:

1. *National Urban Policies*: Formulating urban demographic projections and medium- to long-term urban trends with geographical classification. Establishing national rules to determine the suitability of urbanisation and protect environmental and cultural heritage while mitigating disaster risks and promoting sustainable development. Defining roles and judicial responsibilities for all government levels and local authorities concerning urban expansion, planning, and urban management. Aligning national urban policies with national and regional development policies and plans in sectors like energy, water, transport, and other essential infrastructure. Adopting a framework to reduce disparities between urban and regional areas. Enhancing coordination and coherence between judicial jurisdictions.
2. *Legislation, Guidelines, and Urban Systems*: Distinguishing urban from non-urban land and the inherent rights and responsibilities of urban land. Establishing a legal basis for urban planning, differentiating between public spaces and urban land suitable for construction. Enacting an effective law to define, acquire, and protect public spaces. Recognising and regulating urban development, such as construction rights. Adopting a legal framework that supports enhancing the capacities of national, subnational, and local governments, ensuring appropriate financial, political, and administrative decentralisation based on the principle of subsidiarity. Developing fair and legal tools for monitoring and sharing the increase in land and property prices resulting from urban development operations, infrastructure projects, and public investments, ensuring sustainable use and consumption. Establishing comprehensive and enforceable regulations in

the population and economic sectors, including flexible building laws, standards, development permits, laws, and regulations related to land use, planning, combating speculation, forced, arbitrary eviction, and urban void operations. Setting a minimum of national standards to generalise access to basic services reflecting the right to earn a decent living beyond these minimum standards, allowing for variations based on need and situation. Developing tools for assessing wealth, monitoring, inspection, correction, and access.

3. *Integrated Urban Design and Regional Planning*: Preparing a planning and design process based on evidence, integrated, and collaborative. Planning and demarcating urban areas, as well as agricultural and natural protection areas. Determining the quantity and quality of urban land, including structural planning for streets, blocks, and plots. Enhancing sustainable density and mixed-use to achieve economies of scale. Efficiently utilising urban design to provide suitable residential, walking, and a sense of place. Protecting and preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. Enhancing housing as an integrated element in urban planning. Promoting sufficient spaces within the urban land for a diverse range of economic activities.
4. *Urban Expansion Financing* (Urban Economy and Municipal Finance): Establishing principles to enhance the role of local government in comprehensive, fair, and sustainable urban development and strengthening local leadership capabilities for comprehensive municipal financing. Assisting local authorities in designing and implementing a more inclusive, sustainable, and just local financial and economic framework to activate municipal financing principles. Improving fair and progressive tax policies and revenue generation, along with necessary legal mechanisms. Designing and implementing tools to promote comprehensive local economic development (such as creating job opportunities, organising projects, small financing). Assisting local authorities in designing and implementing systems to ensure physical, economic, and social access to good basic services for all, as well as local economic development platforms that support initiatives led by the local community in providing services. Assisting local authorities in understanding and adapting their policies, mechanisms, and financial models related to economic development to help enhance access to a wide range of affordable housing options, including rentals, cooperatives, gradual construction, and improvement.
5. *Local Implementation*: Utilising proactive tools that address un-built urban growth at the local level (such as planned city expansions). Using tools for urban renewal in neglected and/or abandoned areas (such as redeveloping infrastructure). Planning of urban areas and planned areas and controlling urban speculation on land prices. Providing frameworks for integrated, efficient, and fair urban services, especially in unplanned urban areas. Employing tools for the public benefit of public investment, particularly estimating the value of land, sharing it, estimating and evaluating ecological system services, and more. Establishing and supporting community-led groups that connect citizens and the government.

General Frameworks for Sustainable Development and the Old City of Aleppo

Aleppo's Old City was home to around 120,000 inhabitants before the crisis. It incorporates approximately 240 registered archaeological sites. The city's historic fabric spans both inside and outside the walls, containing diverse functions such as residential, commercial, administrative, touristic, and more, undergoing continuous transformation for various reasons. Division into Strategic Zones, based on indicators: In 2005, The Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo, divided the city into seven strategic zones based on physical and socio-economic criteria, aiming for a comprehensive strategic plan for the entire Old City, addressing specific objectives for each area according to its physical, economic, and occupation status.

Heritage has a significant cultural and economic impact; it contributes to the understanding of sustainable development: Commercially, according to the structural plan and the current uses of the structure. Socially, by taking into consideration the social situation such as population density, secure income, type of possession, families with cars, and duration of residence. Architectural and historical values refer to location, shape of streets, type of houses, the physical and structural condition of buildings (building stock, vacancies), and the economic conditions (location of buildings and business activity, transfer of land/property, value of land/property). Finally, the improvement status, consisting of applications for renovation/commercial activities, the emergency fund, modesty fund, and technical infrastructure, is an important pillar of sustainability to revive Aleppo.

Currently, this plan is no longer suitable for use, as it has undergone many changes due to the crisis. The Syrian crisis has led to a significant deterioration in the physical, human, and economic conditions of the entire Old City of Aleppo. It is necessary to conduct a comprehensive survey of these areas to assess the extent of changes occurring in the urban, environmental, human, and economic fabric. The same method can be used to collect information and lead to the identification of appropriate indicators, likely resulting in dividing Aleppo into multiple strategic zones. This approach should be part of a comprehensive strategic plan for the revival and development of the Old City of Aleppo, considering its unique characteristics and redefining strengths and weaknesses.

Challenges for Implementing Sustainable Development in the Old City of Aleppo

The pre-crisis challenges in Aleppo included rapid urban expansion constraining the possibility of providing basic infrastructure and public services; social pressures; independent budgeting for the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, utilisation, investment, and management of cultural heritage; weak protection and rehabilitation policies; inadequate legal frameworks for property rights; and insufficient awareness

of the importance of heritage preservation in the economic and social growth in the plans of the government. The high-rise buildings intruded on the privacy of residents of traditional houses, forcing them to migrate from certain areas, depleting the cultural vibrancy from the Old City, and altering the function of the residential plots.

There is a need for stronger collaboration and partnerships, incentives for individuals preserving their heritage properties, and greater recognition of the economic and social contributions of cultural heritage development in national economic plans. The lack of comprehensive educational guidance curricula on the importance of cultural heritage, both in general and specifically regarding built heritage, is a challenge. This includes how to deal with, preserve, and manage heritage, leading to the development of societal pride in heritage and identity, emphasising the need to preserve and enhance this heritage. The significant role of cultural heritage development can play in economic growth, and global human advancement is evident. It is unfortunate that there are no financial incentives for individuals preserving their rich built properties in the economic and social plans of the city. Moreover, residents outside heritage areas are disconnected from the rich historical buildings, leading to a lack of awareness of their significance.

There are different considerations for dealing with Aleppo after the crisis. International economic sanctions have directly caused serious economic and humanitarian complications. The challenging living conditions and restricted access to essential services are causing people to struggle to meet modern life needs. Therefore, there are limited opportunities for development within some areas of the Old City. Displacement of residents from the Old City due to precarious conditions, the pressure of returnees on the deteriorating physical state of buildings, and the migration of intellect and labour from the city pose additional challenges. Economic challenges arise from currency depreciation and the increasing costs of goods and labour, while healthcare conditions are poor and epidemics are spreading. Mismanagement exacerbates the situation, environmental degradation, and social inequality and has escalated because of economic hardships, unemployment, and the disruption of economic activities.

Identifying Potential Opportunities in Preserving the Cultural Heritage, Attracting Sustainable Development and Economic Projects in Old Aleppo

Aleppo, the economic capital of the Syrian Arab Republic, has the potential to reclaim a pivotal position in economic growth. It holds significant economic, cultural, environmental, social, and human potential. The following key elements demonstrate the development opportunities for Aleppo:

A unified national identity: National identity is vital in promoting stability and peace by connecting all citizens to a shared history and cultural heritage. A shared history that must be preserved to ensure the survival of the nation.

Economic centrality: The Old City has always been and remains an important economic centre, with specialised traditional souks adding value to its rich commercial history. The souks' central location in the historic city centre, along with its easy accessibility, makes it a hub for economic activities and a popular starting point. These economic ventures create job opportunities, decrease unemployment rates, and enhance living conditions.

Tourist Centre: As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Old Aleppo can become a significant attraction for tourists. The Old City not only boasts a diverse range of historic and archaeological buildings that bear witness to the development of architectural craftsmanship throughout history, but it is also a bustling, vibrant community.

Cultural Radiance Centre: The accumulated cultural and human experiences contribute to a significant local and global cultural heritage. Preserving and developing this heritage, raising awareness of its importance, and strengthening connections to it can turn ancient cities into cultural attractions. Old Aleppo, with its rich cultural heritage, can serve as a hub for economic, cultural, and tourist activities. Rehabilitating cultural heritage sites and hosting various cultural events can lead to cultural, developmental, and economic prosperity.

The Residential Fabric: Residential neighbourhoods that have preserved their distinct characteristics can appeal to residents who feel a strong emotional connection to them. Preserving historical houses with high cultural significance attracts individuals who are conscious of cultural values, desiring to live in homes with historical and cultural significance. As a result, this also draws in affluent individuals, who play a role in preserving a proud community that is dedicated to the growth and progress of the city.

The Applications of the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Plan 2030, the UNESCO Plan on Old Aleppo, and the Possibility of Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Soheir Sowailem's Master Thesis, titled "Strategy for the Sustainability of Traditional Commercial Streets," highlights the significance of urban heritage as a valuable resource derived from human social and cultural endeavours. It acts as a source of information, allowing us to regain lost knowledge and find solutions and answers to new challenges. Urban heritage, being irreplaceable, provides valuable insights into the lives and activities of past generations, enabling us to trace their social and cultural lives. Urban heritage emphasises the critical need to preserve these valuable values and manage them in a way that shows appreciation and respect for previous generations, while also showing concern and consideration for future ones. Serving as the central point for multiple objectives outlined in the New Urban Agenda, the

Sustainable Development Plan, and UNESCO's directives, this statement lies at the heart of the sustainable development process.

As the steward of human cultural heritage and custodian of millennia of history, UNESCO advocates for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage and ancient city centres. By safeguarding these invaluable assets and strategically rehabilitating, restoring, cities can chart a path towards sustainable development that harmonises the lessons of the past with the needs of the present and aspirations for the future. This approach ensures the continuity and evolution of these cities, preserving their allure, nurturing their residents, and safeguarding their existence for generations to come.

Ancient city centres, including the venerable Aleppo, hold significant economic, cultural, and touristic importance. Local and international visitors are drawn to their historical markets, archaeological sites, and cultural activities, which contribute to economic growth and cultural exchange. In order to fully take advantage of these assets, it is essential to develop and promote these activities in a manner that acknowledges and preserves the architectural and cultural heritage while also valuing the privacy and dignity of the residents. These efforts are in line with the goals of the Sustainable Development Plan and the New Urban Agenda, specifically targeting the reduction of poverty and the eradication of hunger. By following UNESCO recommendations and embracing the principles of sustainable urban development, the execution of the New Urban Agenda in Old Aleppo and its surroundings offers a promising chance. This entails a comprehensive and sustainable urban development strategy that encompasses physical, social, economic, humanitarian, and cultural dimensions. This plan promotes comprehensive urban development by strategically linking Old Aleppo with the rest of the city, all while preserving its essential human, economic, and physical elements.

This plan calls for a united approach among stakeholders engaged in the rehabilitation and revitalisation initiatives. It emphasises the need for effective laws and regulations to accelerate implementation. Tailored goals and financing mechanisms are implemented for each area in Old Aleppo, fostering fair and sustainable development. With a focus on community participation, this plan aims to foster a sense of ownership among residents, leading to a deeper connection to their shared global heritage. In doing so, this plan serves as a conduit for achieving the third, sixth, and eighth sustainable development goals, bridging the gap between cultural heritage and sustainable development. The ninth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and sixteenth goals of the New Urban Agenda are realised when implemented correctly and supported by laws and legislation. The plan aims to foster development and achieve a balance between the social and economic conditions of the population and workforce in the Old City. It emphasises the need for thoughtful rehabilitation and repurposing of buildings, roads, urban infrastructure, and fabric.

It is important to identify priorities related to cultural heritage that can guide stability initiatives in Syria. Preserving cultural heritage directly contributes to maintaining national identity, fostering peace-building processes, and supporting stability. Using heritage to support dialogue for peace and national unity through raising awareness about the shared ancient history that can be a source of pride. Cultural heritage

preservation safeguards the comprehensive collective memory that unites people of different religions, sects, and cultural, scientific, and social backgrounds, fostering social cohesion and stability. Restoration of cultural heritage contributes to attracting national and international aid, especially for historic cities like Aleppo, which has global cultural and historical significance. Restoring and preserving cultural heritage plays a vital role in attracting national and international aid for reconstruction, particularly in ancient cities like Aleppo, which hold significant cultural heritage importance and global human memory. This aid draws global attention to the importance of preserving local cultural heritage, mobilising global humanitarian efforts to advocate against wars, protect cities and inhabitants, support stabilisation processes, encourage international investments, and create job opportunities.

Reviving the old souks stimulates economic activity, creating job opportunities, lifting people out of poverty, and encouraging stability. This uplift from poverty discourages resorting to weapons because of economic hardships, thereby fostering stability. Restoration and rehabilitation of the Old City, with traditional housing and urban fabric, along with raising awareness among residents about the importance of cultural heritage, encourages them to return and settle, reducing dependency on external assistance. Prioritising the restoration of neighbourhoods and important landmarks can contribute to boosting domestic and international tourism and encouraging economic investment. Initiatives should focus on rehabilitating the urban fabric within the Old City, encouraging collaboration among residents in the restoration of their homes, promoting necessary dialogue irrespective of political or religious affiliations, to rebuild and preserve the city. Investing in repurposing buildings that have lost their function can stimulate economic investments, resulting in the creation of job opportunities across various sectors. This includes activities such as reconstruction, restoration, rehabilitation, tourism, hospitality, dining establishments, trade, cultural events, and festivals. Such investments play a crucial role in bolstering national stability and incentivising the return of immigrants, workers, and intellectuals to their homeland.

The restoration of the intricate and interconnected urban fabric within the Old City is essential for fostering cooperation among residents in the restoration process. This necessitates direct dialogue among residents, irrespective of their political or religious affiliations, to facilitate the rehabilitation of their homes. By doing so, residents can rekindle the significance of national unity and prevent their differences from becoming a catalyst for the destruction of their city, advocating instead for its preservation and protection. The restoration of this urban fabric and the formulation of development plans to revive cultural heritage cannot occur in isolation. It requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government entities, the private sector, the local community, and non-governmental organisations dedicated to heritage preservation and social and cultural advancement. Such dialogue fosters a participatory environment and instils a sense of ownership and belonging to the place, city, and country among residents.

The current era is characterised by urban expansion, continuously attracting rural populations to settle in cities, creating significant pressure. This is evident in some

cities now and is expected for others in the future. Cities serve as major attractions, combining creativity, invention, and economic development, providing opportunities to benefit from advanced social, health, and educational systems. However, urbanisation also brings challenges like increased poverty, the spread of informal settlements, inadequate and unfit housing, migration of unskilled labour, and lack of essential services. This calls for comprehensive global, national, and local plans for sustainable development to balance population density growth with environmental concerns, poverty, hunger, economic deficits, decaying infrastructure, substandard housing, unemployment, marginalisation, missing health and education services, harassment, women's exclusion, and inequality. Aleppo, throughout its history, has faced periods of complete destruction, either due to military operations or natural disasters. The city's tangible and human heritage has deep roots, making it rise again after each setback, standing as an eternal city of life.

The effort and resources required to revive this ancient city, rehabilitate its urban, economic, and human fabric, are immense. Challenges, such as severe destruction, infrastructure decay, dilapidated rich structures, emigration of qualified workers, and a lack of coordination among partners in various national and international sectors, are evident. There is a need for integrated global, national, and local plans for sustainable development to create the necessary balance between supply and demand, population density, and the challenges of the environment, poverty, hunger, economic deficits, decaying infrastructure, unsuitable housing, and inadequate services. Coordination is crucial among central and local governments, local communities, NGOs, civic associations, popular leaderships, the private sector, urban planning, and donor entities.

Despite the difficult situation resulting from the war, there is an opportunity for Aleppo's Old City to serve as a model for Syria and the world. The rehabilitation should occur through a comprehensive sustainable development plan that preserves and revitalises cultural heritage, activates its role in local and national economic life, and creates a city that balances social, economic, and environmental harmony. This should achieve balanced and sustainable development that interacts correctly with its immediate surroundings, transforming Aleppo into a city that contributes to the greater Aleppo region. This process requires concerted efforts, coordination, and the necessary resources, as well as attracting economic and commercial investments that directly benefit the rehabilitation and development of the Old City, creating job opportunities and supporting stability in the city.

Luna Rajab
Consultant Architect, Expert for
Cultural Heritage and Reconstruction
President of ICOMOS Syria
Damascus, Syria

Preface

This book on *Reviving Aleppo* is the result of three years of intensive work. It is partly based on an online conference organised by Fabian Thiel and Rahaf Orabi entitled "Recovery of Aleppo—Law, Architecture and Geodata Management to Revive War-Torn Cities". The three-day intensive symposium aimed at providing interdisciplinary interested architects, archaeologists, (urban) planners, lawyers, and geospatial data managers with approaches for thinking and acting to what extent cooperation possibilities and fields of activity are possible for the recovery of the city of Aleppo and other war-ravaged cities in Syria and beyond. We were also pursuing the goal of supporting the initiation of functioning and sustainably resilient networks. These networks are indispensable prerequisites for the work in worldwide reconstruction and urban rehabilitation projects. As reconstruction measures and land transactions have begun after the end of the war in Syria, the "zero hour" for comprehensive recovery for ancient cities such as Aleppo has long passed. However, there was and still is not the slightest reason for resignation—quite the opposite. The online conference in 2021 therefore saw itself as a platform for the collection of strategies that have definitely fallen short in the previous discourse and existing implementation guidelines drawn by (donor) organisations, foundations, or companies.

This book publication in the *Cities, Heritage, and Transformation*-series provides indis-pensable and interdisciplinary insights into the revitalisation and redevelopment of urban centres in war-stricken conflict regions such as Aleppo in northern Syria. For this purpose, the publication aims to supply innovative toolkits not yet investigated in science and prac-tice for digital building technologists, engineers, architects, archaeologists, (urban) planners, and geographers. The compendium sees itself as a platform for the collection not only of strategies that have definitely fallen short in the implementation guidelines drawn by donor organisations, development agencies, and political actors. The book brings together various experiences by various stakeholders, (mostly Syrian) Ph.D.-candidates, renowned scholars and development cooperation experts who capture efforts at multiple levels to assist the city of Aleppo, its built heritage, from international level to the community level.

Its main goal is to initiate functioning and sustainably resilient networks such as the support for "academics and practitioners at risk" to establish dialogue platforms

and initiate capacity building especially in the Arab Region, and beyond. Finally, the contributions discuss tenure and property rights security within land management and land policy instruments (such as the controversial Housing, Land, and Property Rights-approach) for a socio-spatial balanced approach towards sustainable communities in Aleppo and the region.

In his work on "Syria" (2019) David W. Lesch states that not only material reconstruction is needed, but also emotional reconstruction. In the end, he concludes, "I will bet on the Syrians" (p. 181). We, the book editors, cannot agree more with this optimistic analysis. It is the combination of law, architecture, planning, (digital) tools, data management and 3D multi-sensory geospatial data collection for the reconstruction of the building fabric that could also involve "emotional reconstruction", not restricted to the Syrian context. Capacity building on numerous levels will be needed. In our opinion, the toolkits already developed, especially from a legal point of view, should be blended with technologies for digital documentation and analysis, not just for heritage monuments. Instruments such as the multipurpose cadastre, 3D databases for the preservation of the identity of places and for collective memory or the digital archiving and documentation of cultural heritage are promising approaches for culturally sensitive reconstruction. In addition, Heritage Building Information Modelling (HBIM) will gain increased relevance in the recovery context. The aim is to show how locally adapted and culturally sensitive recovery processes can be successfully and, above all, consistently implemented by combining law, land management, digital land administration, land policy, land governance, urbanism and digitisation.

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Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Fabian Thiel Full Professor of Property Valuation and Land Law, Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geomatics, Department of Geodata Management and Real Estate, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Fabian Thiel studied Law at the University of Regensburg and Geography at the University of Hamburg, Ph.D. 2001 at University of Hamburg, Habilitation 2017 at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen on the topic of "Legal Geography". Professional stations among others: Environmental Research Center Leipzig-Halle and Integrated Expert for land management in Phnom Penh/Cambodia. Since 2018, he acts as Full Professor for Property Valuation and Land Law at Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences. Professor Thiel researches and teaches national and international property law, real estate valuation, land readjustment, planning law, land policy, and legal geography.

Rahaf Orabi The Cyprus Institute, Andreas Pittas Art Characterization Lab (APAC), The Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Centre (STARC), Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus.

Rahaf obtained her degree in Architecture from Damascus University in (2012). Following her graduation, she began working at the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) in Syria. Her work involved 3D documentation of endangered archaeological sites, historical urban centres, and artefacts. In 2016, she obtained a master's degree in "Architectural Design" from Damascus University and later pursued a master's degree in "Digital Cultural Heritage" at the Cyprus Institute in 2021. She joined The Cyprus Institute as a "Research Technical Specialist" in 2022. During her career, Rahaf was a member of "Project Anqa," a collaborative effort between ICOMOS, CyArk, and the Carleton Immersive Media Studio (CIMS), aimed to digitally document monuments in Damascus. Additionally, she initiated a large-scale laser scanning project in the Old City of Aleppo as part of her Ph.D. dissertation, where she focused on the digital reconstruction of the Old

City's historic urban fabric. She successfully defended her dissertation and graduated Summa Cum Laude from Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, Hungary, in 2023.

Contributors

Rama Aldaher Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary

Mounir Azzam Institute of Geography, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany

Cynthia Berning Global Land Alliance/Prindex Global, Washington, DC, USA

Maan Chibli Faculty of Architecture and Design, Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Turkey;
Former Mayor of Aleppo, Aleppo, Syria;
Abbasağa, Beşiktaş, Istanbul, Turkey

Malcolm Childress Global Land Alliance/Prindex Global, Washington, DC, USA

Carla Chlela Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary

Valerie Graw Institute of Geography, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany

Maan Habib Faculty of Civil Engineering, Damascus University, Damascus, Syria

Ryan L. Knox Former Head of Country Programme, UN-Habitat Syria, Damascus, Syria

Silvia La Placa DICAr, Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, University of Pavia, Pavia, Italy

Anne Mollenhauer Museum Für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Shahd Mustafa Global Land Alliance/Prindex Global, Washington, DC, USA

Lore Mühlbauer Munich, Germany

Giulia Annalinda Neglia Department of Civil Engineering Sciences and Architecture, Polytechnic University, Bari, Italy

Rahaf Orabi Andreas Pittas Art Characterization Laboratories (APAC Labs), Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Centre (STARC), The Cyprus Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus

Sandro Parrinello DIDA, Department of Architecture, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

Francesca Picchio DICAr, Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, University of Pavia, Pavia, Italy

Andreas Rienow Institute of Geography, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany

Saleem Shaheen Urban Systems Engineering MSc, Spatial Planning, Urban Transformation MSc, Biberach an der Riß, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Fabian Thiel Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geomatics, Department of Geodata Management and Real Estate, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Sepideh Zarrin Ghalam Middle-East-Cooperation (MEC) Unit, Chair of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Urban Planning, BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Brandenburg, Germany

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