Analyzing the Social Fabric in Rehabilitated Residential Quarters

The Case of Rehabilitated Multi-family Courthouses in Old City of Hebron

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Abstract

The Old City of Hebron has a compact urban fabric mainly composed of open courthouses. Before deterioration, extended families inhabited these residential quarters. The rehabilitation process since 1996 by Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) has brought new residents to fill these empty courthouses after their restoration. The selection of these residents has been based on a special policy where both the original owners and HRC have participated in this process. The purpose of this research is to analyze the new social structure resulted from this policy, through examination the family kinship level of the newly selected residents. This research has found that the policy has preserved a close-knit community character on family kinship level but with a difference between the residents selected by HRC and those selected by property owners. Although few owners moved back, these owners and their relatives are now occupying more than one third of the rehabilitated units. In addition, there is a good level of family kinship among the newly selected residents on both levels; the courthouse units and the general neighborhood.

Keywords: rehabilitation; courthouse; social fabric; family kinship; Hebron Old City

1. Introduction

The Old City of Hebron has a dense urban fabric mainly consisting of houses with open courtyards (courthouse) dating back to 18 century. For various reasons, the Old City and its buildings have suffered neglect and deterioration since 1967. Before the period of neglect, these buildings were inhabited by extended families where the family members enjoyed a great degree of privacy from outside, the rich spatial quality within inside, and multi-level shared spaces. When Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) started rehabilitating these buildings in 1996, the restoration required the reconfiguration and the subdivision of many of these courthouses to be suitable for smaller families. In order to encourage families to move in, HRC has created a tenant-system where both HRC and the original owners of each compound select some of the new residents to live in these units after restoration. However, maintaining a certain degree of social cohesion and smooth social integration are necessary for preserving the qualities of this Islamic traditional living environment, since many families will share large areas of semi-private spaces and even private ones. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the new social fabric of these re-inhabited residential quarters in terms of the family kinship level of the newly selected residents based on HRC’s policies. The results of this research will be drawn from analysis of the resident database of the rehabilitated units from 1996 to 2007.

2. Research Method

Information concerning 320 rehabilitated (apartments), which were rehabilitated and reoccupied by new residents, was provided by HRC upon request (HRC, 2007). The information includes the number of units, their locations, the original owners, the name of the new residents, the years of residency, and whether
the selection was done by HRC or by the owner. This information was then classified according to main courthouses (compounds) and neighborhoods. The family connections or kinship among original owners and selected residents were examined and then among the new residents themselves. The family kinship here is defined as the state of being descended from the same extended family or the same branch family (Fakhd in Arabic) (Dabag, 2007) and usually go back to third and fourth generations. In addition, multiple visits and site surveys particularly to Salaymeh neighborhood were carried out in May 2007, and included a number of interviews with HRC staff about the rehabilitation policy.

3. Context
Hebron (Al-Khalil in Arabic) is an old mountainous Palestinian city located 32 km to the south of Jerusalem (Fig.1.). Most of the buildings located in its Old City date back to the 18-century (Tukil, 1998). Hebron has had a distinct political history that has had a major impact on the Old City due to the Israeli military occupation in 1967 accompanied by the Israeli settling activities and the city’s division in 1997. As a result, the population of the Old City declined from 10,000 people in 1967 to only 1,500 people in 1997 (HRC, 2006). Approximately 85% of the houses were abandoned; their residents either left their houses by moving out or else renting them to poorer relatives. In 1996, Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) was formed to rehabilitate the Old City and to encourage people to move back. The boundaries of HRC’s activities encompass an area of 270,000 m² with 85,000 m² of ground floor area (Qawasmi, 1999). Between 1996 and May of 2007, 756 units were restored or were undergoing restoration as of the May, 2007 date (HRC, 2007). The project is still in progress, but major parts of it are complete as shown in Fig.2.

4. Rehabilitation of the Residential Quarters
4.1 Spatial and social characteristics of residential quarters
The residential Quarters in the Old City are formed of clustered courthouses connected by a traditional organizational pattern of winding alleys attaching the residence quarters with the main streets in hierarchical arrangements. Every extended family had its own quarter, or Hosh, housing up to 10 smaller families. Every Hosh has more than one entrance and a number of open and semi-open courts at different level, which form a network that connects all the rooms. As the family grew (i.e., sons get married), the Hosh extended...
vertically adding new rooms and courts. Usually each family had two private rooms and shared the service rooms in the lower levels. The residents enjoyed a high degree of privacy from outside. Extended families of the same Fakhd used to gather in the same neighborhoods and formed a cohesive network of relatives. Many neighborhoods, such as Mohtasibeen, Jabri, and Jaber neighborhoods, still carry their original names.

4.2 The rehabilitation process

The prolonged continuity of the factors that have caused the deterioration of the Old City has made it difficult for HRC to encourage former residents to move back into these abandoned quarters after restoration. The rehabilitation process required dealing with three aspects, the physical (the restoration process), the legal (building ownership), and the social aspect (selection of residents) - see the chart in Fig. 3.

4.2.1 The Restoration process

The rehabilitation required the division of the compound into smaller units for the new families. These divisions/reconfigurations have been based on minimum interventions, including the additions of extra stairs, walls, toilets, units, and kitchens. In the proposals opened to tender these compounds were divided into smaller projects of 3-5 units each that mostly utilized the same entrance, or at least shared the same alley (Maraqa, 2007).

4.2.2 The building ownership

The ownership structure of these courthouses was complicated. It took three years for HRC to create an efficient system to thoroughly solve it and to proceed with the restoration (Hilmi, 2007). The building registration map of 1929 was used as the starting point. HRC needs only the permission of 60% of owners of the same building to start restoration. Various families (exceeding 60) own the buildings in the Old City; however, six families dominate at least 25% of the rehabilitated buildings as shown in Table 1. The legal issues of occupancy right of these units will be explained in next sub section.

4.2.3 The selection of residents

HRC created the tenant system policy to encourage residents to move in. The policy can be summarized as follows: In the case of a small building where the owners (or their relatives) still live, HRC restores the building for free of charge without requiring them to move out temporarily in order to carry out the work. In the case of large compounds, the owners are consulted as to division of the compound; HRC rents out one-third of the restored compound for five years for making it available for new residents. In the case of abandoned buildings where none of owners agrees to move back or even select any new residents, HRC

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**Fig. 3. The Rehabilitation Process Chart**

**Fig. 4. (a) Re-inhabited Units by New Selected Residents from 1996 to 2007. (b) The Relation between New Residents and Owners of the Compounds (Others Refers to Units for Non-residential Uses)**
has the right to rent out the full compound in return for the restoration costs. After the reconfiguration and the restoration process of the building are finished, HRC lends its share with no charges for a fixed period of time for new selected residents. In addition, the residents benefit from various incentives such as free health insurance, subsidized electricity and water, and tax reduction. HRC’s selection criteria is based on point selection system, and both HRC-selected and owner-selected residents go through this process. It gives priority to young married couples having several children, with limited means. Also they should have no criminal records, no real estate properties, and a good education level is preferred (HRC, 1997).

Table 1. The Main Owners in Old City of Hebron

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family name</th>
<th>No. Of units owned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dwaik</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhtaseb</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharif</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja'ibri</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaheen</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natsheh</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The Compound Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of compound</th>
<th>No. of rehabilitated units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Analysis

Out of the 320 units, 310 were selected for further analysis. These units are located in 104 compounds. 70% of these compounds have more than one unit that has been rehabilitated (Table 2) and mostly are located in the Old market area and Sayalmeh neighborhood (see Fig.1.). The analysis is divided into two parts; first, analyzing the general characteristics of HRC's and owner’s selection of new residents (Fig.4.); second, analyzing the family connections characteristics of the new residents both on compound and on neighborhood levels (Fig.5.).

6. Discussion and Results

6.1 The selection of new residents

As shown in Fig.4. (a), the owners selected 177 families or residents, while HRC was responsible of selecting 133 new families. The owners have relatively controlled the selection process by exceeding their share to almost 60% of the selection. Hence, their choices have influenced the present social composition more than HRC'. However, two third of their selections were made between 1996 and 2003. From 2003 onwards, HRC has dominated the selection process. Concerning the typology of the selected residents by the owners (Fig.4., b), only 23 units were re-inhabited by the original owners, a number which represents 13% of all units; 53 units were re-inhabited by family members belong to the same extended family or Fakhd as the owner, and 101 units were re-inhabited by residents who have no apparent family kinship with the respective owners. On the side of the selected residents by HRC, most of the residents (97%) have no apparent family kinship with the compound...
owners. There is a clear difference between the selection made by HRC and those made by the owners. In addition, although few owners moved back to their restored houses, these owners and their relatives are currently occupying more than one third (1/3) of the rehabilitated units.

6.2 The family kinship between newly selected residents

120 units have been re-inhabited by families who share kinship with at least one family in the same compound (Fig.5.). HRC selected 37% (45 units) of them and the owners selected the rest. In addition, 160 units (120+40) have been re-inhabited by selected families who share kinship with at least one family in the same neighborhood. This leads to conclude that the social composition of the re-inhabited residential space still sustains a close-knit community character, and the extended family structure and Fakhd are still having their presence to a certain degree on both the compound level and neighborhood level.

To explain this on a smaller scale, Salaymeh neighborhood in Jaber quarter is introduced as shown in Fig.6. The documentation and survey of this neighborhood in 1996 showed 70% of the buildings were abandoned, 22% were still being in use, while 8% were partially used (Maraqa & Muhawi, 2007). Only six families used to live in this neighborhood before restoration. The quarter was divided into 19 projects for restoration, to provide 52 housing units. Up until 2007, 21 units have been filled with new residents, HRC selected 11 of them and the owners selected the rest. Four families of them share apparent family kinship with the owners. In addition, 6 families share family kinship with at least another family living in the same compound, and 10 families share family kinship with at least another family living in the neighborhood.

Seven families of these ten families are from Salaymeh Fakhd family and three are from Razem Fakhd family. In the case of the Salaymeh families, HRC has selected three and the owners selected four of them. The other three Razem families were all selected by HRC.

7. Conclusion

This research paper analyzed the social composition of the restored and re-inhabited residential quarters in the Old City of Hebron. Since the project is still in progress and there are empty units waiting for new residents, the present social composition of the Old City is still in a state of flux. However, and based on analyzing the reoccupied courthouses, a number of findings can be drawn. First; the rehabilitation process has sustained a close-knit community on the family kinship level but with a difference between the HRC’s selection and the owners’ selections. Second; although few owners moved back to their restored houses, these owners and their selected relatives are currently occupying more than one third of the rehabilitated units. Third, there is a good level of family kinship between the newly-selected residents on both levels; that of the courthouse and that of the local neighborhood. More research on how the spaces of these courthouses are shared between the new residents is important in order to fully understand the implications of the new social fabric viewed in this case study.

References

2) HRC, Social Division, 1997. The selection criteria for the new residents.
8) Qawasmi, K., 1999. Architects Record of Hebron Old Town Rehabilitation. HRC.

Notes

1 In Palestine the classification of family levels are mainly four; Hamula or clan and it contains several smaller branches and sometimes it dominates the whole village, then Fakhd, the branch of Hamula and mostly its member have stronger connections and gather in same neighborhoods, and then extended family to third generation which was used to exist in the each of the courthouses in old fabric of cities, and last the nuclear family.
2 The Israeli policy has been discouraging Arabic people from staying there by various means such as closing shops, limiting traffic, prolonged curfews, and blocking main entrances under the pretext of security reasons to protect newly-built Israeli settlements in the old city, these settlements house 200~400 Israeli settlers (LRC, 2007).
3 In 1997 the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel signed Hebron Protocol which divided the city into two sections: H1 and H2, where the Old City is located, includes 20% of the city area and remained under Israeli Occupation. This division has isolated the Old City and created more restrictions on Palestinian movements (for more details see BTselem reports in www.btselem.org of 2003 & 2007 and West Bank Closures-Hebron Old City by UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2007).
4 Up to this day the extended families structure still even in the new built area.
5 Ten units could not be analyzed for missing necessary information about the names of the new residents and therefore were excluded.