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Attempting to document and rehabilitate Aleppo between 1994 and 2011: the ramifications of pre-conflict built heritage mismanagement and the effects of the scarcity of documentation on options available for post-conflict conservation

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Abstract

This paper examines several aspects of the attempt at rehabilitating Aleppo and the data available about the city prior to the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. It discusses documentation, rehabilitation and conservation practices in Aleppo, focusing on the operations between 1994 and 2011 that were coordinated by several institutions managed primarily by the Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo (DOCA) and the *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ). The analysis considers not only the old city, which is inscribed on the World Heritage List, but also other historic and culturally significant areas in Aleppo. This research primarily uses notes from other scholarly resources, statements by various relevant experts, and the reports and documents produced by the DOCA, the GTZ, and UNESCO to argue that some of the practices during that period were in part responsible for overlooking important aspects and places of the city's built heritage. The paper then explains the ramification of these approaches, which are still perceptible today, on the prospects for any future efforts to safeguard the city's built heritage.

Keywords　Aleppo, rehabilitation, GTZ, heritage, documentation, Syria, reconstruction, urban, conservation, mapping

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the ongoing Syrian conflict in 2011, Aleppo, one of Syria's two largest cities, only matched by Damascus, has witnessed the loss of a great part of its unique built heritage. That is of course in addition to the many humanitarian atrocities that have occurred during the war.

To discuss the question of postwar built heritage in Aleppo, this study entails an examination of heritage practices in the city before the conflict and a detailed description of the 16 years prior to the conflict, including documentation, planning, and community consideration. The paper includes a clarification about these practices and an argument that they are closely entangled with other heritage practices. Documentation, planning, and community consideration are mindful actions and processes, not simply outputs, and they lead to tangible outcomes.

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Before going into detail about heritage practices in Aleppo in the decade and a half prior to the war, the first two sections of the paper address two issues arising from the key literature. This first part considers the example of other cities, especially postconflict cities, to describe how documentation, planning and community exclusion or inclusion reshaped those cities. The second segment covers the historical context of heritage politics and practices in Aleppo prior to the period at stake (1994–2011).

Finally, the paper engages in how the lack of documentation, community exclusion, and improper planning have affected and continue to affect the built heritage of Aleppo. Politics and policies are indeed entangled in this problem and cannot be set aside in any unreserved city-scale discussion.

2 Theoretical framework: documentation, community consideration and planning as integrated parts of heritage practices

2.1 Documentation

The availability, accuracy, and limitations of documents have a tremendous effect in regard to options for reconstruction in the postconflict phase. For example, in the wake of WW2 in Warsaw, reconstruction relied upon the prewar documentation created by university students about the buildings, as well as 18th-century paintings of the city (Murawski 2009). However, it is notable that the efforts at mapping the extent of the damage immediately after the war were aimed at documenting the present state of the buildings and played an essential role when deciding on the most appropriate reconstruction approach (Elżanowski 2012).

In the reconstruction of Kosovo and in particular the European-funded project to restore the traditional historic towers known as *kullas*, documentation was lacking, as most of the fabric of the towers was nonexistent, lost, or taken by the Serbs to Belgrade (Legnér 2018); thus, new documentation had to be produced, which was costly and time-consuming. Furthermore, because of the lack of documentation, restoration in many cases was not possible, so reconstruction leaned on imagination. In contrast, the detailed documentation of the historic layers and urban development of the city of Freiburg prior to its destruction in WW2 made possible the recovery of the city's historical identity during its reconstruction (Vedral 1985).

2.2 Community consideration

Community consideration, specifically community inclusion and exclusion, has often had very tangible and visible results in cities, especially in postconflict situations. Perhaps the most infamous case of the catastrophic result stemming from the disregard for the community

is the reconstruction of downtown Beirut. In that case, the downtown area was rebuilt by Solidere, a firm owned by the prime minister of Lebanon, to project a modern image of the city and attract large firms and wealthy businessmen and people from other countries, ignoring the locals. The compensation granted to many residents for the properties they lost was in the form of shares in Solidere, and the once robust downtown of Beirut, where people from all backgrounds and religious sects used to meet disappeared and was turned into a semighost town (Bollens 2019).

As a counterexample, in Dresden, Germany, the people's demands were eventually answered after they contested the American/British air raids that devastated most of their city's historic centre and left it in rubble in 1945. It was not until German unification in 1990 that the mobilisation of citizens resulted in the initiation of the public campaign known as the *Ruf aus Dresden*, which urged the reconstruction of Dresden's historic centre and its most iconic landmark, the *Frauenkirche* with the surrounding *Neumarkt*. In 1992, the communal government and the church's representatives expressed their support for the campaign, and the centre was reconstructed to resemble its prewar state (Ibold 2020, 110–121).[1]

2.3 Planning

Unlike the previous examples of Warsaw and Freiburg, in which prewar documentation existed or was gathered after the conflict to plan for the city, Beirut is the most prominent example of how an old city was erased. The new plans that Solidere created for the old town took a *tabula rasa* approach, except for a small number of buildings that were selected to be restored. These plans, backed by policies and politicians, wreaked more havoc on Beirut than wartime bombs and guns. The previous examples demonstrate how documentation, consideration for the community and planning entangle in the rebuilding of a city.

3 Literature review: heritage practices and policies in Aleppo

In the literature, an important publication addressing this issue is a work by Nora Lafi, a historian of the Middle East and North Africa (Lafi 2017), in which are described several aspects of the development of heritage as a concept and as a practice in Aleppo since the Ottoman period. Lafi argues that French colonial rule has deepened and developed the idea of the protection of individual monuments as an alternative to an urban substantive approach.

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[1] The case of Dresden is nonetheless marked by mismanagement, faulty documentation, and other issues.

This approach stemmed from the French's special focus on protecting Hellenistic and Roman ruins and built on the French authorities' experiences in their North African colonies. This is not to say that the local approach during Ottoman times did not highlight monuments. For example, documentation by Al-Ghazzi, the famous Aleppine historian, highlighted monuments as flag points in each district of Aleppo. Unlike French colonial experts, who excluded Ottoman heritage, the work of Al-Ghazzi paid attention to all neighbourhoods and monuments, even those from more recent periods (Al-Ghazzi 1923, 489–491). The focus on singular monuments is still traceable in the ways in which heritage is approached today in Syria in general and in Aleppo in particular, as this paper argues and clarifies.

According to the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) laws in Syria (DGAM 2000, 3), a building should be at least 200 years old to be considered a protected form of built heritage, with some individual exceptions. Nonetheless, all the urban fabric within the designated borders of the world heritage site in Aleppo is protected in one way or another. The Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo (DOCA), which is the authority overseeing the old city today, was created in 1992 as a result of the rehabilitation project that this paper discusses.[2] At least theoretically, DOCA falls under the authority of the Municipality of Aleppo, as it was established by the municipality. Moreover, since the DGAM is a countrywide national body within the centralised government, theoretically it is positioned above the Municipality of Aleppo and the DOCA in the government's hierarchy.

Accordingly, two important issues have resulted from the limitation in heritage protection laws. The first is that many neighbourhoods and structures built in historicist styles that appeared in the late nineteenth century, such as Al-Aziziye (Fig. 1), do not fit the protection criteria that require entities to be at least 200 years old, nor are they a part of the World Heritage Site (Zeido and Ibold 2019). The second issue is that some neighbourhoods were historic, with a very similar urban fabric to the rest of the old city of Aleppo that included spaces such as open courtyard houses and windy alleyways. Nonetheless, these neighbourhoods were not designated by authorities as being part of the old city or the World Heritage Site. This exclusion has consequently led to their destruction, as in the case of the Al-Masharika neighbourhood (Fig. 1), which the paper discusses in detail later.

4 Research questions, aims, and methods

A number of relevant questions arise in relation to the decade and a half prior to the war. What kind of documentation existed about Aleppo prior to the war? To what extent were local communities involved in decision-making or informed about what was happening to their city? What were the approaches and plans suggested and executed? Furthermore, how were other heritage practices entangled with documenting, planning and considering the community?

In any discussion about the future of Aleppo's built heritage, it is important to consider a series of important questions pertaining to the limitations on documenting in the prewar period, the old and enduring policies towards local communities, whether those policies emanated from local or international organisations, and the previous plans that considered or ignored the city's inhabitants, reality, and needs.

The aim of this research is to shed light not only on the positive but also on the negative aspects of the rehabilitation of Aleppo, which have often been dismissed, and to discuss their potential ramifications for the city's heritage in the future. The research relies on several methods, including the following:

> *The use of primary sources*: This research uses the data available in the digital archive at the Brandenburg University of Technology. This collection includes unpublished reports and digital plans and blueprints that were prepared by the *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ)[3] and the DOCA. The Syrian Heritage Archive project in Berlin has obtained a copy of this archive.
>
> *The use of secondary sources*: The study uses the reports and documents published by the GTZ, DOCA, and UNESCO as well as the notes and different scholarly resources produced by other researchers who commented on the rehabilitation project in Aleppo.
>
> *Interviews*: Since the Municipality of Aleppo, the directorate of old Aleppo, and the *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (German Agency for International Cooperation, GIZ, which succeeded GTZ) have rendered only a selected part of their materials and data accessible to specific institutions and persons, the author depended mostly on statements from different relevant persons about the issues. In a few cases, the author does not specify the names or exact professional positions of the persons quoted or state-

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[2] Follow the link: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/21/.

[3] GTZ: the German Organisation for Technical Cooperation (known today, after merging with other organisations, as the GIZ: German Corporation for International Cooperation).
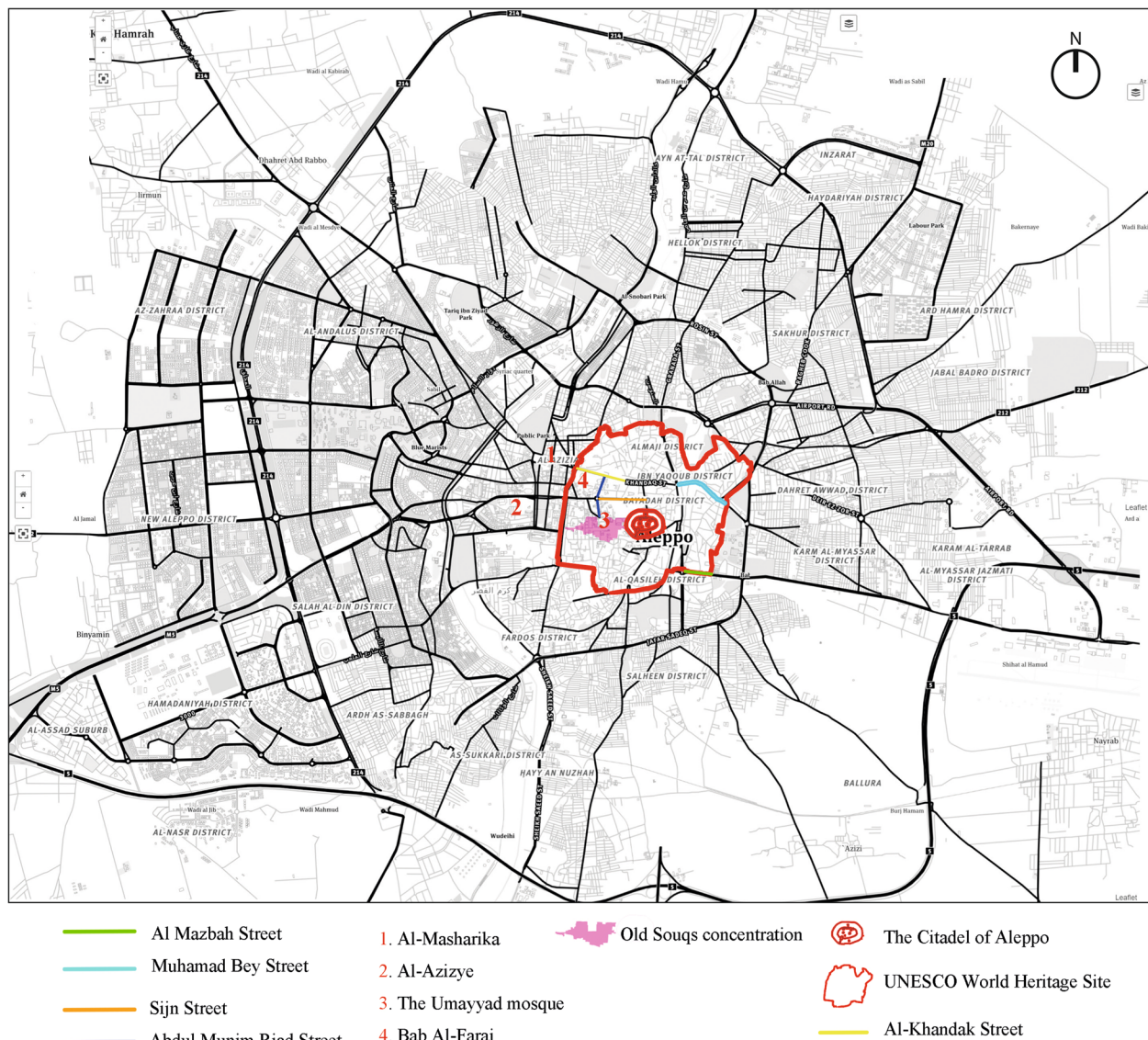
Fig. 1 A map of Aleppo (Source: the Author, background from thealeppoproject.com)

ments sourced, either because these individuals wished to remain anonymous or because the author collected their testimonies informally or through a third party. Statements of Aleppines from the old city specifically and from Aleppo generally are also used. The details of the interviews are further explained in the 'cited interviews' section.

5 Collaboration to rehabilitate the old city of Aleppo

Prior to the ongoing Syrian conflict, Aleppo's built heritage, especially the old city, of which a large part was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, was in a

bad condition. An article by an urban history scholar published in 1975 (David 1975) drew attention to problems in the old city, which had become obvious to its inhabitants by that time, such as issues with its post-1950s high-rise buildings and the deteriorated condition of its historic houses. This scholar eventually joined the team that compiled the 1980 UNESCO report that addressed important aspects of the city's built heritage problems (Bianca et al. 1980). Nonetheless, most of these problems were ultimately overlooked, and almost no steps were taken to rectify the issues, even after the old city of Aleppo was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986 (UNESCO 2012).

In 1994, a cooperative effort to rehabilitate the old city of Aleppo started, led mainly by GTZ, a German

public institution,[4] and DOCA; however, this collaboration eventually ended in 2011, shortly before the start of the Syrian conflict. Importantly, the start and end dates (1994 and 2011) mentioned in this study are based on the correspondence between the author and GIZ, which succeeded GTZ. Although a GTZ report confirms that this cooperation started in 1994 (GTZ 2008), another source, a paper written by Maan Chibli, a prominent actor[5] in the collaborative effort and a former mayor of Aleppo, mentions that the cooperation started in 1992 (Chibli 2000, 316–318). Similarly, while reports on the rehabilitation of Aleppo implying that this rehabilitation is still ongoing cease to be produced in 2010 (Ouroussoff 2010), the date at which the rehabilitation cooperation project ended is not mentioned in any official written report accessible to the public.

6 Documentation: inadequate maps and unidentified historic fabric

6.1 The creation of a digital map

In 1985, Gaube and Wirth (Gaube and Wirth 2007, 93–96), historians and cultural geographers of the Orient, published a book[6] discussing the latest available maps of Aleppo. They clarified that the latest maps documenting the city in detail, including land parcels and properties, were those prepared between 1927 and 1931 during the French colonial period. The maps produced in the following period, they added, only help to comprehend the expansion of the city but do not show land parcels details. The authors published their own map of the city, which covered the new streets that penetrated the old city and new areas. However, their map did not include land parcels and properties either. Nonetheless, some newer maps covered details of a small section or certain streets and buildings in the city.[7] While there seems to be no official explanation, neglect seems to be the reason for the absence of updated reliable maps of Aleppo.

When cooperation for the rehabilitation of the city of old Aleppo started in 1994, there were no reliable cadastral maps of Aleppo in general or of the old city specifically. Therefore, as an alternative to conducting surveys of the city, a digital cadastral map based on the 1927–1931 French colonial maps was created during the late 1990s and early 2000s[8] (Fig. 2).[9] This map was later edited to account for the current situation of the old city by adding the noticeable elements that were introduced after the 1930s, including the streets that penetrated the old city as a result of the 1950s modernisation attempts, some high-rise building blocks, and the new plan of the Bab Al-Faraj area, which was bulldozed in the late 1970s. The map (Fig. 3) that was eventually created was adopted by the GTZ and DOCA for their work.

According to the GTZ and DOCA, 'The whole city was surveyed by means of aerial photographs that were later checked with land triangulation surveys resulting in the accurate cadastral records for the city. The Old City in particular still relies on these original surveys for cadastral records' (GTZ n.d., 4). The availability of new 'aerial photographs' as indicated at the time seems debatable— a person who formerly worked with the Municipality of Aleppo (Interview #1) implied that the aerial photographs were public domain satellite images, such as those produced by Google Maps, which do not provide sufficient details. This claim is supported by a low-quality satellite image that the author found in the DOCA and GTZ document collections,[10] which was titled 'Aerial photo with buildings'. This low-quality satellite image only showed orange lines that highlighted where a few streets passed and red lines that represented the outline borders of the French 'cadastral units' maps.[11] The absence of aerial photos was further confirmed by the Syrian Heritage Archives Project (Syrian Heritage Archive Project 2013), a project managed by two German institutions[12] and primarily dedicated to documenting and collecting Syrian archival materials. According to one of the specialists who was interviewed by the author (Interview SHA):

We obtained most of the materials that the GTZ and DOCA prepared while they were working on Aleppo. The materials that we received from them did not include any new aerial photographs that show the changes that occurred in Aleppo in the last few decades, specifically, the wide streets and high-

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[4] According to the official website https://www.giz.de/en/aboutgiz/shareholder.html, 'The sole shareholder of GIZ is the Federal Republic of Germany'.

[5] Chibli was commissioned by the GTZ as an expert on the Project's Progress Review Mission and was a partner in the firm Suradeq, which had a subcontract with the DOCA to conduct most of the studies for the rehabilitation project.

[6] The 2007 book is a corrected and translated newer edition of the 1985 book.

[7] Some of these maps are available and were collected by the 'Syrian Heritage Archives' project (Interview SHA).

[8] The creation date of the digitised file that the author was able to examine for the cadastral maps (Fig. 2) was 1999. The file is a part of the Aleppo digital documents archive in Brandenburg University of Technology.

[9] The author was able to examine files and pictures related to this process. The files included scans of the different 1927–1931 French colonial maps, a file that compiled the scans, and a *.dwg* format digital version of that compiled map.

[10] Specifically, in the file 'Cadastral maps collage' in The Aleppo Digital Documents Archive, Brandenburg University of Technology.

[11] The French cadastral maps are named 'cadastral units' in the maps and plans produced by the GTZ and DOCA.

[12] According to its official website, the Syrian Heritage Archives Project is a joint project of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin and the German Archaeological Institute.

Fig. 2 Selected Digitised 1927–1931 Maps of Aleppo (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)

rise buildings that were erected in the old city. In fact, the latest aerial photographs that are available for Aleppo, at least in our position, are the Dutch aerial photographs that date back to 1954.

After close examination, it can be concluded that the map (Fig. 3) contains several errors when compared to the situation on the ground before the war. For instance, both sides of Muhamad Bey Street and Al Mazbah Street[13] display different arrangements of buildings than were on the ground before the war. This mistake is easy to notice when using public satellite services such as Google Earth that display satellite images taken at different times in the course of the 2000s. In addition to these errors, one of the most problematic aspects of this map is that it defines land parcels without the built properties; in other words, the map shows only the estate borders but ignores the buildings within them. Overall, for the most part, the new map (Fig. 3) copied the contours of the parcels noted

on the French maps (Fig. 2) and deleted the buildings shown inside the parcels. Indeed, the disappearance of buildings can be further noted in the zoomed-in partial maps presented in this paper (Figs. 4 and 5).

6.2 Utilisation of the produced map
The old city map was eventually utilised for a GIS documentation system (Khirfan 2010, 43). However, as noted in one of the reports of the GTZ and DOCA (GTZ 2005, 81–86), the data on housing types were imprecise, and for the most part, the GTZ and DOCA regarded districts,[14] which combined traditional quarters or parts

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[13] See their location in Fig. 1.

[14] For further elaboration, a Syrian Heritage Archive specialist explained that there were two different kinds of maps that depicted traditional quarters or district divisions in the old city. One was a map of cadastral units, which are the divisions made according to the French cadastral maps, and the other was a map that tried to define districts as the local people knew them. The 'districts' used for this district assessment did not follow any of the previous divisions or maps. Furthermore, the basis on which the selection of these divisions or districts was made was not clarified by the GTZ or DOCA.
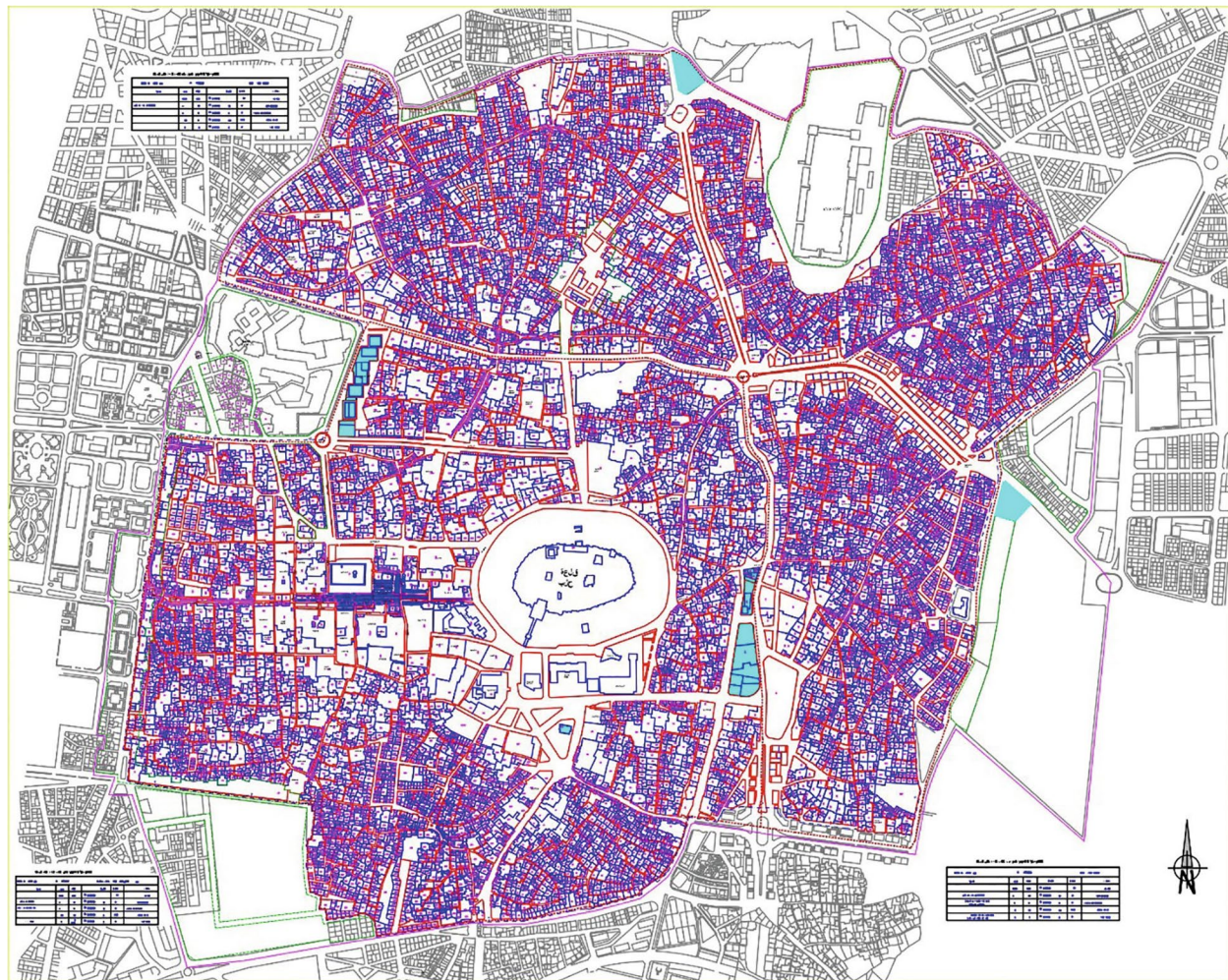
Fig. 3 Modified Map Based on a Selection of Digitised 1927–1931 Maps of Aleppo (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)

of them, as units rather than single land parcels. For instance, districts were rated 'poor', 'medium⁻', 'medium', or 'medium⁺' based on their 'physical condition'. The evaluation of the urban fabric was mostly limited to noting the 'predominant type of houses' in each district; these houses were broadly evaluated as 'courtyard houses' or 'mixed, courtyard houses and modern houses'.

Furthermore, as explained in the same report, the GTZ and DOCA depended mostly on two all-purpose indicators in their surveys to create what they called 'strategic zones'. The first indicator was 'land use', with districts being generally evaluated as 'predominantly residential', 'mixed', and 'commercial'. The second indicator was 'rate of change or dynamics', which entailed the general evaluation of these districts as 'in transition', 'undergoing moderate changes', 'stagnating', 'declining' or 'consolidated'. Districts that were similarly evaluated were combined into a 'strategic zone'. In other cases, small areas that did not exceed 15 ha were selected for as places for where 'concentration

in activities' took place and were named 'action areas'. Strategic zones and action areas were the basis for many schemes and plans for the old city (GTZ 2005, 17).

6.3 The map's explicit shortcomings
Khirfan, a researcher in heritage and urbanism, noted the problems existing in the documentation approach itself. Most noteworthy, minimal to no documentation was gathered for the historic houses' numbers, locations, façades, interiors, materials, or other physical details, such as windows shapes, and decoration (Khirfan 2010, 44).

As David (1975) and the 1980 UNESCO report explained clearly, one of the major concerns about the old city was the severe physical alterations to the historic fabric implemented since the 1950s. These alterations included walls that divided the open courtyard houses into smaller units and physical alterations to several elements of historic houses, but perhaps most importantly, the many high-rise buildings that compromised the
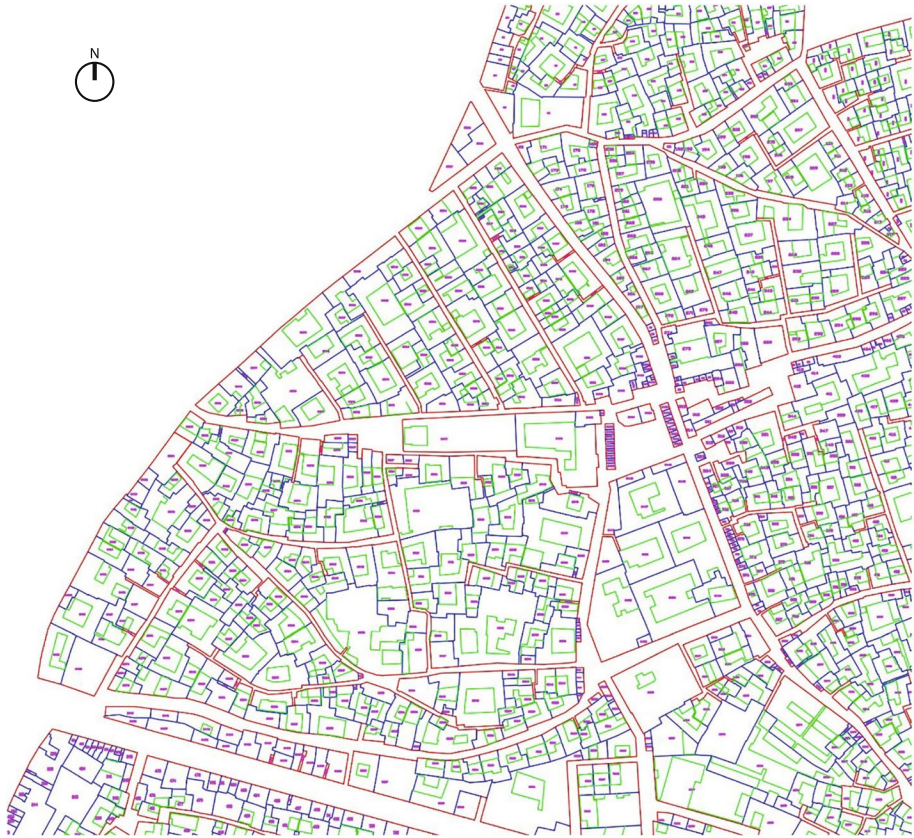
Fig. 4 The Al-Judayda Area from the Selection of Digitised 1927–1931 Maps of Aleppo (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)
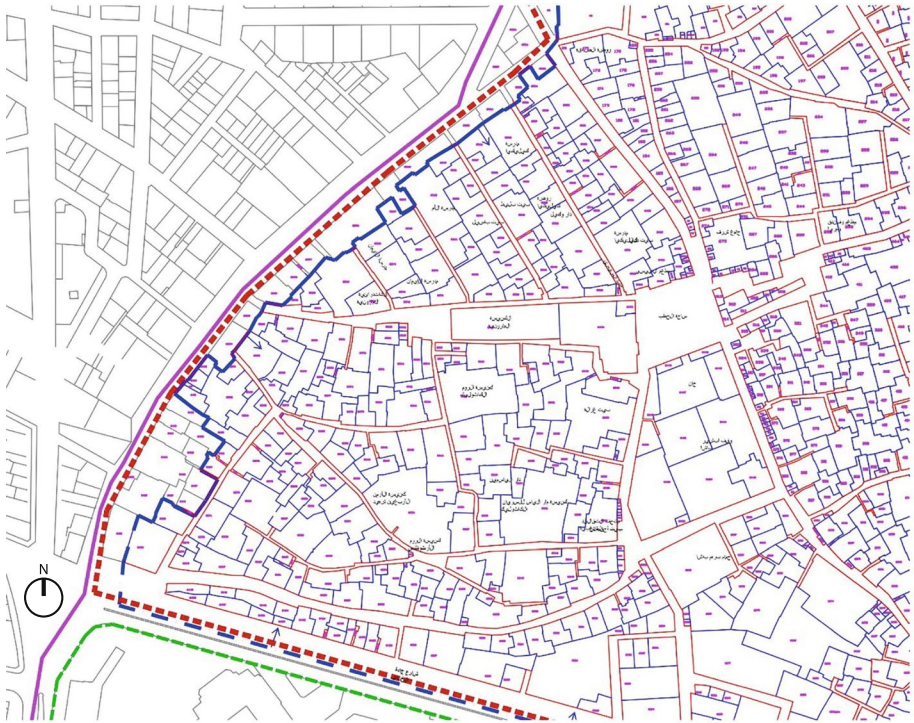

Fig. 5 The Al-Judayda Area as Shown in the Map of Aleppo created in the 2000s (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)

Fig. 6 Left: Skyline of Aleppo, taken from Aleppo's Citadel, possibly in the 1940s. (Sources: Aleppo from the citadel [between 1898 and 1946]. Retrieved 12 August 2020 from Library of Congress https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019698853). Right: Skyline of Aleppo, taken from Aleppo's Citadel in 2009 (Source: *Blick auf Aleppo von der Zitadelle aus*. Retrieved 12 August 2020 from https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleppo#/media/Datei: Aleppo.jpg)

skyline (Fig. 6), the privacy of the courtyards, the aesthetics, and the population density of the old city (David 1975, 33–36). These changes meant that the map adopted by the GTZ and DOCA, which included land parcels but no indication of properties, did not specify for the most part which parcels included houses that were historic or those on which high-rise buildings were built after 1950, or otherwise (Fig. 7).

For example, David published a partial map in 1975 that reflected the changes in some buildings that he surveyed in the Al-Judayda district. He specified which houses were traditional courtyard houses, new buildings, or altered traditional houses[15] (Fig. 7). These changes, however, are not detectable on the map adopted for the rehabilitation plans (Fig. 5). As a result, arguably, the projects and plans for the old city focused on aspects related to movement, zoning, and refurnishing public squares but rarely on conserving historic houses, solving the issue of high-rise buildings, or tackling other problems that were urgent and reported on by UNESCO after 1980.

To further clarify, some historic houses were documented, but this documenting was done mostly for specific houses or minor areas of the old city. Landmarks, including mosques, churches and Khans, seem to have been much better documented than historic houses.[16] Additionally, according to some experts interviewed by the author (Interview #2), it is quite likely that information about each land parcel, including the plans of the properties and their divisions, were available at the Directorate of Real Estate Affairs for taxing and ownership

management purposes, but these records were not shared with the DOCA or GTZ.

Moreover, some areas with a historic fabric similar to that of the old city were not included in the UNESCO-defined borders of old Aleppo and thus were marginalised. Noticeably, some of these historic areas outside the UNESCO borders (Fig. 2) that were initially digitised were deleted and ignored (Fig. 3). This deletion and neglect of areas outside of the World Heritage Site is observable in almost all maps produced or published by the GTZ and DOCA. Although late-nineteenth-century 'modern' neighbourhoods such as Al-Azizye (Fig. 1) housed many culturally significant buildings, these neighbourhoods were not even considered for the initial digitalisation process.[17] As has been previously noted, neglecting specific areas and 'layers' of built heritage in Aleppo was in some cases clearly related to the Syrian antiquity laws or indirectly related to how authorities defined and approached the city's built heritage (Zeido and Ibold 2019, 88–89).

7 Approaching old–new issues in the old city
7.1 Housing and density issues
The limitation caused by the lack of documentation seems to have had a reciprocal impact on the focal points of the rehabilitation processes and procedures in the old city. In other words, the deficiency in documentation, including the lack of a comprehensive city map, prompted the GTZ and DOCA to favour certain projects. Likewise, the projects that were pursued did not

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[15] See David's paper for more details on his categorisation for the houses in old Aleppo.

[16] Documentation files of the GTZ and DOCA in the Aleppo Digital Documents Archive, Brandenburg University of Technology, were examined by the author.

[17] The author researched the materials collected by different institutions on these maps, including those in the Digital Documents Archive, Brandenburg Technical University and the Syrian Heritage Archive project; seemingly, the GTZ and DOCA did not scan the maps for the 'modern' late-nineteenth-century districts.

Fig. 7 David's Survey Showing Changes in the Al-Judayda Area (Source: David 1975, 32–33)

properly document the ongoing work and the results. One of the problematic aspects was that the GTZ and DOCA frequently addressed the UNESCO Heritage Site as an island inside the city. This approach not only led to the neglect of other culturally significant parts of the city outside the UNESCO site's borders but also to a failure to acknowledge that the old city's problems could not be solved independently from those of the rest of the city. For instance, the old city was overly dense as a result of the changes that had taken place since the 1950s, such as the division of many courtyard houses into smaller units and the erection of high-rise buildings, which were meant to accommodate more families (David 1975, 26–36). To resolve these issues, it was necessary to consider the hindrances weighing on the overall city development plan and the skyrocketing real estate prices.

A 2010 BBC report[18] mentioned that 'Syria has suffered from a chronic housing crisis for half a century,

with the difference between the supply of housing and the demand of about 750 thousand homes'. The report also quoted an individual who said that the reasons for the housing crisis were 'the lack of government provision of land at a reasonable price for all classes of people and the lack of economic tools such as loans with appropriate benefits, poor management of the crisis, and the absence of a systematic plan to meet the increase in demand for housing" (Kamal 2010). The report mentioned that this crisis also directly caused the spiralling of informal settlements. The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics mentioned that Aleppo's population was 4,045,166 in 2004 and that the city had 675,647 occupied residences versus 65,523 empty residences and 39,789 residences either under construction or being finalised (The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics n.d.).[19] These numbers seem highly questionable when compared with not only those in the BBC report but also those in other reports, such

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[18] The British Broadcasting Corporation

[19] The exact term that is used is 'under cladding'. This information is offered under 'General Census' in the referenced official website of the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics.

as that produced by TSPA,[20] a company commissioned by the GTZ. The TSPA report mentioned that 'The informal settlements with varying degree of legal status and building quality make for roughly 40% of the city surface, while 50% of the population live in these areas' (TSPA 2010, 106–107).

Resolving the old city's excessive density and its negatively altered open courtyard houses meant finding a replacement for the additional housing units that had been created by dividing traditional courtyard houses or erecting high-rises. Thus, any solution to accommodate the inhabitants' needs meant possibly finding alternative housing for some families outside of the old city and considering the city in its entirety, something that the rehabilitation project mostly neglected to do.

Estimating the surplus in the number of family units was tricky given the lack of statistics and documentation about the open courtyard houses that had been altered and the number of high-rise structures built in the old city after 1950. Proposing a proper plan required a real political will to address the housing shortage crisis in the city.

7.2 Accessibility and zoning

In most cases, ideas and plans for solving the chronic problems of the old city were similar to conventional measures that proved to be inefficient. In some cases, some of these methods were found to be inappropriate by heritage experts. For instance, one of the prominent issues in the old city was that most of it did not accommodate cars, which meant that the few streets that did allow cars suffered from heavy traffic. This problem is typical in places with a traditional urban fabric of narrow streets that are heavily packed with markets, religious buildings and official institutions. As a result, the old city also attracted many car drivers who did not live there. The GTZ and DOCA plans were to a large extent limited to indications of the direction of traffic flows when mapping the streets that accommodated cars. Moreover, there was a heavy focus on creating parking spaces. The idea, which was never implemented, emphasised three streets relatively close to the Umayyad Mosque and the old markets, and it was suggested that underground parking spaces be built under two streets, Abdul Munim Riad Street and Sijn Street[21] (GTZ 2008).[22] Notably, in the underground parking plan, no concerns were expressed about archaeological findings in what is one of the oldest locations in the city. While the plan mentioned the

importance of public transportation that connected the old markets to other parts of the city, it did not mention creating a dedicated lanes for this public transportation as they exist in other cities.[23] Mainly, the plans did not consider limiting traffic in the old city or relocating some bureaucratic administrative functions that put pressure on the old city to other areas outside of it. This redistribution of functions, however, was considered in what was known as the 'Proposed Land Use Plan' for the old city. Nonetheless, in this plan, on the one hand, some administrative functions were relocated away from the citadel's surrounding to create touristic areas. On the other hand, buildings within the old city, which formerly had served different functions, were to assume administrative roles.

Khirfan criticised the Proposed Land Use Plan (Fig. 8) for its segregation of functions in the old city into different zones because old Aleppo 'traditionally lacked any clear separation of uses' (Khirfan 2010, 46) (Fig. 9). Furthermore, the GTZ and DOCA did not elaborate on the reasons behind this segregation.

7.3 Waste management

Similar to the approach addressing the traffic issue, the waste management plan was rather a simple reformulation of the system already in place, in this case, arguably a dysfunctional one. Indeed, the plan simply suggested that garbage collectors would take specific routes and collect the waste from each house at specific times while warning the inhabitants that 'Failure to comply with the plan and at its specified time will expose you to the fines imposed by the regulations of the Aleppo City Council" (GTZ 2008).[24] A report by the GTZ stated, 'In other parts of Aleppo, the inhabitants pay somebody to take the domestic waste from their house to the next container' (GTZ 2008, 32).[25] However, the plan disregarded that the private garbage collectors system was applicable to all of Aleppo, including the old city. Private garbage collecting was a necessity, arguably because of people's meagre wages and the limited number of public garbage collectors who were hindered in their efficiency and capability to do a proper job.

Several inhabitants of the old city (Interview #3) indicated that while some inhabitants paid private waste collectors, many others could not afford it. Al-Hakam Shaar, an inhabitant of the old city in Qadi Askar district,

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[20] Thomas Stellmach Planning & Architecture

[21] See the location of the mentioned streets in Fig. 1.

[22] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/res/mod8/08_2/Subject%20 Plan%20Traffic%20and%20Transportation%202002.pdf.

[23] The author refers to the 'Metrobus' in Istanbul, or the 'Tehran Bus Rapid Transit' that have semidedicated lanes or the 'Bus Rapid Transit' in Amman.

[24] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/res/mod8/08_3/introduction%20of%20new%20coll%20syst%20-%20information%20leaflet.pdf.

[25] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/res/mod8/08_3/Subject%20 Plan%20 Waste%20Management%202,006.pdf.
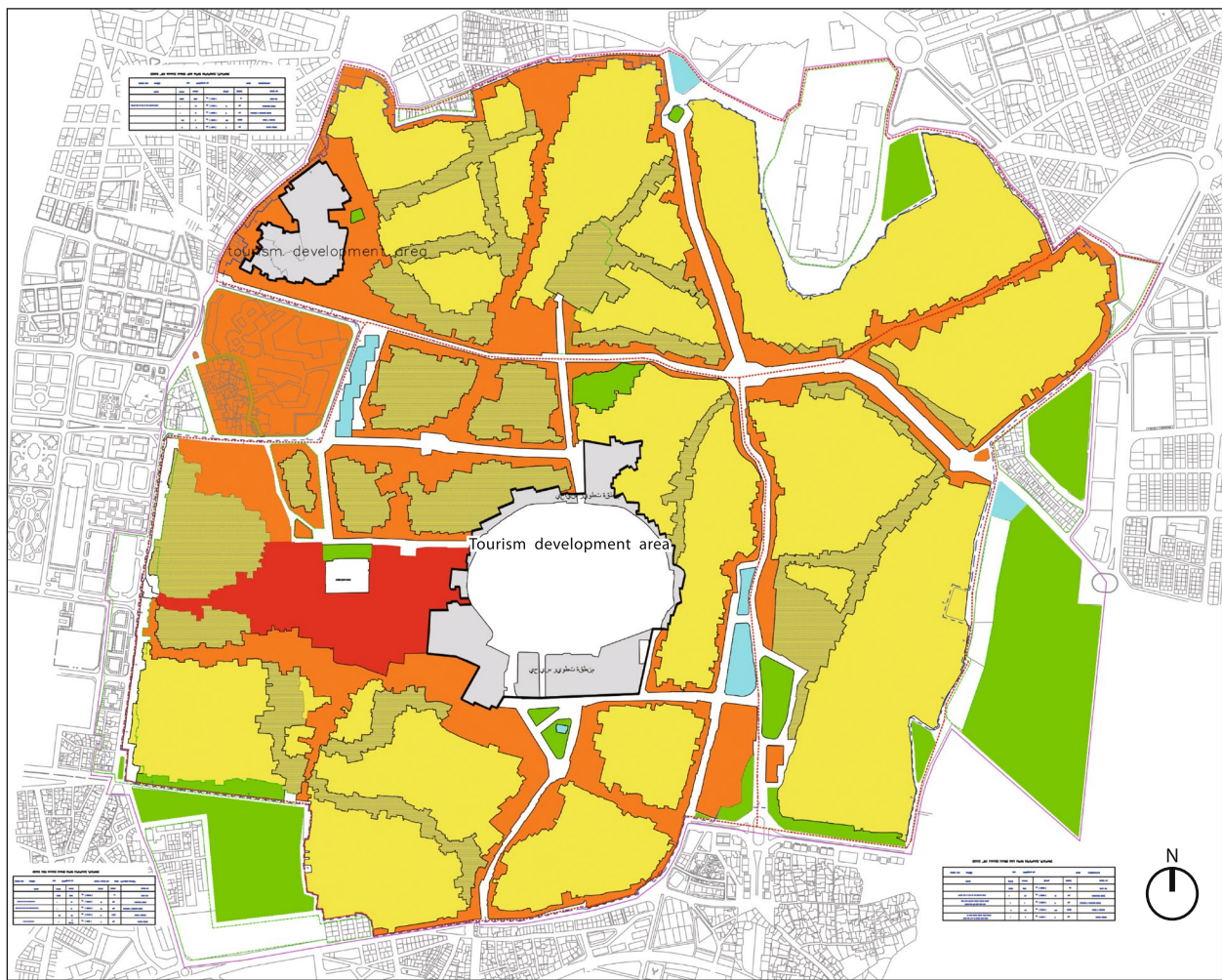
Fig. 8 'Proposed Land Use Map of The Old City' from the 'Development Plan' of the Old City of Aleppo Proposed by the GTZ and DOCA (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)

stated, '*We paid the garbage collector as an incentive to come, he always said that he couldn't do his job because he had so many houses to cover and no time, ...we were aware that his salary from the government was so little. .... Some of our neighbours did not pay regularly because they could not afford it. .... People would mostly dispose of their waste near the main road by the electricity post,* *and that waste would be picked up eventually .... Burning the waste in the big container was very troubling for us; it was not regularly collected, and we did not truly note any difference or change in the years before the war*'. Additionally, the waste management plan included the placement of large waste containers in which the inhabitants could dispose of their waste themselves, although sometimes

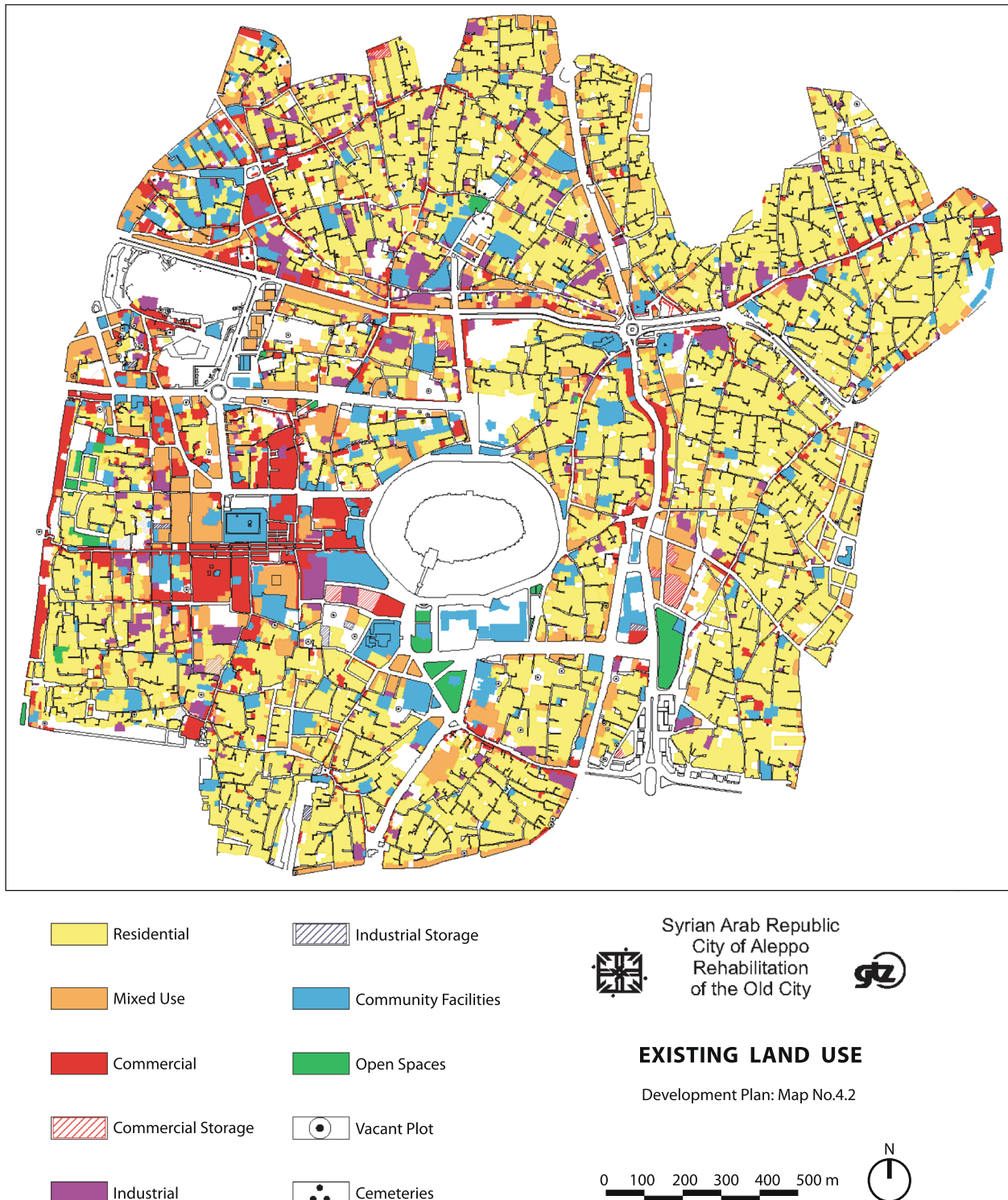**Fig. 9** Existing Land Use in the Old City of Aleppo (Source: GTZ 2008)

these containers were only placed in two locations for three neighbourhoods near roads accessible by the garbage collecting trucks. Moreover, the plan stipulated that

garbage collectors would sweep the streets once every day and would have either tricycles or plastic containers on wheels for their door-to-door waste collection

(GTZ 2008).[26] The plan not only disregarded important well-known facts about Aleppo and did not offer anything new but also ignored crucial planning aspects, for instance, the provision of smaller waste bins around the streets for use by pedestrians, the introduction of a recycling system, or solutions to the issues of the insufficient number of garbage collectors and their low wages.

7.4 Creating and implementing regulations within the old city

According to Khirfan, stringent regulations and detachment from reality impeded the city's rehabilitation and in some cases forced some inhabitants out of their historic houses (Khirfan 2010, 44). As Nora Lafi, an expert in the urban history of the Middle East and North Africa, put it, 'In Aleppo, gentrification accelerated in the 2000s, leading to the expulsion of numerous poorer families to the peripheries' (Lafi 2017, 227). In fact, different examples in the 'rehabilitation' cooperation revealed a pattern. In numerous cases, the GTZ and DOCA implemented regulations and projects that harmed homeowners and shop owners financially, which implies their ignorance about or indifference to reality or to the people affected.

Clearly, most of the city-scale schemes were not based on reality. This disconnect indicates either a serious ignorance of the reality of the situation or a lack of will or even interest in working and pushing for realistic schemes and changes. Moreover, it is apparent that a basic first step, which should have included surveying or documenting historic houses and creating an adequate map, was skipped. As this paper will further clarify, this mistake is alarming given the time and money spent for such a grand 'rehabilitation' project.

8 Evaluating the conceived projects in the old city
8.1 Water and sewage networks

While the GTZ and DOCA reports described concepts, plans, and ideas extensively, they only mentioned some of the projects executed on the ground and did not provide much detail. This void makes evaluating the outcomes of the 17 years of 'rehabilitation' plans rather difficult, especially since the reports generally did not clarify which plans were implemented, partially implemented, or not implemented at all. One of the projects that was, at least partially, implemented was the 'Upgrading of Technical Infrastructure'. However, it is not clear to what extent this plan was realised, as some experts and inhabitants of the old city (Interviews #2 & #3) doubted the reliability

of the numbers offered by Ammar Ghazal,[27] a prominent actor in the rehabilitation project. Ghazal's report stated that 95% of the sewage and 80% of the drinking networks were replaced (Ghazal n.d., 23 in pdf). Notably, these numbers did not refer to a specific date for this supposed achievement. A report produced by planners from the GTZ and DOCA to show the status of the work in 2003 (GTZ and DOCA 2003, 64, 65) offered a map using only one colour to highlight the 'Rehabilitated Water Supply Network' (Fig. 10) indicated as 'Planning and Execution', not clearly distinguishing between what was planned and what was executed. The same document stated that in 2003 only 14% of the sewer rehabilitation had been completed, while 4% were still under construction. A different report produced by the GTZ and DOCA, referring to a similar map (Fig. 11), showing that in 2005, 80% of the drinking water and 60% of the sewage networks were renewed, but the report did not provide much detail (GTZ 2008).[28] However, another document (Ghazal 2010, 43) by Ammar Ghazal highlighted different streets on the map to indicate what had been achieved by 2005 (Fig. 12). Thus, although the two maps (Figs. 11 and 12) are supposed to show what had been accomplished by 2005, they do not match. Both maps also highlighted streets without differentiating between the water and sewage networks. Therefore, what was planned and what was accomplished remained vague, and the accuracy of the numbers and maps offered was questionable.

Any references to these networks were mostly confined to statements such as 'Any improvement of the water supply system needs to be accompanied by the rehabilitation of the sewerage system' (GTZ 2008).[29] Therefore, it is also unclear to what extent, or even whether, the rehabilitation included other infrastructure, such as the electricity grid and communications networks. The reports only included phrases such as 'In case these authorities plan to rehabilitate their networks, all activities should be properly coordinated' (GTZ 2008),[30] while pointing out the lack of communication between different institutions as a problem. The combined lack of communication and lack of available data was regarded as the obstacle hindering the rehabilitation of the sewage and water networks. The DOCA and GTZ could not easily obtain available maps or data from other institutions, nor did they know whether any existed. Therefore, the first step was

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[26] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/res/mod8/08_3/introduction%20 of%20new%20coll%20syst%20-%20information%20leaflet.pdf.

[27] Ammar Ghazal was a partner in the firm Suradeq, which had a subcontract with the DOCA to conduct most of the studies for the rehabilitation project.

[28] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/img/mod7/Exhib-Panel7-Techn-infrastr-l.jpg.

[29] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/mod/en/mod7/07_4_3.html.

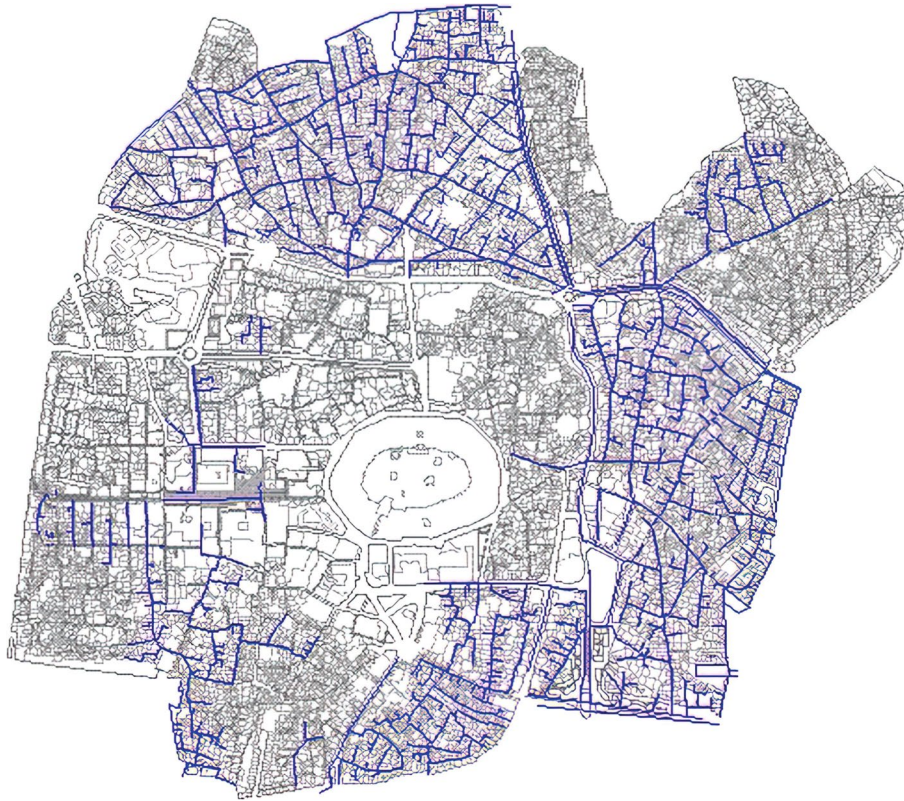[30] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/mod/en/mod7/07_4_3.html.

Fig. 10 Map Provided by the GTZ and DOCA entitled 'Technical Infrastructure Planning and Execution / Rehabilitated Water Supply Network (2003)' (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)

to 'search for available data, drawings and plans and contact all involved authorities and institutions'; it was also added that 'the biggest obstacle to rehabilitating water and sewerage networks is lacking or incorrect information concerning the topographical situation and existing networks. Although they are time consuming and costly, comprehensive surveys of the demographic and topographic situations as well as building conditions are as essential in the beginning of the planning phase as the accurate documentation of results' (GTZ 2008).[31] However, there were no further details about how this was resolved, or about whether a decision was made to conduct the necessary surveys, or about the basis on which those networks relied for their renewal and the digging involved. Notably, this statement was made in 2008, supposedly after most of the networks were renewed.

In addition to stating these numbers and showing photos of digging works, very little information was offered, and no maps were provided to show the old or replaced networks. Infrastructure rehabilitation in this case was limited mostly to changing the worn-out sewage and

water system. In some cases, people had to take the initiative to finish the work. For instance, some shop owners had to hire a private contractor to fill the dug-up trenches, as their customers had to jump over them to get to their shops, and they did not want this to last for months (Rabo 2005, 119).

8.2 Designing public squares

Another visible project executed on the ground entailed the redesigning of two squares: the Al-Hatab square in Al-Judayda and the citadel square. The creation and reorganisation of these public squares were generally seen as positive, despite some criticism in both cases. For instance, Mahmoud Hreitani, an Aleppine heritage specialist, criticised the general attempt to rehabilitate Al-Judayda, about which the GTZ and DOCA reports did not offer much information: 'The markets of Al-Judayda were distorted with excessive decorations to look more beautiful!! According to the perception of those responsible officials of an oriental market!! However, this case we presented was not entirely negative; Al-Hatab square in Al-Judayda was reorganized and has become a public square for the neighbourhood' (David and Hreitani 2005, 78–79). The creation of a square right in front of

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[31] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/mod/en/mod7/07_4_3.html.

Fig. 11 Map Provided by the GTZ and DOCA on the Renewal of the Sewer and Drinking Water Networks in 2005 (Source: GTZ 2008)
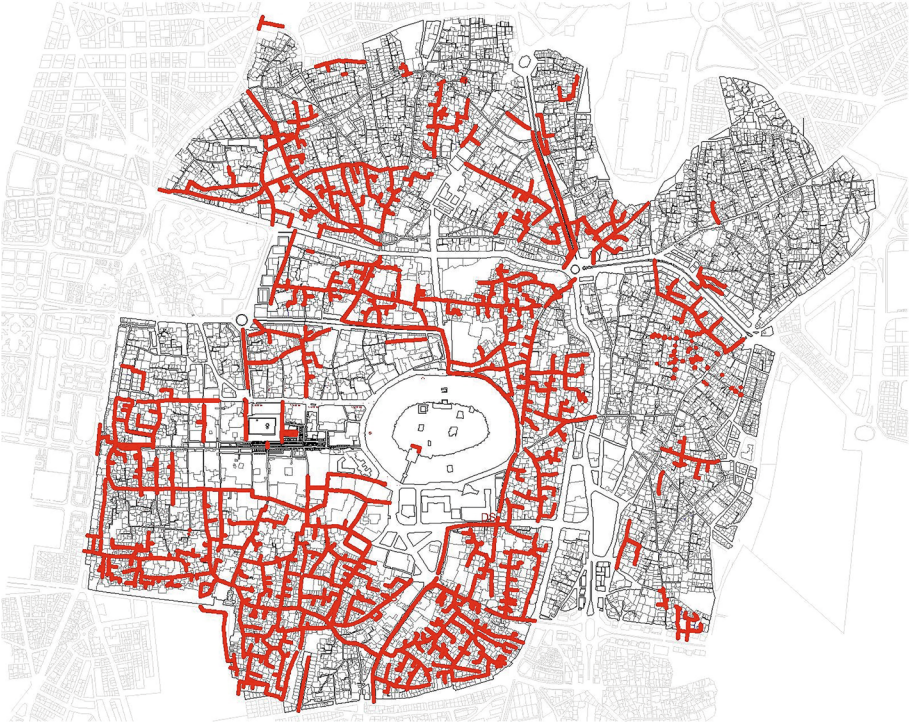

Fig. 12 Map Provided by Ammar Ghazal on the Renewal of Infrastructure Networks in 2005 (Source: GTZ and DOCA 2003)

the citadel's entrance was also seen as positive. This project was implemented simply by detouring the street that used to pass in front of the citadel and making the space accessible to pedestrians only. However, the design of the square, by a German planner, was controversial, specifically in the use of palm trees, which were similar in shape and height and distributed in a geometrical order and within equal distance from one another. For instance, on one of the social media pages where the reconstruction of the city was discussed, one person commented, 'We are still thinking with the same mentality that we followed before the war in the conservation of old Aleppo. I give you only one example, the deformity that took place in front of the entrance of the castle using the black volcanic rock with palm trees is evidence of the corruption of the taste of those who designed it and approved that project' (Almulla 2017). The controversy revolved mostly around the use of palm trees, which several Aleppines declared are not a part of Aleppo's nature or character but constitute rather an oriental fantasy. The project also revolved around the lack of shady areas and trees or of proper seating areas other than cafes and restaurants that are not free of charge. Nonetheless, several Aleppines (Interview #4) did not have entirely negative opinions about the design of this square, and even the palm trees were not seen as out of place by everyone; rather, opinions and feelings were very mixed and diversified.

8.3 Implementing the project for the façades of Al-Khandak street

The renovation of the façades of the adjacent buildings in Al-Khandak street[32] was also perceived as a positive outcome of the rehabilitation plan. As the blueprints[33] of the DOCA and GTZ suggest, the project included removing the additional floors that were built illegally, something that was very common in the city of Aleppo. Furthermore, pictures showing the area before and after the project suggest that all the air-conditioning equipment was removed from the façades, although no details were provided on the alternative measures taken to provide a solution for the heat during the summer, if indeed solutions were in fact envisaged. Moreover, according to a member of the Archaeological Society of Aleppo, Ahmad Adib Shaar (Interview Shaar), who was aware of the details of the project, the owners of these buildings had to pay for the restoration costs, or at least a significant part of them. Ironically, the renovated façades that dated from the late 19th and early 20th centuries became a

'success poster' for the rehabilitation of the city, while the buildings of a similar style and from the same period that were located outside of the UNESCO limits, such as buildings in Al-Aziziye and Al-Jamiliye, were demolished for the purpose of development and commercial projects (Zeido and Ibold 2019, 89, 90, 100). Notably, these façades were featured in Ghazal's presentations (Ghazal 2010, 49–50) and in a publication for the 'Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urban Design' (Busquets 2005, 59–60).

8.4 Introducing minor loans and funding to restore houses

The DOCA and GTZ also offered financial support to the inhabitants for the restoration and maintenance of their houses. The 2005 report (GTZ 2005, 13) stated that there were two kinds of funds available, a 'Rehabilitation Fund' (about which the report only mentioned that there were 30 houses that were beneficiaries in Al-Judayda and that 75% of the loan was to be paid back) and the 'Emergency Fund', which was founded in 1993. If the cooperation started in 1994, this means that the establishment of the Emergency Fund preceded that of the cooperation.[34] The total amount of this fund was roughly the equivalent of 70,437 Euros (at the time) and was distributed to over 450 cases, each case receiving an amount roughly between the equivalent of 282 and 564 Euros. Notably, these reported numbers did not add up.[35] Experts (Interview #2) made various comments about these amounts, some stating that even though the amounts were small, they were of some help, as many of the old city's inhabitants were in an unfortunate financial situation. Others, however, indicated that the very small amount could not truly help, referring to the irony of the funds spent on other aspects of the rehabilitation attempt in the old city. The 2003 report (GTZ and DOCA 2003, 7) prepared by the GTZ and DOCA mentioned that the GTZ and BMZ[36] had spent 7 million Euros on advising and management, technology, local experts, co-financing of rehabilitation measures, training, and equipment and materials. Moreover, the city of Aleppo spent 3 million Euros for a project manager, qualified staff, the co-financing of rehabilitation measures, expenditures, and maintenance. While the report specified the amount spent on each of these categories, it did not give further details. *The Guardian* newspaper reported that the German government spent

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[32] See the location of Al-Khandak Street in Fig. 1.

[33] The author was able to examine a copy of the [.dwg] file produced by the GTZ and DOCA titled, [واجهات المحور - شارع الخندقة امام الشاريتون] in the Aleppo Digital Documents Archive, Brandenburg University of Technology.

[34] In the introduction, the author referred to the issue of this inconsistent reporting about the date when the cooperation started.

[35] The report mentioned the numbers in Syrian Lira. 20,000 S.L = 282 Euros, 40,000 S.L = 564 Euros, 5000,000 S.L = 70,437 Euros. However, if each case was to receive the minimum amount, it would mean that the total amount should have been at least 450 X 20,000 S.L = 9,000,000 S.L = 126,7 86 Euros.

[36] BMZ: Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany

Fig. 13 Satellite Images from 2000 and 2004 Showing a Large Bulldozed Area in the Remains of the Historic Al-Masharika Quarter (Source: Google Earth)

approximately 40 million Euros on the rehabilitation of Aleppo in addition to writing off a Syrian debt (Connolly and Bloch 2015), which at the very least amounted to 8 million Euros (GTZ 2008).[37]

Despite the funds previously disbursed, one of the headings of the 2003 report was 'Distribution of Rehabilitation Costs: The Private Sector Bears the Largest Share' (GTZ and DOCA 2003, 9). The report specified that the costs were covered by the private sector as follows: 27% residents, 21% factories and businesses, and 12% commerce, while the rest was paid by governmental agencies. The report, however, did not mention whether the costs the private sector had to bear were only direct costs, such as materials and workers' fees, or if they extended to indirect costs, such as fees to hire experts and planners and purchase equipment such as computers.

9 Substantial transgressions and errors

'How can we explain the vandalism that accompanies it?' (David and Hreitani 2005, 79). Hreitani, an Aleppine heritage expert, expressed these thoughts after discussing the work being done on the infrastructure of the old city, which he stated was an improvement, even though the deterioration of the old city continued. One of several controversial cases arguably visible in Aleppo on a city level was the massive six-storey hotel that was built in the 2000s during the 'rehabilitation' period and that was eventually opened in 2007 in the Bab Al-Faraj area.[38] The sizable hotel, as mentioned by Hreitani, constituted a clear violation of the old city's regulations (David and Hreitani 2005, 78) and was built despite the problematic aspects of implanting of high-rise buildings in the old city with the traditional fabric of the one- or two-storey and courtyard houses. This issue was well recognised in the old city and explicitly explained in the 1980 UNESCO report (Bianca et al. 1980, 76).

Bab Al-Faraj itself, a neighbourhood of the old city with a long and diverse history, was bulldosed in the late 1970s but still inscribed as a part of the old city. On several maps produced by the GTZ and DOCA, this area was moved outside of the boundaries that defined the old city, and on one map from 2005, it was designated as a buffer zone (GTZ 2005, 18). However, according to a 2012 UNESCO map, the boundaries of Old Aleppo had remained unchanged since 1986, the year that the old city of Aleppo was inscribed on the World Heritage List (UNESCO 2012). Furthermore, the UNESCO description of the ancient city of Aleppo still states that 'the setting is distinctly vulnerable due to the lack of control mechanisms in the planning administration, including the absence of a buffer zone'.[39]

Another project that can arguably be labelled as 'vandalism' and was also perceivable on a city scale was the bulldozsing of a large part of the remains of the historic Al-Masharika quarter.[40] Satellite images of the area on Google Earth between 2000 and 2004 showed that a large part of what was left of Al-Masharika was bulldozed for a development project (Fig. 13). However, to this day, the bulldozed area remains empty with no sign of a plan for it. The historic quarter, which had an urban fabric similar to the rest of the old city of Aleppo, was never inscribed as a part of the old city; and the reasons for not including it are ambiguous. The DOCA and GTZ never discussed or acknowledged this event in their reports. In fact, the reports of the GTZ and DOCA almost never discussed the issue of the destruction of culturally significant buildings and places that were not within the limits of the old city as defined by UNESCO. This issue included the systematic destruction of neighbourhoods similar to the old city, as well as historicist and modernist buildings of the late-19th and early-20th-century neighbourhoods of Aleppo.

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[37] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/mod/en/mod2/02_1_4.html.

[38] See the location in Fig. 1.

[39] Follow the link: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/21/.

[40] See the location in Fig. 1.

10 Key players, 'community participation', and 'capacity building'

Several institutions were involved in the rehabilitation projects, including Syrian governmental institutions such as the Directorate of Antiquities, the Directorate of Tourism, the National Departments of Water and Sewage, the Health and Education Departments, the Awqaf (religious endowments) Directorate, the Directorate of Old Aleppo and international agencies, most notably the GTZ (today GIZ) and the Agha Khan Trust for Culture.

A GTZ and DOCA report mentioned, 'Activities are coordinated by the Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo [DOCA] in cooperation with the German Technical Cooperation [GTZ]' (GTZ 2008).[41] However, according to statements made by several witnesses (Interview #2), the two institutions, the DOCA and the GTZ, monopolised the rehabilitation projects rather than coordinating them. The GTZ reports on Aleppo elaborated extensively on theories about the importance of community participation, stakeholders, capacity building, environmental protection, and other very general concepts. However, they did not clarify how these theories were executed in Aleppo or how to conceivably implement them while taking into consideration the economic and political situations.

For instance, one document titled *Capacity Development for Sustainable Development* stated the following regarding human resources: 'This dimension of capacity development primarily looks at how to develop human resources and to use them within society. It comprises the transfer of knowledge, experience, skills and values, behavioural changes, the development of cooperation and communication systems.' Furthermore, 'The aim is to boost organisational output through training and upgrading for the members of the organisation, the establishment of management and incentives systems', and for institutions and democracy, 'This includes the development of democratic, rule-of-law institutions' (GTZ 2008).[42]

Hence, the concepts and values included in the reports and the practices of the GTZ and the DOCA were contradictory according to the findings of the author and other previously studies conducted by different researchers. Statements by national and international experts (Interview #2) agree with the following opinion: '*It was obvious that the Directorate of Old Aleppo, and the German Agency [GTZ] were very 'cliquish' as there were certain people who gathered to create closed circles and did*

not allow anyone to come close;....they dodged all questions directed to them and were very secretive about what they were doing.'

A prominent individual who was part of the rehabilitation cooperation was asked by an expert (Interview #2) to clarify how 'local community participation' had been implemented, as it was outwardly absent for spectators and the inhabitants of the city to see. This person answered that questionnaires collecting data from the old city's inhabitants were a form of 'community participation'. The questionnaires, however, as the GTZ and the DOCA publications have shown, addressed aspects such as the number of residents per house, the age of the buildings, the residents' social condition, the sufficiency of housing areas, the value of the estates, the structural condition of the houses, the places where residents worked, and whether they were owners or renters (GTZ 2005, 87–101). The questionnaires did not address residents' involvement in decision-making. Furthermore, notably, the GTZ's publication mentioned that data in some cases were collected from Mukhtars (Neighbourhoods' Municipal personnel) rather than directly from the city's inhabitants. Moreover, the GTZ referred to Mukhtars, who are governmental staff, as 'residents' representatives' (GTZ 2005, 18), which indicates either a lack of cultural and social understanding or a misrepresentation of facts in an attempt to fit preset guidelines that were not applicable to the case of Aleppo. To clarify, the GTZ and the DOCA conducted several activities for Aleppines. However, as Rabo, an anthropologist who interviewed many people from Aleppo, explained, 'Most of these, however, were seen not as part of an urban rehabilitation scheme but rather as more general urban cultural activities. They [the Aleppines] did not separate such events from others, like theatre performances or open-air concerts' (Rabo 2005, 119).

A similar criticism was voiced by experts from different fields. 'Some of the planners insisted during their interviews on the presence of a strong participatory component throughout the project's phases. But, discussions with the local inhabitants and, also, observations during the workshops and public meetings in Aleppo offered a different perspective—one that reflected a lack of genuine integration and an absence of participation.' (Khirfan 2014, 105) 'How do Aleppines see these reforms and organization? Do they feel it practically?' (David and Hreitani 2005, 79) 'Most of my informants in the medina[43] had only a very vague idea of the presence and status of this project, or of its aims, goals and development'; but 'generally, the project was not part of their everyday concerns, nor a topic of conversation' (Rabo 2005, 119).

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[41] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/mod/en/mod0/00.html.

[42] Follow the link: file:///Digital_Disc_Driver/res/mod1/01_1/en-gtz2003-capacity-development.pdf.

[43] The word used in Aleppo to refer for the old souqs.

In several cases, Aleppines, including experts in different fields, used harsh language when they spoke about the rehabilitation project (Interviews #2 & #3). A highly criticised aspect of the cooperation process was that the GTZ and the DOCA presented the highly problematic case of Aleppo as a positive one. Media and international experts, and even UNESCO, are careful to adopt information offered by Syrian agencies. Nonetheless, they are more trusting of information presented by an international European public enterprise. For instance, heritage researchers, using the GTZ as a source, described the Aleppo rehabilitation project in positive terms: 'A participatory approach was followed to overcome the issue of crossed responsibilities, as well as to ensure active local involvement in decision making at all levels' (Jamhawi and Hajahjah 2017, 97). Harvard University awarded the rehabilitation project 'The Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urban Design' in 2005 and stated that 'the effort demonstrates that the city's inhabitants can be the protagonists of such improvements' (Harvard University Graduate School of Design 2006). *The New York Times* went as far as calling the project '*an auspicious model for the region*' (Ouroussoff 2010).

11 Findings: community exclusion, mismanagement, planning and implementation

Contrary to what the GTZ and the DOCA reported, locals and residents of the city were almost completely left out of all decision-making processes and plans. Furthermore, the recommendations and plans that were put forwards were most of the time detached from the political and financial reality of the city. Additionally, reports on what happened in the old city of Aleppo were quite deficient, incomplete, and sometimes even inconsistent. At the conferences and colloquiums attended by the author, the work of the GTZ remained a debatable issue among heritage experts. While some scholars harshly criticised the rehabilitation project, others argued that the GTZ and similar agencies had performed to the best of their abilities given the restrictions and political situation they faced.

With regard to management, the reports suggested that there was no cooperation between the DOCA and the GTZ on the one hand and other Syrian institutions on the other, even on a basic level such as for obtaining the necessary maps or general data. Thus, the reports revealed that the cooperation management, represented by the DOCA and the GTZ, had restricted authority and did not receive the needed support.

On a planning level, many suggested that these plans and ideas were controversial and that in many cases they did not consider important archaeological and social aspects of the city. Some ideas, such as the assignment of 'strategic zones' and 'action areas', seemed rather arbitrary, especially in a context in which there was a clear lack of basic data on how the old city would be divided into specialised areas. Moreover, the long text devoted to the matter in the reports did not give a clear explanation.

Regarding implementation, it is not possible to clearly assess to what extent the cooperation affected the old city based on the limited data offered in the reports or on the data accessible to researchers and the public. Nevertheless, in general, the city's inhabitants felt minimal to no positive effects, and the observable behaviour and actions of the two agencies reflected a lack of a sincere desire to create change and consequently were mostly inefficient.

12 Discussion and concluding notes: available documentation and the future of Aleppo's heritage

The author argues that the ripple effect of incomplete, misrepresented or false information and the positive image of the deteriorating situation of the city of Aleppo created by the rehabilitation reports can have harmful consequences for the future reconstruction and conservation of the city. The reports by the GTZ and the DOCA have been adopted not only by their respective staff but also by the media and international researchers that rely on those reports. Moreover, according to the experience of the author during the conducting of this research,[44] the positive portrayal of the rehabilitation of Aleppo extends to a larger circle of people who were commissioned by the GTZ and the DOCA, whether inside Syria or internationally, in addition to public European universities and institutions. The author also argues that in the case of Aleppo, providing a positive image of a problematic situation might have hindered in many ways any local or international initiatives for a real rehabilitation.

Today, there is still no reliable map with indications of urban fabrics or properties for Aleppo. While some initiatives have been attempted, their results have been limited, and their focus has mostly been on monuments such as souqs, religious buildings and bathhouses. Furthermore, other than in unofficial initiatives on social media (Zeido and Ibold 2019, 99), places of cultural significance located outside the UNESCO site's borders are still highly marginalised. Basing the postwar reconstruction plans on inadequate maps or the arbitrary methods used by the GTZ and the DOCA before the war is highly

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[44] From 2016 until 2020. The author here is referring to European university lectures that he attended or where he was able to examine staff's or guests' presentation files on Aleppo. The author is also referring to the several events regarding the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Syria and the opinion of various employees of different institutions in the heritage field.

problematic, especially since it is not unlikely that some prewar actors, whether institutions or persons, might be involved again (Ibold 2019). To provide an example, during the ongoing conflict, a map was produced in 2020 as a flashy postwar reconstruction tool (BTU 2020). It was sponsored by German public funding and led by a person previously commissioned by the GTZ. The map simply copied the older GTZ map (Fig. 3) with all its mistakes, deficiencies, and detachment from the rest of its surroundings; that map also added the ground-floor plans of the buildings that were previously documented and available. In addition to a generic text, there was no real explanation as to why this map was formulated or what purpose it could serve. Here, the author notes again that documentation and planning is an action and a process entangled with other conservation practices rather than a simple output. Furthermore, documentation and planning have a ripple effect on the future of the built heritage of Aleppo, as demonstrated in this paper. Finally, the persistent exclusion of Aleppines from the decision-making process and the fact that they have been denied the knowledge about what has been happening is their city, in addition to a general lack of transparency, whether from local or international institutions, will most likely lead to an additional erasure of the city's built heritage.

The author would like to end by stating that the lessons featured this paper are not only relevant to Aleppo but are also applicable to other situations within the heritage field. It is important to refrain from idolising the work of organisations, ignoring local political reality, or limiting the definition of heritage. The locals can provide a more reliable reflection on the situation than reports by the media and organisations; likewise, it is vital not to treat heritage sites as secluded islands in the context of their respective city areas. Furthermore, the experiences of other cities and the experience of Aleppo reflect that comprehensive documentation, coordinated planning, and community inclusion are indeed entangled and essential for conservation or rehabilitation projects, especially those that occur on a vast city-wide scale. This in return implies an acknowledgement of previous flaws, learning from them, and recognising that heritage is not an evolving combination of intertwined concepts only but also of practices.

Appendix

Cited Interviews

The author did not include any information about the interviews subjects who wished to remain anonymous in the paper. This included their names or any indications to who they might be, including their professional positions.

To be noted, the author had access and was able to interview and collect statement of the different individuals through two ways. The first is that they were connected directly or indirectly with someone from the author's personal social network, as he was born and raised in Aleppo. The second way was through his academic network, as the author has been in contact with researchers who were also working on Aleppo. To clarify, until the present time, the author did not and does not have any direct personal or professional connection or relationship with Syrian national institutions.

Interview #1: The author spoke informally with a person who worked with the Aleppo municipality in 2017. The author refrains from mentioning the name and position of this person, as revealing this information might be harmful to him or her. The informal conversation revolved mostly around the possibility of the author obtaining a map depicting the entire city or a more detailed or updated map of Aleppo than the one in his possession (Fig. 3) or around the question of whether such a map existed in the first place.

Interview #2: Experts who were, to various degrees, close to or familiar with the rehabilitation process were interviewed by the author between 2016 and 2019. The author refrains from mentioning their names or indicating their exact professional positions. These experts included professors and academics who were knowledgeable about the rehabilitation of the city through their own field, research, connections or projects, which they had managed in Aleppo city. One person was a junior architect at the time he worked for the rehabilitation project. The interviews and questions were not structured, and the author contacted these individuals more than once.

Interview #3: The author interviewed five people who were residents of the old city, including Al-Hakam Shaar, who is quoted in the research. The interviews included semistructured questions and were conducted at different times during the author's research on this topic between 2016 and 2019.

Interview #4: The author interviewed 20 Aleppines during his research on this topic between 2016 and 2019. The interviews mostly consisted of semistructured questions, and some people were contacted more than once as more questions emerged.

Interview Shaar: In 2017, the author prepared semistructured questions about the old city. Al-Hakam Shaar played a mediatory role in asking these questions to his father Ahmad Adib Shaar, a member of Jam'iyyat Al-Adeyat, which is usually translated as Al-Adeyat Archaeological Society, Adiyat Association, or the Archaeological Society of Aleppo.

Interview SHA: The author has been in touch with Syrian Heritage Archive specialists since 2016. The project is dedicated mostly to collecting the available archival materials on Syrian sites, cities and culturally significant buildings; this material includes photos, maps, plans and aerial photographs. The person quoted in this study is a specialist in materials relevant to Aleppo. The author conducted this interview in 2019 in a semistructured form.

Abbreviations

DOCA	Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo
GTZ	German Organisation for Technical Cooperation (today known as GIZ after it merged with other organisations)
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
DGAM	Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums [in Syria]
BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation

Author's contributions
The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials
The author has received all the needed permissions for the data that he used in the paper. The Digital Archive of Aleppo in Brandenburg University is not publicly available nor accessible through the library. It's only in position of few personnel and few researchers including the author. There is no official statement or reason given by the university to why these materials were not made public.
The Syrian Heritage Archives of Berlin has obtained a copy of this archive, and to the author's knowledge, researchers can request information and files from there.

Declarations

Competing interests
The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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