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# Towards Decreasing Encroachments on Conserved Historic Buildings, Users Participation as an Approach: The Case of Youth Center-Sebastia

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## Abstract

This paper examines what, why, and how users' behavior can cause encroachments on historic buildings after conservation. It also introduces users' participation in the conservation process as an approach to containing these encroachments. With this aim, this paper reviews the literature and extracts three approaches to user participation in the conservation process, which are social-benefits, economic-benefits, as well as emotional-needs. To examine the possible role of each approach in containing the negative practices by users, the youth center in Sebastia, Palestine has been analyzed as a case study in which the process of the encroachment of the users of these types of buildings and the reasons behind them have been studied. In addition to the former, this paper presents the users' role in the deterioration of historic value and the visual appearance of the building within the short period of conservation. Based on this analysis, it was found that the encroachments have manifested in different forms, such as unsystematic interventions, sporadic neglect, and vandalism. Such intrusions on these structures are a direct result of not involving users in the conservation process. Thus, the paper discusses involving users in the former process to limit harmful practices using suitable approaches including users.

**Keywords:** users' practices; conservation process; approaches of participation; historic buildings; forms of encroachments.



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## Introduction

Ensuring the physical sustainability of preservation interventions after conservation has become one of the most important factors that are taken into account in architectural heritage preservation. Moreover, this factor relies on active mitigation of the negative impacts caused by the long-term use of buildings (Barthel-Bouchier, 2016). In that sense, guaranteeing the suitable use of historical buildings is an approach of high importance in enhancing the built environment, so long as it is approached with adequate strategies to decrease heritage deterioration through time (Barthel-Bouchier, 2016). Therefore, factors causing deterioration in historic buildings- both natural and manmade- are causing challenges, which must be faced in the process of conservation to guarantee the successful protection and preservation of historical buildings on the long term (Richardson, 2002). This paper deals with the role of users' practices in making encroachments and unsuitable uses of the building after the conservation process has ended in different historical structures in Palestine.

It is worth mentioning that it is vital to differentiate between the concept of architectural conservation and the concept of restoring the physical aspects of historical buildings. Architectural conservation is a comprehensive term which combines all direct (physical) aspects of preservation, as well as indirect, cultural aspects that are closely related to the local population (Feilden, 2007). Restoration, on the other hand, is relevant to conservation because it is the direct measure that is taken to strengthen buildings and restore them to optimal physical condition (Rabun, 2000). However, the conservation of architectural heritage is more comprehensive, as it includes not only improvements to the physical building, but it also plays a noticeable role in raising awareness among residents and encouraging their participation in the processes as a fundamental part of achieving conservation goals (Boschi, 2009). Taking into account both the physical and cultural/social aspects should allow for the preservation of architectural heritage and its sustainability for future generations. In that sense, the paper asserts that the active participation of users in the conservation process and including them in decision-making concerning future use is a possible approach to increasing their awareness of the importance of cultural heritage.

Studies worldwide have shown that working on restoration in isolation from improving the awareness of residents of the area of conservation does not foster the necessary social and economic environment for successful conservation (Jokilehto, 2017). Neglecting the local population's awareness also damages the potential sustainability of these projects, and therefore, the restoration operations do not yield the desired results. Users may not accept conservation projects if they were not invited to share their views and concerns. This in turn plays a significant role in damaging the overall atmosphere for conservation. Consequently, taking indirect aspects, such as the role of users, into account in architectural conservation has become an international requirement (Boschi, 2009). Here, the role of the architect or conservator becomes important in supporting communities by involving them in the decision-making process (Elsorady, 2017). On the one hand, involving the community in the restoration process ensures both the inclusiveness of the process, and that it is not limited to a specific number of buildings. On the other hand, it ensures the continuity of the restoration process and that the community itself finds the motivation to conserve and keep the modifications applied to any said building (Bennetts & Williamson, 2003). Indirect aspects consist of studying the demographic, social and economic characteristics of the inhabitants of the surrounding areas to make appropriate decisions in architectural conservation parallel to the population's needs. This then leads to a better understanding of the methods of ensuring the continuity of these projects. Hence, the importance of users' awareness and practices of conservation has emerged internationally as an indispensable pillar of conservation operations (Guarisco, 2009).

Here, user awareness is used as a term meaning the community's shared consciousness of the importance of the conservation of historical buildings. It can be noticed that the former is composed of two equally vital concepts, which are the personal consciousness of each individual and social elements of any said society (Bleibleh & Awad, 2020). Consciousness is considered the result of the interaction between people and the physical world in which they reside; therefore, it plays a vital role

in social development, whether this role is positive or negative. Consequently, people may assist in developing a society or may be seen as an obstacle hindering its growth and development (Rao, 2005).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the conservation process which usually takes place in Palestine, it first needs to be clarified that there are two ways of subsidizing conservation. The first involves owners renovating their buildings at their own expense, while the second features an institution requesting financial sponsorship from donors to conserve a building for public use. For the latter, the institution rents the building from its owner for a specific period of time – usually between 10-15 years- to be agreed upon between the owner and the institution. Ultimately, the owner then does not pay a fee for the restoration of the building. After the lease contract ends, the institution may sign a new lease contract, if the owner agrees and sees fit.

In the second method of conservation, it is important to involve the local community and discuss the proposed use of the building, especially in the case that the building will eventually be serving the public. The owner of the historic building is also a part of the community and must agree with the final plan to maintain a good relationship with the tenants. Therefore, they must be present at such meetings. Many non-profit organizations have undertaken projects to preserve historic buildings over the past three decades, but the primary focus of most of these projects was the physical conservation of historic buildings with less attention paid to public opinion and needs (Elnokaly & Elseragy, 2013). However, Palestinian organization for the preservation of architectural heritage (RIWAQ center) is distinct in the sense that they have involved the local population in their projects in Palestinian villages based on community workshops conducted before starting the conservation projects. This makes evaluating the success and continuity of these projects in terms of users' role an important research topic that should be closely monitored in the future. Following that line of inquiry, this paper takes into consideration users' practices in conserved historic buildings and the possible interventions that they apply to these buildings based on their awareness and practices.

Many previous studies have dealt with the topic of conservation projects in Palestine in terms of the appropriate uses of various historical buildings. However, these studies have paid little attention to the role of users and their awareness and practices in the sustainability of these projects, as well as the vital role they play in the continuity of conservation. An example of a study that has dealt with the subject of community participation and continuity of cultural heritage is a doctoral thesis of Yousof (1995) entitled "Conservation of cultural heritage in the West Bank under Occupation: The Case of the Old Town of Nablus." The study elucidates the importance of users' participation in the conservation process as a practical solution for sustaining cultural heritage in Palestine, while rooting the research in the political and economic complexities of the Palestinian context. Shehada (2020) also discusses notable practices of the community which community clarify various aspects regarding selected case studies. Finally, (Ijla & Broström, 2015) focused on the RIWAQ Center as an example of sustainable conservation and evaluates the case study with particular attention paid to the economic sustainability of conservation projects.

While these studies provide a view into the integration of the local community and their involvement with conservation, none tackle the role of users' awareness of the importance of historical buildings in the continuity of conservation projects in Palestine. It should also be noted here that few studies have followed these projects post-completion to identify the challenges facing their continuity. Moreover, many conservation projects do not take into consideration the fact that these buildings will be returned to the owner post-conservation and after the expiration of the rental contract - a fact that is especially concerning if the proposed use was not negotiated or discussed with the owner, considering the fact that they will be the party responsible for maintaining the modifications to the structure after the project is completed.

Thus, this paper aims to check and analyze the ways and reasons in which users' practices can cause encroachments on historic buildings after conservation. It also aims to introduce and high-

light the importance of involving users in the conservation process as an approach to containing these encroachments and limiting them.

It is important here to overview possible approaches to involving the population in the conservation process in order to raise awareness about historic buildings, starting with that which concerns the social benefits of such awareness. It is vital to take into consideration the possible approaches to involving users in the conservation process. This in turn plays an important role in raising awareness about historic buildings and highlighting the social benefits of this awareness. ICCROM, for example, encourages heritage participation by framing every specific conservation process as a contribution to society in social, economic, and environmental terms (Wijesuriya, et al. 2016). Other scholars focus on the social needs of people based on the roots of heritage, to meet the people's needs, in which case ordinary people can play a role in the conservation process by suggesting elements that would satisfy their emotional needs (Walter 2016). The second approach is the economical-benefits approach. Some scholars have discussed economic benefits as a possible approach to involving people in the conservation process; the conservation of historic Cairo is a good example to be highlighted here. This project concentrated on the idea of viewing historical heritage as a "resource, not a burden" for the citizen to establish modalities of citizen participation in heritage conservation (al-Ibrashy, 2021). The third approach is the emotional-needs approach. This approach focuses on involving people in documenting intangible heritage such as their memories and stories to strengthen their relationship with historical buildings. In that sense, a set of religious beliefs and traditional customs can be attached to the conservation process to enhance the emotional dimension of conservation for the citizens. (Modwel, 2016)

Based on the aforementioned review, it can be concluded that neglecting the proper awareness and involvement of users in the conservation process can lead to increased manmade causes of decay in historical buildings. Users can cause deterioration as a result of negative practices, such as abandonment, neglect, inadequate use, and vandalism (Feilden, 2007). Accordingly, the following sections discuss the paper's methodology of identifying such encroachments if existent in the chosen case study, and the potential of participatory approaches in containing them.

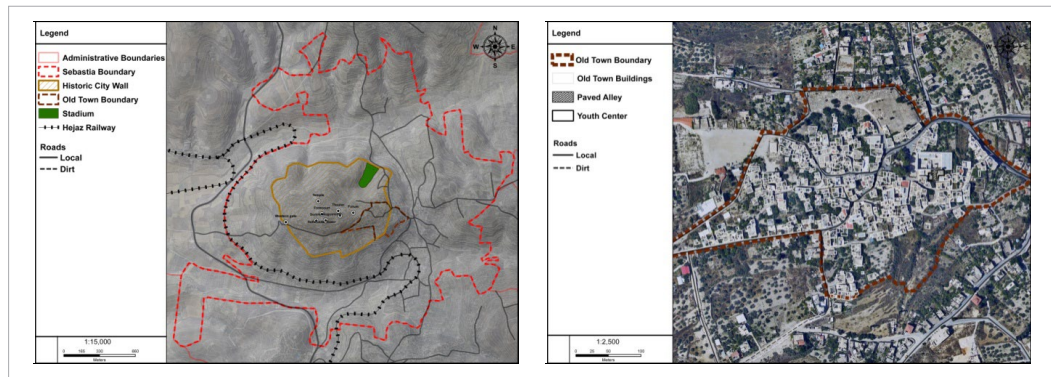
To achieve the aforementioned goal, the study follows a case study methodology, which is based on qualitative and quantitative approaches. The chosen town of Sebastia has a local population that most likely has an inclination and interest, as well as experience in recognizing the heritage and value of historic buildings due to the heavy dependence of the town's economy on tourism. Furthermore, Sebastia is a prolific place for studying conservation projects for two reasons. First, it features important cultural heritage that dates back to before the Roman era. Furthermore, it is home to several conservation projects that have been conducted in the old town of Sebastia since 2005. This is due to its association with cultural heritage tourism, as well as funding from international institutions. As a part of this study, a survey was conducted on all the conserved/restored buildings in the old town of Sebastia (from December 2021 to June 2022), and based on its results, the town's Youth Center was chosen. This is due to the clear practices and interventions implemented by the owner. In this case study, the term "owner" is used instead of "user" due to the fact that the owner is, in fact, the person who uses the building and its facilities. In other cases, on the other hand, the user may be any given individual, including residents, visitors, renters... and so on. Data collection for this case was based on fieldwork, observations, and non-structured interviews of the municipality manager, the owner of the conserved buildings, and two of the architects responsible for its restoration. The questions asked during the interviews were designed in a way to understand the interventions conducted both by institutions and the owner, and the reasons for these interventions if found. Additionally, data on the history of the chosen building and its conservation process was collected. Fig. 1 shows a map of Sebastia and the location of the chosen case study.

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## Methodology

Fig. 1

The location of the case study is to the left, and the map of Sebastia is to the right (Benelli, & Hamdan 2020)



## The historical value of Sebastia

Sebastia is a small Palestinian town located at a strategic point on the junction of two main historical routes; the northern Nablus Road to Jenin and the western route from the Jordan River Valley to the Mediterranean coast. It was built on a steep and isolated rocky hill with a long and spacious plateau for its summit that rises about 400–500 meters above the open valley on the north (Conder & Besant, 1888). The modern village occupies the eastern slopes of a hill, beyond which extend the remains of the ancient city dating back to the Iron Age. Around 25 BC Herod the Great founded a new city on the site, naming it Sebastia after the emperor Augustus (Sebastos). The Roman city was surrounded by a stone wall with projecting rectangular and rounded towers, enclosing some 64 donums. Excavations in 1908–1910 and 1931–1935 revealed the podium of Herod's temple of Augustus on the hilltop. East of the temple lies the Forum and to the north stood the theatre, the temple of Kore and the stadium. A colonnaded street ran from the west gate to the site of the present village on the east (Pringle, 1993)

During the Byzantine period, Christianity arrived in Sebastia in 324–663 AD. During the first Christian period, two sanctuaries were dedicated to John the Baptist. The first, his sepulcher, is in the modern village, and once stood just outside the city walls. A second small basilica, built in the 5th century and the Byzantine church of John the Baptist was already crumbling in the 8th century. In July 1187, Sebastia was occupied by Saladin's nephew, Husam Edin Muhammad. The cathedral was turned into a mosque dedicated to the prophet Yahya, the Muslim name for John the Baptist (Yahya, 2010).

Sebastia's old town represents the typical architecture from the Ottoman period of what is known as the throne villages in rural Palestinian areas. Throne villages were the seat of the Ottoman ruler whose authority encompassed the surrounding areas (Abdulfattah, 2007). The combination of basic architectural units linked together by hierarchal spatial configurations weaves a building mass characterized by balanced relationships between solid and void, light and shadow which create a clustered form with a bright environment (Salameh et al., 2022). The clustered buildings that shape the old town network overlap in plan and elevation creating various, yet homogeneous visual expressions. The old town buildings range from simple vernacular, to dominant monumental architecture. The old town also contains a variety of architectural styles that date back to different periods of history, such as Al-Kayed Palace, the mosque/cathedral, and Al-Hawari Palace ((Benelli & Hamdan 2020).

Due to the importance of Sebastia, a series of restoration activities have been carried out in the eastern neighborhood of the old town where there are buildings from the Roman, Byzantine, Crusader and Ottoman periods, including the mosque, the shrine of Nabi Yahya, the Roman Mausoleum, an olive press, the youth center, and traditional buildings along the tourist trail. Some were rehabilitated as hostels like Al-Kayed Palace and other two small hostels (Carabelli, 2019). The youth center project was selected from these cases because of its important location adjacent to the mosque (the center shares its south wall with the mosque) and because the first floor of the building is from the Crusader period, while the second floor is from the Ottoman period.

The Youth Center conservation project is located at the heart of the old town of Sebastia, south of the main mosque. The project is composed of three buildings, and a separate kitchen and bathroom, which are privately owned by inhabitants of the town, and an alley as shown in Fig. 2. The three main architectural characteristics of the original buildings before conservation were as follows:

- Main building - Number 1: The building is composed of two floors: the ground floor containing two rooms that date back to the Crusader period, and the first floor, which was built in the late Ottoman period. It consists of two rooms in front of a balcony overlooking the outer yard on the western side. In the back (east side) lies a grove of trees and a concrete room used as a kitchen. To the south is a modern cement bathroom (Building 5). The ground floor was abandoned and was never used and is therefore currently in poor physical and structural condition. The first floor was used as a residence, making it in a better condition. The first floor was served by an outside concrete staircase (see Fig. 3).
- Second building - Number 2: It is composed of two floors with a rectangular footprint. The building was an abandoned residence and in poor physical condition before the beginning of the project.
- Third building (Taboon) - Number 3: It was originally used as a taboon, but was abandoned before the conservation process started.

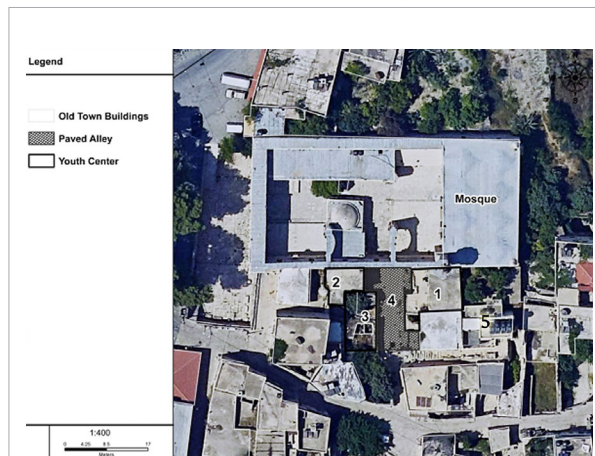
The owner of the main building (Number 1 as shown in Fig. 2) rented out his building to Sebastia's municipality in a 13-year contract (1 May 2005-30 April 2018) rent-free to give the municipality a chance to save these buildings by conserving and rehabilitating them for public use. The owner received his buildings back from the municipality in June 2018 after the contract expired and the municipality was not interested in continuing to renting it.

The project was restored with financial support from the Italian government on the condition that its use should be public. It was implemented by CISS, an Italian NGO, in cooperation with the Sebastia Municipality and was led by an architect who is an expert in conservation. The main aim of the project was to encourage the participation of the local community, especially the youth, by supporting them in creating an active multi-use

## The case: Youth Center- Sebastia

Fig. 2

Youth Center buildings (1-3), the alley (4), and the kitchen and bathroom (5)



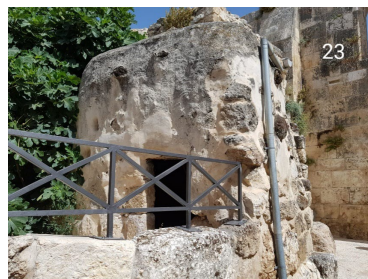
A site plan of the youth-centre buildings



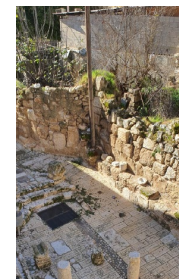
An illustration of building no 1



An illustration of building no 2



An illustration of building no 3



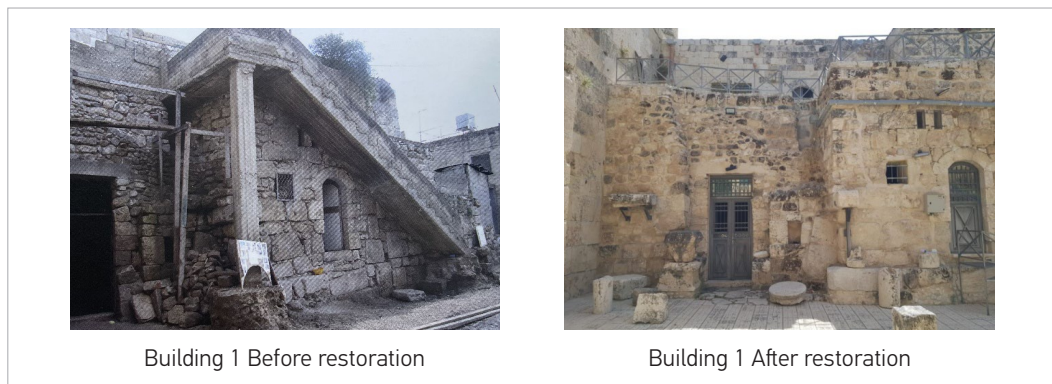
An illustration of alley no 4

youth center. The primary concern in the project was to preserve the wealth of cultural heritage in the region and to conserve the historical center of Sebastia through continuous vocational training offered to the local community. The project, thus, aimed to continue with the development of the historical and cultural heritage of the area in order to benefit the local population, for the project was intended as a public space for everyone. The main participants in the project were the Sebastia Municipality (mayor and members of the Municipal Council) and the local community (Srouji 2022).

The adaptive efforts to improve the safety of historical buildings were based on the reversibility principle, which basically entails employing materials compatible with both the original and the environment, while simultaneously attempting to refrain from the modification of their original aspects or the historical phases of the buildings. The conservation works were carried out by a team of workers from the village trained to work on historical buildings and were led by experts and an architect from the Mosaic Centre in Jericho (Yahya 2010). Fig. 3 shows the Main Building of the Youth Center before and after restoration.

**Fig. 3**

The youth center project-  
Sebastia: before and  
after restoration in 2006.  
(Benelli 2017)



After the project was restored, a group of volunteers from the town took it upon themselves to manage and operate the youth center under the supervision of the municipality by arranging activities for the local community and visitors. Eventually, it became untenable for the volunteers to keep managing the site without the appointment of a manager and financial aid. Despite this unfortunate outcome, a no manager was appointed and the building was left abandoned and open to visitors without control or management. The owner of the property and the architect indicated that the problem was with the municipality itself, as a change in the municipality councils reflected in a change in interests and policy foci. Additionally, the project was not utilized to its potential, although it was available and ready for public use until the rent contract was over.

### **The components of the restoration project:**

1. Building 1: The building was used as the main building of the youth center, as one of the rooms on the ground floor was used as an administration office and one of the rooms on the first floor was used as a library/archive for documents that serve as a historical record of Sebastia. The other was utilized as a computer room. The two floors were connected by a spiral staircase which was added in the restoration process to serve the new population and the outside concrete staircase was removed.
2. Building 2: The ground floor (one room) was restored to be used as a multipurpose room for lectures and movie screenings (Fig. 2).
3. Building 3: It was used as a storage area for the other two buildings (Fig. 2).
4. The alley: Through the restoration process, it was cleaned and paved with stone tiles and seating areas were added (Fig. 2).

The proposed use of the project before and after the expiration of the rental contract was not a topic of discussion with the owners prior to the conservation process. The effects of this can be seen in the main building (Number 1), as the donors who sponsored the restoration of the structure had implemented a condition that the building should remain for public use, so the municipality of Sebastia acted accordingly. Despite the former, the sponsors did not involve the users in the conservation process in any capacity other than gaining the approval to rent the building and the signing of a contract. Moreover, the architect responsible for the restoration and the proposed use stated that the goal was to keep the building in use as a youth center, even after the contract expired and that the municipality was to keep renting it. Nevertheless, the municipality was not able to maintain the keep up of the building due to a lack of interest from the municipal council, failing to hire a manager and financial issues.

### **Users' Interventions on the Youth Center Buildings**

The Youth Center was returned to the owner's control in mid-2018, however, he did not know how to keep it in use in light of the modification that was implemented. This modification entailed changing the layout of the building, causing it to serve as one unit. Therefore, the building was closed by the owner and neglected until Dec. 2020, when he started to make changes to the main building (Building 1) with the intention of restoring it to its previous state as two separate units ready for rent.

1. Partitioning the building into two separate floors: The internal spiral staircase that had connected the levels from inside was removed (Fig. 4:1). In its place, an external iron staircase from the middle of the alley to the first-floor balcony was added (Fig. 4:2) to serve each floor separately.
2. Separation of the two rooms on the first floor-: The owner separated the two rooms to rent out separately, though the bathroom and kitchen are shared by both. The kitchen and bathroom are located on the upper floor outside the building to the east (see Fig. 1). To implement this idea, the eastern window was removed and was opened as a door to provide access to the service facilities (Fig. 4:3). In the second room -where the spiral staircase had been- the owner covered the floor to use the entire area of the room (Fig. 4:4). This room has a door to the kitchen and bathroom on the east side. These interventions left the ground floor without a bathroom and kitchen, making it difficult to rent and the two rooms on the first floor in need of serious maintenance.
3. Removal of planter pots-: On the western balcony, the owner removed all the planters to create a wider space in front of the two rooms (Fig. 4:5).
4. Removal of clay water pipes-: The owner removed the clay water pipes that were added during restoration (Fig. 4:6).

As documented in our interviews, it was found that the owner conducted these interventions without consulting neither the municipality, nor the architect who led the restoration. He claimed that said modifications were minimal and there was no need for consultation. In his opinion, they were necessary to keep the building in use and were seen as method for protecting it from being neglected. The architect and the municipality criticized the owner's interventions and characterized them as random and unplanned. Despite the former, they could not stop him due to the fact that the cultural heritage by-laws were not implemented. Thus, the owner had the right to intervene as he saw fit, as the estate was his.

As established in the formerly conducted interviews, the interventions of the owner were implemented for economic reasons to rent out the building in three different sections. However, the building has not been rented out to this time.. In order to rent out the ground floor, the owner must add a bathroom and a kitchen, which will cause further negative impact on the historical value of the building and its authenticity, especially as this part of the building dates back to the Crusades.



Fig. 4

Practices and interventions by the user (owner) on the youth center-Sebastia (building 1)



The spiral stair was installed in restoration building 1 (Benelli 2017)



The spiral stair was removed by user building no 1

1. Removing the internal spiral staircase by the user to split the two floors. building no 1



Before interventions by user building no 1



A new iron stair was added by the user building no 1

2. The user added a new iron staircase outside the building to serve the first floor



Window on the right side of the façade before dismantling it and replacing it with a door in building no 1 (backyard)



step 1: Dismantling the window protection and frame to open a door in building no 2



step 2: The window was removed and the door was installed in building no 2

3. Removing the window and the addition of a door to serve the room with the kitchen and bathroom in the backyard in building no 2



Spiral staircase opening on the first floor before interventions by a user in building 1 (Benelli 2017)



After interventions: Closing the opening of the spiral staircase in building 1

4. Closing the opening of the spiral staircase after removing it to separate the two floors in building 1



Before interventions of user: planters in the yard of building 1



After interventions: removal of the planters building 1

5. Owner removed planters in front of the two rooms on the first floor to give more space



6: Removing Water pipes (clay) in the alley no4

Based on the previous analysis, all interventions by the owner were negative and completely out of place, as they harm the historical value of the buildings. Such interventions contradict conservation standards as indicated by (Feilden, 2007). Conservation standards dictate that interventions should not harm the historical value of the building, which is not what happened in this case. The previously mentioned interventions caused visual pollution in many parts of the building, and moreover, were not compatible with the original material of the building. Unfortunately, some were even permanent, such as the conversion of the window into a door, for example, is irreversible. However, some of the interventions are reversible; the spiral staircase can be added again and the added iron staircase can be removed. The negative manifestations of the owner's practices in the case study -which can also be found in other restored buildings in Palestine- can be classified as the following:

1. Random interventions: Interventions by the user that do not adhere to the standards of conservation, mainly reversibility, compatibility, and transparency. These interventions influence the historical value of the building and often lead to visual pollution (Fig. 4:1, 2).

## Discussion

2. Neglect: Some parts of the building are not maintained and thus, increase the rate of deterioration of the building materials and structural system (Fig. 2: building 2 and 3).
3. Vandalism: Direct deterioration of the building, such as destruction of original architecture and/or painting (Fig. 4:5-6).

### Verification of the Hypothesis

The reason for such negative practices according to the case analysis and interviews is rooted in users' frame of mind, behavior, and the exclusion of the user (owner) from the conservation process. The following will elucidate the cause's previous points:

- a. Lack of understanding of users' needs in the conservation process.
- b. Inadequate efforts in raising user awareness about the historical value of the building.
- c. Not taking into account users' interest and intended use of the historic building.
- d. The lack of focus on the sustainability of the conserved building among users, the institution, and the owner is a result of the contrast between the proposed use of the institution and the interest of the owner.

However, in reference to the aim of this paper to check what, why and how users' practices can cause encroachments on historic buildings after conservation, and as discussed in the literature review, approaches that involve users in the conservation process are likely to prevent and mitigate negative practices of users, or at least decrease such practices as clarified in the following Table 1.

**Table 1**

Clarification of the role of participatory approaches in solving negative practices of the owner of the Youth Center-Sebastia building

Approach name	Approach -Explanation	Mitigation of negative practices by user
Economical-benefits approach	The idea of viewing heritage as a "resource not a burden" for people. It focuses on the economic benefits of sustainable historic buildings, as well as a description of economic loss associated with losing the historical value of the building.	This approach is likely to prevent the first type of negative practices, which are random interventions, by taking into consideration the economic needs of users and explaining the economic benefits of the conservation conducted.
Social-benefits approach	Encourages heritage participation by framing every specific conservation process as a contribution to society. It concentrates on people's social needs and stays close to the original needs-based function of the heritage building	This approach is likely to deter the second type of negative practice, which is neglect, by explaining that maintaining each part of a historic building indirectly contributes to society.
Emotional-needs approach	Involves people in documenting intangible heritage, such as their memories and stories to strengthen their relationship with historical buildings. This utilizes the emotional dimension of conservation for citizens.	This approach is likely to deter the third type of negative practice, which is vandalism, by strengthening the emotional relationship between users and the heritage buildings.

The participatory approaches of the previous table can be applied as a methodological approach for understanding reasons of unwanted changes (encroachments) that occurred in the case study. The owner of the discussed case study received a conserved building, but this was not enough for him to keep the building as it is. The new function and intervention of the conserved building could not help the owner in fulfilling his own economic benefits, which is a proper result of not involving the owner in the conservation process from the beginning. Due to the former, he opted for changing the use of the building. Instead of taking into consideration the benefits the locals of the town could have reaped from its use as a public building, -such as social interaction and cultural

continuity as examples- he chose his own economic gain. This of course does not come as any form of surprise, for the owner was never involved in using the building before it was conserved, which makes him unfamiliar with such social benefits. And thus, after conservation, the new use didn't suit the owner as a result of him being unaware of such social benefits in its original spatial design. Emotionally, the building was important to the owner and he expressed a desire in keeping it, though he refused to respect the manner in which it was conserved. This in turn leads to interventions that are considered unacceptable since they harm the historic value of the building as previously discussed. Finally, it can be concluded that if the owner was consulted before conservation, he would have contributed to the conservation process and assisted in finding a use that preserves the economic, social, and emotional benefits after receiving the building back.

### **Guidelines for involving users in the conservation process**

Based on the above discussion, urgent actions are required to develop the process of conservation of historical buildings in Palestine. Here, proposed guidelines for involving users in the conservation process to ensure the continuity of historic buildings in Palestine are presented, for each institution or NGO renting a building for conservation should:

- a. Assess the benefit to users in new building use proposals: The user is more aware of the area and the contexts in which the historical building exists. Hence, any conservation project needs to take advantage of their assistance and knowledge to determine the nature of the project it will develop, thereby improving the chances of success. Local people can invest in the project with special attention to development or rehabilitation, and this leads to a decrease in costs in conservation projects. Public participation is also important in identifying appropriate solutions that suit the needs of users and thus, is very important for the continuity of the conservation project.
- b. Community workshops before starting the conservation process: Activating dialogue with the community and in doing so, identifying problems and deciding how to address them. Communities will appreciate the value of heritage, only if they know its importance. Learning about heritage through mechanisms for popular participation will be beneficial on the long run, especially in achieving the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts. This will enable in the avoidance of interventions that the local community may carry out during the use phase to adapt the building to its needs, if they have been ignored by the restorer. Such interventions may fundamentally harm the nature and authenticity of the restoration project as a whole.
- c. Raising user awareness of cultural heritage by job creation: This is a strong basis for achieving effective popular participation in the field of conservation. In the absence of this awareness, it is illogical to adopt a grassroots curriculum or involve the public in a program of conservation. The public's attitudes and the degree of their cooperation in conservation projects are expected to change as this awareness grows. Therefore, their awareness of the processes that will occur, the expected results, and the extent of influence on their lives, is essential.
- d. Keeping up the building's physical status: Educating the public about the various dangers threatening their cultural heritage from natural and human factors is vital. It also clarifies the unintended impact of their behavior on this legacy and the importance of adherence to the advice and guidance set forth by professionals. And finally, explaining why there are rules, specific laws, and instructions for dealing with heritage buildings.

This paper addresses the importance of user awareness of architectural heritage with the intention of decreasing encroachments on historic buildings after conservation. It also discusses the importance of their participation in the conservation process in Palestine as an approach to guaranteeing their continuity, while shedding light on current user practices while using historic buildings. These practices play a role in challenging the sustainability of these structures, and range from random interventions, to neglect and vandalism.

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## **Conclusion**

However, these practices can be reduced by adopting three approaches to participation, which are the Economical-benefits approach, the Social-benefits approach, and the Emotional-needs approach. Accordingly, the paper concludes that community awareness of heritage in Palestine needs special attention. Palestinians should be highly aware of the need to preserve their architectural heritage, as preserving heritage means preserving the right to exist and proving ownership of the land.




The paper also proposes several ways to improve such practices, thus creating a suitable climate for conservation operations in the future. The mechanism of community involvement in conservation processes should be accompanied by increasing people's knowledge of their architectural heritage, its benefits and the importance of preserving it.

Hence, the paper recommends raising user awareness through educational courses, workshops and other related programs. Another recommendation is to undertake further studies to improve the conservation process in Palestine based on people's participation. It is also hoped that this approach has great potential to increase the number of conservation projects in a country that suffers from complex political and economic conditions.

Finally, it is important to identify the relationship between people's participation and awareness of conservation projects. **Table 2** contains a proposed relationship between user participation and awareness as a conclusion of the analyzed case:

**Table 2**

The proposed relationship between users' practices and participation

Participation before and after restoration		Continuity of conservation
Participation after restoration		Random interventions
No participation		Neglect or vandalism

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