

Conservation of Architecture, Urban Areas, Nature & Landscape

Towards a Sustainable Survival of Cultural Landscape

Vol II



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The Hijazi Railroad Line: A Cultural Landscape of a World Heritage Quality

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Abstract

The UNESCO recognizes cultural landscapes in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* as cultural properties that represent the "combined works of nature and of man". In this sense cultural landscape demonstrates evolution of cultures under the influence of the different constraints and opportunities. The term 'cultural landscape' manifests the dynamic interaction between humankind and its natural environment (UNESCO, 2005).

The aim of this study is to explore the Hijazi Railroad Line (HRL) as a cultural landscape rather than single stations scattered along the Line. As Hayden (1995, p. 9) states "Urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features ... as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes". Therefore, the study highlights the cultural values of the HLR which was initially built to connect people and places. It introduces it as an example for a cultural landscape that satisfies most of the UNESCO relevant criteria. This is important as there is a lack of sites recognized as such in Asia in general and the Arab region in specific. Besides, defining the HRL as cultural landscape liberates the concept of landscape from its conventional perception as being strongly associated with plantation, and the HRL from its association with singular monuments.

Keywords: the Hijazi Railroad Line, cultural landscape, conventional and 'liberated' perceptions of cultural landscape, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

1 The significance of the Study

This study fills part of the gap generated from the small number of sites identified and recognized, nationally and internationally, as cultural landscapes in Asia in general and the Arab world in specific. The lack of such sites was recognized by Akagawa & Sirisrisak (2008) in their study of cultural landscapes in Asia and the Pacific. Also, by addressing the issue of cultural landscape definition, this study contributes to 'liberating' the concept of landscape from its conventional perception among Jordanian scholars. This perception has its root in the Western association of landscape with land, gardens and nature, especially in the 18th and 19th century. This perception was strengthened by the Florence Charter: Historic Gardens, which was adopted by the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982. This perception was also enhanced by the dominant wilderness-based definition of landscape embraced by the National Park Services in the United States of America.

The Hijaz Railroad Line (HRL) is part of the railroad that was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid to connect Istanbul with Al Madina (Daher, 1995, p. 343). It connected Damascus with al-Madina. Its length was 1320 KM. In 1914, the HRL passed through 27 stations between the two major cities. The work started in September 1900, and reached Amman in 1903, and the first train reached Al Madina in 1908 (Daher, 1995, p. 342- 343). The HRL is part of the Ottoman legacy in Jordan, which only recently came under attention and management as single stations scattered along the Line (see section 3). Thus ridiculed the meaning and use of these stations, and marginalized the original purpose of them. Indeed, "Cultural landscape might require more sophisticated management than sometimes the case with relatively straightforward monuments" (Fowler, 2003, p. 21).

This study examines the HRL as a whole, in the light of the definition and criteria set by the UNESCO. It emphasizes the continuity of the HRL along Jordan, and its direct connection with the surrounding countries. This connection represents unity and continuity in place and people of the region. It is important to mention that the aim for this study is not to designate the HRL as a World Heritage Site. Rather, it is to identify it as a cultural landscape that is only meaningful when identified as such.

According to Aplin (2008, p. 440) cultural landscapes idea serves raising awareness of sustainable approaches to nature, by enhancing the understanding of human effects, both positive and negative, on the physical environment. It also introduces the different cultural approaches to nature, and the uniqueness and importance of each approach as a reflection of that culture. In Jordan's case, establishing the idea of the HRL as a cultural landscape will demonstrate the intimate interaction between humans and nature. The negative impacts of the HRL on the nature (i.e. polluting air, destruction of natural features) will be measured against positive impacts (i.e. enhancing the quality of the pilgrimage journey; connecting people and places; establishing new stations). Such i

