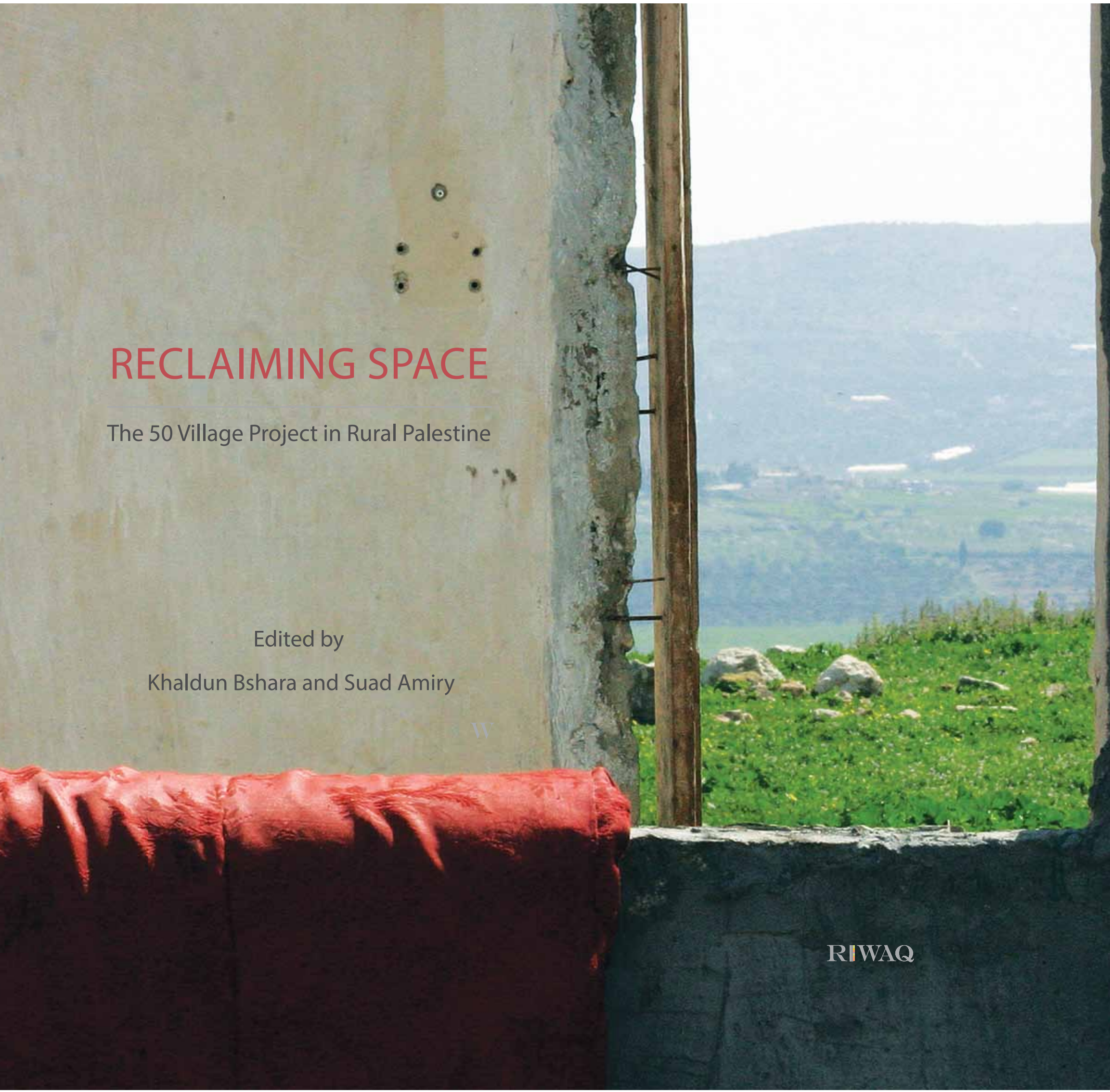




RECLAIMING SPACE

The 50 Village Project in Rural Palestine

Edited by

Khaldun Bshara and Suad Amiry

W

RIWAQ

Madness is the Ultimate Wisdom

Be MAD

Be BRAVE

Have a DREAM

A Bigger Than Life Dream

Go out and about to fulfill it

*And rest assured there are, out there, enough crazy-wise people, like yourself,
to help you make that dream a reality*

A bigger than life reality

A wonderful reality



OLIVE TREES AND ROMAN COLUMNS, SABASTIYA, NORTH WEST BANK

Ten years have passed since Riwaq had the audacity to dream, a big dream, a mad dream, that has, over the course of time, become a reality that now has a name: **The 50 Village Rehabilitation Project**.

Suad Amiry

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Reclaiming Space

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Reclaiming Space

The 50 Village Project in Rural Palestine

Edited by

Khaldun Bshara and Suad Amiry

RIWAQ



LEISURE TIME, DEIR GHASSANA, CENTRAL WEST BANK



Aga Khan Award for Architecture

The revitalization of Birzeit's historic center is a dynamic project in which Riwaq succeeds in mobilizing stakeholders and local craftsmen into a process of healing that is not merely physical but that is social, economic, and political. By reversing a process of neglect and erasure within a complex and difficult political context, the project manages to transform not only a neglected historic core but also people's lives, and restores not only buildings but also the dignity of their users. The project offers an alternative to "museified" historic cores, and it pioneers the regeneration of Birzeit's historic center into cultural infrastructure. It facilitates the reclamation of heritage by the people involved, while also allowing them to achieve their self-expressed aspirations. The project is an exemplary dedication to rural heritage that can serve as a model for the 50 villages in which Riwaq is involved, particularly the strategic interventions designed to stimulate long-term development.

—The Jury Statement of the 2013 Aga Khan Award for Architecture



Acknowledgements

It should be celebrated that so many people have, in one way or another, contributed to the publication of this book, or more accurately, to the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project, the subject of this book. On behalf of Riwaq, we would like to thank everyone, hoping not to miss anyone. And if we have missed you, it is certainly unintentional and our apologies come before our words of gratitude.

First and foremost, we extend our gratitude to His Highness Prince Shah Karim Al Hussaini Aga Khan and Farrokh Derakhshani, the Director of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture awarded to Riwaq for the rehabilitation of Birzeit's historic center in 2013. We are grateful for their generous support towards the publication of this book.

Perhaps it is specifically because of our many challenges and difficulties that Riwaq's 50 Village Rehabilitation Project has become a source of inspiration, not only to Riwaq's full-time team working on the ground to make this dream a reality, but also to the many others outside of Riwaq. As such, the project has triggered many additional initiatives by numerous individuals and local and international institutions.

The 50 Village Rehabilitation Project has been the subject of cooperation between Riwaq and many academic institutions and departments of architecture and conservation, such as the one with Mark Frederickson and his students from Arizona University, who in the summer of 2010 worked on a landscaping project connecting the historic center of Birzeit to the new town of Birzeit. Riwaq's Think Tank, which included many local and international experts from different fields, convened in 2007 in order to examine and reflect on Riwaq's first rehabilitation project, namely the rehabilitation of Birzeit's historic center. During its two-day meetings, the Think Tank addressed many issues related to urban regeneration. And both Daniele Penni and Paolo Ceccarelli from Ferrara University in Italy, together with their students, contributed to many of Riwaq's rehabilitation projects, including the regeneration of Birzeit and 'Abwein.

The production of this book reflects valuable and long term cooperation between Riwaq and many academic institutions and universities. Two of the contributors, Nasser Golzari and Yara Sharif (from the London-based NG Architects, University of Westminster, and Oxford Brooks), have worked with Riwaq since 2007. Both Sharif and Golzari, who were part of Riwaq's Think Tank, worked together with Riwaq on Jaba' village as well as the rehabilitation of the village of Beit Iksa, which are the topics of their contributions to this book.

The same is true for the two-year involvement of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAAP) from Columbia University in New York. With the blessing of Dean Mark Wigley, the help of Columbia University's Amman Studio Director Safwan Nabulsi and Nora Akawi, and under the supervision of Craig Konyk and Anthony Max Tung, a dozen

students worked on the village of Deir Ghassana in the summer and fall of 2011. In the spring of 2014, Craig Konyk conducted another studio on the deserted Palestinian village of Lifta with Nina V. Kolowratnik as his teaching assistant. With the support of Columbia University's Amman Studio-X Director Nora Akawi, Craig Konyk, Anthony Max Tung, and students Whitney Starbuck Boykin, Geoffrey Bell, Jose Alexandro Brunner contributed to this book. We thank them all.

We especially thank SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency, one of the longest supporters of Riwaq, not only of the 50 Village Rehabilitation Project, but also of Riwaq in general since 1994. We are also grateful to the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development who generously funded the rehabilitation of many of the villages. We thank those who closely worked with us from the Arab Fund, including Samir Jarrad and Ahmad Osman. Both did all they could in order for Riwaq to pursue its dream. Nabil Qaddoumi has always been a great supporter of Riwaq both in a personal and professional capacity; we thank him for all of his support. We also thank Hashim Shawwa and the pioneering Bank of Palestine for their continuous support of our work.

Our on-the-ground crucial partners include the village and town councils of Birzeit, Taiyibeh, Adh Dhahiriya, Hajjeh, Jamma'in, 'Abwein, Bani Zaid al Gharbiyya, Yatta, Rantis, Beit Iksa, and Jaba', as well as their residents, who were not only the hosts, but also the driving force of the project. We especially thank Yousef Nasser, the Mayor of Birzeit, and Musa Abulhajj, Birzeit's Municipality Director for their faith in Riwaq and its mission, which made the Aga Khan Award a reality for us.

We thank former Riwaq staff who relentlessly contributed to the process of rehabilitation but also to Riwaq at large. These include Nazmi al Jubeh, Iyad Issa, Lana Judeh, Baha al Jubeh, Najla Barakat, and Shrouq Jaber. The 50 Village Rehabilitation Project would have remained just a dream without their intellectual and practical input. We dearly thank them. We also extend a very special thanks to Farhat Muhawi who relentlessly worked, discussed, and challenged every step Riwaq did or did not do, in the field of rehabilitation. Farhat remains an inspiration to all of us who are still muddling through the vast field of rehabilitation.

We thank Birzeit University's faculty and students, including Yazid Anani, Lubna Shahin, and Mohammad Abdulhadi from the Department of Architecture, who dedicated several courses to the regeneration of Birzeit and Jaba' villages. We also value Inas Yasin from Birzeit's Ethnography Museum who partnered with Riwaq in the Hosh el Etem residency in Birzeit's historic center. We particularly acknowledge the efforts of Yazid Anani who toured the 50 villages and reported on the state of conservation and significance that fed into the formulation of the initiative.

We are indebted to those who worked on this production and compiled the necessary material to print the book. We especially thank Greta Anderson-Finn, the in-text editor of this book, who worked very hard in order to make our English clean and flawless. In addition, we thank photographers Ziyah Gafić (Bosnia) and Tanya Habbjouqa (Jordan) for their superb images, some of which appear in the book. We also acknowledge Tom Kay, God bless his soul, for his sketches of some heritage sites that appear in this manuscript. We thank all of Riwaq's staff for the production of the book's illustrations, and Adwa Company for their graphic design and for printing to such high standards. We appreciate the dedication and hard work.

We are eminently grateful to the Arab Culture Fund (AFAC) for their support of Riwaq's research, seminars, and photography of the 50 villages.

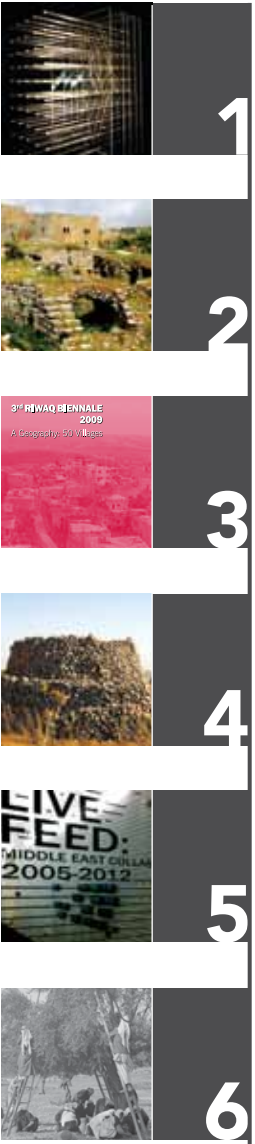
We cannot but reiterate our appreciation and gratitude to every single member of Riwaq for their tireless work. Rest assured that sooner or later, YOU will be remembered as the MAD ones who made the unattainable possible. Your unwavering commitment and importantly, your harder-than-stone work, made a big dream a hard-to-believe reality.

Last, but not least, we extend our gratitude to Riwaq's former Director Fida Touma who was as MAD if not more.

Suad Amiry and Khaldun Bshara

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PROLOGUE

Why should we?

Fida Touma

It is a fact that Palestine is under occupation, it is a fact that our cities and villages are an archipelago of geography, and it is a fact that our national resources are minimal, but are these the justifications for the program and projects this book is presenting? I would like to think that although all of these are factors pushing us to come up with solutions to the state we live in, that at the core of it, this program exists because simply, it is the right thing to do.

Safeguarding and investing in cultural heritage is an act that should be done regardless of the political, economic, or social context in which we live. Our built heritage is a treasure that has been handed down to us, and it is our responsibility to care of it and hand it over to the next generation. But what is happening here is actually deeper. Riwaq has consciously focused on and championed for vernacular architecture; architecture that has shaped the landscape of Palestine for centuries and has been molded by the hands of the average person to respond to his/her needs. It is an act of social justice; it is an act of brushing the dust from a jewel that has been long neglected.

It is not just an act of reclaiming space in the physical sense; it is reclaiming the values that this space occupied and working with its users to attach new values to it. The act of regeneration in itself carries a deep human value, but it is the act of generation in historic village cores that adds another dimension. Palestine has long been celebrated for its monuments, religious shrines, antiquities, and its ostensible biblical landscape, however the people who built these monuments— their intuitive genius, and their continuous existence and relationships with the natural landscape of the land— have been absent from the mainstream imagery of Palestine. Regenerating the core of Palestinian villages brings this genius to the forefront, and celebrates the intricate techniques and spatial arrangements that carry an unbroken line of human knowledge and values.

Riwaq never claimed ownership of a magical wand that would breathe life into abandoned spaces, nor was it shy from opening up its experimental approach for others to tap into and critique; this book is proof of that. This publication is a simple but brilliant endeavor to put an experience that has accumulated over more than seven years of work on the table. The experience is open for critique and further development. It is a call for celebrating the aptitude of the vernacular, and for adopting approaches that are far from the grand and cliché, but rather, are authentically responsive to the context of Palestine.

Fida Touma is currently the Director of OCJRP/Welfare. She became Co-Director of Riwaq in 2011. She joined Riwaq in 2000 after completing a B.Sc. in Architectural Engineering from Birzeit University. Fida received a Fulbright Scholarship in 2005 to study at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst where she attained a master's degree in Public Policy and Administration. Her work at Riwaq began with restoration projects and evolved into managing and building Riwaq's strategies, partnerships, and networks.

EACH VILLAGE IN PALESTINE HAS ONE OR MORE SHRINE OR MAUSOLEUM -TYPICALLY ONE OR TWO-
ROOM DOMED STRUCTURES WITH A TOMB DEVOTED TO LOCAL SAINTS OR HOLY MEN



FOREWORD

Farrokh Derakhshani

Creating a better future for oneself and for others is a noble dream that can only be realized if there is a vision that has the power to convince the immediate and larger world to participate in its implementation. How do you convince people that surmounting difficulties and complex conditions is not an impossible task? In the face of limited resources, political will, and exceptional social circumstances, how can an idea survive and the dream become a reality?

Every generation inherits a built environment and then goes about altering it—usually for the better. In some cases, however, these alterations are for the worse. Usually in these circumstances, there is a lack of understanding of the realities of the place, both physical and social. But where there is a collective social responsibility, intelligent approaches to problems can lead to positive change and an improvement in quality of life.

Public spaces in urban and rural environments have gone through dramatic changes in the past century as social behavior and lifestyles have changed. The processes of change are accelerating, and in most cases, cities and villages have not adapted intelligent ways to the realities of the time, which has led to a decline and a degradation of living conditions. These circumstances often lead to a crisis of identity, economic hardship, and cultural ruptures, which often create false nostalgia or dreams of utopias.

Experts in the field—architects, planners, engineers, conservationists, environmentalists, and professionals from other related disciplines—have the responsibility to reshape our environments. But the only way for them to be effective is to create a healthy dialogue with end-users, i.e. society at large.

I remain optimistic despite the many failures in the world. Through my time at the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, I have seen that there are exceptional projects that offer solutions that have gone further than expected, and have provided examples to inspire others. I have realized that despite many

obstacles, these projects are role models of excellence, not only in their neighboring environment, but also in the furthest corners of the planet. What resonates is a clear understanding of the processes, issues, appropriate approaches to implementation, and that sometimes the lessons learned are more important than the end result.

Through experimentation, exchange of ideas, and learning from their own mistakes as well as those of others, Riwaq has showcased a number of tangible results that can be seen as models, and which deserve further exploration. First and foremost, Riwaq's projects have returned dignity and improved the quality of life for project beneficiaries. Riwaq's success is predicated on assuming shared responsibilities and operating in collaborative teams. They have understood that interventions in the built environment— whether a simple shed or a large-scale urban project— is the result of a collaboration involving many disciplines and people.

This publication offers an in-depth look into Riwaq's work, including the way they have been able to disseminate their findings to specialists and the general public throughout the world. Considering the circumstances under which Riwaq achieved its vision, I think it deserves special attention for such work anywhere in the world. Let's hope that the dream of those who started Riwaq becomes the vision of many others.

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