

İÇƏRİŞƏHƏR

DÖVLƏT TARİX-MEMARLIQ
QORUĞU İDARƏSİ



Bakı, AZ1000, İçərişəhər,
Asəf Zeynallı küç., 20

www.icherisheher.gov.az
office@icherisheher.gov.az

Tel.: [+994 12] 492 11 75

Faks: [+994 12] 492 60 51

№ 4-210/110/102

"14" 03 2024-cü il

Increasing Livability in the Walled City of Baku (Icherisheher): The Baku Khans' Park and the Baku Khans' Palace Complex

Administration of State Historical-Architectural Reserve "Icherisheher"

Project started: 2018

Project completed: 2022

Context and drivers:

The Walled City of Baku as the historical center of Baku and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000 is recognized as a valuable place where people walk, meet, have fun, shop, and, generally, get involved with different cultural activities. Thousands of local and foreign guests enter the Walled City by cars and on foot every day round the clock. As an ancient place of human residence known for millennia, Baku, its beautiful architectural masterpieces and mysterious urban environment attracts visitors from various countries of the world. However, no matter how important these activities and their enjoyable aspects for urban residents are, they directly influence the sense of the quality of life among local people and visitors.

By the course of time the Walled City has transformed from the tiny isolated fortress on the bank of the Caspian Sea into the nucleus of the rapidly growing and urbanizing megapolis, surrounded by great civilian port and naval infrastructure, railroads and oilrigs. Meanwhile the urban growth, which had burst beyond the fortress walls, turned the once political, economic and cultural capital simply into the Inner City (Icherisheher) or Old City.

Unfortunately, today we observe globally how historical centers of big cities lose their social value as people are not involved in the community life and have limited social communication in public spaces and city centers in response to their safety concerns and environmental challenges, such as noise, pollution, and traffic problems. Considering this global challenge faced by world cities, we have set it as our objective to make the Walled City of Baku more sustainable and livable able to adapt to the major challenges of the coming years. It is particularly important for us, the Administration of the Icherisheher to ensure that the Walled City of Baku can preserve its original medieval charm and continue to provide its residents and visitors with high-quality living environment as well.

Objectives:

The project "Increasing livability in the Walled City of Baku: Baku Khans' Park and Baku Khans' Palace Complex" is the initiative that help us to achieve our goal to make the historical center of Baku sustainable by addressing people's sense of well-being, enhancing opportunities for communication among people, increasing the sense of community, and neighborhood watch in the site. In the framework of this project the Administration of the Walled City of Baku initiated to build the largest park in the site along with restoration of the complex of Baku Khans Palace including a set of historical buildings such as XVIII century Palace building, the underground bath, souvenir shops, etc. located on the Double Gate square. The initiative is also aimed to highlight the uniqueness of the Walled City of Baku, to improve quality of life through a sustainable use of open spaces and renewable sources of energy. It was also an objective of the initiative to increase accessibility and sustainable mobility in the site in order to avoid noise and environmental pollution.

Involvement of different stakeholders and the local community:

Icherisheher, as a 22 ha wide open-air museum, is one of the most visited places for urban residents and guests, both children and adults. Therefore, the authorities, retailers, local businesses, residents and tourists/visitors were our primary stakeholders, whom, as a rule, we involve in our new activities based on the principle that our "cultural heritage is a common good", which must be preserved by everyone. Our project "Increasing Livability in the City of Baku: Baku Khans' Park and Baku Khans' Palace Complex" was an important matter for the above stakeholders as well.

During regular meetings, we communicated the value of increasing livability in the Old City to the local people and businesses, who were also informed how the new Park together with the Palace Complex and other service facilities will improve the quality of life based on better environment, social and economic conditions.

The Administration was also in direct contact with various government agencies to consult the planning and restoration activities. It should be noted that restoration of the three-centuries-old complex and its non-the-less ancient neighborhood required thorough contemplation and very sensitive approach to the issue.

And last but not least, a team composed of experts, community representatives and staff members of the Administration was established as an informal council representing various stakeholders. The council was regularly updated on the restoration plan and implemented works and their feedback was considered by the Administration.

Key elements and components of the project:

The following components were considered when designing and implementing the initiative:

The outstanding universal value and systemic vision of the Walled City of Baku: We acted on the basis of a strategic development vision by promoting the respect for outstanding universal value of the Walled City of Baku, by protecting its cultural heritage and by reusing its disused areas.

The environmental components of sustainable open spaces: Designing of the initiative considered urban and social sustainability by enhancing the qualities of the historic urban landscape.

Accessible and comfortable public spaces: We aimed to make the city comfortable, accessible, attractive considering that public spaces are the historic places of the community and of the urban living.

Cultural component: Baku Khans' Park, the largest park in the Walled City of Baku has been built around the Complex of Baku Khans' Palace, a XVIII century monument, which has been restored as part of the project. Restoring the cultural aspects of a city and of its public spaces, by operating on the historic viability was fundamental for the Administration. Baku Khans' Palace, located right in the middle of the Park, has been restored and will be used as a museum, with interactive experiences aimed to bring the Baku's history to life. VR and other digital technologies showcasing the history of Baku have already been installed in the museum, which will be open to public soon. The Park along the with Khans' Palace Complex enhance livability by increasing people's sense of belonging and their enthusiasm for the subject of cultural heritage.

Tourist satisfaction: As Azerbaijan is one of the countries in the region living through rapid economic development, the tourism industry is the leading foreign exchange earner, after oil industry. Furthermore, Azerbaijan is endowed with an abundance of attractions for tourists including heritage resources that are particularly suitable for sustainable tourism. This specific situation provides an exclusive foundation to expand the tourism industry, as well as introduce Azerbaijani culture. The cultural attractions located in heritage sites constitute one of the major parts of Azerbaijan's tourist attractions. Hence, the improvement and enhancement of heritage areas is considered as a fundamental function for the development of Azerbaijan's tourism industry. We believe that the improved livability will increase the level of tourist satisfaction, which will ultimately contribute to the government's policy to become a world-class tourist destination in the region.

Public participation: Community involvement was considered as an important element in the initiative in question as it improves social unity, economic development, while also enabling accessibility for local people. The idea is that public participation can increase livability as it creates "public surveillance and neighborhood watch". In addition, with improved self-image and identity of the city, we expect to increase civic pride and inspire the community to actively address a wide range of development and livelihood issues. One of the Palace buildings located in the Park is used as a souvenir shop and restaurant, where local people and businesses provide services to visitors.

Outcomes and impacts of the project:

With the new Park in the Walled City of Baku, local residents, visitors benefit from high-quality public spaces that are favorable for interactions, exchanges, and solidarity. The initiative also helps visitors and residents to have high satisfaction with their quality of life. Because of the social value of public space, social life of residents and visitors change with increased attachment of people to their locality and opportunities for exchanging with others. As the Park is surrounded by cultural venues, historical monuments, museums, etc., people also explore the site and its outstanding universal value while also spending their time in the area.

Main challenges in the implementation:

Making a city livable requires collaboration, flexibility, earnest investment and continued commitment.

The first challenge that we faced in implementing the livability project in the Walled City of Baku was to make sure that the new Park and restoration of the Baku Khans' Palace Complex is integrated with the overall plan for wider Baku city. This is very progressive approach as it does not focus on the conservation in isolation from their surrounding environment. The

emphasis in our new project was not just what heritage can do for the city in terms of increasing revenues from tourism inflows, but also what it does in terms of promoting social harmony and inclusion.

Another challenge was to make sure that both the restoration of the Baku Khans' Palace Complex and new Park, with their complex and layered built form, are addressed as a whole. All restoration activities were guided by the "General Plan for the Conservation of the historic center of Baku" approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan. The General Plan for Conservation emphasizes that the conservation of architectural heritage and sites must be undertaken in a holistic manner.

Contribution to sustainable development agenda of the city:

When we initiated this project, we were inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda and the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach of UNESCO. Our purpose was to make the Walled City of Baku more sustainable to be able to adapt to the major challenges of the coming years and to ensure that the site could continue to provide each generation with high-quality living environment.

The initiative will contribute to the sustainable development as follows:

- To ensure livability in the Walled City of Baku, we believe that the new Baku Khans' Park with the restored Baku Khans' Palace Complex, which will be used as an interactive history museum, will further protect the identity and image of the Walled City of Baku, and promote its cultural expressions. The initiative will also help us to make the Walled City of Baku a vibrant life-space.

- We understand that the culture is also a platform for social and economic development. The new Baku Khans' Park along with the new Baku History Museum and spots for souvenir shops (Sales Points of the Center of Traditional Arts, a center established in 2012 to develop and regenerate the traditional Azerbaijani arts and crafts) will be assets for the development of the site, local communities, promotion of cultural and creative industries, and enhancement of sustainable tourism. These activities contribute to economic development by generating income and creating employment for local communities.

Contribution to further protection of the built heritage in the site:

UNESCO's periodic survey about endangered World Heritage in Europe concluded that a weak application of preservation activities was a threat to the successful preservation of the cultural heritage sites. We believe that the less livable historical sites could be one of the most dangerous risks in the preservation of the residential function in historical districts. The Baku Khans' Park and Baku Khans' Palace Complex, a project that aims to increase livability in the Walled City of Baku, is an initiative that will contribute to protection of heritage in the site by creating a unique sense of place and singular urban landscapes. The Park is home to Baku Khans' Palace, a complex of several buildings built in the XVIII century and belonged to members of the ruling family of the Baku Khanate. Upon occupation of Baku by the Russian Empire in 1806, a military garrison was quartered in the Palace. This place served as head-quarters of the Baku military garrison exactly for two centuries, through the Empire and Soviet times and has finally been "discharged" from military duty in 2006. The Palace used to have a garden with pool and flowers, that has now been restored, and XVII century underground bathhouse nearby. The underground bathhouse, laid below the level of the fortress walls, was buried during the "garrison period" for the purpose of having a parade-ground and remained unearthened until restoration of the Baku Khans' Palace. After its discovery it took restoration team several years to unearth, analyze, restore and repair the bath-house building, which now serves as another museum in the Old City. From 2006 to 2018, the Palace Complex was totally disused and strongly needed a restoration. The Administration of the Walled City of Baku started the restoration works in the complex in 2018. The Palace Complex is seen as one of the most significant and valuable pieces of the architectural legacy of the Baku Khanate. The Khans' Palace will be used as a museum, with interactive experiences aimed to bring the area's history to life. In parallel with the restoration works in the Palace Complex, a Park surrounding the Complex was also built from the scratch, which is now the largest garden park in Icherisheher.

Meanwhile, the Underground bathhouse was not the only precious object recently found in the area. During the archaeological excavations in the area, we discovered an ancient Water treatment system, Reservoir (Ovdan) and ancient Pottery workshop. Today all these are open for visitors and we prepared information stands about them in 3 different languages in order to help visitors to know more about the site. In the Underground bathhouse we created mini-exposition and used "museum self-exploration" practice there. Baku Khans' Palace Museum will be a wonderful historical experience and great opportunity for visitors taking them to a journey through the centuries of history of Baku.

Once the museum project is completed, the restored Palace Complex, a previously unused place and the surrounding Park will increase the livability in the Walled City of Baku by preserving the heritage and improving a city's self-image and identity through recognition of heritage assets, which will also increase civic pride and energize communities to actively address a wide range of development and livelihood issues.

Contribution to resilience of the heritage and of the community to reduce the risk of disasters from natural hazards:

Baku is not a hotspot for calamities with high exposure and vulnerability to flooding, eruptions, landslide, forest fire and other natural hazards. However, the Baku Khans' Park project aimed to establish a well-designed public open space in Baku where population is dense. On the other hand, any spot left half-destroyed and unattended in such an ancient place with secret basement, dugouts and ground waters can quickly turn into nest of rodents, insects or any other biological hazard. Besides

that, plaster and white paint on the walls could not help against erosion of the stone fabric and prevent the risk of collapse and emergency situation. In this regard, restoration of the Palace and the Park, located right next to the entrance to the fortress, was of utmost importance and eliminated possible risk of biological contamination and physical damage to the residents of both inner and outer city.

As a public open space, Baku Khans' Park, aside from providing environmental, and physical and mental health benefits to citizens, would be a useful place for emergency response and disaster resilience. As a signatory of EU's Covenant of Mayors Initiative, the Administration committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%. The new Park in the center of Baku will contribute to the country's efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Support of livelihoods, local revenues and small enterprises:

The scope of this initiative is pretty broad and it includes five different buildings and large park area. Underground bathhouse and Baku Khans' Palace are the museum part of the initiative. Moreover, in the second building of Baku Khans' Palace large commercial center named "Baqqal" is operating. The purpose is to support small enterprises and increase local revenues through trade of local handicraft accessories and souvenirs. The Complex also includes the "show-room" building of the Icherisheher Traditional Art Center (called "Dastan") to sell its products and several restaurants on both sides of the Palace, offering local cuisine.

Social inclusion:

The new Park along with the Double Gates Square and all cultural facilities in the area serves as a venue for social events of the Administration such as festivals, master classes, gathering of the volunteer group "Goru", etc., which makes the Walled City a socially inclusive, interesting, enjoyable, stable city with equal and fair access for people who enjoy a diverse range of social, cultural and economic opportunities here.

Contribution to peace and security and promoting dialogue between cultures:

Azerbaijan is a country with multicultural experience and rich historical heritage. Using this experience and heritage, Azerbaijan makes great efforts to promote intercultural dialogue among different nations all around the world, which is the strong indication of country's intention to play an active role in building bridges and trust among societies, among cultures. Azerbaijan is a unique place where different cultures meet. Its role as the bridge between Asia and Europe made the country to absorb values of the different civilizations. The historical context and geographical location, as well as peaceful coexistence of other nations in this territory created favorable conditions for the spread of different cultures and religions in the country. This cultural diversity, as well as the ancient tradition of tolerance became one of the great strengths of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani leadership makes all efforts to remain such diversity.

To preserve the cultural diversity and ensure intercultural communication, Azerbaijan introduces several powerful instruments. Among them are mixing and integrating local and foreign cultures and communities through tourism, building opportunities for mutual exchange and understanding, promoting local cultural heritage. In this context, the Walled City of Baku, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which represents an outstanding and rare example of an historic urban ensemble and architecture with influence from different cultures, presents wide range of options to bring people from different cultures together, offering multiple touristic attractions that are necessary for mutual exchange.

Following that policy line, the Icherisheher developed itself into one of the most favored destinations for both the local and foreign visitors representing various cultures. Building on this experience, the Administration believes that the restored Baku Khans' Palace Complex and Baku Khans' Park will serve as the venue for mutual exchange and fusion among people of different nationalities ensuring that they enjoy their time in the historical environment.

Contribution to gender equality and women engagement:

At the outset of the project, Administration had organized a project team with predominant female participation. To ensure that both women and men are effectively represented in the management of the project, Administration followed the gender equality at all levels of project leadership. For example, the chief architect and a senior coordinator were women. We had history team responsible of researching and writing materials for interactive panels of museum, and we ensured that gender equality is observed here as well. It is planned to have women employed in various positions at the Baku Khans' Palace Museum after its inauguration.

Chairman of the Board



Shahin Seyidzade