

**Beyond Culture and Civilization: Community-Based Approaches
to Strengthening Architecture and Urban Heritage Conservation
in Southern Egypt**

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Abstract

Preserving architectural and urban heritage has become a human obligation that contributes to preserving historical landmarks for future generations. Heritage plays a crucial role in shaping nations' collective memory, civilization, and local culture. The preservation of architectural and urban heritage is no longer merely a cultural and civilizing act; it also has economic and social consequences. It is an authentic expression of a society's culture and achievements and one of its pillars. In the face of changing times and globalization, it also serves as a pillar of civilization and identity and supports community values. In addition, it contributes positively to the building and community development movement and the growth of economic dimensions, as this heritage represents a national treasure not only at the local level but also on a global scale. Therefore, preserving and investing in this heritage is regarded as one of the essential economic principles. In an era in which the tourism industry is regarded as one of the critical industries, architectural and urban heritage is regarded as one of the most significant elements of attraction for global and local tourism. This research deals with the experience of preserving the architectural and urban heritage of the West Suhail village as a case study, which is one of the key Nubian civilization and cultural centers in southern Egypt. This research aims primarily to create an integrated framework

to maximize the benefits of this civilizational and cultural heritage and not limit the process of preserving the state's role and its various bodies. The research concludes by highlighting the importance of preserving urban heritage and how to utilize it in creating new job opportunities for young people and preserving urban cultural heritage with an emphasis on the role of people's participation in this area.

Keywords: Community-Based Approach, Architectural and Urban Heritage, Conservation, Southern Egypt.

1. Introduction

Architectural and urban heritage conservation is a crucial part of preserving the history and culture of a city [1, 2]. It involves protecting, restoring, and preserving buildings, monuments, and other structures deemed to be of historical or cultural significance [3]. The importance of architectural and urban heritage conservation is widely recognized [1]. It helps preserve a city's unique character by protecting its historic buildings and monuments from destruction or alteration. This can benefit tourists and locals as it provides a sense of identity for a place. Furthermore, it can help boost local economies by attracting more visitors interested in exploring the city's history [4]. Additionally, conserving historic buildings can also help to reduce energy consumption as they often have better insulation than newer buildings [5].

Despite its importance, several challenges are associated with architectural and urban heritage conservation [6, 7]. One major issue is funding; many cities need more resources to maintain their historic sites properly. Additionally, there may be conflicts between those who wish to preserve the past and those who want to move forward with development projects that could damage or destroy these sites [8, 9]. Furthermore, there may also be legal issues related to ownership rights that need to be addressed before any work can begin on a site.

To ensure successful architectural and urban heritage conservation efforts, cities must develop comprehensive plans that address all

aspects of preservation, including funding sources, legal issues, public engagement strategies, etc. [10, 11]. Additionally, cities should consider utilizing modern technologies such as 3D scanning to document existing sites before any changes are made accurately. Finally, cities should also strive to create partnerships with local organizations to ensure that the community supports their efforts [4, 12-15]. Urban heritage conservation has been an increasingly important topic in urban planning and development [16]. This study examines the current literature on international case studies in urban heritage conservation. The review focuses on the challenges and opportunities associated with conserving urban heritage and the strategies and approaches used to address these issues.

By summarizing key findings from the literature [2, 11, 17-19], challenges and opportunities are associated with conserving urban heritage sites worldwide; however, various strategies can be employed to address these issues effectively. International case studies provide valuable insights into how different cities have approached this issue successfully or unsuccessfully, thus, providing valuable lessons for other cities looking to conserve their own unique cultural heritage sites effectively. Firstly, examining the challenges associated with preserving urban heritage, these include a need for more awareness and understanding of the importance of preserving historic sites, limited resources for conservation efforts, competing interests between developers and preservationists, and a lack of legal protection for historic sites [2, 4, 11, 20]. Secondly, looking at the opportunities associated with conserving urban heritage, such as economic benefits from tourism, increased public engagement in local history, and improved quality of life for residents [6, 10, 12, 21].

The third part reviews strategies used to address these challenges and opportunities. These include public-private partnerships, adaptive reuse projects, community-based initiatives, and cultural mapping projects [2, 16, 22-25]. The fourth section looks at international case studies in urban heritage conservation worldwide [13, 15, 26-36]. These include examples from Europe (e.g., Barcelona), North America (e.g., New

York City), Asia (e.g., Tokyo), Africa (e.g., Cairo), Australia (e.g., Sydney), and Latin America (e.g., Mexico City).

Heritage conservation is integral to preserving a society's history and culture. It is a complex process that involves multiple stakeholders, including the community [4, 24]. This study explores the role of the community in heritage conservation, focusing on how communities can be involved in the process and how their involvement can benefit heritage conservation efforts. The first aspect of community involvement in heritage conservation is public participation. Public participation is an integral part of any conservation effort, as it allows for local voices to be heard and for local knowledge to be incorporated into the decision-making process [6, 27]. Studies have shown that public participation can lead to increased support for conservation efforts and an understanding of the importance of heritage preservation [15, 34, 37, 38]. Public participation can also help ensure that conservation efforts are tailored to local needs and values.

Another way communities can be involved in heritage conservation is through education and awareness-raising initiatives [22-24]. Education initiatives can help to raise awareness about the importance of heritage preservation and encourage people to become actively involved in protecting their local cultural heritage. Education initiatives can also help foster a sense of pride in local cultural heritage, leading to increased support for conservation efforts.

Moreover, communities can also be essential in providing financial resources for heritage conservation projects [4, 24]. Communities may be able to provide funding through donations or grants, or they may be able to provide resources such as labor or materials [22, 39, 40].

Financial resources are essential for many heritage conservation projects, as they allow necessary repairs and maintenance work to be carried out. This study highlights the critical role that communities play in heritage conservation. Through public participation, education initiatives, and financial resources, communities can contribute significantly towards preserving their local urban and cultural heritage. Involving communities in conserving their heritage is essential to ensure its long-term protection and preservation.

1.1 Architectural and Urban Heritage Conservation in Egypt

Egypt is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which has been shaped by its long history and the many different civilizations that have inhabited the region [41]. Architectural and urban heritage conservation in Egypt is an essential topic due to the country's long and rich history. The country has been home to many civilizations, including the Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Ottomans. The conservation of this heritage is of great importance to the country, both for its economic value and for its contribution to the identity of the nation [7, 8].

There is a need for more comprehensive policies to protect these sites from destruction or neglect [8]. Currently, several laws are in place to protect archaeological sites from destruction or damage due to development projects. However, these laws are only sometimes enforced or followed due to a lack of resources or political will. Additionally, the Egyptian government has taken several steps to protect and conserve its cultural heritage. In 2002, it established the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), responsible for overseeing all Egypt archaeological excavations and research projects. The SCA also protects monuments from damage or destruction due to natural disasters or human activities [42]. In addition, it has established several museums and archaeological sites throughout the country to preserve important artifacts and monuments. These organizations are responsible for overseeing archaeological excavations and providing funds for restoration projects. However, a lack of resources or political support often limits their efforts.

Various policies have been used to conserve Egypt's cultural heritage [8, 42]; one of the standard policies used to preserve Egypt's cultural heritage is legislation. The Egyptian government has enacted several laws to protect its cultural heritage, such as the Antiquities Law of 1983 and the Cultural Heritage Law of 2002. These laws provide legal protection for archaeological sites, monuments, artifacts, and intangible cultural heritage such as traditional music and dance [41, 43]. The regulations also provide penalties for those who damage or destroy these items. Other policies are through education and awareness-raising

campaigns [8]. These campaigns aim to educate people about the importance of preserving their cultural heritage and encouraging them to participate in its conservation. For example, the Ministry of Antiquities has launched several initiatives, such as “Heritage Awareness Days,” which involve lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and other activities to raise awareness about Egypt’s cultural heritage among locals and tourists.

Several initiatives have recently been aimed at increasing public awareness of Egypt’s cultural heritage [42]. For example, UNESCO launched an initiative called “Cultural Heritage for All,” which seeks to promote public engagement with cultural heritage sites in Egypt through educational programs and activities. Additionally, there have been efforts to promote tourism to archaeological sites to generate revenue for conservation efforts [43]. Moreover, the other type of policies used to conserve Egypt’s cultural heritage is through collaboration with international organizations such as UNESCO [43, 44]. UNESCO has been involved in several projects in Egypt to preserve its cultural heritage, such as restoring ancient monuments like the Great Pyramid of Giza or the Valley of Kings in Luxor.

Despite these efforts, many challenges still need to be overcome in cultural heritage conservation in Egypt [8]. One major challenge is the illegal excavation and looting of archaeological sites by looters looking for artifacts that can be sold on the black market. Additionally, there are concerns about managing large numbers of tourists visiting archaeological sites without damaging them or interfering with ongoing research projects. Moreover, one major challenge facing architectural and urban heritage conservation in Egypt is the need for more public awareness about these sites and their importance in preserving cultural identity [7, 8, 31]. Another challenge is inadequate funding for conservation projects due to limited resources available from government sources and private donors. Furthermore, many sites are located in areas with high poverty levels, making it difficult to attract tourists or other visitors who could help generate revenue for preservation efforts [7]. Finally, there is also a need for better

enforcement of existing laws protecting archaeological sites from destruction or damage due to development projects.

To address these challenges, several opportunities could be explored further. One potential solution is increased collaboration between government agencies such as the SCA and private organizations such as NGOs or universities to develop more effective strategies for protecting archaeological sites from looting or damage caused by tourists or natural disasters. Additionally, increased investment from public sources and private donors could help fund more comprehensive conservation projects throughout Egypt's many archaeological sites.

There is much work to be done to preserve Egypt's architectural and urban heritage for future generations. There need to be more comprehensive policies put into place that protect these sites from destruction or neglect while also providing adequate funding for restoration projects. Additionally, public awareness needs to be raised about the importance of these sites in preserving cultural identity so that people can appreciate their value beyond just economic gain.

Finally, better enforcement of existing laws protecting archaeological sites must be implemented so that developers do not take advantage of them without consequence.

2. Research Methodology

This study relies on relevant surveys, interviews and personal observations based on the researcher's experience with the reality of Aswan City as one of its citizens. Moreover, the study depends on analyzing and describing the role of community participation in preserving the urban heritage through field studies that focus mainly on focus group discussions, field trips, and personal interviews with the local residents.

2.1 Case study Area (West Suhail Village in Southern Egypt)

The village of West Suhail is located on the mainland west of the Nile in the waterfall area. The site is one of the villages in the Aswan Governorate, which represents the southern gateway to the Arab Republic of Egypt. Aswan has been known since the early days of

Egyptian history as the gateway to the heart of Africa and has recently been considered one of the important cities to be a quiet winter resort, in addition to the Pharaoh's monuments and major modern projects such as the High Spring and Aswan Reservoir, the village is an ancient trade route between Egypt and Africa.



Figure 1. A map shows the location of the village of West Suhail, its entrance, and its location from the city of Aswan.

The village of West Suhail is located within Aswan Governorate on the west bank of the Nile, where it borders the city of Aswan and is uniquely located because it is located in the place of suffocation of the river flow, and the village has taken the form of a strip parallel to the Nile (Figure 1). The façade of the Nile is 3.3 km, and the width of the village from the west is about 0.7 km . The village is bordered to the east by Berber Island, Suhail Island, and the international park. In contrast, it is bordered on the west by the Western Desert, on the north by the Aga Khan Cemetery, the Island of Plants, and the tombs of the

nobles, and in the south by the Aswan Reservoir, West Suhail is about 10 km from Aswan.

The village can be reached from two main entrances; one of them is the land entrance, which is located in the south of the village in the northwest of the Aswan reservoir and is primarily relied on by locals. In contrast, tourists mainly rely on the river entrance, where the marina is located north of the village (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Land entrance to West Suhail village



Figure 3. Nile river entrance (river marina)

3. Results& Discussions

3.1 Architectural and Urban Style of The Buildings

When examining the layout of the village, it was observed that the overall design is organic in nature, with various types of buildings such as homes, religious centers, and community spaces arranged around winding roads and streets. The layout does not follow a strictly geometric pattern and instead has a more natural flow. The village tends to expand horizontally, with most buildings being one or two stories tall. The village's design is influenced by the cultural traditions of the Nubian community, and local materials are often used in construction. The village's layout also blends well with the mountainous landscape and rugged terrain. This can be seen in the way the buildings are constructed to match the contours of the land and the use of natural stone steps to connect different levels of the village. Figures 4 and 5 show the overall design and integration of the village's layout and style in West Suhail.



Figure 4. physical planning and urban fabric in line with the mountain nature of the village



Figure 5. The different urban styles of the dwellings and the narrow streets, which are winding with the mountain nature of the village

The village's economy comprises various activities, including tourism, commercial services, and recreation. Tourism is heavily focused on heritage, cultural, and therapeutic experiences. Commercial activity can be found in tourist areas and some residential areas, such as stores. Services are provided by organizations such as civic associations, religious establishments, educational facilities, post offices, health

clinics, and cemeteries. Recreational opportunities are available at the West Suhail youth center and playground.

The village is primarily inhabited by Nubians and has certain distinct features. The exteriors of buildings are painted white to counteract the hot arid climate. A technique known as "directing inward" uses inner courtyards. Domes and vaults are typical on the roofs of buildings. Building materials such as mud bricks, palm trees, and beards are sourced from the local environment and used in construction (Figure 6). The village's streets are narrow and winding, and a tapestry-like appearance characterizes the overall architectural style.

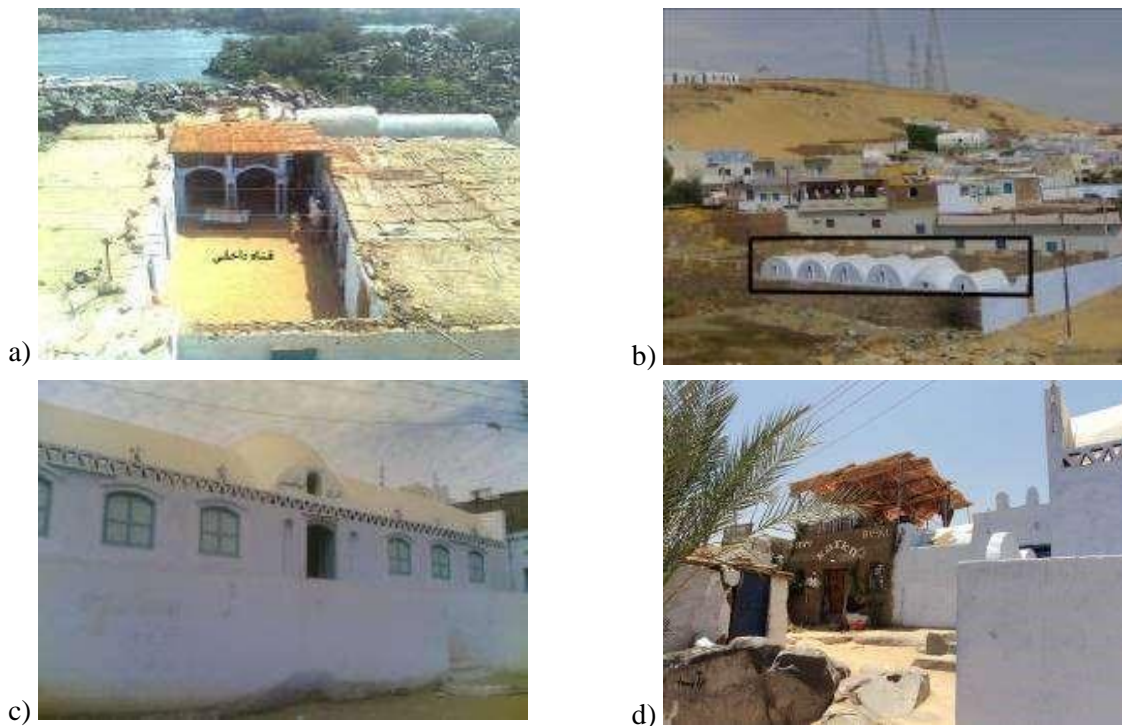


Figure 6. a) Inner and inward courtyards; b) Use of domes and vaults; c) Use of light (white) colors; d) Building materials used from the surrounding environment

3.2 The Role of Community Participation in Preserving the Urban Heritage in The Village of Gharb Sohail:

The story of this village began approximately one hundred years ago, but the narrative of this story only started a few years ago when the village youth completed work on a Nubian Museum project in Aswan. The question that arose for them was: "Why should tourists visit the land of Nubia, its culture, features, and atmosphere within the cold museum environment, where the lighting is dim in places and centered

on one piece here and another there... a bracelet, or a Nubian necklace, or a pottery piece... lighting that is sufficient to create a fictional barrier between the tourist and the culture they seek to see, separating them from it to the extent that they are close to it... why is Nubia still alive just a few steps away?" From these questions, the concept of Nubian home tourism in the village of West Suhail was born. It put the village on the world tourism map as an essential tourist destination, not just in the winter season, but also in the summer months, after the daily life scenes have attracted visitors who come by the Nile to the village and spend a pleasant time on the Nubian way under the domes and arches of houses that still preserve the authenticity of its inhabitants and their heritage, as shown in (Figure 7) examples of Nubian homes in the village of West Suhail.



Figure 7. Model Nubian House in West Suhail village.

In this context, the village inhabitants are aware of the importance of preserving their Nubian heritage, distinguishing them from many parts of the city. It is worth mentioning that the importance of the village and its architectural and historical heritage among the villagers increases with the increase in tourist activity in the village, which has become one of the most visited areas within the city.

One of the interviewees, Mr. Nasser Aldin Abdel Sattar, one of the oldest villagers who pioneered open-house Nubian tourism, said that tourists are keen to visit the village in the winter season and also in the summer despite the high temperature. The village is visited daily by at least 300 tourists during the summer months, with an average of 6,000 tourists per month. Tourists start visiting the village at 6 am and finish

at 8 pm, and usually come to the village by sailboats on the Nile River. They land on a sandy beach called "Barbar" and are welcomed by a beautiful caravan that takes them inside the village to spend a day in the Nubian houses. There, they can buy handmade products and enjoy a live experience. Mr. Nasser adds that everything related to the ancient Nubian heritage can be found in the village, especially the crocodiles raised in the houses, and tourists feed them after they are trained. Most of them are small to medium in size. In addition, tourists can enjoy Nubian food, especially Nubian bread, which is left on the house roof to be baked under the sun and served with black honey and cheese for the tourists. They also pass by the local crafts such as baskets, pottery, straw mats and traditional Nubian women's clothes such as "Jergar" which is a light black fabric embroidered with many cuts and is worn over a colored robe, in addition to the henna tattooing that the village women practice (Figure 8).

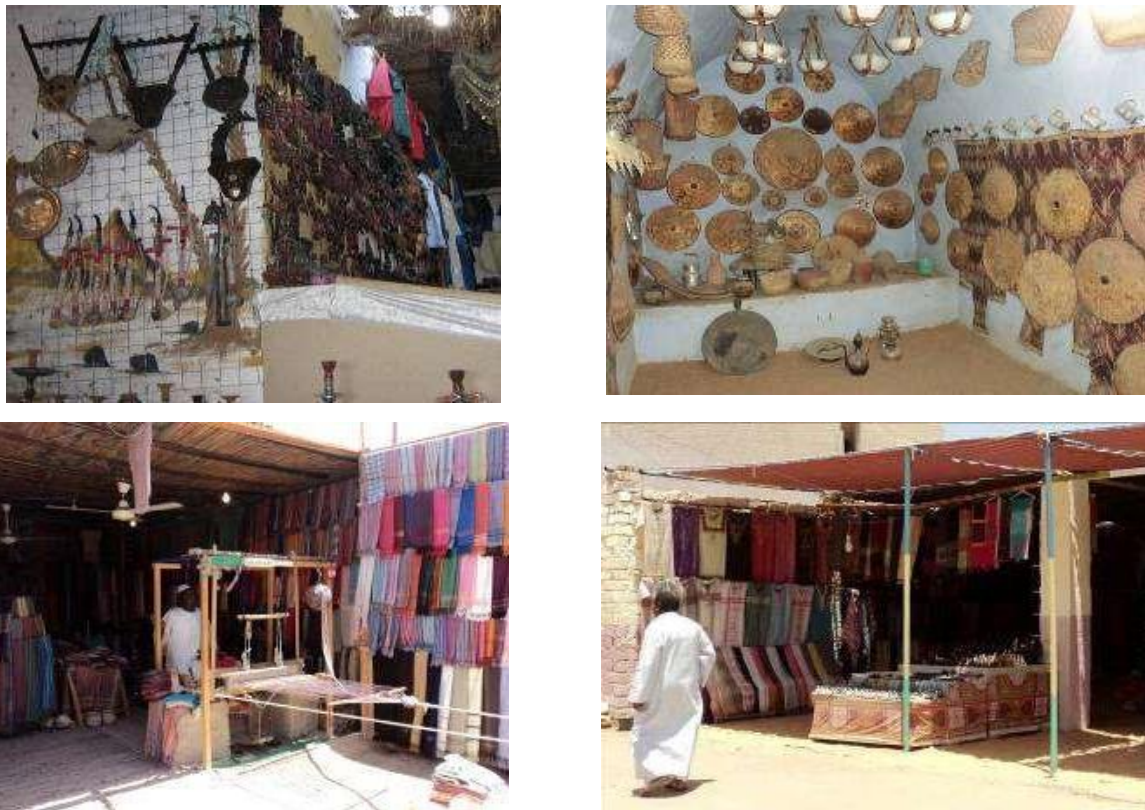


Figure 8. Nubian heritage artifacts and fabrics at the village fair (Souq).

One manifestation of this awareness is that even when building new buildings in the village, they use the essential elements and features that characterize the architecture and urbanization of the village, such as domes, vaults, and some Nubian decorations and ornaments, even when they use modern building materials such as red bricks as an alternative to traditional old building materials (Figure 9).

The motives of the local residents to preserve this heritage are based on its importance for tourism as their source of livelihood and basic income and their realization that this city's heritage distinguishes the village of West Suhail and attracts tourists. In the north, many people of the village of West Suhail depend mainly on the material income from tourism, as most of the villagers work in tourism without any other profession or trade.



Figure 9. Using red bricks on the buildings in the village as an alternative to mud bricks to build domes and vaults.

3.3 Physical Utilization of The Village's Urban Heritage

3.3.1 Nubian houses in the village

The Nubian House is considered the best and most crucial tourist program for visiting the village since it has become one of the most important tourist attractions if exploited appropriately through significant developments in the means of communication, especially television coverage, to arouse the desire for a wide segment of tourists to learn about the lifestyle of indigenous people, provided that clean means of accommodation are available. All its purpose is to retain the knowledge and culture of those people, hence the idea of Nubian houses so that visitors enter one of the houses scattered in the village, namely

more than 100 Nubian houses, to know the customs and traditions of Nubia (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Nubian House is one of the tourist activities in the village of West Suhail.

The tourists enter the Nubian house and live with its residents, characterized by old Nubian style and paintings on the walls of Nubian culture and heritage, offer pure Nubian meals and drinks, and provide a distinctive Nubian lifestyle. Homeowners also offer some handmade Nubian products, and tourists see the crocodile house (Figure 11). Visitors see live crocodiles raised inside houses in large basins for large crocodiles or small glass basins for small crocodiles. Special programs on request are Nubian Flower for special guest parties, dinners and special Lunches requested by the visitor or the owner tour company.



Figure 11. The internal space of the Nubian House in the village of West Suhail.

3.3.2 Tourism investments

The village has become one of the most important tourist programs in Aswan, so it has become a destination for entrepreneurs to invest in it; how many entrepreneurs rent houses and also establishment of health resorts in the village to take advantage of the resources of the village, and also some tourist companies do not rent some Nubian houses or work with the same profit system between the company and the homeowner (Figure 12).

In terms of internal and external tourism, the village west of Suhail has become one of the essential tourists stops in the tourist program; tourists are keen to visit the village and sometimes stay there for several nights. One of the interviewers, an investor and lover of the city's heritage who is an owner of a tourist resort in the village, said that: "I came to this place as a visitor several years ago and I liked the place and decided to set up several projects here in the village in cooperation with the villagers, one of which is a hotel on the Nile. The hotel was designed with a Nubian style and with local building materials, which tourists see as a typical eco-lodge, and this is perhaps one of the main reasons tourists like the village and its style."



Figure 12. Hotels and tourist resorts in the village.

3.4 Role of Governance in Preserving Urban and Architectural Heritage

Through onsite surveys and interviews with local residents, it has been found that there is a lack of involvement or action from official state bodies or government institutions in preserving the village's urban heritage. There is a lack of regulations or laws to protect this heritage

and prevent its destruction. This lack of interest and action from the state has led to the demolition of heritage homes and the construction of modern buildings, which may negatively impact tourism and residents' livelihoods.

"There is not much interest from the state or the governorate in the village, even though there are no building requirements or regulations to preserve the village's urban heritage and prevent its destruction," said Al-Haj-Nasser, a member of the board of directors of the West Sohail Community Association. He added; "some residents have demolished their heritage houses and built modern ones of reinforced concrete (Figure 13), which may affect local tourism, which is a basic source of livelihood for many residents in the village." Other residents have suggested creating a local unit for the village to establish specific regulations and requirements to preserve its unique heritage.



Figure 13. The beginning of the deployment of concrete buildings and the use of new construction materials affected the village's heritage.

Another interviewer, Mr. Ahmed Mughrabi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the West Suhail Association and Director of the Nubian Drama and Research Centre in the village, added: "West Suhail Village is suffering from ignorance of official authorities and organizations, as we demanded the activation of the role of the state and the consideration of the village as a heritage area that should be preserved. The former governor of Aswan showed special interest in the village. He promised to put regulations and legislation to preserve the village's urban heritage, but these promises were not fulfilled, especially after changing the governorate's administrative departments and departments." He added, "Through our community association, we seek

to raise awareness among the villagers to preserve the village's urban heritage, on the one hand, and on the other hand, we carry out some activities in the Association, such as teaching the Nubian language, to preserve it from extinction."

3.5 The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Preserving the Village's Heritage

The role of West Suhail community Association emerged as a model for the work of non-governmental organizations in raising awareness and promoting the heritage of village towns locally and internationally. One of the manifestations of this is the work of the website in the information network (www.gharbsohil.com), which contains information about the village and old Nubia and tourist attractions and heritage. The website also includes a group of images of the village, Artifacts, ornaments and decorations used by the village as well as the customs and traditions of the village.

One of these manifestations is that the community organization has implemented the idea of building a center in the tourist area of the village to promote and preserve Nubian history and culture (Figure 14). The center aims to foster academic research, heritage preservation through a Nubian library, language study and conservation, promotion of creative works, training young people in Nubian studies, hosting conferences and events, supporting exhibitions and festivals, and securing funding for the center's programs and projects.



Figure 14. Teaching some local crafts for Nubian heritage products at the West Suhail Association.

4. Conclusions

West Suhail is one of the villages in the city of Aswan. It is a unique example of Aswan's spontaneous architectural and urban style, called the "Nubian style," and the distinctive architectural and urban characteristics contained in this improvisational style. West Suhail Village is considered a realistic model of the importance of the role of community participation in preserving the heritage of the area, in which we find a clear awareness among the local residents about the importance of preserving their Nubian heritage, which distinguishes them from many other areas. Economic incentives were the main engine for preserving the heritage of the West Suhail village because the residents realize the importance of this heritage for tourism as a source of their livelihood and basic income, and they also recognize that it is this heritage of the city that distinguishes the village of West Suhail and attracts tourists.

This study found that there is a lack in the role of official institutions and government agencies in preserving the region's heritage, or in encouraging residents and raising their awareness of the importance of protecting the heritage of the village town. On the other hand, there is a clear role for non-governmental organizations and NGOs in educating residents about the importance of West Suhail village heritage with the publicity and promotion of the village town heritage locally and internationally, where a marketing campaign has been created that shows the heritage of the village.

The main findings of this study recommend seriously considering the heritage and richness of our environment, working to build awareness, and finding the best ways and means that contribute to their preservation. Build real projects that contribute to preserving the integrity of the remaining components of this climatic, heritage, urban, and cultural environment, and create new motives for local residents to protect this heritage. Use this heritage in an integrated manner in all aspects of nature, culture, and urban as an economic resource in sustainable development plans and integrate the role of urban heritage in comprehensive development in general and tourism development in particular. Benefit from the preservation of local urban heritage as an

economically viable mechanism for local communities, encouraging reverse migration from overcrowded urban centers to heritage towns and villages, with the need to provide incentives and means of sustainable financing and investment in infrastructure.

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