

Learning From Past; Assessment of the Post-War Reconstruction of Qasr-e-Shirin in Iran

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Abstract

This paper addresses the post-war reconstruction experience of Qasr-e-Shirin, Iran, in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Compared with the war-damaged cities in southwest Iran, western cities such as Qasr-e-Shirin lack a post-war reconstruction assessment and documentation. With an objective view, the author aims at documenting the situation of the city almost thirty years after its reconstruction. To this purpose, ten criteria based on the other national and international experiences, as well as the primary aims of the reconstruction plan itself and the community's needs have been developed. Data is acquired through extensive fieldwork, interview, reviewing governmental documents and other relevant national and international literature. Moreover, for the assessment of the reconstruction plan, a GIS analysis is conducted. The results show that the reconstruction process of Qasr-e Shirin was not successful in reviving the city nor in encouraging the migrants to return to their hometown. Analysis of this experience confirms that a detailed assessment of pre- and post-war reconstruction, preparing a flexible and long-term plan based on the resources and needs, documentation and monitoring, coordination and harmony between the stakeholders, community participation and empowerment and using technologies such as remote sensing and modern communication means are among the influential factors in yielding positive results in the post-war reconstruction.

Keywords: Post-war reconstruction, Qasr-e-shirin, Assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of war, wrong decisions are easy to be made in haste. Rebuilding cities and bringing the war-affected population back to their everyday life is a challenging process requiring a multi-faceted approach which takes into account all the obstacles to fulfilling this task.

To build a strong foundation for the theoretical and practical planning of the post-war reconstruction, it is crucial to look at and learn from past experiences. Although due to the idiosyncrasy of each case, it is impossible to find an all-inclusive answer to the problem of reconstruction after the war, assessing different experiences and investigating their strengths and weaknesses will help to build upon past procedures so as to approach the problem with a well-oriented mind. Furthermore, it can also reduce the interval between decision-making and implementation and help to avoid mistakes and waste of budget.

While the post-war reconstruction experiences in Iran have been rarely addressed and published in the international research communities, there is numerous literature on the reconstruction after the war in different countries. Most recently, Pendlebury et al. study the 20th-century urbanism and try to discover the very unique circumstance behind each practice to extend the knowledge about this period of city planning in the second half of 20th century in general [1]. Robert Dale, in his paper 'Divided We Stand: Cities, Social Unity and Post-War Reconstruction in Soviet Russia, 1945–1953', addresses the reconstruction period in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the accompanied conflicts and problems in Russian cities [2]. Bullock and Verpoest in their book 'Living with History, 1914–1964; Rebuilding Europe after the First and Second World Wars and the Role of Heritage Preservation' focus on the destruction and the post-war reconstruction task, and in particular the interesting aspect of heritage preservation in the twentieth century in Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands [3]. Al-Harithy in 'Lessons in Post-War Reconstruction: Case Studies from Lebanon in the Aftermath of the 2006 War' investigates different cases of

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reconstruction projects in Lebanon. Based on the documentation, he further discusses lessons that can be learnt and applied to other cases [4]. In 'After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War', Sultan Barakat presents extensive research on post-war reconstruction by examining case-studies from Afghanistan, Rwanda, Kosovo, Somalia and Indonesia to address the requirements that are necessary for a successful long-term reconstruction [5].

From a national perspective, there is limited research on the post-war reconstruction of the cities in the south-west Iran such as Hoveyzeh [6–8], Khorramshahr [9 - 10] and Rofayye [11]. Qasr-e Shirin¹ and western border cities, on the other hand, have not been yet studied. The only full paper published on the reconstruction of Qasr-e Shirin is written by Bizhan Kalthornia who was at the time in charge of the preparation of reconstruction plans for the western war-damaged cities of Iran. In his research, Kalthornia attempts to formulate the theoretical procedure behind the reconstruction by taking advantage of interviewing with the authorities to prove the successful results of the reconstruction procedure [12]. The scarcity of research and lack of a comprehensive study on the post-war Qasr-e Shirin justifies the need for documentation of its reconstruction experience before it becomes a subject of forgetfulness. Add to these reasons, taking Qasr-e-Shirin as an example, some criteria for the assessment of the post-war reconstruction have been developed which can be applied to other cases.

With this introduction, established upon the international research and national papers on the issue of reconstruction, in the next chapters, Qasr-e Shirin, as an example of post-war reconstruction in Iran is critically assessed. This study therefore addresses the following questions:

What strategies were implemented in the reconstruction process of Qasr-e Shirin?

What factors are important in a successful reconstruction experience; in other words, what are the assessment criteria?

To what extent was the reconstruction plan of Qasr-e-Shirin successful in reviving the city and satisfying the war-affected citizens?

What lessons can be learnt from the reconstruction of qasr-e-Shirin?

2. METHODOLOGY

The assessment of a reconstruction plan requires defining a series of criteria. These criteria operate as a yardstick for judging the success rate or in the other word, the strengths and weaknesses of the plan. Each project is unique in its nature; therefore, in determining the assessment standards, the objectives of the project should also be considered. In this regard, the goals of the reconstruction plan itself are a major source in developing the assessment criteria. Nevertheless, 'it is hard to dispute that the ultimate objective of any housing reconstruction

after disasters should be the survivors', recipients', or, as some call them victims' satisfaction. In other words, the reconstructed settlement should meet the users' needs' [13]. Accordingly, assessing the success or failure of any reconstruction plan needs a 'participatory approach' [14] which involves different stakeholders of the reconstruction plan, in particular, the local community. This implies that the voice of the local community and examining whether their needs have been satisfied by the reconstruction plan are also a major point of reference in deciding the success rate of the reconstruction of Qasr-e Shirin. This has been achieved by a questionnaire and interviewing the inhabitants of the city or those migrants who opted for not returning to their city after its reconstruction. Finally, the feature of the city and the national and international reconstruction experiences and literature are among other fundamental sources that have been consulted with for developing the assessment standards (Figure 1).



Fig 1. Criteria for the assessment of the post-war reconstruction plan; (Source: author)

Considering these criteria and based on the field observation of the author, the interviews and questionnaires and the GIS analysis of the aerial photos and changes of the city, the post-war reconstruction of Qasr-e-Shirin is assessed.

3. ABOUT QASR-E SHIRIN

Qasr-e-Shirin is located on the western border of Iran in Kermanshah Province on an important route which connects the roads of Tehran to Bagdad [15]. It shares 186km of its border with Iraq [16].

Historic records show that the strategic location of Qasr-e-Shirin on the Silk Road had given it a pivotal role from commercial and warfare points of view [17 - 18]. Due to its importance, Qasr-e Shirin experienced World War I and II and was occupied by the involved forces [19].

Before the Iran-Iraq war, Qasr-e-Shirin had been shaped on a land where it was curbed by the north and south hills and the river from the east side. In other words, the terrain features and the geomorphology of the region had a great impact on the development of the city. Qasr-e Shirin, similar to any other traditional settlement in

¹ Also written as Ghasr-e Shirin, Qasr-e-Shirin and Kasr-i-Shirin

the hot climate zone of Iran, had a compact structure in which the buildings were organically interlocked with one another. The arrangement of the buildings had shaped narrow and winding alleys. The neighbourhoods were taking advantage of covered passages which were providing more shade in the hot and long summers of Qasr-e Shirin. The aerial picture of the pre-war city proves that the components of a residential building were arranged around an inner courtyard, in most cases with small green spaces.

Here, it is noteworthy to add that the modality of the disposition and the adjacency of the buildings had also a significant role in the social cohesiveness of the city through strengthening the neighbourhood relations, as well as increasing the cooperation spirit between the neighbours [20].

As remarked before, Qasr-e-Shirin was historically important. The historic complex of Qasr-e-Shirin, located in the northeast of the city has been inscribed on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage as ‘The Historical Ensemble of Qasr-e Shirin’ since 09 August 2007 [21]. In addition to these heritage sites, some other constructions such as Quarantine Hospital and Nasr-Abad Bridge were highly valued by the citizens.

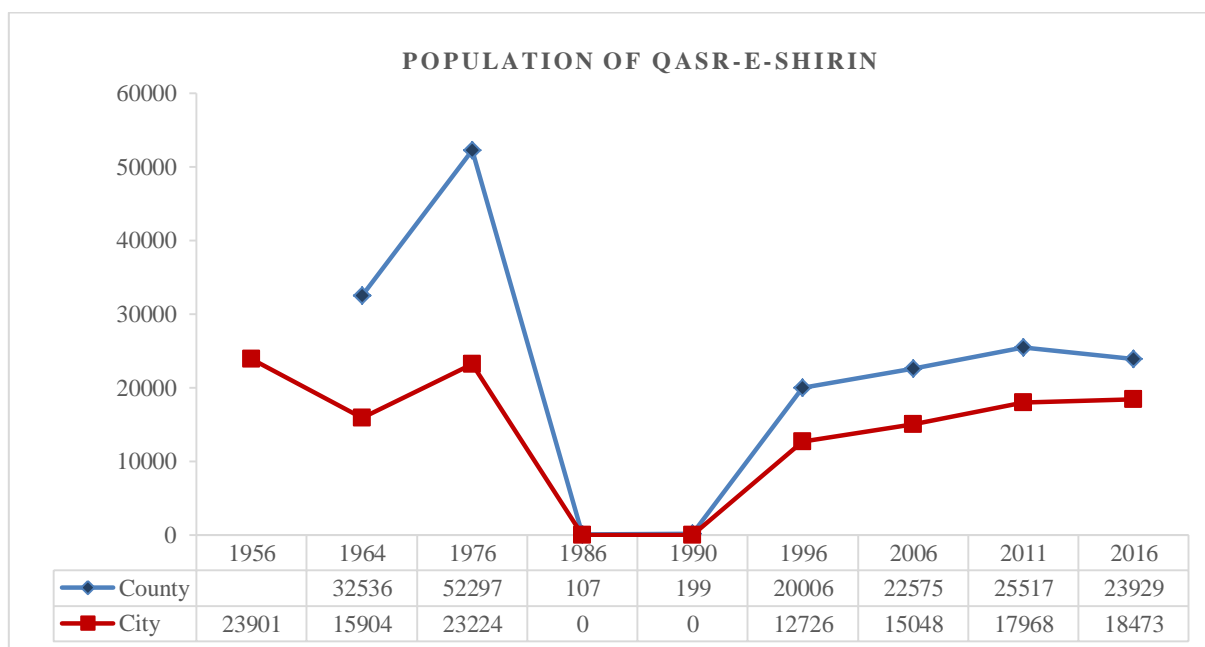
The population of Qasr-e-Shirin has always been influenced by the war and the economic fluctuation. In 1956, the city was the second most populated city in the province of Kermanshah. From 1958, after the change in the Iraqi ruling regime from Kingdom to the Republic of Iraq, the relation between Iran and Iraq declined and the Iranian pilgrims were banned from travelling to Iraq. This affected the population size of the city and the city lost around 14000

of its population during 10 years from 1956 to 1964. After 1964, Qasr-e-Shirin gradually recovered from this severe socio-economic strike by taking advantage of its natural resources and strengthening the agricultural activities [20]. Not unexpectedly, the war inflicted the second population strike on Qasr-e Shirin (Graph 1).

On 22 September 1980, the fire of 8-year war between Iran and Iraq was ignited. Qasr-e-Shirin could only withstand five days. However, even after the evacuation of Iraqi forces, in 1982, Qasr-e-Shirin was devoid of life, until the end of the war [22]. According to the reports, six Iranian cities were completely destroyed during the long war, among them Qasr-e Shirin.

4. POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION OF QASR-E-SHIRIN

In 1988, Iran faced the tremendous impact of the war on its cities. According to the report of the administrator of the reconstruction committee, 18000 residential and 2700 commercial units in Qasr-e-Shirin had been completely damaged [23]. Having sustained damage of 100% of its buildings, Qasr-e Shirin, suffered also from the destruction of 80% of its farming fields and agricultural infrastructures and 90% of its gardens [17]. At this point, the war became a momentum for change and the reconstruction was seen as an opportunity to improve the housing and infrastructure condition. Planning for the reconstruction of Qasr-e-Shirin started in 1990 and its implementation in 1991.



Graph 1. Changes in the population of Qasr-e-Shirin, 1976-2016

By author, data sources: General Governor’s Office of Kermanshah 1990; Statistical Centre of Iran 1996; 2006; 2011

Based on the primary studies and an agreement between the responsible state organisations, it was decided to prepare a quasi-master plan and a detailed plan for reconstructing Qasr-e Shirin. The members of the planning team were selected among the engineers and experts not necessarily from Qasr-e-Shirin but from Kermanshah Province. The preparation of the master plan was to be carried out with the cooperation of the Organisations of Agriculture, Environment, Housing and Urban Development, and Plan and Budget, with the management and supervision of the planning group in the Technical Bureau of Kermanshah General Governor’s Office.

Furthermore, based on the national policies, having a participatory approach was emphasized. In this approach, people and the state were to complement the role of each other in the process. Therefore, a small council of the local community was formed and entrusted with the task of consulting with the reconstruction committee.

However, the level of intervention of each stakeholder had to be defined in accord with the national policy and the organisational structure of the reconstruction process. Based on this approach, the discourse between the state and local stakeholders was appreciated in determining the location of the city and the ownership pattern; while on the other side, the state had the responsibility of defining the priorities, preparing the plan, supervision of the process, technical assistance and granting loans to the community, constructing the infrastructures, easing the access to the construction material, and final decision-making (Table 1).

The planners had anticipated that the reconstruction process would need a quinquennium to be accomplished [20]. Their perspective with regard to the urban planning was to positively use the vantage that the war had provided for building a “good city” [12] and improving the urban spatial structure. The planners’ aims were to preserve the original feature of the city as the main principle of the reconstruction, protect the elements with substantive value for the citizens, assign a district identity to the neighbourhoods by defining a local centre and a new traffic network, improve the traffic and access networks of the old sectors and use the old public spaces such as caravansaries and garages for supplying the new needs of the community [20].

In fact, the national defence policies alongside the ideology of the planner in designing a city based on the modern urban planning theories shaped the city as it is today. In order to achieve the pre-delineated visions of the reconstruction plan, a new district was designed on the east side of the river. The old city was to be reconstructed maintaining its original spatial structure. Therefore, the city was designed in two main divisions, namely the ‘Old City’ and the ‘New City’ (Figure 2). In addition to the general goals of the reconstruction plan, the planners stated that the preservation and revitalisation of parts of the city which were culturally and symbolically meaningful for the residents should be highly regarded.

Table 1. Stakeholder and actors of the reconstruction process of Qasr-e-Shirin

The Roles	Stakeholders					
	Community	Local Authorities	Central Government	NGOs	Military	Local Experts
Clearing the city from mines & debris	-	①	-	-	①	-
Decision making	②	①	①	-	-	①
Planning	-	①	②	-	-	①
Financing	①	①	①	-	-	-
Implementation	①	①	-	-	-	①

- Without a role ① Major role ② Secondary role

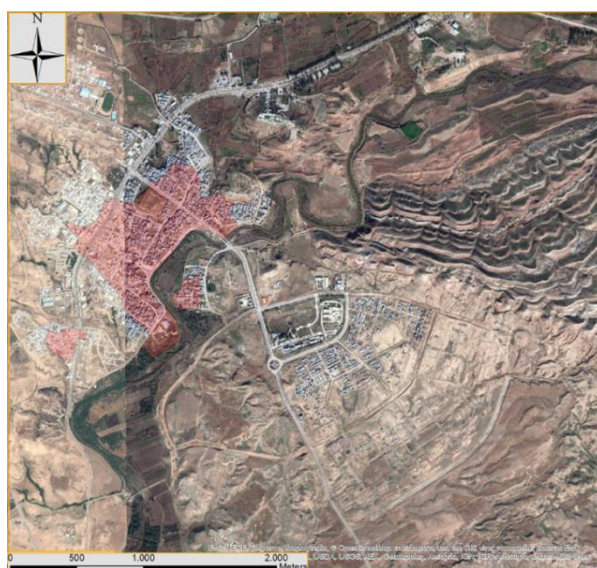


Fig 2. Qasr-e-Shirin after reconstruction in 2011; the built environment of the pre-war city is highlighted in red
By author; data sources: National Cartographic Centre of Iran, ESRI Basemap, OSM, DIVA-GIS and Earth Explorer

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PLAN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Taking the argument of the reconstruction of Qasr-e Shirin further, this chapter focuses on the analysis of reconstruction process. First, each criterion has been briefly explained and subsequently, the reconstruction plan has been analysed based on these criteria.

5.1. Assessment Criteria

Criterion 1: Having a progressive essence; If the reconstruction has been seen in a long-term and an on-going framework; in other words, if the reconstruction has been seen as a process rather than a product.

Criterion 2: Meeting the objectives of the plan; If the objectives of the planners have been met in the reconstruction process.

Criterion 3: Understanding the priorities; Whether the planners have prioritized the actions based on the needs and requirements of the context and the community. Understanding the priorities is important in a long-term process of reconstruction since it avoids wasting of resources.

Criterion 4: Community participation and acceptance; If the community and non-governmental organisations have been playing a role in the process. Overriding attention in a reconstruction plan should be placed on the community since the reconstruction process is to be responsive to their needs.

Criterion 5: Economic role of the city; If the city has retained its economic viability or has obtained a new economic role.

Criterion 6: Infrastructure and welfare; Whether the reconstruction plan has considered upgrading infrastructures such as water, electricity, transportation, education, healthcare and social welfare.

Criterion 7: Equality and fairness; If the actors have been just in compensating the loss of people whose property has been affected by the reconstruction plan.

Criterion 8: Socio-cultural values; Whether the reconstruction plan has respected the socio-cultural concerns of the citizens and objects of symbolic value for the society.

Criterion 9: Technical aspect/ Urban planning; If the plan has been successful in terms of the physical planning of the city considering factors such as the context, geographical features, proper distribution of the services, ease of access, etc.

Criterion 10: Land ownership; If the reconstruction plan has taken into account the problem of ownership.

5.2. Analysis of the Reconstruction Plan

Here, using the aforementioned criteria and mainly based on the field observation of the author, the interviews and the satisfaction level of the locals from the reconstruction plan, and finally the GIS analysis of aerial

photos and changes of the city, the assessment of the reconstruction plan is conducted.

As described previously, the reconstruction process was programmed to be fulfilled in a short-term period of 5 years. The planners had also a 10-year perspective regarding the return of the war immigrants. The irrational timetable of the reconstruction process was intensified with the new national policies and the decision on the dissolution of the Council of Reconstruction and Renovation of War-Damaged Areas by the government in 1997. The confusion caused by this new policy left the local authorities and the war-afflicted population in a maladjusted state.

In analysing whether the plan has met its own objectives, it is crucial to consider the characteristics of the context once again. The planners' first concern for defining the best development orientation, based on the security issues, was responded by extending of the city towards the east side of the river. The fact that these lands were the 'best' agricultural fields¹ of the city shadows the goodwill of the planners for this decision. This disputable decision is partly due to the lack of a sound estimation of the future population of the city and partly due to the modernist atmosphere of the time among urban planners and architects. A GIS analysis of the New City shows that this part occupies 230 ha, almost three times of the built area of the Old City with 82 ha area. The fact that until 2011 only 25 ha of the New City was completed makes this decision even more controversial. Secretary of Qasr-e Shirin's mayor explained that 'the people are constantly complaining about the empty lots in the city. They argue that this incomplete construction is a source of pollution and crime.' Based on these discussions, the question then arises whether it was necessary to plan for the outward development of the city towards the perimeter instead of an inner development. Preparing the new section for construction work not only imposed a high cost on the project but also spoiled the agricultural lands of this area.

An important priority for planners was to use the opportunity of reconstruction for improving the traffic network. Although the plan was partly successful in improving some of the access and traffic routes of the old city, the extent of the intervention and dividing the city into two distinguished parts had considerable negative impacts on the city. Firstly, the human-scale of the city was ignored in the planning and more priority was given to the vehicle traffic. People, who were once taking advantage of the pedestrian-friendly environment of Qasr-e Shirin, now have to use vehicles for traversing even the short distances. In addition to this problem, the services are not fairly distributed.

Secondly, in increasing the width of streets and alleys, a large extent of private properties was affected. Based on the GIS calculation of the aerial photos of 1964 and 2011,

¹ Although the planners stated that these fields had a low agricultural value, in the interview with locals it was revealed that these lands were the best agricultural fields. Nevertheless, to justify their decision, the planners excused themselves by reasoning that these fields were damaged considerably due to the war

for example, the changes alongside the river bank influenced about 11500m² of the residential buildings to make space for a new road. The new traffic network has cut through the old structure of the city and has affected the neighbourhoods and green spaces. The changes in the neighbourhood divisions due to the modification of the alleys made some of the residents who had lived for years in a neighbourhood move to the new division of the city. This alteration affected the social cohesiveness of the sectors too.

Comparing the green areas of the pre- and post-war city by overlaying the aerial pictures of 1964 and 2011 in the selected area indicates that while approximately 150 ha of the city was covered by green spaces in 1964, in the reconstructed city only one-third, namely 50 ha, of these green spaces has been retained (Figure 3).

In their objectives, the planners had an architect- or engineer-oriented approach focusing on physical planning. Although the reconstruction plan included studies on the social, economic, climate, and other aspects of the urban planning and reconstruction, there was a lack of a concrete link between these chapters. In other words, the planners did not have a proper assessment of the process and the complex issues intertwined with it. The planners also failed to define the priorities based on the resources and the needs of the society.

Considering the geographical features of the city, the plan has also failed to consider the climate factor. In the

reconstructed city, wide streets and block buildings with extroverted characteristic, in contrast with the past, are directly exposed to the high temperature and hot winds of the summers.

In the case of social and cultural values of the city, despite the goodwill of the planners in retaining the sites and objects with symbolic meanings, the decision-makers did not regard the voice of the community. In addition to the sites with a strong historical background, people still recall, with enthusiasm, the memories of China Bazaar, Quarantine Hospital (Figure 4), and Nasr-Abad Bridge and the extensive green areas of the city. Despite the fact that China Bazaar, as an example, did not have a significant architectural or historic value, it was considered as the social hub in Qasr-e-Shirin and reviving it could have had a great positive psychological impact on the war-afflicted citizens.

In the first years of the reconstruction process, citizens were suffering from the inefficiency of education and healthcare services. Migrants with young children who had already made their life in other cities during the past 10 years were more dissuaded by the lack of consideration for such problems. Today, the education system has been upgraded considerably, but the deficiencies in the healthcare services make the citizens travel to the neighbour cities.

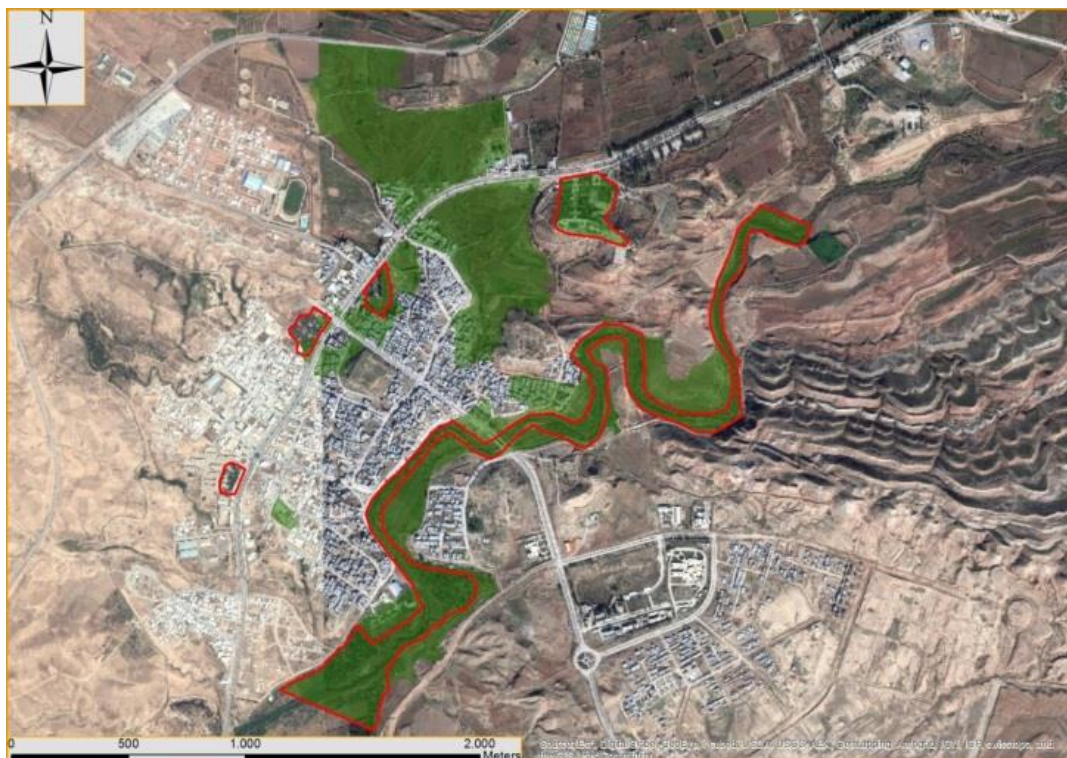


Fig 3. Comparing the areas of green spaces before and after the war

Green highlight: green spaces of the pre-war city

Inside the red outline: green spaces of the reconstructed city

By author, data sources: National Cartographic Centre of Iran, ESRI Basemap, OSM, DIVA-GIS and Earth Explorer



Fig 4. Comparison between pre- and post-war condition of Quarantine Hospital
Top: before the war [16]; Bottom: after the reconstruction, (Source author, 2016)

Although the national organisational framework of the reconstruction looked promising in taking advantage of the grassroots in the planning and decision-making, in reality, the role of people was underscored in the process. In the case of Qasr-e Shirin, even though the planners took the first step firmly in asking for the local participation, they did not consider their needs and priorities in the final decision. Reconstruction of Qasr-e-Shirin can be understood as a semi-participatory process, in which the decision-makers chose where and when the process could be shared with the locals. Interestingly, in the stage in which the locals participated actively, there was no dispute and a consensus was achieved among the community in solving the problem of ownership. However, later, the policy for assigning the lands to those who were affected by the reconstruction plan caused a grave injustice to the owners, especially the farmers and proprietors of the agricultural fields. Some owners were given a lot which was much smaller than their original property. The farmers, who had lost a land that was their income source, received a lot in the new city instead. From 100 villages of the pre-war period, according to the previous general governor of Qasr-e Shirin, 36 were located near the border and were not reconstructed due to the national security policies. It is worth mentioning that these unreconstructed villages had 9000 population before the war. According to the new statistics of the aforementioned source, currently, the county has 20 active villages [24]. This considerable difference in the statistics confirms that 44 other villages which were inside the permissible reconstruction area are missing.

Prior to the war, 85% of the population of Qasr-e-Shirin were involved in the agricultural activities.

In addition to the decline of the potential agriculture activities due to the war, the establishment of military defence structures and lack of investment on demining the fields intensified the situation [17]. The citizens who owned once large properties and were self-efficient and producer now have their roles as consumers with low-paid jobs in big cities. In justification of lack of concern on the agricultural activities, it is said that the war damage was too intense that the revival demanded too much of investment. That means the decision-makers preferred short-term solutions in the reconstruction plan having no consideration for the long-term consequences of their decision. And once again, this question arises that was it necessary to build a new development centre? What if the costs for preparing the lands in this area would have been invested in the long-term development of the city?

Taking the argument further, graph 1 clearly confirms the significant changes in the population structure of the county and the city. In the first glance, it is clear that the population has decreased considerably since the war and that prior to the war, the population of the county was twice the population of the city. After the reconstruction, due to the failure in the reconstruction of the villages and the small cities of Sumar and Naft-Shahr, the difference between the population of the city and the county has strikingly declined. Highlighting these arguments, the economic situation of the city can be assessed. As it was explained, the economic viability of Qasr-e-Shirin was dependent upon agricultural activities, oil industry, and trade. The role of Qasr-e-Shirin as a trade city was faded after the war due to the vague relationship with Iraq, insecurity of the borders and the war in Iraq and conservative national policies in regard to the border cities.

Moreover, agriculture and oil industry were not attended by the planners and local authorities. Reminding of the population fluctuation of Qasr-e-Shirin in the course of history, it is evident that the migration of citizens was considerably influenced by the economic situation of the city. Although in the reconstruction plan natural and cultural resources of the city have been mentioned, there was no concrete plan for making the best use of these resources. In other words, the planners failed to find a substitute economic role for the city.

In addition to the previous arguments, the result of the survey on the satisfaction of Qasr-e-Shirin residents is not in the favour of the reconstruction plan. For example, in their answer to the question whether the reconstruction has been successful from socio-cultural, economic and welfare points of view, 72% of the respondents declared their sharp opposition. Though 71% of the respondents who currently reside in Qasr-e Shirin were satisfied or fully satisfied with their living place, physical reconstruction of the city, namely the city planning was perceived as inappropriate by 52% of the respondents.

5.3. Summary of the Results

Based on the previous arguments, the reconstruction plan of Qasr-e-Shirin does not appear to have a clear understanding of the important matters in the reconstruction process, nor has it met the needs of the society (Table 2). The term ‘dead-end’ was used several times by the interviewees to describe Qasr-e Shirin. In fact, the plan has also caused disappointment among the citizens so that some of the migrants who had returned to their city decided to leave it once again, but this time for good.

Table 2. Assessment of the success level of the reconstruction plan based on the predefined criteria

Level of achievement	Level of achievement		
	Achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved
Criterion			
Having a progressive essence			✓
Meeting the Objectives of the Plan			✓
Understanding the Priorities			✓
Community participation & acceptance		✓	
Economic viability			✓
Infrastructure and Welfare		✓	
Land ownership	✓		
Equality and Fairness		✓	
Sociocultural Values		✓	
Urban planning			✓

6. FINAL DISCUSSION: EXPLORING THE REASONS

In this study, the attempt was to subject the unexplored reconstruction plan of Qasr-e-Shirin in Iran to an empirical and theoretical scrutiny. To conclude the study, here, some major critical points are argued about the reasons for the unsuccessful reconstruction of Qasr-e Shirin.

Study of the reconstruction plan proves lack of a proper assessment of the situation and national and local resources before the decision-making. This problem led the decision-makers to prejudice to the reconstruction requirements so that there was a gulf between the resources available and the final decision of the planners. The planners’ radical desire for change based on their unrealistic utopian ideas without considering the economic realities of the country, inflicted more expenses on the process.

The process was not flexible and no alternative plan was thought out. In fact, the obstacles and problems that might hinder the progress of the reconstruction plan or bring about undesirable consequences were not seen during the process. This problem was intensified with overlooking the importance of monitoring of the project implementation.

The reconstruction task was seen as ‘a series of short-term quick fix’ [25] projects. In reality, however, the process took much longer than the national political propaganda so that the city was never returned to its ‘normalcy’ after the reconstruction. Short-termism of the reconstruction plan was also more stimulated by the national reconstruction policies where the policies were not seen in an ongoing process. The manner in which the central government ignited hope in the war-afflicted population in promising ‘to build a new Qasr-e-Shirin in a short time even much better than what it was before’ did not deliver any positive result rather than more disappointment of the citizens at the end.

The reconstruction plan was physically oriented and the planners had less if no regard for the social and psychological problems of the traumatized people and the economic issues related to a war-torn city. Therefore, the city was rebuilt but never revived after the war.

The process of reconstruction started at about three years after the end of the war. The long absence of the citizens was a major issue that was overlooked by the planners. During 10 years of absence, the migrants had already established a new life in other cities. The changes in the social structure of the neighbourhoods during the reconstruction had also a grave negative impact on those who returned to Qasr-e-Shirin in the hope for the old good days.

Despite the emphasis on the importance of the local community, the top-down approach of the centralized government of Iran decreased the role of the citizens in the reconstruction process. Experience confirms that ‘the lower the level of participation rates of recipient individuals in the reconstruction process, the lower the level of satisfaction rates of the resultant relocation and shelter’[26].

Going back to the discussion of the reconstruction plan, it appears that lack of trust to the community and their participation as a major actor and decision-maker led the community to be dependent on the government and expect the government to solve all the problems. After World War I, the community had to face the problems of the reconstruction without any external aid. This confirms the power of the local community in making decisions by relying on the local resources such as vernacular construction techniques and materials. In the reconstruction plan of Qasr-e Shirin, the community was obliged not to use traditional construction materials for the purpose of strengthening the buildings in case of disasters such as an earthquake. A better solution could have been improving the problems of the vernacular construction techniques instead of introducing ‘modern’ materials. Nevertheless, this decision had two great impacts. On one hand, the construction prices increased, which with regard to the soaring building prices made some owners unable to afford to rebuild their property on the new sites. On the other hand, the local community’s expectation increased considerably so that they were willing anymore to use ‘old-fashioned’ materials such as mud brick which was more in accordance with the climate condition of the city.

The reconstruction was mainly oriented around the city and the villages were not attended by the planners and the government.

Finally, lack of cooperation and accordance among different organisations that appears to be as a result of the absence of an effective monitoring system was one of the other problems of implementation and actualization of the reconstruction plan.

7. CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNT

Based on the lessons learned from the post-war reconstruction of Qasr-e Shirin, some prepositions are offered for future post-war reviving plans. Here, the term “reviving” is suggested instead of the term

“reconstruction”; because in the author’s point of view, using “reconstruction” can be at some points misleading since it is more associated with the physical attributes of a place. This miscomprehension often comes at the expense of depreciating non-physical attributes of the place and the connection of the community with the city. Therefore, considering the delicacy and complexity of the post-war reviving, there is a need to methodically approach the problem and take the following suggestions into account (Figure 5).

Depending on the socio-cultural and economic background of each case and the scale of the destruction, the complexity of the reconstruction process and the measure that should be taken vary. Precise assessment of the pre- and the post-war situation is of a great importance for a successful context-based reconstruction.

War is a crisis that disrupts all the aspects of life in a city and is followed by this fact that things can never get fixed quickly. Therefore, a long-term comprehensive planning is needed to face with multi-character intricacies of the reconstruction; otherwise, the reconstruction plan will be a mere housing project to which the citizens probably do not have a sense of belonging even if the visage of the city is ostensibly picturesque.

The multi-dimensional nature of the reconstruction task demands a multifaceted plan that is dynamic rather than being frozen in the fixed univalent assumptions of the planners. Reconstruction ‘policies have to be flexible enough to accept alteration and adjustment based on continuous genuine feedback from the field’[25]. Continuous documentation and monitoring of the process should not be taken for granted. In fact, the reconstruction task should be considered not in a linear but rather cyclical process to ensure the flexibility and dynamicity of the project. Furthermore, monitoring the process improves management and the results of the reconstruction. It also prevents some issues such as corruption and ‘fraudulent use’ [24] (both from the community’s side and other stakeholders involved).

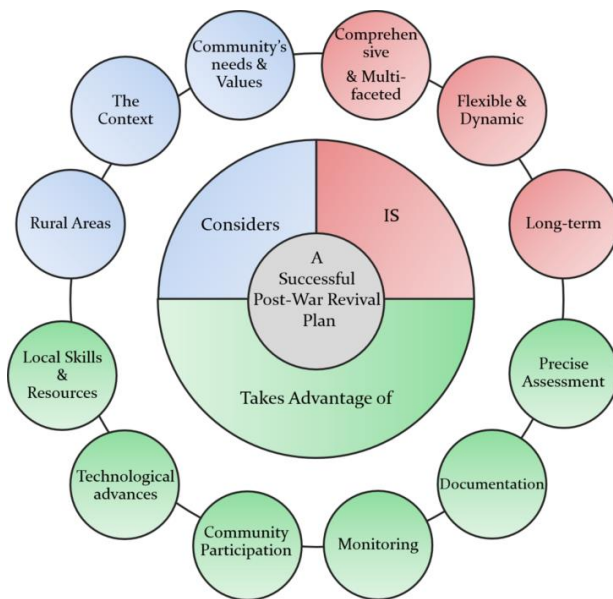


Fig 5. Criteria for a successful post-war revival plan; (Source: author)

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If the war is protracted, the social structure and the population of the cities will be greatly affected. In the prolonged absence of the citizens 'connection to the place may be lost, reducing the possibility that former occupants return and reoccupy.' [27] Re-attracting and reintegration of the former citizens require understanding their socio-cultural needs. In this regard, preserving and/or reviving the cultural heritage and sites with symbolic meanings can be an answer to the emotional needs of the traumatised people. [25]

Reconstruction of villages especially in the non-industrial contexts of the developing countries is as important as the reconstruction of the cities. 'A healthy and prosperous economy of rural areas will support the economy of the city to flourish.' [28] Preserving the balance in the population is another result of a successful reconstruction of rural areas. On the contrary, overlooking villages in the reconstruction process expedites the migrations of rural dwellers to the cities which probably results in the emersion of slum areas in the outskirts of the cities.

Effective community participation is of a great significance in a successful reconstruction process. The international and national experiences have proven that it is impossible to condone society, their needs, and wills and deny their role in the reconstruction process. NGOs can play a vital role in involving the general public in the process. In this manner, social groups would turn into inviting stimulators for each other towards taking part in the reconstruction task. Nevertheless, the key to a successful public participation is understanding their skills and resources, 'extensive and long-term capacity building, training and education of government and public officials' [29] as well as grassroots in particular young generation. On one hand, the participation of grassroots helps them to recover faster from the trauma that they have experienced during the war. It also increases their satisfaction with the reconstruction results and their sense of belonging to the place. On the other hand, the planners will have a better understanding of the people's needs and the reconstruction requirements. On the contrary, if the role of locals in the reconstruction task is ignored, they will turn into oppressed groups that are dependent on the government and humanitarian aids.

Today the technological advances offer many opportunities that were impossible less than thirty years ago. For example, 'satellite imagery analysis is now a routine tool for assessing potential damage to cultural heritage sites.' [28] Remote sensing and air-born imagery can ease the process of assessment and study the changes in large areas of cities in the mid-war period. GIS is another useful analysis and management tool which connects the non-geographical data with a place. Applying these technologies, it is possible to start the planning task and decision-making at the earliest possible opportunity and monitor the progress of the process effectively. Furthermore, the new communication means such as social networks can be extremely beneficial in tracking and contacting the war-afflicted people, assisting them in coping with trauma, encouraging and empowering them

for playing a role in the post-war future of their homeland. If planned and managed properly, these networks can increase the social solidarity and sense of belonging of the immigrants of war in particular youth to their origins and have them as the protagonist of the post-war reconstruction.

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