Walled Cities & Open Societies: Managing Historic Walls in Urban World Heritage Properties

Siena, Italy. 26-27 January 2017

Rhodes city, around 1490
(Konrad Grünenberg - http://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/id/7061)

Rhodes (Greece)
Info sheet
1. City Background Information

Rhodes is the largest of the Dodecanese islands in terms of land area and also the island group's historical capital. Administratively the island forms a separate municipality within the Rhodes regional unit, which is part of the South Aegean administrative region. The principal town of the island and seat of the municipality is Rhodes. The city of Rhodes had 50,636 inhabitants in 2011 population survey. It is located northeast of Crete, southeast of Athens and just off the Anatolian coast of Turkey. Rhodes' nickname is “The island of the Knights”, named after the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem, who once conquered the land.

Historically, Rhodes was famous worldwide for the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Medieval Old Town of the City of Rhodes has been declared a World Heritage Site. Today, it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe.

The Old Town of Rhodes occupies an area of about 41 hectares (409.511 sq.m.) intramuros. With its fortifications and the moat, the surface reaches about 58 hectares (574.611 sq.m.). The protected archaeological site according to the declaration of 2009 is approximately 89 hectares (886.098 sq.m.). The Old Town with fortifications occupies 6.8% in relation to the new city. It hosts a little more than 2,000 permanent residents.

2. Basic description and brief history of the walls

The ancient city was fortified, but its walls were strengthened after the Siege of Demetrius (302 BC). The method of construction of the walls, the so-called “emplékton,” was one of the finest and most famous of its day. The harbours were protected by moles like that of St Nicholas and the Windmills, and the “galley port” (Mandraki) could be closed by a boom made of chains.

During the 6th century AD the enormous Hellenistic city had dwindled to about 1/3 of the present day Old City. In the middle of the 7th century Rhodes was based round the great harbour and was separated into three defence zones. The Byzantine acropolis, the “Kastron” and the rest of the city. Between these parts arose walls with towers and outworks.

During the period of the Knights’ the southern wall of the early Byzantine “Kastron” was strengthened by a deep moat, indicative of the Knights’ relationship with the indigenous population and the defensive tactics of the Order against the Ottomans. The early Byzantine “Kastron” is now known as “Collachium” and includes the Palace of the Grand Master, the Church of St John (the mother church of the Order), the Inns of the different “Tongues”, the Hospital and the Armoury. The southern, and largest, part of the settlement made up “the Bourg” (Burgum), where the people had their homes. The centre of economic activity was
the Agora, which started from the St. George Gate, crossed the present day Apolloniou and Socrates Streets and ended up at the Sea Gate.

The development of ballistics forced the Knights to continue with the progressive modernization and strengthening of the fortifications. By mid 15th century, the city's fortifications had escarpments, or were or vertical to the wide ditch, with an interior corridor between the ramparts and bastions and openings for shooting arrows at certain parts of the outworks. The shape and form of the fortifications is part of the Western European conception of mechanics and architecture.

3. Current functions and management/governance framework

By an Italian decree of 1929 the Old City of Rhodes and the Muslim and Jewish cemeteries round the moat were designated as a Monument Zone. The declaration of the rest of the historic settlement as a monument brought about pioneering steps in the history of modern town planning. This decision came into force in 1935 along with the Planning Regulations (Plano Regolatore) of the city. By this decree the Old City was to remain untouched, new constructions were forbidden and strict control was exercised over any constructional intervention into the existing buildings. In the decade of the 1930s the area of the former cemeteries was planted over and became a protected green belt encircling the moat and offering impressive views of the fortifications.

With the incorporation of the Dodecanese in 1947, the Greek Military Administration upheld the Italian decrees that were in force regarding the Old City. In 1948, by a decision of the General Council of the Dodecanese, many Mediaeval and later architectural monuments both inside and outside the walls were designated as “historic monuments to be conserved.” In 1960, by a ministerial decision, the entire Old City of Rhodes, with the walls and monuments in and around it, was declared a group of historic monuments to be conserved.

The protection of the Old City and its architecture came under the aegis of the Archaeological Service and in June 1947, Yiannis Kontis was installed as the first Director of the Greek Archaeological Service in Rhodes. His term of office was marked by a period of rich archaeological and restoration work. In the following year work was begun on the restoration of buildings damaged by the war, with important financing from the Military Administration of the Dodecanese.

When the Dodecanese was incorporated into Greece, implementation of the Archaeological Law of 1932 could come into force and maintenance of existing conditions in the Old City became possible. Buildings which had collapsed, either as a result of the bombing or from natural causes, were rebuilt based on details in the Land Register. By the general terms of
the same law the Archaeological Service exercised control over the various construction works (renovations, minor additions etc.) on both the interior and exterior of the buildings.

Already by the end of the 1970s the impossibility of applying the dynamic and flexible policy which the maintenance, protection, display and development of the Old City demanded was becoming apparent, and of pressing concern. The Archaeological Service was trying by all the means in its power to find solutions to the urban planning and architectural problems presented by a dynamically developing town. The need for a complete programme of activities and works which would deal with the physiognomy of the city as a whole entity, combined with the existence of a significant number of municipally owned properties, forced them to take active steps to deal with the problems thus presented.

What gave things the impetus, however, was the novel and, for Greece, pioneering decision for joint action by the various responsible authorities. This action was the product of the desire of those people who made up the local responsible bodies, and in particular the then Mayor Dr. S. Karayannis and the Ephore of Byzantine Antiquities Dr. Elias Kollias, to operate jointly for the upgrading and preservation of the walled city. This was accepted by the Ministry of Culture, at that time headed by Melina Mercuri as Minister of Culture.

Consequently, in September 1984 (within the framework of Law 1416/1984) a Joint Agreement was signed between the Ministry of Culture, the Archaeological Receipts Fund and the Municipality of Rhodes. The object of this Agreement, which was to last for 20 years, was the drawing up of plans for the conservation, protection and development of the Old City, the working out of a programme of immediate priorities, the carrying out of archaeological excavations and the setting up of archaeological sites, the carrying out of scientific studies (historical, social etc.) for the Old City and the convocation of International

After 20 years the collaboration of the Municipality with the Ministry of Culture, through its local archaeological service, proved to be a success. Nevertheless, the central administration refused to renew the agreement of the two agencies. The policy of the Ministry of Culture seems to be changed on how to get direct profit from historic monuments and archaeological sites, beside the strong opposition of the archaeologists.

The Municipality goes on with its own means and its efforts are aimed to a different direction. We believe that Rhodes can recover to a great extent and find its position in the regional and international context. Rhodes should fix again the strategic goals of its development and reverse the phenomena of decline and degradation of the last years. It has to take advantage of its cultural heritage and its natural environment. Its brilliant past was always closely related to its geographical position, a crossroad between East and West. The city and the island have the assets to become a meeting point of the cultures of Asia, Europe and Africa. Towards that end Rhodes has to mark out its international character and appear not only as a place for rest but also for communication.
The integrated protection of the Medieval Town should be based on the Management Plan, which is already prepared by the Municipality of Rhodes approved by the Ministry of Culture. It reflects the will of the state for all the issues concerning the Medieval City. From this Plan, the policies necessary for the housing, the technical infrastructure, the social and cultural enhancement of the Medieval City, the determination of the development framework within the protected monumental settlement, will emerge.

The Management Plan also takes into consideration the relation of the walled city to the wider urban tissue of the city of Rhodes. The function of the three ports, and the charges brought by regional traffic artery near the port and tourist trips, since it functions as an entrance to the city centre.

Attention should be given to: the evacuation of the Medieval City from the permanent residents, the uncontrolled touristic over-exploitation, the deterioration of its character from arbitrary structures, the appropriate report of merchandises, the noise pollution of the night clubs and circulation, the illegal occupation of public space, etc.

The need for cooperation among stakeholders, i.e. the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Rhodes, and the benefits that come out of this, are obvious. We believe that the effective city management requires a Single Management Agency, which will be the link between stakeholders in order to achieve coordination, collective action and comprehensive result. This body should be directed to integrated protection and management of the Medieval Town, to meet the modern needs of the residential complex with a view to the maintenance of the monumental and historical character.

The objectives of the new Programmatic Convention are:

1. Approval and implementation of the Management Plan and Legislation.
2. Management and revaluation of cultural and historic monumental site and free spaces.
3. Implementation of housing policy with incentives for repair and management the property (private and public).
4. Implementation of specific studies and policies concerning the use of renewable energy sources, providing incentives, development of utility networks, introduction of specific regulations for the implementation and control of the institutional framework, international cooperation etc.
5. Effective dealing with everyday problems.
6. Training-education of the permanent residents and businessmen.

This effort includes many details which cannot be analysed from this step. The daily function, the obligations of entities, the confrontation of the unconventional behaviours, the decision-making and the financing are issues that will determine the success. Key to all this is the cooperation, the unity and the commitment to the common goal.
4. **Role of the walls with the regard to the OUV of the WH property and its management system**

Article of Incorporation of the Medieval City of Rhodes in the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II, IV and V. (December 30, 1987).

**Criterion II:** The fortifications of Rhodes, a "Frankish" town long considered to be impregnable, exerted an influence throughout the eastern Mediterranean basin at the end of the Middle Ages.

**Criterion IV:** This cultural property is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble which illustrates the significant period of history in which a military/hospital order founded during the Crusades survived in the eastern Mediterranean area in a context characterized by an obsessive fear of siege. Rhodes is one of the most beautiful urban ensembles of the Gothic period. The fact that this medieval city is located on an island in the Aegean Sea, that it was on the site of an ancient Greek city, and that it commands a port formerly embellished by the Colossus erected by Chares of Lindos, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, only adds to its interest. Finally, it must be noted that the chain of history was not broken in 1523 but rather continued up to 1912 with the additions of valuable Islamic monuments, such as mosques, baths and houses.

**Criterion V:** With its Frankish and Ottoman buildings the old town of Rhodes is an important ensemble of traditional human settlement, characterized by successive and complex phenomena of acculturation. Contact with the traditions of the Dodecanese changed the forms of Gothic architecture and building after 1523 combined vernacular forms resulting from the meeting of two worlds with decorative elements of Ottoman origin. All the built-up elements dating before 1912 have become vulnerable because of the evolution in living conditions and they must be protected as much as the great religious, civil and military monuments, the churches, monasteries, mosques, baths, palaces, forts, gates and ramparts.

5. **Main challenges and opportunities concerning walls management**

From the time it was set up and alongside its programme for the buildings in the Old City, the Office of the Medieval Town began to take care of the moat and fortifications. By means of extensive initial intervention and then through patient annual maintenance the fortifications were cleared of weeds and the path round the top of the ramparts became negotiable. The cleaning and removal of undergrowth from the moat, the fortifications and the retaining wall became the object of a major endeavour. The damaging plant growth was removed from the stonework by hand, by machine and by chemical means. At the same time large sections of the walls were supported in order to avoid them falling into further disrepair.
Because of the specialist nature of the deterioration, the particular make-up of the fortifications and the enormous extent of the work, it became obvious that a prerequisite for going ahead with the setting up of the projects and the execution of works in the area of the monuments as a whole was access to specialist studies which could be used as a foundation. Thus, in co-operation with the Office, research began into the subject of the construction materials of chemical and mechanical specializations, with the object of strengthening those materials as well as studies on the geotechnical and geological strengthening of the fortifications.

Once the specialist studies were completed, and following strictly lays down principles of intervention based on the international agreements for the maintenance and restoration of monuments, works were put in hand for the underpinning and repair of sections of the fortifications. Efforts for the conservation of the mediaeval fortifications are ceaseless both on the bastions, some of which have been restored and host exhibition and lecture halls, and on the walls themselves, where cracked and collapsed sections have been restored. At the same time projects for the installation of floodlighting and display of the walls and battlements went ahead.

Great importance was also given to the restoration of the surrounding moat. Where solutions were found for the chronic problems of flooding, damp, and the dumping of rubbish, which rendered the area impossible to enter and were weakening the foundations of the walls. The inauguration of an open-air theatre which every summer plays host to theatrical performances, dance troupes, operas and concerts on its natural stage and with the walls as a backdrop has brought new life to the area.

From 1998 till today the conservation and enhancement of the mediaeval fortifications has been implemented by the Ministry of Culture.
ANNEX - HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE CITY OF RHODES

The island of Rhodes, the bride of the god Helios according to mythology, and capital of the "Southern Sporades," is situated in the Eastern Aegean very close to the shores of Asia Minor. The city of Rhodes was founded in 408 BC at the northernmost point of the island by the Olympic victor, Doreius. It was envisaged as the combined settlement of the three ancient cities of the island, Kamiros, Ialysos and Lindos. The ancient city was about the same size as the modern town with the exception of its NE section, where the necropolis is to be found with important tomb monuments.

The city was built based on the street plan system of Hippodameus with straight streets in a grid and underground sewage and water installations of exceptional technique. Two of the straight streets, P31 & P10, wider than the others, crossed the city from end to end, leading from the countryside outside the city to the small harbour and from the big harbour to the Acropolis respectively, and in so doing they gave definition to the commercial and intellectual heart of the city (Magnum et Communis Plataea). On the Acropolis, high on the Hill of St Stephen, the Temple of Apollo Pythias dominated the scene and further north stood the stadium and the Temple of Zeus and Athena Poleos.

With its exceptional town planning, its impressive walls and the flourishing of art and wealth, Hellenistic Rhodes was one of the most shining cities of the ancient Greek world, and an important cultural centre.

With the Romans in the ascendancy Rhodes lost her independence but, until 42 BC, she maintained her prestige as an important centre of letters and science with famous schools.

From as early as the second century AD an active Christian community was developing, a fact which can be seen from the large number of early Christian monuments in the city and interior of the island. According to tradition, it was St Paul who founded and taught the new religion on the island. There are only a few early Christian churches in the Old City which are known to us: the three-aisled ruins of the church of the Archangel Michael (Demirli Mosque), early levels of the churches of St. Spyridon and St Fanouri, and the anonymous churches in Agisandros Street and Theseus Street.

During the 6th century AD the enormous Hellenistic city had dwindled to about 1/3 of the present day Old City. In the middle of the 7th century Rhodes was based round the great harbour and was separated for defence into three parts. Residential areas were also found outside the walls. The marks of the ancient streets could still be seen until the 15th century by the width of the roads. Those ancient roads correspond to today's Street of the Knights, Socrates Street, Pythagoras Street, St Fanouri Street, etc.

Information about the fortunes of the island in the Mediaeval Era is very slight and relates mainly to Arab incursions and looting. Through many fluctuations of fortune Rhodes remained part of the Christian Byzantine Empire until 1309, when she came into the hands of the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem. The installation of the Knights on Rhodes (after many adventures!) and the creation of a new state through the annexation of the neighbouring islands, gave the island the power to escape the fate of the rest Greece, which became part of the Ottoman Empire. The re-birth of
Rhodes in all sectors from trade and commerce to arts and letters through her relationship with Western Europe lasted for around 200 years.

The architecture of the city of Rhodes during the period of the Knights can be separated into two distinct building periods. The first lasted until the first Turkish siege in 1480 and the catastrophic earthquake of 1481. Few buildings remain which can be recognized with any certainty as belonging to this period. Rhodian architecture of the 14th century adopted western European late-gothic elements, while in the 15th century elements of Catalan and French architecture appeared. Italian Renaissance techniques and styles appeared at the beginning of the 16th century. The main construction material was local limestone, which was worked by Rhodian stonemasons who were experts in the working of this stone. The buildings were two storeys high, with covered porches on the ground floor, rooms and open colonnades on the first floor and yards to the side or at the back.

The churches were usually slightly vaulted. The remains of three churches fitting the Western European style of architecture survive: the Virgin of the City, a 14th century three-aisled basilica, the ruins of St Mary of Victory from the 15th (?) century, and the Cathedral Church of St John, a three-aisled basilica, wooden roofed with a central semi-circular dome and a vaulted transverse aisle. The remaining 25 churches of the Old City are of the Byzantine type and style. The most important of these are the Church of St George (Hourmali Madrasa), the church of St Augustine (Dolapli Mosque) and the Church of St Catherine (the Ilk Mihrab).

The second building period lasted from 1481 - 1522, when Rhodes was finally occupied by the Ottomans, and is characterized by the reconstruction of public buildings and residences and the repair and strengthening of the fortifications. The surviving parts of older urban planning phases were maintained and incorporated into the final form of the buildings, a significant number of which remain to this day.

The Ottomans occupied the island finally in 1522, and Rhodes remained under the Ottoman yoke for almost four centuries (1522 – 1912). Apart from the fact that the Rhodians were granted certain privileges, such as freedom of religion and exemption from the forced recruitment and training of Christian boys for the Turkish army, the island fell into decline and turned into a colonized city of the Ottoman Empire.

During the time the island was under Ottoman control the Greek element was driven out of the Old City and so the local people organised themselves into residential clusters round the Old City, the famous “neighbourhoods” (marasia), with their characteristic type of traditional Rhodian house – with a main area, cook-house and floors decorated with cobbles (“chochlakidi”). The homes of the Greek people and the Knights within the walls were used after the conquest to house the Muslim population, with a few transformations such as the hamman, lattice windows and bay windows in order to adapt them to the Ottoman way of life.

The public buildings housed various offices of the Ottoman administration. The Palace of the Grand Master was transformed into a prison and, in the 19th century, the hospital was turned into a barracks. Most of the city's churches were transformed into mosques, while, at the same time new
mosques were built, the most important of these being the Mosques of Ibrahim Pasha and Recep Pasha and the Suleyman Mosque, the latter including a group of buildings of public amenities. Three more public baths were built as well as a host of public fountains. The entire mediaeval fortifications of the city were retained almost unaltered and with just a few tactical repairs for the entire duration of the Ottoman occupation.

The city suffered some serious disasters during the second half of the 19th century: catastrophic earthquakes, the explosion of the gunpowder cache in St John of the Collachium in 1856, which flattened the surrounding area (including the Palace of the Grand Master) and the great fire of 1876.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Italians declared war on Turkey and in 1912 they occupied Rhodes. For 15 years from 1924, in a wide programme of modernization, reorganization of the administration, expansion of the city, works of public amenities and promotion of the island for tourism were put into effect. Subsequently and consequently there was an effort by the Italian occupational administration to propagandize Italy as the natural successor of the Knights of St. John. They founded the archaeological service, which did work of significance. Throughout Rhodes extensive excavations brought to light important ancient monuments, some of which they partially restored (the Ancient Stadium, the Temple of Apollo Pythias, the ancient Theatre etc.)

Apart from the excavations and the great scale of building intervention that took place to secure the fortifications and to clean the moat, monuments were restored to their mediaeval form, with the removal of later Ottoman additions. Typical examples of this are the church of the Virgin of the Castrum and the Street of the Knights. The major Mediaeval monuments were also restored, the greatest example of this being the rebuilding of the Palace of the Grand Master and the erection of the Church of St John in the new town at Mandraki as a copy of the church of St John which was destroyed in the explosion of 1856. During these restorations important older ruins were often ignored and traces of town planning and other archaeological details were lost as a result of indiscriminate demolition and lack of scientific documentation.

The end of the Second World War was followed by two years of British control, then, in 1947, Rhodes and the other Dodecanese islands were officially incorporated into the Greek State. During the Second World War the Mediaeval City suffered great damage from Allied bombing, which created gaps in the urban planning fabric of the Old City.

---

1 This document has been drafted by the City of Rhodes. Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in this paper and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization