

Shahira Sharaf Eldin*

Preserve and enhance existing sound housing stock – Wekalet El-Lamoun, Alexandria

Zachowanie i zwiększenie istniejących zasobów mieszkaniowych – Wekalet El-Lamoun, Aleksandria

Keywords: wekalet, caravanserais, street livability, preservation

Słowa kluczowe: wekalet, karawanseraj, żywotność ulicy, ochrona

1. COMMERCIAL FACILITIES IN ALEXANDRIA

Man knew markets since very old times to be established initially near arenas and temples. Later, it was taken into consideration when planning cities to leave an empty space for the establishment of the market, but at that time, a specific shape of the market was not yet determined [1].

The development of business activities between people lead to the establishment of business facilities buildings to keep up with the development and expansion of trade. These installations were known in the Islamic civilization with the name of Wekalet, khan, hotels, caravanserais and Qaysarriet. The Arab Historians in the middle Ages did not notice obvious differences between these buildings types. They noted that they are all similar in the presence of court in the middle and around the court an arcaded corridor leading to the stores. Each building may consist of two residential floors of private apartments and one shops' floor. For this reason, some research workers considered that Wekalet, Khan, hotel and Qaysariya are different names for the same building type. Caravansara or Caravansary is another matching word for those buildings. The Persian word "Kārvānsarā" is a compound word combining "Kārvān" (caravan) with "Sara" (palace, building with enclosed courts), to which the Persian suffix "yi" is added. We should note that "caravan" means a group of traders, pilgrims, or other travelers, engaged in long distance travel [2].

It seems that the use of the term (Wekalet) was restricted to Egypt. Later, it was adopted by some other countries of the Islamic world, and then moved to other countries such as Byzantine, Spain and Portugal. Wekalet were spread in the Ayyubid and Mamluk Era. Some of the Mamluk Sultans participated in the construction of these Wekalet, such as el Sultan Qaitbay, and Prince Koson. Also some ladies of the high society have built many Wekalet such as Tag el Moolook, Bint Al-Zahir

Baybars Wekala, Aisha Khatoon Wekala, and Nafisa El-Bayda Wekala from the Ottoman era. At that time, the wekala was used as a hotel for the accommodation of travelers with their goods as well as a trading place. Some Wekalet were used as factories for craft production industry [1].

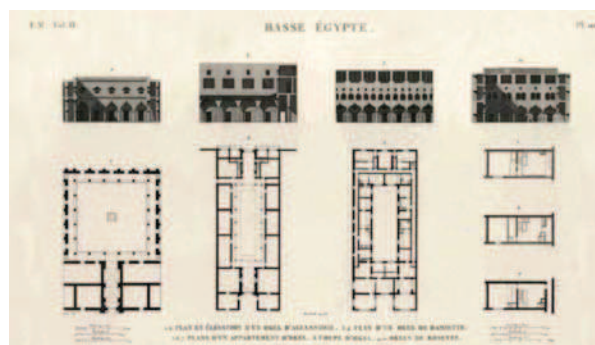


Fig. 1. Some wekalet drawings at Alexandria and Rosetta [1]

It is interesting to know that Alexandria had known many Wekalet along with the hotels since the Mamluk Era. Wekalet Terbana at el Mansheya district is one of these remaining famous Wekala in Alexandria that dates back to the Ottoman era. Ibrahim bin Obaid Terbana Almsrati built three Wekalet in addition to the Hanged Mosque in the year 1105 AH/ 1693 AD. This turned the area into a huge commercial market related to "Diwan El Gomrok", i.e., custom office. He even devoted some residential units in one of his Wekalet to the Jews since the area was characterized by their intensified presence, due to their work in the Diwan El Gomrok. This wekala consisted of an open courtyard surrounded by a group of shops followed by two floors occupied by residential units.

We should notice here that most of the surviving caravan-serais in Alexandria date back to the Ottomans' times. Wekalet

* Ass. Prof., Architectural Department, Pharos University in Alexandria, Egypt, shahira.sharafeldin@pua.edu.eg

El-Lamoun, located in the Jewish neighborhood is one of the distinguished surviving caravanserais; which offered housing to Jews that used to live in the district and work in the nearby Customs Bureau. Wekalat are considered as examples of the forgotten architecture that has to be studied. This is because that Architecture plays an essential role in people's attachment to the place. Furthermore, great buildings are the backbone of any great community.

2. WEKALET EL-LAMOUN AS CASE STUDY

The present study is concerned with Wekalet El-Lamoun in the Turkish district area of Alexandria, Egypt. The Turkish district represents the oldest settlement of Alexandria, it was built between the 17th and 18th century [3]. It has its own character, its urban pattern, architecture and social life. As it is the central business district, near the main port and the most populated settlement in the city, it suffers from several problems relating to urban sprawl and crowded quarters.

Wekalat El-lamoun is one of the most famous caravanserais in Alexandria. This Wekala was named Wekalat El-lamoun as most of its warehouses were used as storage for citrus fruit and lemon. Till now, Alexandria is famous with its lemon that people come from all over the world to buy, (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Kaffir lime leaf and Alexandria famous lemon

The street of Wekalet El-Lamoun has three other names:

1. Wekalat El-Khodar (map 753 Survey authority 1940),
2. Dr. Abd el-Monem el-Rabah (Google earth),
3. Dr. Abd el-Moneim el-Deba.

Wekalet El-Lamoun Street is the most popular name [4].

The street of Wekalet El-Lamoun passes through eight monuments registered by the governorate of Alexandria in June 2007 [5], most of them are Wekalat and Mosques and other unregistered buildings although they are architecturally significant buildings. Most of them are residential. The street includes three historic buildings; Wekalet El-Lamoun, Wekalet Hamza, El-Geriany Pasha and Fouad Kabany house (fig. 3). Wekalet El-Lamoun Street and its extension "souk el-Tabahkin" have a start and an end from the sea in the both sides, the first one is from the side of the port of Alexandria "bab 6", "El-sultan Safar Pasha street" and passing through

a number of other valuable streets in the city; those streets are "Souk El-Khodar street", "Masjed Terbana street", "Mohamed Korayem street" and ends at "El-kornish avenue" (fig. 4).



Fig. 3. A collecting map of Wekalet El-Lamoun street, (Source map 709,750,751 and 753 from Survey authority 1940), [4]



Fig. 4. Google map modified by the author

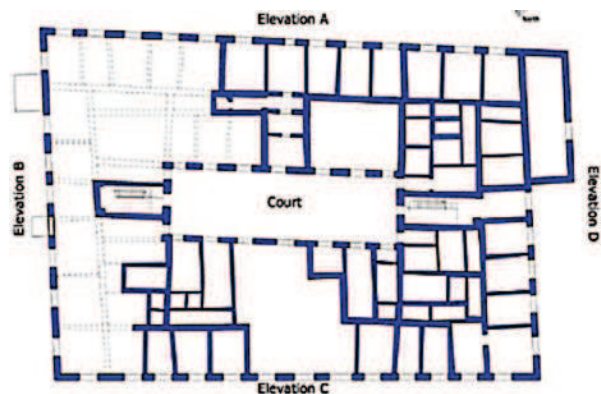


Fig. 5. First floor plan of the Wekala [6]

2.1. Description of the building

The Wekala is owned by "Alfred Blon Metkass" registered under (n. 121 Sheyakh Souk El-samak). It was constructed in 1835 by a Greek Jewish family [4]. The Wekala was built on the model of a hotel and has been chosen due to its location near the harbor entrance, so as to serve and accommodate traders coming from outside the country.

Wekalet El-Lamoun building has four storeys; the ground floor occupied by shops and store-rooms, the other floors are residential. The internal courtyard is reached by two symmetrical entrances from two sides of the building those entrances have no doors in the original design.

buildings that creates the visual completeness peculiar of the place, (fig. 11). As a result, the most common alteration of the street is the replacement of traditional buildings with the high rise apartment blocks. Of course, alterations in the street have negative effects on the character of the urban spaces once defined.

The litho type analysis done through this study revealed that Wekalet El-Lamoun walls main building materials are masonry units either stone or bricks. There are other different materials included in the elevations which are mostly used in windows and doors (fig. 12), such as: wooden shutter, steel balustrades, Aluminum shop fronts with rectangular ornaments lining the façades. Although the function of the building has not changed, the physical fabric has obviously altered [9].

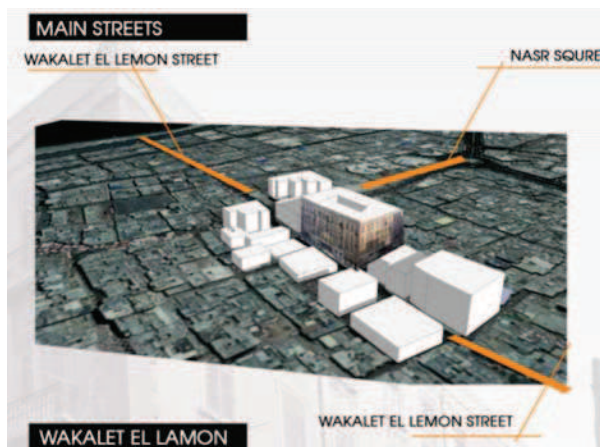


Fig. 11. 3D model showing the different buildings heights compared with the Wekala (Source: author)



Fig. 12. Photos showing the building façades current condition (Source: the author, 2010)

The alterations of the Wekala are evaluated in relation to their effects on that visual continuity and can be categorized in two main groups;

Alterations in form; For instance most of the stores still have their original front style but with changes such as different finishing materials and colors which are used regardless of the existing fabric of the building. Many of the shops also are currently just closed doors. Also, the signs of the stores in the ground floor destroy the aesthetic feature of the original building (fig. 13).

Another type of intervention is the closing of the entrances to gain more storage areas of shops or the changing of shops into warehouse (fig. 14).

Alterations in materials; The most common type of alterations observed are that of material use, as a result of the repair and replacement on the building façades. Timbers' replacement with the plaster is also a common type of alteration. Even the street's stone pavement has recently been replaced by a concrete pavement, which broke the continuity of the stone walls with the street pavement. The continuity is legible only in a small portion of the passageway on the street, where the original stone pavement has been kept.



Fig. 13. Photos representing the store front of the building (Source: the author, 2010)



Fig. 14. Photos representing the entrances of the courtyard [8]

2.3.1. Deterioration features in Wekalet El-Lamoun building

- a. Deterioration features of the main façade (fig. 15):
 - Vertical and inclined cracks can be noticed on the first floor façade's walls.
 - Worn of the façade's stones and cantilevers.
 - Falling of portions of the first floor and roof plaster finishes Lime paints on top of stones and the separation of paints finishing from the walls.
 - Unaesthetic finishing material choices and bad condition of paintings surfaces.
 - Accumulation of dirt and dust on top of the façades.
 - The vanishing of gypsum cornices and the ornaments from the façades.
 - Bad condition of opening (doors and windows): Loss of frames, wooden leaves, accessories and glassing.
 - Total loss of inner wooden panels.
 - High percentage of humidity in the woods leading to bio deterioration and worn in all woods with loss of wooden panels.
 - Wrong restoration of some doors and windows and changing of opening design.
- b. Vandalism and modifications in the main façade:

- Vandalism includes any missing parts due to inappropriate use, replacement of elements due to reuse, and any modification made causing the material separation. It can be whether hanging laundry or adding inappropriate banners and signage or using paper as sheds or wall papers and Graffiti or installing sewage pipes on the façade, (fig. 16).
- Broken shutters and laundry hangers are also common feature of human bad intervention. Electricity network system with cables passing through the buildings and not in covered pipes, distorts the architecture of the buildings that might cause several damage [4]. In time of raining, some of these cables are not isolated which can make electricity failures. Other cables are cut out when the wind speed is high which cause electricity cut and it may even cause fire.



Fig. 15. Different types of deterioration on wekalet El-Lamoun main façade

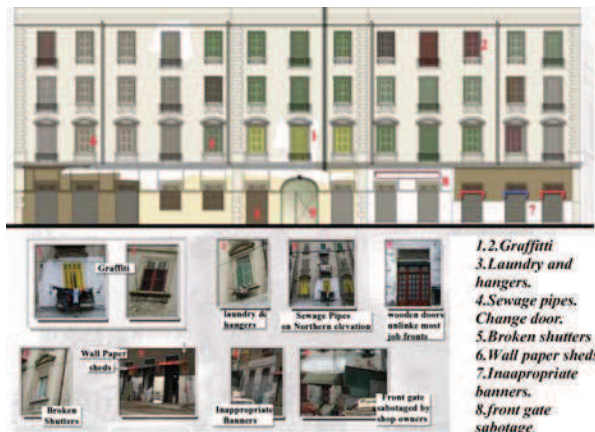


Fig. 16. Different types of vandalism on wekalet El-Lamoun main façade

- c. Deterioration features of the residential floors' façade:
- The appearance of vertical and inclined cracks with different lengths and widths in some walls.
 - Deviation and inclement in some walls.
 - Missing insets and falling of plaster finishes from the walls.
 - Bad condition of painted surfaces and painting materials.
 - Deterioration of the ceiling in some apartments.
 - Bad condition of doors and windows, as describe in the façade deterioration (fig. 17).



Fig. 17. Different types of deterioration on Wekalet El-Lamoun residential façade



Fig. 18. Photos representing the staircases in relation to the upper floors [8]

- d. Deterioration features of the residential staircase: (fig. 18)
- Wear of the residential staircase.
 - Appearance of disjointing at the staircase walls' corners,
 - The appearance of vertical and inclined cracks with different lengths and widths.
 - Deviation and inclement in some walls.
 - Scaling of plaster finishing from the walls and bad paints.

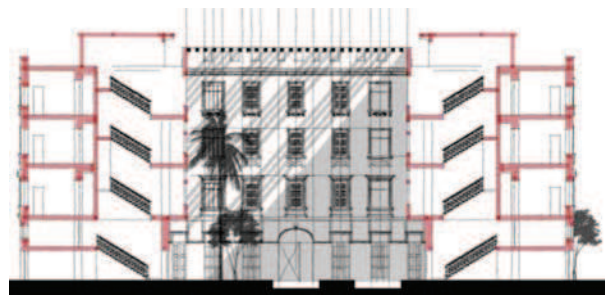


Fig. 19. Drawing representing the inner court and the stairs [6]

- e. Deterioration features of the courtyard and workshops: (fig. 19)
- Deviation and back weathering in some walls.
 - Unaesthetic choices of finishing material.
 - Appearance of vertical and inclined cracks with different lengths and widths in the first floor's wall.
 - Semi-total deterioration of flooring and ceiling.
 - Separation and falling of plaster finishes from the walls.
 - Bad condition of wooden ceilings, doors, and windows.
 - Appearance of rust on top of metal doors and windows.
 - The absence of paint finishing on the first floor courtyard façades.
 - The worn and missing of some stone cornices and craved stones.

- f. Deterioration features of the roof floor:
 - Accumulation of dirt and dust at the top of the roofs.
 - Lack of maintenance of the gutters and isolation material cause leakage problems.
 - Damaged floor's tiles and the missing insets of construction materials.
 - The irregularity of the walls as a result of material deterioration.

2.3.2. General causes of alterations and deterioration features in El-Wekala

There are three main causes of alterations which can be observed while studying Wekalat El – Lamoun case study, such as:

a. Inheritance; the traditional buildings have usually more than one owner; so the division is one of the most common types of interventions observed in the site. The type of division and its effects on the original scheme of the building varies depending on the characteristics and the potential of the buildings. Lack of maintenance work for long time and the absence of its real owner, lead to building deterioration as the occupant didn't pay any rental fees to cover maintenance work

b. Structural problems; the building have suffered various interventions realized by their owners in the past for maintenance and repair purposes. The types of these interventions and their effects on the original characteristics of the buildings are variable.

c. Changes in life style; The apartments which are designed according to the standard needs of their users in the time of their construction do not satisfy the needs of their current users. Therefore, various interventions have been realized in order to adapt the buildings into current conditions and requirements.

As result of inheritance problems, buildings have been divided in horizontal and vertical manner, which is a common type of intervention. However the effects of this intervention vary depending on the potential of the building. Needs for separate circulation, and for extra spaces-when the capacity of building is not sufficient – is provided by internal divisions within the spaces. Addition of new volumes, or new architectural elements such as staircases, doors; lead to the destruction of the volumetric and architectural integrity of the building. This also assure that the scattered pattern of responsibilities and ownership can be a serious problem [8].

The repair and replacement of the building materials and architectural elements is another common type of intervention, caused by the structural problems. In buildings, the repair is usually made by filling the spaces between the frame elements with another material such as brick and plastering the exterior surface.

The replacement of the architectural elements such as windows, brackets, doors are also very common in the buildings. In some of them, they are replaced with similar elements, so that the intervention remains in the scale of the element, whereas in some of the buildings, the material, form, or in some examples even the size of the element is altered, thus the original façade arrangement is altered. Misusing the building by either introduction of inappropriate usage or overcrowding of dwelling spaces overload the structural elements.

The change in the life style, on the other hand, is reflected on buildings as two different groups of interventions. The first group consists of alterations realized for the adaptation of the

buildings into a more expressive for life style of today, such as the addition of balconies, or enlargement of windows in order to get a better view towards outside, so that the façade arrangement and the volumetric properties of the buildings are altered. This can be seen in the building in some changes in windows even though the building is registered.

The second group consists of the alteration of the spaces and architectural elements depending on the contemporary needs, such as the adding bathing spaces within the rooms, and the installation of the mechanical equipment. These alterations, usually affect the usage scheme and sometimes the plan arrangement of the building.

As a result, although the interventions observed in the surveyed building have common causes behind, the solutions applied, and their effects on the original characteristics of the building vary from case to case. Some of them cause the loss of the architectural and values of the building, while some others are being tolerated within the potential of the building.

It is an obvious factor that, the building has major problems to be solved before being adapted to the contemporary requirements of life. However, any intervention to be applied in such an area should be designed and evaluated in relation to the characteristics and the potential of it, avoiding standardization of the solutions.

3. DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN FOR ADAPTIVE RE-USE OF WEKALET EL-LAMOUN

Adaptive-Reuse: is one of the relatively recent technique that is characterized by its sensitive and complex procedures hence it deals with introducing new functions to a building without losing its original identity. Innovation while respecting the existing building are required characteristics for the success of the process. Regaining life in such buildings help in drawing the attention of cultural groups to its value, consequently, regaining vitality to valuable areas [10]. In that sense, the adaptive reuse of a historic building should have minimal impact on the heritage significance of the building and its setting Adaptive reuse is fundamentally sustainable development and offers a tremendous opportunity to enrich the present status by engaging the past.

There is a kind of romanticism in adapting historical buildings for residential use. These revitalized buildings are sought after not only for their amenities and features, but because to live in one is a statement of one's interests and values that endure beyond current trends. Socioeconomic pattern of the building's tenants affects technical quality for all restoration work. Compensation for the original residents can be successful than trying to reform the rent law and to solve problems between the owner and the occupier. Evacuation of these buildings and reusing them can be a better solution.

So the reuse of such a remarkable building, (fig. 20) can be the finest alternative to preserve such a unique building. One of the suggested options is its modification to be reused as a hotel in the center of the city; Ground floor can be turned into commercial, food and ancillary areas with distinguished authentic design to cope with the building style. Active ground floor uses will be encouraged along main pedestrian routes to stimulate new investment and employment. Other residential floors can be used as hotel rooms. A small space can be assigned for craft work and exhibition gallery of the traditional work.

Of course, converting the building into a hotel will insure profitable revenue, capable of sustaining buildings' future and its periodically maintenance.



Fig. 20. Photo of the remarkable Wekalet El-lamoun with its authentic architecture style [6]

Wekalet El-Lamoun is a part of one of the oldest inhabited settlements which form a continuing tradition of economic and commercial activities which gives it a unique socio-economic character. Its street has a physical significance for its relation to the port and the central business district of Alexandria. Surrounding buildings can also be of great importance providing the area with potentials for development while preserving the architectural value. Those buildings give the site great architecture and historic values and they can be an economic resource for the residents if they are carefully conserved.

There are many important points that must be taken into consideration while developing the Wekalet El-Lamoun building, among these;

- **Architectural style and materials preservation:** Little attention was given to Wekalet El-Lamoun building or street. In spite of the outstanding architecture features of the Wekala expressing the identity of the place that must be preserved. Also the Wekala Street present enormous amounts of commercial and entertainment activities which can add to the city's attraction and is in good relation with the city's downtown. Also this distinguished wekala represents a special architectural style
- **Enforcing Laws and regulations:** Government regulations must comprise new rental laws or provide owners by incentives and grants to reuse and maintain their building. Demolition control is needed in a heritage district to preserve the authenticity of the place. Property owners neglect preservation laws and will often argue that the prohibitive cost of repairs and deferred maintenance creates an economic hardship for owners.

- One of the solutions is forming a housing cooperative of the occupants which can then get a co-operative loan to purchase and repair the building. Another solution is to include tax incentives to property owners, or specific measures targeting historic cores in cities, that can be incorporated into the revised rental laws of the country [8].
- **Adjust land usage:** Redesigning the urban fabric creating attraction points along the streets to form a walkable remarkable area in the city center coping with the identity of the place. Creative townscape, not only for pedestrians, but also for cyclists, drivers and public transport users must be taken into consideration while developing the district.
- **Provide Transportation and services:** Appropriate parking must be supplied to facilitate tourism movement and to deal with the increase of the rate of car ownership and the limited capacity of the city's street to accommodate both moving and parking cars. Also, there must be separation between pedestrian walks and public roads.
- **Increasing public awareness:** Creating a sense of place involves understanding how people develop place attachment and feel part of their physical and social environment. This attachment is often based on a community's cultural response to the environment's features, the role that a place plays in satisfying human needs, historical meanings and symbolism embedded in the location, and the possibilities for individuals and groups to identify with the space. Promoting Wekalet El-lamoun among people can make them effective and cooperative in the conservation process and heritage protection. Advertising is the most effective approach for public awareness (fig. 21).
- **Improvement of cultural and social environment:** Enhancing the economic level by providing jobs through oriented projects. New and existing public spaces can be linked by streetscape. Sense of public safety and vitality can be accomplished through street arts and encouraging opportunities for retail, cafe and restaurants that are consistent with the fabric, scale and character of the area.

4. CONCLUSION

The problems of Wekalet El-Lamoun historic, is shared by many other buildings in Alexandria, where the cultural values are being eroded due to the inconsistency of conservation policies, as well as the lack of an effective conservation program and regular maintenance.

The building has a bad situation of conservation because of the lack of maintenance work for long time and for the absence of real owners. Rental fees or even paying services (electric water supply) have minor effect. Generally the building needs consolidation for some of the construction elements (bearing walls – wooden ceilings also rehabilitation and renewal of infra



Fig. 21. Ideas for public awareness such as advertising on: a) Public transport or, b) On billboard street or, c) Designing posters on important public buildings like in bibliotheca Alexandrina Plaza

structure services. All traditional crafts workshops need revitalization and rehabilitation for (machinery, tools and services) beside the restoration work for the Wekala.

Also, intervention with the urban context of the Wekala is strongly interrelated with the street individual items and components. This not applies only to the restoration of the historic buildings but also the construction of the new buildings coping with the historic settlement. What integrates a new item to an existing environment is not its repetition of the common traditional features existing in the site, but the way by which it interacts with the existing context.

The concern is how to preserve buildings and areas and at the same time insure profitable revenue, capable of sustaining

their future. Abandoned unsafe environments encourage the appearance and breeding of unhealthy communities.

Thus, all kinds of interventions to be applied in a historical settlement – either in the form of rebuilding or restoring – should be decided, evaluated, guided and realized with a contextual point of view based on the complete consciousness of the area. Effects on the site in all scales must be considered respecting the identity or unique characteristics of the irreplaceable buildings or the quality of the space.

Finally, historic buildings and districts should be conserved as they present part of our cultural heritage, and they should be handed intact to future generations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] El-Gohary A., *Commercial establishments in Alexandria hotels and caravanserais in the Islamic Ages*, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Alex-Med Newsletter, 20, 2010, 18.
- [2] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caravanserai>
- [3] Forster E.M., Durrell L., *Alexandria: a History and a Guide*, Gloucester: P. Smith, 1968.
- [4] Naguib I., *Historic Areas as a Tool for Urban Regeneration*, MSc Thesis, Alexandria University, 2011.
- [5] Alexandria Governorate, *National Registered Heritage Buildings: List of Alexandria*, Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2007.
- [6] The Alexandria & Mediterranean Research Center, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Last modified: August 3, 2012, <http://www.bibalex.org/English/researchers/Alexmed/alexmedcenter.htm>
- [7] “Italian Architects and Modern Egypt”, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://web.mit.edu/akpia/www/articlepallini.pdf>
- [8] Bussagli M., *Understanding Architecture*, London: IB Tauris, 2005.
- [9] Hanafi M.A., *Development and conservation with special reference to the turkish town of Alexandria*, PhD Thesis, University of York, 1993.
- [10] ElKerdany D., *Transition and Switch Transition of the historical cities: realistic perspective of the survival of historic buildings*, Engineering Research Journal, Helwan University, 85, 1999.

Abstract

The philosophy behind this study is that there can be no sustained development or meaningful growth without clear commitment to preserve the environment, promote the rational use of resources, and at the same time put historic buildings – such as Wekalet into good use.

The case study discussed in the present paper is that of Wekalet El-Lamoun in Alexandria; a very famous caravanserais for exporter of citrus fruits. The Wekala is located through the street perpendicular to the cornice and leading to the old port gate. In order to enhance the livability of the street, we have to protect the distinctive characteristics of the street's most famous buildings “Wekalet El-Lamoun”; those warehouses, shops and others related to it. For future intervention, many views have to be discussed.

Streszczenie

U podstawy niniejszej pracy leży stwierdzenie, iż nie może być mowy o zrównoważonym rozwoju czy znaczącym wzroście bez wyraźnego zobowiązania się do zachowania środowiska, promowania racjonalnego wykorzystania zasobów, a jednocześnie właściwego wykorzystania zabytkowych budynków, takich jak Wekalet.

Przypadek omawiany w prezentowanym artykule to Wekalet El-Lamoun w Aleksandrii; sławny karawanseraj dla kupców handlujących owocami cytrusowymi. Wekalet znajduje się po przeciwnej stronie ulicy, skracającej pod kątem prostym i wiodącej do bramy starego portu. W celu zachowania żywotności ulicy należy chronić wartości wyróżniające ją spośród innych. Jedną z takich wartości jest „Wekalet El-Lamoun” ze swoimi charakterystycznymi magazynami, sklepami i innymi przestrzeniami o podobnej funkcji. W związku z powyższym problem interwencji konserwatorskiej wymaga możliwie szerokiego spojrzenia.