

State Party Report

Property name: Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace

Property ID: 1549 Rev

State Party: Azerbaijan

1. Executive Summary

The State Party is submitting this report following the recommendations set out by the World Heritage Committee Decision 43 COM 8B.36 and provides progresses achieved regarding implementation of requested recommendations.

During the 43rd session of World Heritage Committee held in Baku in July of 2019, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the Historic center of Sheki with the Khan's Palace on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (v)**. World Heritage Committee recommended the State Party to give consideration to the following:

- Revising and adopting the Management Plan of the property;
- Preparing and adopting the Conservation Master Plan for the property;
- Defining guidelines for residential house restoration and preparing planning instruments (Regeneration Urban Plan) to incentivize private participation in this process;
- Ensuring the monitoring of all processes of urban rehabilitation by the Site Management Team.

In July 2020, following the detailed elaboration of the provisional SOUV, the final version of it was agreed between the State Party and WHC.

State Party considered the recommendations of WHC and worked out all the required documents in coordination with ICOMOS and by involving local experts. The Management Plan and Conservation Master Plan of the property have been updated according to the final SOUV along with supporting documents such as Emergency Plan, Urban Regeneration Plan, Infill Design. All the documents have been adopted by the State Party and is hereby submitted for further examination by the World Heritage Committee.

State Party has considered some regulations for residential house restoration and updated the Restoration Manual accordingly. Preliminary awareness activities among the residents were conducted with regard to restoration standards and requirements. Ensuring private participation in restoration and urban regeneration processes has been set out as one of the main objectives for the State Party.

State Party is also reporting on additional conservation and development activities held in the Site after its inscription. It covers information about the new national status, changes in the management of the Site, newly registered monuments, a series of ongoing restoration projects and implemented safety and infrastructural activities.

2. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee

1) Revising and adopting the Management Plan of the property

The Reserves Management Center under the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (RMC), as a focal point for the management of Sheki Historical Centre with the Khan's Palace, has revised the Management Plan of 2017 considering the updates and changes of the final Statement of OUV. In order to adjust the Management Plan in a way that it focuses main aspects of the management of the Site and its significance, RMC has closely worked with the ICOMOS and outlined the Site's main attributes and elements which formed a basis for further development of the Management Plan. The revised Management Plan addresses and covers aspects such as current management structures and key stakeholders, brief description of the current state of conservation of both tangible and intangible heritage, tourism development factors and issues. It sets out objectives in efficient management, conservation of OUVs and its attributes, the promotion and interpretation of the Site's significance, tourism development management, capacity building, risk management and provides respective actions with responsible agencies and monitoring indicators.

The revised Management Plan for the Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace 2020-2025 has been adopted by the State Tourism Agency.

As mentioned in the Protection and Management requirements part of the provisional SOUV document, a comprehensive approach to risk preparedness and mitigation needed to be developed in an Emergency Plan. The State Party conducted a risk assessment with the focus on the main attributes of the OUVs in the Site. The Emergency Plan of the Site was developed afterwards with assessment, response and recovery plans for each type of natural and manmade hazards in Sheki. The Emergency Plan compliments the Management Plan regarding Risk Management issues.

2) Preparing and adopting the Conservation Master Plan for the property

The State Party has prepared a Conservation Master Plan with the aim to preserve the significance of the Site through conservation of the key attributes of the OUVs. The Conservation Master Plan will help set out detailed and precise conservation guidelines for each attribute, its restoration and adaptation. The document compliments the Management Plan with regard to all conservation issues and has been adopted by the State Tourism Agency accordingly.

State Party revised and updated the Restoration Manual to align it with Conservation Master Plan's content and structure. The Restoration Manual has been upgraded with more useful and relevant restoration solutions for private residential houses while the content for restoration of monuments and public buildings as well as urban typologies has been transferred to the Conservation Master Plan. The updated Restoration Manual was shared with the ICOMOS for final revision and feedback before the final version of the document was adopted by the State Party.

In addition, the State Party has prepared Infill Design Manual for new construction to address issues regarding new construction in the Site which will protect traditional building typology as well as urban fabric. The Manual elaborates framework of the infill parameters though it needs updating according to the urban zoning introduced in Urban Regeneration Plan.

3) Defining guidelines for residential house restoration and preparing planning instruments (Regeneration Urban Plan) to incentivize private participation in this process.

Guidelines for residential house restoration are thoroughly revised and updated in the Restoration Manual. The changes made in the restoration guidelines for residential houses mainly reflect the cost-friendly, practical and feasible solutions thus making the restoration process for private owners more rational and productive.

The State Party has carried out awareness activities regarding the distribution of restoration guidelines for residential houses. Informational sessions on the standards and guidelines of the Restoration Manual were conducted for various group of stakeholders: representatives from the Sheki Executive Committee's respective departments, City Municipality representatives and heritage specialists from "Yukhari Bash" National Historical and Architectural Reserve team. Informational leaflets describing main restoration rules and standards were prepared and distributed among the residents of the Site.

The State Party is introducing Urban Regeneration Plan as a document to respond the issues identified for re-development in the Site. Its objectives are focused on the protection and restoration of urban fabric, preservation of OUV attributes and social-economic development of the Site by relevant proposals and regeneration action plan. The Plan introduces urban zoning for the effective use and regulation of the Site. Urban zoning will also imply strict and soft regulations for development within the Site and its Buffer Zone.

To incentivize private participation and ensure community involvement in both planning and implementation stages are one of the key objectives of the Urban Regeneration Plan. The measures and mechanisms provided in the Plan ensure social inclusion as well as mitigate the risk of gentrification. The State Party plans to further elaborate and develop the incentive mechanisms for private and public participation (set out in the Management Plan as an action).

4) Ensuring the monitoring of all processes of urban rehabilitation by the Site Management Team
Monitoring of ongoing processes in urban rehabilitation and control of some local dynamics has been a priority for the State Party. One of the main interventions in the process of construction development was establishing a control mechanism by the Reserves Management Center based on the Construction and Urban Planning Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to the Code, the local Executive Committee (ExCom) of Sheki region as a main government body responsible for any construction projects in the region has to coordinate and align the approval process with the management of the Yukhari Bash Reserve in case the construction happens within the borders of the Reserve. The final approval for construction applications is only granted by the ExCom of Sheki if the construction project is assessed and approved by RMC from architectural and heritage conservation perspective. So far, the RMC has evaluated around 25 construction projects based on the Restoration Manual's guidelines and granted approval or provided recommendations for further changes in the project. Later the team controlled the implementation of the construction projects based on the rules of the Restoration Manual and closely worked with private owners.

In order to enhance the monitoring of construction development and other urban rehabilitation process, the State Party has concluded an agreement with "Azercosmos" OJSC, the satellite

operator in Azerbaijan. According to the agreement, “Azercosmos” will be providing regular reports in the format of satellite images identifying any new developments in the respective area.

Overall, the State Party has declared a strategy for limited new construction and promotes the reasonable usage of existing buildings for various purposes. As a manifestation of this strategy, the recent case with “Sheki Art Residency” NGO can be indicated. The NGO was offered to consider an old prison building (sample of Tsar Russian architecture) as an Art Center instead of building new premises. It was agreed to use the building without paying a rent fee for a long period in exchange for NGO’s commitment to restore the building and maintain it according to the conservation standards set forward by RMC.

To strengthen safety and security measures in the Historic Centre of Sheki, the Site Management has entered into an agreement with local Sheki Regional Protection Police Department (according to the legislation Regional Protection Police Department can be the only responsible institution for 24 hours security of monuments) to install additional security posts in the proximity of Khan’s Palace and House of Khans (Shekikhanovs’ House). The security posts will be ensuring the safety of the monuments and surrounding areas from misbehaviors and potential damages to the heritage. For this purpose, camera surveillance system has been installed in the Khan’s Palace and Shekikhanovs’ House.

In order to enhance the monitoring role of local Heritage Supervisors from the Yukhari Bash Reserve team, RMC has adopted a neighborhood divisions approach. All 9 neighborhoods in the reserve area are monitored and controlled by assigned Heritage Supervisors of Yukhari Bash Reserve Administration on a regular basis. They are controlling the ongoing issues in the area, holding regular meetings with residents to update them on latest developments, processing individual appeals, ensure that hygiene, cleaning and waste issues are properly managed.

Solid waste disposal and cleaning issues within the borders of the Site have also been a priority for the Site Management. STA has concluded an agreement with Communal Services Office under the ExCom of Sheki to further reinforce the waste management efforts within the Site area. Additional services are being provided by the Communal Services Office and this includes regular collection and disposal of the solid waste in the historic center of Sheki.

3. Additional Conservation and Development Report

In January of 2020, “Yukhari Bash” State Historical and Architectural Reserve has been granted a status of “national reserve” by the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This prominent change in the status of the reserve has ensured certain benefits to the management process including increased protection measures as well as better remuneration package for the reserve management team.

In order to strengthen the management capacity of the local reserve team, STA and RMC have carried out recruitment of new staff members. A new director for the reserve has been appointed, two architects have been recruited along with some other changes in the team.

Most of the registered monuments within the borders of the Site with OUV, national and local significance were remaining without an ownership status and with no inventory registration after the Site’s inscription in 2019. RMC has conducted an analysis of those monuments and STA made an appeal to relevant government authorities to register them as the Yukhari Bash inventory. The list of those monuments is provided in the Management Plan.

To continue these efforts, STA has entered into an agreement with State Committee on Property Issues to upgrade the technical registry documents (technical passports) of main monuments in the Site. According to the agreement, new passports for a few monuments with protection zones and pertaining land areas will be identified and provided by the Committee in 2021 and will continue for the rest of the monuments in the years to come.

There is a presidential order for conducting additional measures to protect the historical part of Sheki issued in 2018. According to the order, STA is delegated to work out long-term protection, conservation, restoration and purposeful use of historical and cultural monuments located in the territory of the "Yukhari Bash" State Historical-Architectural Reserve. STA plans to carry out most of the conservation and restoration projects based on this presidential order which allocates state investment funds for planned activities.

A few restoration projects have been launched and project design works are ongoing. These include administrative building for the Yukhari Bash Reserve and event hall each located in old hospital buildings (XIX century Tsar Russian architecture), a museum and art gallery buildings. The reason for selection of specific buildings for urgent restoration is importance and their need for immediate intervention.

Khan's Mosque and its surrounding was occupied with 6 internally displaced families which was an issue to the protection of the monument. STA has brought this issue to the attention of the ExCom of Sheki and State Committee on Internally Displaced People and facilitated to solution of the issue. As a result, 6 families were provided with new accommodation, and the Khan's Mosque and surroundings were later cleaned and prepared for further restoration activities.

Taking into consideration the urgency and need for immediate intervention, RMC has also conducted a series of infrastructural rehabilitation activities in the Site area:

- Prepared an evacuation plan for the Khan's Palace;
- Repaired electricity lines within the Fortress walls;
- Built new sewage system around the Fortress walls;
- Repaired damaged roads;
- Installed signage system in the center of the city;
- Installed turnstile system to Khan's Palace and House of Khans to facilitate to visitor management process;
- Repaired sewerage and water system of House of Khans.

Fuad Naghiyev

Chairperson of the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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