

Revitalization of Traditional Rural Settlements: A Model Proposal

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Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to propose model for revitalization of traditional rural settlements. In order to provide a rational basis for this model the paper will, firstly, discuss the strategic approaches for revitalization of historic urban quarters and rural settlements separately. Then through integrating these two, a model for revitalization of traditional rural settlements, which has been applied in the case of Dip Karpaz village, will be presented. The methodology of this paper is based on to set the procedure by referring to two setting; rural settlements with authentic traditional built environments, considering the pillars of sustainable development; the social and economic issues but also the enhancement of the physical assets which should be considered as an important aspect of the revitalization strategy. The analysis of rural tourism and the main strategic planning rules are based upon the information from a large number of literatures and practical experience of the authors while conducting the research project as the proposed paper, which is an outcome of a research project funded by the Ministry of Education of TRNC (MEKB-06-12) and conducted at the Eastern Mediterranean University between September 2006 and June 2008.

Introduction

Sustainable development, protection of the environment and scarce resources imply both protection of natural as well as manmade/ built environment. Since protection of the manmade/built environment can not be realized without consideration of social and economic issues, sustainability and revitalization of settlements (urban/rural) are notions, which should be considered in a mutual relationship.

Examination of the motives, which calls for the revitalization of rural and urban settlements in different parts of the world, reveals that in case of urban settlements, revitalization efforts have been initiated mainly to cope with the deterioration and decay of the historic areas as part of the cultural heritage. Regarding the rural settlements, declining population and economic base have been the motives for their revitalization. Accordingly the strategic approaches for their revitalization have been different in scope and content. However, in case of rural settlements with authentic traditional built environments, not only the social and economic issues but also the enhancement of the physical assets should also be considered as an important component of the revitalization strategy.

Based on this argument, strategic approaches for rural settlements would be developed as an interface of both the revitalization strategies for rural settlements (which has a more focus on social and economic matters) and the revitalization strategies for historic/traditional settlements (with a more focus on built features).

Considering the inherent qualities of sustainability and revitalization in general, they should involve social and economic dimensions rather than purely physical protection and enhancement measures in a long-term perspective. Such a process calls for the connectivity of revitalization area objectives and the consideration of physical quality, social viability, economic vitality and the wider concern for sustainability, all of which demands the rapid, efficient and focused conversion of new knowledge

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into socially, economically and environmentally acceptable solutions. Literature survey reveals that only through employment of strategic planning approaches would it be possible to develop an understanding and vision across a whole range of social, environmental and economic issues that go far beyond conventional approaches, taking a comprehensive and integrated approach over long time horizons.

Strategic planning approach

Strategic planning has been used extensively in the private sector to provide corporations and businesses with long-term vision and goals and short-term action plans to achieve these goals. Although strategy is the means used to achieve the objectives, it is not just any plan, however. The concept of strategy has to be perceived as a plan, which is the result of analyzing the strengths and weaknesses and determining what the environment has to offer (the opportunities and threats), so that the objectives can be achieved. (Jauch, et al., 1988).

The purpose of strategies is to determine and communicate, through a system of major objectives and policies, a picture of what kind of enterprise is envisioned. Strategies do not attempt to outline exactly how the enterprise is to accomplish its objectives, since this is the task of countless major and minor supporting programs. But they furnish a framework for guiding thinking and action. (Koontz, et al., 1988)

Development of strategies became recently much more popular than ever before not only in the business world, but also in many other fields due to the rapidly changing environment. Town Planning, Urban Design, Architecture and Conservation Planning are no exception to this general trend. As Rowley (1997) states, “. . .conventional planning approaches tend to be oriented toward looking at problems based on current understanding, or an inside-out mind set; whereas strategic planning requires an understanding of the nature of the issue, and then of an appropriate response, or an outside-in mind set”. According to Zapryagaev (1999), strategic planning tends to be idea driven, is more qualitative, and seeks to provide a clear vision or focus. Based on this vision, unlike in the conventional planning which is operational in nature, the main emphasis is on the required actions and responsible actors to carry out these actions.

As any process, a strategic planning approach also is composed of several phases: Analysis stage; vision; objectives and goals; development of scenario and planning strategies stage; development of action plans; monitoring and feedback stage (Hoşkara, 2007; DPT, 2006).

Examination of revitalization practices or proposals in different parts of the world reveals that in almost all cases strategic planning approaches have been adopted both for urban settlements more specifically for historic urban quarters, as well as for rural areas. However, as stated in the preceding lines the motives, focus, content and scope for revitalization differs for historic urban quarters and rural settlements. In order to provide the basis for the model proposal for revitalization of traditional rural settlements, in the following lines strategic approaches for both different cases will be summarized.

Strategic Approaches for revitalization of historic urban quarters

With their traditional character and architectural value, historic urban quarters are considered as part of the cultural heritage of any country. Since 1960s historic urban quarters have been re-evaluated with their overall positive qualities, and the efforts for protection of individual buildings in these areas has been replaced by policies for area-based protection. This new attitude implies revitalization of these areas as functioning parts of their cities. As stated by Tiesdell et al, revitalization can be defined, in its simplest form, as a process through which the deterioration and decay of an historic urban quarter can be addressed, terminated and reversed (Tiesdell et al, 1996). Thus, in order to provide an historic urban quarter with an appropriate level of economic competitiveness and with the basis to channel the various competing demands for spaces within them, determination of an appropriate strategic approach is an important issue to debate on. The underlying intention of a strategic approach with regard to revitalization of historic

urban quarters in particular as well as a traditional environment in general, is to identify what is valuable in a historic urban quarter/traditional environment, qualities that should be protected and enhanced; and along with identifying these, to determine where negative factors could be removed or mitigated and to identify where the opportunities for enhancement lie. Accordingly, it can be stated that revitalization is the development and restoration of specific urban areas that will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is a clear fact that this statement overlaps with the definition of sustainable development, which has been introduced at the Earth Summit- Rio in 1992.

Keeping in line with the model (the Venn diagram) of sustainable development with its pillars: economy, environment and equity and in order to systematize and simplify the process of revitalization, a model has been suggested by one of the authors, which would cover the possible processes in an historic urban quarter (Figure1). Focusing on conservation and revitalization, such a model should involve three distinct processes:

- *Protection of Historic Urban Quarters*, which focus on protection of cultural heritage;
- *Economic Development*, which inherently involves maximization of profit, and sustainability of economic viability and competitiveness;
- *Community Development*, focusing on social aspects and well-being of citizens.

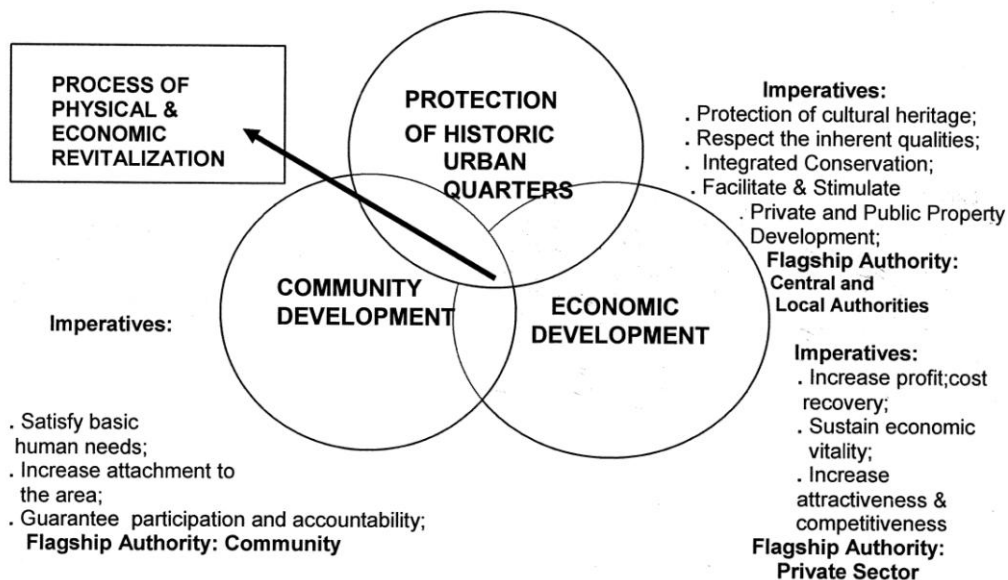


Figure 1.
The three distinct processes

Considering the imperatives of each process independently, it is only a matter of likelihood whether they serve revitalization of the concerned area. Taking the spirit of revitalization of historic urban quarters into account, which can simply be defined as a process through which the deterioration and decay of an historic urban quarter can be addressed, terminated and reversed, the process of *Physical and Economic Revitalization* should take place at the intersection of the set of three processes. Being at the intersection, physical and economic revitalization acts as a process of bringing these three processes into balance with each other.

Only at this intersection the three distinct processes would compromise, directing the diversified or even conflicting interests of many different uses, of many actors, of different public and private institutions towards a single 'shared' objective: Conservation and Revitalization (Doratl, 2000). Thus, considering the main focus of revitalizing historic urban quarters, the employment of strategic approaches for their revitalization seems to be a major concern.

In view of the set of three distinct processes, taking the imperatives of each sub-set into account independent from each other, it can clearly be seen that each calls for a different

flagship authority (Figure1). In the sub-set of *protection of cultural heritage*, the flagship authority is the central/local authorities; in the sub-set of *community development*, it is the community itself; and in the sub-set of *economic development* it is the private sector. At the intersection of the three distinct processes, the three flagship authorities would compromise signifying public-private partnership, which lies in the spirit of strategic approaches.

As in the process of planning in general, strategic planning for revitalization of historic urban quarters also includes various stages, among which the analysis stage¹ is the most crucial one since both the key constraints and opportunities of the concerned historic area and the external conditions which would positively and/or negatively affect the area, are identified at this stage.

The most important difference between the strategic approaches for revitalization of Historic urban quarters and the conventional conservation planning approaches for these types of areas is that strategic approaches are action oriented and the all actors who would be directly or indirectly influenced are involved in the process. In addition to this as one of the stages of the strategic planning approaches, action plans will be prepared for revitalization of historic urban quarters, which would answer the questions: 'Who would be doing what? ; 'When?' ; and highlight priorities; possible constraints; possible financial resources.

According to Tiesdell et al. (1996), depending on the source of the mismatch between the services offered by the fabric of the historic quarters and the contemporary needs, two types of revitalization would be utilized for reconciliation this mismatch. If the source of the mismatch lies in the physical fabric, there is a need for *physical revitalization*; if it is related to the economic activities within the fabric; *economic revitalization* has to be utilized. Physical revitalization is a straight forward adaptation of the physical fabric to contemporary needs through various modes of renewal². Whereas economic revitalization is about utilization and purposeful occupation of the improved/enhanced building stock (through physical revitalization), which would sustain revitalization in a long term perspective.

Physical and economic revitalization should be considered as complementary to each other. Physical revitalization will help to increase confidence in the area, the maintenance of this confidence, however, requires economic revitalization. Adopting this approach the process of revitalization, would serve to support the goal and objective of the area-based protection of the cultural and historical heritage, since area-based conservation involves much more than preservation of only specific large building complexes.

Considering that every historic urban quarter is unique in terms of the values, which make it worthy of preservation, *the type and level of obsolescence* and the inherent *development dynamics* that it may face make it unique and different from other parts of its city. There can, therefore, be no uniformly strategic approach in terms of revitalization. There are three basic strategic approaches for the long-term revitalization of historic urban quarters (Tiesdell et al., 1996): *functional restructuring*; *functional diversification*; *functional regeneration*. The relevant strategic approach should serve the endowment of historic urban quarters with a fresh sense of purpose in order to ensure their survival. Only then may it be possible to give them a contemporary role. Ensuring survival of a historic urban quarter in the long run can only be possible with the economic revitalization of that particular area (Doratlı, 2005).

Strategic approaches for revitalization of rural settlements

The strategic planning process related to rural development deals with a wide range of parameters corresponding to the complexity of issues concerned (Rusali, 2005). Different

¹ In addition to classical analysis topics, SWOT analysis as well as determination of 'type and level of obsolescence' and 'development dynamics' in the concerned area should be conducted in order to define the opportunities and constraints (Doratlı, 2000; Doratlı et al. 2004; Doratlı et al. 2007).

² Modes of renewal: 1. Refurbishment (conservation and consolidation); 2. Conversion (adaptive use): the adaptation of a building to a new function or use; 3. Demolition and redevelopment (Doratlı, 2005)

than the motives for determination of the most relevant strategic approach for revitalization of historic urban quarters, literature survey reveals that in case of rural settlements/areas, *depopulation*³ and *land abandonment* have been the most basic reasons for taking action towards revitalization of these areas.

Following a thorough study and analysis of the existing situation, different situations regarding revitalization of rural areas can be distinguished with relation to two main factors: *the density of the population* and *the agronomic potential*. Revitalization policies are dependent on an enabling macro-economic environment and an appropriate institutional framework and should be an integral part of specific sectoral policies, especially agricultural and rural development policies.

In a report, which was prepared by FAO- UN in 2006, it has been stated that revitalization policies face different contexts, pursue different goals and can implement different tools.

However, these situations are not mutually exclusive and should be seen as a continuum.

In the same report strategies for revitalization are identified as:

1. Revitalization through nature – preservation of biodiversity (agronomic potential and population density low)
2. Revitalization through recreation – preservation of quality of life and biodiversity (agronomic potential low, population density medium to high)
3. Revitalization through economic development – develop rural areas for economic reasons and create synergies with other sectors such as the agro-processing industry and tourism (agronomic potential high, population density low) (Rusali, 2005; FAO, 2006).

Based on this approach, it can be stated that the major focus is on the socio-economic activities, where there is almost no reference to the traditional architectural qualities. It can only be expected that depending on the applied strategy and only if it is the third one; the traditional building stock can somehow be part of the revitalization policies. This is a natural outcome of a general tendency in the Mediterranean countries, which indicates a tendency to focus governmental effort upon sectors (such as agriculture, or industry, or environment) rather than upon territorial units. When declining economies of rural areas come into question, most of the time country-wise sectoral policies for agriculture are developed without much concern about specific rural settlements. Additionally, if only the density of the population and the agronomic potential, land degradation etc. are major concerns regarding revitalization of rural areas, long –term and targeted revitalization of existing villages may not be sustained. Thus, there would be a risk of total disappearance of the traditionally formed settlements.

At this point, it would be worthwhile to draw attention to tourism, which is considered to be a kind of environment friendly consumption industry that can be a good tool for protection of natural environment and cultural heritage. However, the last decade of the 20th century has witnessed practices in the field of tourism, which have been associated with detrimental effects to the natural, man-made and social valuable resources of many countries. As a result, tourism industry has been questioned and re-evaluated putting forward environmentally and socially responsive concepts like *sustainable tourism*, *eco tourism*, and *rural tourism*.

When considering the growth and diversification of tourism movement and the role of tourism in the economic growth and development as a flagship sector especially in the Mediterranean islands, the authentic values and traditional building stock can play a major role in the revitalization of declining rural areas. Yordamli states that: 'The Mediterranean is already the world's most significant tourist region. Its rural areas can use the environment and cultural tradition as major factors to stimulate appropriate tourism, thereby promoting sustainable development and providing hope that the population can

³ The reasons for abandonment of land are multidimensional and can be differentiated as follows: natural constraints, land degradation, socio-economic factors, demographic structure, and institutional framework. *Depopulation* is a process, whereby the resident population is leaving the area and the population density is falling below a critical level so that any socio-economic activity is hindered by the lack of people to maintain infrastructure and basic services (FAO, 2006).

be maintained at viable levels of activity and acceptable social conditions.' (2002). Findings of various researches in this field reveal that tourism would generate a positive impact on the long-term growth of small countries, hence for small islands (Hazari and Ng, 1993). Sustainable tourism, which became popular at international level and at all tourism destinations (UN, 1999) has been accepted as setting up a vital relationship between natural resources and tourism (Sharpley et al, 1997).

As rurally oriented ecotourism has grown in popularity, which is believed to be the fastest growing tourism segment, its definitions have been expanded to incorporate ideas about eco-tourist responsibility, environmentally friendly destination management, profit linkages to conservation efforts, and the sustainable development of local populations and their productions (Numan & Dincyurek, 2005).

Based on all these arguments, it can be asserted that the potential of the traditional building stock should equally be considered just like the density of the population and the agronomic potential whenever revitalization of rural settlements comes up, especially in countries, more specifically in small island states, where tourism is a flagship sector of economy. However, it should be noted that this would only be an accurate initial step in the revitalization process. Unless strategic approaches are not utilized, a good beginning would not guarantee successful results. Fulfilling the high-grade aesthetic, cultural and ecological functions of the rural area based on the protection of natural and cultural potentials of the area accompanied by the preservation of typological features of the rural identity; and the integral protection of the housing heritage, all of which integrated with social and economic measures; would only be possible through adopting strategic approaches for revitalization of specified rural settlements.

Yordamli defines *rural development* as: 'Rural Development is a deliberate process of sustained and sustainable economic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, designed to improve the quality of life of the local population of a rural region (2002).' The key points of this definition, which are: The emphasis on a deliberate and sustained **process**; the inclusion of **sustainability**; the five other adjectives – economic, social, cultural, political and environmental and the word change all comprehend both sustainable development and revitalization. As in case of revitalization of historic urban quarters, revitalization of rural settlements also can be sustained through utilization of strategic approaches. Simply because through conventional approaches it would not be possible to sustain an integrated approach to comprehend multi-faceted key elements of revitalization of rural settlements.

Keeping in line with what have been argued regarding revitalization of historic urban quarters and revitalization of rural settlements, in the following lines, a model for revitalization of traditional rural settlements will be introduced.

The proposed model for revitalization of traditional rural settlements

Based on what has been discussed in the preceding lines, revitalization of rural settlements would be much more viable, if efforts for revitalization of rural areas are settlement specific rather than being on sectoral basis for the whole country/area. Additionally, since revitalization of rural settlements with authentic traditional character is in a way sustainable development, it should comprehend protection and enhancement of the built environment, economic development and community development.

Accordingly, as a first step on conceptual level the model, which has been introduced for the revitalization of historic urban quarters, has been adopted for revitalization of rural settlements. This would ensure that the three distinct processes (protection of environment; economic development and community development) would compromise for physical and economic revitalization.

This has been followed by the development of the model itself, which keeps in line with the conceptual basis as well as the stages of strategic planning approaches.

Examination of Figure 2 reveals that some stages/ parts of the stages (like in the analysis stage) differ from that of the conventional planning approaches and as in any strategic planning process, there are five stages:

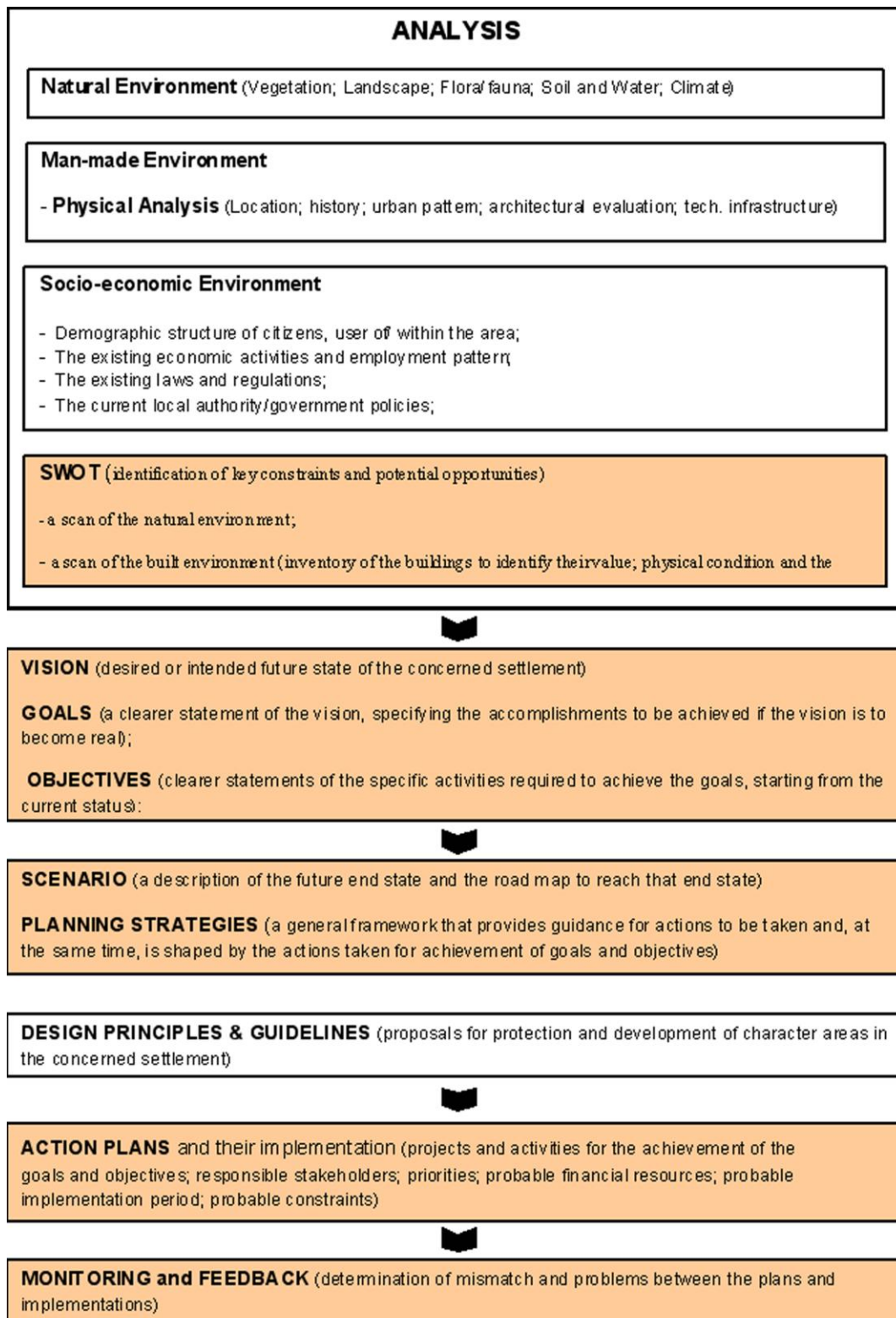


Figure 2
The Model for Revitalization of Traditional Rural Settlements

1. Analysis: This is the most important stage because in addition to classical data, key constraints, opportunities, full potential of the specific settlement is determined.
2. Vision, goals and objectives: At this stage, given 'Where we are', it is clearly identified 'Where we want to be' through *vision statement* and *goals* and 'What to do' through the objectives.
3. Development of scenario and planning strategies: At this stage with reference to vision, goals and objectives, the future end state is somewhat pictured through a scenario; and a general framework for road map for the actions through planning strategies are developed.
4. Design principles & guidelines: It should be noted that in original definition of the stages of general strategic planning, there is no such a stage. On the contrary this may be part of a conventional planning study. However, since the model is targeting a specific rural/traditional settlement, at this stage design principles and guidelines have to be determined.
5. Action plans: An important stage of strategic planning, since all activities, which are necessary for achievement of the goals and objectives; all responsible stakeholders with possible signs of probable public-private partnership; priorities; possible financial resources as well as probable constraints are determined.
6. Monitoring and feedback: Scanning and control of implementation activities for determination of possible mismatch between the implementations and plans.

If appropriately applied, the model has the potential to lead to the achievement of revitalization of any traditional settlement. However, it should be noted that it is inevitably necessary to keep all the time in line with the conceptual model as well. After all, just like in the case of historic urban quarters the proposed actions should be classified as a physical revitalization or economic revitalization activities. This would be a kind of justification of the action plan, since physical revitalization proposals are the short term interventions, which would be undertaken under the responsibility of the central/local authorities; and economic revitalization proposals are more long term interventions that would be realized through public-private partnership.

Concluding remarks

Revitalization of traditional rural settlements especially on small island states in the Mediterranean region deserves special attention. Simply because islands, more than other localities depend on a delicate balance between environment, economy and society. They are particularly vulnerable to shifts in any of these factors due to their small scale and difficulty of recovery which can be costly in many respects but may also take much longer time. Therefore, whenever revitalization of rural areas comes up, in addition to social and economic characteristics, the built and natural environment should also be equally considered.

Accordingly, the conceptual basis for revitalization of historic urban quarters, which has been suggested by the authors, has been adapted to revitalization of traditional rural settlements. It is a clear fact that the multifaceted nature of revitalization calls for utilization of strategic approaches. Pursuing the general strategic planning framework, a model has been suggested for revitalization of traditional rural settlements. It may be argued that a standard model would not always be appropriate for different settlements. However, keeping the overall structure, it may be adopted to different conditions.

As a final remark it should be noted that the most important factor in the realization of revitalization is the commitment and involvement of all stakeholders at all levels.

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