

# The Heritage of Modern Movement in Tel Aviv

## SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION VERSUS PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

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**Public consciousness in relation to built heritage in urban textures, its development, and the elements of the public discourse created in an effort to protect these textures require characterization and discussion. This topic derives from the recognition of the importance of public participation in the process of safeguarding the built heritage and in searching for ways to increase its involvement in the preservation of cultural and historical sites.**

IN THE CASE of Tel Aviv–Jaffa, this heritage has broad expression in the urban landscape, and since the 1980s has merited attention, appreciation, and criticism. In 2003, Tel Aviv<sup>1</sup> won international recognition, and portions of the city, in which this tradition found spatial expression, were inscribed on the World Heritage List (*fig. 1*).

This article focuses on the development of the public discourse in Tel Aviv as a result of the national and international heritage designation and its characteristics. It assesses the measure of assimilation of terms and distinctions that serve the professional organizations (both local and international) among the Israeli public. The central claim of this article is that the awareness of the local preservation phenomenon is usually expressed in general terms without the depth of understanding it deserves, despite the worldwide distribution of the phenomenon, and despite the professional recognition in the importance of modern architecture.

THE RESEARCH METHOD for analyzing the public discourse in Tel Aviv is based on two sources: journal reviews and a public opinion survey. In order to expose the connection between the activities of the Tel Aviv Municipality in relation to the urban built heritage and the development of proper public consciousness, we examined journalists' reports. Through their analysis, it

LA FAVEUR DE L'OPINION PUBLIQUE EST UN ATOUT SOUVENT INDISPENSABLE POUR LA MISE EN VALEUR, LA CONSERVATION OU LA SAUVEGARDE D'UN BIEN PATRIMONIAL. L'IMPORTANCE DE LA PARTICIPATION PUBLIQUE EST PARTOUT CONSTATÉE, RELAYÉE PAR LES MÉDIAS OU INITIÉE PAR EUX. CETTE CONSCIENCE PUBLIQUE, KEREN METRANY ET IRIT AMIT-COHEN CHERCHENT À EN DÉTERMINER LE RÔLE, L'INFLUENCE, LES CARACTÉRISTIQUES, EN PROPOSANT ICI L'ÉTUDE DE CAS DU PATRIMOINE BÂTI DU MOUVEMENT MODERNE DE TEL AVIV-JAFFA. À PARTIR DE RESSOURCES JOURNALISTIQUES ET D'ENQUÊTES D'OPINION PUBLIQUE RÉALISÉES EN 2006, CES DEUX CHERCHEURS PROPOSENT UNE ÉVALUATION SCIENTIFIQUE DE CETTE CONSCIENCE PUBLIQUE.

was possible to learn about the role of the printed media in the creation of a public discourse regarding the issue of preservation, its development, the popular attitudes toward this phenomenon and the changes that it underwent over the years.

The public opinion survey, that took place during 2006, examined three subjects: (1) the extent and the content of the preservation messages; (2) the difference between public consciousness characteristics and international recognition characteristics; (3) an evaluation of public awareness regarding urban preservation and planning activities.

Fig. 1.  
The White  
City  
of Tel Aviv,  
World  
Heritage  
nomination  
area



© Tel Aviv's Modern Movement: The White City of Tel Aviv - A World Heritage Site (Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, 2004), 43

THE research method, combining press reviews with public opinion survey, is based on Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) taken from the field of social psychology. This model was used to assess methods of processing media information and its ramifications on social awareness and on community involvement (Cacioppo and Petty, 1979). By using this model, the researchers proved a connection between the effective influence of written messages and the path of processing the information attached to these messages. According to Cacioppo and Petty, there are two "routes" to such processing: central and peripheral. Peripheral processing means relying on slogans, visible symbols and linguistic images instead of digging into the content, scientific justification, and empirical data. Peripheral processing of information indicates low societal involvement in the decision-making process and a passive public attitude. In order to avoid a superficial analysis of the information, the researchers recommend an insistence on transferring a singular message over time, leveraging the communication tools and integrating them with targeted social programs.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF MODERN MOVEMENT ARCHITECTURE**

In the past twenty years, with the strengthening of the environmental approach and the focus on issues of sustainability, the boundaries of the professional discourse regarding cultural and natural heritage have been significantly expanded. This trend raised new issues in relation to the selection of cultural values represented in natural and built landscapes, their appreciation, interpretation and designation.

In this period, the matured preservation conventions expanded on the practical and realist aspects of built heritage. One of these aspects is viewed in the development of twentieth century architectural heritage issues. This category includes buildings and sites of heritage values which were erected between 1900 and 1999, and which reflect the principles of modern architecture. The unique status of modern movement architecture is characterized by two essential issues: (1) architects and urban planners were influenced by social-cultural ideologies that represented the twentieth century concepts; (2) these architects and urban planners left their imprints in original settlement solutions and in uniquely formed building heritage. Indeed, the visual aspects of the modern movement architecture inspired the characterization of its product as a new architectural style—the international style.<sup>2</sup>

The modern movement left a deep physical imprint in many countries, among them Israel. During the twentieth century, these countries were characterized by accelerated development, and the new international style answered their developmental needs and their ideology. Until the end of the 1970s, the protection of buildings

and built environments that belonged to the twentieth-century architectural heritage was rife with difficulties of cultural and legal aspects. The cultural difficulties referred to the fact that the public hardly applied heritage values to buildings and structures that were created during its own generation (Bronson & Jester, 1997; Goldberg, 1995). This approach was particularly observed in countries in which a built heritage of hundreds or thousands of years was common. Moreover, it was compounded by the fact that the architectonic values of the international style were unrecognized by the public at large. The legal difficulties referred to the fact that in many countries in Europe and in the United States, legislation defined benchmark conditions based on age for heritage designation: fifty years and above. According to this approach, sites of younger age were not evaluated, were not included in the heritage lists, and did not warrant protection.

OVER THE YEARS, due to development pressures, some modern movement architectural monuments, which reflect a landmark in the development of design and construction technology, were damaged or destroyed. The call to protect these properties grew stronger in the 1980s with the establishment of professional organizations like Docomomo, Icomos, and other European forums. These organizations act to strengthen public awareness of architecture of the modern movement, and their activities memoranda and recommendations called for immediate actions to protect the endangered properties. It is of special relevance here that over the years these organizations expressed a special concern regarding the physical and legislative status of modern movement architectural sites in Israel. The broad range of activities of Docomomo and Icomos led Unesco to add a category of Twentieth Century Architectural Heritage to the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage—the most important of its conventions. Since at least 2000, twenty-four World Heritage Sites were inscribed under this category, among them the White City of Tel Aviv.

#### **TWENTIETH CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN TEL AVIV**

On any historical scale, Tel Aviv is a young city. It is less than one hundred years old, but during these years it evolved from a small suburb of old Jaffa (in 1909) into an independent city, and became the center of economic and cultural activities of Israel. The significant (short) history of the city, together with its rapid changes, gave Tel Aviv the image of an active, lively metropolis embedded with heritage values. These values have earned official international recognition due to its built heritage, which reflects a modern ideology of urban planning and modern architecture.

IN GENERAL, historic buildings that are located in the old city center (overlapping municipal quarters 3 and 5) belong to the category of twentieth century architectural heritage due to their age. It is customary to classify these buildings according to two main architectural styles: eclectic style, and international style. Each one of the styles left a clear imprint on the urban landscape, but the most prominent among them is the international style, its concentration in Tel Aviv being among the highest of any city throughout the world.

THE MUNICIPALITY of Tel Aviv identified the potential inherence of its built heritage in the second half of the 1980s. It recognized the prominence of the heritage phenomenon and its frequency in the historic city center, and captured it as a means of strengthening the urban renewal processes it had initiated. In this period, the part of the city center that was built in the 1930s and 1940s received the name "The White City." The unique design of the White City was remarked by a group of "culture intermediators"—a group of prominent personalities who belong to the cultural élite of city. These people were motivated by a nostalgic longing for the modern aesthetic and by a desire to strengthen a 'European' urban landscape for Tel Aviv (Nitzan Shiftan, 2000; Azaryahu, 2005; Rotbard, 2005; Amit-Cohen, 2005). The group acted as a lobby within the municipal authority, and advanced the awareness of the local modern movement heritage on the municipal, national and international levels.

IN THE BEGINNING of the 1990s, the Tel Aviv municipal authority was also influenced by the international recognition by Unesco of the White City's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). As a result, the preparations of preservation planning policies were accelerated.

The strengthening of the preservation phenomenon encouraged the municipality to view its modern movement architecture as a means to promote the city image as one of a modern city, to strengthen its position as a global city, to increase its international exposure, and to highlight it as a destination for cultural tourism.

The desire to create a preserved urban landscape, as well as the desire to bestow upon it international stature, led the authorities to grant the White City a special legal status through local planning policy.<sup>3</sup> This policy includes the outlining of the designated area's boundaries and the determination of planning tools and designation criteria. The desire to win international recognition for Tel Aviv's twentieth-century heritage was given practical expression in 2003, with its inclusion in Unesco's World Heritage List, basing it on two criteria:<sup>4</sup>

"(1) The White City of Tel Aviv is a synthesis of outstanding significance of the various trends of the modern movement in architecture and town planning in the early part of the twentieth century. Such influences

were adapted to the cultural and climatic conditions of the place, as well as being integrated with local traditions.

(2) The new town of Tel Aviv is an outstanding example of new town planning and architecture in the early twentieth century, adapted to the requirements of a particular cultural and geographic context."

#### **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ITS MEASUREMENT**

The declaration of the White City as World Heritage and the efforts of the local authorities to protect it in the urban planning framework are not sufficient to promote its public recognition. Researchers assign great importance to the perception and involvement of the local community in the preservation process. They sustain that public involvement in heritage decision-making influences its readiness to implement the preservation policy (Evans, 2002; Rodwell, 2002; Coeterier, 2002).

By the beginning of the 1990s, the municipality recognized the need to prepare local public opinion towards the modern movement built heritage. Nitzza Szmuk, who headed the municipal preservation team in those years, highlighted this need as follows: "the characteristics of the White City are often hidden from the public eye. They are not so accessible, and are not self-understood." In her opinion the reasons for this are embedded in "the dullness of the material and the lack of maintenance which led to physical disintegration of the buildings" (Szmuk, 2003).

As mentioned above, analyzing the local public consciousness in relation to the modern movement heritage, and to its characteristics, will explain their readiness to accept this phenomenon and their wiliness to be involved in its preservation.

#### **JOURNALISM REVIEW**

A review of the press between 1994 and 2006 in Israel's four major daily newspapers found more than 500 articles related to the heritage discussion. Furthermore, the review included publications that appeared in local newspapers, on-line editions, weekly inserts and special editions. In order to find the circumstances of the publication, a "time line" was used which indicates the main events in the process of creating the municipal preservation policy (fig. 2).

The press review indicated development of a number of aspects: the quantity of articles; their exposed and concealed goals; review trends; conceptualization of the preservation phenomenon throughout that period; its local, global, cultural, planning and economic contexts. The number of headlines dealing with the phenomenon grew slowly but constantly, and reached its peak in 2004—just after the White City was nominated as "World Heritage Site." Beginning in 2004, every event—cultural, public, political or economic—that had

a direct or indirect connection with the city built heritage, merited headlines in all the newspapers and aroused prolonged discussions.

THE REVIEW showed that in the decade from 1994 to 2004, the Tel Aviv municipality dealt with strengthening the preservation awareness within a specific professional public (mainly planners and architects). In these years, the press agenda regarding preservation was mostly influenced by the activities of the National Council for

declaration to the international style. Despite the connection between the declaration, the declaring organization, and the reason for the declaration, low proficiency was found in relation to other aspects related to the phenomenon. For instance, no correlation was found between the geographic area of the international declaration and the public conceptualization of the term "White City." More than 40% of those questioned erroneously connected the declaration with the historic business district, which is not a part of the White City.

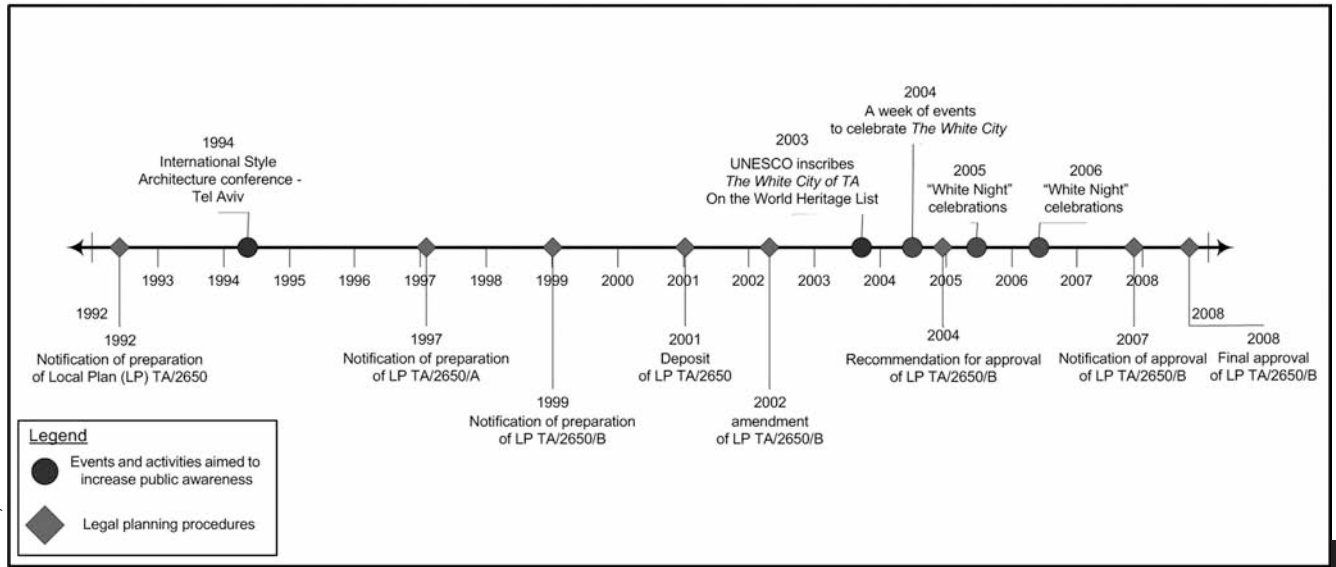


Fig. 2. Timeline indicating milestones in the policy process of urban conservation

Preservation of Monuments and Sites.<sup>5</sup> The public struggles of the council won great exposure and contributed to the expansion of the heritage discussion and to the promotion of public awareness. In these years additional actors in the media sphere were public relations persons who promoted economic-symbolic messages for entrepreneurs in development of historic buildings. From 2005 onwards, it was identified a tendency of multiplicity media messages relating to the preservation phenomenon in Tel Aviv. However, this tendency was accompanied by a reduction in the scope of explanatory messages related to the need to protect the modern heritage values.

### PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

The questionnaire survey was based on a three-pronged approach of the public's position: a cognitive prong, an emotional prong, and a behavioral prong—each assessed separately.

The findings, representing the cognitive aspect of the public's position in relation to the local preservation phenomenon, indicate broad awareness of the Unesco declaration, while demonstrating general proficiency in relation to the essence of the declaration. Some 80% of those surveyed were aware of the declaration, and some 70% of those questioned correctly connected the

Particularly prominent was the deep-rootedness of the geographic errors among residents of the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Furthermore, most of those surveyed expressed a consolidated opinion on issues related to the economic aspect of the preservation phenomenon, despite the fact that only a few of them (if any) could establish this opinion based on personal experience. The same surveyed persons indicated the high cost of preservation and the bureaucratic processes that accompanies it, and indicated a large demand for historic properties.

The findings related to the emotional element of the public's position indicate different relations towards the two architectural styles that characterize the built heritage in the city: the eclectic style and the international style. Between these two styles, there exists a slight preference for the first one. The eclectic style is regarded as more beautiful, and it creates a higher interest among the public.

The findings in relation to the behavioral aspect of the public's position indicate a readiness to adopt and implement a planning preservation policy. At the same time, the public felt that it lacked sufficient knowledge regarding the local preservation phenomenon in order to take an active part in its protection and to participate in the future design of a local preservation policy.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this article was to reveal the elements of the public discourse that had developed in Tel Aviv in relation to the preservation phenomenon. In order to identify the elements of the public discourse, the findings from two sources were cross-referenced: (1) a journals review, which presented the definitions and linguistic terms relating to the local heritage, its values and its characteristics; (2) a public opinion survey that expressed the assimilation of the terms, and the measure of acquaintance with the phenomenon. The analysis of the two sources indicates that the written media had a large but superficial influence on the public consciousness.

On the one hand, the media was responsible for the creation of a unified language. A success was achieved in relation to the assimilation of key words that describe the local built heritage, such as the White City, the Bauhaus and in relation to economic terms that are connected to the phenomenon. The heritage discourse was, however, characterized by broad statements lacking detail, especially in geographic and economic aspects.

On the other hand, the minor influence that the written media had on the assimilation of quality messages regarding the heritage values of the White City stood out. The surveyed persons did not demonstrate sufficient acquaintance with the local phenomenon, its characteristics and its uniqueness. According to the ELM model presented by Cacioppo and Petty, these findings may indicate a low public involvement relating to the preservation phenomenon and a passive and unstable public attitude.

BASED ON THE ELM MODEL and in accordance with the findings of the research, and as a conclusion, several approaches can be recommend to the city authorities to adopt as policies. These are needed for deeper public understanding of the Tel Aviv cultural built heritage and its values:

- (1) To insist on a logical, dependable and consecutive media exposure in relation to the preservation phenomenon in Tel Aviv;
- (2) To be accurate in the description of the characteristics of the modern movement heritage in Tel Aviv and to sharpen the image of its contribution to the urban appearance;
- (3) To create more frequent circumstances for raising the issue in the media's agenda;
- (4) To hold a prolonged individual-public discussion on modern movement heritage—its development, its spread, its characteristics, its uniqueness, its values, its design expressions and its elements—to reflect a period and its concepts.

The implementation of these recommendations could contribute to the awareness of the unique phenomenon of the modern movement heritage and its preservation potential in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

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## NOTES

- 1** Despite the municipal definition (adopted in 1950) "Tel Aviv-Jaffa," Jaffa and Tel Aviv are distinctively different when one reviews the city's history, built heritage assets, urban planning, preservation processes and developments in these two parts of the city. While Tel Aviv was the fastest growing city in Israel, Jaffa represents an ancient settlement rich with archeological buildings that developed at a slow and steady pace. Thus, conservation processes in Tel Aviv and in Jaffa are remotely related but very different and should be examined separately. This paper focuses on the Tel Aviv historic center with the attributes exclusive to it.
- 2** The "international style" is a term coined by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock in 1932 for the exhibition which bore this name, displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.
- 3** The first plan for protecting the built heritage of Tel Aviv is the Local Plan LP/2650/B "Preservation of Buildings and Sites in Tel Aviv," which became valid in September 2008.
- 4** Decision 27COM 8C.23 – White City of Tel Aviv – the Modern Movement (Israel). In: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1096>
- 5** Since 2008, "the Council for the Preservation of Heritage Sites in Israel."