

WALKSHOP 1.0: THE BANYAN TREE PROJECT for INTERNATIONAL DAY OF MONUMENTS AND SITES (IDMS)

Curated by: Natural Heritage Association Of Karachi (NHAK)
Collaborated with: International Council Of Monuments and Sites Pakistan
(ICOMOS) PK

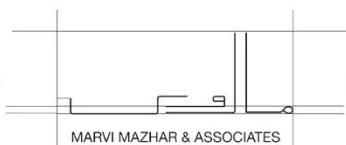


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Subject: Celebrated International Day of Monuments and Sites (IDMS)

Project: The Banyan Tree Project

Date: April, 18, 2024

Location: Salman Farsi Park, Shahrah e Iran

The International Day of Monuments and Sites is celebrated globally on 18th April 2024 and is an event annually organized by the ICOMOS International, bringing together professionals, conservationists, academics and students to identify, recognize and value the heritage. This year the theme of the International Day is ‘**Disaster and Conflict through the lens of the Venice Charter**’. The event was organized and coordinated by the Executive Council of ICOMOS Pakistan, included two important heritage sites which are both cultural and natural heritage; Frere Hall Building and The Banyan Tree Project.



Fig 1.0: ICOMOS poster designed by the ICOMOS team Pakistan

Introduction

This year, one natural heritage site visit was planned by ICOMOS Pakistan, along with short introductory speeches by key people at Frere Hall and the site of The Banyan Tree Project on the afternoon of 18th April 2024.

The aim of the site visit was to create awareness, to closely witness the spirit of the place, and understand different clauses of the Venice Charter by being part of field learnings.

The site visit planned was divided into two parts:

1. The Frere Hall Conservation Project explained by Mr. Dr. Kaleemullah Lashari under Sindh Exploration and Adventure Society (SEAS) Pakistan
2. The Banyan Tree Project by NHAK members, on Shahrah e Iran and Hatim Alvi Road, Karachi.



Fig: 2.0 During the walk Arch. Marvi Mazhar highlighted about the issues of preservation and protection of The Banyan Trees

Learning from Experience:

Marvi Mazhar, Arif Belgaumi & Mariyam Iftikhar.

A guided tour also known as a *walkshop* was curated by Architect Marvi Mazhar, Arch. Mariyam Iftikhar and Arch. Arif Belgaumi was an active member of Natural Heritage Association of Karachi (NHAK) to celebrate International Day with ICOMOS Pakistan.

Discussion Points:

- Narrated the History of Old Clifton, Karachi and its importance to the environment.
- Discussed about the Policy and Legal Framework of Banyan Trees as a 'Heritage Site'
- Contribution of Sindh Government and District Administration
- The ideology of Park Development in context of Karachi
- Understanding the difference between chopping and pruning - an act of Infrastructural Care
- Management & Way Forward
- Activism / Being Proactive in City's Conversation

Walkshop Participants:

Architects, Marvi Mazhar, Arif Belgaumi, Dr. Anila Naeem, Samia Sarfraz, Marianne from SEAS, Tania Soomro, Fawad Soomro, Faryal Sikandar, Dr. Asma Ibrahim, Areeba Ahmed, Hira Batool, Subhana Fatima, Zain, Zahida Quadri and Dr. Masooma Shakir.

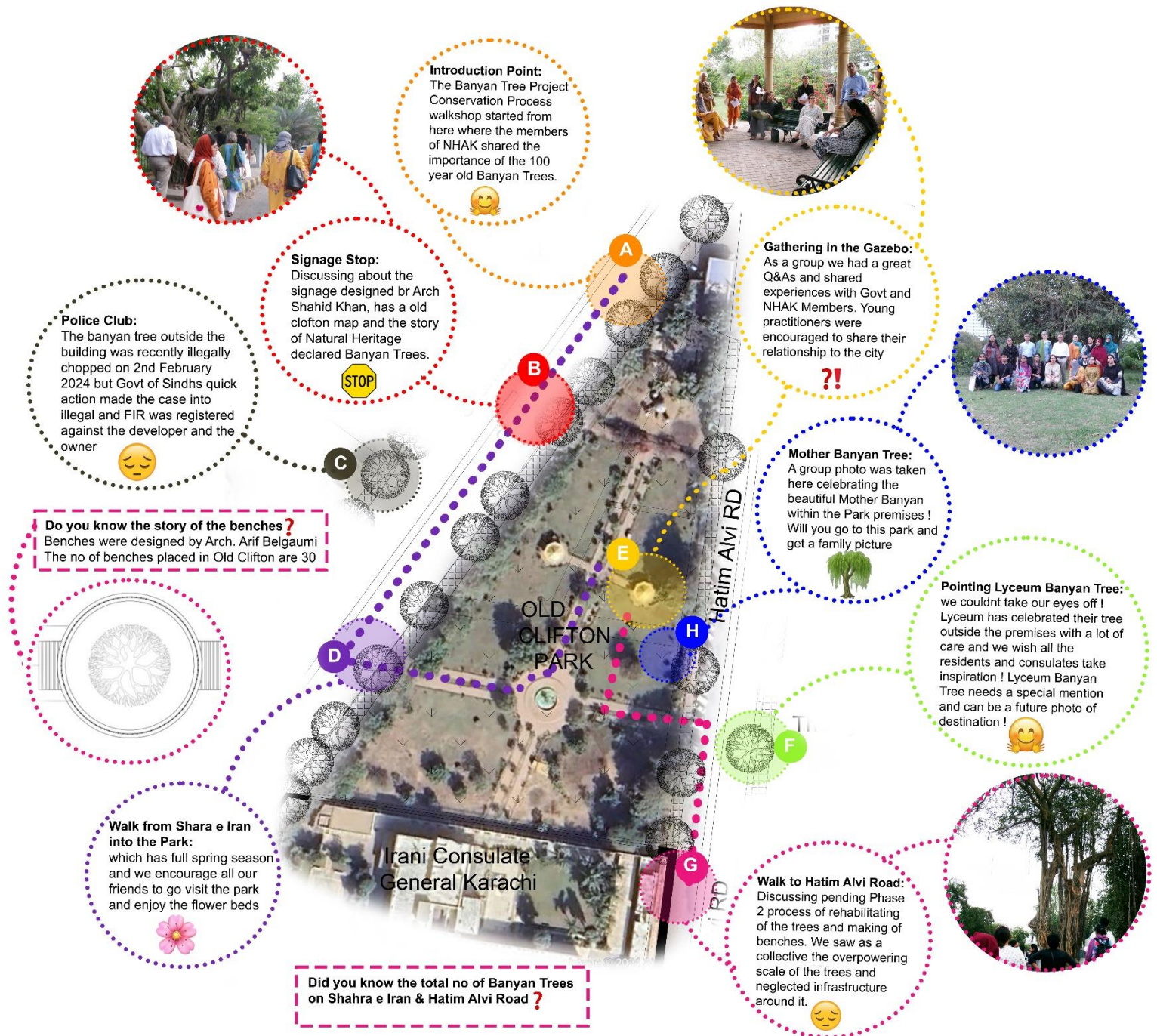


Fig no 3.0: Walkshop map designed by Marvi Mazhar & Associates MMA, shares the points where information was discussed by NHAK members

The NHAK team shared the learnings and experiences with participants focusing on the preservation and protection of more than 100-year-old banyan trees on 25th September 2020.

They highlighted that it is important not only from the beautification perspective but it is our historical heritage. They further explained that Banyan trees, with their sprawling canopies and intricate root systems, are not just trees; they are living monuments to the wonders of nature. Banyan Trees' significance extends beyond their botanical importance; they are cultural symbols, spiritual icons, and ecological treasures.



Fig 4.0: Arch. Marvi Mazhar, Arif Belgaumi and Mariam Iftikhar sharing challenges of preservation of The Banyan Trees Project

Discussing the Challenges: Process of Preservation & Declaring Banyan Trees as Heritage

Historical Importance: As the tour progressed, participants delved into the historical significance of banyan trees in various cultures and civilizations. They shared stories of

ancient banyans serving as meeting places, shelters, in some cultures, emphasizing their enduring presence throughout history.

Context Challenges: In the aftermath of the 2002 suicide bombing outside the Consulate General of the United States, consulates in the Clifton area were compelled to create denser fortifications and a process of double barricading soon began. These barricades both enveloped and contained the numerous trees (now caught in concrete) that are present outside consulates in Old Clifton. More recently, developments of the Clifton underpass and construction of Park Towers have also transformed the built environment home to these heritage trees and have accelerated the stream of traffic that flows through Clifton and towards Two Talwar. Finally, after the tragic Peshawar School Massacre of 2014, many educational facilities in the Clifton area have also increased security measures by developing wider barriers around their premises. As a consequence of these abrupt fortifications and developments, many argue that the natural fabric of this historic area has come under particular threat. All these above-mentioned issues have led to deterioration of Old Clifton's ecological order.

Ecological Importance: Amidst the shade of towering banyan canopies, participants gain insights into the ecological role played by these majestic trees. She discusses their contribution to biodiversity, providing habitat for numerous species of plants and birds, and their role in stabilizing soil and preventing erosion. And it is important to highlight that The Banyan Trees are home to indigenous birds and the ecological system of Old Clifton of Karachi accommodates a very important migratory pattern as well.

Declaring The Banyans as Heritage: Senator and advisor to Chief Minister Sindh Mr. Murtaza Wahab, on 7th December 2019 issued an order in respect of the ongoing Banyan Trees conservation project, declaring the significant Banyan Trees in Clifton and all other parts of Karachi city, as protected Heritage.

Sharing the Progress

National Heritage Association of Karachi (NHAK) Vision

In the context of preservation of Banyan Trees, the Natural Heritage Association Karachi milestones:

1. Team held a first inception meeting on 14th November, 2019, in the Commissioner office Karachi. In the first meeting, the NHAK team presented its vision for the conservation of 68 significant Banyan Trees on the Shahrah e Iran.
2. With the partnership of NHAK team and Sindh Government the inauguration of Banyan Trees held on 01st December, 2019 at Old Clifton Public Park, Mr. Iftikhar Shallwani, Commissioner, Karachi to chair the conserving project. Marvi Mazhar and Associates presented the Condition Survey Report, Field Documentation, and proposed Master Plan of Banyan Tree Project.
3. On 7th December, 2019 the official declaration of Banyan Trees was issued, as **'Protected Heritage'** by Sindh Government.
4. Sept 2020, Banyan Trees declared as a Natural Heritage site by the Sindh Government.

Continuation of the Conservation Conversation: the tour also shed light on the conservation challenges faced by banyan trees due to urbanization, habitat loss, and climate change. Arch. Marvi Mazhar narrated the vision of NHAK's ongoing conservation efforts aimed at protecting these natural heritage sites and engaging local communities in the preservation process. The collaboration with the Sindh Government and NHAK

proved that projects partnered in holistic strategies can lead to positive outreach for the betterment of the city and its ecological factors.

During the discussion under the shed at the Salman Farsi Park, Mr. Irshad Sodher, former Deputy Commissioner South Karachi, shared his experiences of the preservation project

and further elaborated on the Governments lens working with civil society and professionals to guide the project through a detailed narrative and further emphasized on ensuring his support for future initiatives and encouraged young professionals to be part of city development and positively fostering relationship with local governance.

As per the project concept Phase 01 focus on Shahra e Iran and as per Government Proposal Phase 2 was to consider Hatim Alvi Roads 68 Trees but right now as a conclusion the Phase 2 is a pending project for the future.



Fig.5.0 Former Deputy Commissioner South Mr. Irshad Sodher, discussing about the government contribution for The Banyan Trees Project



Fig 6.0: Participants observing maps of Banyan Trees in Old Clifton Karachi.

Developing a Way Forward: Relationship with Organizations, Civil Society & Banyan Tree Project

ICOMOS Pakistan works to protect and preserve natural heritage under the charter of UNESCO, Banyan Trees are declared natural heritage, ICOMOS work with collaboration of Government and other non-governmental organizations to ensure the preservation and protection of Banyan trees, and celebrate as natural heritage.

Conclusion:

A guided tour curated by NHAK of The Banyan Trees Projects offers a multifaceted exploration of nature, culture through storytelling, experiential learning, and hands-on activities. Participants gain a newfound appreciation for these ancient giants and the vital role they play in the city.

As stewards of the environment, it is our collective responsibility to safeguard these treasures for future generations to cherish and celebrate. At the end Arch. Marvi Mazhar shared the way forward that Civil Society, ICOMOS, NHAK and Government of Sindh should continue this collaboration with each other for further progression of the Banyan Trees in Karachi



Fig:6.0: Participants group photo

Credits

A Project of Natural Heritage Association Karachi (NHAK)

NHAK Members

Ms. Marvi Mazhar (Heritage Consultant / Architect)

Mr. Arif Belgaumi (Architect)

Ms. Mariam Iftikhar (Architect)

Mr. Shahid Khan (Architect)

Ms. Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy (Film Director)

Mr. Toufique Pasha Mooraj (Environmental Activist)

Ms. Sara Tahir Khan (CEO FM91)

Special Acknowledgment

ICOMOS, Pakistan

The event was organized and coordinated by the Executive Council of ICOMOS Pakistan current office: Zahida Quadri, Vice President ICOMOS and Dr. Masooma Shakir.

Government of Sindh

Report Developed by

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