

Heritage Sites in **Sousse** and the **Kerkennah Islands** as Levers for Sustainable Territorial Development and SDG Implementation.

Heritage-Driven Urban Revitalization to Advance SDG 11.4.

Policy Paper – 2026



Prepared by
Sana Smadah Sghaier, PhD,
Laboratoire d'Archéologie et
d'Architecture Maghrébines
(LAAM), Faculty of Letters, Arts
and Humanities - University of
Manouba, Tunisia



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Sana Smadah Sghaier, PhD,

Laboratoire d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Maghrébines (LAAM), Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities - University of Manouba, Tunisia

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PREFACE

Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires more than translating global goals into national targets – it demands that sustainable development be rooted in the realities, needs, and capacities of local territories. Local and regional governments are indispensable actors in this process: they deliver essential services, address inequalities on the ground, and turn policy commitments into concrete actions. Yet this critical role is only fully effective when backed by strong evidence, meaningful knowledge exchange, and coherent governance across levels.

The Local2030 Knowledge and Scientific Network (KSN) was established within the UN Local2030 Coalition precisely to respond to this need. As a dynamic global platform, KSN connects young researchers, policymakers, community leaders, and practitioners around a shared mission: to harness science for sustainable development with local impact. It does so by aligning academic inquiry with the specific priorities of local development stakeholders, while amplifying research findings as inputs to SDG-related global processes.

Central to this approach is the understanding that research must not only be produced – it must be translated into policy and action. KSN promotes a more dynamic and responsive model of academia, one that co-creates scalable solutions rooted in scientific evidence and community priorities, and that empowers local actors with the skills, tools, and institutional support needed to engage in evidence-based decision-making and influence policy. Through its Country Pilots – sponsored by the Italian government and implemented by UN-Habitat and the Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI ETS) – and Innovation Labs, the network operationalizes this vision by connecting universities and students with local policymakers, enabling interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity-building in territories across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Action-research is the methodological backbone of this work. Territories are engaged not as passive subjects of study, but as spaces for experimentation and learning, where sustained interaction between researchers, local governments, civil society, and communities drives learning, adaptation, and co-creation. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods – data analysis, spatial assessments, stakeholder engagement, and participatory approaches – this process generates a comprehensive and grounded understanding of local dynamics, inequalities, and development opportunities.

This policy paper is the result of that process. It reflects the outcome of collaboration between academic research, territorial analysis, and multi-stakeholder dialogue, in the spirit of the KSN's core objective: translating research into policy and action. Its aim is to offer context-sensitive analysis and practical policy recommendations that can inform SDG localization at the local level – bridging the gap between global agendas and the communities that will ultimately determine their success.

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1. FOREWORD

This policy paper has been developed within the framework of the Local2030 Knowledge and Scientific Network (KSN), an initiative of the Government of Italy in partnership with UN-Habitat and CeSPI ETS, anchored to the Local2030 Coalition. KSN connects experts and scholars worldwide to support the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and bridge research, knowledge production, and local policymaking.

The author thanks UN-Habitat, both at headquarters in Nairobi and in Tunisia, for guidance and support, and the municipalities of Sousse and Kerkennah Islands for their collaboration. Both cities had previously identified the degradation of their built heritage, and their proactive engagement justified their selection as case studies. Despite contrasting contexts—a dense historic coastal city and a fragile island archipelago—they share a common strategic entry point: valuing local knowledge, traditional construction techniques, and cultural practices as levers for socio-economic revitalization.

Through the KSN Local Labs, municipalities hosted participatory research platforms bringing together local authorities, experts, community members, and stakeholders. Safeguarding and revitalizing heritage in Sousse and Kerkennah reflects a bottom-up approach aligned with SDG 11.4, building on locally identified needs to outline practical, context-sensitive pathways for heritage-driven urban revitalization.



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Tunisia, the urban and architectural heritage of Sousse and the Kerkennah Islands face significant degradation, a challenge recognized both locally and nationally. Municipal authorities have highlighted the need for targeted interventions to preserve and revitalize these heritage assets. Both territories confront common challenges, including heritage erosion, limited public awareness, and weakening social cohesion.

This policy paper adopts a programmatic, heritage-driven approach to the revitalization of historic urban landscapes, grounded in the concept of everyday heritage. Rather than focusing solely on monuments or exceptional ensembles—although their value is fully acknowledged—the strategy deliberately centers on ordinary built and cultural heritage. These everyday heritage assets, often unprotected and overlooked, are critical to local identity, social practices, and urban continuity, and their safeguarding aligns with SDG 11.4, which calls for strengthened efforts to protect the world’s cultural and natural heritage.

In Sousse, the focus is on 20th-century built heritage, increasingly recognized in Tunisia and internationally for its architectural and historical significance. In Kerkennah, the emphasis is on neighborhoods with patio houses and traditional residential clusters, reflecting coherent urban patterns, vernacular architectural responses, and the use of sustainable local construction materials. Both contexts illustrate heritage under-documentation and insufficient protection, highlighting broader challenges in valuing and integrating ordinary heritage into urban development.

Beyond conservation, this heritage-driven approach is conceived as a lever for urban revitalization, aiming to rebuild social ties, stimulate local economies, and promote inclusive territorial development. The strategy unfolds through a multi-level programmatic framework, from which actions and recommendations will derive and be implemented at different scales and timeframes.

1. Knowledge Production: Identification, documentation, and assessment of the respective everyday heritage assets, creating a robust evidence base for planning and intervention.
2. Advocacy and Regulatory Frameworks: Addressing legal gaps, promoting protection mechanisms for ordinary, non-listed heritage, and strengthening municipal capacities.

3. Citizen Awareness, Participation, and Co-Production: Engaging communities in consultation processes, fostering locally grounded solutions, and rebuilding social cohesion.
4. Implementation of Concrete Projects: Translating strategy into fundable, actionable projects that mobilize public and private resources, while promoting ecologically sustainable approaches—less costly and less polluting than full-scale reconstruction.

These four levels provide a common entry point for both case studies. However, acknowledging the specificities of each territory—their geographic, social, and economic contexts—the recommendations are tailored to local needs, ensuring both relevance and coherence within the overarching revitalization strategy.

3. CONTEXT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Across Tunisia, urban and architectural heritage is increasingly exposed to degradation as a result of rapid urban transformation, development pressures, and limited integration of heritage considerations into local planning frameworks. While national strategies acknowledge the importance of cultural heritage, its protection and management—particularly at the local level—remain fragmented and uneven.

In this context, the cities and territories of Sousse and the Kerkennah Islands illustrate shared structural challenges as well as distinct territorial dynamics. In both cases, municipal authorities have identified the deterioration of urban and architectural heritage as a pressing concern and have expressed the need for targeted, operational responses aligned with local realities.

A central issue common to both territories is the progressive loss of “everyday heritage”—built environments that are neither monumental nor formally protected, often privately owned, and rarely perceived as heritage by their owners or users. This includes ordinary residential fabrics, vernacular buildings, and coherent urban ensembles that embody architectural, social, and environmental values. Despite their significance, these assets are frequently demolished or altered, leading to the erosion of local identity, social cohesion, and environmentally responsive construction practices.

In Sousse, urban change has increasingly affected an extensive 20th-century urban fabric developed in close juxtaposition with the UNESCO-listed Medina. Often described as “European” or “Colonial” heritage, this fabric forms a coherent urban ensemble and represents a valuable architectural and historical legacy, illustrated by distinctive Neo-Moorish, Art Deco and Art Nouveau buildings and by the continuity of historic residential neighborhoods. Beyond their aesthetic and historical qualities, these areas contribute to the identity of local communities and to the layered character of the city.

From a Historic Urban Landscape approach, such heritage should be understood as an integral component of the urban landscape and a resource for sustainable development, rather than as isolated buildings. In principle, these assets should be documented, safeguarded, and valorized to enhance the cultural and social value of historic neighborhoods. However, in practice, the absence of effective legal protection allows the demolition of architecturally distinguished buildings, often

replaced by generic constructions, leading to the gradual erosion of urban coherence, heritage value, and collective memory.

In the Kerkennah Islands, the fragility of the insular context further intensifies these challenges. Vernacular architecture and traditional settlement patterns are deeply rooted in local ways of life and in a close relationship with the natural environment. Neighborhoods characterized by patio houses and coherent residential clusters reflect adaptive architectural responses, the use of local and sustainable construction materials, and long-standing socio-spatial practices that are well adapted to local climatic conditions and resilient to future climate change. Together, these elements form a distinctive cultural landscape that combines built heritage with rich intangible traditions, notably the ancestral fishing technique of Charfya, inscribed on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Despite this significance, Kerkennah’s everyday heritage remains largely under-documented and insufficiently integrated into heritage and urban development policies. One of the most critical challenges stems from inheritance-related ownership fragmentation. Conflicts among heirs—between selling, demolishing, subdividing, or individually redeveloping inherited properties—have led to progressive abandonment, physical deterioration, and fragmented construction practices. In many cases, interventions labeled as “restoration” result in substantial alterations, including the elimination of patios to increase floor area, the removal of load-bearing walls, and the reconstruction of buildings in ways that compromise architectural authenticity and urban coherence. These dynamics contribute to the gradual erosion of Kerkennah’s vernacular heritage and undermine its potential as a resource for sustainable and culturally grounded territorial development.

The degradation of everyday heritage in both territories is further compounded by weak identification and inventory systems, limited public awareness, and insufficient mechanisms for community engagement. As a result, heritage is often perceived as an obstacle rather than a resource for sustainable territorial development.

Addressing the challenges of heritage degradation in both case studies is expected to generate concrete outcomes. First, heritage assets—both built and intangible—will be identified, documented, and assessed, creating a robust evidence base to guide planning and interventions. Second, legal and policy frameworks will be strengthened, with enhanced municipal capacity to protect ordinary, non-listed heritage and implement safeguarding mechanisms. Third, communities will be actively engaged in participatory processes, fostering awareness, co-design, and social cohesion. Finally, pilot heritage-led projects will demonstrate sustainable, scalable interventions, mobilizing public and private resources and providing replicable models for broader urban revitalization, directly supporting the localization of SDG 11.4.

4. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH

This policy paper adopts a heritage-driven urban revitalization approach, primarily aligned with SDG 11.4 and, secondarily, with the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) framework. Heritage is understood as an integrated system, connecting built assets, spatial patterns, social practices, and intangible elements, with the aim of promoting sustainable development, inclusive governance, and community engagement.

The framework is operationalized through four key principles:

1. **Comparative perspective:** The analysis examines two territorial contexts to identify both common challenges and context-specific solutions, ensuring strategies that are locally grounded and transferable.
2. **Participatory and educational engagement:** The study was conducted in close collaboration with municipal authorities, local stakeholders, and community members. Field surveys, interviews, local labs, workshops, and consultations enabled the collection of qualitative and quantitative insights, fostering local ownership and raising awareness. These participatory processes also generate tangible knowledge products, including preliminary heritage inventories for selected sample areas identified as representative of both case studies and possessing significant potential for urban revitalization, as well as documented case studies and analytical reports. Such outputs contribute to knowledge production that can support municipal planning, inform heritage-sensitive development strategies, and provide reference tools for monitoring future interventions and heritage management.
3. **Focus on everyday heritage:** Priority is given to non-monumental, under-protected assets that contribute social, cultural, and environmental value. This includes private properties, vernacular constructions, and historically significant modern buildings, whose preservation is critical for sustaining resilient urban coherence.
4. **Policy alignment:** All analysis and proposed orientations are aligned with municipal, national, and international frameworks, particularly SDG 11.4, ensuring that recommendations can be integrated into broader urban development and heritage strategies.

This approach enables a holistic assessment of heritage assets, highlighting vulnerabilities, governance gaps, and opportunities for sustainable revitalization. It is designed to be practical, adaptable, and replicable in diverse contexts, providing a solid foundation for future project design, institutional engagement, and donor investment.

5. THEORY OF CHANGE

Heritage can serve as a powerful lever for sustainable territorial development. By recognizing and valuing cultural and built assets, cities can stimulate economic opportunities, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance urban resilience. This paper addresses two distinct contexts—Sousse and Kerkennah—in parallel. While the challenges and responses differ, this comparative approach highlights context-specific strategies while drawing broader lessons for heritage-driven urban revitalization.

Recommendations are presented as tailored, place-based interventions rather than one-size-fits-all solutions, recognizing the importance of local specificity within a unified national framework and the need for multi-level, multi-stakeholder governance.

Inputs and activities include knowledge production, participatory engagement, advocacy, and pilot heritage initiatives involving local authorities, experts, and communities. These are expected to generate **outputs** such as heritage inventories, documented case studies, awareness actions, policy recommendations, and small-scale rehabilitation pilots. In turn, these outputs aim to produce **outcomes** including improved heritage protection, strengthened municipal capacity, enhanced social cohesion, and new local economic opportunities. **The overall impact** is sustainable territorial development and the effective localization of SDG 11.4.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

In the following section, the policy paper presents a set of general recommendations structured to address three key policy questions: what to do, why it matters, and how it can be implemented. These recommendations stem directly from the programmatic revitalization strategy outlined above and are designed to provide an operational framework for action. For each general recommendation, the analysis is subsequently translated into context-specific measures, tailored to the distinct territorial realities of Sousse and the Kerkennah Islands. This two-tiered approach ensures both strategic coherence at the policy level and practical relevance at the local level, allowing shared challenges to be addressed through locally adapted solutions.

6.1. Recommendation 1: Strengthen Knowledge and Identification Frameworks for Heritage Assets

Effective urban revitalization cannot occur without a solid knowledge base. In Tunisia, the lack of systematic identification and documentation of everyday heritage continues to undermine informed decision-making, leaving ordinary yet culturally and socially significant assets exposed to degradation or irreversible loss. Strengthening knowledge and identification frameworks is therefore a strategic prerequisite for any heritage-driven urban policy. By establishing comprehensive inventories, spatial mapping, and qualitative assessments of non-monumental, often privately owned heritage assets, public authorities gain the capacity to anticipate risks, prioritize interventions, and guide urban transformation rather than react to it.

Investing in knowledge production is not a purely academic exercise; it is a cost-effective policy tool that supports sustainable urban management. Compared to large-scale reconstruction, early identification and preventive action reduce long-term financial burdens while promoting environmentally responsible practices, in line with SDG 11.4. Moreover, shared and accessible knowledge enhances institutional coordination, facilitates partnerships with universities and civil society, and creates a common reference framework for planners, municipalities, and local communities. In this sense, knowledge becomes both a governance instrument and a catalyst for social engagement, enabling heritage to be integrated into broader urban

development strategies rather than treated as a constraint.

6.1.1. Sousse's Recommendation 1 – Build the knowledge and identification foundations for 20th-century heritage

In Sousse, building a robust governance framework for 20th-century heritage requires the establishment of an integrated knowledge and identification foundation. This recommendation calls for the creation of a thematic documentation library, a multidisciplinary heritage inventory, and an official municipal register of publicly owned heritage assets. Currently, knowledge remains fragmented and dispersed, limiting the capacity of public authorities to protect, prioritize, and integrate heritage into urban planning processes. A comprehensive, geolocated, and legally recognized inventory is therefore essential to inform decision-making, guide urban transformation, and contribute directly to the implementation of SDG 11.4. Implementation should rely on the centralization of existing and new research through partnerships with universities and cultural institutions, the conduct of standardized inventories combining archival research and field surveys, and the formal integration of the municipal heritage register into urban planning tools.

The Municipality of Sousse would play a coordinating and validation role, supported by universities and research laboratories—including the National school of architecture and urban planning in Tunis (ENAU), Higher Institute of Environmental, Urban and Building Technologies (ISTEUB), the Sousse Institute of Fine Arts, private architecture schools in Sousse, and research labs such as the Laboratory for the Study of Archaeology and Architecture of the Maghreb (LAAM), where many researchers focus on Sousse—as well as architects, historians, NGOs, and cultural associations involved in dissemination and public engagement (including Association for the Safeguarding of the Medina (ASM), Association for Research and Studies on the Memory of Sousse (AREMS), Association PRAXIS for art and design, Association “Mémoire et Édifices”, and the Association of Alumni of Bab Jédid High School).

Monitoring and evaluation should be conducted annually, based on the number of buildings documented and geolocated and the completeness of the library and inventory compared to planned coverage, under the supervision of an ad hoc municipal–technical committee (a project-specific municipal technical committee could be created) or in partnership with local universities and research laboratories, with periodic adjustments recommended as needed.

This recommendation is particularly significant for Sousse, as its recent designation

in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities will further encourage the production and sharing of knowledge, including the systematic documentation and inventorying of 20th-century heritage. UNESCO already acts as a partner and potential funding source to support these initiatives.

Expected outcomes

- Formal recognition of previously undocumented heritage assets
- Clear identification of local architectural and urban heritage
- Establishment of a shared municipal heritage library and database centralizing collected knowledge
- Creation of a reliable knowledge base to support future protection and planning measures
- Recognition of heritage as a prerequisite for its protection

Key actors and roles

- Municipality: coordination of the process, hosting and management of the common library and database.
- Universities and research institutions : archival research, historical studies, architectural surveys, mapping and documentation.
- National heritage institutions (INP) : technical guidance and alignment with national standards.
- Local stakeholders and civil society: Participatory mapping of heritage. Contribution of local knowledge and support to identification efforts.

Measurable progress markers (Monitoring indicators)

- Number of buildings inventoried
- Number of buildings with documented architectural and urban history
- Volume of archival research conducted and materials collected

- Number of architectural surveys and field studies completed
- Production of heritage maps and cartographic documentation
- Establishment of a municipal thematic heritage library and database
- Accessibility and use of the collected data by municipal services

6.1.2. Kerkennah's Recommendation 1 – Document, recognize, and safeguard vernacular urban and architectural heritage

In Kerkennah, the recommendation focuses on establishing a pilot heritage documentation and inventory program targeting vernacular architecture and cultural landscapes. Much of the local heritage remains under-documented and unprotected, despite its strong links to community identity, traditional livelihoods, and ecological resilience. The program should combine geolocated architectural surveys, archival research (when available, given that archival sources are often limited for vernacular architecture), oral histories, and participatory mapping with local communities, documenting building typologies, conditions, ancestral construction techniques, traditional know-how, and the use of sustainable local materials. Where feasible, advanced approaches such as 3D documentation and H-BIM modeling should be employed to build a precise and dynamic heritage database.

Implementation relies on close collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. This includes the local municipalities of Kerkennah for coordination; universities and research laboratories in architecture, anthropology, and environmental studies, conducting study visits and field-based workshops with supervised student groups—particularly from the National School of Architecture and Urbanism (ENAU) of Tunis—supporting façade documentation, mapping of public spaces, and heritage assessments. Under the supervision of faculty familiar with Kerkennah, these academic partnerships provide a cost-effective, high-quality approach while strengthening knowledge transfer and capacity building.

Local associations and community representatives such as Intergenerational Communication Association – Kerkennah Branch (ACG) actively participate in participatory mapping and inventory activities. The program also engages the Insular Heritage Museum of Kerkennah, placed under the aegis of the Cercina Center for Research on Mediterranean Islands, led by the Tunisian scholar Abdelhamid Fehri, recognized as a leading expert on Kerkennah. Additionally, ONU-Habitat Tunisia supports monitoring and evaluation, while the National Heritage Institute (INP)

collaborates on annual reviews and quality control.

All outputs of the inventory and documentation process will be integrated into municipal and regional planning tools, linking heritage data to land-use plans, zoning regulations, and development guidelines, thereby supporting sustainable and culturally-informed urban management. Monitoring and evaluation indicators include the number of heritage assets documented and geolocated, the level of community participation, and the degree of integration of findings into planning. By consolidating knowledge, fostering community engagement, and leveraging partnerships with academic, governmental, and international actors, this initiative will create a strong foundation for the protection, valorization, and sustainable development of Kerkennah's vernacular heritage, fully aligned with SDG 11.4.

Expected outcomes

- Comprehensive documentation and recognition of Kerkennah's vernacular heritage and cultural landscapes
- Creation of an operational heritage database integrating architectural, environmental, and intangible dimensions
- Strengthened community engagement and preservation of traditional knowledge
- Integration of heritage data into planning tools, supporting culturally informed development aligned with SDG 11.4

Key actors and roles

- Local municipalities of Kerkennah: coordination and integration into planning frameworks
- Universities, research institutions, and ENAU: documentation, surveys, and academic supervision
- Local associations and community representatives: participatory mapping and knowledge sharing
- National and international heritage bodies (INP, UN-Habitat Tunisia): quality control, monitoring, and technical support

Measurable progress markers (Monitoring indicators)

- Number of heritage assets documented and geolocated
- Level of community participation in inventory activities
- Establishment of an operational heritage database
- Integration of results into municipal and regional planning instruments

6.2. Recommendation 2 – Enable legal protection for ordinary historic urban ensembles

Recommendation 2 focuses on enabling legal protection for ordinary historic urban ensembles and adapting regulatory tools to address the challenges posed by derelict heritage and shared ownership constraints. While existing legal frameworks primarily cover exceptional or listed assets, many historic neighborhoods remain unprotected, leaving façades and vernacular ensembles vulnerable to deterioration. Strengthening municipal regulatory tools, including mandatory façade maintenance, and applying targeted legislation for buildings at risk ensures both the preservation of urban identity and the safety of residents, directly supporting SDG 11.4. Implementation relies on drafting clear municipal by-laws, anchoring them in existing frameworks (CATU, PDUI, Heritage Code, Law No. 2024-33), and ensuring enforcement through inspections, graduated sanctions, and emergency interventions when needed. Partnerships with municipalities, technical experts, cultural institutions, legal professionals, property owners, and communities are key to effective and context-sensitive application.

6.2.1. Sousse's Recommendation 2

In Sousse, the emphasis is on strengthening municipal regulatory frameworks for ordinary historic urban ensembles, particularly through mandatory façade maintenance regulations. Municipal by-laws should be drafted and anchored in the CATU and Heritage Code, using data from PDUI inventories to identify ensembles at risk. Enforcement mechanisms—including timelines, inspections, and graduated sanctions—should ensure compliance by both public and private building owners.

The Municipality of Sousse leads adoption and enforcement, with technical guidance from the Ministry of Equipment and Habitat and validation from the Ministry of Culture / National Heritage Institute (INP).

Monitoring should track the number of façades maintained, compliance rates, and annual municipal reports on the condition of urban ensembles. This approach allows Sousse to protect ordinary heritage pragmatically, preserve urban identity, and implement a scalable and sustainable model for heritage governance.

Expected outcomes

- Legal protection of ordinary historic urban ensembles
- Preservation of façades and urban identity
- Improved compliance with maintenance regulations
- Scalable and sustainable municipal heritage governance

Key actors and roles

- Municipality of Sousse: drafting, adoption, enforcement
- Ministry of Equipment and Habitat: technical guidance
- Ministry of Culture / INP: validation and technical advice
- Property owners & local communities: compliance and engagement
- Technical experts: assessment and maintenance guidance

Measurable progress markers

- Number of façades maintained
- Compliance rates of building owners
- Number of inspections and sanctions applied

- Annual municipal reports on heritage condition

6.2.2. Kerkennah's Recommendation 2 – Adapt regulatory and planning tools to address derelict heritage and shared ownership constraints

In Kerkennah, the priority is to adapt regulatory and planning tools to address derelict vernacular heritage and complex shared ownership constraints. Many abandoned or structurally unsafe houses represent both heritage assets and public safety hazards, with multiple heirs and unclear property rights delaying necessary interventions. Law No. 2024-33 provides a legal entry point to identify and prioritize buildings posing immediate risks, while heritage-sensitive procedures distinguish between demolition and emergency stabilization, favoring temporary safeguarding and consolidation of culturally significant structures. Simplified mediation and notification mechanisms should allow municipalities, in partnership with technical experts, to act even when full consent among heirs is not achieved, with costs recoverable later. Key stakeholders include the local municipalities of Kerkennah, the Ministry of Equipment and Habitat, legal experts and notaries, and local communities and property owners.

Monitoring and evaluation will track the number of unsafe buildings secured, cases addressed under shared ownership, and the reduction of safety incidents, ensuring both heritage preservation and public safety, fully aligned with SDG 11.4.

Expected outcomes

- Secured and stabilized unsafe vernacular heritage buildings
- Preservation of culturally significant structures despite shared ownership constraints
- Reduced public safety hazards linked to derelict buildings
- Enhanced capacity of municipalities to intervene in complex property situations
- Practical application of heritage-sensitive emergency procedures aligned with SDG 11.4

Key actors and roles

- Local municipalities of Kerkennah: identification, prioritization, and intervention
- Ministry of Equipment and Habitat: technical guidance and regulatory support
- Legal experts and notaries: advice on property rights, mediation, and documentation
- Property owners / heirs and local communities: collaboration and facilitation of interventions
- Technical experts / architects: assessment, stabilization, and consolidation of heritage structures

Measurable progress markers

- Number of unsafe vernacular heritage buildings secured or stabilized
- Number of cases successfully addressed under shared ownership agreements
- Reduction in reported safety incidents linked to derelict buildings
- Number of emergency interventions completed using heritage-sensitive procedures
- Documentation of municipal capacity strengthened to manage complex property scenarios (protocols, trained staff, successful interventions)

6.3. Recommendation 3 – Strengthen awareness, mediation, and public engagement

Recommendation 3 focuses on strengthening awareness, mediation, and public engagement to make heritage visible, understood, and valued by residents, youth, and visitors. Knowledge and appreciation of heritage are prerequisites for sustainable protection, legal enforcement, and public investment, fully supporting SDG 11.4.

Implementation involves a combination of traditional and innovative awareness-raising actions: temporary interventions (architectural lighting, façade projections), thematic guided walks, short audio-visual content, and immersive digital tools such as QR codes, VR/AR apps, and digital twins, as well as “before-and-after” visualizations of renovated buildings to communicate impact. Additionally, citizen and artistic engagement is central: workshops, participatory design sessions, and artist residencies allow residents to co-create, project, and visualize renovated buildings, ensuring that local communities’ perspectives and aspirations are integrated into heritage initiatives. These activities foster a sense of ownership, intergenerational dialogue, and active participation, enhancing the legitimacy and sustainability of protection measures.

Partnerships with municipalities, cultural services, universities, NGOs, media, tour operators, and private sponsors are crucial to enable broad-based participation, knowledge dissemination, and the scaling of pilot actions. Monitoring and evaluation focus on events conducted, participation rates, digital content reach, community feedback, and integration of citizens’ and artists’ contributions, providing actionable insights for future initiatives.

6.3.1. Sousse’s Recommendation 3

In Sousse, the strategy emphasizes making 20th-century heritage tangible and engaging for diverse audiences. Actions include architectural lighting and façade projections, thematic guided walks with youth participation, short audio-visual content, and immersive digital tools (QR codes, VR/AR apps, and digital twins). Visual tools such as before-and-after posters communicate the impact of interventions, while workshops and artist residencies engage residents in co-designing and reimagining renovated buildings, capturing their visions for the urban environment. Key stakeholders include the Municipality and cultural services, the Ministry of Culture / National Heritage Institute (INP) / Tunis International Center for

Digital Cultural Economy (TICDCE), local associations (AREMS, PRAXIS), schools and universities (Sousse Institute of Fine Arts, private architecture schools), media and digital platforms, and tour operators. For the private sector, Elbirou Art Residency in Sousse can be included, providing a hosting space for artistic residencies.

Monitoring and evaluation track events organized, participant numbers, digital reach, community input, and pilot testing feedback, ensuring measurable impact on heritage awareness and citizen engagement.

Expected outcomes

- Increased awareness and appreciation of 20th-century urban heritage among residents, youth, and visitors
- Active citizen engagement in co-designing and reimagining renovated buildings
- Strengthened sense of ownership and intergenerational dialogue around heritage
- Sustainable legitimacy of heritage protection measures through participatory initiatives
- Enhanced visibility and understanding of heritage through digital and physical interventions

Key actors and roles

- Municipality and cultural services: coordination, hosting events, overseeing interventions
- Ministry of Culture / INP / TICDCE: validation, technical guidance, and support for digital tools
- Local associations (AREMS, PRAXIS) and schools/universities (Sousse Institute of Fine Arts, private architecture schools): participatory workshops, youth engagement, co-design activities
- Media and digital platforms: dissemination of audiovisual and immersive content
- Tour operators: support in heritage walks and guided experiences

- Private sector (Elbirou Art Residency): hosting artistic residencies and collaborative workshops

Measurable progress markers

- Number of awareness events organized (workshops, guided walks, projections, etc.)
- Number of participants engaged (residents, youth, visitors)
- Digital reach of content (VR/AR apps, QR codes, digital twins, audiovisual media)
- Community and participant feedback collected and integrated into initiatives
- Number of co-created designs or proposals from workshops and artist residencies
- Evidence of increased citizen engagement and ownership in heritage projects

6.3.2. Kerkennah's Recommendation 3

In Kerkennah, the focus is on community-led awareness and sustainable heritage valorization, integrating heritage, traditional knowledge, and local livelihoods. Actions include revitalizing neighborhood public spaces by hosting local folklore performances and festivals, while simultaneously promoting renovation and adaptive reuse through creative industries, low-impact digital tools (QR codes, audio guides, digital twins, before-and-after visuals), and mural art projects, which can be implemented in pilot areas to depict well-known local figures symbolizing Kerkennah's history of activism, conveying the archipelago's politically significant heritage. Workshops and artist residencies engage residents to co-create visual narratives and project renovated buildings, ensuring that heritage interventions reflect community aspirations. Pilot initiatives strengthen eco-tourism, crafts, and fishing traditions while enhancing vernacular architecture (Here is the idea of a "Crafts Village" that combines tangible built heritage with intangible cultural heritage.) Key stakeholders include local associations and community groups (Association for the Continuity of Generations – ACG; Kraten Association for the Sustainable Development of Culture and Leisure – AKDDCL), municipality and cultural services, universities and NGOs (e.g., Higher Institute of Arts and Crafts of Sfax – ISAMS), tourism operators and cooperatives, and private sponsors and communication partners.

The private sector plays a fundamental role in supporting heritage initiatives through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. Partnerships with banks and other companies, which have an interest in culture, education, and community development, can provide critical funding and technical support for heritage projects. Such collaborations not only mobilize resources for restoration, awareness, and community engagement activities, but also strengthen the social legitimacy and sustainability of interventions.

Monitoring and evaluation focus on number of events and initiatives, participation rates, community feedback, and social/economic impacts, ensuring heritage awareness, citizen engagement, and sustainable local development in line with SDG 11.4.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased awareness and appreciation of heritage, traditional knowledge, and local livelihoods
- Active community engagement in co-creating visual narratives and planning renovated spaces
- Strengthened intergenerational dialogue and local ownership of heritage
- Promotion of sustainable local development (eco-tourism, crafts, adaptive reuse)
- Visibility of politically and culturally significant heritage through creative interventions

Key Actors & Roles

- Local associations and community groups (ACG, AKDDCL): participatory workshops, co-creation
- Municipality and cultural services: coordination, hosting events
- Universities and NGOs (ISAMS): technical guidance, participatory projects
- Tourism operators and cooperatives: eco-tourism and cultural activities
- Private sector / CSR partners, banks, sponsors: funding, technical support

- Artists / creative industries: murals, festivals, residencies, visual storytelling

Measurable Progress Markers

- Number of heritage awareness events, festivals, workshops, residencies
- Number of participants engaged (community, youth, visitors)
- Community feedback collected and integrated
- Number of pilot initiatives implemented (mural projects, Crafts Village, adaptive reuse)
- Reach and usage of digital tools (QR codes, audio guides, digital twins, before/after visuals)
- Evidence of positive social and economic impacts (eco-tourism, crafts, livelihoods) private resources, and create replicable models for broader interventions across Kerkennah.

6.4. Recommendation 4: Implementation of a Pilot Heritage-Led Urban Revitalization Project through International Cooperation and SDG Localization

This recommendation aims to operationalize the heritage-driven development strategy through the implementation of a concrete, modular pilot project within the study sample areas. The project focuses on revitalizing a representative urban space by mobilizing both tangible built heritage and intangible cultural practices, demonstrating the feasibility and impact of heritage-based urban revitalization.

Starting with a single site or neighborhood allows for visible improvements, community engagement, and the creation of a replicable model for broader interventions. International cooperation and SDG localization mechanisms play a crucial role in supporting implementation, capacity building, and financing.

6.4.1. Sousse' recommendation 4 – Pilot Revitalization Approach

In Sousse, the pilot project targets a representative public building or communal space within the study perimeter, particularly in areas surrounding the historic core.

Intervention

- Adaptive reuse of a public heritage structure or improvement of a communal space as a multifunctional cultural and social hub
- Integration of cultural activities, exhibitions, workshops, and community services
- Enhancement of surrounding public spaces (streetscapes, pedestrian areas, small squares)

Expected Effects

- Tangible urban improvement and reactivation of underused areas
- Strengthening of social cohesion and local identity
- Demonstration of sustainable adaptive reuse practices
- Attraction of local economic activity and cultural initiatives

International Cooperation

Sousse could engage decentralized cooperation with Mediterranean historic cities such as Palermo, Naples, or Valencia, which have implemented large-scale revitalization of historic urban areas.

Through partnerships, study visits, and technical exchanges, the municipality can access expertise in heritage management, sustainable tourism, and inclusive urban revitalization.

Participation in international frameworks such as UN-Habitat, Local2030, and UNESCO can further support project design, monitoring, and alignment with SDG localization objectives.

6.4.2. Kerkennah's recommendation 4– Pilot Revitalization Approach

In Kerkennah, the pilot focuses on revitalizing a representative vernacular setting—such as a traditional courtyard, neighborhood cluster, or communal space—by integrating both architectural heritage and living cultural practices.

Intervention

- Rehabilitation of a vernacular space using traditional materials and techniques
- Activation of the site through craft workshops, community gatherings, cultural events, and small-scale eco-tourism activities
- Promotion of local intangible heritage, including fishing traditions, folklore, oral history, and community practices

Expected Effects

- Preservation of vernacular architecture and cultural identity
- Strengthening of social cohesion and community participation
- Creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities
- Demonstration of heritage-based development in a fragile island context

International Cooperation

Kerkennah would particularly benefit from partnerships with island territories facing similar environmental, socio-economic, and heritage challenges. Engagement with island networks, including SMILO—with Kerkennah Island currently a label in progress—can provide valuable technical expertise on sustainability, climate resilience, and community-based development. In addition, twinning arrangements with SMILO-labeled islands—such as Lavezzi Islands in France or Formentera in Spain—would facilitate the exchange of best practices in heritage preservation,

sustainable tourism, and environmental management.

The Kerkennah diaspora represents another key partner, offering financial support, technical knowledge, and advocacy, while maintaining strong cultural and social ties with the islands. Such cooperation can strengthen local capacities, promote knowledge transfer, and support the implementation of context-sensitive revitalization initiatives adapted to the specific realities of small island territories.

Collaboration with Local2030, UN-Habitat, Medcities and UNESCO can facilitate funding opportunities, capacity building, and integration into global SDG implementation frameworks.

Rationale

By implementing a single, carefully selected pilot project supported by international cooperation, this recommendation:

- Translates strategic visions into concrete action
- Demonstrates the socio-economic value of heritage
- Mobilizes local, national, and international stakeholders
- Enables learning through exchange and technical cooperation
- Creates a scalable model for other neighborhoods, cities, and island territories

Ultimately, the pilot serves as a catalyst for a broader heritage-driven urban revitalization process aligned with sustainable development goals.

7. CONCLUSION

Sousse and Kerkennah face urgent challenges due to the degradation of their built and intangible heritage, threatening cultural identity and sustainable urban development. This policy paper proposes four integrated recommendations—knowledge production, advocacy and regulatory frameworks, citizen engagement, and pilot projects—to address these challenges in a modular and action-oriented way.

These interventions are expected to generate tangible outcomes: heritage assets will be identified and recognized, legal frameworks strengthened, communities engaged, and pilot projects providing scalable models for heritage-led urban revitalization. This approach combines preservation with participatory, sustainable strategies, fostering socio-economic benefits and social cohesion while directly contributing to SDG 11.4.

The experience of Sousse and Kerkennah demonstrates that heritage can serve as a strategic lever for territorial development. Modular, small-scale initiatives can be scaled or adapted to other cities, offering a replicable framework for municipal authorities, policymakers, and international partners to support heritage-driven urban revitalization.

8. ACRONYMS

ASM — Association for the Safeguarding of the Medina (Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina, Tunisia)

CATU — Land Use Planning and Urban Development Code (Code de l'Aménagement du Territoire et de l'Urbanisme, Tunisia)

CeSPI — Centre for Studies on Public Policies, Italy.

CSR — Corporate Social Responsibility

ENAU — National School of Architecture and Urbanism of Tunis (École Nationale d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme de Tunis)

INP — National Heritage Institute (Institut National du Patrimoine, Tunisia)

ISAM — Higher Institute of Arts and Crafts (Institut Supérieur des Arts et Métiers, Tunisia)

ISTEUB — Higher Institute of Technological Studies of Urban Planning and Building (Institut Supérieur des Technologies de l'Environnement, de l'Urbanisme et du Bâtiment, Tunisia)

KSN — Local2030 Knowledge and Scientific Network

PAU — Urban Development Plan (Plan d'Aménagement Urbain, Tunisia)

PDUI — Integrated Urban Development Program (Programme de Développement Urbain Intégré, Tunisia)

SDGs — Sustainable Development Goals

SMILO — Small Islands Organisation

TICDCE — Tunis International Center for Digital Cultural Economy

UN-Habitat — United Nations Human Settlements Programme

9. KEY CONCEPTS

Built heritage

Physical elements of cultural heritage, including historic buildings, urban fabric, and architectural structures of cultural value.

Heritage Code (Tunisia)

Legal framework governing the protection, preservation, and management of cultural heritage in Tunisia (Code du Patrimoine, Tunisia).

Intangible cultural heritage

Practices, knowledge, skills, and traditions transmitted within communities, contributing to cultural identity and continuity.

Everyday heritage

Heritage assets of local significance that are not formally listed but play an important role in daily life, collective memory, and sense of place.

Vernacular architecture

Traditional building forms and construction techniques developed in response to local climate, materials, and cultural practices.

Heritage-led urban revitalization

An approach that uses cultural heritage as a driver for sustainable urban and territorial development, social cohesion, and economic opportunities.

Participatory approach

A process that actively involves citizens and local stakeholders in decision-making, planning, and implementation.

Co-production

Collaboration between public authorities, experts, and communities in designing and implementing policies or projects.

SDG localization

The process of adapting the Sustainable Development Goals to local contexts, priorities, and governance systems.

Urban planning instruments

Regulatory tools such as development plans, zoning regulations, and planning codes that guide land use and urban development.

Derelict buildings

Abandoned or structurally unsafe buildings that pose risks to public safety but may also hold heritage value.

Shared ownership (co-ownership)

Property ownership distributed among multiple heirs or stakeholders, often complicating decision-making and interventions.

Pilot project

A small-scale intervention designed to test feasibility, demonstrate impact, and provide a model for replication or scaling up.

Scalability

The potential for an initiative to be expanded or replicated in other areas or contexts.

Community-based development

Development initiatives driven by local needs, capacities, and active participation of community members.

Climate resilience

The capacity of communities and systems to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from climate-related impacts.

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smadahsana91@gmail.com



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