

# Preface

This book illustrates the complex work carried out by Politecnico di Milano, highlighting Italian excellence around the world and the important role played by our country and its leading experts in places that are geographically far but very close in terms of their historical and cultural connections. For thousands of years Multan has been an important caravan and trading city situated on a major trade route. On the basis of an ancient tradition, this is also the place where Alexander the Great died and where some of the main Sufi saints came from. Such figures highlight how Multan was once and continues to be a bridge between the Western world and the Islamic world and between Asia and Europe.

The Italian cooperation project to restore part of the old town centre of this ancient city was first launched in 2012 as part of the Pakistani–Italian bilateral debt-for-development conversion scheme and takes major action to protect the artistic and historical heritage of one of the most fascinating urban fabrics in Pakistan and, perhaps of, all Central Asia. Presented as a platform for the economic relaunch of the area, the project's main goal is the social and environmental redevelopment of spaces and buildings that have been left abandoned for many years, plus an improvement in the health conditions and quality of life for the many thousands of people living and working in the “walled city”. The project is also important for the process of identity building of those living in Multan as, with over 70 % of the local population under the age of 30, it enables new generations to rediscover their past and build their future using these origins as a starting point.

Italy therefore paves the way with a large-scale project that encompasses technical and scientific analysis, architectural restoration, capacity building and fight against poverty, by safeguarding ancient trades and protecting the environment and human health. It is hoped that in the future this innovative idea may act as a model for other similar projects carried out by other stakeholders to ensure propitious restoration of the entire old city of Multan and to protect a rapidly declining legacy that could otherwise disappear completely over the course of a few years, victim of an advanced state of neglect and of new construction procedures that pay little attention to the original fragile urban fabric.

This book illustrates how in the first stage, with ongoing support from the Embassy in Islamabad, Politecnico of Milano played a key role not only in carrying out vital activities such as mapping, surveying and planning, but also in acting as a “steering committee” to help drive the project on and facilitate the often difficult interaction between the many figures and various administrative levels involved.

I would like to pay my compliments to Fondazione Politecnico di Milano and the team of researchers, technicians and experts of Politecnico di Milano, led by Professor Adalberto del Bo, who have done a commendable job in the key sector of artistic and historical heritage protection. The work performed by Politecnico di Milano honours Italian tradition in this sector and links its name to a project that will be of very significant importance to Pakistan and the region.

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