

Promoting Integrated Heritage Conservation and Management in Iraqi Kurdistan Region

Applicability of Values-Based Approach; The Case Study of Akre and Amedy City in Duhok Province

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Abstract

Nowadays, heritage is perceived as an invaluable asset that can preserve peoples' identity and generate wealth. The role of heritage conservation in promoting sustainable development has been widely acknowledged. Yet, it is a cross-disciplinary issue, which should be integrated into urban and regional planning and related policies. To facilitate the integration process, it is necessary to understand and consider all the values that are attributed to heritage sites along with an active involvement of all relevant stakeholders as a first step in the conservation process. These are the basic principles of what is known as "values-based approach" to heritage conservation and management. This approach is fundamentally supported in theoretical discussions as a recent robust mode of integrated approaches, while its effectiveness in practice is constantly debated, a problem this study is dealing with.

Historically, Iraq was pioneer in setting laws and regulations and adopting international guidelines and conventions regarding heritage including specific standards for sites that possess a unique value. Nonetheless, the rich urban heritage that represents different ethnics and religions in Iraqi Kurdistan Region has long been suffering from deterioration due to various processes.

This thesis describes the current condition of heritage sites and the extent to which it has been treated in an integrated manner. In addition, it identifies the relationship among the involved stakeholders and analyses the perceptions of local residents toward the interventions and performance of the government in relation to conservation of heritage. At the end, the study explores the applicability of values-based approach in the context of Kurdistan Region.

The methodological approach adopted in this thesis follows a case study design. Based on a series of criteria, the study has selected the cities Akre and Amedy in Kurdistan Region. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, including: document and archive analysis, observation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. It also uses workshops to investigate the applicability of values-based approach in real contextual condition.

Based on these two cities, i.e. Akre and Amedy, the research finds out that heritage in Kurdistan Region is threatened due to the rapid changes of heritage sites, which are caused by on-going private and governmental projects in the absence of clear conservation plans and adequate legal instruments. Moreover, land use planning and tourism related activities are taking place without integration of conservation plans especially those related to cultural heritage sites, and adequate coordination, cooperation and communication among relevant stakeholders. At the same time, local residents perceive heritage conservation as an important task and demand active involvement in the conservation process.

The research findings confirm that one of the main factors in applying values-based approach is stakeholders' willingness to participate in the process. Moreover, the practice of selecting sites and identifying their values represents an appropriate procedure to enhance stakeholders understanding of the conservation needs and their different perspectives. It also encourages stakeholders to think more holistically of the site's potentials, facilitates evolvement of many ideas for the site management, and builds trust especially between residents and government staff. Further, the process opens an opportunity for diverse groups to reinforce their identity.

In conclusion, values-based approach is convenient for the current context of Kurdistan as this region is in the process of making political changes and identity-building phase. However, the extent of success is situational depending on the characteristics of stakeholders, institutional arrangements and other changes which might develop in the future.

Keywords: urban heritage, sustainable development, values-based approach, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, stakeholders, identity building.