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Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: Syria

The Role of Civil Society in Protecting Syrian Antiquities in Conflict

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The transformation of peaceful protests in Syria into an armed conflict led to the collapse of state authority and institutions, including the institutions of preserving antiquities and tangible cultural heritage¹. Random excavation, organized plunder and stolen antiquities trafficking had spread. Simultaneously, the bombing caused massive damage to archaeological sites and museums and the intentional and systematic destruction of cultural heritage. Facing this destruction and violations, initiatives emerged within civil society, and groups of activists and archaeologists were formed, inside and outside Syria, that documented violations, theft and damages resulting from random bombing and protecting museums and their items.

In fact, destroying and plundering historical sites in Syria leads to the destruction of all signs and evidence of ancient societies and their lifestyles (Kila, 2013, p. 320). It also causes "a division in the national, sectarian and social pattern, which increases Syria's disintegration as one country with one people, united by a common history, experiences and aspirations" (Al-Azm, 2015). The destroyed cultural heritage in war may have a severe impact on the identity of people who survived this war (Bahrani, 2008), with evidence proving that this destruction provides resources to prolong the war and provoke violence (Lostal & Cunliffe, 2016). Nevertheless, cultural heritage preservation affects public policies and is a critical step in reconstruction, reconciliation and building civil society (Giblin, 2013).

¹ According to UNESCO, tangible heritage includes buildings, historical places, monuments, artifacts and others, which are considered worthy of protection and should be preserved in an optimal way for future generations. However, the intangible heritage includes, but is not limited to, traditional festivals, oral traditions, epics, customs, lifestyles and traditional crafts... This study focuses on tangible heritage only due to the specificity of the organizations working in it and the possibility of limiting it to some extent.

CASE EVOLUTIONS

By the end of the last century, more than 4,500 archaeological sites² had been discovered in Syria, more than 90% of which were located in conflict areas, which resulted in damaging almost 710 archaeological buildings and sites, including 140 historical buildings (General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, 2015). Many of these sites were damaged in a way they cannot be repaired³. Before 2011, there were 38 museums, more than two-thirds of them were closed, and there are conflicting reports about the fate of their items, in addition to 138 national and foreign archaeological missions that are excavating, before all foreign missions leave by the end of 2012 (Sheikh Musa, 2015).

In fact, the encroachment on antiquities began with the transformation of the archaeological sites into military barracks⁴ and the transformation of many others into battlefields⁵. Furthermore, some of the sites were subjected to airstrikes by the authority forces⁶, others by the International Coalition⁷, while other sites were under attack of mortar by the opposition militants⁸.

² Some of them are registered as world heritage and they are the old neighborhoods of Damascus, old Aleppo, which is considered the oldest human settlement currently in the world, Qalaat al-Madiq, Krak des Chevaliers, the ancient city of Bosra, the city of Palmyra, and the ancient villages in northwestern known as the forgotten cities.

³ Antiquities in Aleppo were under «irreversible damage», including the temple of the «gods of the storm», which dates back to the second millennium BC, and is one of the oldest structures in the world that have been recently discovered and not yet opened for public viewing. (New York Times, 2012).

⁴ Such as the Citadel of Aleppo, the Maarat al-Numan Museum and the Citadel of Ibn Maan in the countryside of Palmyra.

⁵ Ancient mosques, churches and markets in Homs have been relegated to ruins, including the cathedral of Umm Al-Zinnar. Old Aleppo faced severe damage in the «Sultanah Mosque», the Bimaristan, the Museum of Popular Traditions, and two hundred antique buildings and more than a thousand shops in the old city market.

⁶ -Such as Qalaat Al Madiq, Al-Raqqa Museum, Al-Zahrawi Palace in Homs, Krak des Chevaliers and the historic city of Ebla.

⁷ Like the city of Raqqa.

⁸ The mortar attacked the western façade of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.

As a result of the chaos that predominated in Syria, organized crime has spread⁹, and mafias have stolen many Syrian excavations and antiquities equipment, whose value was estimated at the beginning of the conflict at almost \$ 2 billion (BBC, 2013). Later, many international and military parties evolved in plunder, theft, and artifacts smuggling, considered underdeveloped and primitive operations carried out by ignorant poor people; In fact, they were organized operations to meet the needs of art galleries and antiquities collectors in the black art markets in the Western hemisphere, noting that the involved parties benefited from these antiquities theft and earned huge profits¹⁰, which led to the prolong the conflict to preserve these interests that increased on the sidelines of the war. (Hardy, 2017). It is known that recovering stolen pieces and discovered before 2011 is possible relying on international agreements, as they are registered and recognized. However, the challenge is to recover the pieces extracted by random excavation and are not registered, except for some pieces photographed by archaeologists and documented their excavations. In addition, satellite images show the spread of illegal excavations¹¹ in hundreds of archaeological sites, where heavy machinery was used, and some of them were destroyed¹².

The attacks on archaeological sites are not ceased at the systematic theft and plunder, but rather exceed and reach other situations, such as the displacement of many refugees to these sites that were transformed into housing or new buildings over these sites, taking advantage of their columns and stones¹³, in addition to the spread of the phenomenon of transforming archaeological sites into stone quarries¹⁴. Peak's violations occurred in 2015 after this tangible heritage witnessed intentional destruction of historical buildings, shrines and statues to serve ideological and takfirism carried out by ISIS¹⁵.

During these years, civil organizations contributed to documenting cultural heritage's destruction in several ways, combating illegal trade and raising awareness about the tragedy of Syrian

antiquities. Local initiatives were launched at a very early stage, such as "Together to protect antiquities in the event of a security

vacuum" and "Aleppo Antiquities Group"¹⁶. Then it withdrew due to the horror of the violent conflict, only to return at the beginning of 2013 with the increase in global interest and the establishment of several universities and international organizations to allocate programs to preserve the Syrian heritage, such as UNESCO, the International Council of Museums, the World Monuments Fund, the Archaeological Institute of America and others¹⁷. That coincided with the emergence of several foreign non-profit organizations. The majority of its founders were archaeologists and excavation missions that left Syria at the beginning of the events, such as the Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage in the United States of America, the Archaeologik organization in Germany, the University of Copenhagen initiative "Heritage in Syria in Danger", and the International Shirin Foundation¹⁸ and other institutions. Syrian civil institutions outside Syria were established by Syrian archaeologists who left the country and built relations with Western scientific institutions, such as the Syrian Antiquities Protection and "To Syria" in France and Heritage for Peace (HfP) in Spain and others¹⁹. With the evolution of the chronological events, the need for local agents appeared; thus, civil cases that were present in the opposition areas, such as the Idlib Antiquities Center, the Syrian Association for the Preservation of Antiquities

16 Collective effort by specialists and alumni of the archeology department at the University of Aleppo interested in diffuse the archaeological culture in Aleppo and all issues related to the current state of the archaeological buildings in Aleppo Archeology.

17 In 2013, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) published a Red List of Endangered Antiquities in Syria, which is a network of the global museum community that has a consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The World Monuments Fund created a web page called «The Syrian Crisis», and shared a petition and fundraising campaign for donations to preserve the threatened Syrian heritage. Furthermore, UNESCO supported the «Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Heritage» project, headquartered in Beirut. It also carried out measures to monitor the situation, raise awareness and provide technical support for the emergency protection of the Syrian cultural heritage, as well as the American Institute of Archeology (AIA), Blue Shield International, British Association of Near Eastern Archaeology (BANE), Culture in Development (CiD) in the Netherlands, Global Heritage Fund (GHF American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), and Archaeologik in Mainz (Germany) <http://archaeologik.blogspot.de/search/label/Syrien> International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and others.

18 The Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage (ARCH), 2013, Washington, which, in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution Blue Shield, established the Working Group to Protect Syrian Heritage in Crisis which includes experts in heritage preservation, media, diplomacy, history, antiquities and other fields <http://www.archinternational.org/syria.html>. And the Network of Archeology in Syria aiming mainly at «connecting those interested in diffusing the multi-disciplinary knowledge accumulated through continuous archaeological excavations and research in the Near East in general and Syria in particular», <http://ainsyria.net>. <http://hisd.tors.ku.dk>, and Heritage for Peace (HfP) in Arona (Spain), 2013. It organized workshops and training and provided help in establishing a crisis team in Damascus. Its website includes scientific articles on Syrian heritage, and a comprehensive list of resources focusing on heritage preservation and management: <http://www.heritageforpeace.org/>. In addition to the «Syrian Heritage Archive Project» of the German Archaeological Institute at the University of Cologne and funded by the German Foreign Ministry. The project works in cooperation with the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in Syria (DGAM), and aims at developing a database capable of integrating all information about Syrian archaeological sites, including topography, many archaeological artifacts and details of the excavations through archives and photos. The International Shirin Association, a non-governmental organization composed of archaeologists and mission managers, worked on three projects in Syrian sites until 2011; one of them carries out regular damage assessments of sites and excavation houses. Another project is developing an information system capable of integrating all archaeological data from recent surveys. Finally, the database will help in carrying out an inventory of artifacts as accurately as possible. As for the third endeavor, it includes recording the topography of sites, despite how small and isolated they are. The Cultural Heritage Initiative at the American School of Oriental Research (Muraqab Cultural Heritage) is a secure and confidential online platform that allows its users to report any information related to theft and destruction of cultural assets in Syria: <https://bit.ly/2GqJUuw>

19 The Association for the protection of Syrian Archaeology (APSA) was founded in France in 2012, documents the ongoing destruction of Syrian heritage via website, Facebook page and YouTube channel, with updates provided by archaeologists, journalists and students in archeology and architecture: <https://www.bit.ly/2IOjNRe>. As for the SAFE Network, Save Antiquities for All (France, 2011), it promotes the protection of Syrian heritage on its page (Syria: A Global Affair). This network provides a useful overview of the conflict's impacts on Syrian heritage, (suspended), and the association "To Syria" in France (almost suspended).

9 Plundering Roman mosaics from the ancient city of Apamea, where thieves used bulldozers to break through the Roman tiles and move them from the site. A statue of an Aramean deity dating back to the eighth century BC disappeared from the Hama Museum. The Qalaat Jabaar Museum in Raqqqa was also robbed and 17 antique dolls dating back to the third millennium BC were plundered, as well as pieces from "Mary" and "Dura-Europos" in Deir Ezzor, and Apamea in Hama and the Yarmouk Valley in Daraa, in addition to the site of "Tall Agaga" in the south of Hasaka, and the southwestern and southeastern cemeteries in Palmyra.

10 The antiquities trade has become the second source of money for the Islamic State (after selling oil) through what is known as the «Department of (Natural) Resources» that collects money in exchange for issuing licenses for illegal excavations in regions under its control and permitting the entry of excavations machines. After obtaining the antiquities, the thieves get two grace periods to sell them, and then the pieces are returned to the group's antiquities department, which is trying to sell them in an auction affiliated with the organization. The militant also grants 5% of the value of the antiquities he sells to the treasury of Tahrir al-Sham imposes it as a tax on any of its militant who finds and sells antiquities.

11 Illegal excavations occurred in Tal Shaikh Hassan in Raqqqa and in the countryside of Deir Ezzor, including the sites of Tal Tabus, Tal Maadan Atiq, Tal Al-Sen, Mary, Dura-Europos and Al-Rahba. In the countryside of Aleppo, Castle Necmettin, Barad and Jabal Khaled were subjected to secret excavations, and in the southern region, excavations and secret excavations took place in Kharab al-Shahim, al-Qusay, and Khirbet.

12 Satellite images of Dura-Europos and elsewhere indicate that the mafias have access to great resources and expertise, not to mention heavy equipment, evidence of their recruitment of expert mercenaries and archaeologists.

13 Especially in the forgotten cities of Idlib, in the sites of Al-Bara, Serjila, Qalaat Harem and Kafr Hawar.

14 As happened in the sites Taqla, Rifada and Deir Samaan in Mount Simon.

15 The tombs of Sheikh Al-Aqili Al-Manbaji, Shehab Al-Din, Tal Azaz, Tal Souran, Tal Dabiq and An-Nabi Dawud were completely destroyed, and the ancient monastery of Saint Elian in the city of Al-Qaryatayn was demolished. ISIS reached the peak of bombing where they attacked the Bell Temple in the ancient city of Palmyra in August 2015.

and Heritage, the Aleppo Antiquities Division and others²⁰ were invested in exchange for greater cooperation with civil organizations in areas controlled by an authority such as the “Al-Adiyat Association” and the Syria Trust for Development, and with the government structure represented by the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, noting that the results were limited in the areas controlled by the authority and areas controlled by the opposition, and often focused on short-term plans.

Between 2011 and 2014, 14 civil institutions were established to protect the Syrian heritage, including 6 Syrian institutions, while the rest were established in Western capitals and included members of foreign, Syrians or Syrian origin (Perini & Cunliffe, 2014, p.23), which led to the difficulty of separation between the Syrian and Western organizations, especially that the perception of archeology is a common human heritage. It has resulted in multinational groups that cross borders, whose activities reflect a model for what is called a global civil society²¹ (Keane, 2003). However, local civil initiatives were facing administrative and financing troubles that were highly bureaucratic and sometimes politicized.

ROLES

Most of the civil institutions for tangible heritage were formed from academic activists, whether foreign and Syrian archaeologists, university professors or members of cultural research centers, which played an essential task in programming their roles vertically from the top to the base. As a result, forms of “remote work” dominated most heritage protection projects. This tendency dominated the Syrian organizations that work closely with foreign partners. The primary roles tended to mobilize and advocate in the international community, attract media attention and try to influence international policies on Syrian heritage. Their actions focused on publications (such as articles and books), lectures, conferences and workshops (Perini & Cunliffe, 2014, p. 21).

In a relatively late phase, some organizations have played more practical roles, such as collecting information, images and reports, including details of illegal excavations, maps and documentation, and developing electronic databases capable of integrating archaeological information, topography and many archaeological artifacts. The roles more closely related to local communities remained limited, such as restoration projects, control measures and the detection of illegal trade or the proposal of new bills.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that integrating antiquities protection efforts with development projects and improving livelihoods and local cultural resources have not been discussed yet, despite being the most feasible (UNESCO, 2017, Lessons Learned from Mali). Some civil activists also took the initiative to document the destruction of archaeological sites, the protection of some antiquities, and their transformation into safe places²².

20 Many of these initiatives are currently suspended: The Antiquities Department of the Local Council in Aleppo (suspended) <https://bit.ly/2vhtakc>, documentation of the affected archaeological sites in Homs (suspended) <https://bit.ly/2L4ggKe>. Syrian Association for the Preservation of Antiquities and Heritage (suspended) <https://bit.ly/2vgli2n>. Syrian Archaeologist Studies Center, MDMAK: <https://bit.ly/2Vi2LBu>. And the Archeology in Syria network, the Department of Antiquities of the City of Busra al-Sham (suspended): <https://bit.ly/2UQzi1W> Tourism and Antiquities Protection Authority in Al-Hasakah, <https://bit.ly/2IMkJ8x>, Idlib Antiquities Department: <https://bit.ly/2USufOD>

21 By definition, it is «a dynamic non-governmental system of interconnected actors coming from different countries whose members have different nationalities and organize themselves across borders within a new common field».

22 For instance, numerous documents of the destruction in Palmyra belong to the activist Ibrahim al-Mutlaq, while the activist Omar Islam documented the antiquities in Aleppo and the protection of part of them. For more information, watch the new Guardians of the Heritage movie: <https://bit.ly/2IP6hNd>



STRATEGIES

- Saving what can be saved. For instance, through the Heritage Protection Initiative, the Next Day Organization supports local groups that protect archaeological sites, such as the project to protect the Maarat al-Numan and Apamea museums, which have an important collection of mosaic paintings.
- Documenting archaeological sites and historical buildings located in areas not subject to state authority, such as the Syrian Cultural Heritage Protection Center's activities in the northern countryside of Hama and the western and southern countryside of Idlib.
- Recording and documenting violations, as the Syrian Antiquities Protection Society relies on a group of activists to record and capture photos or videos for violations affecting antiquities in their areas. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also considers that the encroachment on antiquities is a crime against humanity. It issues semi-periodic reports on crimes against the historical heritage, including the dates of the destruction cases and the main accused people²³.
- Restoring buildings in relatively quiet areas. The “Oxygen Shabab” organization, with the support of the US State Department, will restore and rehabilitate the Rafiqah wall surrounding the city of Raqqa, and the “Vision for Humanitarian Work” organization, in cooperation with UNESCO, partially restored the Archaeological Museum of Raqqa after being almost completely destroyed.
- Supporting local groups' activities by providing institutional cover for them, providing financial support and consulting expertise, and conducting training courses, whereby the “Heritage for Peace” organization trains Syrian citizens on protecting antiquities and recording damages at archaeological sites.
- Establishing alternative management structures for the directorates of antiquities and museums in areas that are no longer under the regime's control, such as the Bosra al-Sham Antiquities Department, the Idlib Antiquities Center, the Tourism and Antiquities Protection Authority in Hasaka and the Antiquities Division of the former Aleppo Provincial Council.

23 It had previously revealed the excavations in the site of Qarwor, Qmenas and the Babsqa region: on the border with the Iskenderun district.

- Providing the missing dialogue means between the international community and the local population, as Safeguarding the Heritage of Syria and Iraq initiative (SHOSI) conducts training programs to boost local activists' skills in areas that are not controlled by the authority to comply with the international standards, as well as training on emergency and crisis response plans.
- Launching awareness campaigns and workshops to shed light on the importance of these antiquities and spreading awareness of the need to protect and preserve them, such as the Save the Antiquities of Palmyra campaign in 2015 and the Save Idlib Antiquities campaign in 2018.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

- Civilian efforts to protect Syrian heritage constitute a positive factor but sometimes fragile (Massena, 2016). Field complexity, massive violence and the link of the antiquities trade to the economic war are, in fact, among the most crucial factors affecting the civilian role in protecting antiquities, in addition to the stagnation of local and international legal mobility²⁴. Hence, it is possible to examine the internal factors affecting the civil role and leaving it incapable of achieving real transformations in the scene:
- Reflection of political polarization on civil action: the destruction of the tangible Syrian heritage was part of the military strategies of conflict's parties. The Syrian authorities considered it secondary damage to the constant battles. It was also targeted by the Jihadi militants to succeed in the sectarian conflict. All parties have practically used it as a tool to manipulate identity politics, whether to denounce the destruction of a heritage that expresses its identity or the destruction of heritage that symbolizes other identities. On both sides of the conflict, organizations' work has often been classified and politicized according to the heritage "identity" they defend.
- Cultural diplomacy: Cultural diplomacy²⁵ was considered an ethically biased option (Kila, 2013), being adopted by several international organizations operating in heritage protection, and through which it maintained communication channels with the institutions of the Syrian authority²⁶ and its affiliated associations, which led to the devotion of technocratic work methods. Heritage protection was tackled as a technical problem and not a political one, and therefore it can be solved by many mechanisms and procedures. Hence, these organizations participated in institutionalizing power relations, and thus, maintaining the status quo.
- Weak societal interaction: the cultural heritage in Syria was not given the importance it deserves even during more stable situations, as many residents deliberately looted antiquities to earn a profit and did not respond to efforts to protect the heritage (Hollings Center, 2015, p.4). Even in environments that

are most involved in civil action, archaeological activists faced a depreciation of their role. Their preoccupation with defending cultural heritage at this tragic time was considered indifferent to thousands of lives. Although "the hierarchical importance of choice is a basically useless proposition" (Weiss & Connelly, 2018, p. 3). Silence on this humanitarian issue is more a political stance than a neutral one and reveals integrity) (Al Quntar, 2013, p. 5 Quoted from Bernbeck & Pollock, 2004)

- Preference for theoretical approaches over field projects: It is possible to refer to the bureaucratic nature of the international organizations defending the human heritage and their preference for strategies with cautious approaches (2013, Keane), which made them work with theoretical tools avoiding practical fieldwork. For a long time, their procedures were limited to research, data collection and maps of destruction sites. There were no response mechanisms that would enable rapid resource mobilization and adequate capacity transfer from offices to the field (Massena, 2016). Furthermore, opening communication channels with activists has only recently happened, for these organizations "have not had independent experts on the ground to provide them with detailed and accurate information, and they have not had systems that would allow them to work with civil groups that have no legal status" (Sheikh Musa, 2015).
- Operational nature of the financial intermediary institutions: funding institutions searched for financial intermediary Syrian institutions to implement their programs, look for activists and train them. Therefore, they created an artificial market controlled by complicated systems, especially in terms of writing requests and drafting reports and evaluations, while the work of some organizations was designed according to donor proposals and not real needs (Fischer, 2003. p. 22). For example, when the US State Department²⁷ proposed a protection program to the Syrian heritage, an American-Syrian civil society benefited from this funding and implemented some documentary projects. When it wanted to work in the field, it offered a funding grant that benefited Turkey's Syrian foundation. It worked to launch a project to protect the tangible heritage, which made it play an intermediary funding role, through which it provided grants for civil initiatives in Syria. This led to spending the biggest part of the grants on these institutions' operational and administrative costs, including numerous bureaucrats; thus, the real beneficiaries had only access to a few of these grants.
- Lack of interdisciplinary cooperation: It is hard to prioritize heritage in crises with a human dimension, but a cross-sectoral approach integrating the social and economic dimensions into the cultural dimension of heritage provides opportunities for projects that improve and support livelihoods, restore social cohesion and protect heritage at the same time (UNESCO, 2017, Lessons Learned from Mali, p. 12). In this case, appears the need for awareness and a participatory approach to manage the heritage in conflict contexts (Van der Auwera, 2012). That requires comprehensive multi-dimensional projects that set their plans based on the residents who are partners in cultural resources ownership. Nowadays, some demands ask the society to adopt heritage protection as a human-centered approach that integrates its objectives into relief responses providing direct support to populations living in crisis (Al Qunta et al., 2015, p.8).
- The superstructure of some institutions: Archeology has always been accused of orientalism, which has no grain of truth in it,

24 UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2199 in 2015, which approved the prohibition of trafficking in cultural property from Iraq and Syria. The Syrian Law also promulgates the protection of antiquities to increase the sanctions on anyone who smuggles, violates or destroys the antiquities. Syria is a party to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. However, there is a complaint that the actual procedures, in Syria or internationally, were limited. UNESCO had to make more than one appeal to member states to adopt, at the very least, minimum practical measures, such as reporting the confiscation of cultural items coming from Syria or making their domestic laws more severe: For more information, refer to: Hardy, 2017, Curbing the spoils of war. UNESCO.

25 Loosely defined as the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples, to promote mutual understanding independently of political positions (Cummings 2003: 1)

26 Four Syrian associations apologized for not attending an international conference by UNESCO in 2014 entitled «Mobilizing the International Community to Protect the Syrian Cultural Heritage» for they considered it completely biased in favor of the Syrian regime. It also criticized UNESCO and the Heritage for Peace initiative for their focus on conducting training and workshops on the Syrian authority and its affiliated associations, while neglecting the rest of Syria.

27 The US State Department sponsored the publication of the Emergency Red List of Syrian Antiquities at Risk, to alert international customs authorities to the illicit trafficking of Syrian artifacts. It also produced a map featuring 1,000 important museums, historic buildings and archaeological sites to raise awareness of threats to Syrian cultural heritage. The Department partnered with the American Schools of Orient Research to comprehensively document the condition of, and threats to, cultural heritage sites in Syria and assess their future restoration, preservation, and protection needs.

and is largely related to the continuing dominance of colonial and central Western practices, especially that archaeologists refrained from tackling issues related to current politics or identity politics in their investigations into the past Near Eastern civilization. Thus, they were hesitant to interact with locals in their work fields (Al Quntar, 2013, quoting Meskeel, 2002). As a continuation of this approach, civil institutions increased their efforts to stop the destruction of the Syrian heritage regarding its historical, scientific and artistic importance and as a common human property rather than a part of people's lives and identity. Accordingly, some heritage protection programs have been considered external assumptions to educate the ignorant public (Hollings Center, 2015, p. 6). In fact, the whole approach often fails to truly communicate with local communities, as efforts to raise awareness of cultural heritage should be re-examined (Auwera, 2012).

EFFECT ON POLICIES

Heritage destruction within the military strategy means eradicating the other by suppressing their culture, particularly the archaeological buildings that constitute a threat to the identity and a stimulus to the collective memory that maintains collective awareness (Kila, 2013). Destroying the heritage sites and causing; thus, widespread civilian casualties is a means of eradicating a community's collective life and cultural identity and is a "cultural genocide" (Bevan, 2006, p.209). Indeed, the war killed thousands of Syrians, but it also killed an important part of people's identity.

Accordingly, appears the importance of civil work in protecting and preserving Syria's history and heritage, as it does not aim at preserving country's history as it is "materialistic" represented in archaeological sites of global importance, but it is also related to "national identity, common cultural legacies and what makes the Syrian a real Syrian citizen" (Al-Azm, 2015). Hence, preserving cultural heritage is a critical step towards reconciliating, building civil society and contributing to post-conflict reconstruction by enhancing tourism²⁸ and strengthening national identities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Multinational civil institutions provide opportunities for cooperation, exchange of best practices and access to funding. They are also emerging as a prominent voice in international discussions. However, they face problems related to their identity and role and communication channels' weakness with local communities. In the present case study, the question is: Do Syrian heritage protection organizations represent the interests of academics and archaeologists who seek to protect the Syrian heritage? Or do they represent the interests of local communities that interact with this heritage?
- In conflict, it is difficult to implement heritage protection projects without integrating them into a "network of effective activities", such as human rights, humanitarian aid, sustainable development, environment, conflict resolution, security and the rule of law, to improve people's lives and protect their lives in the first place.
- No matter how much it is "specialized", no civil organization can operate while being isolated from political power relations; therefore, all technocratic approaches shed light on the current situation and do not work for change and social justice that are the essence of civil activism.



²⁸ In 2009, the tourism sector in Syria was estimated at 6 billion dollars, equivalent to 10% of the GDP, and almost 47% of the services sector.

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BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the "Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World" program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project "Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making". This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.

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