

# Proposal for the safeguarding of cultural heritage and urban development: theory and methodology

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## Abstract

The proposal for safeguarding and urban development comes as a multidisciplinary project; it fits well to an innovative vision on the enhancement of a complex cultural heritage system. The “case” is the Koya city centre, located in the Kurdistan region. Thanks an agreement with the Koya University, the key topics of the possible work together are: Preservation, Management and Conservation strategies and techniques for a historic centre.

The knowledge starts with “survey” of the present situation, and develops a range of intervention hypotheses and guidelines apt to provide advice for the local stakeholders. The theme has given us the opportunity to think of a possible dialogue between specialists (architect, engineer, planner), starting with the multiple “actors” *in situ*. Promoting the old and contemporary identity values of the area is a main feature of the work of safeguarding, aiming at encouraging an urban development based on the conservation of the past, the quality of life and an eco-compatible tourism approach.

*Keywords: cultural heritage, historic centre, conservation, valorization, Koya, safeguarding, urban development.*

## 1 Introduction

Kurdistan presents a great variety of habitats, ecosystems and cultural remains both archaeological and monumental, some survived despite the long tragic history of the country. At present, the fast urban expansion, the industry, pollution, population growth, along with the extraction of resources, are causing severe environmental and cultural degradation. This paper is resulted after two



on-site visits, carried out by us in 2011, in the frame of a bilateral agreement signed between University of Koya and Politecnico di Milano. At that time, international attention was mainly focused on Erbil Citadel, in list for UNESCO World Heritage nomination. Thanks to the kind invitation of Professor Fuad M. Khoshnaw we had the chance to visit Koya. Koya attracted our interest for two main reasons: the presence of a “Technical University”, with Faculty of Engineering, provided by a campus, with a large number of students, and the layout of the city located in an amusing landscape, still preserving the traces of its past and its traditional architectural features. The peculiar urban features and the genuine interest in saving its historic relics shown by the Mayor and by the colleagues of Faculty of Architecture moved us to focus our effort to draft a program of scientific collaboration between the universities. Koya, in fact, could represent a pilot project to carry on multi-purposed activities, aimed for the heritage safeguarding and enhancement of a wide variety of social components. The grievous memories of past and recent events left a psychological sign to all the people. Moreover physical destruction of the Kurdistan cultural heritage, led to the loss of identity. Monuments, cities, countryside villages have been submitted to a systematic demolition, cancelling in the new generation the concrete perception of their roots.

In these decades, a newfound semi-independence of the country, supported by the interests of oil companies, produced a rapid, but uncontrolled reconstruction of the cities. The goal of heritage projects, in so difficult conditions, is not only to repair obsolete buildings, but overall the aim is to give back a soul to anonymous new settlements. Koya is one of the oldest cities of Kurdistan; famous since old times for its mosques, centres of science and art, famous for its intellectuals and poets. Since I millennium BC, Koya was also the crossway of a vivid economic exchanges, connecting Iran, Mesopotamia and Syrian cities facing Mediterranean Sea. Still now, in the old town, are visible remains of bazaar, caravanserai and memory of the commercial traffic. The most important monument still standing and in good state of preservation is the citadel of Koya, so called Qishla fortress, built during the Ottoman period. In the past, the city was surrounded by a stone enclosure, with two large gateways and two small entrances. Old wall construction techniques with stone and lime are still in use in the countryside villages for domestic dwellings.

## 2 Built heritage

The objective of our collaboration with Koya University is not only the exchange of scientific researchers and professors, but it is also to enhance, through the culture and the preservation of ancient remains, institutional and individual capacities of local authorities and of other relevant stakeholders for the sustainable and effective management of Koya city.

During the meetings, we have pinpointed some observations:

- lack of integration between institutions and local development strategies;
- lack of a legal and regulatory framework for the implementation of a sustainability strategy for cultural patrimony;



- inadequate human, technical and financial capacity of cultural staff at local level to address the complex management issues and to secure effective implementation of conservation actions; many local institutions don't have management and business plans, and capacity for business planning and fund raising;
- little awareness about the role and benefits from decision makers to grassroots levels;
- local community-based organizations lack the official recognition and the capacity to participate in a cultural development: trainings in leadership, management, community mobilization, community-based natural resource management and funding opportunities to put in practice the capacity acquired.

Local communities could perceive a conservation plan as a restriction and have no incentives to participate in management activities. An action plan will target the communities inside and around the District, involving them, through meetings and workshops delivered by officials of the municipality and/or researchers, students and professors of Koya University, to make them proud of their own heritage.

Specific purpose of Koya project, therefore, is evaluate the potential of the area including built heritage (architecture, monuments, archaeological areas, museums, historic urban districts), intangible heritage (local traditions, music, and so on), and natural/cultural resources of the landscape.

The actions project for the conservation and protection cultural heritage could be articulated in three main components:

1. training in cultural management and conservation: a "case study" could be Qishla Castle; this monument, after the conservation project, it could become, in the future, the city's museum and visitor centre;
2. set up a Geographic Information Systems (GIS), including the environmental characteristics of Koya district for properly defend the peculiar landscape or areas of agricultural interest, the location of archaeological or traditional sites located in Koya surrounding, detailed documentation of the still standing monumental and ancient buildings of the city, the risk mapping of these buildings to face in the future a correct plan of conservation interventions;
3. supporting the local institutions to develop a legal framework giving emphasis to management and financing mechanisms.

This systematic data collection will be not only a good exercise for the students of Koya University, which will be trained to fill specific inventory cards. However, it will provide the necessary background to prepare a new master plan with a clear definition of the areas to be protected in the old town. The areas where activities of rehabilitation, conservation and maintenance are carried on and the areas devoted to future urban expansion.



Conservation guidelines for ancient building material and its planned maintenance will be necessary after an accurate survey of the type and the technique of the ancient builders.

Entrance doors, frames, inscriptions, commemorative stones, wooden doors scattered in different buildings of the city are in danger, because these elements are easy removable.

Once again, a cataloguing of these survived elements will be also useful to stimulate the creativity of the younger generation to be inspired from the old native decoration into a new local artistic style.

The majority of the buildings of the old city are in a severe state of conservation with advanced physical deterioration and some of them are actually condemned. The old core of the city must be saved because it is a landmark to sew up the physical and psychological wounds of the civilian society.

There is no denying that this conceptual approach to the past implies new tasks of unprecedented complexity for both architects and planners. The entire urban fabric will have to be handled like valuable “artefacts”, deserving the sort of care and expertise, which we have hitherto associated with monuments. Undoubtedly, the way is not without difficulties. However, we hope, thanks to our previous experience carried out in post-war areas (Vietnam, Laos, Armenia, Eritrea) it is possible to define with precision the various scales and best practices of technical intervention.

### **3 Suggestions for safeguarding of the “tangible” and “intangible” cultural heritage**

A proper conservation intervention (at urban and architectural scale) cannot currently transcend by an initial act of knowledge, which is effected through historical research of direct and indirect sources in order to reconstruct the phases of construction in chronological order. The next step is a geometric and material survey and assessment of the structural instability/degradation; fundamental cartographic bases for organising the conservation project. Moreover, it has become clear that there is a need to practice techniques of preventive diagnostics (a growing area of research today) and monitoring which allow the object of the intervention to be passed on in the future, with maximum possible attention to its historical truth.

The conservation project should also keep in mind its context and surrounding conditions to intervene on the intrinsic and extrinsic causes of degradation (structural or material). The examination so conducted should consciously lead to a correct conservation project that on the one hand sees a commitment aimed at any possible consolidation, and on the other hand at the care for the existing material *facies* and its stratified palimpsest, also thanks to a planned maintenance programme. Finally, in respect of the value of use, the need for new interventions to be expressed in contemporary language – language of the 21st-century man – asserts itself, as a quality design addition thus producing extra authentic cultural and economic value.



In the past thirty years the polemics surrounding restoration/conservation have seen prevail a type of thinking that, while originating from very different schools, consolidated around ideas of respect for the material fact of architectural works and the concept of authenticity/integrity of the work. The ICOMOS Nara document (1994) extended the concept of authenticity, which became no longer strictly connected to the *physical* dimension of works and artefacts. This document claimed that authenticity itself could not be defined universally or based on fixed criteria, but that it was always necessary to take into consideration the differences between different cultures.

In fact, it is underlined that the material dimension cannot be the sole criteria for authenticity: both the customs, traditions and spiritual values, that the “object/heritage” carries with they are equally deserving of protection. The need arose therefore to protect intangible assets, which a UNESCO conference in Paris in 2003 defined – “by ‘immaterial assets’ it is intended practices, representations, expressions and knowledge – as well as the tools, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with these – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as an integral part of their cultural heritage. That intangible cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation, it is constantly recreated by communities and groups interested in compliance with their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and gives them a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”.

#### 4 Conclusion

The concept of “monument” has been enormously enriched, starting with reflection on the themes of material culture and anthropological research and gradually including new types of cultural assets and the entire territory humans inhabit.

These new topics imply the fact that, on the small as well as large scale, the amount of care we need to take with what we have inherited from the past has been greatly increased.

This reasoning is often accused of being prohibitionist: if all of the past is potentially interesting and everything has to be conserved, no transformational intervention should be permitted for the simple fact that it would mean the loss of the pre-existent. We don’t believe that this objection is a valid one because it confounds a value judgment with a univocal work decision: instead of intending in speaking of conservation that a transformation of the world is in any case inevitable, whether made by people or nature. However, this transformation needs to be guided by an awareness of the meaning of what we have inherited from the past and what would be lost should it be unwittingly destroyed. The work procedures used for conservation, the rigorousness of responsible restoration, non-destructive or minimally invasive diagnostics and, finally, new innovative technologies can – together with an acquired ethic born from individual and collective responsibility for conserving the heritage of the past –



preserve historical integrity and enable architectural and environmental assets to endure through time.

The particular nature of these inalienable collective material assets (monument, widespread building, historical centre, cultural setting) and their unique nature, puts us in a position of moral obligation both in terms of safeguarding cultural heritage as a resource, which we hope might be bequeathed to future generations in all its unique worth as evidence, and of making sector professionals, citizens and the political world aware of its genesis, its history, its vulnerability and its protection.

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