

Challenges to urban cultural heritage conservation and management in the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq

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Research Paper

Title:

**Challenges to urban heritage conservation and management in the historic centre of
Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq.**

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research paper is to examine the challenges to urban cultural heritage management conservation in the historical city of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq. The paper focuses on the roles and interactions of stakeholders and the issues that confront the decision making processes that underpin the management of historic city towns.

Design/methodology/approach – A case study methodology is utilised for this research. It involves documentary analysis and interviews with stakeholders who are part of the management of the historic city centre of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq. The findings from this case study are analysed in a systematic way before being discussed in the context of the literature on urban cultural heritage management.

Findings – The research shows that although there is a shared vision of the need to preserve and conserve urban cultural heritage, the management process is a contentious one. Stakeholders have different ideas as to how to achieve conservation goals which leads to increasing conflicts among stakeholders. This situation is compounded by the limited financial resources available to local government agencies, political interference in the work of implementation agencies and the lack of capacity in local government to enforce rules and carry out conservation projects. There are also significant power differentials among stakeholders in the decision making process which often means that local residents are excluded from the process of conserving their built urban heritage.

Practical implications – This research can help practitioners who are in charge of urban cultural heritage management in dealing with stakeholder conflicts. The paper offers insight into a number of sources of stakeholder conflicts and on ways to overcome these in the planning process.

Originality/value – The originality of research lies in the novelty of the case study area. This research highlights the issues of built heritage conservation management and planning practices in an area - Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq – that is geographically less represented in the extant literature. The research also identifies some of the key sources of conflict in urban heritage conservation projects and provides an insight into the roles of stakeholders in the management of smaller locally-dependent historic city centres.

Keywords – Urban conservation, heritage management, cultural heritage, stakeholders, stakeholder conflicts, Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq, urban heritage

Paper type – Research paper

Challenges to urban heritage conservation and management in the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq.

Introduction

Cultural heritage conservation remains an essential part of urban planning and development across the world. Urban conservation management is however increasingly becoming a contentious activity as contemporary global and local forces of production and consumption exert pressure on how heritage places are to be redefined. This leads to a compromise in the conservation and cultural values of these places (Nasser, 2003). Given that urban conservation management involves “a large number of players in a variety of roles, from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds, and often with conflicting interests and agendas” (Orbasli, 2000:99), participatory deliberations and relationships need to be established between decision makers and those at the receiving end of needed change (Healey, 1998; Hunter, 2015). This is to ensure effective management, which Lichfield (1988:38) has argued is about “taking conscious decisions with an eye to the future about ongoing operations or the use of assets, or both in combination within a structured organisation”. Such decision-making emerges from those in key management roles whose activities are constrained by limited access to finance, legislative frameworks and the overlapping relationship between the national, state and local government.

This article examines some of the challenges to urban heritage conservation and management with a specific focus on the role of stakeholders, the issues that influence their work and the resulting conflicts among stakeholders. This is based on the empirical case of the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah in Kurdistan-Iraq. While tensions and conflicts are an inevitable part of any stakeholder relationship, this article deals with the inadequately examined area of the factors that contribute to why conservation management is increasingly conflictual. In particular, this article focuses on how differential powers of decision making amongst stakeholders, limited access to finance and political interference contribute to the ongoing stakeholder conflicts in the conservation management of the urban cultural and built heritage in the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq. After this introduction, the article starts with an overview of the literature on urban cultural heritage conservation management and stakeholder interactions. This is followed by an explanation of the research methodology in the next section which includes an overview of the case study area. The findings and

discussion section analyses five pertinent issues arising out of this research. These are: the set of actors and policymakers involved; the policies available to guide conservation management; issues of financing; capacity of local government and political interference and finally; conflicting relationship between local residents and other stakeholders. The final section of the paper provides a conclusion to the research by evaluating the findings in light of existing literature and ongoing issues in urban cultural heritage conservation management.

Urban cultural heritage conservation management

Current ongoing debates and discourses on heritage have sought to open up new avenues of questioning existing understandings of heritage. Indeed Smith (2006:11) has stated with qualifications that there is “no such thing as heritage”. Her argument is that the concept of heritage is a discursive one that is given concrete form through social and cultural practices. Thus, at a certain level it is the contest of ideas and other forms of political contestations that underlines what comes to be regarded as heritage (Su, 2011; Wang, 2012). These issues notwithstanding, interest in urban heritage conservation continues to grow across the world as many sites and communities seek to be designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS). Many stakeholders despite their differing vested interests, do acknowledge that preserving the built cultural heritage in urban areas adds value to these places (Baarveld et al., 2013).

However, in order to preserve the built cultural heritage in urban areas, there is a prior question of defining precisely what is to be preserved and what is not to be preserved. Zancheti and Hidaka (2011) argues that urban cultural heritage is made up of objects and their attributes as well as processes that people place value on. They further note that the aspects of urban cultural heritage that are considered worthy of conservation efforts are those that society perceives to be significant and so are passed on from one generation to the next. It is only through a long collective and discursive process that certain aspects of the urban cultural heritage achieve a status of significance and worth. There is also always the issue of ownership when it comes to culture and heritage within urban areas. While tangible physical aspects of urban cultural heritage – buildings for example – can be in private ownership, the intangible aspects in the sense of the history of buildings and places can only be owned by the local community. This local community ownership of the history of urban cultural heritage is achieved through communal attachment and belonging (Orbasli, 2000). There is however the risk of appropriation of communally owned urban cultural heritage assets for

private gain. This is why the issue of participatory planning is becoming increasingly important in urban cultural heritage conservation and management activities.

Conservation is defined as “the careful planning and management of limited and selected resources. It is a conscious process to control and manipulate change to a minimum – to a rate that ensures the survival of cultural heritage over a long time” (Fethi, 1993:161 as quoted in Orbasli, 2000:17). The importance of planning in ensuring effective conservation management practices cannot therefore be overemphasised given the heterogeneous nature of stakeholders involved in the process. Moreover, Orbasli (2000) outlines three dimensions of urban conservation which are; the physical dimension linked with building conservation, the spatial dimension concerned with the relationship between space and place – i.e. relationship between spaces and their use – and finally the social dimension which relates to local community and the urban population. There are several overlaps in the responsibilities of key actors and stakeholders in the urban environment who have to undertake work in a given dimension. Given these overlaps, managing stakeholder interactions through collaboration and coordination of activities is a key issue as all three dimensions need to be addressed in a coherent way in the planning process. This is especially so in the context of uneven financial resources and power among various stakeholders.

Stakeholder interactions in the conservation management process

In managing stakeholder interactions, it is important to define who these stakeholders are so that none is overlooked in the process of urban cultural heritage conservation and management. Freeman (1984:46) defines a stakeholder as being “any group or individual who can affect and is affected by the achievement of the organisations objectives”. Thus in the context of conservation management in Sulaimaniyah, stakeholders involve all state and non-state organisations who have responsibilities for different aspects of conservation management as well as local residents and community groups who are affected by the decisions of the state and non-state organisations. Although not all stakeholders can be equally involved it is important for the leading organisation to identify and understand the interests of all stakeholders, from individuals to groups to the whole community (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

Tensions and conflicts are bound to arise in any conservation management programme given the interests of different stakeholders. This is the case especially when it comes to urban

cultural heritage where there tend to be conflicts between community preferences, professional advice and commercial pressures. This means that the opinion of experts on what is to be considered for heritage conservation needs to be counterbalanced by the views of community members. This provides a common platform for all stakeholders to engage in the conservation programme through increased collaboration. Effective stakeholder interactions and collaborations need to start from a joint formulation of objectives leading to a shared vision of future goals. An absence of a shared vision between stakeholders with regard to the form and nature of urban cultural heritage conservation will lead to mistrust, misunderstanding and conflicts between key stakeholders.

In order to ensure that the chances of conflicts and misunderstandings are well managed and/or reduced where appropriate, there needs to be a clear distinction in stakeholder roles and responsibilities and a fair distribution of resources. This helps in ensuring that each stakeholder is clear on what is expected from them. This is often not the case especially when it comes to the role of communities in urban cultural heritage conservation programmes. While the concept of community is generally contested (Anderson, 1993), there is a clear need for inputs from people living within an area where a conservation programme is due to take place. Moreover, the idea of community heritage helps to make certain aspects of the past visible while rendering others invisible (Waterton and Smith, 2010). Consequently, conservation programmes must pay attention to the social and cultural practices that impede stakeholder interactions. Inadequate institutional collaboration can lead to divisions between stakeholders even when there is a shared vision of change (Adu-Ampong, 2014). It is within this context that the case of Sulaimaniyah, Iraqi-Kurdistan is analysed in this research paper.

Research Method

A mainly qualitative case study research methodology was deployed for this research as this allowed multiple sources of evidence to be collected (Mason, 2002; Yin, 2009). The fieldwork in Sulaimaniyah was undertaken from August 2014 to January 2015. During this time, empirical data was gathered through a review of documents, direct observation, photographing of physical artefacts, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. A total of 65 in-depth interviews were conducted (see table 1 and 2 below). Out of this, 25 interviews were conducted with experts, local government officials, architects and planners within the Sulaimaniyah Directorate of Municipality and Sulaimaniyah Directorate of

Antiquity. Experts are considered as “crystallisation points” (Bogner et al., 2009:2) of insider knowledge and hence the 25 experts interviews were conducted on the basis that these experts possess both practical and institutional authority. The experts were also seen as possessing insider knowledge about cultural heritage conservation and management process. A semi-structured interview guide was used and included questions as: “Which special conservation and planning regulations are used for the city centre?”; “How do you fund conservation projects?”; “Why do conservation guidelines and planning policies fail to be implemented?” and; “What are some of the challenges you face in applying conservation guidelines?”

Insert Table 1 Here

Insert Table 2 Here

In addition to the expert interviews, 40 interviews were conducted with local residents, evenly divided between males and females as well as 4 focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were organised with community members along gender lines (see table 3 below). These community interviews were used as a counter weight to the views of experts with regards to the heritage conservation and management process. The questions on the interview guide included: “How supportive has the government been in the conservation of buildings in this neighbourhood?”; “What do you think of historic houses being demolished to make way for commercial buildings?” and; “Why did you decide to renovate your house and what challenges did you face?”

It must be noted here that gender is an important variable in this research given the socio-cultural background of residents in the research area. The majority of residents in this area are Muslims although there are some Christians and other minorities in the area. Thus Islamic religion has had a major impact on the cultural built environment and this was taken into consideration. Given the cultural dynamics, it was therefore important that the focus group

discussions were divided along gender lines. Moreover, since the research sought to understand residents' view of changes to the historic built environment since 2003, a key consideration for selecting interviewees was the length of time they had lived in the area. Majority of interviewees are from medium and low income families who have been resident in the area for a long time. They were therefore able to reflect on their experience of ongoing urban change and its impact on the built heritage.

Insert Table 3 Here

In addition to taking notes, the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts, research notes and policy documents were then analysed in an iterative process using Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) framework approach for qualitative analysis. The 5-step process involved familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping and interpretation. These steps allowed an immersion into the data. The familiarisation phase entailed a deep immersion in the data through rereading of interview transcripts and re-listening to some of the recordings. This made it possible to get a good overview of the data and to begin the process of abstraction. At the index stage, a thematic framework was set up through which to categorise recurring themes as they emerged from the close reading of the transcripts. During the charting phase, a rearranging of data vis-à-vis the research questions allowed different stories of stakeholder interactions in the heritage management process to be drafted. In the final phase of mapping and interpretation, the main goal was to provide a coherent and plausible analysis of all the data through comparison of different accounts.

The analytic approach used enabled the data to be analysed for connections, meanings and salience. In the analysis, the focus was on developing sub-themes of commonalities across the various transcripts. These were later aggregated into broader themes such as 'financial constraints', 'political interference', 'house demolitions', 'commercial buildings' among others. The themes were found to be consistent with earlier research on the factors shaping cultural heritage conservation and management. In the analysis, clear identifiers were removed and effort was made to ensure the anonymity of participants. In some cases, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed and participants were made aware of this

through the information sheet and consent form they signed. However, even if some responses can be traced back to certain individuals, no potential harm is expected to befall them because the issues discussed are commonly known and thus are not controversial.

Overview of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan-Iraq

Sulaimaniyah city is located in the Kurdistan Region of the northern part of Iraq. Its historic Centre, which is the focus of this paper, is divided into 8 districts; Jwlakan, Sabwnkaran, Malkani, Shexan, Dargazen, Sarshaqam, Bazrgani, and Kaniaskan (See Figure 1). These districts are led by several local government institutions including the Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality and the Sulaimaniyah Directorate of Antiquity. Sulaimaniyah was founded in 1784 by Ibrahim Pashae Baban, and grew around the palace of Mahmud Pasha. Throughout its history, from its establishment until today, it has come under different administrative governments: the rule of Baban, the Ottoman Empire, British rule, Iraqi rule, and now the Kurdish Regional government.

The initial pattern of the city composed of compact organic arrangements around the palace according to function and structure. The historic city centre was influenced principally by traditional architecture reflecting the community's culture which bore the principles of Islam. Initially, this style of traditional architecture made up the dominant central part, and was then surrounded by different neighborhoods. Through the the Doxiades Masterplan of 1957 and the modification in the 1980s, the city's urban development started to develop in a structured pattern which separated the boundary of the historic centre from the rest of Sulaimaniyah city.

Insert Figure 1 Here

The oppression of Kurdish people by the Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein against Kurdish people (Human Rights Watch, 1993:7-10) impacted on the development of Kurdish cities. This is particularly so in terms of laws and policies regarding the historic town and even the development of Sulaimaniyah city (Ahmad hama Rashid, 2014, personal communication). An economic blockade inside the country and a subsequent international

embargo against the Iraqi government led to the independence of Kurdistan in 1991. This independence led to several new policies being issued with regards to the urban conservation of the Sulaimaniyah neighbourhood.

Discussion of Research Findings

Contesting stakeholders and values in the built environment of Sulaimaniyah

This section presents the findings of the research and discusses some of the issues underlying stakeholder conflicts over the values to be attached to the built environment of the historic city centre of Sulaimaniyah.

Actors and policymakers involved in urban conservation and management

Local residents including business merchants represent a key set of actors and stakeholders involved in urban cultural heritage conservation and management. The relationship between residents, business merchants and the local administrative authorities is however not always collaborative but tend to be filled with tensions and conflict. Local residents are usually the owners of listed and non-listed historic buildings in the city centre of Sulaimaniyah. While they expect to be able to make changes to their building structures as they see fit, there are rules from the local government authorities on planning permissions. The procedures for obtaining planning permissions are not always followed due to a number of reasons including the inability of the local government authorities to enforce them.

The management of the historic city centre of Sulaimaniyah is the responsibility of the Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality (DSM). This responsibility of the DMS is made possible through the local authority laws for preservation of the whole neighbourhood and listed buildings. These local authority laws are implementable under special planning regulations known as the City Centre Guideline. The City Centre Guideline provides guidelines and planning permission for new constructions on the site of historic non-listed buildings (City Centre Guideline Report, 2011). Among other things, the guidelines states that new structures must be consistent with the old fabric of the neighbourhood in terms of façade, building materials, number of floors and colour of painting used. Furthermore, the

guidelines stipulates the acceptable size and ratio of new buildings, the use of Malkani stones and bricks as well as the use of traditional building techniques such as arches in designing elevations. The guidelines therefore aim to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the neighbourhoods as much as possible. The DMS has however failed to consistently enforce these guidelines due to the fact that they are established based on a developed land-use change. These guidelines have produced unintended consequences as it has provided opportunity for further urban change of the historic core towards more commercial uses. This has generated conflicts among various stakeholders especially between rich merchants and other home owners whose views are blocked by new high rise buildings. During the course of fieldwork, it was observed that inconsistent structures such as those with different stones and modern facades are being allowed to be constructed in the old built up area.

In addition to providing planning permissions for new constructions, the DMS is also responsible for urban conservation management of the neighbourhood through undertaking revitalizing projects. The DMS is made up of the Technical Department, the Master Plan Department, the Municipality Council and the Municipality Supervision Committee. However, the management of restoration projects of listed buildings is to be led by both the DMS and the Sulaimaniyah Directorate of Antiquity (SDA). Residents who were interviewed had the sense that there was no specific organisation dealing with the historic built environment in the neighbourhood. Interviewees from both the DMS and the SDA noted that the availability of financial resources influenced the power and capacity of these agencies in implementing and managing the historic city centre. In February 2006 for example, a Master plan for the whole city of Sulaimaniyah was developed which included how to deal with the historic city centre (Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality, 2006). As one of the officials interviewed explained, “... *Municipality is just wasting money producing proposals for construction and infrastructure projects, relying on foreign offices. However, by the time the proposal is produced, they will say there is not enough funding for implementing the project...* ” (Interview with a local official, Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality, December 2014). In the same way, the Master Plan of 2006 is yet to be implemented because the authorities do not have the needed resources to carry out implementation (Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality, 2011).

Policies regarding the protection of historic Sulaimaniyah city centre

In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1991 up until 2006 there was no comprehensive development planning in place with regards to the Sulaimaniyah city centre. Consequently new settlements were developed without recourse to an overarching land-use and development plan. After 2003, Sulaimaniyah's social and economic systems underwent rapid changes with concomitant rises in land and property prices. The resulting property redevelopment business led to the taking apart of the historic city centre and buildings (Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality, 2011). This resulted in many old buildings being demolished and much of the residential districts of the historic centre being turned into a big commercial centre.

Notwithstanding the absence of an overarching land-use and development plan, several policy directives were issued by the Council of Ministries since 1998. The national Ministry of Municipality conducted a survey regarding the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah, and some other cities in 2000. Thereafter, the historic city centre was marked on a map which was approved by the Council of Ministries at a meeting on March 29, 2000 by order no. 290 which was issued on April 9, 2000. Prior to this order, the Sulaimaniyah Administration Office had initiated a number of official decisions regarding the protection of the historic city centre. For instance, four memos were approved between 1998 and 2000 by the Ministry of Municipality and Tourism, and four memos by the Council of Ministries between 1999 and 2000. However, the local officials from the DSA and the SDA have the final power to make decisions regarding urban conservation work. This power is again dependent on funding provided by the Governorate of Sulaimaniyah.

It appears that the Ministry of Municipality and Tourism is more concerned with producing memos on the preservation of historic neighbourhoods and less concerned about whether they are implemented or not. Therefore, a plan for the protection of the city centre and the registration of listed buildings was initiated leading to the creation of a Master plan for the whole city in February 2006 (Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality, 2011). During the interviews it was noted that the former register of listed buildings relied on local experts and ignored the inputs of residents of the neighbourhoods. The main criteria used by these local experts for listing buildings include unique architectural interest, historic interest, and whether the buildings were related to a historic figure or historic event. Since the process of

getting listed on the register took long, it provided a window of opportunity during which many buildings were demolished to make way for commercial uses. Even the owners of listed buildings used the poor conditions of their properties to justify demolitions. This process of demolition has been accelerated, especially due to a lack of funding for the DSA and SDA to carry out their activities as well as related political and economic instability in the area.

Insert Figure 2 Here

Financing urban conservation and management

In the interview with the head of the SDA, he mentioned how their department was faced with a shortage of financial resources to enable their work on restoration and conservation projects in the neighbourhood. Funding for the work of SDA comes from the local Governorate of Sulaimaniyah who themselves get their funding from the central government. The SDA is the only legal body allowed to undertake repairs and maintenance work on listed buildings. According to the restoration architect of the SDA, there are currently no plans for addressing issues regarding maintenance and repair of listed buildings, or for providing consultancies and technical assistance to owners of buildings who want to undertake maintenance, repairs or restoration of their listed buildings. This is simply because of the lack of financial assistance coming from the central government.

The role of the national government in financing urban cultural heritage conservation is very important. Governments play a clear role in the maintenance of environmental and cultural heritage assets (Paszucha, 1995; Roders and van Oers, 2011). For instance, Baarveld et al (2013:164) have noted that “the preservation of cultural-historical values has usually been financed by governments, often as an incentive for urban redevelopment projects”. However, this historical and traditional role of the government is changing as government budgets are shrinking and there is less money available. The majority of stakeholders raised concerns over the limited financial resources provided by the Kurdistan Regional Government at the central level. This has resulted in urban conservation work being focused only on the architectural restoration without a focus on revitalisation of the historic environment and infrastructural improvements. Funds for undertaking restoration and conservation works are

only made available for listed buildings that are under the direct ownership of the SDA. Out of the currently 106 listed buildings, funding was provided for purchasing 17 houses which are currently under the ownership of the Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Antiquity. However, only about 3 of these purchased buildings are under the process of restoration. The other 89 listed buildings are either empty or still have residents living in them, but remain under the threat of demolition.

The financial system for funding heritage conservation in Sulaimaniyah has not yet been developed in the sense of creating a stable or specific funding stream for conservation of the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah. As commented by the SDA restoration architect in an interview, *“we can only restore our properties, there is not enough budget for restoration of all listed buildings”*. This creates room for increased conflicts among stakeholders especially as the owners are prevented by existing policies to repair and maintain the buildings by themselves. The budget for urban and building conservation is provided by the Sulaimaniyah Governorate at the local level. However, local revenues are collected and taken to the central office. This means that there are no incentives for local authorities to budget for urban conservation and management since whatever revenue will be realised from such projects would not accrue to them but to the central authority. Interviewees highlighted that this situation continues to be a source of conflict between stakeholders when it comes to financing urban conservation and management projects.

Many city centre building owners are given the leeway when they fail to use required traditional materials in restoration work. The reason given for this situation is that,

“...because government cannot support local residents of the city centre, [we have been] informed that any applicant who rebuilds his property is allowed to use cheap materials instead of traditional materials...that is why we cannot apply regulations and guidelines for the management of the city centre” (Interview with a Former Head of the Technical Department, Sulaimaniyah Municipality, December 2014).

This situation puts local government officials in a difficult situation. Since they do not have the funds to help home owners follow appropriate policy guidelines on renovation, they have to turn a blind eye to the violations of building codes and other irregularities. This has provided room for abuse by home owners who will use inappropriate materials even when they can afford the traditional materials.

Local government capacity and political interference

A key finding of this research is that there is a power differential between the local officials at the DSM and politicians at the central government. This power differential is in both political and financial terms. Since the funding for conservation management comes from the central government, political officials sometimes interfere in the work of local government officials and professionals. Political officials from the central level tend to seek for temporal solutions and quick decisions on planning permission applications made by elite merchants with whom they are connected. Thus local officials at the DSM complained about their powerlessness in preventing people from breaking conservation planning rules when these have been sanctioned by the politicians at the national level. A local official at the DSM summed this situation up during an interview:

“Before, applicants were punished if they showed improper behavior, but today employers get investigated. Government requires us to stay silent even if applicants misbehave against our authority...residents demolish their house without getting permission for demolition and later get permission for new constructions, because there is not sufficient punishment. People do not care about laws and regulations...”

(Interview with a local official, Sulaimaniyah Municipality, December, 2014)

In addition to political interference, officials of the local government have low capacity to carry out their duties and responsibilities. The limited availability of funding constrains the ability of local officials to undertake professional training programmes that can enhance their capabilities. The absence of professionals to carry out conservation plans and projects means that conservation goals are not achieved to the highest professional standards possible. In some cases, restoration projects have to be demolished for safety reasons because the appropriate conservation techniques and procedures were not followed. In an interview with the restoration architect and official in the DSA, he explained how on occasions their restoration work projects tend to fail. He gave the example that:

“...we were restoring a house, suddenly the wall fall down...I think our project lacked accurately going through all procedures of building conservation that were needed due to the lack of professional staff for restoration project...we used to have a foreign

consultant, but due to the high fee, projects are being run by our staff” (Interview with Restoration Architect in Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Antiquity, December, 2014)

The obstacles to planning and managing conservation programmes in the historic city of Sulaimaniyah stem from among others the lack of qualified staff and experts. This lack of expertise and capacity at the local government level is hampering effective cultural heritage conservation and management. In the past, technical support and assistance in such projects across Iraqi Kurdistan have come from international organisations and agencies who also provided training for local staff and professionals. International organisations such as the Council of Europe, the World Bank and UNESCO have played a significant role in the training of professionals, in monitoring programmes, and even in the funding of urban development projects. For instance in a UNESCO Revitalisation of Erbil Citadel Project, the UNESCO Iraq Country Office provided a training course in coordination with the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). This training programme was provided for staff from Erbil – the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan. The training was in such areas like Introduction to Conservation of Architectural Heritage in Iraq, International Principles of Protection & their Application in a National Context, Introduction to Investigation & Conservation of Structural Failures in Historic Buildings, and finally Introduction to Maintenance Management Systems, Supervision, & Monitoring of Preservation Project. The training programmes helped to develop the capacity of local staff to proceed with the rehabilitation and restoration project of Erbil Citadel and to share their knowledge with staff in other cities like Sulaimaniyah. Such training programmes are no longer taking place and thus staff capacity has not been improved in a long while.

Local residents and conflicts with other stakeholders

The research findings show that there is a high degree of conflict between residents and local officials as well as between local residents and business merchants. These conflicts arise out of a lack of proper management agreement over the built urban cultural heritage leading to changes in the built form of the neighbourhood that are at odds with key conservation principles and goals. Local residents who were interviewed and involved in the focus group discussions expressed dissatisfaction and a distrust of the local government authorities involved in conservation management. It was noted that local government authorities have

made a number of promises to local owners with regard to the purchase of listed properties but have consistently failed to deliver on these promises of helping with building maintenance. Respondents were also distrustful of the local government's payment plan for the purchase of listed buildings. In the absence of government funding and support, residents have continued to engage in illegal rebuilding projects in both listed and non-listed buildings while in the process breaking planning regulations on conservation management. To avoid the high cost of traditional building materials, residents continue to repair, alter, and rebuild their properties with cheap concrete materials. Others also make use of expensive synthetic materials in restoring their properties but these materials are not necessarily in line with the character of historic buildings and original materials used. To do this, a number of residents resort to tricks in breaking planning regulations as noted by an official from the DSM who stated that;

“some of the local residents pretend to be a low income applicant so that we can not force them to apply the regulations, because we should be supportive due to the lack of financial situation by government. I am confused as to the right income level of applicants and forgive them to use traditional materials, while they show they can only afford cheap concrete construction material, but after they get permission they use an expensive building materials. Or other low income applicants use simple and cheap concrete materials” (Interview with Municipality officer, Directorate of Sulaimaniyah Municipality, 2014)

Local residents were found to be in two broad camps – those who opposed the changing character of the neighbourhood and those who were happy to sell off their properties to business merchants for more financial gain. Through the interviews and focus group discussions it came to light that local residents who are in favour of the economic benefits of the city centre were secretly damaging their properties in order to justify the demolition of these structures in the future after these properties have been sold off to business merchants. Some residents also collude with merchants to raise land and property prices in order to price out people from being able to rent in the city centre. This situation creates a number of tensions and conflicts between residents who are for conservation and residential use of historic buildings and those residents who prefer to convert these buildings into commercial properties.

Another form of conflict and tension is found between local residents and business merchants. Respondents of this research viewed business merchants as putting profits before cultural heritage and the livelihoods of the people who own, live and work in the houses and shops in the neighbourhood. Some of the residents felt that by turning historical buildings into shops, hotels and parking lots the business merchants were destroying a well-loved district of the city centre. These tensions between local residents and business merchants in part stem from the powerlessness that residents feel and their perception that the local government authorities are in the pocket of these merchants. This sentiment is exemplified by the following two comments by an elderly woman and man respectively during the focus group discussion:

“...he [a business merchant] built a six story building and blocked my view. I tried to confront him...but he said he is free to do it, and government gave him permission...however government is useless, supporting these people and not able to stop this” (Focus Group Discussion, Female, aged 50, Sabwnkaran District, August 2014)

“...we believe our properties are indirectly controlled by rich men, who agreed among each other to not give us a good deal to these deteriorated houses. However, when they buy them with a cheap price, they link three to four properties, and have the power to demolish and build them again...but we do not have that power because of our financial condition” (Focus Group Discussion, Male, aged 70, Malkane district, August 2014)

These conflicts and tensions highlight the absence of collaboration and partnership among public and private sector actors. There has been limited effort by the private sector, local media and community members to keep the neighbourhood from demolition and to provide finances for restoration. Private sources of financial resources include funds from real estate developers and home owners. However financing from homeowners is limited and funds from the private sector are usually tied to getting a profit. For instance merchants buy properties to gain profit returns through redevelopment of historic buildings into commercial properties. Some homeowners provide funds to largely demolish their houses and rebuild it in a new residential style. However, these new constructions are inconsistent with the old fabric of the neighbourhood. The research found that so far only one private construction company, Bareaz Companies Group in Sulaimaniyah sponsored the restoration of a historic house in the

neighbourhood, while only about 5 home owners contributed their own money for restoration. However, the restoration was done using new construction materials so the restoration was not consistent with the historic built environment and therefore defeated the purpose of urban cultural heritage conservation and management.

Conclusion

Current academic discussions around urban cultural heritage management highlight the interest in urban conservation and the importance of participatory relationship among stakeholders. Given the opportunities and problems inherent in any conservation management approach, the key role of stakeholders who often have conflicting interests and agendas cannot be overemphasised (Orbasli, 2000). This is why it is important to understand the interests of all stakeholders (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). This understanding leads to effective stakeholder collaboration through a joint formulation of objectives and a shared vision of future goals that can help to overcome divisions and conflicts (Adu-Ampong, 2014).

This case study research shows the contentious nature of urban cultural heritage conservation and management processes. The findings from this research show that urban cultural heritage management of the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah is contested by different stakeholders leading to an increase in conflict and a failure in meeting conservation aims. The main reasons for this situation include differential powers of decision making among stakeholders, limited access to finance and political interference in the work of local government agencies. The power differential between stakeholders is in both political and financial terms. The inadequacy of financial resources influences the power and capacity of key stakeholders in implementing policies and managing the historic city centre. This is linked with the political interference from the central government leading to conflicts between politicians at the central government level and the local officials. Ultimately these conflicts have a negative impact on the strength of the local government in decision making and implementation of plans and policies especially as it relates to planning permissions. These findings are in line with the literature that highlights that effective management of urban cultural heritage conservation requires participatory planning and conscious decision-making processes that involve key stakeholders. This ensures a collaborative relationship between stakeholders

supported by appropriate legislative frameworks and access to finance (Healey, 1998; Orbasli, 2000; Hunter, 2015).

The research findings in terms of policy implications highlight the importance of governmental commitment and responsibility towards urban cultural heritage conservation. Financing urban cultural heritage conservation in terms of maintenance of environmental and cultural heritage assets, relies on the role of national government (Paszucha, 1995; Roders and van Oers, 2011; Baarveld et al., 2013). The lack of commitment showed by the Kurdistan government towards urban cultural heritage conservation in the case of the historic city centre of Sulaimaniyah has led to a rise in conflicts between stakeholders. Local government agencies lack the capacity to enforce policy implementation. Thus there is low collaboration, between stakeholders. Local residents have often been excluded from decisions about preserving their cultural heritage and the conservation planning process. Zancheti and Hidaka, (2011) argues that society puts value on what it considers significant to be preserved in the process of urban culture heritage. The failure of the local Sulaimaniyah government agencies to include local residents in decision making therefore means that their views are not included in defining what is valuable and in need of conservation efforts.

The research has shown how conflicts and tensions are generated among various stakeholders. An overview has been provided to show how this has led to the breaking of rules and planning regulations given the inability of the local government authorities to enforce them. The result has been that structures are being allowed to be constructed in the historic centre of Sulaimaniyah, which are inconsistent with the existing fabric in terms of size, elevation, materials used and facades. In many of these instances private gains overshadow conservation goals. The challenges discussed in this paper highlight why effective stakeholder collaboration remains such an essential element for successful urban cultural heritage conservation and management processes.

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