When Marginalising the Role of Local Participation in Heritage Conservation Policies: Evidence from Erbil Citadel

Although the role of local participation has often been considered essential in formulating heritage conservation policies, it is still misjudged by the top-down approach of heritage decision-makers for multiple reasons. This paper reviews the contradictory vision towards the role of local participation in two processes of conservation conducted upon Erbil Citadel built heritage. It aims at demonstrating the problematic nature of local participation in the current revitalisation process, linking its latent reasons to the overall aim envisaged for the site in the future, namely heritage tourism. The paper comes up with some debatable findings, which, it is recommended, should be investigated further.

Keywords: cultural potential, Erbil Citadel, heritage conservation, local participation

Introduction

The locals’ role is often regarded as a vital pillar when drawing up heritage conservation policies owing to the diverse cultural potential that their local knowledge may contribute to these policies. For instance, the ICOMOS Charters of (1999, 2002 & 2004) reject underestimating the inhabitants’ contributions in revealing heritage histo-cultural values and events based on their capacity to comprehend the cultural spirit and biography of the built context of the site. Huang (2006) attributes this to their ability to deepen some cultural dimensions of the context. Consequently, this can assist in resuscitating a broader image of the requirements that the site's development entails, and thus explore new guides that maintain the validity of the conservation policies to be more responsive to any future changes. In the field of heritage’s 'market-driven tourism', Johnston (2003) and Staiff et al. (2013) consider that a good management plan of heritage conservation is conditional on the extent of a proper revelation of its cultural assets, which is a task that necessitates the engagement of its aboriginal inhabitants. Based on their continuous coexistence with the site, Huang et al. (2012) and Yang et al. (2010) state that their views may demonstrate valid solutions against any physical deterioration of the site, for example. In order to achieve the goals of the site’s future plan, MacDonald and Jolliffe, therefore, suggest dealing with conservation policies as 'community-based partnerships', endorsing giving more 'effective' role for the views at the grassroots level of the site (2003, p. 307).

Based on Thapa (2007) and Wager (1995), this makes local participation essential for attaining long-term heritage policies that are able to perpetuate the tangible and intangible assets of these traditional environments. Accordingly, some recent studies suggest a decentralised power strategy for drawing up heritage conservation policies 'based on co-decision methodology between the site’s authority and inhabitants' (Jasim et. al. 2017 p. 296). In fact, the power of
this approach underlies its potential of involving multiple perspectives and a broad range of knowledge helping to achieve the 'dynamic participation of purposeful concepts [;] conflicts control [;] a more comprehensive process of decision-making' (Ibid, p. 296-7).

However, what often impedes the genuine activation of this role is the extreme reliance on the articles stipulated by some global charters by the local authorities, as if they were "articles of faith", when drawing up the site’s conservation policy (Avrami et al. 2000). Furthermore, some heritage sites, particularly those Asian, still suffer from a state of vagueness regarding the role entrusted to their local communities, whereas their excessive interpretation of heritage, is sometimes deemed to impede some innovative global techniques of conservation. A state of intricacy concerning coordinating the responsibilities and priorities among the site’s authorities and inhabitants also weakens this role, and Aas et al. (2005), and Su and Li (2012) attribute this to a kind of inconsistency among them, which often results from incompatibility regarding planning for the site’s economic and touristic potential. For instance, the inhabitants’ subjective narratives regarding the site’s cultural values might drive to undervaluing the cultural significance of the site globally. Consequently, instead of streamlining the steps of formulating its conservation policies, their narratives may lead to complicating the overall management plan of these policies (Dicks 2000, UNESCO 2005, Poria & Biran 2006, Thapa 2007). More importantly, the local authorities usually seek to globalise the site enabling heritage to become more open-ended to accommodate tourists’ tales and visitors’ interpretations in order to increase the cultural merits and economic impacts that can be brought to the entire place (Chhabra et al. 2003, Park 2014). Yet, this can sometimes challenge some local visions that often see heritage as a fixed and unchanging entity.

In fact, this contradiction about the role of local participation is evidenced in two conservation processes of Erbil Citadel, a fortress of deep-history, tailored from diverse cultural values and historical events (MacGinnis 2013), and resulted from a 'successive rebuilding [] over thousands of years' (Brammah 2009a p. 67) (see: Figure 1). 'Its unique feature of being the oldest continuously inhabited citadel in the world' (Jasim et al. 2018 p. 81) has urged UNESCO to suggest some Guidelines for its conservation (2014), while the inhabitants’ engagement has been regarded as an imperative here for the "assessment" of the current revitalisation policy of the site, including its "overall future aim". However, the current progress of the project contradicts this, and shows some contentious outcomes that may mean a need to focus on this issue.
Hence, this paper is dedicated to demonstrating the issues surrounding local participation in Erbil Citadel’s current revitalisation process, linking its potential role to the touristic aim envisaged for the site in the future. As a methodology, the study relies on some key literature that shows the inseparable relationship between the site and its inhabitants over history, enabling the precise positioning of their role as a vital tool to achieve this aim. Specific references will be reviewed here that firstly settle the affirmative aspects of this relationship in addition to revealing the potentials that can be provided by the locals to the current policy. To fulfil this, the study involves some specific views revealed by some key figures amongst the site inhabitants, the local authorities and the global experts of the revitalisation project regarding the main issues of the project as revealed by some recent studies on the site, and which enable a critical investigation of each. The paper concludes some debatable findings that should be investigated further by future studies.

Site-based Indications Debilitate Local Participation

First: Within Erbil Citadel Renovation Process

The Citadel demonstrates different historical, social and archaeological assets, which may entail a concrete engagement of its local community when planning for the future of the site. Its unique trait of being continuously inhabited for more than 6000 years, (since the Mid Bronze Age, the Neolithic times until the present day) (Novacek et al. 2008, HCECR 2008, Brammah 2009a, MacGinnis 2013) should be regarded as a surplus value for its inhabitants, which sanctions their participation in drawing up the site’s future policies. This may enable a more transparent transmission of its diverse
cultural values to construct their position in the site. In particular, the current
traditional urban fabric of the site, which is assigned to the Ottoman period
(UNESCO 2015), puts its locals in the foreground for partaking in any process
of conservation as being the proper knowledge-holders of this period. The built
context of this period mirrors a strong cohesion and coherence of social
structure and thus urban structure that was considered to be a consequence of
the conformist social relationships, and through the Islamic canon, which
celebrates the concept of social neighbourhood. Hence, the general social
values and traditions among the locals have added a sense of congruence and
social harmony consolidating the social networks, and thus the social criteria of
the site. This in fact also grants the inhabitants primacy in knowing the site
very well, making them familiar with its diverse historical events and
sociocultural values, and accordingly granting them priority in formulating the
site’s future plans (Southgate 1840, Bornberg et al. 2006, SOITM 2013).

In 1979, however, the renovation process carried out on the site was
completed according to an explicit model of top-down decision-making,
resulting in a negative correlation with the site’s cultural ethos and the extent
to which it corresponds with its local privacy. Based on a study by Brammah
Huszar & Associates on the site (2009), the renovation made a series of urban
and architectural changes to the built context, such as ‘the demolition of the
historical south gate’ including the site’s central area, which left real
repercussions on the built context, as if they were ‘deliberate demolitions’ of
the site (p. 68) (see Figure 2). Both the gate and the central area have been
repeatedly emphasised as substantial parts of the context for their deep-
antiquity and thus their symbolic values. Their demolition, therefore, has
jeopardised the site’s cultural values and its historical authenticity, reflecting
an ‘overwhelming feeling’ about the Citadel’s heritage as a historical symbol of
the place (HCECR 2012a p. 1).

The HCECR (2012b & 2012c) attributes this to a clear lack of knowledge
that the renovation team possessed about the site, and their efforts have shown
the complete exclusion of live contributions of the aboriginals and local
stakeholders of the site. Such contributions were often seen as a base, or more
precisely a ‘stable network [of] effective shared views’ of the realistic
continuation of Erbil’s urban and architectural assets, as being more familiar
with the issues and potentials of its built fabric (Jordan 1990, p. 327). Their
vibrant inputs, therefore, can tailor the renovation policy more with this fabric
to be more attached to its tangible and intangible tenors. Nevertheless, the
renovation’s authorities have assigned this exclusion to the departure of some
families due to some ‘damage[s]’ that the site witnessed at that time (Brammah
2009a p. 68). While this may indicate the shortage of experience of the
renovation team in the field of heritage conservation, perhaps it makes the
engagement of those local-based contributions essential, and especially some
of them have appealed for reinstating the site to its original settings (HCECR
2012c). After 2007, therefore, a thorough revitalisation process was initiated to
restore the site’s genuine urban image.
**Second: Within Erbil Citadel Revitalisation Process**

Based on Brammah (2009a & 2009b), HCECR (2012c), and UNESCO (2013 & 2014), the revitalisation process should be driven by the general frame of the broad topological and cultural-traditional features of the site. To achieve this, the role entrusted to the decentralised power strategy between the site’s authorities and inhabitants should be truly activated, which empowers the latter to be engaged in efficient negotiations towards a complete revelation of the sociocultural values and events, or any other ruinous features of the Fortress.

As part of the touristic goals envisaged for the site, the World Heritage Committee recommends that 'links and sense of belonging of the [] inhabitants [should] represent important aspects for a long-term revitalisation of Erbil Citadel and its reintegration into the city as a vital and living element' (2015, p. 16). For the Committee, the Citadel is an efficient popular venue that socially and culturally gathers the inhabitants, particularly through some religious activities in the central public zone. Consequently, any efforts to revitalise the site should consider this aspect as a determining factor in restoring the built context to its authentic setting before the renovation and even when planning for its touristic potential.

Huszar & Associates (2009), who worked on the preparation of the revitalisation Master Plan, also endorse efficient local engagement, which would boost local-based support for the site’s future decisions. Accordingly, they recommend enacting new by-laws and regulations for this purpose that serve 'the creation of a culture of care for the Citadel and its built heritage', where the locals are supposed to act as a cornerstone to fulfil this (Brammah 2009b p. 92). Perhaps, the importance of this comes from what the Implementation Action Plan of the revitalisation (2009) entails, which states that the first threshold in the revitalisation process should focus on how to establish a broad data-base of historical and cultural knowledge that facilitates the objective construction of the site policies. To meet this, the inhabitants should be seen as a living informative base of data 'to deliver the vision of the revitalisation', and thus building 'strong partnerships' with them is essential (Ibid p. 22). More importantly, 'engag[ing] the residents' would sustain...
'significance' of the site as a residential settlement, which boosts 'the revival of its identity', and thus its touristic goals (Brammah 2009b p. 26). In fact, the UNESCO Guidelines on the Citadel Conservation (2014) have strongly appreciated this step, considering the locals as a 'key principle' in gathering 'oral and physical documentation' about the histo-cultural biography of the site that can feed the 'input' and 'assessment' of the revitalisation (p. 17-18). The Guidelines therefore quote in (Page 12) the Burra Charter plan which urges the efficient local involvement within the whole process of revitalisation.

A Non-integral Vision to the Role of Local Participation

Despite the above emphasis on the importance of the local participatory role, more than one study showed that it did not receive real considerations by the site's authorities. For instance, a study on "Repercussions of Singularity of Authorities" in making conservation decisions by Jasim et al. (2018) states that planning for 'the future aspirations of the revitalisation policy rests with the [authorities] more than the site inhabitants' (p. 82), which portends to less encouraging results about the expected role of the latter. For the authorities, continuity of the unique residential feature of the site as being continuously inhabited for millennia will not be a key aim for the site after its revitalisation. This feature will be used as a complementary tool that supports the new touristic aim of the site, and thus 'will be re-employed just to boost' the Citadel’s current urban heritage within 'global tourism [as] a brand for Kurdistan' (Ibid, p. 82). Therefore, the need is for a profession-based vision, which adopts expert views (that can really assist to achieve this aim) more than being a local-based vision resting on the "raw views" of the inhabitants.

Yet, regardless of the controversial vision towards its continuity as a predominant trait of the site, this feature mainly relies on revival of the obsolescence of its different sociocultural potentials, which may enable it to act as an efficient complementary tool that supports the new touristic aim. Within this context, the local-based contributions are supposedly the most appropriate tool that can understand and thus engage with these potentials according to what may support this aim, due to the deep nexus with the site that this feature evidences. The locals are 'traditionally associated with the [site]' as a valid depot of live cultural data, which is 'the foundation' for more objective visions regarding the urban heritage-based tourist aim of the Citadel (IUCN 2004, p. 40). Thus, the realistic setup of the site within the global tourism based on this feature may necessitate a more effective partnership with the aboriginals, who have often been observed as the most appropriate elite to reveal the site's cultural potentials (Jasim et al 2017). In particular, Jasim et al. (2018) note that:

The locals are able to 'revealing some social norms inherent in the [Citadel]; detecting many of its obsolete architectural details; picturing some key historical stories submerged in the site's cultural layers; and thus, their performance as a "storytelling" for the recreational journey of this built heritage' (p. 82/3).
The profession-based vision may therefore come after this stage, which might yield a genuine contribution in drawing up a plan through which such local views can be more effectively channelled into the revelation of the site's sociocultural potential, as well as its activation to what may serve the site's touristic shift. Nevertheless, the first decision that was made for the site revitalisation is the evacuation decision that aims to clear the site of its inhabitants to prepare it for global tourism, whereas all the major decisions of the revitalisation were made afterwards (ICOMOS 2014). This, in fact, made the majority of the inhabitants unable to participate due to their early departure from the site, confining the setup of the revitalisation policy to mutual efforts shared between some global and local experts only.

If we appreciate the decision to make the site globally recognised, still the step to clear the Citadel of its inhabitants was premature since it contradicts, and even debilitates the tourist aim of the site. According to Hampton (2005), the evacuation made "the voices of the local people" powerless, thus confining the plan to the total subordination of the specialists views. In fact, some studies conducted on similar cases, such as Din (1993), conclude that the lack of local views is common within some loose top-down approaches of heritage conservation as their decision-makers often consider themselves the best to 'know what is good' for the site, and thus they 'do not consult with local people' (p. 329). Indeed, this vision largely mimics the case of the revitalisation. Moreover, the evacuation rescinds the unique traits (the continuous habitation of the site) that this aim is premised on, which instead relies on what the profession-based views that heritage experts may contribute to in this regard. As an Ottoman style, for instance, the architectural and urban context of the site has suffered different destructions and demolitions over the last two centuries and are now mostly in ruins (HCECR, 2012c), which makes reinstating the context to its original Ottoman setting somewhat challenging. Conservation experts are therefore seen here as the elite who know everything about heritage, and hence their contributions make restoration of any ruined part of its physical entity possible, and so this task should be completely entrusted to them.

Whereas accepting such a vision remains controversial, to enable qualitative understanding of its cultural assets for the visitor, the existence of the inhabitants is essential based on their live interpretations of these assets that allow open discussion with the visitor, as Timothy (1999) and Park (2014) mention. More importantly, it keeps the site vibrant for the visitor, proving its historical fact as a long-standing residential settlement. Yet, the current revitalisation approach confirms what Timothy (1999) notes that some top-down conservation approaches sightlessly believe that the locals' presence is 'unnecessary' for such goals (p. 384-5). For example, the main concern for the current policy is how to revitalise the site's physical potentials, which deems the authentic retrieval of its physical structures sufficient to create excitement, and thus attract visitors. Whereas the policy condones the fact that the site will be presented as a deserted context, some visitors may enjoy seeing the site celebrating its people, or their questions may demand the presence of the inhabitants.
Through the admittance of the site to the World Heritage List, the
ICOMOS Report (2014) also refers to this issue when repeatedly asserting the
significance of the site having been inhabited for millennia, and then suddenly
being socially deserted. For instance: 'Erbil Citadel stands alone for its
continuity of settlement…; the millennial continuity of occupation of the Erbil
site is also attested to be the remarkable permanence of its name….' (p. 80-81).
However, ‘the fact that Erbil Citadel is currently uninhabited detracts from its
sense of place as a town…and in this regard the…revitalisation formulas
appear excessively [to] not pay attention to the regeneration of the social
fabric’ within the Citadel (p. 80-86).

Therefore, ICOMOS affirms that:
The existence of the locals 'is strongly needed…as of utmost importance for
the future and long-term conservation of Erbil Citadel’s significance. ICOMOS
recommends that the HCECR take into account the role that the previous
residents may play in the revitalisation process…and foresees the return of
former inhabitants' (p. 87).¹

For ICOMOS, misusing the site’s traditional character and changing it
from a residential site to a touristic one results in the current fragility of local
participation in identifying the chronological order of some alterations that
affected the site, and secondly in formulating the diverse criteria of the site’s
sociocultural values, affect[ing] the traditional character of the [site] and the
sense of the place' (Ibid, p. 84). However, the revitalisation project’s top-down
approach seems to condone this discourse, which is perhaps due to the
endeavour of embedding the site's tourist shift within the roots of the
revitalisation policy from the beginning, which is evidenced through a number
of characteristics that have been employed as a motive to support this aim. For
instance, one of the "objectives" of the revitalisation plan is that the site’s
‘culture and cultural heritage will be used as vectors for development…making
it available to [] guests and ensuring its transmission to the future generations’
(UNESCO 2014 p. 5), which in fact shifts the aim from residential to touristic.
Additionally, the plan explicitly declares that the site 'will be enhanced by
means of [] tourism and leisure activities that are compatible with the historical
nature of the place and its aspirations to become a World Heritage Site'
supporting Erbil touristically (Ibid, p. 125). In this, the revitalisation policy
condones what has been endorsed earlier that part of its plan is to work "on
retrieving the Citadel’s spirit", which is residential (see Figure 3).

¹ HCECR: High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalisation, where the author was part of in
2007/8 as a Senior Architect
Figure 3. The Final Proposed Functions and Urban Land Use in the "Overall Master Plan", Which Shows the High Priority for the Tourism and its Recreational Complementary Functions that Dominate the Residential use of the Proposal (Final Report on Revitalisation of Erbil Citadel: Summary of Outputs of the Project 2009, P. 81)
On the other hand, as Brammah (2009a & 2009b) and HCECR (2012a) report, the fact that revitalising the whole site requires a huge budget also stands, albeit indirectly, as another reason for the absence of local views. Achieving this budget necessitates globalising the site touristically, for which the revitalisation policy considers the evacuation (which led to a total absence of these views) can expedite the process. It facilitates making the revitalisation a self-funded process in addition to its multiple economic returns on the whole place, and particularly Paris ICOMOS (2011) considers built heritage as an increasingly important constituent within the industry of global tourism, and thus as an essential driver of urban development of the place. In fact, historical built environments can play a fundamental role in boosting heritage-based tourism culturally, but this also entails a precise vision that invests in their realistic potential, which considers the inhabitants as a vital part of fulfilling this.

Perhaps, what can be stated here is that the new tourist shift might be unable to maintain the site's traditional identity as it seems far from being governed by its unique residential character. Yet, the question remains: are the inhabitants’ views really inefficient in supporting this shift including the aim of making the revitalisation a self-funded process?

Discussion

In fact, debating "why?" and "who?" underestimate the bottom-up views does no more than to reveal the level of consideration of the locals in the revitalisation policy. Firstly, the regional criteria that many Asian heritage sites are subject to (where the Citadel lies) are one of the factors that do not emphasise the importance of keeping these sites celebrating the permanent presence of their local communities. This, based on Uriely et al. (2003), Huang (2006), and Su and Li (2012), reduces cultural awareness regarding deeming the locals as real representatives of their heritage, whose views often receive slight consideration by many top-down approaches of heritage conservation. A study conducted on Nazareth Heritage in (2003), for example, shows that the residents' presence, and thus their visions, in conservation policies is ‘an issue that received little attention’ (p. 69). This, on the one hand, might interpret the weak application of the decentralising power strategy between the site’s authorities and inhabitants, which may underline its absence in the current revitalisation. On the other hand, it may prove that the revitalisation does not prioritise the notion of considering the inhabitants and culture of the site as fundamentally interlinked within its policy (Wilson, 2003).

Indeed, some local studies have come to confirm this fact, demonstrating that local conservation laws of Iraqi heritage sites lack a genuine action plan that considers the inhabitants as real representatives of the site. Through their experiences on some Iraqi heritage sites, Bortolotto et al. (2014) attribute this to the fact that these laws lack ‘an action plan targeting [local] communities [] through meetings and workshops’ (p. 101), which would tailor their views with the policy setup of the site conservation. The study reveals some specific shortages shared among these sites, such as (p. 100-101):

- Little awareness about the role and benefits from decision makers to grassroots levels;
- Local community-based organisations lack the official recognition and the capacity to participate in an actual development [in] community-based [cultural] resource management;
- Inadequate human, technical...capacity of cultural staff at local level to address the complex management issues and to secure effective implementation of conservation actions;
- Lack of integration between institutions and local development strategies.
In fact, this series of weaknesses makes the locals' views a vassal category subordinated to the site decision-makers, which often leads to weakening their appreciation of the conservation plan, and thus perceiving it 'as a restriction' that limits their contributions (Ibid, p. 101). Apparently, such weaknesses have combined to be afflicting the current experience of the revitalisation project, which, regardless of its tourist aim, the mechanism, or more precisely, the evacuation steps through which the site has been moved to achieve this aim are still controversial, and for a two-sided fact.

Firstly, for the policy-makers, the site represents a power for the place, acknowledging Erbil city through the global tourist milieus (Brammah 2009b, MacGinnis 2013), which, according to Uzzell (1996), and Howard (2003), grants the Citadel substantial significance in global tourism. In particular, the future trends to heritage tourism are increasingly seen as an influential incentive through which a new rapport can be found in the local-global nexus of the place based on the cultural potential of its historical environments, and thus between economy and politics (Chhabra et al., 2003). Accordingly, quoting Park (2014), re-directing the Citadel towards global tourism perhaps 'serves both economic incentives and political principles' (p. 3). In fact, what makes such a top-down vision to the site cogent is perhaps what different studies demonstrate that built heritage is powerful enough to flag and introduce the place’s cultural significance globally. For instance, Casey (2007) indicates that heritage 'holds the power to gather experiences, histories, memories and thoughts...in the way of life of many communities...making it...universal' (p. 507). It is a sufficient cultural structure, which enables the re-displaying of the place, communicating its meanings and values globally, as a popular foundation that has its private authority and potentials to legitimately determine the originality of this place (Chapman, 2008). Within this context, Erbil can represent a stockpile of diverse meanings and values for different people in various contexts, creating a kind of place attachment for the visitor as a 'cultural...process that engages with acts of remembering that [place]', substantiating its presence worldwide (Smith, 2006, p. 2). As such, the Citadel’s cultural significance is perhaps essential to shift the site towards this tourist destination.

However, what is contentious here is that re-directing the site towards this destination would not really contradict keeping the site vibrant for the visitor, especially the inhabitants' live views are often seen as 'primary evidence' in telling some bygone values and social norms of the site (Kerr 2013 p. 6-7). This consequently may 'provide handed down stories' that firstly enrich the site’s present cultural significance for the visitor (Ibid, p. 6-7), in addition to making solutions for some sociocultural issues rooted in their daily traditional habits as being integral to their heritage (Dicks, 2003). Hence, as a 'local history society', the Citadel's inhabitants should have been perceived as 'the most promising [elite] to begin' planning for heritage attractions of the site (Kerr 2013 p. 7). Instead of being permanently exiled, their participation should therefore represent a perpetual depository of continuous interpretations of the Citadel’s sociocultural values, which would boost the new cultural scenery of its built heritage, and thus its tourist reputation. This indeed makes heritage tourism goals of the Citadel 'integrated in the social fabric' of its urban context (Nicholas 2009, p. 397), 'as a determinant of residents’ attitudes' (Uriely et al., 2003, p. 69). As such, the inhabitants' role in the industry of the Citadel’s heritage attractions may create a 'more harmonious relationship between [] conservation and tourism' as two integral goals for the current revitalisation policy (Aas et al. 2005 p. 37).

Whilst, an intact vision of making the revitalisation a self-funded process is also conditional upon the viability of the cultural map that will govern the site. It should therefore be originating from the core of the site, while those local cultural assets should serve as a cornerstone of this map, which may increase visits ultimately. In both cases, the role of the inhabitants should be dynamically efficient in order to maintain heritage’s cultural meanings
which vary over time as a 'socially produced, negotiated entity' associated with the interpretations of the visitors and the residents alike (Williams, 2009: 237). Otherwise, the Citadel's built context may become a raw material that fabricates the past for a global touristic consumption, making its cultural heritage 'a nomadic term [and] capricious enough to accommodate widely discrepant meanings' (Samuel 1994 p. 205).

Some instances in this regard show that attempting to access some very local cultural assets of heritage without genuine efforts of its aboriginals often leads to ostensible reconnaissance of these meanings, and thus superficial ties with them. An example of this comes from Angkor heritage where policies were drawn up through a non-traditional approach to represent fascination with its classical architectural residue, which led to condescending the site's anthropological accounts including oral history, local traditions and beliefs across generations. Citing Staiff et al. (2013), this truly requires rethinking how cultural tourism is 'used and deployed within the heritage industry' of the Citadel (p. 175). Otherwise, Erbil may depart from its unique trait of having a deep residential history to merely become an urban venue accommodating global tourism, proving that the site's authorities are curious about preserving the physical components of its built context more than how these components have accommodated unique authentic traditions over history, substituting them with new tourist activities.

To avoid this, the activation of the Citadel's tourist aims should be run through re-employing its bygone events and values in a way that ensures their vital correlation with the present-day cultural language of the place, which together may re-shape a new cultural manifestation for the site. To attain this, the deep correlation between the inhabitants and the site’s history and culture entails granting them a position in displaying the site’s cultural significance, as being the relevant knowledge-holders of its cultural roots (ICOMOS 2008, ICOMOS 2013). 'Erasure of the indigenous people as a living culture [otherwise] makes a...reflexive understanding very difficult for visitors' of the Citadel (Staiff, et. al, 2013, p. 198). According to Dicks (2000); Crooke (2007) and Nicholas (2009), this correlation is deep-rooted and embedded in the historical expansion, cultural traditions and social habits of such environments, and should therefore be the first threshold towards fruitful planning for their potentials. This consequently validates their input in demonstrating many tangible and intangible cultural features embedded in the local past of the site as vernacular heritage actions: the inhabitants are indeed "akin" and "built-in" in the site’s culture, history and meanings (Taylor 2004, Silva & Chapagain 2013).

Hence, Jasim et al. (2017), state that their views abbreviate time in revealing some cultural-historical facts 'inherent in the local social repercussions entangled with the site [] whereby the individual and collective memory is inseparable and correlative' (p. 285), which often drive to more transparent inputs, and thus more feasible outcomes regarding planning for cultural heritage-based tourism of the site. Indeed, this is what Erbil Citadel current revitalisation policy requires. The chronological history of the latter shows variation of events and values since the Neolithic era until its modern Ottoman period (HCECR, 2012c), making local-based views an essential factor in boosting their display as a panoramic scene for the visitors (Naef & Ploner, 2016). This, in turn, may better stimulate the visitor’s ongoing narratives about these values and events as part of an 'endless' process of interpretations (Crang,1994 p. 341), and thus contribute to making Erbil’s heritage 'more attractive and appealing' through a 'reliable' process of uninterrupted re-creation of its stories and meanings (Park 2014, p. 1).

All of this should put the Citadel’s inhabitants as "key informants" who can 'play varied and often overlapped roles' to unveil the tourist potential of its cultural heritage, and thus help in inaugurating 'long-term growth for cultural [] tourism strategies' of its current revitalisation policy (MacDonald & Jolliffe 2003 p. 309). Yet, animating the tourist aim of the site and
through the evacuation step is mostly held in subjective considerations, which reflects a state of repudiation from the role of the site’s social constituents when condoned from the new cultural scenario of the site. This perhaps was one of the glitches that has prevented the aim from being achieved, which subsequently led the UNESCO Office/Iraq (2016) to appeal to any efforts that would really revive this aim and bring it back to life.

**Conclusion**

What makes Erbil’s revitalisation policy materially misstated is a synthesis of repercussions surrounding its vision of making the Citadel’s built heritage a global tourist site based on its sociocultural potential. The policy seems unable to display realistic planning appropriates these potentials, or even resolves the current issues surrounding them. The premature neglect of the locals’ views regarding valid activation of these potentials may be seen clearly. The policy seeks to promote the site’s cultural significance in preparing for this aim, whereas it condones the locals’ role in building its cultural story, and thus leaves it distant from including many sociocultural facts of the site. Its agglomerated sociocultural makeup over a long history proves that numerous sociocultural aspects necessitate the concrete engagement of this role, which can provide numerous information, proposals and recommendations that motivate the site culturally. It broadens and refines the heritage's diverse potentials employed to attain the tourist aim, and thus enlivens the general cultural image of its built context.

In contrast, the policy’s main mechanism seems highly drawn to preserving the material architectural context of the site only. Instead of broadening the interest-base of the site’s tourist aim and involving different intangible sociocultural potentials, it has been confined to accommodating particular economic objectives that mainly rely on preserving the physical settings of the site in order to attract the global investor first and foremost. As a top-down policy, this is regarded facilitative for the next step, which is the adaptation of the site to accommodate new functions, all of which serve its new tourist shift, where the evacuation step is perhaps made in support of this. Yet, planning for the Citadel’s heritage tourism, in this case, will not be mainly based on an empirical vision originating from the site, but will rather be a kind of theoretical-conceptual practice, or even according to what tourists’ narratives dictate. This leads to an insignificant access and ostensible exploration of some very local cultural assets of the settlement, particularly those ingrained in the roots of the Ottoman period of the site. As such, the tourist aim should not be drawn to represent a fascination of its physical assets, whilst the site’s social accounts including local traditions and beliefs across generations are overlooked. This, indeed, entails rethinking how cultural tourism can be positioned within Erbil heritage industry based on some potential that basically may originate from its local residential environment, making returning the inhabitants to the site essential. Otherwise, condoning the site’s residential feature indicates its imprecise employment within the tourist shift, and especially if it is deemed the basis for this shift. Moreover, keeping the site socially deserted may deepen the gap between this shift and its real achievement on the ground.

Whilst, tracing the roots of the reasons that led to the marginalisation of the community role locally (which may not stray far from being ingrained in the Iraqi laws of heritage conservation), it can be stated that the prime reason behind this lies within the constitutionality of the laws’ formulation. Accordingly, the study endorses that any future studies in this regard should investigate the mechanism of formulation of these laws with regard to the heritage’s potentials and requirements focusing on the measures and determinants that have materially participated in constructing these laws. The latter should be
upgraded with new tools and visions in accordance with what keeps them more flexible, comprehensive and open according to what may make them able to assimilate the diverse considerations surrounding the site. Embedded in this, the current revitalisation’s guidelines of Erbil Citadel should sustain a state of flexibility connecting between its sociocultural hegemony and the political-cultural image envisioned for the future of the site which invokes pride in the local history of Kurdistan. The guidelines should therefore aim at understanding the built context as a malleable notion that makes it possible to relate it to wider future tourism contexts, but tied to its authentic values and inner settings as a cultural and social makeup. Otherwise, altering the context from residential to touristic may subject it to a process of continuous building of non-fixed and fast-changing cultural entities, which may detach it from its traditional assets, and thus confiscate its historical-cultural identity eternally.

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