

# Activating the potentiality of local community participation in preserving cultural heritage

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## Abstract

The study is concerned with developing an integrative approach for the local community's role in preserving heritage hand-by-hand with institutions and experts concerned with heritage. This would be done in an exchange process with a dual phase by investigating the development of concepts related to the local community according to international organizations concerned with world heritage. The growing interest that the local community can play led UNESCO in 2007 to adopt local and indigenous communities as a strategic principle within the five strategic principles of the Convention. It went beyond that to rely on the role of the community in the nomination process and not the opinion of experts for heritage sites, relying on the idea that the community's recognition of the importance of the site is a guarantee of its continued responsibility in protecting this cultural heritage. The study includes three main axes. The first deals with the theoretical framework of the role of the local community in heritage preservation processes. The second axis specializes in reviewing pioneering experiences in conservation projects within the development perspective of the local community in light of the preservation of heritage resources. Then we discuss in the third axis the results reached by the research, which showed that there is a tangible role for the community in heritage preservation processes. The impact varies according to three stages: the planning stage, the implementation stage, and the evaluation stage. This can represent a work program for heritage institutions in Iraq and the role that the community can play in light of projects to preserve its cultural resources, where it is possible to provide protection and sustainability for these resources as well as developing the local communities to which this heritage belongs.

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## 1. Introduction

The interest of those concerned with heritage from international organizations is increasing the role that local communities can play in protecting cultural heritage since 1994, when the first reference to residents appeared in the operational guidelines (as outlined in the series of operational guidelines for implementation of the World Heritage Convention Issued by UNESCO).

The local community has an effective role in conservation operations, starting with the process of developing and implementing plans that require protection, rehabilitation, and its requirements, as well as managing heritage resources. The local community is no longer the passive component on which conservation decisions fall, but rather a major component in all conservation activities at all its stages. The problem of the study lies in the absence of the effective role of community participation in conservation projects in Iraq at all its stages, whether in the planning, implementation, or evaluation stages. Involving the community in these decisions will make them enthusiastic about the implementation and will also reduce the possibility of harm to it. Rather, it goes beyond that to achieve economic, cultural, and urban benefits. Conservation no longer targets the building or valuable site alone, but rather it is viewed within a comprehensive development process that targets the surrounding environment, quality of life, and the well-being of the people living there. The United Nations Human Settlements Program has stressed the need to activate community participation and enhance transparency, and governance in decision-making. In this context, the success of heritage area rehabilitation projects is closely linked to the extent of community participation, motivation, and interaction towards highlighting the value of local and cultural life, as the community participation process enhances the sustainability of these projects and their compatibility with the needs of the local community [1].

Recently, some studies dealing with heritage have argued that it is important to involve the community in the management of sites, which is crucial to the preservation of heritage sites and the sustainability of local communities [2], [3]. Efforts to conserve heritage, either natural or cultural, through the World Heritage Program, should be considered cooperation with local people because this heritage also serves as an important resource and in the income of local people [4]. The success of heritage conservation depends on the awareness, participation, and appreciation of heritage values by stakeholders, especially the local community. The community will make wise decisions about protecting and conserving resources that define the essence of their culture and society [5].

Iraq has a huge cultural heritage stock that represents the identity and memory of society, as it has more than 15,000 sites and many religious monuments and historical centers, in addition to archives, manuscripts, and handicrafts of global and national importance with their exceptional values. However, it suffers from many problems at unprecedented rates [6]. The reasons for these problems vary, ranging from weak financial capabilities and shortcomings in the conservation policies followed and their inability to deal with the problems and complexities of reality. In addition, the absence of public awareness of the importance of heritage and the importance of their participation in preserving and reviving it, which in turn led to the decline of the role of society in conservation policies.

Despite the institutional efforts to try to provide protection and sustainability of these sites and preserve them, we find a separation between society and heritage for various reasons. So, the research question revolves around the nature of community participation in the preservation process of heritage by delving into previous literature and identifying diverse experiences as a model in a context that serves to enhance community participation in conservation projects in Iraq. There is an absence of an active role of the local community in the processes of preserving cultural heritage in Iraq in all conservation projects that have been carried out over the past years, as well as a limited number of local studies that address this topic. The practical arena has only witnessed individual initiatives from community organizations seeking to build capacities to restore lost heritage after wars, including what was launched by ICCROM in its heritage recovery program in Mosul. It is a two-year capacity-building program, organized in collaboration with UNESCO and Mosul University, with support from the UAE and the European Union. The program aims to promote community reconciliation through environmental recovery and the rehabilitation of heritage sites in the city, and to make long-term sustainable income for the people of Mosul and ensure their future prosperity.

Community participation is one of the important factors to ensure the success of cultural heritage preservation projects. Therefore, the study aims to reveal the importance of the role of the local community in the process of preserving the heritage and the nature of this role in enhancing the economic aspect and improving the quality

of life for the community. The research seeks to solve this gap by revealing the importance of the role of the local community in the process of preserving the heritage and the nature of this role in enhancing the economic aspect raising the standard of living for society and improving the quality of life, by finding mechanisms to involve local communities in heritage sites in Iraq.

The study also aims to enable heritage institutions in their planning and formulation of sound policies and management directed towards combating the problems of preserving cultural heritage in relation to community participation in heritage management. This study reached in its results the framework of heritage institutions and community participation mechanisms by proposing the adoption of a more comprehensive and participatory approach to preserving and managing heritage. The importance of the research comes from the fact that it frames the role of community participation in preservation projects and the research attempts to analyze the role of community participation from selected experiences. The results of the research can contribute to providing decision-makers with recommendations on possible measures to activate the role of community participation in the framework of preserving heritage and in a way that contributes to ensuring the success of future urban rehabilitation projects.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Local community and increasing awareness of its role in heritage preservation**

Despite what appears to be clear about the concept of the local community, the ambiguity surrounding this concept is represented in the different terms used in the literature that refer to it, in addition to stating the spatial and temporal boundaries that refer to it. Here we must cite all the concepts used and their context by organizations concerned with heritage, to conclude with a specific definition adopted by the study to achieve its objectives. Several terms were mentioned in operational guidelines that refer in their entirety to the concept of local community. The first references to its role in the processes of preserving cultural heritage and the concept of local people were mentioned in 1994. In 1996, the use of local communities emerged. After that, in 2005, the term local population was used, and in the same year, the concept of traditional societies was used. In 2008, local community was used, and in 2015, the term indigenous peoples was used. Here, it is necessary to address what studies have addressed in their definition of local community.

Chiwaura refers in this regard to a group of people who share the same geographical boundaries [7]. Indigenous and local community are two terms used internationally by organizations for the individuals and communities who identify themselves as Indigenous peoples, and at the same time, these communities have been able to maintain an intergenerational connection to the place. This term does not mean to neglect the diversity among peoples. Community is primarily understood in terms of how groups of people are organized and interact in a particular neighborhood, area, or region. The term community can be understood as groups of people formed based on common ties [8].

A study conducted in 2021, as shown in Figure 1, monitored the period during which concepts related to the local community were included in the operational guidelines from its first issuance in 1977 until 2019, and the number of times these terms were repeated and the increase in their repetition in subsequent years.

This study concluded the following [9]:

- Firstly, there was no reference to the local community within the operational guidelines from their first edition in 1977, until 1994, the year in which the first reference to local people appeared.
- Secondly, the appearance of words indicating the role of the local community began to increase since 2005, within the guidelines indicate focusing on the responsibility of local people in the sustainable preservation of world heritage.
- Thirdly, the number of these words increased in the 2019 guidelines, as the terms "local communities" and "indigenous peoples" increased respectively to 12 and 18 times.

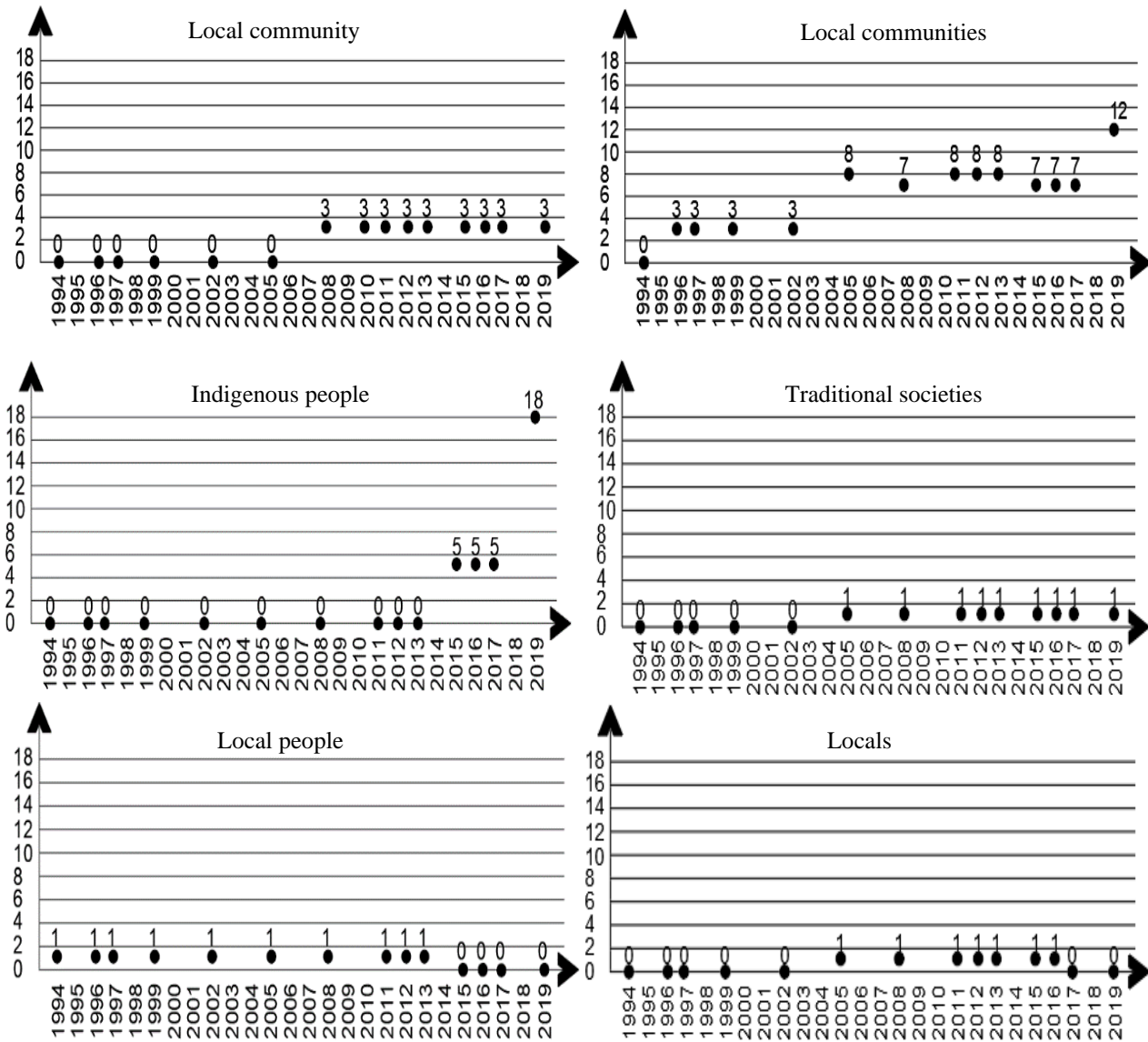


Figure 1. The number of repetitions of concepts related to the local community for the period from 1994-2019; Source: Authors based on the study [9]

**2.2. The change of conservation according to the local community's importance**

The radical change that occurred due to the growing awareness of the role of local communities has changed the concept of preserving world heritage from preserving heritage to preserving people and heritage through the emergence of new concepts that did not exist before. The concepts of local community welfare and respect for human rights showed up for the first time in the guidelines in 2019, 2021, and 2023, respectively, as shown in Figure 2 [10][11][12].

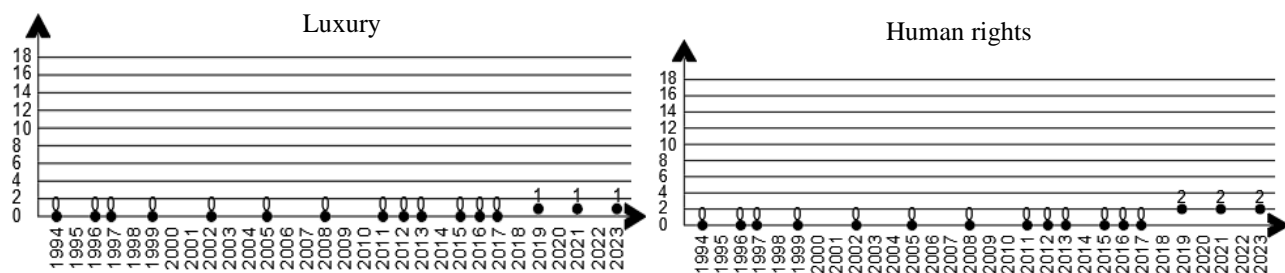


Figure 2. Repetition of the concepts of well-being and human rights in operational guidelines; Source: Authors based on [10][11][12]

## 2.3. The importance of community involvement

### 2.3.1. Community participation

Community participation is not a new concept, but there has been increasing awareness of community participation in recent years in various development and management processes [8]. The concept of community participation is gaining increasing momentum in all areas of development at all political, social, and economic levels, as well as heritage institutions [7]. Participation can be understood as a process of identifying stakeholders, involving them in the process, and influencing project outcomes. Participation can be practiced in various ways such as meetings and seminars. Through these opportunities, people have the ability to participate in decision-making processes, especially in decisions that may affect their lives and well-being [8]. Community participation means engaging in strengthening a community's capacity to control heritage or developing collective influence over cultural heritage [7]. Effective community participation is such that not only do residents take the initiative to participate in influencing the institutional process of decisions, but the institution also takes the initiative to welcome residents involved in these processes to incorporate interests and needs into decisions.

### 2.3.2. The role of participation of community in heritage

Most cultural heritage sites are affected and affect (negatively or positively) the surrounding communities. Therefore, it is very important to have a sound knowledge of the needs, expectations, impacts, and visions of these communities, which can sometimes conflict [13].

Participatory approaches in the management of heritage have shown in various countries to be more efficient and sustainable than top to down methods. By participating local people in management, benefits can be achieved for the communities themselves. Participation in community helps in the growing of belonging sense and identity because it gives the people stronger ties to their identity and belonging sense to their heritage. The community's sense of belonging to its heritage enhances its shared responsibility towards this heritage. This leads to the continuity of the heritage and the preservation of its authenticity. On the other hand, more job opportunities can be created for the community to which the heritage belongs, especially the economic gains resulting from heritage tourism [8]. Community members can participate in different ways such as [14]:

- To propose initiatives that would protect heritage
- Constructively participate in decision-making related to heritage protection and development of the environment to which the heritage belongs
- Contribute to promoting the importance of heritage
- Point out the potential risks that threaten heritage.

## 2.4. Community participation levels in conservation

Community involvement is a general concept used in all political, social, and scientific fields. The best way to gain benefits from the role of the local community and its fields is through what was issued by the International Association for Public Participation, known as IAP2. IAP2 has issued what is called the participation spectrum to clarify the role of the public through its participation in decision-making. It has identified five levels of this participation, ranging from the least influential on the decision-making and formulation process to the most influential. These levels are shown in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1. Spectrum of public participation; Source: Authors based on [15]

| Increase impact on the local community |   |   |   |   |                                      |
|--|---|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|
|  | Informing   | Consulting                                  | Participation   | Cooperation   | Empowerment                          |
| Objective                              | Informing the community of suitable information to give | For general comments on the analysis and/or | Involving the community in decision-making processes to | Expanding community participation not only in decision- | The decision is up to the community. |

| Increase impact on the local community |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
|  | Informing  | Consulting  | Participation   | Cooperation   | Empowerment   |
|  | them a good knowledge of the problems and/or available alternatives and/or opportunities and/or results.   | alternatives and/or decisions.  | understand their concerns and requirements.   | making but also in developing potential alternatives to reach the optimal solution.   |   |
| Role of the local community            | Passive recipients of information  | Contribute to the consultation process with their views and preferences   | Participate in the decision-making process organized by officials of various  | responsibilities and levels<br>Officials share decision-making authority with community members   | Making the decision in part or in full. Here the decision is a reverse process issued by the community and the officials have no choice but to put these decisions into effect. |
| concern                                | It requires credibility and transparency, not withholding any basic information, and not sharing information for the purpose of distorting an issue in order to manipulate public opinion. | Gathering opinions and not taking them into account - bias towards some opinions.   | Officials and organizers do not provide the required training and support that participants may need efficiently, or the participation process is selective in order to empower some groups at the expense of others.                         | Officials use their influence to weaken their community partners.   | Individuals who do not have the ability or resources to manage it efficiently are assigned.   |
| Outputs                                | Keeping the community informed.  | Keeping the community informed, listening to their concerns and interests, and taking these aspirations and concerns into account in the decision-making process. | Collaborate and work with the community to ensure that all their interests are taken into account in the development of alternative solutions and the process of developing them and demonstrating how the public influences decision-making. | Asking the community to take it upon itself to provide suggestions and solutions and to incorporate these suggestions into the decision-making process to a greater extent. | Implementing community decisions  |

There is no doubt that all levels of the participation spectrum have pros and cons. Thus, it requires adopting a certain level rather than others depending on the decision that needs to be taken and the wise management of the decision-making and implementation processes. With the same context, a study [16] showed that the levels of community participation come in seven stages, maneuvering and therapy, information, consultation and placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Figure 3 and Table 2 illustrate this.



Figure 3. Community participation ladder according to [16]

Table 2. Levels of community participation; Source: Authors based on [16]

| Participation level                  | Nature of community participation  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Maneuvering                          | Community presence without participation, such as having representatives of the population on official councils, but they are not elected and have no power, as the society cannot change what has been previously taken.  |
| Therapy                              | This process gives people the opportunity to have a say in issues without any formal form or feedback that can be taken into account. It is the stage that falls under the framework of non-participation.   |
| Informing                            | The first stage of the ladder of real partial participation, which means providing inputs that help in developing an effective policy by the authority, is related to informing citizens about the concept of project development and provides them with limited opportunities to provide advice on small changes or the nature of urban rehabilitation in a symbolic manner.  |
| Consultation                         | It includes slight degrees of participation, where the government provides some forums for the community to take into account different points of view or interactive platforms through various forms such as workshops that help extract general goals, ideas, and concerns regarding decisions related to the fate of regions, and consultation is done by the public answering questions or by consulting a group of elites in society. |
| Placation                            | Includes moderate level of participation; residents cooperate in decision-making by forming groups to achieve pre-determined project objectives after identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.   |
| Partnership                          | Refers to the degree of influence of people in the project, and involves the granting of delegated authority. Partnership is associated with a higher level of participation in the real decision-making process with community members and is achieved through the establishment of joint councils between the community and decision-making institutions.  |
| Delegated power, and citizen control | This system is characterized by the highest levels of public participation in decision-making. Decisions in resource allocation and public administration are heavily biased in favor of the public.   |

## 2.5. Stages of community participation in conservation projects

Community participation in conservation projects can enhance the rehabilitation process and its chances of success. Participation can take three basic stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation [17],[18] as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Stages of local community participation in conservation projects, based on [17],[18]

Table 3. The basic stages of community participation in conservation projects and their provisions, Source: Authors based on [17],[18]

| Stage          | Nature of Community Participation  |
|----------------|--|
| Planning       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Involving the community in the planning process contributes to providing informed inputs on potential conservation policies, which positively impacts the context of the area with its economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It also enhances community empowerment, understanding its needs, and removing any ambiguity related to the proposed rehabilitation project.</li> <li>2. Involving the local community in the planning stage is a key factor for the success of the project, as the community cannot adapt to a plan imposed from the top down; at the same time, the community needs to consult experts to provide comprehensive alternatives that meet functional needs.</li> <li>3. In the planning stage, the local community can participate in preparing plans and providing its opinions regarding the rehabilitation of heritage sites</li> <li>4. This participation enhances the community's ability to negotiate ownership and long-term lease issues, benefit from its opinions in the process of rebuilding damaged buildings in the old architectural style, and obtain information about the history of the heritage area.</li> </ol> |
| Implementation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local community participation in the implementation phase can include rebuilding, restoring, or maintaining heritage buildings, which contributes to reducing the high costs of urban heritage rehabilitation projects.</li> <li>2. The parties concerned with these projects may begin implementing them while the local population is present in the area, which necessitates cooperation and participation with the local population.</li> <li>3. Community participation in rehabilitation projects can help individuals from the local community acquire and develop technical skills in restoration, as well as follow up on work in the operation phase.</li> <li>4. The local community can undertake the operation and management of the project.</li> <li>5. Participation in this phase depends on harnessing all available local community resources, whether material or human or benefiting from the expertise of the elderly.</li> <li>6. The importance of this phase lies in enhancing the sense of belonging among participants and increasing awareness of the importance of preserving the cultural value of the heritage area.</li> </ol>             |



| Stage      | Nature of Community Participation   |
|------------|---|
| Evaluation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community participation contributes to addressing the delicate issues facing urban heritage rehabilitation projects, especially those related to the operational and post-use phases.</li> <li>2. The importance of this phase is highlighted in evaluating implementation steps, reviewing specific objectives, and ensuring that plans are properly implemented.</li> <li>3. The local community's appreciation of the value of heritage and sense of its importance enhances the sustainability of the project and protects it from potential encroachments during the period of use.</li> <li>4. The local community provides ongoing recommendations or comments on how to benefit from the project and employ it economically to achieve returns that benefit the region and the region.</li> </ol> |

Through the above studies, community participation can be defined from a research perspective as: including programs, initiatives, and various levels of community members' contribution, whether material or moral, within a legal framework that allows the community to express its opinions and participate in decision-making related to the preservation and development of heritage areas. It is a two-way participatory process that brings together official institutions and members of the local community (individuals and groups). It consists of several levels, the least influential of which is reporting. It gradually includes consultation, participation, and cooperation processes, and reaches its peak in the process of enabling the community to take the initiative in all processes related to preservation and its management, in terms of the number of planning and implementation studies. Community participation does not mean and does not only aim to preserve the heritage and its resources but is within a comprehensive vision of development to preserve heritage and people and achieve the well-being of society from a broad perspective.

## 2.6. Local community as a strategic objective of the World Heritage Convention

Experience from conflicts between communities in heritage areas and heritage authorities has shown that forcing communities to follow rules issued by institutions in which communities do not participate is impractical and more costly than involving them. World Heritage management has shown that projects that rely on limited community involvement are more costly and less beneficial. Examples of such projects have failed because of limited community engagement. Often religious or cultural values are of great importance to local communities and may not be taken into account by decision-makers because people are not involved in the planning and management process. For example, while some valleys, rocks, or monuments may be viewed by heritage specialists or authorities as natural resources, these sites may be sacred to local people [19]. The study indicated that among the measures that constitute opportunities for protecting, preserving, and reviving heritage is raising awareness among local community members about the possibility of investing in their heritage. Realizing the cultural values associated with it and preserving this heritage represents a strategy for sustainable development, in addition to providing the community and specialists with maintenance mechanisms.

The growing interest in involving local communities in heritage topics prompted UNESCO in 2007 to add the local community as a fifth strategic objective to the World Heritage Convention, which was adopted in 1972 [20]. The decision was to emphasize the four objectives: credibility, conservation, capacity building, and communication as strategic objectives. These four principles were approved by UNESCO in 2002. Recognizing the importance of involving local communities, it was decided to add the local community as a fifth strategic objective in implementing the Convention in 2007 [21], so that the objectives are as follows:

1. Credibility: as a condition for the exceptional universal value of cultural and natural heritage elements.
2. Conservation: includes taking all necessary measures to ensure the effective preservation and maintenance of heritage elements.

3. Capacity-building: Taking measures to build capacity, such as assisting in the preparation of nomination files for heritage resources for inclusion on the World Heritage List, as well as taking all necessary measures to understand the implementation of the WHC.
4. Communication: Focusing on communicating with the public to raise public awareness of heritage resources, increase their participation, and provide the support they can provide to World Heritage.
5. Local communities: Strengthening all necessary measures to activate the role of the local community to implement the Heritage Convention [22].

Meeting the challenges posed by Strategic Objective 5 requires enabling the meaningful participation of Indigenous residents and local community at the earliest stages of the nomination process, enhancing their active participation in site-level conservation, building their capacities, and ensuring that the sustainable development of World Heritage sites benefits local communities. Ensuring this participation will include all stages of the World Heritage Life cycle. UNESCO is developing a policy on Indigenous peoples and has highlighted these issues in recent publications on themes related to communities and sustainable development in World Heritage. In addition, the World Heritage Centre has developed a policy on sustainable development that provides an opportunity to effectively integrate the rights-based approach into the Convention [23]. Active participation includes not only tangible heritage resources but also intangible resources. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has emphasized that the participation of the local community or target group should be the primary objective of ongoing activities carried out under the Convention. Therefore, activities to preserve specific elements of cultural heritage should be carried out by the communities, groups, and individuals concerned. Table 4 shows the requirements for local community participation contained in the agreement and the executive directives [24].

Table 4. Requirements for the participation of local communities or groups contained in the Convention and the Executive Directives of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage [24]

| <b>Tasks</b>  | <b>Community or group involvement required or recommended</b>      | <b>Community or group consent required or recommended</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| Identify and define its intangible cultural heritage                    | Required   | Imposed required  |
| Prepare an inventory of its intangible cultural heritage                | Strongly recommended   | Strongly recommended  |
| Raise awareness of its intangible cultural heritage                     | (Required for heritage items nominated in Forms ICH-01 and ICH-02) | Prior, free, and informed acceptance required   |
| Safeguard and manage its intangible cultural heritage                   | Strongly recommended   |   |
| Business activities related to intangible cultural heritage             | Strongly recommended   | Evidence of free, prior, and informed consent must be provided  |
| Nominate elements   | Required   | Imposed required (Forms ICH-01 and ICH-02)  |
| Develop and implement safeguarding, management, and management measures | Strongly recommended   |   |
| Requests for international assistance                                   | (Required for heritage items nominated in Forms ICH-01 and ICH-02) | Imposed required (communities concerned must have agreed to the dissemination of best conservation practices) |
| Nominate best safeguarding practices.                                   | Required for dossiers  | Community or group consent required or recommended  |
| Prepare periodic reports  | Required   |   |

| Tasks   | Community or group involvement required or recommended | Community or group consent required or recommended |
|---|--|--|
| Representation in advisory bodies and coordination mechanisms | Strongly recommended                                   |  |

### 3. Research methodology

This study relied on the descriptive analytical approach, by reviewing the theoretical concepts of the role of community participation and its stages in heritage area rehabilitation projects for selected models in three main axes. The first axis includes theoretical study to determine the dimensions and indicators of the success of community participation. The second axis is concerned with analyzing models of experiences in the context of local community participation and identifying the most important opportunities for the success of those experiences. The third axis is concerned with discussing the results and reaching the identification of mechanisms for effective community participation in the field of heritage preservation.

### 4. Case studies of community participation in preserving historical sites

In this section, we discuss pioneering global and regional experiences in terms of community participation to monitor the various aspects of participation and its role in preserving the heritage assets of the sites and cities to which these communities belong. Moreover, we study the opportunities and threats related to preservation projects to crystallize a set of indicators that contribute to understanding the role that the local community can play in cultural heritage, and the opportunities arising from heritage and its contribution to the economic and social well-being of communities.

#### 4.1. Blue residential buildings in Hong Kong

The Blue Buildings are located in the Wan Chai area in Hong Kong and consist of three buildings named according to their colors, namely blue, yellow, and orange, in addition to the surrounding open area (Figure 5). The Blue and Yellow buildings were built between 1923 and 1925 respectively, followed by the Orange in 1956. The Blue and Yellow have been given Grade I and Grade III historic building status by the Office of Monuments of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department [25] [26].

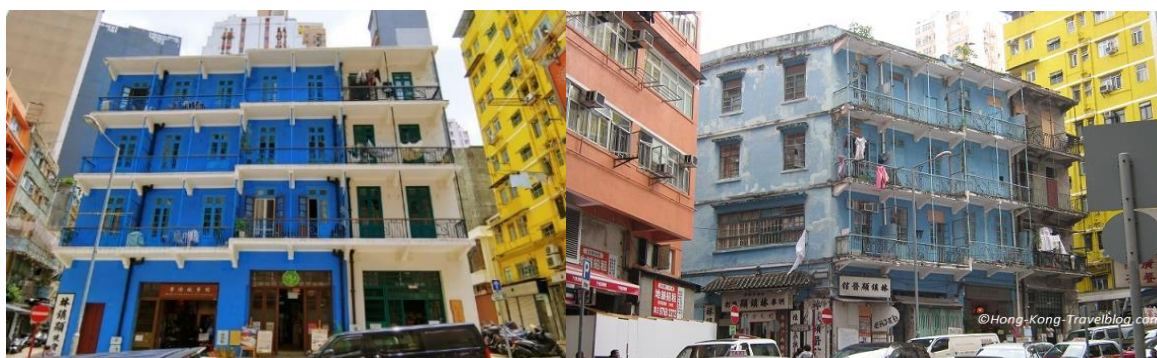


Figure 5. The Blue Houses in Hong Kong before and after rehabilitation [25], [26]

#### 4.1.1. Revitalization project (2006-2016) for residential buildings

In 2006, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Hong Kong developed a revitalization project that adopted the participatory approach of house and tenant retention. The revitalization process not only preserved the physical heritage but also strengthened and sustained community ties and local culture in the neighborhood. Through various participation initiatives and new building improvements, the entire area was preserved. Participation in the revitalization project can be divided into two phases [26].

Phase 1, when the Hong Kong Revitalization Authority was responsible for the project. Public consultations and hearings were used as the main mechanism for participation. However, these hearings were symbolic, limited, and restricted, serving mainly to inform and explain the project to the public. Public opinions were not

considered at this stage, and there was only a one-way flow of information and interaction between project supporters and community members was kept to a minimum.

In Phase 2, there was a higher degree of public participation and engagement than in Phase 1. Consultation and briefing sessions were used. The responsible authority took a more active role and acted as a conduit between stakeholders and project funders such as non-profit organizations. For example, the responsible authority informed stakeholders of the proposals formulated by the non-profit organizations and consulted them regularly. Public input on these proposals was welcomed. Participation at this stage was thus more participatory. However, the final decision-making remained in the hands of the responsible authority and the non-profit organizations. The cooperation of the different stakeholders worked closely together throughout the rehabilitation period, and jointly developed conservation principles.

What can be learned from this experience regarding the participation of the local community, the authorities, and non-profit organizations involved in the revitalization project are the following:

1. Adopting the original use of the site, which is the residential activity as much as possible to avoid mummifying the heritage.
2. Building a strong sense of identity and the importance of local heritage in the local community.
3. A participatory approach instead of the traditional strategy from top to down.
4. Preserving the tangible cultural heritage, including facades, internal structures, roofs, floors, stairs, etc.
5. Preserving the intangible cultural heritage, including stories, culture, lifestyle, oral history, and cultural traditions.
6. Establishing a local management committee to include the local community as well as all the interesting groups with the heritage including stakeholders, residents, specialists, academics, artists, government officials, and NGOs.
7. Establishing different forms of social projects to achieve social inclusion and community participation.

Community identity, development, and culture are the main themes of the project. Community participation is also highly practiced here, involving a high degree of participatory planning and community co-management of heritage. Even after the completion of the revitalization project, residents and community members continue to participate in the co-management of the site. This not only preserves the existing tangible and intangible heritage but also maintains the social fabric. Through this, heritage conservation can be achieved in a more socially and culturally sustainable manner. Due to this holistic approach, the project received the Excellence Award at the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Cultural Heritage Conservation Awards 2017. This is the first time a heritage conservation project in Hong Kong has received this award. The project has been described as a demonstration of a holistic approach to the conservation of urban areas with cultural heritage. This is an unprecedented effort to protect local heritage in one of the most stressed real estate markets in the world. It is an inspiration for other urban areas.

#### **4.2. Volunteer project in Pahlavan-Pour World Heritage Site**

The project is located at the meeting point of Pahlavan-Pour Park and Hassan Abad Moshir Canal in Iran (Figure 6). The two sites are World Heritage Sites, with the garden being one of nine Persian gardens inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2011. The gardens are located in nine different provinces and represent the diversity of Persian garden forms dating back to the era of Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC [27] [28] [29].

The Hassanabad Moshir Qanat is one of eleven Persian Qanats on the site, all 11 of which were inscribed under the name Persian Qanats in 2016 [30]. The voluntary initiative by the Coordinating Committee, World Heritage Centre, and European Heritage has the aim to raise awareness among the various participants about the maintenance requirements of the canals and their associated gardens. The project also aims to enhance cooperation between the local community, the site management, and the various participants in the conservation of these canals, and to provide the knowledge required to learn the basics of conservation techniques and understand the different values associated with the sites.



Figure 6. On the right are the sites of the nine Persian gardens, and on the left are the eleven canals included on the World Heritage List in 2011 and 2016 [29]

Various volunteers were involved in the conservation and maintenance activities of the canals and were accompanied by experts, in addition to promoting cultural exchange between national and international volunteers.

#### 4.2.1. Contribution to sustainable development goals

Volunteers participated in conservation work under the supervision of experts. The participants' work included contributing to cleaning and maintaining parts of the canal using local traditional methods and materials. Residents were educated about harmful practices in the canal, such as washing clothes and carpets, which affect the appearance of the canal, and impact the quality of the canal's water, the environment, and the health of residents. Volunteers also explained conservation activities to tourists and residents and encouraged them to participate in the maintenance work (Figure 7). The project increased local and international awareness of the importance of the canal as an exceptional hydraulic system in arid regions. During this experience, interactive activities were conducted to enable women to lead and manage activities indoors and outdoors.



Figure 7. Hassan Abad Canal and the participation of the local community and volunteers in restoring the walls surrounding the historical park, under the supervision of local experts [27]

Traditional techniques and sustainable agricultural solutions were reintroduced to the local community to control pests that caused the gradual loss of fruit trees in the city and the canal. The audience was listened to in telling stories about the canals, aiming to raise their awareness of the need to protect heritage properties during the World Heritage Volunteer Camp. The most important benefits of the volunteer experience of the Pahlavan Pur project are the following:

1. Raising awareness of the importance of local heritage as an exceptional world heritage.
2. Educating the local community about wrong practices that affect the authenticity of the heritage site.

3. Educating the local community about the importance of using sustainable traditional techniques to control the pest problem and increase agricultural yields.
4. Involving the local community on the one hand and volunteers on the other hand in the maintenance work required by the heritage site for its sustainability [27].

#### 4.3. Dhi Ain Heritage Village - location and importance of the village

It is one of the most important heritage villages in the Al-Baha region in Saudi Arabia. It was built on top of a mountain characterized by a unique heritage urban organization, environmental formation, and a picturesque view of the surrounding farms, which include 312 houses and one mosque. The houses were built of polished stones, with floors ranging from two to four floors, similar in terms of their plans. It dates back to the end of the tenth century AH. The village is characterized by the presence of a permanent water source and defensive fortifications, as it is surrounded by mountains on three sides [31].

The village was included in the temporary file of World Heritage Sites in 2015. The village was named after a water spring that springs from the surrounding mountains and flows into several places. Given these features, the village was nominated for the temporary list.

##### 4.3.1. Community participation

The Saudi Tourism Authority has invested in the village of Dhi Ain with community initiatives that have turned into an integrated project to restore heritage houses, rehabilitate surrounding farms, and establish support service areas. The village represents a source of income for many families and residents through their agricultural and traditional products, especially during the Spring Festival. Families participate in 15 pavilions of the aforementioned festival, displaying popular foods, handicrafts such as mat and wicker making, and handmade gifts. These festivals aim to support low-income families, improve their resources, and transform them into productive families that participate in economic and social development. A cooperative association was established in the village to work on managing small projects that market families' products and invest in agricultural lands in the village. The initiatives have contributed to providing job opportunities for the local community, especially the youth segment, with the participation of women [32][33].



Figure 8. The limit of residential floors in the city of Dhi Ain [34]

The following can be learned from the experience of Dhi Ain Heritage in the participation of the local community:

1. The local community was involved in developing its economic resources by investing in heritage to attract visitors, especially during festival times.
2. The cooperative society manages family projects, in addition to organizing festivals such as the Spring Festival, a popular heritage program, and popular foods.
3. Investing in heritage contributed to supporting the participation of sectors of the community, especially the active participation of youth and women in traditional products, handicrafts, and popular foods.
4. The site contributed to creating job opportunities in supporting tourism services.

5. Developing the economic resources of the community through agriculture, handicrafts, and the tourism potential provided by the heritage environment in attracting visitors.
6. It participated in the sustainability of local culture and intangible heritage such as wicker making, making traditional clothes, embroidery, and making handmade gifts, as well as woodwork.

#### 4.4. Cultural heritage project in Beit Ras Irbid in Jordan - project location and importance

Beit Ras-Irbid is located 5 km north of Irbid. The city was founded in the first century AD. The importance of the city is represented by its connection to the Roman cities from Bosra to the Levant, passing through the Jordanian cities in the north to Aqaba through the road known as Trajan's Road. Despite the urban sprawl on it, which led to the emergence of a modern city on the ruins of the ancient city, some of its archaeological landmarks are still visible. The most important are the Roman Theater, the Nine Vaults, the Byzantine churches, and the pond built of limestone and supported by cylindrical arches and wide walls reaching a width of 2.5 m. These ponds were built to provide water for the city due to the lack of water sources. The city also contains tombs basalt stone coffins, and caves, in addition to containing the shrine of Al-Khidr [34].

##### 4.4.1. Community participation in Beit Ras Irbid

A sustainable cultural heritage project was implemented in the archaeological city by the United States Agency for International Development, involving local communities to help these communities to preserve, manage, and promote their heritage to ensure their sustainability and market them to local and foreign visitors, through a capacity building program that provides workers and institutions with the required basic skills.

This program called SCHEP, brings together governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, experts, academics, and the private sector to develop strategies for heritage management in Jordan, considering heritage as part of the sustainable development program, which contributes to supporting the tourism sector in Jordan. The program aims to develop the capabilities of the local community to preserve and protect its heritage in a sustainable manner through best practices in preservation, management, and tourism promotion, and creating relationships between government departments, institutions, and associations (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Beit Ras Irbid [27]

This program, which extended for the period from 2014-2022, includes [27]:

1. Providing small grants for specific projects that will enhance community development.
2. Involving community members in site development through training, awareness, and job creation related to cultural heritage.
3. Building high-level capacities through training.
4. The project ensures the involvement of women and their acquisition of the required skills and experience to play their role in this strategic project. More than two hundred women were involved in new job opportunities for them. The project achieved the active participation of women in high-level management at World Heritage sites.
5. The SCHEP program aims to create sustainable jobs and job opportunities for different segments of society, including youth, especially in low-income and poor areas.
6. The project focused on knowledge transfer, career development, and community participation in national and international conferences.

### 5. Results

By reviewing and analyzing the models of the selected experiences in the field of community participation, it becomes clear that there is a tangible role for residents in the process of preserving and rehabilitating heritage projects at multiple levels. The methods of group participation and decision-making differ according to the requirements of the concerned groups, their organizational structure, the tasks assigned to them, available natural and cultural heritage resources, the available financial resources, and local regulations. Attention was paid to organizing a series of activities in which local individuals participate; this indicates public awareness of the need to preserve and manage their heritage to benefit from this in developing the local community and redistributing economic resources. The following is a summary of the most important mechanisms and strategies through which the role of community participation, its type, objectives, and mechanisms followed can be identified, as shown in Table 5 and Figure 10.

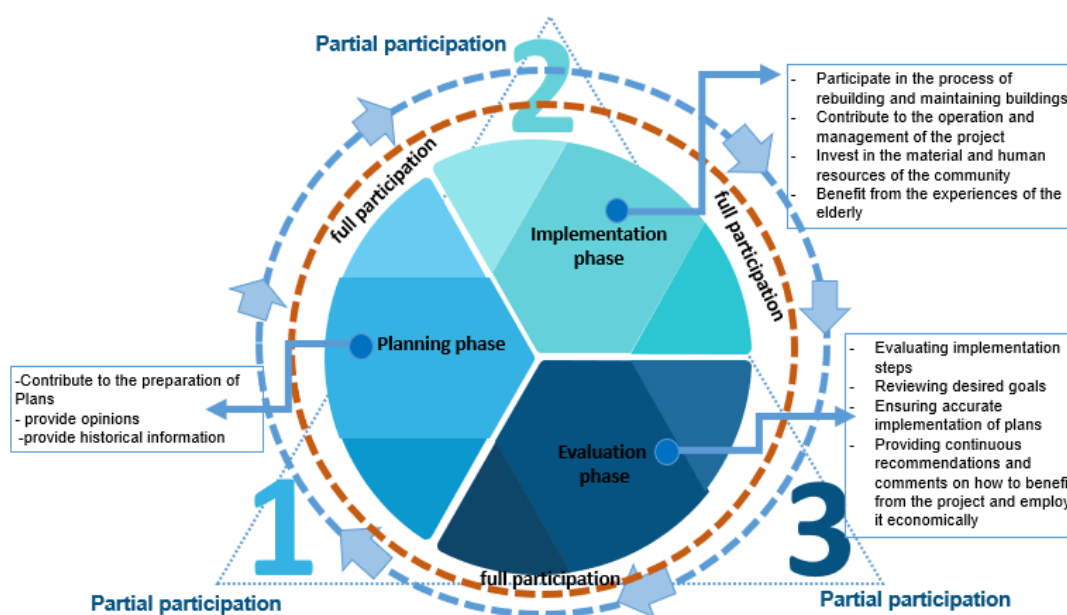


Figure 10. The type of community participation in the different stages of conservation projects and their potentiality

Table 5. Community Participation Path in the Stages of Conservation Projects; Source: Authors

| Phase    | Participation level      | Participation type | Objectives  | Mechanisms  | Actors   | Expected results   |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Planning | Information consultation | Partial directly   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raising public awareness of the importance of their role in participation</li> <li>-Strengthening ties between society and institutions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Workshops to raise awareness</li> <li>-Organized meetings between people and experts</li> <li>-Qualifying training teams</li> <li>-Representation in advisory bodies and coordination mechanisms</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government agencies</li> <li>- Notables and population</li> </ul> | <p>Ensure the minimum preservation of the results of heritage rehabilitation projects.</p> |



| Phase          |                          | Participation level | Participation type  | Objectives   | Mechanisms  | Actors | Expected results   |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---|--|---|--------|--|
| Implementation | Appeasement consultation | Partial directly    | The actual contribution of the community to the preservation and rehabilitation of heritage sites | Contribution to the financing process<br>Contribution to construction and restoration operations<br>Contribution to the implementation of service projects | - Semi-governmental bodies<br>- Professional and labor unions<br>- Civil society associations<br>- Research centers<br>- Popular and civil leadership |        | Ensuring broad levels of community participation that in turn reflects the success and sustainability of rehabilitation and conservation projects. |
|                |                          |                     |   |  |   |        |  |

## 6. Conclusions

1. The research, whether in its theoretical framework or the experiences covered by the case studies, showed that the participation of the local communities in preserving projects has been growing, especially after 2005, when the concept of the local community was included in the operational guidelines. This did not stop there but rather went beyond it to the interest of international institutions concerned with heritage in human rights and the economic and social welfare of communities that belong regionally to heritage sites as a condition for its protection within a perspective of the comprehensive development of communities by investing in their heritage resources.
2. The interest in local communities and their participation in all stages of preserving this heritage does not only return to protecting the heritage and its sustainability but also extends to economic and social benefits that benefit these communities.
3. Heritage and its protection cannot be viewed in isolation from the development of the societies to which the heritage belongs. There is no protection of heritage without the recognition of society, starting with its declaration as a national or global heritage, its protection and the priorities of preservation projects,

its management, promotion, and financing for its sustainability. Therefore, societies are the beneficiaries or the victims of the consequences of this heritage and what is related to it.

4. It is perhaps superfluous to say that there are many problems that the cultural heritage in Iraq suffers from, which are caused by local communities. These problems are about ownership or encroachment and trespassing, or due to conflicts. Sometimes the heritage has been exposed to looting or deliberate sabotage for many reasons, or due to the ignorance of these communities of what heritage can represent to them and the returns it can accrue as a result of protecting this heritage.
5. Institutions concerned with cultural heritage in Iraq should take on the role of the local community and not ignore its seriousness and the importance of its role in heritage, starting with raising community awareness of what this heritage represents as a cultural and social value. It should nurture the fact that heritage represents the identity of society and the basis for its unity and not its division, and push and urge the community to contribute their ideas to the priorities of preservation projects.
6. Considering the preservation of heritage and projects related to it cannot be done without considering the sustainable development with a wide range to the territory to which the heritage belongs.
7. The local community plays a major role in the planning and decision-making process, but the impact of this role varies according to the degree of organization of the community and its level of knowledge of its rights and responsibilities; the clarity of its methods and mechanisms of participation, the extent of its trust in partners, and the transparency of the planning decision-making process.
8. The community or the elite among them should be educated and sensitized, who may later have a role in raising the level of the rest of society and involving them in projects later.
9. The first level of participation is represented by holding consultative meetings urging the public to contribute effectively to them, and taking these opinions into account within the planning process so that it is not a formal participation.
10. Attention should be paid to community participation to be clear, understandable, and specific within legal frameworks that encourage members of society to be interested in participating and interacting with the planning process, in addition to clarifying the role of society within the institutions concerned with heritage.
11. It is necessary to conduct more studies that contribute to clarifying the role that the Iraqi local community can play in heritage, its protection, sustainability, management, and marketing.
12. It is necessary to adhere to the United Nations charters regarding heritage buildings and include them in international standards in order to consider them part of World Heritage. It is important to follow their recommendations and adhere to what is related to community participation instructions.
13. It would be good to prepare a document similar to international documents such as the Venice Charter that guarantees the protection of heritage and community contribution to it.
14. Linking maintenance (to master, main, and sectoral designs) will protect historical and heritage buildings from tampering and make it a legal crime, as it will regulate the relations of the parties concerned with heritage and antiquities. Also, maintenance will become everyone's responsibility and guarantee the rights and responsibilities of investors and workers in the field of maintenance from governmental and semi-governmental institutions, civil society institutions, and the local community.
15. To activate the role of society in the resources of Iraqi heritage, it is necessary to work on several levels:
  - a. First - The administrative level: This is represented in developing the administrative structures of institutions specialized in heritage to accommodate interaction with non-governmental organizations interested in heritage. It is important to encourage social interaction at the level of dealing with heritage and raising the level of awareness of society about the importance of heritage and considering the responsibility of protecting it a societal responsibility. Emphasis should also be on the media aspect to promote the importance of heritage.
  - b. Second - The legal level: Making legislative and legal amendments that regulate the work of individuals and non-governmental institutions so that their work is within the legal frameworks.

Legislating a heritage protection law similar to Arab countries according to the articles and texts that make heritage the responsibility of all.

- c. Third - The urban level: Dealing with the protection of heritage and its sustainability within a broader perspective through the sustainable development of the communities to which the heritage belongs. Directing urban development projects for heritage areas to include the surrounding areas within a perspective that considers heritage an economic resource that aims to develop society as well as protect heritage resources.
- d. Fourth - The economic level: Providing the necessary support for local communities to develop their capabilities and work on integration with the requirements of urban heritage, whether through interest in the type of work required by maintenance and encouraging the community to engage in this work or developing handicrafts and other activities that contribute to developing heritage and protecting its authenticity.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests in any material discussed in this paper.

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