

CULTURAL HERITAGE, SOCIETY & ECONOMY

The promotion, management and regulation of cultural heritage is a complex process involving many different agents and stakeholders on local, national and international levels. This is a critical area of public policy involving a range of actors that includes international organisations, government ministries and agencies, political parties, businesses, museums and local communities. How cultural heritage is produced, interpreted and understood can have a profound impact on social and economic activity and decision-making. It influences the formation of social values and ideas as well as notions of common identity and history, and also affects management of the economy and infrastructure. The importance of cultural heritage management is increasingly recognised and acknowledged in Turkey, and the field is developing rapidly. New issues and problems have emerged, for which solutions that comply with and enhance the highest international standards have to be found within Turkey. This strategic research initiative sets out to examine the relationships between the many agents and actors in the field of cultural heritage in the Turkish context.

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SARAA: Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets

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In spring 2021, the Cultural Protection Fund announced a 2021/2022 funding round that was to be restricted to previous grant holders and focused on a limited number of countries. Gül Pulhan, the coordinator of the BIAA-led Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey (SARAT) project, which had been supported by a large Cultural Protection Fund award (2017–2020), realised that a short-term project of six months' duration could enable the SARAT Online Certificate Programme, Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets, to be made available in a language other than the original Turkish. The resulting application, in collaboration with the Lebanese NGO BILADI, for support for a project entitled Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets (SARAA) was successful. The project started on 1 September 2021 and runs until 28 February 2022. Our partner, BILADI, has immense experience in cultural heritage safeguarding practices and in leading emergency efforts to secure historic buildings following the 2020 explosion in Beirut. To those who took the original SARAT online course in Turkish, the name of BILADI's founder and Director, Joanne Farchakh Bajjalay, will sound familiar: Joanne was one of the heritage specialists interviewed for the course, with her work with BILADI

presented as an example of best practice. The SARAA project employs a small team in Turkey, namely Gül Pulhan as BIAA Coordinator and Özlem Başdoğan as a heritage and communications specialist. Joanne coordinates a larger team in Lebanon and organises a group of Lebanese experts involved on a part-time basis.

Through its ongoing cultural protection work, BILADI has identified a significant skills gap in Lebanon. This became particularly apparent when the heritage professionals and archaeology students who responded to the 2020 explosion in Beirut lacked basic cultural heritage emergency response, triage and stabilisation skills. Thus SARAA intends to build the capacity to prepare for and respond to conflict-related emergencies of current and future heritage professionals working at archaeological sites and museums throughout Lebanon, including the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Tyre, Baalbek and Byblos, as well as site-specific and national museums. To realise this, it is building on the success of the SARAT project by transferring and adapting its education programme to Lebanon and facilitating international knowledge exchange between Turkish and Lebanese heritage professionals. A major aim of SARAA is to make the course materials of the

SARAT Online Certificate Programme relevant to and accessible in the Lebanese context. To achieve this, the materials not only need to be translated, but also adapted. The six-month time span of the current project is not sufficient to create a fully fledged online course though.

Since the first day of operation of SARAA, translation has been ongoing. As a first step, the original Turkish-language Online Certificate Programme course material is being translated into English. The English-language version then forms the basis of the Arabic translation, but can also be used to maximise the potential for impact on the wider cultural heritage community. The translations into English and Arabic are progressing according to plan. At the end of the project three full sets of the course material will be available: the original SARAT course in Turkish and the new Lebanese-adapted course in both Arabic and English.

A day-long workshop in Beirut on 29 November 2021 brought the BILADI team, Lebanese academics and the translators together with Gül and Özlem to discuss progress on the creation of the Lebanese-specific course elements and the Arabic translation of the original SARAT course material. Gül presented an overview of the Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey project to provide the wider context of the original course. Afterwards, the Lebanese academic team presented their approaches and the case studies they are currently working on. Lively discussions about how to teach the course as part of the university curriculum followed; this will require a different timeframe and methodology from the original Online Certificate Programme. Discussions continued in a follow-up Zoom

meeting on 2 December, which focused particularly on the internal organisation of the new material and a schedule for the remaining work. The compilation of case studies for crucial archaeological and historical heritage-related emergencies and rescue operations in Lebanon is progressing well. When complete, it will provide the first documentation of this aspect of heritage management for a large audience.

The completed materials will be piloted at a ‘Training of Trainers’ course, which will take place in Beirut over a five-day period at the end of January 2022. We expect that 25–30 experienced heritage professionals from the Lebanese University, other universities in Lebanon and the General-Directorate of Antiquities in Lebanon will participate in this training programme and be equipped with the necessary skills, materials and equipment to then deliver the Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets course to at least 100 professionals and future professionals – including local museum staff and archaeology students – beyond the project’s lifetime. It is also intended that the course will be offered as an elective for Lebanese University students, thereby further sustaining the impact of SARAA.

To enhance knowledge transfer and exchange, SARAA incorporates several outreach and knowledge-exchange activities. A virtual event, entitled ‘Comparing Notes: Cultural Protection Fund Projects in Lebanon and Turkey’, took place on 26 November 2021, during which representatives of former and current Cultural Protection Fund-funded projects in Lebanon and Turkey presented their work, its aims, challenges and results. All 13 projects accepted the invitation to present at the virtual webinar, although two had to cancel at



The SARAA team meet in Beirut in November 2021.

the last minute due to health-related issues. Nevertheless, the vast majority of former and ongoing projects presented to a group of stakeholders – including policymakers, NGOs, university departments, research institutes and others operating in the field of cultural heritage – in both Turkey and Lebanon, and beyond. The workshop clearly showed the impressive amount of work that has been accomplished already and the great potential for future collaboration between existing and former projects, as well as the generally positive responses from the local communities involved.

In parallel to the activities focusing on Lebanon, a series of telephone and online interviews was conducted with a sample of the 5,500 Turkish SARAT online course graduates (2019–2021). The aim was to collect examples of best practice in applying the knowledge and skills acquired from the course in Turkey to improve the way risks to cultural heritage are prepared for and emergencies responded to. A sample of 504 graduates was selected using a set of selection criteria, such as background, profession, motivation for taking the course, etc. A questionnaire was mailed to each of these graduates and a follow-up call secured receipt of the online questionnaire and re-established contact. Just over 300 of these 504 graduates completed and returned the questionnaire. Their answers will be assessed and a selection of best practices included in the responses will be incorporated in a short video that will be shared at seminars with heritage professionals in Lebanon.

A final meeting will be held with the Lebanese trainees at the very end of the project. The aim is to have a last evaluation of the course by gathering the reflections of the trainees and discussing how best to incorporate the course in the curriculum of the Lebanese University and, possibly, those of other institutions. In addition, one or more seminars are currently being considered, with the aim of promoting the course to faculty and students of some private higher-education institutions as well as journalists and media activists.

On the last day of the BIAA team members' visit to Lebanon (3 December 2021), the British Council's Lebanon Country Director, David Knox, and Arts and Culture Programme Manager, March Mouarkech, visited the BILADI office. At this meeting, Joanne, the head of the SARAA Lebanon academic team, Rana Dubeissy, and the BIAA team of Gül and Özlem had the chance to explain the work of SARAA and how it was progressing, as well as the future plans for the course. The British Council officers expressed their satisfaction with and support for the ongoing project.

Although SARAA has encountered a number of problems, including the postponement of events and travel due to Covid-19, for instance, the team is on track to deliver all elements of the project – so long as not too many new and unforeseen obstacles are thrown in their path in the coming months!

