

Exploring Cultural Heritage of the Arab Region

Potential offered for a more balanced
World Heritage List



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The vernacular architecture of the Ancient Ksour in Mauritania © Editions Gelbart.

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Potential offered for a more balanced
World Heritage List

ARC-WH - ICOMOS Project
FINAL REPORT

October, 2021

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FOREWORD

The World Heritage Convention represents an important instrument for cooperation in heritage protection, conservation and promotion, before and beyond World Heritage designations, but also a precious common space for reflection and exchange on the role of heritage in our contemporary societies. The underlying aim of the Convention, since its inception, has always been to raise awareness about the importance of heritage for individuals and societies alike throughout the world, and to promote heritage protection and conservation so as to integrate it more effectively into the life of citizens. Any action aiming to increase the representativeness of the World Heritage List cannot lose sight of these underlying principles: heritage has a role to play in society and, regardless of whether it is of global, regional, national or local significance, it needs to be taken care of. The World Heritage List is a powerful instrument that promotes the cause of heritage and showcases exceptional examples of well understood, cared-for heritage sites for the benefit of the public in order to draw attention to the importance of local or regional heritage manifestations that are no less significant for a variety of communities, societies and citizens in terms of sustaining their cohesion and resilience, and as a source of inspiration for building humanity's future.

It is in this spirit that this joint ARC-WH and ICOMOS study was initiated: it has been an enriching journey and a rewarding experience for both organisations, and the outcomes prove that a successful, representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List can be achieved only through a collective and cooperative effort to understand and to keep alive our heritage, and make it humankind's common inheritance.

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Director
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1.



**Executive summary:
Potential and
challenges
of the Arab States
Region for a more
representative World
Heritage List**

1. Executive summary: potential and challenges of the Arab States Region for a more representative World Heritage List

The study has been initiated with a view to understanding how the Arab States region can contribute to a more representative World Heritage List, taking into account its geo-cultural specificities and its historic development, as well as socio-cultural and institutional factors that can support or hinder an improved and more faithful reflection of the cultural heritage of the region on the World Heritage List.

The study has included:

- An analysis of the entries on the World Heritage List and on the Tentative Lists of States Parties of the region in the light of thematic and typological frameworks in line with the methodology adopted in the 2004 ICOMOS document "The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps – an Action Plan for the Future" (hereafter: the 2004 ICOMOS Gap Report);
- A consultation of a group of international experts through a questionnaire to elicit observations on the strengths of the heritage of the region, areas of possible under- or over-representation, factors influencing the selection of sites to be put forward for nomination, priorities for further study, and actions to be undertaken to improve the situation;
- A workshop gathering invited specialists on and from the region to discuss the results of the questionnaire, distil the potentials of the region, and outline steps forward.

The analysis of the World Heritage List and of the Tentative Lists of States Parties from the region has clarified that they do not currently reflect the richness and diversity of the cultural heritage of the region. It has also confirmed the findings of the 2015 update of the *ICOMOS Gap Report*, namely that existing Tentative Lists do not collectively address the 'gaps' of the World Heritage List, but rather tend to replicate the status quo. The gap analysis may be a useful instrument but not one that leads directly to improvements, for which proactive measures are necessary. For this reason, the ARC-WH and ICOMOS study also examined, although at a preliminary level, the most promising themes for the Arab States region and possible typologies of heritage reflecting those themes.

The frameworks offer a composite perspective of the entirety of the immovable heritage assets and can be more helpful when employed as conceptual lenses to expand the understanding of cultural heritage and of how it can reflect human histories and achievements. Comparative frameworks, on the other hand, will help to single out those sites that may exhibit potential for World Heritage Listing.

A combined exercise would be needed, on the one hand, to expand what can be understood as cultural heritage and, on the other, to select from wider and more diverse sets of eligible sites to identify robust potential for inclusion on the Tentative Lists.

The questionnaire and the workshop have preliminarily elicited the following themes that appear relevant for the Arab States region:

- **Movement of people:** as the region is recognised as a crossroads of culture, this theme might be illustrated by a variety of routes – e.g. commercial, cultural or transhumance-related – and associated tangible legacies that are greatly varied in nature (archaeological heritage, sections of routes, living or relic cities, specialised commercial structures);
- **Utilising natural resources:** given the constraints in terms of availability of resources, particularly water, this theme has appeared particularly important, also in connection with the 'heritage of water' theme, and could be associated with agricultural or aquaculture-related sites, landscapes, extraction and processing sites;
- **Developing technologies:** the history of oil extraction has been seen as particularly important for the region, but the diffusion of the railway is also worth being investigated;
- **The heritage of modernity:** in its regional and sub-regional inflections, and as a reflection of the encounter between the region and the western world, this has been seen as a promising theme, with a number of surviving examples to be further investigated;
- **Expressions of society:** this theme has not been particularly used in the region, although tangible heritage survives in the region that reflects this theme;
- **Spiritual responses:** this appears to be a particularly relevant theme for the region, also reflecting the diversity of faiths that characterises the region and for which physical testimonies could be considered as being at threat from rapid disappearance;
- **Creative responses and continuity:** as this theme is rather broad and equipped with sub-themes, it tends to be overused, and the Arab States region is no exception; however, its breadth still offers room, particularly when taking into account under-represented typologies.



1. Saint Catherine Area, Egypt.

2. Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

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The specialists involved in the study also identified several potentially promising typologies:

- **Archaeological sites in the Gulf region**, particularly Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age sites, and especially if related to the development of technologies;
- **Submerged heritage** (both archaeological and built sites);
- **Pre-Islamic Berber and Punic sites** in North Africa;
- **Vernacular urban centres**, associated with their specific social practices - a rich but threatened heritage - along with their associated surrounding landscapes and systems to harness local resources (e.g. water management systems);
- **Cultural landscapes**, particularly desert and island landscapes and the subsistence practices of their inhabitants as well as the traces of their centuries-long history of inhabitation, traditional rural landscapes and associated food processing facilities;
- **Trading and pilgrimage routes**: these, however, would all need a regional and transboundary approach to reflect fully their significance;
- **Urban and building episodes of the different colonial mandates**, including examples of planned zones, urban centres and buildings;
- **Roman hydraulic complexes**: although Roman archaeology is represented, this aspect of Roman engineering has not been adequately investigated;
- **Medinas** are represented, but further examples could be considered for the way outside influences have determined their structure, or how they exercised their own influence on the **development of other urban settlements**;
- **Expression of societies**, such as educational systems and their associated facilities, as well as the heritage of different religious groups, which is an important, yet unrecognised, trait of the region;
- **Industrial and technological heritage**, as well as the tangible manifestations of the socio-economic and cultural impact that industries have had on society. These interrelated themes should not be seen only in relation to the 19th - 20th centuries but expanded to examine ancient civilisations and their technological achievements too;
- **The heritage of the 20th century** and the different articulations of modernity in the region: this heritage is often interpreted through the lens of 'nation-building' by States Parties, which might not serve well the purpose of presenting properties with a supra-national breadth as sought by the Convention.

The specialists' contribution has also been key to highlighting that **thematic studies** would be highly beneficial in several areas, in order to establish the necessary comparative frameworks and their parameters and to single stronger candidates out. Below, a list of thematic studies evoked in the responses to the questionnaire and during the workshop is presented:

- Sites related to the **earliest civilisations** as well as fossil and hominid sites;
- **Rock-art sites**;
- **Cultural landscapes** and the interlinkages between culture and nature;

- **Cultural routes**, possibly articulated in sub-themes, e.g. commercial, religious and pastoral or other nomadic routes;
- The heritage of '**modernities**', possibly articulated into sub-themes;
- **The heritage of resource extraction and production**, including but not limited to industrial heritage;
- **Railway network building**: an update and expansion of the 1999 thematic study on railways in Europe and the Americas would be needed;
- **Maritime heritage**, in the form of archaeological sites but also in terms of later, but still traditional, practices and related sites;
- **Fortifications** in the region;
- A possible expansion of the thematic study on the **heritage of water to urban areas**;
- The heritage associated with **slave routes and slavery**;
- Finally, a study focused on '**expressions of society**', and on how tangible and intangible values and manifestations are intertwined, would be beneficial to be able to achieve more cohesiveness in presenting these values and the way in which heritage sites convey them.

Specialists also identified priorities for the identification and protection of heritage categories that suffer from impending threats: in their view, the most endangered at the moment include the heritage expression of minority groups, vernacular heritage - prone either to abandonment or to beautification for tourism - and rock-art sites as well as archaeological heritage, especially in urban areas.

Reflections on the adequacy of legal and institutional frameworks to cope with the challenges raised, but also on the opportunities offered by an evolving understanding of cultural heritage and its role in societies and, in parallel, of the role of societies in its promotion, remain relevant. Strengthening those frameworks and adapting them to new contexts and needs represents an indispensable precondition for enabling a more effective response to the 'quest for heritage' of societies in the Arab States region and, at the same time, for harnessing in full the opportunities offered by the World Heritage Convention.

In this regard, a key aspect that seems necessary to address concerns the fear that sovereignty can be lost or diminished if sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List and the international community becomes involved. Steps may need to be undertaken to increase the awareness of high-level decision-makers about the World Heritage Convention and the engagement its ratification entails.

While acknowledging the ongoing unstable situation of many countries in the region, it has also been observed that changing political and socio-economic conditions might also offer room for a shift in attitude and mechanisms and for enhanced collaboration among different actors, as exemplified by processes occurring in a number of countries of the region suffering from ongoing conflicts.

3



4



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3. Memphis and its Necropolis, Egypt.
4. Gebel Barkal and the Sites of the
Napatan Region, Sudan.
5. Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat), Iraq.
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Key challenges to be addressed in the region that have been identified through the questionnaire and the workshop include:

- Fully integrating and operationalising the founding principles of the World Heritage Convention;
- Developing a vision for heritage and its role in society grounded in the principles of the World Heritage Convention;
- Updating and modernising inventories, taking into account the evolution of the notion of cultural heritage and the scope of the World Heritage Convention as well as of other international conventions and programmes;
- Strengthening and modernising the legislation for heritage protection, by widening its scope both in terms of heritage categories and how to understand the notion of protection (active rather than passive) and related strategies;
- Operationalising the provisions of primary legislation through secondary legal instruments (regulations, bylaws, standards);
- Developing cross-cutting instruments to actively support protection and conservation;
- Recognising the role of civil society, scholars and communities in supporting heritage protection, awareness-raising and establishing grounds for interinstitutional dialogue and cooperation.

Some States Parties have begun to address these challenges and initial results can be already appreciated. Intra-regional dialogue and collaboration can consolidate achievements and extend them throughout the region.

These challenges are complex and multiple, and many can only be addressed by States Parties. However, the specialists agreed that there is much room for technical expertise to tackle identified needs, for instance, in heritage survey and inventorying, awareness-raising, thematic studies, and capacity building in heritage management and participatory processes or in World Heritage procedures and policies. The latter is particularly relevant, taking into account the recent revision of the nomination process, with the introduction of the Preliminary Assessment, and the recently released Guidance for developing / revising World Heritage Tentative Lists, which aims at providing assistance to States Parties at an early stage of the nomination process.

The suggestions for action listed below are to be understood as possible steps forward to enhance the contribution of the Arab States region to the representativeness of the World Heritage List and eventually to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

- Strengthening collaboration among local actors responsible for heritage protection, conservation, management and the identification of sites suitable for entry on the Tentative List, heritage scholars and academics, and international organisations such as the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage and ICOMOS, would be of utmost importance.
- Envisaging a format for capacity building initiatives to optimize the contribution of local, national and international actors in order to increase institutional capabilities, reinforce interinstitutional communication and cooperation, and possibly achieve a better understanding of which cultural heritage sites might have potential global significance. The involvement of all three groups of actors would be necessary to initiate a sound process that can eventually lead towards the revision of Tentative Lists: this recommendation appears particularly timely and in line with the framework provided by the ICOMOS – IUCN Guidance for developing and revising Tentative Lists.
- Agreeing on and implementing a regional capacity building strategy with a clear role for each partner appears crucial in order to coordinate endeavours and harness them in full.
- Making wise use of the Upstream process at the earliest possible stage of a nomination: upstream advice, if followed, provides for an early assessment of the potential of a site and of the robustness of the chosen nomination strategy, and may suggest possible alternative options or assist in deciding whether a nomination is to be pursued or not.
- Reinforcing interinstitutional dialogue and cooperation among national institutions, and between these institutions and regional/provincial and local entities, in heritage identification, protection and management would significantly contribute towards the building of a collaborative environment among different organisations, dialogue capacities, and a mutual understanding of reciprocal functions that can only facilitate a coordinated response to challenges and eventually establish a sound management process for heritage.
- Updating national inventories, their rationale and their scope, taking into account the definition of heritage in the World Heritage Convention and the three frameworks used in the Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List and in the 2004 ICOMOS Gap Report. However, such work on inventories calls for strengthened capabilities in positioning the heritage located in one country within regional and global perspectives.
- Extending the reach of awareness-raising actions to citizens and society at large, on the one side, and to high-level decision makers on the other: an augmented and widespread awareness of the significance of the heritage of the region and of its relevance well beyond national or regional boundaries may trigger wider social processes that could eventually lead to reforms in the sector that may otherwise struggle to take off.

Further steps that would create better pre-conditions include the following actions, to which States Parties would need to take a proactive approach:

- Strengthening the educational system and the curricula related to heritage management, conservation and promotion;
- Strengthening the links between the provisions of heritage legislation with the mandate and tasks of heritage institutions;
- Strengthening the communication and negotiation capacities of heritage institutions in order to improve the effectiveness of their advocacy action and to be able to use arguments supporting heritage protection that can resonate with decision-makers' priorities;
- Strengthening the capacity of heritage institutions to enter into dialogue and collaboration with local communities and civil society organisations;
- Establishing clear principles and rules of procedure for the consultation of heritage institutions by other public actors in charge of planning and development as well as consultation processes for civil society organisations;
- Elaborating a regional study on the impacts of heritage protection, conservation and rehabilitation on the socio-economic fabric of the region.

Many other initiatives can be stimulated and activated, for instance by ARC-WH with the cooperation, where needed or helpful, of the Advisory Bodies. Examples include preparing thematic studies with a specific focus on the Arab States region, developing workshops and capacity building initiatives for the preparation or revision of Tentative Lists or awareness-raising initiatives, comparative studies on legal, institutional and management frameworks in use in the region, and compiling good practices related to heritage stewardship and the implementation of the World Heritage Convention from within the region.

2.



The objectives and activities of the project

2. The Objectives and Activities of the Project

2.1 Objectives of the project

The overall objective of this project is to understand the specificities of the Arab States region in terms of tangible immovable cultural heritage that can be considered to achieve a more representative and balanced World Heritage List; and to identify the steps to be taken and whether/how a road-map for the region could be developed to strengthen a meaningful representation on the World Heritage List of the heritage from the region that meets the requirements for listing.

The present study has been carried out in the spirit of the “The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps – an Action Plan for the Future” (ICOMOS, 2004, known as the “ICOMOS Gap Report”) but has taken into account the lessons learned from the way the ICOMOS Gap Report has been used and from the updating of the study in 2015. In particular, the notion of “gaps” has been found misleading to a certain extent and not necessarily useful for improving the representativeness of the World Heritage List: nominating a site to fill a gap does not necessarily mean that the site can demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), and perceived gaps have been filled without necessarily improving the inclusion of under-represented regions.

Therefore, this study puts at its centre the notion of Outstanding Universal Value, and underlines the importance of achieving an overall appraisal of the geo-cultural specificities of the region as a basis for identifying the most promising themes that can be reflected by sites which might exhibit the potential of demonstrating outstanding global significance.

As part of the study, a preliminary reflection was conducted on the challenges faced by the countries of the region with regard to legal and institutional frameworks and how these impact on their ability to identify, protect and promote wider ranges of cultural heritage able to convey in an outstanding manner the geo-cultural particularities of the region, therefore contributing to the implementation of the Global Strategy for a more representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List.

2.2 Working methods

The study was carried out via desk-work and a multi-session workshop. The desk-work included a qualitative and semi-quantitative analysis of the entries on the World Heritage List and the Tentative Lists of the States Parties of the region, through the lenses of the thematic and typological frameworks used in the 2004 ICOMOS Gap Report, and the preparation and distribution of a questionnaire among specialists on and from the Arab States region. The workshop gathered the respondents to the questionnaire and additional specialists; and discussed the outcomes of the questionnaire as well as possible steps forward for strengthening the identification, protection and conservation of a wider range of cultural heritage sites that may eventually contribute to a better representation of the region’s heritage on the World Heritage List. The travel restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible to carry out the planned in-person workshop, which was instead turned into a four-session online event, attended by several specialists in July 2020.

2.3 Analysis of World Heritage List and Tentative Lists in the Region

The analysis was carried out consistently with the approach/methodology adopted in 2004 for the first Gap Report and in the update prepared in 2015 at the World Heritage Centre's request. A multi-category approach was adopted, in order to ensure that the different facets of complex properties are taken into account. This analysis has made it possible to understand how properties on the World Heritage List and the Tentative Lists reflect different themes or typologies from the thematic and typological frameworks of the Global Strategy, and how and to what extent these are represented on the World Heritage List or on Tentative Lists.

In addition, an analysis of how the Tentative Lists have been dealt with by the States Parties of the Arab region was carried out, given that the number of Tentative Lists to be analysed was manageable. In general, no State Party has carried out a complete revision of their respective Tentative List since its establishment, while those who have significantly updated their Tentative List did so more than 10 years ago (with the exception of Saudi Arabia, who submitted a full Tentative List in 2015). Some States Parties have shown intermittent efforts to update their Tentative List, but many others have shown almost no activity since the Tentative List was established. In conclusion, a complete revision of the Tentative Lists is almost absent in the region.

Comparison between the 2004 and 2019 study in general, and with regard to typological framework for representation on both the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists, offers interesting insights and some positive trends.

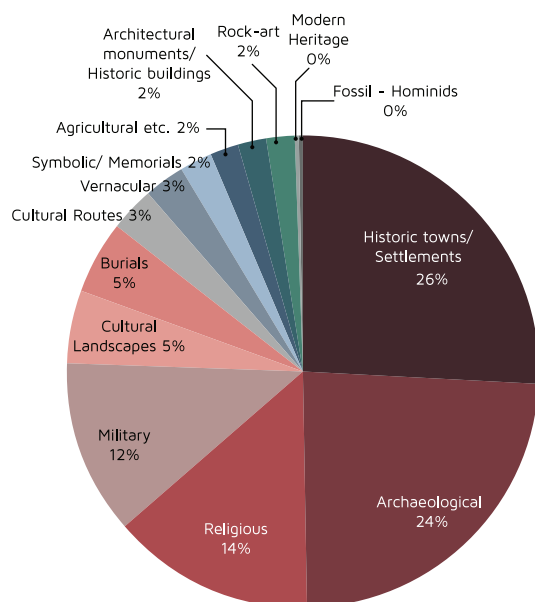


Chart no.1
Typological framework Arab States region
WHL (2019)

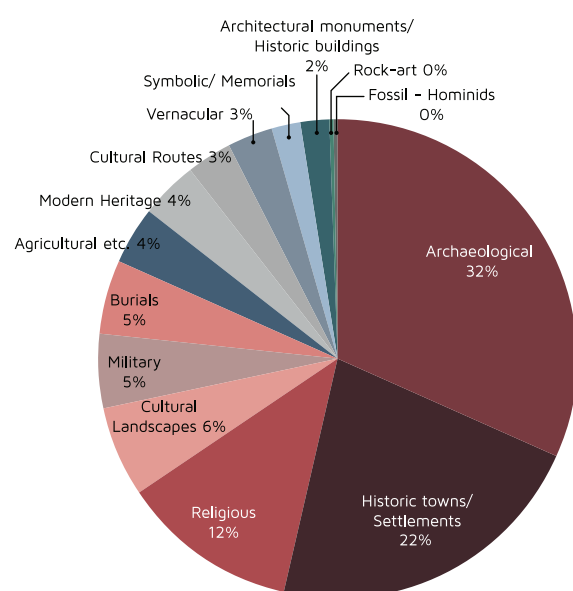


Chart no.2
Typological framework Arab States region
TL (2019)

Source: *Preliminary Analysis of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists (2019) in the Arab States Region.*

Since 2004, there has been an increase in the percentage of inscribed sites in the Arab region, from 9% to 13% in 2019 (with numbers increasing from 49 to 86).

The percentage of regional Tentative List entries, encompassing not only cultural sites, but natural and mixed too, has slightly increased, comprising 8% of global Tentative Lists entries in 2004 (or 117 Tentative List entries out of 1477¹ entries globally), to slightly more than 10% in 2019 (or 180 entries on regional Tentative Lists).

The multicategory analyses conducted in 2004 and in 2019 show the relative increases and decreases in the representation of certain typologies compared to others, and interesting observations can be drawn.

Typologies not represented at all in the 2004 study – such as cultural routes and memorials – make an appearance in the 2019 study (3% and 2% respectively). Cultural landscapes have increased from 2% to 5%, therefore doubling their percentage of representation, while religious sites have almost tripled their percentage (from 6% to 19%), and historic towns and archaeological sites have also significantly increased their percentage – the former from 14% to 26% and the latter from 17% to 24%. Interestingly, other types of heritage, such as architectural monuments or burial sites, saw their representation significantly reduced – from 7% to 2% for the former, and from 13% to 5% for the latter, indicating a change of approach in selecting sites for nomination.

Similar considerations can be presented for the entries on the Tentative Lists from the region, where the trends in percentage increase or decrease are coherent with the picture offered by the typological distribution of percentages for sites on the World Heritage List. Unfortunately, no specific regional focus was given to the thematic framework in the 2004 Gap Report, in which only a global ‘photograph’ was presented. However, it is possible to compare the 2019 distribution of the Arab region with the global distribution in 2004 and 2015.

The theme ‘creative responses and continuity’ took the largest share globally in 2004 and 2015. The sheer imbalance between this theme and others is certainly a result of the extensiveness of the sub-themes that this theme includes. Global trends captured in 2004, when the theme comprised 67% globally, are now presenting in the Arab region, with the theme comprising 65% as of 2019 – interestingly, the global percentage for this theme in 2015 was 56%.

The theme ‘movement of people’ has shown an increase since 2004 – from 7% up to 13% – which is consistent with the global increase (11%). On the other hand, the theme ‘spiritual responses’ shows a decreasing trend since 2004 (10% against 13%) and compared to the global trend in 2015 (14%), meaning that this theme seems to be harnessed less frequently in the Arab region.

The themes ‘expressions of society’ and ‘utilizing natural resources’ also show a reduced percentage compared to the global trends in 2015, but have increased since 2004. The theme ‘developing technologies’ shows a slight increase since 2004 (3% against 2%) but is slightly reduced compared to the global trends in 2015.

These semi-statistic considerations, however, must be read and weighed against the way in which sites are understood as belonging to a certain typology or theme, and the progressive development of sub-themes for some of the themes, but more importantly against the potential of the region with regard to the nature and the extent of survival of the tangible inheritance of past epochs in the region, based on its geo-historical and cultural characteristics. These qualitative aspects have been explored through the questionnaire and the workshop.

1 See ICOMOS Study “The World Heritage List: filling the gaps – an Action Plan for the future”, 2004, p. 20.

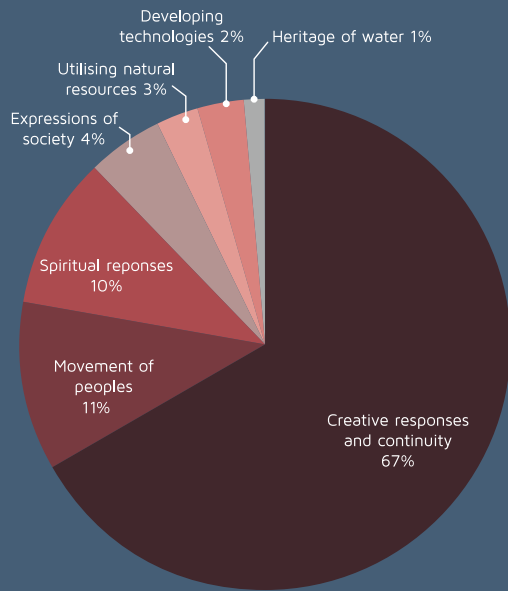


Chart no.3
Thematic Framework Arab States region
WHL (2019)

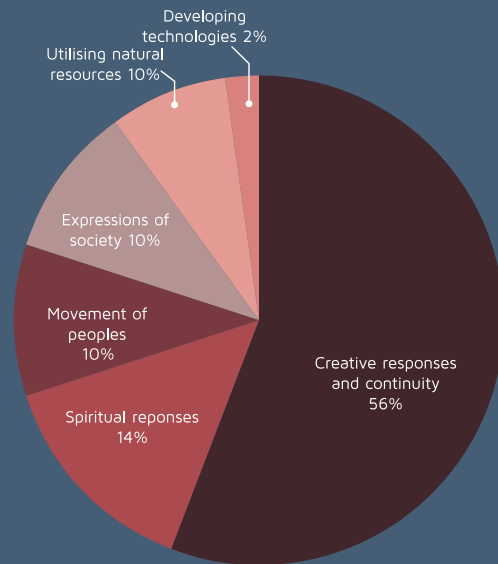


Chart no.4
Thematic Framework
WHL (2015)

Sources: *Preliminary Analysis of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists (2019) in the Arab States Region (L)*; and *ICOMOS Study to Update the 2004 ICOMOS 'Filling the Gaps' Report: Analysis of properties inscribed on the World Heritage Lists and Tentative Lists 2003-2015 (R)*.

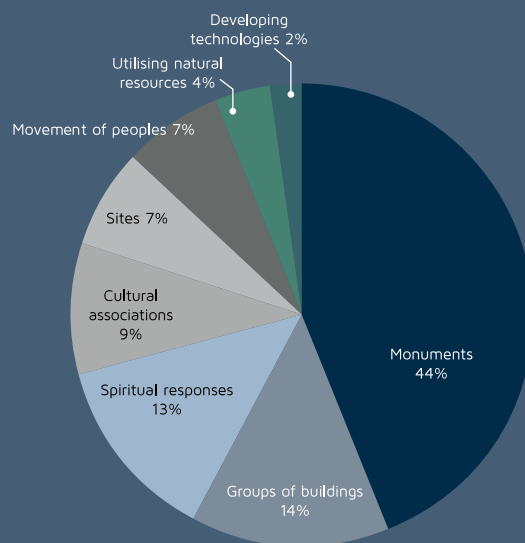


Chart no.5
Thematic Framework

Source: *The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps - an Action Plan for the Future: An Analysis by ICOMOS (2004)*.

2.4 The questionnaire: harnessing the expertise on and from the Region

The desk study carried out on the World Heritage List and on the Tentative Lists offers only a picture of which heritage sites States Parties consider worth selecting for nomination: this picture is partial and does not necessarily reflect the richness and variety of the heritage from one region, sub-region or country. In order to capture in a more comprehensive manner the diversity of the tangible manifestations and legacies of cultures and civilisations, reflecting their achievements or interchanges at important stages of human history, illustrating human creative genius, or bearing witness to human interaction with the environment or to associations with events, living traditions, ideas or beliefs, it was important to reach out to specialists well-acquainted with the cultural heritage of the region, who could identify themes and typologies as well as potential examples that might be relevant for the purpose of the study. To this aim, a questionnaire was prepared, including eleven questions, which was shared with several specialists on different aspects of the cultural heritage of the region.

The questions revolved around the potentials and strengths of the heritage of the region in terms of themes and typologies, the level of representation and under-representation on the World Heritage and Tentative Lists of heritage sites pertaining to one or more theme/typology, and possible priorities for identification and protection of heritage sites that exhibit potential for being listed and belong to themes or typologies that are under-represented and under threat. Some questions focused on factors that may influence the selection of candidate sites, including the legal and institutional frameworks, and also took into consideration how to deal with possible sub-regional specificities.

Between the workshop and the consultation phase, a total of 20 contributions were collected. It should be noted that the consultation phase involved the written input to the questionnaire.

2.5 The workshop: discussing the findings of the questionnaire and steps forward

The responses to the questionnaire yielded much material that deserved to be further elaborated and discussed with the respondents in order to distil the main findings and outline possible future actions that could strengthen the understanding and appreciation of the heritage of the region and possibly contribute to improving its representation on the World Heritage List. A workshop was considered the most suitable format to gather further inputs and reflection from respondents to the questionnaire and other specialists and consolidate the picture obtained from the questionnaire responses. Some 20 professionals participated in the four sessions of the workshop: the outcomes of the workshop, presented in detail in the next chapter, show that the heritage of the region is more varied and diverse than what the World Heritage properties from the region would suggest. Indeed, a full assessment of the potential of specific sites would require further research, particularly in relation to developing comparative frameworks and thematic studies; however, both the questionnaire and the workshop have brought into light a number of themes and typologies that are worth being further explored.

A regional approach has been found particularly relevant and promising, and therefore thematic studies focussing on the region may play a key role in setting the parameters and the frameworks for identification, comparison and selection of future robust candidate sites.

A reflection on the factors that may limit States Parties from the region from harnessing fully the potential of the Global Strategy and the heritage still surviving locally has also highlighted areas where further strategic thinking and structural action may be needed, for instance on the role given to, or function played by, heritage in society, on the legal and institutional frameworks, and on interinstitutional coordination and intra-regional cooperation. Signs of changes in perspective have been reported and suggest that the Arab States have become more and more aware of the need for a comprehensive approach to the emerging heritage quest: for instance, a number of States Parties in the region have revised their legislation to align it with principles stemming from UNESCO Conventions, and initial attempts to diversify the profile of candidate sites on the Tentative Lists have been made. These efforts need to be supported and guided.



6. Kairouan, Tunisia.



7. Ouadi Qadisha (the Holy Valley) and the Forest of the Cedars of God (Horsh Arz el-Rab) , Lebanon.

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3.



**The
outcomes
of the
project**

3. The outcomes of the project

3.1. Strengths of the Arab Region from a geo-cultural perspective

The Arab States region features its own geographic, historic and cultural specificities; it is thus important that recognition at the international level focuses on heritage that reflects such specificities. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how and to what extent the surviving tangible legacies of the past illustrate the geo-cultural peculiarities of the region. To this end, establishing a common ground would represent a first step, for instance, by identifying issues and challenges of a universal nature addressed by all human cultures and then bringing into focus the distinctiveness of human responses in the Arab region. In this way, a basis would be set out for appraising whether and when sites have reflected specific responses that might be considered outstanding at the regional or global level.

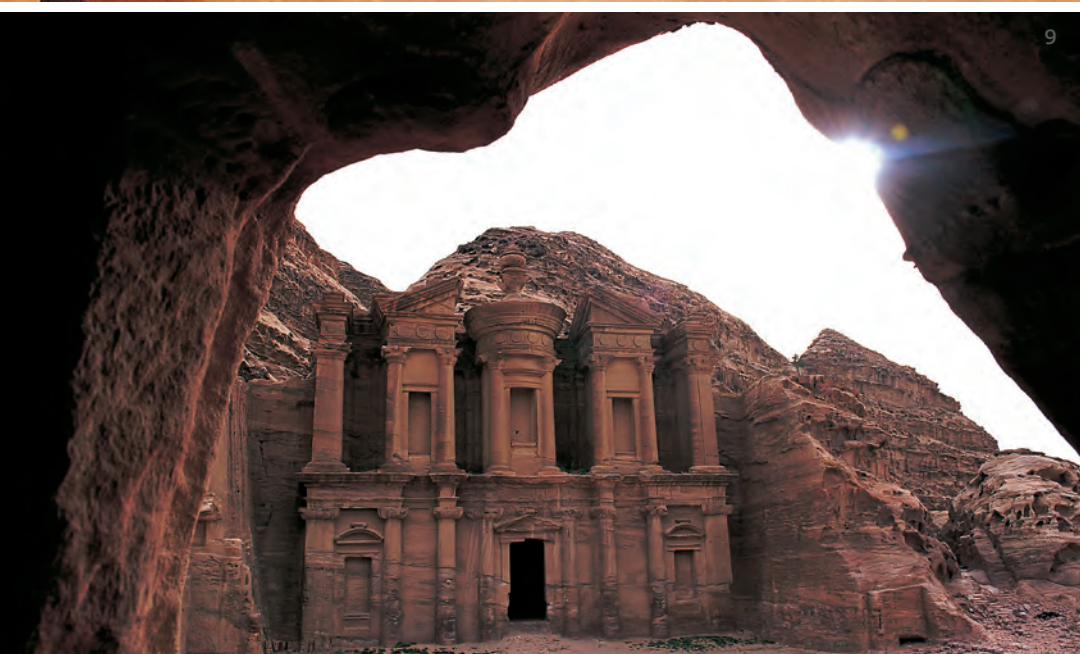
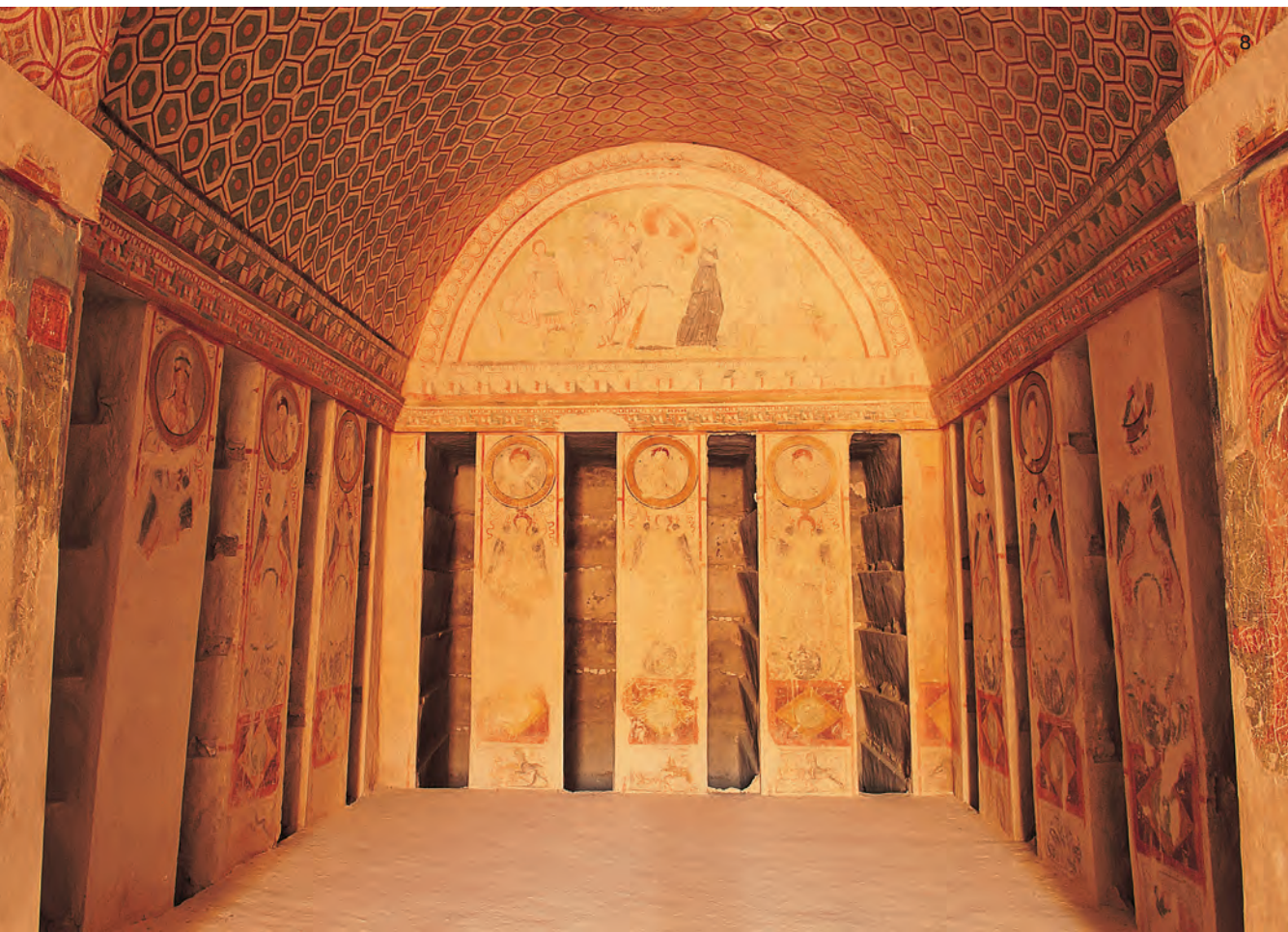
Articulating more precisely the geographic and historic-cultural specificities of the Arab region compared to other regions appears an indispensable exercise before discussing themes, categories and typologies. Once the regional distinctiveness has been set out, it will be easier to extract which themes, and then categories and typologies, might be more likely to reflect those specificities, and which sites might exhibit potential outstanding significance for the purpose of World Heritage Listing.

This exercise is yet to be achieved in a comprehensive manner, but it has been seen as particularly urgent for the task and would help bring into focus overlooked themes, categories and typologies. Although such sites might be potentially relevant for a better representation of the region on the World Heritage List, they might not necessarily be perceived as carrying heritage significance within the region itself, and therefore, may have less chance of being preserved, protected and considered for designations.

The discussion on relevant themes for the region needs to be placed within the context outlined above and supplemented with further research and ad-hoc thematic studies. Some priorities have been identified by consulted experts and are presented in this report in sub-chapter 3.5.

Geographically, the Arab region has always been a crossroads between several cultures and a place of constant exchange – e.g. shown by stylistic influences in architecture, trade routes, etc. Therefore, the theme “**movements of people**” would appear to be a strength for the region, exemplified in cultural routes, be they commercial (e.g. the incense trade and spices routes as well as developments of the Silk Roads), religious (e.g. the Hajj route), or related to transhumance, pastoralism and nomadic life. These in turn can be looked at through the prism of the “utilising natural resources” theme and can find expression in a variety of heritage types, particularly cultural landscapes.

The geographic position of the region also offers opportunities to explore the theme of human evolution in relation to fossil landscapes, taking into account the climatic changes experienced by this region throughout the millennia, and the way subsequent civilisations have coped with climatic and resource constraints and have modified the landscape. Many civilisations have left an imprint on the region and have had enormous local impact, their significance being more likely to be appraised correctly through a regional approach. Such an approach is relevant to prehistory, for instance with the megalithic sites in Lebanon, Jordan or Iraq, as well as with later epochs, such as those represented by fortifications from the time of the Crusades to the 16th and 18th centuries, with Spanish, Portuguese, and Ottoman tangible legacies.



8. Site of Palmyra, Syria.
9. Petra, Jordan.
10. Rock-Art Sites of Tadrart Acacus, Libya.
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The theme “**utilising natural resources**” includes a variety of manifestations, such as agriculture, aquaculture, fishing and related processing systems and activities, as well as mineral extraction and processing. These activities can be reflected by sites where these practices took place in ancient times but have since long ceased, and which could therefore be considered either archaeological sites or relict landscapes, or by sites/areas where traditional practices have continued and still play a role in the life of communities and in maintaining the socio-economic systems, sites and landscapes. Examples evoked in the survey and during the workshop include the archaeology of agriculture, particularly in Iraq and Bahrain, ancient aquaculture sites and processing, such as pearling, and Garum.

The ‘**heritage of water**’ is seen as a very important theme, given the scarcity of this vital resource in many areas of the region and the ingenious ways in which it has been managed throughout the centuries. Yet, the theme remains largely under-represented, although recently more attention has been given to sites which would illustrate it. Furthermore, there are religious sites associated with water that might also deserve consideration.

Under the theme “**developing technologies**”, the history of oil extraction is considered particularly relevant to the region: it is intertwined with the encounter between societies from the region and the western world, colonisation and ‘modernity’. Similar considerations can be made regarding the development of the railway network, which cannot be understood without adopting a regional approach on a transnational scale. Both mineral or oil extraction and railway construction need to be explored not only in relation to the industrial or technological facilities directly related to the operations of these industries, or to communication infrastructure, but also to the socio-economic and cultural impacts that these industries have had on societies, towns, territories and landscapes. Some States Parties have recently added to their Tentative Lists sites related to oil history, and it would be worth focusing on this theme and identifying guidelines for these nominations also from a transboundary perspective, on the basis of thematic studies examining how this history is represented in the Gulf, the Maghreb or the Levant.

The region’s encounter and close contact with the western world that occurred via colonisation has left an imprint, and this could constitute a specific theme – or sub-theme – which deserves to be explored more carefully. It has been noted that the chronological framework for the region in the 2004 ICOMOS Gap Report omits some 20 years between the end of the Ottoman Empire and ‘**modern heritage**’ after World War II; this missing period would need to be examined more carefully. From a typological perspective, the architecture, as well as the town planning legacy, of the British and French mandates and European colonialism might exhibit potential for consideration, particularly in Aleppo, Beirut and Cairo. It has also been observed that Neo-Moorish architecture, e.g. in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, or Neo-Arab architecture in Egypt, as well as architectural expressions of ‘**modernities**’, cannot be seen simply as ‘hybrid architecture’, but illustrate a not-always-easy encounter between two cultures, and should perhaps be studied considering this perspective. Some experts mentioned examples of modern architecture in Egypt and Iraq (e.g. the work of Hassan Fathy and Rifat Chadirji), Kuwait, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as well as Algeria (e.g. the work of Fernand Pouillon) that would need further investigation.

“**Expressions of society**” is also deemed a relevant theme in the Arab region, one example being the Majlis system of reception spaces where communities meet and gather on a weekly basis (e.g. in the Gulf countries). “**Spiritual responses**” would appear as a particularly pertinent theme, especially when taking into consideration the tangible legacies of the multitude of religions and beliefs that still survive, although threatened, in the region.

The theme “**creative responses and continuity**” has been perceived as rather broad and, to a certain extent, over-used, probably also because it appears easier to refer to this theme when categorising heritage sites in comparison with other themes. Additionally, sub-themes have been further elaborated only for this theme, thus facilitating its use. In any case, despite this theme covering the majority of World Heritage properties and the entries on Tentative Lists, the experts noted that there is potential for further heritage typologies that have not been sufficiently harnessed so far within the region, including vernacular architecture, which, despite the diversity that can be found in the region and the fragility of this heritage, remains poorly recognised for its cultural values.

Indeed, all these themes would benefit from a regional approach rather than national, as this would reveal the interconnections among different areas of the region, and the scope of the impacts that certain phenomena have had on societies, environment and heritage. The relevance and significance of individual sites would be reinforced if seen as elements of wider processes and systems, often reflecting regional or sub-regional facets of global phenomena.

Some barriers that may prevent harnessing fully the strengths and potential offered by the heritage of the region have been observed, such as limited experience in transboundary and transnational nominations and the tendency to adopt a national standpoint when preparing Tentative Lists and nominations.

A shared view among experts of and from the region is that the notions of setting, surroundings and, more widely, of landscape have not been sufficiently employed. This has a double impact; firstly, the significance, and therefore the protection and management of monuments does not consider the interlinkages these have with their setting and surroundings; secondly, landscapes are widely overlooked as possessing heritage significance in their own right and therefore are not protected or managed as such. In most cases, landscapes are reduced to their characteristic features and processes, and only these are singled out for protection.

Finally, whilst aware of the pause for reflection taken by the World Heritage Committee with regard to the heritage of recent conflicts, some participants highlighted that important, yet difficult or contentious, events include tangible manifestations that reflect the history of the region and might reveal outstanding significance.

3.2. How well the thematic and typological frameworks have been harnessed

Applying the frameworks of the 2004 ICOMOS Gap Report in a meaningful and useful way requires keeping the focus on the notion of Outstanding Universal Value. No real benefits can be generated by simply seeking the ‘gaps’ on the World Heritage List and proposing nominations that might appear to bridge those gaps: it would not suffice to identify sites that might ‘fill a gap’ if their outstanding universal significance cannot be demonstrated.

The key concepts for the identification of potential sites for World Heritage Listing are Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity: these do not have an even geographic distribution across the globe and across countries but depend on a variety of factors, including the historic developments of each region, climatic conditions, interconnection between humans with their environment, and the tradition of heritage protection.

However, it has been noted that most of the themes that can be considered as strengths for the region are often under-represented on the World Heritage List or on the Tentative Lists of States Parties.

Conversely, whilst some themes and typologies appear fairly represented on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists, there is still room for some sites that might reflect chronologies or typologies that have not been adequately considered. For instance, it has been acknowledged that sites related to Roman or Greek archaeology enjoy a fairly good representation on the World Heritage List and on the Tentative Lists of many countries from the region. Similarly, living historic cities have received attention in the region and a number of examples are now on the World Heritage List. However, it has been noted that this typology cannot be considered 'exhausted' by the listed examples, particularly when considering urban heritage and urban planning episodes dating back to the last two centuries, a period which is poorly represented and seems to have attracted less interest from the authorities responsible for heritage management and from decision-makers.

Whilst the limited attention given to this heritage might be explained by the mixed or negative perceptions it raises, as it often relates to the colonial period, many other under-represented typologies of heritage reflect cultural phenomena that are specific to the region, such as the heritage of the Berber/Amazigh peoples, or chronological periods illustrating the formation of the human and cultural fabric of the region, such as prehistoric sites, rock-art sites, fossil hominid sites, vernacular architecture, traditional subsistence systems, pastoralism, nomadic life, the heritage of water, cultural routes, and post-World War II 20th century heritage.

It has been widely acknowledged that cultural landscapes are not adequately represented on the World Heritage List, but these exhibit considerable variety and might reflect outstanding responses to human needs and the environment. Oases are the most obvious example, but cases extend beyond them to include terraced landscapes, desert and pastoral landscapes, either continuing or relict, and associative landscapes. A study on the cultural landscapes of the Maghreb² offers a basis for initiating a reflection on the parameters that it would be necessary to develop for comparative purposes. It has also been mentioned that natural and mixed sites would deserve more attention and a specific exploration.

Vernacular, and particularly earthen, architecture has been repeatedly mentioned as a typology that would be worth further exploration: many examples of traditional settlements and architecture still survive in the region, although threatened by abandonment or beautification.

20th century heritage has not received any particular attention in the region yet, and might offer potential to be further considered.

A revision of the typological framework for the Arab region and the possible identification of sub-regional specificities were evoked by some participants in parallel with mapping potential sites that could illustrate under-represented themes.

Insufficient knowledge of, and a lack of studies and research on, heritage assets illustrating under-represented themes and typologies has been noted as a key weakness that needs to be overcome by systematic inventorying and mapping in order to establish a sufficiently populated basis for developing a comparative framework.

² Ahmed Skounti, *Les paysages culturels au Maghreb. Situations actuelles, stratégies de protection et de gestion, renforcement des capacités*, Maghreb Regional UNESCO Office, 2012.



11. Old Town of Ghadames, Libya.
12. Ksar of Ait-Ben-Haddou, Morocco.
13. Old City of Sana'a, Yemen.
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14. Qal'at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun, Bahrain.

15. Land of Frankincense, Oman.

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3.3. Potential themes and categories that can be further explored

In summary, the specialists involved in this study have identified a variety of themes/categories and types of heritage that are not or are very limitedly represented on the World Heritage List or on Tentative Lists of States Parties from the region and might therefore deserve further exploration and documentation. They span:

- **Archaeological sites** in the Gulf region, particularly Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age sites, not only from the point of view of their chronological characterisation but also related to the development of technologies;
- **Submerged heritage** (both archaeological and built sites);
- **Pre-Islamic Berber and Punic sites** in North Africa;
- **Vernacular urban centres**, associated with their specific social practices (e.g. fortified [Ksour] or troglodytic settlements in the Maghreb [e.g. Jabal Nefusa] or the Arabian Peninsula), a rich but threatened heritage, along with their associated surrounding landscapes and systems to harness local resources (e.g. water management systems);
- **Cultural landscapes**, particularly desert and island landscapes and the subsistence practices of their inhabitants as well as their centuries-long history of inhabitation (e.g. Djerba or the Qarqna Islands, which have a social practice of fishing and allocating sea zones among different peoples just as is done for plots of land in other communities), and traditional rural landscapes as well as associated food processing facilities (e.g. the traditional production of date syrup in Bahrain and other regions in the Gulf);
- **Trading and pilgrimage routes**, such as the silk or incense routes or the Augustinian sites; these, however, would all need a regional and transboundary approach to reflect fully their significance;
- **Urban and building episodes of the different colonial mandates** – both including examples of planned zones, urban centres and buildings. North Africa – and Algeria in particular – is rich in extremely interesting examples of Art Nouveau, which has been steadily decaying;
- **Roman hydraulic complexes**: although Roman archaeology is represented, this aspect of Roman engineering has not been adequately investigated;
- **Medinas** are represented, but further examples could be considered for the way outside influences (e.g. Andalusian or Ottoman) have determined their structure, or how they exercised their own influence on the development of other urban settlements;
- **Expression of societies**, such as educational systems and their associated facilities (e.g. in Bahrain), as well as the heritage of different religious groups, which is an important, yet unrecognised, trait of the Region;
- **Industrial and technological heritage**, railways and fossil fuel industries, as well as the tangible manifestations of the socio-economic and cultural impact that they have had on society. These interrelated themes should not be seen only in relation to the 19th - 20th centuries but expanded to examine ancient civilisations and their technological achievements too. For instance, the Dilmun hub for the production and distribution of bronze is extremely important; however, the Dilmun civilisation is represented on the World Heritage List by its tombs and the archaeological remains of a human settlement in Bahrain.
- **The heritage of the 20th century** and the different articulations of modernity in the region (the word in its plural form – “modernities” – is preferred to reflect the differences). This heritage is often interpreted through the lens of ‘nation-building’ by States Parties, which might not serve well the purpose of presenting properties with a supra-national breadth as sought by the Convention.

It has been noted that some themes, such as nomadic life, might pose challenges as settlements are temporary in nature, so it would be useful to address conceptually these challenges and see whether and how themes such as nomadic life can be represented on the World Heritage List. Some participants also underlined the importance of being aware that certain historic and cultural developments are common throughout regions and cannot be seen as regional specificities, e.g. the accumulation of layers from different civilisations throughout the centuries or the millennia is commonplace.

It has also been noted that the role played by the intangible dimension in enriching the significance of a heritage site is important. However, since the World Heritage Convention is a site-based convention, intangible values should find a tangible and outstanding manifestation in immovable physical assets. The water management systems in Oman (Aflaj) have been quoted as an example: they have tangible expressions that reflect a very detailed system of counting the amount of water, and books containing water amounts counted centuries ago have been conserved. This system is among other reasons why the Aflaj system was built in the way that it was, and it explains and substantiates the cultural significance of the tangible expression of this water management system. The counting method is based on reading shadows and stars and represents inherited knowledge that enriches the overall significance of this heritage, which includes both tangible elements and intangible ones, such as the whole organisation and operation of the system.

3.4. The need for thematic studies

Both the survey and the workshop identified a wide array of potential thematic studies that could be developed for the region. Proposals took into consideration those that have recently been developed for other regions as well as studies carried out globally that might deserve an update and expansion at the regional level. Potentially relevant thematic studies include the following:

- Given the importance of the idea of the '**cradle of civilisations**' in the self-representation of the region, studies on the expression of the earliest civilisations as well as on fossil and hominid sites would be highly beneficial;
- Related to, but distinct from the previous proposal, a thematic study on **rock-art sites** in the Arab region would represent an important step forward in shaping a framework for an under-represented, yet significant, facet of the legacy of ancient civilisations and societies;
- A focus on the **cultural landscapes** of the Arab region is extremely necessary and the study recently carried out for the Pacific Islands offers a structure that can be adapted regionally; it would be important to deepen the interlinkages between culture and nature;
- Thematic studies on **cultural routes** are also necessary and, given the breadth of this phenomenon, would benefit from being articulated in sub-themes, e.g. by considering commercial routes, religious routes, and pastoral or other nomadic routes; the preparation of a framework to contextualise these routes, similarly to what is being done for the Silk Roads, would also help. Such studies may also consider how these routes have impacted the urban fabric, taking into account the location of related commercial structures, the articulation of the trade systems, the role of Waqf, and other factors;
- A thematic study on '**modern**' heritage, the way in which modernity has been articulated in different parts of the region, and how specific 'modernities' are reflected by tangible heritage would be important. This study could build upon the work already carried out by

UNESCO on the facets of modern heritage in a geographical, social, cultural and temporal framework. Given the magnitude of the phenomenon, it would be more appropriate to break down the study into sub-themes to articulate the issue of modern heritage in the region;

- The heritage of **resource extraction and production**, including industrial heritage, would also deserve a carefully crafted thematic study, possibly articulated in sub-themes, taking into account the wide timespan and variety of resource exploitation systems and technologies, e.g. mineral and oil extraction, pearling, quarrying;
- **Railway network building** also requires a thematic approach: a thematic study on railways exists but it focuses only on Europe and the Americas and dates back to 1999. It would need to be updated and extended to the Arab States region;
- **Maritime heritage**, related to maritime activities and/or routes, in the form of archaeological sites (submerged, coastal) but also in terms of later, but still traditional, practices and related sites;
- Although some **fortifications** are already represented on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists, the extent of the phenomenon calls for a thematic study on the topic, in order to provide a solid comparative framework that can guide potential proposals;
- Finally, a study focussed on '**expressions of society**', and on how tangible and intangible values and manifestations are intertwined, would be beneficial in order to be able to achieve more cohesiveness in presenting these values and the way in which heritage sites convey them.

As a general note, it is essential to underline the importance of presenting these potential studies in a manner that can resonate with the way in which Arab societies perceive themselves, their history and their possible contribution to the heritage of humankind.

Indeed, thematic studies targeting the region can offer a robust foundation to build a comparative framework and, more importantly, re-construct and assemble knowledge about the heritage of the region, its strengths and weaknesses.

A study on the **Cultural Heritages of Water in the Middle East and the Maghreb** was recently published by ICOMOS in collaboration with ARC-WH, but the theme certainly deserves further exploration, particularly in urban areas and with a focus on the lessons that can be drawn from past systems and that would need to be addressed with a view to strengthening sustainability and resilience. Events such as the Water Week held in Stockholm in 2019, where discussions were held between water management and heritage professionals, are extremely rewarding and should be continued. It has also been observed that many World Heritage properties, or their surrounding landscapes, also reflect important aspects related to water management which have not been taken into consideration in their respective nominations, and therefore are not addressed in the narrative for the inscription; in the Statement of OUV or in the management.

One additional theme that was proposed as worth being examined concerns **slavery and the traces that this has left throughout the Arab region**. This specific subject can be seen as contributing to various themes included in the thematic framework. Slavery and its legacy are very important to UNESCO and several initiatives have been ongoing for several years now.



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16. Aflaj Irrigation Systems of Oman, Oman.

17. Archaeological Site of Carthage, Tunisia.

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Tackling the topic of **multireligious encounters** would be very interesting but also challenging in terms of how to determine whether sites reflect these encounters in an outstanding manner. Taking into account the rapid erosion of the diversity of spiritual responses that the Arab region has witnessed, particularly due to recent conflicts that have large impacts on vulnerable communities, undertaking a preliminary exploration on this matter would be extremely urgent (the now-deserted Christian quarters in Aleppo and Damascus have been cited, as well as the island of Djerba, where communities affiliated to three different religions cohabitate).

Finally, some specialists from the region consider that it would be relevant to carry out a study on the **heritage of conflicts** (not necessarily recent) in the region from a variety of perspectives, including technological development, building typologies, landscapes, and the interconnection between the tangible and the intangible.

3.5. Priorities for protection and recognition at the national and regional levels

Prioritising heritage protection and recognition is not an easy task, and has become particularly challenging as the region is in turmoil. Some countries in the region suffer from ongoing or intermittent conflicts, while other countries endure instable situations that make medium- and long-term planning difficult. In conflict zones, heritage recognition might also have unwanted side-effects, such as intentional destruction.

Perhaps not as challenging, but still complex, is the establishment of operational priorities for the recognition and conservation of heritage that suffers from abandonment because its significance is not understood by its owners, users or heritage decision-makers. Most of the categories mentioned earlier as under-represented or not represented might well be considered as priorities.

Indeed, it has been acknowledged that the heritage of minority ethnic or religious groups is under imminent threat and might perhaps be seen as the most urgent priority. However, this type of heritage, like the inheritance of colonisation, is also one that raises political issues and conflicting sentiments, therefore defining operational steps to document and recognize its heritage significance might be difficult. Different, scholarly-based values of this heritage, such as those relating to architectural, artistic and technological interests, might then help to reduce the ideological dimension of these often-contested legacies.

Other forms of heritage that need to be urgently recognised include vernacular settlements and architecture, which are at risk of disappearing as a result of either abandonment or beautification for tourists; and 20th century heritage, which, particularly in urban areas, suffers from development pressures. Heritage related to the development of industries and resource exploitation is also threatened by substitution or upgrade as well as abandonment.

Rock-art deserves to be prioritised as sites suffer from both intentional and unintentional damage due to lack of awareness of their importance and unregulated visitation. Archaeological heritage also needs attention, particularly in urban areas, where rescue archaeology might be conducted but often only artefacts are recovered, whilst immovable vestiges are archaeologically removed.

Cultural landscapes and the heritage of water have begun to be recognised; however, this recognition is recent, and many sites still await to be documented and protected and remain therefore under threat.

A mixed approach, both bottom-up (community-based or participatory) and top-down (or science-based), to the identification of priorities and areas of under-representation is seen as being able to generate useful outcomes and deserves to be applied. In this sense, specialists from the region consider that the Advisory Bodies can act as catalysts for a process of identification and recognition led by States Parties.

The inventorying and recognition of heritage struck by conflicts is critical, but also problematic, as an assessment will be required of whether the surviving remnants of the attributes that might have supported the heritage site's potential outstanding significance are sufficient, and whether recovery and reconstruction can be carried out so as to preserve, or at least partly recover, that significance. Destruction caused by conflicts might bring to light layers of history as well as relationships with the wider setting that were not evident or not perceived before: new values might come to the fore that could offer different perspectives for the understanding of the significance of the heritage site.

3.6. Would a regional differentiation help?

This topic was included in the study as a discussion on whether a differentiation of the region into sub-regions, from a geo-cultural perspective, would be considered advisable when looking at the geographical specificities of different areas within the region and at the different trajectories of their historical development. Whilst the responses to the survey were more mixed in their approach, the exchanges in the workshop led to the conclusions that a differentiation of the region into sub-regions, with regard to the thematic and typological frameworks, would not be needed and might even be counterproductive. The typological and thematic frameworks were found to be sufficiently flexible in terms of classifications to allow the nuances of sub-regions to be captured. Additionally, sites could be classified under more than one theme or typology, depending on the aspects and values brought into focus by studies or assessments, while a sub-regional differentiation might complicate this multi-category approach. Specificities, both in terms of geographical conditions and historic-cultural contexts, need to be brought to light, but this can happen at a later stage, also because the geo-cultural distribution of certain cultural processes or phenomena and their tangible manifestations varies considerably in relation to the theme and the heritage types, as in the case of oases. An artificial sub-division of the region into sub-regions would lead to fragmentation and might increase a top-down approach in the formation of Tentative Lists and in the nomination process.

The real issue seems to reside in the extent to which the thematic and typological frameworks are captured in the inventory systems in use throughout the region. If inventories at the national level are designed in such a way that the inventoried heritage cannot be easily looked at through the lens of the thematic or typological frameworks used within the Convention, it might be difficult to show that they can indeed meet the themes and typologies of the World Heritage system. Additionally, a number of sites potentially relevant within the global framework would not even enter the inventory. This issue therefore appears a structural one and is further discussed in sub-chapter 3.8.

3.7. Factors influencing the identification and selection of candidate sites

It has been widely acknowledged that the Tentative Lists of States Parties in the region currently do not reflect the richness and diversity of their heritage and, apart from some exceptions, tend to follow familiar paths. The reasons for this imbalance are complex and interlinked and their roots are not easy to disentangle.

However, one of the most evident causes seems to lie within the scope of the sectoral legislation for heritage protection, which is also closely linked to how and to what extent heritage has been given a role in nation and identity building, and to whether heritage legislation has evolved since it was first established. The scope of the legislation has an impact on what becomes designated as heritage and hence protected, what society perceives as heritage and how heritage is perceived (e.g. through education in schools), and how institutions recruit their technical staff and the scope of the experience accumulated by heritage institutions. The scope of the legislation, whether it is narrow or broad, and the frequency of its revision to reflect the evolution of thinking on heritage, also influence what types of heritage tend to be documented and studied, and thus better known and understood. Legislation, therefore, is seen as a key factor with direct and indirect impacts on what is likely to be considered eligible at the national level for inclusion on the Tentative List, and then put forward for nomination.

The limited knowledge and awareness of the cultural significance of certain types of heritage, such as cultural landscapes and industrial or technological heritage, might also be the result of the way in which educational systems and academic programmes are framed, as well as of the scope of the educational background of the technical staff of heritage institutions, often revolving essentially around archaeology or history of art and architecture.

Probably more complex are the underlying reasons for the modest interest aroused by the built legacy of the 19th and early 20th centuries, as it is often entangled with, or is the outcome of, colonisation, and therefore carries messages that might raise mixed feelings in different sectors of society. National identity narratives and political agendas and priorities may also influence the selection of sites from which the illustration of the image of a country is derived.

A collective process might be needed to accompany society at large to consider the tangible remains of the colonial period as heritage, and the same might apply to the '**heritage of minorities**'. Such a process can be the result of social changes and evolution of thinking, but might also be triggered by the conscious efforts of the high-level decision-makers in a country.

The understanding of what is considered heritage, and therefore deserves protection and conservation, has evolved over time, including the progressive reduction of the nature-culture dichotomy, a more 'context-based' notion of authenticity, the emphasis on sustainability, and the increase of public participation in the definition of heritage and its significance. However, the evolution of concepts and of social understanding and appreciation of cultural inheritance has yet to be fully incorporated into the legal and institutional framework within the region, therefore a gap exists between needs and available instruments. Such a gap is to be borne in mind, for often practical motivations affect choices; for instance, the existence or lack of legal protection for certain heritage sites, or of adequate research background information and documentation that would inform the preparation of the nomination dossier.

A lack of resources, both human and financial, also has an impact on what States Parties consider feasible to protect, conserve and promote, and what is therefore adequate, or advantageous from a tourism perspective, for potential nomination. It might be the case that larger or more complex areas, such as urban sectors, historic centres and cultural landscapes, are not considered because such areas are too complex to manage, they might not enjoy protection designations, or it might be difficult to address development pressures.

In parallel, political agendas must also be seen as a relevant factor in choosing sites that can convey messages in line with the ideology of the ruling class, or that can bring economic benefits, particularly through the development of the tourism industry. Sites with robust potential for successful nomination might be discarded because they are considered less interesting in terms of tourism attractions or require too much investment to be turned into successful destinations.

The specialists observed that, generally, the identification of sites suitable for potential nomination is not guided by a strategic approach solidly rooted in the understanding of the specificities of the region and of the World Heritage system. In several cases, the updating of the Tentative List is a process limited to adding one or a few sites, rather than involving its complete revision, an exercise which would allow for a wider and deeper reflection on how heritage has evolved and what the heritage from one State Party can contribute towards a more representative World Heritage List. It has been further observed that the formation of the Tentative List is frequently assigned to a group of experts with little or no input from relevant stakeholders, institutions or civil society, thus limiting the perspective brought into the selection process. Widening the discussion among the various actors in each State Party on how the notion of heritage has evolved, and the stratification of meanings and functions that it carries, is crucial in order to embrace and popularise the spirit of the Convention.

In some cases, inclusion on the Tentative List is seen as a way to guarantee some form of protection against impending development and to attract the attention of public opinion and political decision-makers. The use of the Tentative List by heritage protection institutions as a deterrent against development pressures often backfires, as developers lobby against Tentative Listing and nominations. In other cases, inclusion on the Tentative List is seen as a first step for the promotion of the site as a touristic destination.

Reluctance to put forward sites for potential nominations can also be generated by the fear of losing sovereignty over the site when the international community becomes involved.

The complexity of the elaboration of the nomination dossier, and issues related to the conditions of integrity and authenticity, have also affected the number and selection of properties to be included on the Tentative Lists.

It has also been noted that, in the past, the formation of Tentative Lists was particularly influenced by the institutions responsible for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention at the national level (i.e. for cultural heritage, the Ministries of Culture and the Departments of Antiquities). The educational background of the staff therefore largely determined what was considered important to propose. Furthermore, the lack of regulations in the legal framework setting out clearly established parameters and technical administrative steps guiding the selection of sites to be included on Tentative Lists leaves the process largely unregulated with possible arbitrary decisions.

Participants observed that, since it is the prerogative and responsibility of States Parties to decide which heritage sites to put forward for World Heritage Listing, integrating the principles and approach of the World Heritage Convention within the national system is a pre-condition for achieving a more robust understanding of heritage at large and its role in human life, and for facilitating the identification of sites bearing robust potential.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned factors that hinder the possibility of fully harnessing the richness and diversity of the heritage from the region to improve the representativeness of the World Heritage List, changes have been occurring from a political and cultural perspective

that are beginning to be reflected in the revision of the Tentative Lists. With the progressive involvement of civil society and NGOs in heritage discourse, the understanding of heritage is expanding, and this has begun to influence the sites being proposed for inclusion on Tentative Lists.

A more difficult challenge will be how to reconcile the need for development with the need for guaranteeing the protection of the heritage, particularly for emerging economies and in a pandemic and post-pandemic scenario.



18. Anjar, Lebanon.

19. Bahla Fort, Oman.

20. At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah, Saudi Arabia.

21. Quseir Amra, Jordan.

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3.8. Legal and institutional frameworks: perspectives and challenges

Experts agreed that addressing the issue of how the legal framework facilitates or hinders the recognition and protection of a larger or narrower array of cultural heritage resources requires consideration of three main aspects of the issue.

The most evident point, from an international perspective, is represented by the lack of legislative regulations to operationalise the principles and scope of the World Heritage Convention. Ratification of the Convention obliges signatories to respect and implement its provisions; however, ratification decisions or laws do not suffice to achieve the integration of these provisions into the national legal framework and jurisprudence.

The second key issue concerns how legislation is conceived, what is its scope, what does it cover, and to what extent can the way in which it is written accommodate the evolution of the notion of heritage over time.

The third point relates to what extent primary legislation is backed up by regulations, orders and policies, and if its provisions are clearly related to the tasks of ad-hoc dedicated institutions to enable its implementation.

The scope of the legislation is what defines its extent and reach: the wider the scope is, the more facets of culture and heritage it can cover. The scope of the law essentially depends on the definition of the concept of cultural heritage, and these definitions differ from one country to another. Generally speaking, North African countries use general definitions based on the criteria of cultural, historical, artistic, traditional or aesthetic value, while Middle Eastern countries usually apply a closed criterion of age to define the objects to be protected. Some Arab countries combine both approaches in their legislation.

Other Middle Eastern countries and Gulf States focus mainly on the protection of antiquities, and do not make reference to cultural heritage as a general concept. Usually, antiquities laws are based on the criterion of age to circumscribe the objects to be protected. Objects younger than a certain age are not protected by law or cannot be protected. The word “antiquities” appears outdated and narrow and does not take into account the evolution of the notion of antiquities into that of cultural heritage, which is much wider, more diverse and coherent with international conventions.

In the legislation of the Arab States, two main ways of delimiting the scope of the law can be distinguished: static or dynamic. Static definitions leave little room for a broad interpretation and an expansion of the circle of objects to be protected. They do not leave space for the evolution of society and the use of the holistic approach when dealing with the protection, management and promotion of cultural heritage.

On the other hand, a general and dynamic definition allows more flexibility and leaves room for an evolving interpretation of the kinds of cultural heritage that might deserve being recognised, designated and protected over time.

In recent years, a number of States Parties have decided to develop or revise their legislation concerning heritage protection. These laws have been inspired by international principles and understanding of cultural heritage, and have introduced it as a notion within their relevant territories (Lebanon, Palestine, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Qatar). However, despite some exceptions, the scope of most of the laws in the Arab region generally remain limited and do not allow even for interpretation, thus preventing

the protection of new categories of cultural heritage.

The lack of secondary legislation has an impact on the possibility of implementing protection, but also on inventorying and documentation. Regulations and technical specifications are necessary to build inventories, and categorise and document heritage assets, and also allow for the alignment of national heritage categories/typologies with those in use in the Convention, thus facilitating in practical terms the expansion of the scope of cultural heritage, starting with inventories.

It has been noted that the potential offered by the cultural heritage of the Arab States to provide a more complete picture of the legacies of past and living cultures in the region, and consequently significantly contribute to a more representative World Heritage List able to reflect the diversity of tangible cultural manifestations, is high. However, this aspiration may not be achieved, if States Parties do not actively build a comprehensive vision for their cultural heritage, supported by appropriate administrative structures, qualified human resources and adequate legislative tools. This is a great challenge for most of the Arab States, especially in the current pandemic situation, which will certainly have serious social, economic and financial consequences, and lead to a re-examination of national priorities.

Steps towards a strengthened understanding of the evolving nature of the notion of heritage and of its progressively broadening scope are to be envisaged to trigger changes in the perception of what is heritage and how it should be protected, which can then feed into an updating of the legislation: these efforts are a common responsibility of national institutions, civil society, scholars and communities. A strategy that can combine a bottom-up approach, by sensitizing citizens, civil society and NGOs from the sector to build a shared understanding of what the notion of heritage could encompass, with a top-down approach, which focuses on building the capacity and awareness of high-level decision makers, opinion leaders and institutions, might contribute towards the acceleration of a process that has already begun.

Difficulties in implementing the legal framework also result from many factors, including the excessive workload of the institutions charged with protection responsibilities, limitations in the number and scope of the competencies of the technical staff, and, in some instances, even the multiplication of entities with responsibilities over the same sites. In the case of urban heritage, for instance, it is not infrequent that this is not understood as a continuum but is limited to the density of designated heritage buildings. A similar situation may also occur when it comes to cultural landscapes, where the relationships between features, processes and the expanse of the territory where these processes occur are not considered, and landscapes are reduced to their attributes. In this sense, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011) plays an important role in improving the understanding of townscapes and of how planning instruments can become heritage protection instruments.

In summary, the main challenges that were identified by specialists involved in the project with regard to legal frameworks in the region include:

- Fully integrating and operationalising the founding principles of the World Heritage Convention;
- Developing a vision for heritage and its role in society grounded in the principles of the World Heritage Convention;
- Updating and modernising inventories, taking into account the evolution of the notion of cultural heritage and the scope of the World Heritage Convention as well as of other international conventions and programmes;

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22. Byblos, Lebanon.
23. Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din, Syria.
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- Strengthening and modernising the legislation for heritage protection, by widening its scope both in terms of heritage categories and how to understand the notion of protection (active rather than passive) and related strategies;
- Operationalising the provisions of primary legislation through secondary legal instruments (regulations, bylaws, standards);
- Developing cross-cutting instruments to actively support protection and conservation;
- Recognising the role of civil society, scholars and communities in supporting heritage protection and awareness-raising as well as establishing grounds for interinstitutional dialogue and cooperation.

Indeed, a long-term strategy is needed for the region, as the areas which need to be acted upon are several and complex and call for a structural response, starting with improvements in the education system.

Likewise, a number of factors impacting on institutions for heritage protection limit the possibility of recognising certain categories of heritage as important within national realms, or of protecting them through official designations, or hinder effective implementation of that protection. These factors are intertwined, reciprocally influencing one another and generating processes that will need long-term strategies and dedicated commitment to see them redressed.

It has been noted that one of the effects of the administration of heritage resources in their different broad expressions – e.g. cultural, natural, tangible, intangible, movable, immovable – has been the establishment of a multitude of institutions in charge of specific heritage classes. This has fragmented responsibilities, and, in the absence of a comprehensive holistic vision of heritage and of adequate coordination mechanisms, undermines efforts and results. Specialisation, instead of working towards competent and targeted heritage safeguarding, causes inefficiencies, power conflicts and loss of resources. However, when it comes to cultural heritage, it is observed that the main problem often lies in the opposite situation: in most cases, only one department – usually named the Department of Antiquities – deals with all immovable heritage types. Participants noted that the Department of Antiquities can be seen as a colonial legacy, which reflects the vision of heritage prevalent at the time: essentially archaeological sites related to Roman or Greek civilisations and little else.

Where legislation has not evolved and archaeology is still the focus of protection, archaeologists make up the majority of the technical staff; if the legislation has witnessed some form of modernisation, then it is likely that architects are also employed. However, these two educational backgrounds are no longer sufficient to address all the needs and challenges and the growing complexity of heritage protection, management and promotion. Other professional competencies and skills would be needed, including management capacities, knowledge of economics, as well as communication and dialogue skills.

It has been noted that limited opportunities exist in the Arab region for education in heritage conservation, and even fewer in management; additionally, in most cases, those who have received this type of education do not seek employment in public institutions, as the status and salary of civil servants are not attractive and pressures are high. Therefore, positions at heritage institutions are filled mainly with archaeologists, who have almost no other job opportunities outside public institutions, and with non-specialised architects or conservators.

A reported crucial weakness is the lack of institutional continuity and memory: when a civil servant leaves their position, the accumulated knowledge goes with them, and their work and produced documentation is lost.

The instruments in the hands of heritage institutions to guarantee heritage protection are seemingly limited, and their capacity to address development or political pressures are low and frequently rest on mid-level officers, often left alone to deal with complex situations and not necessarily supported by their superiors.

The mandate of heritage institutions is usually narrow – implementing protection, monitoring the respect of legal provisions and issuing permits for interventions – and does not envisage active protection, interinstitutional cooperation or cooperation with the private sector. The challenges posed by sustainable development in the heritage realm remain out of their scope of work, therefore staff members are not adequately prepared to negotiate with development agents, be they from the public or the private sector. Heritage institutions have limited influence on government agendas, which are frequently driven by other topics, mainly enabling development and reducing public expenditure, and often they have limited capabilities of negotiation with other departments of state or local administrations.

The legal profile and status of heritage institutions – whether they should be totally or partially independent agencies, or articulations of the Ministry of Culture or other state administrations – remain the subject of an unresolved debate. As yet, no comprehensive evaluation has been made on what should be the appropriate legal administrative and financial status of heritage institutions to enable the accomplishment of their mandate and legal tasks. However, it is not infrequent that when an institution does not seem to perform its mandate adequately, a new institution is created with a slightly different profile and mandate but often with significant overlapping with the responsibilities of existing institutions. This causes conflicts and coordination issues.

Centralisation and the lack of deconcentrated offices reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of protection implementation: decisions that need to be taken promptly are delayed, tensions grow and pressures to eliminate what are seen as unnecessary bureaucratic complications increase.

An approach that integrates heritage protection with sustainable and compatible development requires the understanding of the multiple facets of heritage, beyond its historical or cultural significance, including social, economic and political dimensions: institutions and their staff need to be assisted in developing these types of capabilities as they refer to new competencies for which almost no background education is offered by university curricula on archaeology or architecture. Awareness has grown in heritage institutions that other actors can intervene in heritage-related processes and play a positive role in sustaining heritage, and that public institutions are called to play a more proactive function in these processes. However, heritage institutions are also acutely aware of the need for new skills and instruments to tackle these new challenges. Changes of attitudes towards civil society organisations and NGOs are progressively emerging within the region and this is also attested by reforms in the legislation (e.g. in Saudi Arabia). There is a need to build on these changes, and both public institutions and NGOs hold the responsibility to facilitate this happening so as to create synergies rather than competition.

A closer collaboration with academics and practitioners has been evoked as a means to strengthen educational curricula and to assist in improving communication and sensitizing the younger population to the importance of heritage.

Many institutions do not have international departments and therefore lack adequate knowledge and experience of international conventions on heritage. This limits the possibilities of collaboration with international organisations as well as with neighbouring countries.

It is not easy to determine how to improve the situation, and further consideration and analysis is needed; however, participants observed that efforts could focus on certain areas that have been considered as priorities:

- **Strengthening the educational system** and the curricula related to heritage management, conservation and promotion;
- **Reinforcing the coordination** between state institutions and the cooperation with other public agencies and levels of administration as well as with civil society organisations;
- **Promoting international cooperation** among States Parties from within the region on heritage matters;
- **Ensuring that the knowledge of the staff** of heritage institutions is fully harnessed and sustained through lifelong capacity-building initiatives;
- **Strengthening the links** between the provisions of heritage legislation with the mandate and tasks of heritage institutions;
- **Facilitating the integration of institution staff** into internationally-funded projects in order to make good use of existing capacities and build upon them;
- **Strengthening the communication and negotiation capacities** of heritage institutions in order to improve the effectiveness of their advocacy action and to be able to use arguments supporting heritage protection that can resonate with decision-makers' priorities;
- **Strengthening the capacity of heritage institutions** to enter into dialogue and collaboration with local communities and civil society organisations;
- **Establishing clear principles and rules of procedure** for the consultation of heritage institutions by other public actors in charge of planning and development as well as consultation processes for civil society organisations;
- **Elaborating a regional study** on the impacts of heritage protection, conservation and rehabilitation on the socio-economic fabric of the region.

Institutional reforms are a very delicate and complex matter: there is a need to first assess the situation, identifying problems and possible solutions, while bearing in mind the legal constraints that might need to be overcome. Customs and traditions must be taken into account in order to establish institutions that can be sustainable over time. The heritage realm has become more complex and this calls for additional skills and more agility in the institutional framework, which need to be achieved while considering that changes in mentality and administrative working methods take time and that reforms need time to deploy their effects: continuous reforms are likely to reduce effectiveness rather than improving it.

Finally, a more regular dialogue between heritage institutions and parliamentary commissions and parliamentarians with special knowledge of, or commitment to heritage has been suggested to make better use of the mechanisms of cooperation between ministries and governments, and push for the enhancement of legislation and policies supporting heritage management and integration in larger processes.

4.

**Main
findings
and
follow up**

4. Main findings and follow up

Improving the representativeness of the World Heritage List and enhancing its implementation throughout all regions of the world requires not only ensuring a fair representation of the tangible legacies of the past on the World Heritage List, if these exhibit global significance, but, foremost, the recognition of the key role of heritage in nurturing human well-being and inspiring people's hope and resilience, and, for these very reasons, the guarantee that heritage is to be put at the centre of sustainable and equitable development as well as recovery processes and policies.

The use of the word 'gap' might not be the most appropriate choice to address the imbalances of the World Heritage List. Any process aiming to achieve a more precise reflection in the World Heritage List of the richness and diversity of the cultural heritage sites of the region, as well as of the world in general, needs to elicit sites that might have the potential to exhibit Outstanding Universal Value for the purpose of the World Heritage Convention, rather than trying to 'fill gaps'.

Achieving an open but realistic understanding of what the region can offer to improve the representativeness of the World Heritage List, and a more coherent vision at the regional level of the potential of the region to contribute to a more representative and balanced World Heritage List, are two crucial steps. In turn, taking these steps would require a more cohesive approach to heritage to be established at the regional level, able to build synergies among national agendas and overcome competing paths.

4.1. Key findings

The three frameworks – thematic, typological and chronological – used by ICOMOS in its 2004 Gap Report should be seen as tools to assist the singling out of heritage places that have not been identified through national inventories or previous selections. The three frameworks offer a composite perspective of the entirety of what can potentially be covered by the notion of immovable heritage assets (those eligible for inscription on the World Heritage List): the frameworks can be more helpful when employed as conceptual lenses to expand the understanding of cultural heritage and of how it can reflect human histories and achievements. Comparative frameworks, on the other hand, will help to distil those sites that may exhibit potential for World Heritage Listing.

A combined exercise would be needed, on the one hand, to expand the notion of what can be seen as cultural heritage, and, on the other, to select from wider and more diverse sets of eligible sites to identify robust potential for inclusion on the Tentative Lists.

This study has been based essentially on a scholarly approach and, after analysing the current profile and thematic and typological distributions of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and of sites included in the Tentative Lists of States Parties, has attempted a preliminary expansion of the horizons, bringing into light themes that are relevant for the region and might offer interesting potential in relation to its geo-cultural specificities:

- **Movement of people:** as the region is recognised as a crossroads of culture, this theme might be illustrated by a variety of routes – e.g. commercial, cultural or transhumance-related – and associated tangible legacies that are greatly varied in nature (archaeological heritage, sections of routes, living or relic cities, specialised commercial structures);

- **Utilising natural resources:** given the constraints in terms of availability of resources, particularly water, this theme has appeared particularly important, also in connection with the 'heritage of water' theme, and could be associated with agricultural or aquaculture-related sites, landscapes, extraction and processing sites;
- **Developing technologies:** the history of oil extraction has been seen as particularly important for the region, but the diffusion of the railway is also worth being investigated;
- **The heritage of modernity:** in its regional and sub-regional inflections, and as a reflection of the encounter between the region and the western world, this has been seen as a promising theme, with a number of surviving examples to be further investigated;
- **Expressions of society:** this theme has not been particularly used in the region, although tangible heritage survives in the region that reflects this theme;
- **Spiritual responses:** this appears to be a particularly relevant theme for the region, also reflecting the diversity of faiths that characterises the region and for which physical testimonies could be considered as being at threat from rapid disappearance;
- **Creative responses and continuity:** as this theme is rather broad and equipped with sub-themes, it tends to be overused, and the Arab States region is no exception; however, its breadth still offers room, particularly when taking into account under-represented typologies.



24. Archaeological Sites of Bat, Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn, Oman.

25. Qal'at al-Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun, Bahrain.

26. Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madāin Sālih), Saudi Arabia.

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The study has also identified a number of typologies that might be reflected by sites exhibiting potential for the purpose of World Heritage Listing, if their global significance can be confirmed through adequate comparative exercise. They are:

- **Archaeological sites in the Gulf region**, particularly Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age sites, and especially if related to the development of technologies;
- **Submerged heritage** (both archaeological and built sites);
- **Pre-Islamic Berber and Punic sites** in North Africa;
- **Vernacular urban centres**, associated with their specific social practices - a rich but threatened heritage - along with their associated surrounding landscapes and systems to harness local resources (e.g. water management systems);
- **Cultural landscapes**, particularly desert and island landscapes and the subsistence practices of their inhabitants as well as the traces of their centuries-long history of inhabitation, traditional rural landscapes and associated food processing facilities;
- **Trading and pilgrimage routes**: these, however, would all need a regional and transboundary approach to reflect fully their significance;
- **Urban and building episodes of the different colonial mandates**, including examples of planned zones, urban centres and buildings;
- **Roman hydraulic complexes**: although Roman archaeology is represented, this aspect of Roman engineering has not been adequately investigated;
- **Medinas** are represented, but further examples could be considered for the way outside influences have determined their structure;
- **Expression of societies**, such as educational systems and their associated facilities, as well as the heritage of different religious groups, which is an important, yet unrecognised, trait of the region;
- **Industrial and technological heritage**, as well as the tangible manifestations of the socio-economic and cultural impact that industries have had on society. These interrelated themes should not be seen only in relation to the 19th - 20th centuries but expanded to examine ancient civilisations and their technological achievements too;
- **The heritage of the 20th century** and the different articulations of modernity in the region: this heritage is often interpreted through the lens of 'nation-building' by States Parties, which might not serve well the purpose of presenting properties with a supra-national breadth as sought by the Convention.

The specialists' contribution has been key to identifying relevant themes and typologies according to which the heritage of the region can be understood; however, the study has also highlighted that thematic studies would be highly beneficial in several areas to establish the necessary comparative frameworks and their parameters and to single stronger candidates out. Below, a list of thematic studies evoked in the responses to the questionnaire and during the workshop is presented:

- Sites related to the earliest civilisations as well as **fossil and hominid sites**;

- **Rock-art sites;**
- **Cultural landscapes** and the interlinkages between culture and nature;
- **Cultural routes**, possibly articulated in sub-themes, e.g. commercial, religious and pastoral or other nomadic routes;
- The heritage of '**modernities**', possibly articulated into sub-themes;
- The heritage of **resource extraction and production**, including but not limited to industrial heritage;
- **Railway network building**: an update and expansion of the 1999 thematic study on railways in Europe and the Americas would be needed;
- **Maritime heritage**, in the form of archaeological sites but also in terms of later, but still traditional, practices and related sites;
- **Fortifications** in the region;
- A possible expansion of the thematic study on the **heritage of water to urban areas**;
- The heritage associated with **slave routes and slavery**;
- Finally, a study focused on '**expressions of society**', and on how tangible and intangible values and manifestations are intertwined, would be beneficial to be able to achieve more cohesiveness in presenting these values and the way in which heritage sites convey them.

Specialists also identified priorities for the identification and protection of heritage categories that suffer from impending threats: in their view, the most endangered at the moment include the heritage expression of minority groups, vernacular heritage - prone either to abandonment or to beautification for tourism - and rock-art sites as well as archaeological heritage, especially in urban areas.

Reflections on the adequacy of legal and institutional frameworks to cope with the challenges raised, but also on the opportunities offered by an evolving understanding of cultural heritage and its role in societies and, in parallel, of the role of societies in its promotion, remain relevant. Strengthening those frameworks and adapting them to new contexts and needs represents an indispensable precondition for enabling a more effective response to the 'quest for heritage' of societies in the Arab States region and, at the same time, for harnessing in full the opportunities offered by the World Heritage Convention.

In this regard, a key aspect that seems necessary to address concerns the fear that sovereignty can be lost or diminished if sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List and the international community becomes involved. Steps may need to be undertaken to increase the awareness of high-level decision-makers about the World Heritage Convention and the engagement its ratification entails.

While acknowledging the ongoing unstable situation of many countries in the region, it has also been observed that changing political and socio-economic conditions might also offer room for a shift in attitude and mechanisms and for enhanced collaboration among different actors, as exemplified by processes occurring in a number of countries of the region suffering from ongoing conflicts.

Key challenges to be addressed in the region that have been identified through the questionnaire and the workshop include:

- Fully integrating and operationalising the founding principles of the World Heritage Convention;
- Developing a vision for heritage and its role in society grounded in the principles of the World Heritage Convention;
- Updating and modernising inventories, taking into account the evolution of the notion of cultural heritage and the scope of the World Heritage Convention as well as of other international conventions and programmes;
- Strengthening and modernising the legislation for heritage protection, by widening its scope both in terms of heritage categories and how to understand the notion of protection (active rather than passive) and related strategies;
- Operationalising the provisions of primary legislation through secondary legal instruments (regulations, bylaws, standards);
- Developing cross-cutting instruments to actively support protection and conservation;
- Recognising the role of civil society, scholars and communities in supporting heritage protection and awareness-raising and establishing grounds for interinstitutional dialogue and cooperation.

Some States Parties have begun to address these challenges and initial results can be already appreciated. Intra-regional dialogue and collaboration can consolidate achievements and extend them throughout the region.



27. Medina of Sousse, Tunisia.
28. Medina of Essouria, Morocco.
29. Medina of Tunis, Tunisia.
30. Historic Cairo, Egypt.
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4.2. Follow up

Determining the need or opportunity for reforms in the legal and institutional frameworks fall within the responsibility and prerogative of States Parties. However, specialists agree that there is much room for technical expertise to tackle identified needs, for instance, in heritage survey and inventorying, awareness-raising, thematic studies, and capacity building in heritage management and participatory processes or in World Heritage procedures and policies. The latter is particularly relevant, taking into account the recent revision of the nomination process, with the introduction of the Preliminary Assessment, and the recently released Guidance for developing / revising World Heritage Tentative Lists, which aims at providing assistance to State Parties at an early stage of the nomination process.

The suggestions for action listed below are to be understood as possible steps forward to enhance the contribution of the Arab States region to the representativeness of the World Heritage List and eventually to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Strengthening collaboration among local actors responsible for heritage protection, conservation, management and the identification of sites suitable for entry on the Tentative List, heritage scholars and academics, and international organisations such as the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage and ICOMOS, would be of utmost importance. A format for capacity building initiatives can be envisaged that optimizes the contribution of local, national and international actors in order to increase institutional capabilities, reinforce interinstitutional communication and cooperation, and possibly achieve a better understanding of which cultural heritage sites might have potential global significance. The involvement of all three groups of actors would be necessary to initiate a sound process that can eventually lead towards the revision of Tentative Lists: this recommendation appears particularly timely and in line with the framework provided by the ICOMOS – IUCN Guidance for developing and revising Tentative Lists.

Streamlining and coordinating capacity building efforts of different international actors, like UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, the UNESCO regional offices or ARC-WH, would indeed contribute to making more effective use of resources and may facilitate the formation of a more robust network among people, objectives and actions, favouring the sustainability and resilience of the system in the long term. To this aim, agreeing on and implementing a regional capacity building strategy with a clear role for each partner appears crucial in order to coordinate endeavours and harness them in full.

Making wiser use of the Upstream process at the earliest possible stage of a nomination is another suggestion that emerged from the debate: upstream advice, if followed, provides for an early assessment of the potential of a site and of the robustness of the chosen nomination strategy, and may suggest possible alternative options or assist in deciding whether a nomination is to be pursued or not.

Reinforcing interinstitutional dialogue and cooperation among national institutions, and between these institutions and regional/provincial and local entities, in heritage identification, protection and management, well before nominations are proposed and well beyond World Heritage, would significantly contribute towards the building of a collaborative environment among different organisations, dialogue capacities, and a mutual understanding of reciprocal functions that can only facilitate a coordinated response to challenges and eventually establish a sound management process for heritage.

Convened experts considered it an utmost priority for States Parties in the region to update their inventories, their rationale and their scope, taking into account the definition of heritage

in the World Heritage Convention and the three frameworks used in the Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List and in the ICOMOS Gap Report. However, it has been observed that such work on inventories may be of limited usefulness if carried out only through the lens of national values: the need for strengthened capabilities in surveys and inventories and in positioning the heritage located in the country within regional and global perspectives has been again underlined.

Extending the reach of awareness-raising actions to citizens and society at large, on the one side, and to high-level decision makers on the other, represents an important sphere of action: an augmented and widespread awareness of the significance of the heritage of the region and of its relevance well beyond national or regional boundaries may trigger wider social processes that eventually can lead to reforms in the sector that may otherwise struggle to take off.

All the experts agreed that the outcomes of this ARC-WH initiative represent a good basis for further activities that can respond to the most urgent needs of the region. It is evident that several important actions can only be undertaken by States Parties: in this regard, the Action Plan for the Region to be prepared at the conclusion of the Third Periodic Reporting exercise represents an important programming instrument for the region and for States Parties alike, and includes objectives and activities synergic with those suggested by this study.

On the other hand, it has been underlined that many other initiatives can be stimulated and activated by ARC-WH with the cooperation, where needed or helpful, of the Advisory Bodies. For instance, the preparation of thematic studies with a specific focus on the Arab States region, the development of workshops and capacity building initiatives for the preparation or revision of Tentative Lists or awareness-raising initiatives, comparative studies on legal, institutional and management frameworks in use in the region, and the compilation of good practices related to heritage stewardship and the implementation of the World Heritage Convention from within the region, can be proposed as a contribution of the ARC-WH to assist States Parties in implementing the World Heritage Convention in the most effective manner.

Further steps that would create better pre-conditions include the following actions, to which States Parties would need to take a proactive approach:

- Strengthening the educational system and the curricula related to heritage management, conservation and promotion;
- Strengthening the links between the provisions of heritage legislation with the mandate and tasks of heritage institutions;
- Strengthening the communication and negotiation capacities of heritage institutions in order to improve the effectiveness of their advocacy action and to be able to use arguments supporting heritage protection that can resonate with decision-makers' priorities;
- Strengthening the capacity of heritage institutions to enter into dialogue and collaboration with local communities and civil society organisations;
- Establishing clear principles and rules of procedure for the consultation of heritage institutions by other public actors in charge of planning and development as well as consultation processes for civil society organisations;
- Elaborating a regional study on the impacts of heritage protection, conservation and rehabilitation on the socio-economic fabric of the region.

5.

Acknowledgements and the List of Annexes

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5.1. Acknowledgements

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5.2. List of Annexes

- **Annex 1** – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists in the Arab States Region
- **Annex 2** – Agenda: Experts online meeting- Potential offered by the Arab States region for a more balanced World Heritage List (6, 7, 9 and 13 July 2020)



31. Kairouan, Tunisia.
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