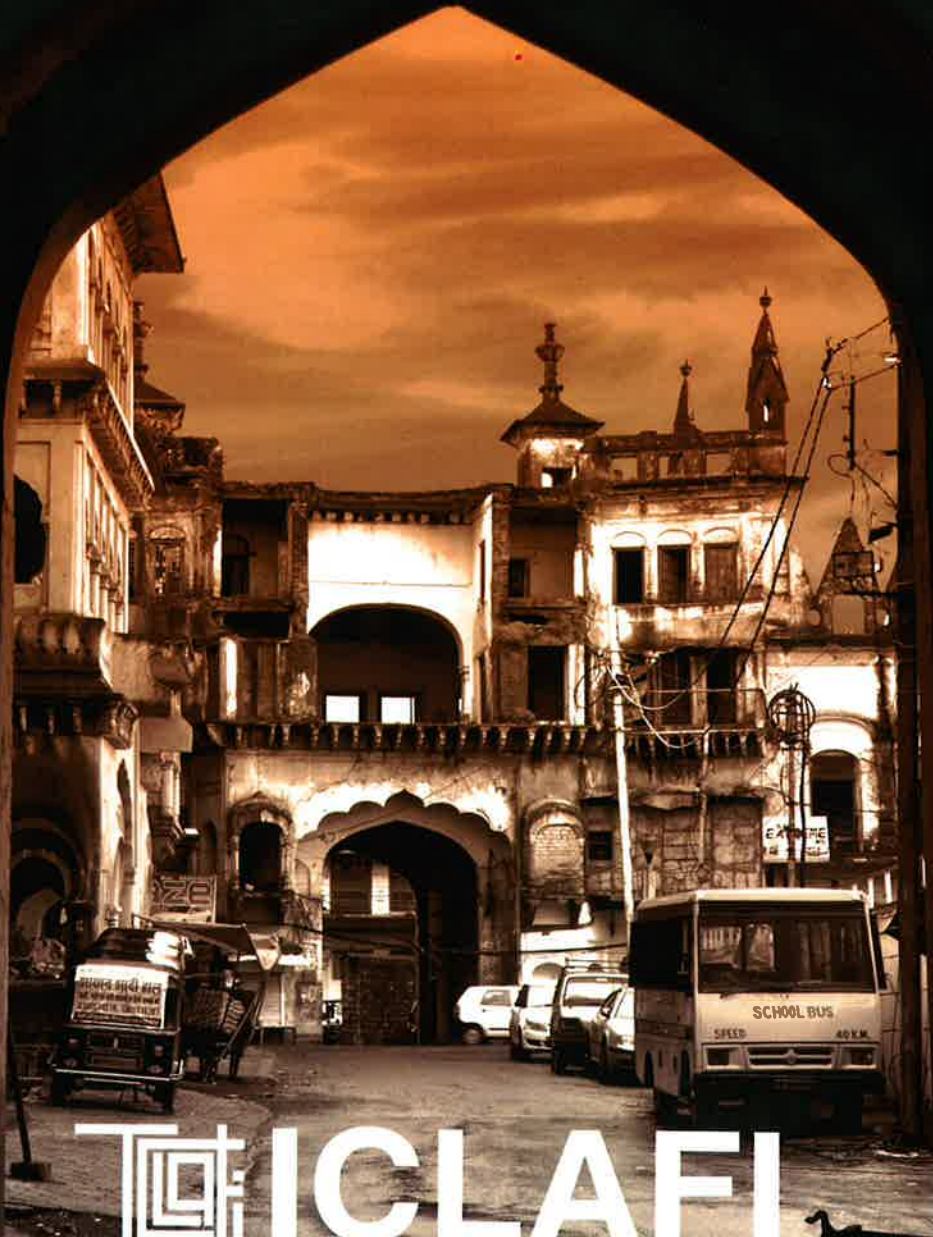


# SHARED GLOBAL EXPERIENCES FOR PROTECTION OF BUILT HERITAGE



 **ICLAFI**  
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## Conservation of cultural heritage in Turkey

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### Abstract

The paper gives a brief description of the concepts, organizations and the institutions related to the preservation of heritage in Turkey along with their functions and responsibilities. It then discusses the general issue of management and maintenance of cultural heritage in Turkey. The problem of financing the conservation efforts is tackled towards the end of the paper. The paper concludes with a remark that the need of the hour is a campaign of "awareness raising" and "consciousness creating" among citizens, so that everyone believes in the value of inherited heritage and behaves actively for that goal.

### Keywords

Heritage, Cultural Property, Rehabilitation, Gentrification

## 1.0 Heritage Definitions

1.1 **Cultural Property** should have the following characteristics (requirement by the National Law):

1.1.1 Originality, cultural and scientific value.

1.1.2 It should be of "historic" or "prehistoric" times.

1.1.3 Representing the social and cultural life, arts, folklore, etc., of a specific period.

1.1.4 It could be on ground, underground or underwater.

1.1.5 Tangible, immovable (generally) or movable physical assets.

## 1.2 Architectural Heritage: Buildings

1.2.1 **Monuments:** temples, churches, mosques, palaces, amphitheatres and related public buildings.

1.2.3 **Traditional Houses:** Residential units and houses of old times that have architectural and cultural attributes.

Architectural heritage is grouped under two headings:

The First Grade which includes the monuments and similar public buildings, where the holistic character, the originality and the identity has to be kept as it is. No major interventions or alterations are permitted. A new function can be assigned to the building; however the originality of the cultural asset should not be disturbed. The second grade comprises of simple buildings and residential units which can be refunctionalized and where inner decorations and alterations are possible. But the outer appearance and facades of the buildings has to be kept as same.

## 1.3 Sites

Sites are conservation areas and are categorized under four categories:

1.3.1 **Archaeological Sites:** These sites are the remains of several civilizations both from prehistoric and historic (antique) times; presumably ending by the Ottoman Empire that is the end of 13th century.

1.3.2 **Historic Sites:** There are certain places and locations where a historic incident has happened and that remains as a memoir in the minds and culture of the citizens or groups of people. There usually stands a physical element or an architectural object that reminds the historic event.

1.3.3 **Urban Sites:** These are the parts of cities or settlements having an original/historic nature, resembling the traditional fabric of a "life" and/or culture. These clusters of dwellings and buildings of a certain historic time have significant cultural value inherited.

**1.3.4 Urban-Archaeological Site.** Such places are locations of both first and the third categories, overlapping and sort of mixed with each other.

**1.4 Archaeological Site categories:** The Ministry of Culture is entitled to decide on the type and fate of such areas:

**1st Grade Archaeological Site:** Ruins and remains of cultural heritage are clearly observed and kept. Only scientific excavation and restoration by museums or archaeological excavation teams are permitted.

**2nd Grade Archaeological Site:** Same nature as the first degree; however there are people living in the site and it are a de facto living urban area or part of a human settlement.

**3rd Grade Archaeological Site:** These are probable archaeological sites, and there is strong evidence that remains could be discovered if an excavation is conducted. Urban developments in such areas are not permitted unless a proper examination or a sample excavation is done by the museum's archaeologists.

**Buffer Zones (protection zones):** A protection belt is provided around the "listed" entity (monument, traditional house, or similar architectural object). Buffer zones cannot be created around archaeological sites because of the provision of the Law, but there is such a need and an amendment has to be done in the law to enable such labeling.

## **2.0 Organizations & Institutions**

### **2.1 The Ministry of Culture and its local branches:**

The main body of public organization in Turkey which is responsible for the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage is the **Ministry of Culture and Tourism**. Out of several departments of the Ministry, "**General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums**" is the authorized section that is specialized in these affairs and it is located in the capital city.

Besides the General Directorate in the capital, there are regional offices in charge of conservation issues of that district. Every regional office also has a decision making body called "**Regional board for the conservation of cultural heritage**" that is composed of architects, urban planners, archaeologists, art historians and lawyers.

### **2.2 Local Governments (Municipalities):**

#### **2.2.1 Greater City Municipalities**

#### **2.2.2 District Municipalities**

Municipalities are the local public authorities which is authorized and responsible for the implementation and realization of conservation decisions of the Regional Board. For this purpose KUDEB Units (bureau for preservation implementation and control) are established at almost every specific municipality specialized in conservation subject.

### 3.0 Management and Maintenance issues

- 3.1 **OWNER:** A cultural property, if it is listed and registered officially, is under the responsibility of its owner and possessor, and that person is obliged to keep the property in good and original position. If not, a legal action is initiated against him/her by the public prosecutor.
- 3.2 **MUNICIPALITIES:** The local administration also has a responsibility in providing all the necessary measures for the well-being of the inherited cultural heritage. Among these are the environmental amenities required for the proper preservation of the asset. It is the duty of the municipalities to prepare urban conservation and gentrification plans, and then implement them for the future livability of the area.
- 3.3 **MINISTRY OF CULTURE & TOURISM:** The Ministry is the national organization for overall administration and realization of all types of cultural heritage. By law, the state is the sole owner of any archaeological remain and element within the boundaries of the country regardless of being underground, over ground or in water. Any intervention, whatever the nature and type, has to be with a project or plan and be ratified by the organs of the Ministry. The Ministry also is advised to give financial aid or loan to those individuals who intend to restore their buildings, or houses.
- 3.4 **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREAS:** As stated above; excavation, conservation and restoration of archaeological sites are controlled and regulated by the Ministry. The artifacts found can either be removed to a museum or kept in-situ depending on the conditions of the site, according to the decision of the Regional Board for Cultural Heritage.
- 3.5 **MONUMENTS:** Monuments are those buildings which have been build mainly for public use and are of outstanding architectural greatness and value of their era, examples such as temples, amphitheaters, public baths, palaces, churches, mosques, etc. Such cultural heritage properties are grouped as 1st Grade buildings, meaning that they require utmost attention and no intervention or alteration is possible during the restoration process. Drawings of the existing situation, restitution and restoration plans have to be examined and ratified by the Regional Boards for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. New functions are seldom assigned to such monuments, but that should never disturb the monumental character of the property.

For such monumental buildings detailed projects and sometimes technical reports are required since most of them have been surviving since centuries and even millenniums. Careful handling is compulsory because of the close scrutiny of UNESCO's experts and principles.

- 3.6 **TRADITIONAL HOUSES:** Traditional houses or such dwellings are better advised to be kept in clusters, thus at the same time showing the old historic urban fabric that reflects the life and culture of old civilizations. These houses exhibiting vernacular architecture of old times are given new functions and uses when necessary, since the viability of them depends upon proper management and good maintenance. They are usually grouped as 2nd Grade buildings, where inner decorations and changes in the layout are tolerated, as long as the outer appearance and stability of the structure is favorable.

In case if only minor repairs are targeted, the written permit of the local museum and the municipality is sufficient, no extra efforts like projects or plans are asked. Otherwise drawings of the present situation, restitution and restoration plans are compulsory which brings great burden to the owner or possessor. Generally the financial condition or the limited budget of the owner does not enable him to make such expenses and this leads to undesirable and also illegal physical modification of the cultural property.

- 3.7 DISAPPEARANCE OF LISTED PROPERTIES:** It might look strange but this has been a big issue in the conservation process of the cultural heritage in Turkey when, the department and the regional board for conservation of cultural heritage is notified that certain monument or traditional house has disappeared from existence. The owner or the possessor demands the removal of that specific cultural property from the registration list; consequently this removal will enable the holder of the property to develop freely without any bounding criteria.

The reasons usually given for the unintended disappearance are; *being demolished by natural causes like excess rain, storm, earthquake, or being burnt or knocked down by vagrant, illegal stray people*. Thus the owner and the possessor would not be held responsible for the uncared attitude towards the listed property. That is the designed scenario. Generally the case is taken to the court by the public prosecutor, but this measure hasn't been a discouraging factor for people who intend to destroy that property.

What could be done is to reduce the burden of maintenance of such old cultural properties to their owners, and introduce incentives to take advantage of them. One effective result was the rehabilitation plans and gentrification efforts of those neighborhoods by the municipalities, thus increasing the vividness and the value property. Such investments and implementations could be done by the local administration. Banning and prohibiting has not been effective policies in conservation process.

#### **4.0 Financial Resources**

Conservation of cultural property is a difficult and costly process. The expenses of maintenance and repair has either to be generated by the property itself (rent, revenue, similar income, etc.), or an outside resource should back-up and supply the amount needed. The first option unfortunately is seldom exercised and most of the time outsourcing is unescapable.

Outsourcing of conservation of cultural heritage has of course a conceptual and legitimate base, which is that we, the inheritors of old civilizations, are responsible and even obliged to keep them in good condition and also transfer to the future generations. What I mean by "we" is the public by all means, central and local governments, NGOs, citizens, and all others.

For this purpose the government has enacted a law which allocates a certain percentage of the annual real estate tax to be spent for the preservation of cultural heritage, by the local administration. This has been a good start of financial aid to the conservation process but more resource has to be found.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is trying to give some help to the citizens for their preservation efforts but that is very limited in amount. Some quasi-public organizations like

the "Mass Housing Authority" are involved in urban renewal and gentrification projects but the implementation has aroused concerns and serious debates regarding the main goal of keeping the originality and paying respect to cultural heritage principles in essence.

In the country many of the archaeological sites are on privately owned estates, and this is a big problem since a huge amount of money is necessary to expropriate those lands. Another measure to acquire those lands is the "barter" instrument, where an equivalent piece of land is given to the owner in exchange for the archaeological parcel in question. The difficulty in this mechanism is of course the limited availability of similar value lands in the possession of the public authorities.

## 5.0 Conclusions

Turkey is a country where numerous cultures and civilizations have trodden on, left remains and traces of invaluable historic and architectural elements. In fact it is one of the rare countries which exhibit and mirror such a great variety of different cultures over a long historic time span. This brings an unattained richness of heritage inherited, but at the same time a burden and equal responsibility in the task of preserving them in proper manner.

When you look at the past of preservation and conservation processes in Turkey, you see that there has been a gradual but continuous development throughout a time of approximately fifteen decades. There is no need in criticizing or grading the overall performance of the country, but I want to point out some of the important problems or the failures in this context.

The administrators both at the national and local levels did not pay enough attention or gave importance for cultural heritage conservation. This has led and is still causing inadequate resource allocation for this field, in a comparative sense.

The people and the citizens of this land did not have the necessary respect and willingness of care, or consciousness for the inherited cultural properties, which led to a savage destruction and sometimes plundering of the valuable artifacts and treasures. The leaders and politicians of the country didn't introduce measures and mechanisms to prevent this destruction. Laws and regulations are quite adequate, and the technical expertise level of the country is well developed. The urgent need is a campaign of "awareness raising", "consciousness creating" among citizens, so that everyone believes in the value of the inherited heritage and behaves actively for this goal.

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