

**RESEARCH PAPER****Engaging Communities in Built Heritage Conservation: Insights and Challenges****<sup>1</sup>Dr. Sana Younus, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Saima Gulzar and <sup>3</sup>Faiqa Khan**

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**\*Corresponding Author:** sana.younas105@keyanomail.ca**ABSTRACT**

This research is focused on the critical role of the community in the conservation of built heritage and the lessons learned for successful execution of these projects. The active participation of community can enhance the conservation processes with their indigenous knowledge and expertise. Heritage is not only representing our past but also a reflection of the whole era that contributes to the identity of the place and people. The loss of heritage is alarming and in addition to lack of funds that further slows down the processes. In this scenario the community involvement can play vital role for sustainable conservation projects. The study adopted the qualitative, descriptive research design to understand the role of community for built heritage and further complemented by literature mapping and content analysis. The results emphasized the need for the community led heritage conservation. As these further covers more aspects like interpretation, participation and continuation of the heritage with cultural narratives. The study concluded with recommendations for paradigm shift in conservation of built heritage towards inclusive and participatory approaches to protect the living heritage cultural expressions.

**KEYWORDS** Community Participation, Built Heritage, Resilience, Sustainability**Introduction**

The community engagement in built heritage conservation is the only successful model for ensuring the sustainable conservation processes for safeguarding the heritage. The community involvement fosters a sense of ownership in the community in addition to the participation in decision making that creates local people dedicated efforts towards interpretation of the heritage sites. The community and residents' contribution through their knowledge, memories and skills further enhance the whole conservation process making it more aligned with cultural values that are not present in the documented references. This participation further strengthens the social cohesion and support cultural identity propagating the heritage as a living resource.

Cultural inheritance gives an identity to the group of people and it offers a connection that cannot be detached. Because the heritage communities can identify themselves and develops a feeling of belonging, and shared pride. The World Bank views engagement and community participation as a process of growth and a wide range of phenomena that are mainly dependent on the participants. It is a complex issue where people of diverse backgrounds are involved and the atmosphere of work is unusual. Some people do not compromise on ethics and a group of people take this as a matter of their expertise; and for yet others, it is an end in and of itself. Regardless of whatever one the researcher chooses; they are all valuable. Forceful, induced, and genuine participation

are the three types of community involvement in heritage management, according to a review of the relevant literature (Marzuki et al., 2012). Spontaneous participation is one of the three and is described as the capacity of the citizen to plan, decide, and steer the project development (Arnstein, 1969).

The pride in owning the heritage is very important. The impact of culture and its importance is different in each social fabric. For some, it may entail establishing specific behavioral patterns prevalent in a given group or the formal norms that serve to direct those patterns. Built heritage fosters a sense of togetherness and connection among individuals who are comprised of a particular group, and indeed, it is imperative to maintain particular cultures, histories, and heritages since, unfortunately, many different languages and cultures are becoming extinct owing to a lack of knowledge and ownership.

Communities play a significant role in conservation. Communities include interest-driven collectives, residents, and business owners (Atalay, 2010; Selman, 2004). The participation of stakeholders is important as new legislation is passed, interests are shared and buildings are conserved. (Chirikure, 2010; Pacifico & Vogel, 2012; Reid, 2003). The employment chances in the process of community-based conservation work are very high. The group activities and interactive sessions inspire the residents to learn new skills and build up their confidence. The grooming of the non-expert members of society comes hand in hand and eventually brings happiness and purpose.

Since government officials have decision-making power, decision has always been delayed (Su & Wall, 2014). Hence, community involvement is a must for sustainable planning. Furthermore, the decision for the conservation process always collaborates with government and non-government institutions. As a result, citizens have limited participation since their participation is restricted to advice and consultations. Consequently, they have little or no power in policy-making (Marzuki et al., 2012). The conservation process is delayed due to the avoidance of community participation in conservation process meetings since the policy-making powers reside under government officials (Lovan et al., 2017). Subsequently, the main motive to increase community participation in collaboration with government officials remains unfulfilled. There is no extensive knowledge of how management can engage citizens to suggest proposals for the conservation process (Ashley et al., 2015).

There is a huge research gap between the progress of community participation with the progress of no community participation. Accordingly, extensive research is important to examine the dynamics of participation and how participation can be encouraged for conservation to achieve sustainability increasing awareness among locals is vital to design participatory strategies for the least background information.

However, the participation of the residents is taken as a waste of time that causes conflict and may also come up with the least wanted results. Furthermore, there is not enough literature available to confirm the productivity of the community-based approach. It is inevitable to enhance our understanding of the collaborative or participatory approaches and their right implementation.

## **Literature Review**

According to Aas (2005), Local communities are groupings of individuals with the exact origins, interests, or collective identities also the communities of a place or the

communities based on the interests (Selman, 2004). As Singh (2014) explains a community is full of diversity and is an active social group with all the members sharing some common background, geographic closeness, historical ties, or personal affinity to heritage locations may be harmonies (Chirikure, 2010). As with tradition, communities are experiencing constant change. They are changing due to the experience they gain with the passage of time and alteration in their overall environment (Waterton & Smith, 2010).

An inclusive community has a social fabric that shares common interests. Such as neighborhoods, civic duties, or cultural identities (Chitty, 2011). The word refers to locals, cultural organizations, company owners, community experts, heritage freelancers, lovers, and heritage conservation. Multiple stakeholder engagement in prognostication is a critical theory of workable development in conservation work. Stakeholder engagement is a way to negotiate heritage conservation, future promotion, and use of historical treasures (Landorf, 2009).

The literature agrees that an integrated community stakeholder strategy should go beyond representation. Local communities, such as residents, proprietors of businesses, and cultural organizations.

Hawkes (2001) asserts that a sustainable form of planning in heritage conservation calls for evaluating and accepting community interests, attitudes, dynamics, and any present or potential conflicts (Hawkes, 2001). Sustainable development necessitates many decision-making voices, with destination communities actively participating in the creation of heritage protection projects (Li & Hunter, 2015). According to Jordan (2013), community engagement is a strategy for giving people more authority over decisions. These host communities involve the natives, business owners, and organizations that promote cultural activities. The evaluation and acceptance of joint interests, attitudes, subtleties, and any major differences must also be taken into account.

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**Table 1**  
**Community Conservation Planning Incentives (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Hall, 1999; 2007)**

Motives Based on Ideology	Motives Based on Real Life
Promote democracy	Adjustment of the needs of those who were harmed
Safeguard equitability	Conflict resolution on common grounds
Build social & political capital	Achieve excellence hospitality environment Inspire pledge

Current heritage conservation and community participation research advocates for community engagement in community planning ideologically and pragmatically (see the above table). Engaging communities in destination planning promotes democratic management for those most impacted by heritage conservation (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). The role of community also lies in the idea generation, picking up the best options and taking up the charge. Community members should be given full permission to play

their role in all kinds of activities that can bring a good change into their lives. This is seen as a critical democratic concept and a fundamental human right. When it comes to an area like identification based on culture, it is always for the sake of a group of people representing themselves and participating in their heritage conservation and representation.

According to Wates (2000), a community is characterized by common interests. Communities are stronger when members dwell in the same region. (Corcoran, 2012) claimed that contemporary societies may be readily linked. The Internet has produced a new generation of "online communities" where individuals with similar interests may connect online (Qanzua, 2013). They have community participation goals that lead to heritage conservation and encourage the mass population, and local to conserve and preserve their history and participate in it. Encouraging citizen participation in decision-making will boost local organizations' trust, strengthen party connections, and reduce NGOs' conflict. Involving locals in design to enhance plans and services. Shared goals strengthen communal identity. In Port Said Egypt, there is a Greek club to educate the people about their history where the sponsored exhibition events are held (Fouad, 2018). Local Communities participate in the conference in order to preserve their heritage and appreciate their culture.



Figure 1 Greek Club in Port Said Egypt (S. Fouad 2018)

## Material and Methods

The qualitative, descriptive research design was used to explore the community engagement in built heritage conservation. Semi-structured interviews were also employed for the major stakeholders (community members, heritage professionals and local government) to investigate their in-depth knowledge, insights, experiences and challenges. The document survey and analysis were performed to draw comparison of policies, reports and available community engagement frameworks. The devised methodology assisted in drawing perspectives of community engagement from different stakeholders and further explored the challenges for the community engagement in heritage conservation.

## Results and Discussions

It can be admitted that the community-led design approach is complex and its installation into the real-world setting can be a heavy task to perform, provided that interactions are going to be with a diverse group of people and communities, the interests can be opposing, and the previous old school management with poor results can be very

hard to change. If we wish to fill the voids between the literature and real-life work, this research defines the role of community with the help of a deep study of the power of community participation in the heritage zones and it states that the technique where the community is involved and the joint effort technique is used then all the financial crisis, communal differences, and poor conservation work, all these problems can be solved. Hence, an agenda for assessment is vital for further study, provided that the beginning of contribution can be shown to be a useful approach in a system where the earlier forms of administration had strong roots. As there is still less capability to handle the process and consequences of such change from top-down management in a pluralist self-governing tactic, it is significant to present the results of this study, which address the chief problems. These guidelines are composed of "context awareness", "motivation" and "cooperation"

**Table 2**  
**Important Points for Participatory Approach as Based on the Research Findings**

Context	Motivation	Cooperation
Heritage interpretation	Community ideals	Collaborative decisions
Diversity	Attachment	Social rationality
Relevance	Sense of belonging	Constructive conflict
Inclusion	Collective benefits	Trust
Policy tradition	Heritage values	
Credibility	Identity	
Accountability	Public Access	
Responsiveness	Spatial proximity	

Primarily all the stakeholder has a different background that shapes their ideas and personality. The community environment shapes the derivatives and actions of all the stakeholders. The community-led study can explain the procedure of social construction and action plans by the illustration of heritage amplifications and traditions that form local practices at both the highest and lowest levels. This study shows the collection of heritage discourse is critical to evaluate and improve its importance and to safeguard the contribution of participants' viewpoints to discuss policy-making influentially as a joint procedure that moves the community as a whole. In parallel practice, the previous policies can be studied to identify the problematic areas from the start to form a solid base for collaboration. Secondly, active involvement is also a voluntary idea and shows the social exchange tendencies among people with their common benefits. Effective motivation is required here to engage the people for a common cause. Based on our results, we maintain that the intangible merits of collaboration must be considered to understand the motivation. An important application for participatory policy is based on social activities, giving the residents a sense of community. Moreover, the identity values of the heritage sites need attention because they can increase their sense of community attachment. Thirdly, appropriate and established social cooperation activities should be applied on-site to see the results. The imbalance of the wealth distribution is because of the social fabric of developing countries like Pakistan and it shapes the community's behavior when they make a joint decision in the form of budget-making and its preferred allocation. It is stated that higher civilian power promises higher assistance in the decision-making for the conservation process. The study also showed that democratic debate encourages positive conflict from a disagreement while formulating the policies which eventually results in greater cooperation. As the concept of participation in conservation would not be an easy task to go through a broad set of practices, this structure's approach coming from the case study might need to be made customized according to the heritage site and its communal bodies. Nonetheless, this set of guidelines give a supporting outline of the main factors

that need to be taken into account when adopting a community-led approach, illustrated graphically below;



Figure 2 Resilience & Sustainability of a Heritage Building with the help of a Community

Despite the fact discussed exclusively in the literature, the issues of participation are not pleasant for policy-making due to its complex nature and less practical examples where the highest management could work with local communities. However, it is time to step ahead and this study, offers framework/guidelines for boarding on community-led arrangement. These proposed guiding principles are given below;

- There is a need for a network formation through government approved media channels (social, visual and print media)
- There is a need to align the combined objective (promotion of the built heritage conservation) under the light of existing legislation & policies.
- There has to be a constant monitoring of the outcomes and improvements. Under a third party like an audit and inspection team for the quality assurance.
- In order to achieve collective objective community and the officials must have equal share in each service and initiative.
- Community awareness and motivation programs should be incorporated as free diploma courses in the academic institutes as a part of formal curriculum.
- Community engagement should be divided into different levels from awareness till management of the heritage conservation.

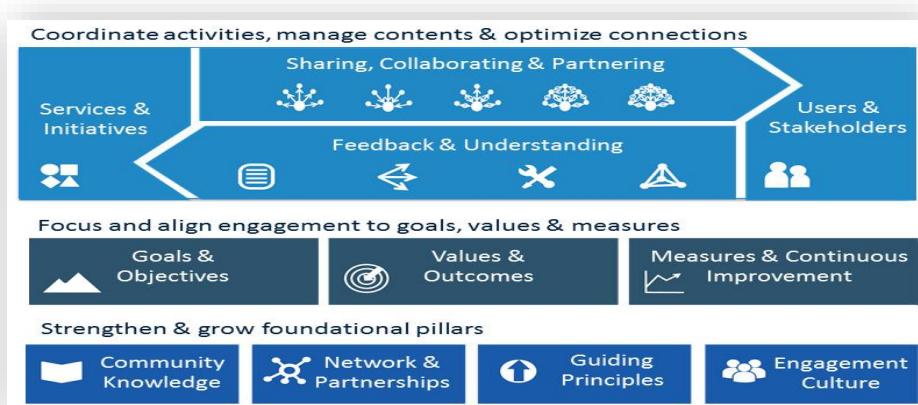


Figure 3 Guidelines for the Engagement of the Community

### Basic Level of Participation

- Motivation, education and incentives for the community in the form of employment generation either generation of jobs or encouragement of small business startups.
- Network and partnership between the officials and the locals should be formalized.
- Pre-define set of rules and guiding principles to keep the stakeholders (officials and locals) in the designated roles so that everyone is aware of their power and capacity to release orders.
- Engagement culture should be defined that tells the behaviors and expectations that we can improve to build a comfortable working environment.

### Intermediate Level of Participation

- Clear understanding of the goals and objectives behind the collaboration and that goals should be the improvement of the conservation process
- Definition of the roles according to the seniority level for both the locals and the government bodies
- Authorities of local representative and their area of work should be highlighted to avoid conflicts.

### Advance Level of Participation

- The demolition of structures or major policy alteration or in case change in the conservation legislation, there should be an allowance for the local representatives to voice their opinion.
- Organization and management duties must be assigned to the locals' representative and they should be formally engaged and paid for their work assignments.
- Funds should be allocated for the community's grooming and must be transferred to the representative right away.

**Table 3**  
**Levels of Community Participation**

Community Participation	Levels
Leadership	Advance Level
Partnership	Advance Level
Conservation	Intermediate Level
Consultation	Intermediate Level
Mobilization	Basic Level
Awareness	Basic Level

### Constraints and Future Research Avenues

The research insists that a study that encourages planning based on participation in heritage sites has an extravagant value for the sustainability of the conservation process due to the current gaps in the related literature and also there is a shortage of ideas for the community's role while making important verdicts. First of all, we cannot avoid the fact that each heritage site has its challenges and features in all aspects. These features can be social as well as cultural. Based on these aspects the condition of the zone can be different resulting in the varied participatory design of the conservation project.

Secondly, the important factors that influence the collaboration have to be marked before approaching the design of final participation policies. Since our focus is

on built heritage conservation, we limit our exploration to heritage, conservation, and social values. Nevertheless, the extra inquiry into emotional, political, and economic aspects can be of great importance.

Thirdly, for the future study the topic is derived from this study, that is the exploration of assorted possibilities of participatory administration. It addresses the factors behind the motivation and mobilization of both community and government bodies to come up with the ideals that lay the foundation of the decision-making mechanism among the stakeholders.

Future studies could use the same pattern to improve actions at several phases of participatory arrangements, such as setting an objective, implementation, and monitoring. Likewise, the economic aspect discussed, can help in finding the accurate features of behavior, such as disparities within community members and its efficacy to change partialities, imbalanced authority, and societal compression.

## Conclusion

This research explored the effective role of community engagement in built heritage conservation projects while providing insights and challenges as well. The data collection with all the identified stakeholders and recording their experiences along with the literature studies further complemented the community engagement levels. The three-level approach for the community participation further depicted the importance of the community in the decision making for carrying out the sustainable conservation projects. The successful strategies highlighted through this research are effective communication, awareness and the financial incentives. The study also explored the built heritage conservation through involvement of community make it a living resource that strengthens the community's social cohesion and enhances the cultural expressions through their ownership. This research concluded with the actionable recommendations with initial guidelines.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

- The built heritage conservation projects should adopt Institutionalized of 3 level participation approach for sustainable conservation projects.
- The strengthening of communication and awareness programs for inclusive conservation projects.
- The development of financial benefits and mechanism for successful implementation of the projects.
- The integration of community knowledge into the conservation process to achieve the outlined objectives with traditional knowledge and skills.
- Conservation initiatives should prioritize adaptive reuse and community-led activities that allow built heritage to function as active social and cultural spaces, strengthening social cohesion and supporting cultural expression while maintaining heritage values.

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