

Strategies for reconstructing and restructuring of Museums in post-war (*Aleppo Museum as a Model*)

Abstract:

The cultural heritage in Syria is one of the victims of the Syrian war. The destruction of the ancient monuments, museums and the illegal excavations have reached during the Syrian conflict very high level. Numerous Syrian museums were affected by the armed conflict in Syria. The damages of the museums are relatively different from one to another; some museums have suffered from theft, damage, destruction, bombardments, and the impact of explosives and firearms fragments. The Directorate General of Antiquities & Museums has urged to respect the museums and cultural heritage sites and encouraged keeping them away from the armed conflict. On the other side, the Antiquities department - which has been established by the opposition in Syria – has done some steps to protect the museums in territory under their control such as (Ma'arrat al Nu'man museum) and many similar attempts to protect the Syrian heritage. Those efforts were not effective enough to protect them from harsh damages.

Aleppo Museum was built in 1931. At that time, the museum took its place at Ottoman Palace; in 1968, a modern building replaced the Ottoman Palace, which still the current museum until now. Nowadays, Aleppo Museum is divided into five sections: Prehistoric section, Ancient Syrian Antiquities section, classical section, Islamic Antiquities section and section of modern art.

Efforts taken during the conflict

The Museum has been exposed to different types of risk and threat: like theft (plundering), armed attack, bombardments and the impact of explosives and firearms fragments, (car bombs - mortar shells - small and big projectiles). During the conflict, many protection efforts have been taken at the national museum of Aleppo to protect the artifacts. Starting with archiving and digitize museum records. In addition, the removable antiquities have been transferred from the showcases and the important and rare pieces have been moved to a safe place outside the museum as well. In order to protect the important statues, concrete walls were built. The over-size artifacts in the galleries were covered from all sides by sandbags and wooden boxes filled with sand. The same method has been applied for the indoor and outdoor garden of the museum.

Questions of research

The main chapter of my research is to build strategies in scientific way for reconstructing and restructuring of Aleppo Museum in Post-War period.

My strategies will focus on building up two different strategies for the national museum of Aleppo. The situation of Syria after the war is yet unknown; therefore, it's uncertain which direction will be followed in rebuilding damaged museums in Syria. Whether there will be enough financial resources to build new museum or only to use the current buildings and reconstruct them. I aim here to build two strategies so they are ready in case of any decision in post-war period.

The restructuring scenario:

There are many problems and errors at Aleppo museum before the war, at all levels, starting from the museum's plan to the distribution of galleries, display methods, Presentation styles, showcases, museum Posters and Labeling Artifacts. Therefore, it will be very important before we start restructuring to take advantage of previous experiences in similar situations in different museums, such as the Berlin museums, Beirut museum and Baghdad museum. In addition, it will be worth to discuss the possibility of implementing experiences in the restructuring of Aleppo museum from other archaeological and historical museums in Switzerland and other countries.

The question is whether should we keep the same former distribution of the sections, Galleries, halls and rooms in restructuring project?

This research will be based on the new redistribution of the galleries depending on (the chronology system) with preserving the archaeological sites as much as possible after correcting errors and previous problems.

In addition, proposals will make to open new galleries in the Museum, such as History of the city of Aleppo, Assyrian civilization, Women through history, History of the art of mosaic, Aleppo museum during the war.

The focus will also be on reorganization to storage rooms of the Museum, where 80% of museum artifacts are stored there. Display method will be explained in the new museum with examples. (Showcases, Posters, Labeling Artifacts), and modern technologies in the presentation of the museum of Aleppo depending on my experience that I am collecting during my PhD project through the visit of several international museums.

The reconstructing scenario:

Depending on all of above the damage and destruction in the structure of the museum, previous mistakes, problems of the storages and groundwater, and the inability to contain all the artifacts preserved in it. It is important to build a modern Museum instead of an old Museum.

Several points have to be taken into account before rebuilding a new museum in Aleppo e.g. the location of the building, the historic value of the building incase using other building, the size, the storages and the most important what will the museum contain and what will be presented there. Will it be a Museum of art, museum of Natural historic, folk museum, or all of them together in one building?

Aleppo has a long history extend from the Third Millennium B.C to the Islamic era.

In the countryside of Aleppo, more than 20 exploration missions were carried out in the sites from prehistoric times to the Islamic period. More than 150 thousand artifacts are preserved in Aleppo Museum from various Syrian sites. Therefore, it is important to build a modern central museum in the city of Aleppo.

In order to be an important center for cultural and social development that preserves the history, identity and cultural diversity of the Syrian people. Through the increase of its Spaces and the re-distribution of archaeological collections by presenting them in scientific ways suitable more attractive to visitors and the local community.

With facilities for researchers and educational activities and workshops. Addition visitors service insurance such as garage, cafeteria, etc. which did not exist in the old building.

The last chapter of the research is the relationship between the Museum and the visitors, local community and school. In addition, to discuss what methods should be followed to attract public to museum? Whether it is by telling them exciting stories, which reflects the Syrian identity, common history and cultural diversity that Syria has experienced during the different pre-historic and historic periods. Or it is through held temporary exhibitions, lectures, music parties, films at Museum, Art exhibitions in the Museum.

Moreover, focusing on the social media, by using the online community to drive visitors and the local community to the Museum. **The last point** of my research will be the role of the museum as an educational center and the relationship with the school. After this big gap between the museum and the school and even with the local community which

was the case in Syria before the war. This chapter will describe also the types of activities and workshops in modern museums. Which attracts children to the Museum. Such as the workshops for young museum visitors where they try out various techniques for themselves: making clay models, plaster casts, and learn excavation methods, restoration methods, coloring, etc.

To sum up, we can say that museums are more than places where objects are exhibited and conserved. It is an important factor in the preservation of the cultural identity, for us and for the future generations, as a part of the human cultural heritage. We hope that this war will end not far in future, and it will be the end of the human tragedy and the huge destruction of cultural heritage in Syria. Also, we hope that the reconstruction of Museums and cultural heritage in the aftermath of war could play a major role in rebuilding a healthy post-conflict society.