

CHAPTER 3

Safeguarding, Enhancing and Managing Archaeological Heritage and Museums in Iraq

The Contribution of the EDUU Project

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Abstract

Over four decades of conflicts and instability have severely deteriorated Iraq's social and political systems. These long-term trends have also progressively damaged the rich heritage of the country and repeatedly weakened its cultural infrastructures. Against this backdrop, in recent years, international institutions and funding bodies have promoted initiatives to revive and relaunch the Iraqi cultural heritage which is considered a critical component to support the wider post-conflicts recovery as well as an important player in the country's post-oil reality. Among these, between 2016 and 2020, a European-Iraqi partnership launched the "EDUU - Education and Cultural Heritage Enhancement for Social Cohesion in Iraq" project, funded by the EuropeAid Programme of the European Union. The project focused on improving education and enhancing cultural heritage by connecting Iraqi universities, heritage institutions, secondary schools, museums and local communities. To this end, the EDUU project implemented a wide range of activities using archaeological, ethnoarchaeological, cultural heritage, and community engagement methodologies. This paper provides a critical analysis of the project results and lessons learned together with future outlooks to foster social cohesion through cultural heritage in the country.

Keywords: Iraq archaeology, community archaeology, cultural heritage, collaborative archaeology

Introduction

Over the last decades, Iraq has faced deep cultural and economic changes due mainly to the dramatic conflicts occurring since the 1990s and the harsh consequences of their aftermath (Foster, Foster and Gerstenblith 2005; Isakhan 2013; Matthews et al. 2020). While the 1979–1987 Iran–Iraq war marked a gradual socio-political and economic decline for the country, the situation worsened considerably with the outbreak of the Gulf War in the early 1990s and the international economic sanctions imposed on

Saddam Hussein's regime. This state of uncertainty, internal conflicts and crises worsened further after the second Gulf War in 2003 and the emergence of ISIS (in the northern part of the country) between 2014 and 2017. A substantial drop in the national GDP (World Bank 2019a) and growth of internal displacement and international migration (Lischer 2008; Oxfam 2007; UNHCR 2019) represent some of the most significant effects of the country's instability.

These long-term trends have also had a considerable impact on cultural heritage in Iraq (Foster, Foster and Gerstenblith 2005; Matthews et al. 2020). Indeed, for over 30 years archaeological sites, monuments, artefacts and places of worship were systematically destroyed all over the country, coupled with the intentional eradication of cultural diversity associated with the process of 'cultural cleansing' (Baker, Ismael and Ismael 2010; UNESCO 2017). In the Iraqi context, cultural cleansing has long undermined the ability of local communities to access archaeological and cultural sites, fully enact intangible heritage practices and pass them on to younger generations, enjoy freedom of expression and creativity, and participate in cultural life (Isakhan and Meskell 2019; Isakhan, Zarandona and Al-Deen 2019). Although most of these processes have now ceased, their long-term effects are still visible. In particular, cultural cleansing in Iraq has contributed to (1) creating distrust between the different communities and between the state and citizens; (2) weakening the state and its local authorities; (3) threatening the preservation and protection of Iraqi heritage; and (4) undermining national social cohesion and a sense of cultural belonging in favour of sectarian divisions (Bokova 2015; Isakan, Zarandona and Al-Deen 2019; UNESCO 2017).

Against this backdrop, in the last few years several international institutions and funding bodies have identified cultural heritage as a critical component for supporting the country's wider post-conflict recovery and an important player in Iraq's post-oil landscape (Danti 2015; Marchetti et al. 2018; Mehiyar et al. 2020; Zaina 2019). As a result, various initiatives have been promoted throughout the country to heal and revive its cultural

fabric, including the documentation, preservation and publicising of archaeological sites, monuments, museums and intangible traditions (Matthews et al. 2020). Although this is not the only answer to the many challenges facing Iraqi society, cultural heritage can constitute an important entry point to fostering a national debate around shared histories and the transition towards a more sustainable economy.

In 2016, the project EDUU – Education and Cultural Heritage Enhancement for Social Cohesion in Iraq was launched in this context to build a European–Iraqi partnership focusing on education and cultural heritage enhancement, linking up universities, secondary schools and museums. The 38-month-long project was funded by the European Union (EU) within the framework of the Civil Society Organisations – Local Authorities (CSOs–LAs) Programme in Iraq (2015–2017) and coordinated by the University of Bologna in cooperation with the University of Turin, the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino (CRAST), and the Iraqi Universities of Qadisiyah, Kufa and Baghdad. Additionally, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities of Iraq, and the Youth Committee of the Italian National Commission for UNESCO acted as associate partners. The overall objective of the project was to contribute to strengthening social cohesion in Iraqi civil society by improving the public's general awareness of local and national cultural heritage and by fostering the idea that Iraqi society is a combination of ancient and modern cultural traits and a pluralistic state. To reach this goal, the EDUU team employed archaeological and ethnographic methodologies together with cultural heritage and community engagement practices (Zaina, Proserpio and Scazzosi 2021).

This chapter stems from the discussions about, reflections on and critical analysis of the project conducted by the EDUU consortium members and involved beneficiaries. After the presentation of the aims and method, we will discuss the EDUU project's rationale and the results of project impact evaluations while providing concluding remarks and identifying future per-

spectives deriving from the project's learning and sustainability components. Our contribution is offered according to a learning perspective. In fact, the authors acknowledge the limitations of the project, which was made possible thanks to an international partnership supported by a top-down approach to funding. At the same time, EDUU was a valuable lesson and a preparatory step towards future archaeological projects and cultural activities involving local communities in Iraq. Since Iraq is moving away from the conflicts characterising its recent decades, the development of new projects needs to take into account a larger and more differentiated range of actors and support distinctive ownership by Iraqi local communities and CSOs.

Aims and Method

The wider aim of this chapter is to present possible prospects for future archaeological projects that embrace a 'collaborative approach', understood as the synergy of action between international and national heritage actors and local communities that is crucial in the Iraqi context, by critically reviewing the EDUU project, its objectives and its outcomes.

The specific accountability (what we can prove has been achieved) and learning (what we and others can learn from our experience) objectives are:

1. to assess the project impact with a specific focus on creating new avenues for collaboration between the actors involved (i.e., universities, SBAH officers, local communities and civil society), improving the cultural landscape of the country thanks to EDUU activities, and any spillover effects on the social issues described in the introduction;
2. to draw out the learning component of the project by identifying key lessons learned during the implementation of its activities and the level of need and appropriateness for future work;
3. to draw out the sustainability component by identifying seeds for long-term and sustainable change and how future projects

can take stock of the work done through EDUU and carry it even further by creating fully fledged community archaeology projects.

This analytical framework and the project objectives and results have been monitored and evaluated by the project members (internal evaluations) and private agencies (external evaluators). The evaluations were carried out via online surveys and interviews at the end of the main intermediate steps (work packages) of the project (formative evaluations) and at the end of the project (summative evaluations). In total, 35 respondents provided feedback on the project: 20 Iraqi academics (15 men and 5 women); 4 European academics (3 men, 1 woman); 6 SBAH officers (all men); 3 community leaders (all men), and 2 Iraqi students (1 man, 1 woman).

The Rationale behind the EDUU Project

This section focuses on the project's background and premises, illustrating how it was designed by the funding body (the EU). To develop a strong consortium and properly design a project that responded to the scope of the call for applications, the needs and expectations of all the partners involved were taken into account. The EDUU preparatory phase lasted a year and was carried out through online and in-person meetings reaching a wide range of formal and informal stakeholders. A lengthy preparatory phase is to be considered a best practice that allows the development of a bottom-up project (in contrast to a top-down project built around the objectives of the donors only) and a more significant community-wide impact.

European Union

In 2015, the European Commission launched the EuropeAid CSOs–LAs Programme in Iraq. The specific aim of this call was to generate different types of action to strengthen CSOs and support

LAs in the country (European Commission 2012, 2013). According to the EU vision, community unity could be strengthened by focusing on ‘ideas’ that were divisive in the Iraqi context. Culture, environment and heritage were the fields of action identified as potentially fostering a common identity and contributing to overcoming sectarian, tribal, religious and ethnic dividing lines. In launching this call, the EU looked to receive project proposals for actions under three main pillars:

1. support local initiatives in the field of culture, heritage and environment with a focus on safeguarding and valorising national resources;
2. reconciliation and social cohesion, in the sense of fostering solidarity, understanding, trust, tolerance and dialogue between and among different segments of the population;
3. empowerment of community-based organisations and grass-roots movements to sustainably engage in reconciliation, in cooperation with local authorities.

Iraqi Project Partners

The Iraqi partners’ aims and expectations in relation to the EDUU project varied between the three universities (Baghdad, Kufa and Qadisiyah) and public institutions (SBAH and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism).

The local universities’ main interest was in improving scientific research and teaching methods in the field of archaeology and cultural heritage. A particular interest of the Iraqi counterpart was specifically to enhance students’ level of preparation and resume archaeological fieldwork, as such work has suffered a drastic decline in the previous 20 years (Al-Hussainy and Matthews 2008; BANUU 2020). Furthermore, the restoration of monuments was a major concern especially for the University of Kufa staff, due to the need to integrate historical buildings into the region’s wider tourism sector. To a lesser extent, partners also expressed expectations that the project would help to improve ways of communicat-

ing cultural heritage to local communities through the creation of dedicated spaces such as museums.

The representatives of the SBAH and the ministry instead displayed greater interest in safeguarding and communicating the country's heritage. One of their more pressing concerns was insufficient financial support and lack of training for their officers, aspects that had prevented them from efficiently safeguarding and promoting the heritage of Iraq. From their point of view, therefore, the EDUU project's aim was to contribute to improving the country's cultural heritage documentation and management system, partly in light of endemic looting and the continuous destruction of archaeological sites due to irrigation and canal excavation. Specific training for SBAH representatives together with updated equipment to improve their activities were among their primary aims. Less concern was expressed regarding the communication of heritage to local communities and their involvement in its protection. In this case, the lack of pilot projects was also connected to a lack of knowledge about appropriate methodologies and approaches.

EU Project Partners

The European partners included the University of Bologna, the CRAFT and the Italian delegation of the UNESCO Youth Committee. As the new season of archaeological research in Iraq made it possible to address previously unsolved scientific questions, key expectations included a new understanding of the ancient history of central-southern Mesopotamia using updated methodologies and technologies and a fine-tuned assessment of damages to archaeological sites and monuments in the targeted regions. However, the experiences of project members in other countries of the Middle East have shown that without the involvement of local authorities and communities, such activities would generate only short-term outcomes. Furthermore, previous, less-inclusive approaches have provided benefits mainly for foreign institutions rather than local authorities and communities. In line with the

new commitments of many international archaeologists (Isakan and Meskell 2019; Matthews et al. 2020; Melčák and Beránek 2017; Nováček et al. 2017), the European partner recognised the necessity of dedicating more effort to collaborating with local authorities and communities, and to understanding their needs and objectives. This translated into planning different sets of activities focused on training local personnel (SBAH, students and professors) and involving them in the joint creation of spaces (i.e., museums) promoting the cultural heritage of Iraq.

The EDUU Pre-Project Situation

Following the EU call for applications and consultation about the needs and expectations of both Iraqi and European partners, the EDUU project focused on several emergent issues:

- Low levels of interaction between Iraqi universities and the SBAH. This trend is reflected in the fact that the SBAH has trouble staying up to date, especially about documentation and management strategies. For the university, this issue had led to a lack of archaeological research in the field.
- Limited interaction between Iraqi universities and secondary schools. The fact that universities did not mention the dissemination and communication of cultural heritage in schools highlighted an important area to work on.
- Some interaction between SBAH and local communities thanks to the widespread presence of SBAH members on the ground. However, due to a lack of appropriate communication methodologies, local communities are still partially unaware of the importance of safeguarding archaeological sites and other heritage places.
- A low degree of collaboration between international universities, Iraqi universities and the SBAH. According to Al-Hussainy and Matthews (2008), international collaboration in the field of cultural heritage represented one of the pillars supporting the heyday of Iraqi archaeology between the 1950s and 1980s.

- No active debate between universities (both local and international institutions working in Iraq) and the SBAH on how to involve local communities in their activities. This lack of debate hinders the possibility of sharing best practice and initiatives in the communication of cultural heritage.

The EDUU Project Workflow

To tackle the pre-project issues and meet the needs and expectations of all the partners, the EDUU team adopted a blended methodology combining different types of activities, such as training, archaeological fieldwork and heritage communication. Four specific objectives guided all the activities:

1. increasing knowledge about the ancient history of Iraq through archaeological fieldwork;
2. improving cultural heritage safeguarding by training SBAH officers and local community members;
3. promoting the importance of Iraqi heritage among the younger generations;
4. enhancing civil society engagement in cultural heritage through the improvement of cultural infrastructure (i.e., museums).

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the EDUU project design involved seven interrelated work packages (WPs). WP1 and WP2 focused on research and training, WP3 and WP4 focused on communicating heritage and creating/improving ad hoc spaces, and WPs 5–7 were dedicated to dissemination, management and quality assurance (Figure 3.1).

Archaeological Research and Training (WPs 1–2)

WP1 and WP2 aimed to increase knowledge about the ancient history of Iraq and improve cultural heritage safeguarding through various activities. To this end, several archaeological fieldwork

projects consisting of excavations, surveys, and ethnographic research and training were carried out between 2017 and 2019 in the regions of Wasit, Qadisiyah and Najaf (Lippolis 2020; Maner, Al-Lami and Zaina 2020; Marchetti et al. 2017, 2018, 2019; Zaina, Proserpio and Scazzosi 2021). These activities were conducted twice a year and coordinated by the Italian and Iraqi universities, also including SBAH officers, scholars, students, and local communities when possible. The relevance of the Iraqi component is underlined by the fact that a total of 148 students, scholars and SBAH officers were involved. Beside the theoretical and practical skills acquired by Iraqi scholars, students and SBAH personnel through the fieldwork and training, the latter also voiced a need to update their equipment so as to improve the efficiency of their activities. To achieve this aim, the EDUU team developed an open-access WebGIS including almost 8,000 archaeological sites in Iraq and nearly 4,000 potential ones identified through

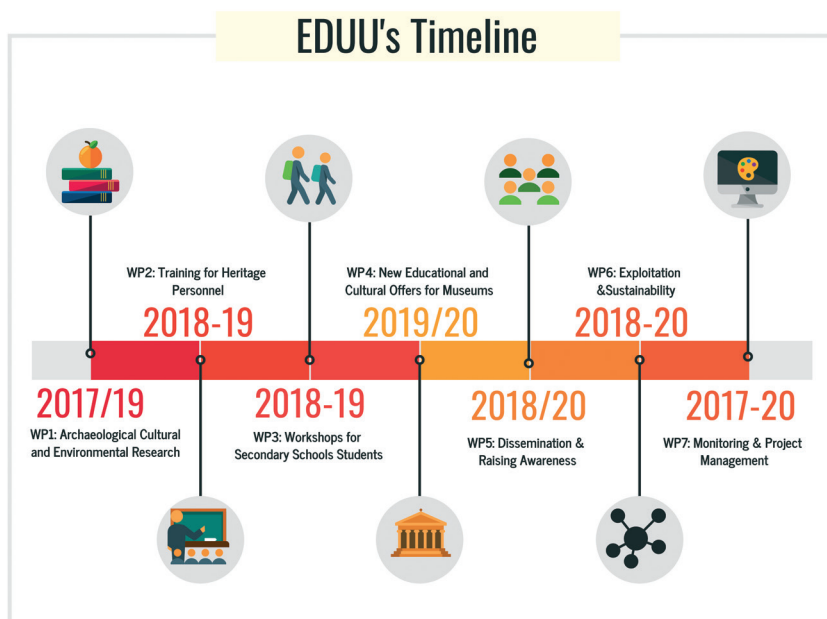


Figure 3.1: EDUU project timeline and WPs.

Image: Federico Zaina, Courtesy of EDUU project (www.eduu.unibo.it).

remote sensing. Details about each archaeological site, including position, extension and chronology, were included to facilitate the SBAH officers in organising their monitoring and management more efficiently. The SBAH representatives recognised the benefits of this platform, stressing that until that point, they had relied on printed (and often outdated) maps or incomplete digital datasets and shapefiles for their daily activities.

In order to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the Web-GIS, the SBAH was provided with a copy of the dataset and two officers were trained on how to manage and maintain it. In addition, to increase heritage communication skills among SBAH officers, museum operators, university students and researchers, and community leaders, additional tailor-made training sessions were conducted in Iraq between 2018 and 2019. The sessions included ‘History of Archaeological Restoration and Museology’ (organised at the University of Baghdad in 2018), ‘Cultural Heritage: Preservation and Spreading of Awareness’ (organised at the universities of Kufa and Qadisiyah in 2018), ‘English Language for Archaeology’ (organised at all three universities in 2018) and ‘Communicating Heritage: Tools and Methodologies’ (organised at the University of Kufa in 2019). A total of 190 participants attended the training courses. Moreover, to expand the audience of the training, a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) on ‘The Museum and the Society’ was developed by the EDUU team. The MOOC provided basic knowledge and key concepts about museum management, including the organisation of collections, communication and marketing strategies, involving different audiences and the social, political and economic impact of cultural institutions. An entire week focused on the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad as an example of best practice in cultural heritage conservation. The first edition of the MOOC was attended by 205 Iraqi students and young researchers out of 440 total participants. The feedback provided by interviewed stakeholders regarding the courses’ overall capacity-strengthening effectiveness was very positive. The majority of them highlighted that the courses met their needs by addressing important issues and indicated the Eng-

lish language courses and practical follow-ups as the most useful. Specifically, several stakeholders stressed the importance of ‘understanding new methodologies’, referring to the use of tools such as GIS (Geographical Information Systems), or how to fill a database and document archaeological finds and how to conduct field research.

The lack of coordination between Iraqi universities and the SBAH initially affected the participation of officers in trainings. As highlighted above, the low degree of connection between these two institutions represented one of the main problems voiced during the pre-project phase. Indeed, many trainees stated that prior to the implementation of the EDUU project, attempts to strengthen cooperation between the SBAH and universities had been rare and generally unsuccessful. The experience of the EDUU project helped to restore this critical relationship, especially as regards the male component of SBAH (Figure 3.2). While the overall number of SBAH officers (both male and female) participating in EDUU activities remained rather low during the first year, the number of men increased from 37 to 232 between 2018 and 2019; although the number of women doubled, its growth rate was much lower than that of men. This highlighted the issue of women’s participation in the project activities. This trend was particularly evident in more religious regions such as Kufa, and less so in Baghdad. Furthermore, participation in indoor activities (i.e., training in universities) was less problematic than participation in outdoor activities (i.e., archaeological surveys and excavations) (Figure 3.2).

The improvement in scientific research skills requested by the Iraq partners before the start of the project was confirmed by the publication of several academic papers by various scholars, including Professor Abbas Al-Hussainy (Al-Hussainy and Notizia 2018, in press; Marchetti et al. 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), Professor Alaa Hussein Jasim Al-Lami (Maner, Al-Lami and Zaina 2020), and Ryam Hussein and Professor Sheyma Al-Badri (Al-Badri et al., in press).

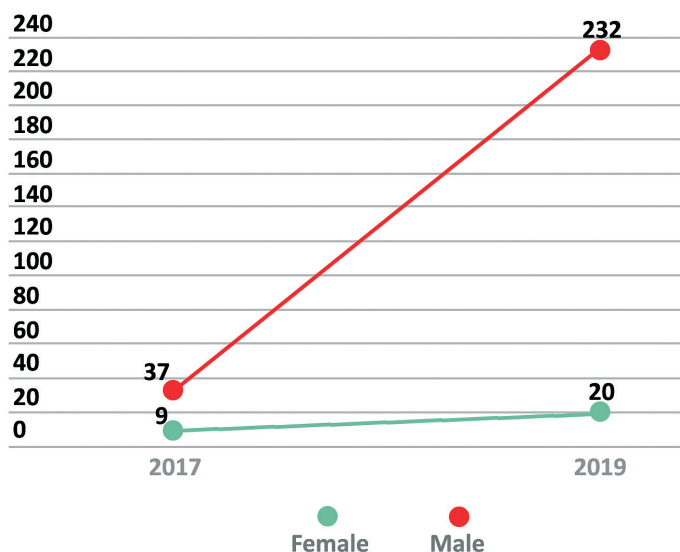


Figure 3.2: Number of female and male SBAH members who participated in WP1 and WP2 activities.

Image: Federico Zaina and PI Nicolò Marchetti, Courtesy of EDUU project (www.eduu.unibo.it).

One of the final outcomes of this phase of the project was the organisation of two conferences, one in Iraq and the other in Europe, focused on current archaeological and cultural heritage projects and their results. A total of 470 people attended the conferences and had the opportunity to learn more about the activities of national and international projects underway in Iraq, to build new transnational collaborations. Moreover, the results of the fieldwork projects were published in several national and international scientific journals between 2017 and 2020. This conference represented an important point of reference for future initiatives, as also confirmed by the financial support provided by a local private company. Indeed, the conference was perceived as an opportunity to enhance cultural tourism among both national and international tourists.

Supporting the Younger Generations in Cultural Heritage Education (WP3)

WP3 was aimed at emphasising the importance of Iraqi heritage among younger generations. To do this, the EDUU project included activities specifically targeting Iraqi children and young adults with the twofold aim of enlarging the audience beyond the academic sphere and training ‘the adults of tomorrow’. An education in cultural heritage that is inclusive and high quality can, in fact, constitute concrete support for the growth of young people, their awareness of their past and a greater understanding of the socioeconomic dynamics of their present.

This work package consisted of various interrelated activities targeting students from secondary schools in the three regions of Baghdad, Qadisiyah and Kufa. Given the primary importance of properly communicating and promoting the country’s heritage to the younger generations, these activities involved 320 students from four public schools with the active collaboration – in both planning and implementation phases – of local university scholars and professors, as well as secondary school teachers.

In particular, the European–Iraqi project team designed three comic books (the ‘Road to Baghdad’ series) available in three languages (Arabic, English and Italian) and focused on the following topics: the discovery and presentation of the National Museum in Baghdad, the importance of the landscape as part of the local cultural heritage and the job of the archaeologist (Figure 3.3). Comics have proven to be a powerful tool among both girls and boys that can contribute to fostering an interest in the cultural heritage and identity of the local society, thanks in part to their typically engaging character. Over 5,000 copies were printed and distributed in local villages and schools with the help of the Iraqi partners. Likewise, a short cartoon on archaeology and museums was produced and made available on YouTube.

The other activities involved the participation and collaboration of Iraqi University professors visiting the four selected secondary schools (the Alemomah secondary public school for girls,



Figure 3.3: The comic 'Road to Baghdad' (Arabic version) and its distribution in secondary schools.

Book cover: Mirko Furlanetto.

Photo: Federico Zaina and PI Nicolò Marchetti, Courtesy of EDUU project (www.eduu.unibo.it).

the Algad secondary private school for boys, the Aleatizaz secondary school and the Almawhubin secondary school for girls) and organising lessons and lectures on the history of the country, the main archaeological expeditions and discoveries, and the importance of cultural heritage for increasing social cohesion and local identity. In addition to these lessons, some students had the chance to visit the restored National Iraq Museum in Baghdad and to participate in the educational activities organised by EDUU in the museum's new educational room.

Involving a Wider Audience in Local Cultural Heritage (WP4)

Since the fourth objective of the EDUU project was to enhance civil society engagement in cultural heritage, WP4 was dedicated to creating new cultural and educational spaces and developing existing ones so as to allow community members to learn more

about the history of their country and hold discussions with SBAH officers and local academics.

To open these spaces and make them accessible to the largest number of people possible, in selecting the sites the team considered the distribution of the Iraqi population at a national level and in the selected regions, as well as the population's access to cultural places. Most Iraqis (70.1 per cent) live in urban areas, while nearly a third of the population (about 11.7 million; World Bank 2019b) is distributed in the flat countryside. Furthermore, both public and private museums telling the country's history are mostly clustered in major cities (BANUU 2020). These medium- and large-scale urban sites are not very accessible to rural populations, due to numerous factors including distance and discontinuous opening hours. Considering this situation, two different types of tailor-made activities were designed as part of the EDUU project.

First, the team focused on improving the accessibility and use of an existing renowned museum, the National Museum of Baghdad. One of the main issues was low attendance at and knowledge about the museum among the younger generations. For this reason, the museum's director explicitly asked that a new educational space dedicated to children be created. The EDUU team, in collaboration with the museum staff, designed and set up this new area and equipped it with teaching materials (including a video station, didactic maps, and interactive games on archaeology and museums), furnishing and tools for facilitating the learning process among children and young adults. The room was opened in January 2020 (Figure 3.4). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted activities in the museum, but at the time of writing many schools were committed to visiting the museum as soon as the situation allows it, thanks in part to collaboration with the local non-profit organisation Friends of Baghdad Museum, which will coordinate educational activities in the future.

The second activity in WP4 was the renovation and adaptation of a historic government building (King Ghazi Palace) located in the Iraqi countryside, Qadisiyah region, to create Iraq's first landscape museum. In 2018, SBAH officers expressly asked



Figure 3.4: The new educational room of the National Museum of Baghdad set up by the EDUU team.

Image: Federico Zaina and PI Nicolò Marchetti, Courtesy of EDUU project (www.eduu.unibo.it).

the EDUU team to transform this building into a new cultural space. The SBAH chose to redevelop this place in part because it is already very popular with local people due to the fact that it is surrounded by a large park. The new King Ghazi Landscape Museum is focused on the relationship between people and their landscape over the millennia and has the main objective of raising awareness about the richness of the local land and its bond with urban development. The museum includes six exhibition rooms, equipped with photographs, maps, videos and archaeological artefacts that illustrate the ancient and modern history of Iraq, and an educational space for children similar to the room created in the National Museum in Baghdad. The King Ghazi Landscape Museum was opened in late 2020 and at the time of writing was waiting to hold its first activities and guided tours as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic was over.

Discussion

The EDUU project was based on an assumption that cultural heritage in a multicultural country like Iraq can play a key role in post-conflict recovery, fostering social cohesion and cultural coexistence. Promoting dialogue between different sectors of civil society leads to a concept of cultural heritage that is functional and understood by all; it also has the potential to aid in developing tourism and local economies – aims that are equally significant for both rural communities and national cultural reconstruction. There is a need to continue working towards further engaging a wide range of stakeholders. In this section, therefore, we begin by presenting some considerations about the project impact, before outlining the main lessons learned during the implementation of the project. Lastly, we propose some long-term sustainability strategies and possible trajectories and approaches for future ‘collaborative’ projects in the field of archaeology in Iraq.

Assessment of the Project Impact

A review of the feedback from internal and external evaluations showed that the EDUU project managed to operate and involve the target groups in a coherent way in a complex and rapidly evolving context, testifying to the relevance of the initiative with respect to these groups’ needs and priorities. The project was based on an in-depth knowledge of the complexities characterising the context in which it operated, and the gaps caused by a lack of communication with different stakeholders engaged in promoting and protecting cultural heritage. For this reason, the project was very flexible in adapting to the ever-changing Iraqi context.

The project has achieved some significant results with a multi-layered and sustainable long-term impact. First, it has contributed to increasing the knowledge of heritage professionals and strengthening their skills. The evaluation reveals that the project, thanks to a strong partnership between European and Iraqi universities, has successfully engaged a variety of stakeholders in

cooperating for the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. In addition, it has attracted and involved other segments of civil society, such as private enterprises, and has bridged the communication gaps between Iraqi institutions, laying the foundations for enhanced cooperation on the common grounds of cultural heritage. All of these elements impacted on the individual, organisational and social levels, fostering an initial change in perspective that is expected to guarantee buy-in and sustainability.

The second key result of the project is the engagement of secondary schools and communities. The workshops targeted approximately 300 students in schools in Baghdad, Qadisiyah and Najaf. These activities were coordinated by the Iraqi universities. Overall, the evaluation found that this experience was positive for both Iraqi universities and secondary school students. However, this engagement represented a first step that will need further development to maximise its potential impact through other initiatives and projects. In terms of sustainability, the College of Arts at the University of Baghdad, in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq, pledged to continue its work in the schools.

Another important outcome is the increase in local museums' educational and cultural offerings. An educational room was created in the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad and a complete renovation was carried out to create the King Ghazi Landscape Museum. The link between the work carried out in schools and the rationale behind the renovation of museums is evident. Both activities are aimed at strengthening awareness of Iraq's pre-Islamic past in order to enhance social cohesion. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, exploitation and sustainability activities had to be suspended and it remains to be seen what kind of impact these components of the project will have on young students and the public.

Lessons Learned

Some expectations formulated during the project design and implementation phases were not met. We have critically reflected on the limitations of our project to identify the key lessons learned and to devise counter-measures to mitigate them in future work: the language barrier, gender balance, communication strategies and synergies between Iraqi partners.

First, the use of different languages represents a major obstacle, as already highlighted by several studies (Atalay 2010; 2012; Humphris and Bradshaw 2017). Considering that the official project documents needed to be in English and the Arabic skills of the EU team were limited, English was the official language of the project while Arabic played a role in several activities. Future projects can plan to include a pre-project English language assessment to better design the project activities and necessary language support; the identification, during the pre-project phase, of members of the Iraqi institutions involved in the project who are fluent in English and who can act as a bridge between the EU and other Iraqis by facilitating communication; and the constant presence of Arabic-speaking facilitators at all activities, given the scarcity of fluent English speakers within local communities.

The second point is related to gender balance. Before the beginning of the project and during most of its implementation, the project partners shared high expectations as to the participation of Iraqi women at multiple levels. This expectation was supported, among other elements, by the considerable number of female SBAH officers (the director of the National Museum of Baghdad is a woman), university scholars (one of the presidents of the Iraqi universities involved in EDUU was a woman), students and local community members. This trend allowed us to reflect on how to avoid potential pitfalls in future activities through initiatives such as:

1. establishing a minimum number of women (and possibly equal to the number of male participants) taking part in the activities as a first step towards principles of equity, inclusion and gender balance within the projects;
2. actively involving girls and young women in international projects, including through periods of training and professional development abroad;
3. increasing awareness about and 'normalising' the role of women in academic and professional fields already starting in the younger generations, working in primary and secondary schools directly (for example, by involving an equal number of males and females in the activities) and indirectly (for example, by making female characters the protagonists of stories in comics, cartoons, etc.);
4. conducting detailed research to better understand the gender barriers and inequalities faced by academics, archaeologists and heritage professionals in Iraq.

The results of the study should inform the mitigation strategies of future projects and possibly the inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators in monitoring and evaluation tools.

Another lesson concerns the use of communication tools as successful strategies for fostering engagement in cultural heritage. In fact, the project has tested out various communication methods depending on the activities' target participants, such as creating promotional videos and online courses accessible for free and specifically aimed at older age groups and professionals, or creating comics for children and teenagers. These approaches follow from and confirm the validity of other projects in similar contexts (Humphris and Bradshaw 2017; Lorenzon and Zermani 2016; Näser 2019; Näser and Tully 2019; Tully 2007).

Finally, the project has proven the crucial importance of creating synergies and collaboration among the Iraqi partners to guarantee the success and long-term sustainability of the activities. The analysis of the cultural heritage field in Iraq carried out in the pre-project phase provided an overview of problems, ongoing

ing initiatives and potential future areas for action. However, the EDUU team had to deal with a much more complex and tangled situation. As noted above, a major issue in the implementation of several activities was the low degree of collaboration between the SBAH and Iraqi universities. This situation reflects the broader problem affecting Iraq's diverse cultural heritage institutions, coupled with a remarkably low degree of connection between these institutions and local communities. Future projects should take these issues into consideration right from the design stage. For example, it is important:

1. to involve all institutions in the project design, possibly through focus groups, in order to favour solid synergies and to highlight issues in a clearer way;
2. to carry out detailed studies not only to understand the problems and needs of each partner (as the EDUU team did) but also to identify the barriers that limit collaboration between and among them.

Conclusion: Long-Term Sustainability and Future Outlook

The EDUU project was able to guarantee the sustainability of some of its most important activities and to help lay the foundations for new approaches to documenting, managing and communicating cultural heritage in Iraq.

Some of the activities developed in the framework of EDUU have continued after the project's completion. These include the International Conference on the Enhancement of the Archaeological Heritage in Iraq (ICEHAI), held for the first time in 2018 and continued in 2019 (with the support of an Anglo-US-Iraqi partnership). The 2020 edition was to be supported by the EU-funded Erasmus+ Capacity Building KA2 project called BANUU (2020–2023), which aims to contribute to improving the employability of archaeology and cultural heritage graduates and generating new channels of cooperation among universities, the public sector and

enterprises in these fields. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was postponed.

The fieldwork activities conducted in the Kufa region, together with the results achieved by several spillover activities (see below), have fuelled the implementation of cultural tourism activities in the Kufa area and its immediate vicinity. This important effort was part of the larger BANUU project. The first step, consisting of assessing the potential for developing cultural tourism in the Kufa, Najaf and Hilla areas as well as this sector's critical issues and needs, was completed in summer 2020 (BANUU 2020). The following phases consist of training activities involving university scholars, students, private companies and national bodies.

The field research activities carried out in the early stages of the EDUU project (WP1–2) led to the development of new forms of collaboration between the partners, some of which have resulted in new projects. Since 2019 these have included the SBAH and University of Qadisiyah conducting the Meh Enlil-Arakhtum joint archaeological survey project, while the Koç University of Istanbul, University of Bologna, University of Kufa and SBAH carried out the Land of Kufa archaeological survey project between 2019 and 2020.

Another important spillover initiative in the field of heritage documentation and preservation is the Kufa heritage monument project jointly developed by the Koç University and University of Kufa in collaboration with the University of Bologna, the local SBAH office and the municipality of Kufa. The project aims to document the endangered historic buildings in Kufa's old town and, eventually, to restore and reuse some of them for tourism purposes. The project was recently supported by a grant provided by the UCL Nahrein network.

Finally, the project contributed to spreading and strengthening bottom-up approaches in cultural heritage practices by actively supporting local communities' role in conserving and managing archaeological sites, monuments and intangible heritage, in keeping with an approach currently at the top of the agenda of archaeologists and cultural heritage experts worldwide (Agbe-Davies

2014; Atalay 2012; Moshenska and Dhanjal 2011). As the enhancement of civil society engagement in cultural heritage was only one of the project's four specific objectives (see above), the work with local communities carried out between 2017 and 2020 achieved important but not conclusive results. Nonetheless, the project contributed to laying the foundations for developing archaeology projects that involve communities in decision-making at all levels. According to Matthews et al. (2020, 134), community archaeology represents the ideal tool for realising the 'core development challenge', that of 'convert[ing] long-accumulated heritage capital into a realisable asset that works effectively and ethically to the social, economic and cultural advantage of the communities in question'. If fully developed, community archaeology could prove pivotal by virtue of its potential to aid in the reconstruction of community ties and its positive socioeconomic spillover effects.

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