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Assessing stakeholders' perspectives towards the conservation of the built heritage of Suakin, Sudan

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The conservation of built heritage is recognized as a vehicle for sustaining local identity, and a powerful instrument for urban regeneration. The problem of how to engage local culture in this process, however, has received comparatively little attention, despite the recognition of 'stakeholders' and the importance of their involvement. This research examines how collaboration between stakeholders might be established to conserve and thus help regenerate the historic and largely abandoned port town of Suakin. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of Suakin's stakeholder groups, and supported through archival analysis and observational studies. The intention was to explore the stakeholders' views of the 'conservation drivers', 'conservation practice', and 'conservation challenges and enablers' affecting Suakin. The stakeholders' response provides a preliminary status to the various perspectives concerning the conservation of Suakin's built heritage. The findings identify a number of major issues impacting Suakin's conservation and reveal a potential for implementing a comprehensive and inclusive conservation approach. The research establishes the case for further research to determine best methods to enable stakeholders to collaboratively address the issues impacting Suakin's conservation. This approach to stakeholder involvement represents a new step toward the conservation of Suakin, and a new contribution toward the conservation process.

Keywords: Conservation practice; integrated approach; stakeholder engagement; Suakin

Introduction

The conservation of built heritage is now widely recognized as a vehicle for sustaining local identity (Lin and Hsing 2009; Salama 2000) and a powerful

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instrument for urban regeneration: conservation initiatives can promote physical and environmental sustainability and economic and cultural development (Mangeli and Sattaripour 2009; Rypkema 2008). There has been a corresponding shift from 'static' conservation approaches, involving the preservation, maintenance and possible enhancement of existing built heritage (Salama 2000), towards a dynamic integrated approach that considers built heritage within its historic, cultural, social, and physical contexts (Bianca 2007; Orbasli 2008; Vehbi 2008). The idea of an integrated approach towards the conservation of built heritage has been almost universally accepted for over thirty years (Salama 2000), however, it has been acknowledged more recently that to achieve an integrated conservation approach it is necessary to include stakeholder participation and coordination (Bianca 2007; Ercan 2010; Yung and Chan 2011). How this might be done is less established. The means of enabling local involvement are poorly understood and in practice local stakeholders are often excluded from the conservation of their built heritage (Chirikure et al. 2010; Cueni 2007; Lin and Hsing 2009).

In the developing and Middle-Eastern realm, a number of 'pioneering' conservation projects utilizing integrated and participatory approaches have been attempted. Such interventions are highly experimental due to the novelty of this approach within such regions, the unique context of individual sites (Bianca 2007), and a number of specific challenges. Included within these challenges are rapidly emerging urban environments, causing the destruction of historic structures to make way for new developments, and the deterioration of historic structures while agendas are focused towards new development rather than conservation (Boussa 2010; Bianca 2007). Inadequate local administrative structure, appropriate legislation, and policy, often prevent the identification and collective organization of stakeholders' interests to enable participation within conservation initiatives (Daher 1999). Approaches, practices and legislation that guide the conservation of built heritage are often developed within a developed western context, and often do not translate to local realities and values elsewhere (Orbasli 2008; Assi 2008). Specific developments associated with the conservation of built heritage, such as restoration, world heritage status, and the cultural tourism this can bring, are driven by western investors; therefore the results achieved through such efforts are often directed towards a foreign market, without bringing much benefit to the local communities removed from this process (Assi 2008). Collectively, these challenges suggest that an integrated conservation approach that works with the local culture needs both encouraging and substantial effort. Suakin, a once thriving port city on Sudan's Red Sea coast that was abandoned in the early part of the twentieth century, faces these challenges to the conservation of its built heritage in specific ways.

The conservation of Suakin, Sudan

At its height Suakin was Sudan's major port, providing a gateway between Islamic culture and Eastern Africa on the pilgrimage route to Mecca, and facilitating a unique crossroads of Islamic, Sudanese, Ottoman and other cultures (Mallinson 2012). The historic town is made up of an island of approximately 400 by 600 metres within a natural lagoon harbour, a larger mainland area joined to the

island by an artificial causeway (Figures 1, 2), and a number of outlying fortifications. The island at one time accommodated up to 300 buildings, including a majority of privately owned residences of prominent merchants and traders, trading offices and stores, and a number of public buildings such as mosques, banks and shops. The mainland accommodated a mixture of residences and public buildings that were populated by merchants and traders, and the local nomadic tribe of the 'Hadendowah' (Greenlaw 1976). The fifteenth to twentieth century coral block buildings for which Suakin is famous and once termed the 'Venice of Africa' provide one of the last remaining examples of the Red Sea architectural style (Mallinson 2012) (Figure 2). Suakin was largely abandoned by the 1920s for Port Sudan, which opened in 1909 as Sudan's major port and is located approximately thirty miles north. Suakin's historic structures quickly deteriorated once no longer inhabited and maintained due to their fragile construction and the impact of the local climate. Many buildings were deliberately pulled down to provide construction materials for elsewhere (Greenlaw 1976; Salim 1997). In 1991 a new port opened at Suakin and some of the historic mainland was again inhabited with new settlements emerging outside the historic town, yet the historic island town remained deserted (Salim 1997).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Figure 1. Suakin's location, historic town and port, new port, and expanding new town (author's illustration, 2013).

[INSERT FIGURE 2]

Figure 2. Sketch of Suakin's historic coral block buildings in the 1950s by J.P. Greenlaw (Greenlaw, 1976, Sudan Archaeological Research Society Greenlaw Archive, British Museum, London).

Suakin's historical and cultural significance, and more recently, the potential for economic development, has sustained a constant desire for its revival and sponsored previous academic research, government-led development plans, and international missions (Greenlaw 1995; Hansen 1972; Lane 1994; Mallinson 2012; Salim 1997; Taha 2011). Included within these efforts are a number of formal proposals for reconstruction of the historic buildings from 1933 onwards, and recognition of Suakin's potential world heritage status (Hansen 1972; Lane 1994; Salim 1997; Mallinson 2012). Yet apart from the partial restoration of two historic mosques since 2008 (Mallinson 2012), there is no recorded evidence of the numerous proposals for historic Suakin's reconstruction materialising on the ground (Salim 1997). Suakin has remained on Sudan's World Heritage 'Tentative List' since 1994 (Mallinson 2012).

A number of significant challenges preventing the conservation of Suakin's historic town are recognized throughout previous studies and proposals.

The two major long-term challenges include financial restrictions and ownership. The Sudan government's already limited financial resources were often dedicated towards more 'immediate' necessities than the conservation of built heritage, such as physical and economic development (Hansen 1972). The Sudan federal government's 'National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums', responsible for Suakin as an antiquities site, reportedly did not seek contributions from outside of their own administration to overcome scarcity of funds (Salim 1997). Private ownership of the majority of Suakin's historic properties introduced a number of obstacles. These included legislative restrictions that prevented government funds being spent on Suakin's privately owned property (Lane 1994; Salim 1997); yet recognition of Suakin's historic island town as a Sudan antiquities site prohibited private owners from making any alterations, including repairs and/or reconstruction, to the historic structures (Mallinson 2012). Suakin's historic town has also been threatened by increasing development pressures since the opening of Suakin's new port in 1991. Since then, investments have been focused towards the development of Suakin's port, rather than the historic town's conservation. The historic mainland properties that were not clearly protected as an antiquities site were increasingly sought to accommodate these developments (Salim 1997; Taha 2011). A number of potential enablers to mitigate the challenges to Suakin's conservation have also been recommended. To overcome limited financial resources suggestions include collaboration with and financial contribution from external parties (Hansen 1972; Lane 1994; Salim 1997; Mallinson 2012). To rectify barriers between government and Suakin's historic property owners the formation of ownership committees was proposed (Mallinson 2012), and implemented during the mid-1990s (Salim 1997). A larger masterplan has been emphasized as a necessity to ensure both Suakin's conservation and development initiatives are appropriate, and to coordinate stakeholders' actions, (Lane 1994; Salim 1997; Mallinson 2012). Yet there is no evidence of these potential enablers for Suakin's conservation being implemented effectively and/or long-term.

To date, however, the studies and proposals towards Suakin's conservation have not adequately considered the socio-cultural context. These previous efforts have focused largely on Suakin's physical and historical aspects, and when considering 'local community' only Suakin's historic property owners have been included, the majority of whom no longer live locally. Yet this lack of consideration of Suakin's current socio-cultural context is not surprising. The studies and proposals towards Suakin's conservation were conducted by external parties, such as foreign researchers and consultants, without involving Suakin's stakeholders who represent the local culture. There also appears to be little connection between the various studies, plans and proposals conducted, indicating little communication between those conducting these efforts. Thus, there is no clear overall strategy for Suakin's conservation, or responsibility by one specific party or number of parties for implementation. This emphasized the need to review the approach towards Suakin's conservation, and to specifically address the local cultural context of Suakin as a built heritage, as is addressed through this research.

Method

A series of semi-structured interviews were used to establish stakeholders' perspectives on the conservation status of Suakin's historic town as a built heritage. As this was the first time this information had been sought directly from the stakeholders themselves, semi-structured interviews enabled the combination of closed and open-ended questions to access the potentially richest source of data. This also avoided influencing the interviewee by leading questions and excessive guidance from the researcher, and/or other attendees within a larger focus group or workshop environment (Denzin 2000; Gillham 2000; Walliman 2006). Prior to the interviews archival analysis of current planning documents and fieldwork observations of the site's physical condition, local activities and informal discussions with various stakeholders established the scope of Suakin's current and potential stakeholders. This revealed a diverse range of stakeholders, many of whom had never been formally acknowledged within Suakin's official plans or consultations to develop these plans. Each stakeholder had their own agenda and objectives and that often conflicted. This emphasized the need to seek out the diverse range of stakeholder perspectives concerning Suakin's conservation, further investigated through the series of interviews that followed. The fieldwork observations continued throughout the duration of the fieldwork, and findings from the archival analysis and observational studies were used to supplement the interview data.

The interview design consisted of a number of themes regarding the conservation of built heritage with specific reference to Suakin, determined through a review of previous research. The interview themes included: 'Suakin's conservation drivers' ('drivers' referred to as that which gives reason or force to conservation efforts); 'Suakin's conservation practice' (including conservation 'approaches', 'actors' ('actors' referred to as those who are active in Suakin's conservation) and 'evaluation' of conservation practice); and 'Suakin's conservation challenges and enablers' ('enablers' referred to as suggested actions to address 'conservation challenges'). Immediately prior to the interviews the interview themes were explained and relevant examples provided to ensure interviewees understood and could respond as much as possible. The interview-sampling frame included twenty-one representatives of four major stakeholder groups. The stakeholder groups were initially identified through a review of previous studies and proposals towards Suakin's conservation (Salim 1997; Mallinson 2012), then confirmed and key representatives identified as interviewees through archival analysis and fieldwork observations conducted prior to the interviews. Suakin's stakeholder groups included: Government; Investors; Consultants; and End Users. Key stakeholder group representatives were identified as interviewees according to their roles and responsibilities towards Suakin's conservation (Table 1). As explained throughout the results and analysis not all interviewees, especially End Users, could respond to all interview themes due to lack of inclusion and consequential knowledge of Suakin's conservation. Influencing the selection of interviewees was an absence of locally skilled artisans or masons involved with Suakin's conservation, due to so few conservation initiatives having been implemented.

Audio recordings were made of the 30-45 minute long interviews, which were subsequently transcribed. Field notes were made from the archival analysis and observational studies. These documents were then organized into a thematic structure for analysis. An inductive data analysis enabled the issues within each interview theme to be established by organizing the data into units of information, rather than these categories determined beforehand and data organized between them (Cresswell 2009). This enabled the interviewees' meanings to be conveyed as much as possible, rather than those brought by the researcher and previous literature. A two-step analysis process identified and ranked the major issues within each interview theme: the issues recognized by the interviewees within each interview theme were counted; numerical rankings of the issues identified within each theme (1 being the highest ranking / most prominent issue) then determined based on consensus views within each stakeholder group. Due to a significant contrast between Government's representatives the numerical rankings for Government have been displayed as both an overall result for the stakeholder group, and individually for the federal, state and local representatives.

Table 1. Interviewee stakeholder groups and participating representatives.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Semi-structured interviews

The following sections consist of the major themes explored during the interviews, including 'Suakin's conservation drivers', 'Suakin's conservation practice' (including 'conservation approaches', 'conservation actors', and 'evaluation of conservation practice'), and 'Suakin's conservation challenges and enablers'.

Suakin's conservation drivers

The interviewees were first asked to identify Suakin's conservation 'drivers'. As shown in Table 2 'development' and 'historical and cultural significance' both received an overall ranking as the first two major drivers, 'sustainability' as the third.

Table 2. Suakin's conservation drivers: rankings of stakeholder group responses (refer to Table 1 for interviewees included within each stakeholder group).

[INSERT TABLE 2]

NR: No ranking (not identified as a driver).

F: Federal

S: State

L: Local

'Development' was identified as major conservation driver by the interviewees, with the exception of Governments' federal representatives who did not recognize this driver. Government's, Investors' and Consultants' recognition of 'development' as a conservation driver was driven by a focus on tourism as a new major industry being developed by Sudan's 'Red Sea State Government' (RSSG), followed by local physical development. As stated by a Consultant interviewee, '...historic Suakin's potential role within this new development, as providing tourism and a cultural centre to the larger Red Sea State development, is a major motivation to these local parties for the site's conservation'. In comparison, End Users identified 'development' as a conservation driver in terms of local industry related to their everyday livelihoods such as the port, fishing, and local trades such as shoemaking. Emphasizing the focus towards Suakin's development, directly and indirectly associated with the site's conservation, are two key planning documents, including: the 'Suakin New Town Extension Plan' (SNTEP) produced by the RSSG for the expansion of Suakin's new town between 1994 and 2014; and the 'Suakin Development Plan' (SDP) produced by Sudan federal government's 'National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums' (NCAM) in 2007 to integrate Suakin's historic town with the surrounding new town and port zone.

'Historical and cultural significance' was considered a conservation driver by End Users with a major focus on local and religious culture, such as the on-going use of many of the historic site's religious buildings, also considered a contributing factor by Consultants. Government and Investors however recognized political relations as the major contributor to 'historical and cultural significance' as a conservation driver, regarding the potential for Suakin's conservation to build relations between Sudan and foreign governments, especially those with a shared history in Suakin's built heritage. This is expressed by an interviewee representing the British Embassy's previous funding of the restoration of a historic Suakin mosque, who stated that '...with the desire to engage with Islam and to raise awareness of the multi-faith society within the UK...we felt a preservation project of Sudan's oldest Mosque would give weight to the work we were carrying out...in our promoting of non-radical Islam'. Suakin's (potential) world heritage status was also recognized as contributing towards 'historical and cultural significance' as a conservation driver by Government and Investors.

'Sustainability' was recognized as one of Suakin's conservation driver by only Consultants and Investors. The interviewees sometimes provided a definition of what they meant by 'sustainability'. When interviewees referred only to the general term 'sustainability', guidance was provided of what this term encompassed, such as economic, physical or socio-cultural sustainability, and the interviewee was then asked to provide further definition. Both stakeholder groups considered this conservation driver to encompass the sustainability of the conservation process concerning the knowledge and skills base required to implement approaches and practices needed for Suakin's conservation, and the ability for conservation initiatives to generate sustainable urban planning. In

addition to the interviewees' responses one End User was unable to identify Suakin's conservation drivers.

Suakin's conservation practice

The investigation of 'Suakin's conservation practice' consisted of three sub-themes including: conservation 'approaches'; conservation 'actors'; and 'evaluation' of conservation practice. It should be considered that the stakeholders' ability to respond to this part of the interview was limited. This was due to a limited number of Suakin's conservation initiatives reaching implementation, those that were implemented involving few of Suakin's stakeholders, especially local parties.

Suakin's conservation practice: conservation approaches

When asked to identify Suakin's conservation 'approaches', the interviewees' responses fell into two major categories, and that were determined during analysis of the data, of 'dynamic' or 'static'. The interview results indicated a shared agreement between all stakeholder groups of the major approach towards Suakin's conservation as 'dynamic' and the second or lesser approach as 'static', as shown in Table 3. The exception to the stakeholders' consensus however was a clear division between Government's state and local representatives who recognized only a 'dynamic' approach and federal representatives who recognized only a 'static' approach. The interviewees described a 'dynamic' approach as the preservation of historic structures with the introduction of new materials and methods to improve the structures' physical strength and durability. Supporting this view was the suggested ability for a 'dynamic' approach to contribute to local development through integrating the historic structures with their local context and needs of the (potential) inhabitants, as opposed to limiting their use to preserve them. A number of evident examples reinforced the stakeholders' perspectives towards a 'dynamic' approach for Suakin's conservation. Sudan federal government's 'National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums' (NCAM) 'Suakin Development Plan' (SDP), discussed previously during 'Suakin's conservation drivers', proposed to integrate the historic town with the surrounding new town and port zone. As stated by a Consultant who was involved in developing the SDP, a major focus of the plan was '...to encourage individual investment in eco-tourism by promoting the redevelopment of individual buildings on Suakin Island, along with utilizing the abundance of solar and wind energy through modern methods to encourage infrastructure investment'. At the time of this research, the Turkish Government were in the process of reconstructing three of Suakin's historic structures, with the addition of new methods and materials to improve structural strength and reduce required maintenance (Figure 3). A number of informal reparation and construction works were being implemented by Suakin's local community on the historic island and mainland. Within the historic island, where formal construction was prohibited, shanty structures were constructed amongst the ruins to enable private owners to continue inhabiting their plots of land (Figure 4). Within the less restricted mainland, some historic structures had been repaired using original and various found materials, and some had been dismantled and rebuilt to a new layout and appearance (Figure 5).

A 'static' approach was explained to involve the use of traditional skills and materials to preserve the historic structures, maintaining the original layout and appearance. Supporting the ranking of a 'static' approach as the less implemented were no current examples at the time of this research. Suakin's historic structures that had not received conservation, repair and/or reconstruction efforts, either through a 'dynamic' or 'static' approach, had been reduced to ruins and rubble (Figure 6). Many interviewees could not identify an approach towards Suakin's conservation, explaining they had little or no involvement in conservation decision-making and implementation. These interviewees included the majority of End Users, two Investors, Government's local representative, and a Consultant.

Table 3. Suakin's conservation approaches: rankings of stakeholder group responses (refer to Table 1 for interviewees included within each stakeholder group).

[INSERT TABLE 3]

NR: No ranking (not identified as a driver).

F: Federal

S: State

L: Local

[INSERT FIGURE 3]

Figure 3. Turkish Government's reconstruction of Suakin's historic island structures (author's photo, 2012).

[INSERT FIGURE 4]

Figure 4: Construction of shanty structures within Suakin's historic island town (author's photo, 2012).

[INSERT FIGURE 5]

Figure 5: Dismantling Suakin's historic structures (left side of street) to reconstruct to a new layout and appearance (right side of street) (author's photo, 2012).

[INSERT FIGURE 6]

Figure 6. Deterioration of Suakin’s historic buildings to ruins and rubble (author’s photo, 2012).

Suakin’s conservation practice: conservation actors

The interviewees identified four major ‘actors’ within the conservation of Suakin’s historic town, as shown in Table 4, including: Sudan federal government’s ‘National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM)’; Sudan’s ‘Red Sea State Government’ (RSSG); ‘local community’ (including local professionals, residents, religious groups, and investors); and ‘foreign parties’ (such as foreign governments, international development agencies and specialist groups).

Table 4. Suakin’s conservation actors: rankings of stakeholder group responses (refer to Table 1 for interviewees included within each stakeholder group).

[INSERT TABLE 4]

NCAM: National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums

NR: No ranking (not identified as a driver).

F: Federal

S: State

L: Local

‘NCAM’, being Sudan’s governmental organization responsible for Suakin as a registered antiquities site, was deemed by the overall rankings as the key actor in Suakin’s conservation. Yet NCAM were seen as less influential by participating Consultants, who argued NCAM’s role to be a supervisory role with limited impact on a project’s implementation. Reinforcing this is the influence of foreign and private investment on Suakin’s conservation. As explained by one Investor, ‘due to the majority of [conservation] work in Suakin being enabled through foreign and private investment, NCAM’s role is more supervisory, and their involvement often diminishes once project implementation reaches the ground’. Also demonstrating NCAM’s less influential role, than would be expected as the key actor in Suakin’s conservation, were a number of examples. This included no visible evidence of NCAM’s 2007 planning document, the ‘Suakin Development Plan’ (SDP), being actively enforced on the ground. Emphasizing the lack of implementation of the SDP was the recently constructed new Suakin Fisheries building within Suakin’s historic mainland, implemented through the RSSG and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), that contrasted with that outlined in the SDP. In addition to these factors, NCAM’s involvement with any intervention within Suakin’s historic town was deemed necessary through legal regulations, yet their presence was absent during the reconstruction works implemented by the Turkish Government.

Average rankings considered ‘RSSG’, being the Sudan state government where Suakin is located, as the second critical actor in Suakin’s conservation, yet

RSSG were not recognized by End Users. An understanding expressed by a number of End Users was that RSSG were responsible for Suakin's development in terms of the port and new town, rather than the conservation of the historic town. This was supported by RSSG's planning document the, 'Suakin New Town Extension Plan' (SNTEP), being well underway to expand Suakin's new town, and RSSG's cooperation with UNIDO to construct the new Suakin Fisheries building.

'Local community' received an average ranking as the third most significant conservation actor, yet received less recognition by Government, and no recognition by Investors. A general view expressed by the interviewees was that while local community was not the legally responsible party for Suakin's conservation, they had the greatest potential to implement Suakin's conservation in the future, if appropriate training could be offered and authoritative roles were enabled. This was supported by the rich level of informal activity being implemented by Suakin's local community within the historic town, as discussed earlier within 'Suakin's conservation approaches'. The central and collaborative role local community could play within Suakin's conservation is suggested by a local Government interviewee's description of a member of Suakin's local community, stating that '...this Suakin resident is a key longer-term actor who has a personal interest and has contributed directly towards Suakin's conservation, and who has also worked in collaboration with foreign funding bodies to implement works'.

'Foreign parties', involved with research, funding and/or implementation of Suakin's conservation initiatives, received an average ranking as the fourth conservation actor, yet were seen as more influential by Government's local representative. Despite the lower overall ranking of 'foreign parties' as a conservation actor, they were stated to be the key figures in driving Suakin's conservation initiatives. Confirming this was the restoration and reconstruction of a number of Suakin's historic buildings funded by the British Embassy, a Kuwaiti bank, and the Turkish government. As in the previous interview themes, a number of interviewees were unable to identify Suakin's conservation actors. This included two Investors and two End Users.

Suakin's conservation practice: evaluation of conservation practice

The interviewees' responses concerning the 'evaluation' of Suakin's 'conservation practice' fell into two major categories of 'positive' and 'negative'. As shown in Table 5, this revealed an average ranking of the major evaluation of Suakin's conservation practice as 'positive', Government's state and local representatives and Investors providing only a positive evaluation. A positive evaluation consisted of the interviewees' general agreement towards the conservation initiatives implemented. The second or lesser evaluation of Suakin's conservation practice was 'negative'; although Government's federal representatives did provide only a negative evaluation. A negative evaluation included Government's federal representatives' disagreement with methods implemented during the Turkish Government's reconstruction of three of Suakin's historic buildings. This is illustrated by a Government interviewee's comment that

'works not always being implemented through NCAM, and rather through foreign groups and their own professionals, is a point of weakness as this is not way NCAM would have done it'. Government's federal representatives also expressed concerns over new developments threatening the historic town, such as the recently constructed Suakin Fisheries building located within the historic mainland. Consultants' and End Users' negative evaluation of Suakin's conservation practice resulted from conflicts between stakeholder agendas and operations during recent projects, and a lack of community involvement and awareness of conservation initiatives. Confirming a common trend revealed throughout the interview results, and emphasized within the current theme of 'Suakin's conservation practice', was a number of interviewees unable to evaluate Suakin's conservation practice, due to lack of involvement in the decision-making and implementation of Suakin's conservation. The interviewees unable to respond included the majority of Investors, two End Users, and one Consultant.

Table 5. Evaluation of Suakin's conservation practice: rankings of stakeholder group responses (refer to Table 1 for interviewees included within each stakeholder group).

[INSERT TABLE 5]

NR: No ranking (not identified as a driver).
F: Federal
S: State
L: Local

Suakin's conservation challenges

When the interviewees were asked to identify Suakin's conservation 'challenges', six major challenges were revealed. As shown in Table 6, 'legal issues' and 'financial restrictions' received an average ranking as the first two major challenges by all of the stakeholder groups, followed by 'stakeholder inclusion and collaboration', 'physical and environmental issues', 'conservation knowledge and awareness' and 'technical capacity'.

Table 6. Suakin's conservation challenges: rankings of stakeholder group responses (refer to Table 1 for interviewees included within each stakeholder group).

[INSERT TABLE 6]

NR: No ranking (not identified as a driver).
F: Federal
S: State
L: Local

A consensus amongst all interviewees was that 'legal issues' was deemed as the major preventative factor for Suakin's attempted conservation. This was largely attributed to private ownership of the majority of Suakin's historic properties as the most significant long-term obstacle to Suakin's conservation. Many interviewees expressed great frustration towards the 'stalemate' situation that had been caused by: private ownership of the historic properties preventing implementation of government (or public) led conservation initiatives; and restrictive legislation over Suakin's historic island as a registered antiquities site preventing owners from implementing conservation and/or development initiatives within their historic properties. Also recognized as a major contributor to 'legal issues' as a conservation challenge was a lack of political and legislative support to enable Suakin's effective conservation. Confirming the impact of restrictive legislation over owners' activities were some families continuing to inhabit their properties on Suakin's historic island within informal shanty structures, rather than repairing their historic houses, as mentioned previously. A lack of enforced legislative protection was also evident throughout Suakin's mainland where numerous historic structures had been dismantled for their materials and/or to make way for new developments. This situation was evident even within the historic island that had legislative protection as an antiquities site. The Turkish Government was reported to have acted against NCAM's permission in dismantling three of Suakin's historic island structures, and in reusing materials from other (protected) historic buildings during their reconstruction.

'Financial restrictions' received consensus amongst the interviewees as Suakin's first or second conservation challenge, excluding Government's local representative who did not recognize this challenge. 'Financial restrictions' was explained to be a conservation challenge due to limited financial resources at both government and local levels. These restrictions were evident on the ground concerning the livelihoods of Suakin's local community, and the inability of Sudan's government to implement conservation initiatives without financial support from external parties. A number of interviewees also claimed that an absence of fundraising strategy prevented access to potential financial resources that could be directed towards Suakin's conservation. Examples of potential financial resources evident throughout this research included: the United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) long-term interest in Suakin's potential status as a potential world heritage site, and the financial contributions that could be accessed if this status was achieved; current and previous conservation works sponsored by the British and Turkish Governments; the new Suakin Fisheries building sponsored by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); and various investments throughout the area by local, national and international parties. In addition to these examples there was much expressed interest, by foreign governments and private investors, in funding potential conservation-related projects within Suakin's historic town.

'Stakeholder inclusion and collaboration' also received consensus

amongst the interviewees as Suakin's first or second conservation challenge, excluding Government's state representatives who did not recognize this challenge. The interviewees explained 'stakeholder inclusion and collaboration' as a conservation challenge to encompass conflicting operations between stakeholders and ineffective involvement of local parties. Demonstrating the complexity and impact of 'stakeholder inclusion and collaboration' on various aspects of Suakin's conservation were two key examples. The first example was the new Suakin's new Fisheries building, discussed previously throughout this paper. The building was constructed 2011-12 within Suakin's historic mainland town (adjacent to the historic island), funded by UNIDO, and implemented in collaboration with Sudan's Red Sea State Government (RSSG) (Figure 7). Informal stakeholder discussions revealed NCAM's concern towards the encroachment of this type of new development on the historic town. NCAM also believed that the location of the new Fisheries building, having ignored that outlined within their 'Suakin Development Plan' (SDP), overrode their authority. Local stakeholders (including the RSSG and Suakin Fisheries) however approved the construction of the new building, explaining that it directly supported local livelihoods, and expressing their opposition towards the long-term restrictions imposed by NCAM regarding such developments. The second example was one of Suakin's historic island mosques, also discussed previously throughout this paper. This mosque was previously restored through funds contributed by the British Embassy, and under NCAM's direct supervision. The Turkish Government later commenced their own project, and that included within their remit first dismantling and reconstructing of the same mosque previously restored by the British Embassy and NCAM (Figure 8). Informal discussion and observation revealed the British Embassy were perplexed at the absence of consultation regarding their involvement with this specific structure. Stressing the implications of these actions towards Suakin's future conservation initiatives is a representative from the British Embassy's statement that '...the main issue for us was the project we supported being adversely affected by competing priorities and complete lack of consultation between parties...this highlighted to us how precarious any future involvement would be'. NCAM's disagreement with the conservation methods implemented by the Turkish reportedly caused numerous conflicts on site, culminating in NCAM's lack of involvement with the project. As a result, reconstruction works at the time of this research were conducted and supervised by only the Turkish group's experts, without the involvement of NCAM deemed necessary through legal regulations.

[INSERT FIGURE 7]

Figure 7: The newly constructed Suakin Fisheries building within Suakin's historic mainland town (author's photo, 2012).

[INSERT FIGURE 8]

Figure 8: Turkish Government's reconstruction of a historic Suakin island

mosque (author's photo, 2012).

'Physical and environmental issues' received a ranking as either the second or third conservation challenge by the majority of the stakeholder groups. Exceptions included Government's state representatives who did not recognize 'physical and environmental issues' as a conservation challenge, and Government's local representative who recognized this as a first challenge. Numerous factors were broadly discussed between the interviewees as contributing to 'physical and environmental issues' as a conservation challenge. This included the impact of inadequate infrastructure and services, and planning and development, on conservation related proposals and the feasibility of potential investments; and the impact of the physical environment on the historic structures, such as decay of the historic structures caused by humidity and rising damp.

The identification of 'conservation knowledge and awareness' as a conservation challenge revealed a clear division between the stakeholder groups, apart from Government's local representative who did not recognize this challenge. Investors, Consultants and End Users considered a lack of 'conservation knowledge and awareness' amongst local parties as a conservation challenge. Government however considered a lack of 'conservation knowledge and awareness' amongst decision makers and implementers as a conservation challenge.

'Technical capacity' was recognized by all stakeholder groups as a conservation challenge, yet received comparatively less recognition by Government. This challenge was generally reasoned amongst the interviewees to involve an inadequate level of technical capacity amongst all conservation actors to implement the approaches and methods required for Suakin's conservation.

Suakin's conservation enablers

To conclude the interviews, the stakeholders were asked to suggest potential 'enablers' to address the 'challenges' to Suakin's conservation they had previously identified. The interviewees suggested four major 'enablers' to address their identified 'challenges' to Suakin's conservation. As shown in Table 7, Suakin's conservation enablers in order of their average rankings included: 'stakeholder awareness and involvement'; 'political and legislative measures' jointly ranked with 'development'; and 'improved management and planning'.

Table 7. Suakin's conservation enablers: rankings of stakeholder group responses (refer to Table 1 for interviewees included within each stakeholder group).

[INSERT TABLE 7]

NR: No ranking (not identified as a driver).

F: Federal

S: State

L: Local

Facilitating 'stakeholder awareness and involvement' through a range of means was suggested by all stakeholder groups as a potential enabler to address a number of Suakin's conservation challenges. Four were identified as key issues. Firstly, collaboration between stakeholders, specifically Suakin's historic property owners and government parties, was suggested to address the problem of ownership within the conservation challenge 'legal issues'. Secondly, local level involvement was considered to address the challenge of 'stakeholder inclusion and collaboration', as local stakeholders had often been excluded from Suakin's conservation initiatives, yet were regarded as the greatest potential conservation actor (as discussed within 'Suakin's conservation actors'). Thirdly, awareness raising activities and facilities, such as workshops and the formation of conservation project committees implemented through a project center, were recommended to address the challenge of 'conservation knowledge and awareness'. To address the challenge of 'financial restrictions', the generation of a fundraising strategy was proposed to raise awareness and encourage financial contribution towards Suakin's conservation. Finally, the need to facilitate 'stakeholder awareness and involvement' to address Suakin's conservation challenges was emphasized by a lack of interviewee response throughout the interview themes. This lack of response was explained to be a result of inadequate involvement with, and awareness of, Suakin's conservation, and was especially evident amongst End Users within the interview theme of 'Suakin's conservation practice'.

'Political and legislative measures' were suggested by all of Suakin's stakeholder groups, apart from Government's local representative, as a potential enabler to address Suakin's conservation challenges of 'legal issues' and 'financial restrictions'. These suggestions, as in the recognition of 'stakeholder awareness and involvement' as a conservation enabler, were discussed broadly between the interviewees. The nationalization of private properties was suggested to address the obstacles introduced by private ownership of Suakin's historic properties, within the challenge of 'legal issues'. Recommendations were made to improve legislation and policy to regulate conservation and development initiatives, and to increase political support/agenda towards conservation initiatives, to address the need for 'political and legislative support' within the challenge of 'legal issues'. Improved legislation and policy was also suggested to direct increased funding towards Suakin's conservation, to address the challenge of 'financial restrictions'.

Various forms of 'development' were recognized as key enablers by Investors and Consultants to address Suakin's conservation challenges, while recognized considerably less by End Users and not recognized by Government. Forms of 'development' as a conservation enabler included tourism to address

the challenge of 'physical and environmental issues', by encouraging improvement of Suakin's infrastructure and services, as suggested by Investors and Consultants. Investors and Consultants again suggested tourism, in addition to cultural development such as world heritage registration, to address the challenge of 'conservation knowledge and awareness', by encouraging awareness of Suakin's historic and cultural significance and conservation requirements. Physical development to reduce the impact of the physical environment on the historic structures, such as the provision of essential infrastructure, was considered by Investors, Consultants, and End Users to address the challenge of 'physical and environmental issues'.

'Improved management and planning' was suggested as a potential enabler by only Investors and Consultants yet received comparatively less recognition than the previous enablers. 'Improved management and planning' was suggested to address Suakin's conservation challenges of 'stakeholder inclusion and collaboration' concerning plans and proposals for Suakin's conservation that included defined roles for all of Suakin's stakeholder groups. To address 'physical and environmental issues', 'improved management and planning' was suggested through the development of an appropriate masterplan to ensure all physical interventions were appropriate to Suakin's conservation and relevant contexts.

The interviewees' greatest degree of response and consensus was demonstrated within the current interview theme towards the recognition of Suakin's conservation challenges, signifying the impact and significance to the stakeholders of the issues discussed. The broad and often shared interviewees' recognition of potential enablers to address Suakin's conservation challenges demonstrated a shared perspective and intention towards the future of Suakin's conservation. There were however still a number of differences reflecting the stakeholders' varying interests and roles. Consultants provided a more extensive recognition of Suakin's conservation challenges than other stakeholder groups. Indeed, Consultants' responses throughout the interview themes indicated a more continuous involvement throughout the conservation process than that of other stakeholder groups. Government demonstrated a lesser recognition than other stakeholder groups towards a number of conservation challenges, including 'stakeholder inclusion and collaboration', 'physical and environmental issues' and 'technical capacity'. This affirmed the suggestion throughout the previous interview themes of Government's removal, especially of the federal representatives, from the ground-based implementation of Suakin's conservation initiatives, and consequential detachment from Suakin's local culture and conditions.

Discussion

To address the issues influencing Suakin's conservation, the consensus of researchers was the development of an integrated approach. Such an approach is intended to facilitate interdependence between the conservation of Suakin as a built heritage, and Suakin's physical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts (Hansen 1972; Lane 1994; Salim 1997; Mallinson 2012). Representation and

collaboration between stakeholders is essential to achieve the integrated approach required towards Suakin's conservation (Bott et al. 2011; Daher 2005), yet their conflicting interests and operations prevent this (Ben-Hamouche 2010, Daher 2005). Therefore, local cultures, specifically Suakin's, have not yet been adequately included or considered in conservation initiatives (Ashley et al. 2011; Cueni 2007; Lin and Hsing 2009). As specified by Boussa (2010), to develop effective approaches towards the conservation of built heritage, community participation must be enabled within a collaborative framework between stakeholders.

Establishing the integrated and inclusive approach required for Suakin's conservation is however still an emerging field in practice (Bianca 2007; Chirikure et al. 2010). The developing context of Suakin also threatens the application of an approach where financial investment, political dedication, and effective stakeholder collaboration would need to work effectively. It is then not surprising that a comprehensive plan based on an inclusive participatory approach, and which considers the factors impacting Suakin's conservation, has yet materialized. However, as this research reveals, there is great potential to overcome these evident challenges. The stakeholder interviewees shared a strong overall intention towards achieving Suakin's conservation despite their differing interests and agendas. The stakeholders' perspectives, representing the various aspects of Suakin's conservation that should be addressed, also support the potential implementation of the comprehensive plan needed if they are going to work together.

Working towards establishing the integrated and inclusive approach required for Suakin's conservation, this research has begun to set out the divergences between the interests and agendas of Suakin's conservation stakeholders, as explained as necessary by Chirikure et al. (2010) and Yung and Chan (2011). As the perspectives of an equal representation of Suakin's stakeholder groups was being assessed, and for the first time, it was necessary for data to be collected on an individual basis to prevent the stakeholders from influencing each other's responses. However, as Yung and Chan (2011) argue, stakeholders must also be involved within the decision-making and planning process, rather than dismissed through token consultation. Emphasizing this acknowledged need for stakeholders' involvement, in the decision-making and planning process of Suakin's conservation, was the interviewees' inability to respond to a number of the interview themes; due to an explained lack of involvement with, and consequential knowledge of, Suakin's conservation practice. This was especially significant within the theme of 'Suakin's conservation practice', and amongst the End User interviewees. In addition to an inability to respond, interviewees' responses sometimes required guidance by the researcher through the suggestion of pre-determined categories within the interview themes. Therefore, further efforts must be conducted, such as capacity building to enable understanding of and active participation within Suakin's conservation, to engage stakeholders in collaborative efforts to address the issues identified during this research.

Whilst the interviewees' response suggested End Users to be the most excluded stakeholder group from Suakin's conservation practice, End Users were also revealed this research as Suakin's most diverse and complex stakeholder group. Suakin's other stakeholder groups had formally defined roles within Suakin's conservation and were generally more uniformly categorized, such as Government's 'federal', 'state' and 'local' representatives (Table 1). End Users, however, consist of anyone interacting with Suakin generally on a daily basis, which, as noted through field based observations, consisted of local residents, private property owners, religious groups, fishers, visitors (national and foreign), and many more yet to be identified. It was not possible to represent all of Suakin's End Users during this research due to time restrictions, so this research rather provides an indication of the constituents of this stakeholder group. The constituents of the End Users will also change in conjunction with Suakin's rapid development, and therefore a singular or short-term investigation and static definition of this group would be inaccurate long-term reference. This diversity and complexity of Suakin's End Users, that represent the context(s) that must be responded to through the conservation of Suakin as a built heritage, reinforce the need to enable End Users' understanding and active participation within Suakin's conservation. Further investigation to represent Suakin's End Users on an on-going basis, and as an integral part of Suakin's conservation process, is therefore imperative.

Conclusion

This research aimed to establish stakeholder perspectives on the current status of the conservation of the built heritage of Suakin. The interview findings identified a number of major factors influencing Suakin's conservation, and provide essential groundwork to understand the unique dynamics involved. It reveals great potential for implementation of a comprehensive and inclusive conservation approach, if the varying perspectives towards Suakin's conservation are harnessed and Suakin's local culture and stakeholders represented. Further research is now being undertaken to determine an inclusive approach to solving the practical and political problems involved. If such an inclusive approach is implemented, this could provide an opportunity for Suakin's local culture, represented by the stakeholders, to shape the conservation of their built heritage. This collaborative focused approach has never before been attempted in Suakin, despite recognition in earlier research of its necessity.

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