

## **A World Heritage Site: Diyarbakır under the Shade of Conflicts**

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### **Abstract**

Diyarbakır embodies different cultures, significant heritage properties and natural features. In 1990's to prevent deterioration on urban fabric, fortresses and cultural properties, some conservation attempts were started. After 2002, these attempts had speed up. In 2015 "The Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape" have inscribed in world heritage list. Progression has stopped with the armed conflicts at the end of 2015. This paper aims to examine the current situation and to question the future of the cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** *Diyarbakır, Cultural Heritage, Armed Conflict, Cultural Landscape, Safeguarding, Rehabilitation*

### **Introduction**

The Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape is located in southeast Anatolia which is a part of Mesopotamia region. The fortified city and the gardens are in the upper part of Tigris River basin and located on an escarpment. The cultural landscape comprises Amida Mound, the City Walls (including many inscriptions), Hevsel Gardens, Ten-Eyed Bridge, the Tigris River valley and the natural and water resources of the area.

Amida Mound situated inside Inner Castle where traces of first settlements are seen. Inner Castle embodies all stages of the urban developments. All civilizations used Inner Castle as a control and administrative center (Parla 2005). Gardens are located outside of the city walls along Tigris River and connect the city to the river. They are still used for fruit and vegetable farming. Ten-Eyed Bridge is situated above Tigris River. All these features are inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2015 by the means of being an outstanding example of combined works of nature and man.

The settlement which is surrounded by City Walls, still takes a part in daily life of Diyarbakır, functioning as residential, economic, touristic and cultural center. The fabric of urban settlement is formed by, monumental structures, traditional buildings and streets. Monumental structures are mostly religious and commercial buildings which belong to different dates, civilizations and religions. Remarkable examples of monumental buildings are St George Church (3<sup>rd</sup> A.C.), The Great Mosque (Ulucamii- 7<sup>th</sup> A.C.), Carvansaray inside Inner Castle (The Old Prison- 8<sup>th</sup> A.C.), Hz Süleyman Mosque (12<sup>th</sup> A.C.), Hasanpaşa Inn (16<sup>th</sup> A.C.), Fatihpaşa (Kurşunlu) Mosque (16<sup>th</sup> A.C.), Surp Giragos Armenian Church (17<sup>th</sup> A.C.) etc. Traditional buildings are configured around atriums, constructed with basalt, not directly opened to streets and organically positioned. Streets are narrow, green and open areas are limited (Revised Conservation Plan 2012) but the urban fabric deteriorated because of the pressures of inappropriate urban development.

Besides being a unique cultural landscape it has a critical importance in political arena. In the region where Diyarbakır is situated, multi-dimensional problems (terror activities, political struggles) are going on for three decades. To solve these problems State has announced 'peace processes' in the end of 2009.

Recently the future of peace process is unclear and unfortunately armed conflicts intensified since October 2015 especially in Suriçi which is the buffer zone of the cultural landscape. This situation has led to a destruction of invaluable cultural heritage. Experiences in Syria, Yemen, Mali, and Afghanistan show that cultural heritage is never more vulnerable than during times of conflict.

This paper aims to examine the current situation and to question the future of the cultural landscape also to raise the discussion at a base of international conventions, summarize the effects of political stability in safeguarding and tourism activities in cultural landscape. To do so all relevant data will be gathered and will be analyzed. Also interviews will be realized with Central Government and Municipality agencies. Additionally paper will contain suggestions to recover economic and tourism activities by safeguarding policies right after the conflict finishes.

### **Summary of an Exalted Past**

Amida today referred as Diyarbakır is a distinctive area which has prehistoric settlements dating back to 3500 BC. First settlements and early city walls belongs to Hurri-Mitanni civilization, situated in Amida Mound, today called Inner Castle (İçkale). The city was an important center in Roman Period. In two stages, it had remarkably expanded and reached to its final boundaries. Firstly walls were prolonged to east. After abandoning of Nisibis to Sasanian's, immigrants from Nisibis were placed to the western part of the city. Secondly, to involve the population inside, the walls were extended again. It became the metropolis of Roman Mesopotamian Region by the time. It was called as Amida in all Roman and Byzantine sources (Icomos 2015).

In seventh century the city was occupied by Islamic Forces. Then it became respectively a part of Marwanid, Seljukid, and Artuqid land. Ten-Eyed Bridge thought to be built during Marwanid period in eleventh century. Some traces are found from the Artuqid Palace in Amida Mound (Parla, 2005). City had been invaded by Timur in fourteenth century. While leaving Anatolia, Timur left the city to the founder of Aq Quyonlu State, who will make the city capital. Soon it became an important center where trade route from west to east passed (Icomos 2015). In the beginning of sixteenth century, city was conquered by Ottomans. It was governed by Ottoman Empire till twentieth century. When the Empire collapsed, the city became a land of Turkish Republic and in 1937 its name has changed as Diyarbakır.

All the periods the walls were repaired, reconstructed and some new bastions and castles were built also inside the city walls new monuments were constructed. For centuries, whatever the domain was, Diyarbakır was an important administrative and symbolic center of the region.

### **The Republic Period and First Safeguarding Activities**

The Ottoman Empire had a heterogeneous population consisting different religions, nationalities and languages. Armenians, Jewish, Muslim, Kurdish, Turkish people lived together in peace at Diyarbakır. Also these communities shaped Diyarbakır by constructing their own spaces, living their own culture and speaking their own language. Unfortunately the multi-cultural structure altered during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War (Management Plan 2014).

After the foundation of new Republic in 1923, municipal activities had been tried to be modernized. On behalf of modernization sometimes heritage properties were discounted. Diyarbakır Fortresses received its share by means of the demolishment of walls located in the north and south part in 1930. But the city continued its entity without any important change till 1960's. After 1960's, the population growth and urban development that could

be seen overall Turkey, affected the physical appearance. People had to move to urban areas from country sides and they mostly chose Diyarbakır for economic reasons. Migration deepened in late 1990's, due to increasing conflict between PKK<sup>1</sup> and Turkish State in rural regions. Most of the inhabitants of Suriçi, are populations whom do not have good economic conditions. So those who live in traditional buildings not only have the opportunity to respond the urgent need to implement restoration but also they split the buildings and built new squatters. Squatting expanded to the entire city, built adjacent to walls and spread to inner castle also multi-storey buildings caused physical fragmentations (Kejanlı & Dinçer 2011).

The physical deterioration of Suriçi increased day by day. This migration also entailed a rise on Kurdish Political Movement. In 1999 the party which rises from this movement won Municipality elections. Hence the tensions between Municipality and Central Government, which continues until today, have started.

Just before 1990's independently safeguarding activities was arisen in Turkey and fundamental terms were introduced, like conservation plan, conservation councils, funding mechanisms, by the entrance of Law on The Conservation of Cultural and Natural Property<sup>2</sup> in 1983. Same year Turkey also subscribed UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Such developments and the need of prevention from further deterioration; the Suriçi was registered as a historic urban settlement that should be preserved in 1988. The first conservation plan was approved in 1990. The plan favorably proposed green belt around the walls and re-function the Inner Castle for touristic and cultural purposes. But on the other hand, because of limited awareness of relevant agencies on safeguarding, plan had some failures. It authorized six storeys for commercial use which is higher than the city walls disturbing the skyline and fragmenting Suriçi. While re- adapting the morphology and proposing new roads it also did not pay much attention to the original locations of traditional houses, atrioms and water sources (Conservation Plan 1990). As it was expected, the plan could not prevent the raise of population and the condensation of built environment. In the period of 1990's very few conservation attempts on city walls had failures for similar reason. The implementation had been made without any survey and it had been done locally with inappropriate materials especially grey-cement (Icomos 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> PKK, Kurdistan Workers Party, takes place in 'European Union list of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts and subject to restrictive measures.' (European Union 2015)

<sup>2</sup> This law is the major law on heritage conservation and it is still in force with some improvements.



Figure 1: Restoration of Fortresses, Before- After (26th Buttress and 47th Buttress)

### Political Situation after 2002 and Peace Process

When AKP (Justice and Development Party) came to power in 2002 elections it was a turning point for Turkey. AKP committed to make Turkey to be a part of European Union. To insure that it announced its political program as; economic growth, democratic improvement, solution for terror. Economic growth constituted on construction sector. On behalf of democratic improvement they claimed to widen the rights of different ethnic, religious societies. For solution of terror peace process had been started.

These developments, which are experienced overall Turkey, affected Diyarbakır deeply. After setting peace processes, primarily conflicts in the region had decreased. Also Municipality and Central Government had worked more coherently. The region becomes secured for investments. Construction sector was risen rapidly and supported by both Municipality and Central Government. Economic value of land become more substantial than all other values including cultural ones. Safeguarding and conservation activities were considered as a part of construction sector without any accuracy about its values. New housing area built on Kırklar Hill which has a direct effect to the view of cultural landscape, indicates this phenomenon clearly.

Although the economic value of land became primarily, nevertheless the heritage economic value took a fundamental role in city's life. Tourism-based income had risen and heritage properties had re-functioned for touristic activities. The growing interest in the area has resulted in a rise of State allocation. A considerable budget (39 million Euros after AKP come to power) was reserved for project development and restoration of the cultural properties and safeguarding of Suriçi (Governorate of Diyarbakır 2016).

In 2007 and 2008 an urban regeneration protocol was signed between Housing Development Administration, Metropolitan and District Municipality and Governorate for Inner castle (İçkale) also for the southwest part of Suriçi. In the content of this protocol squatting expropriation was carried out and demolishment has started. In Inner castle a 218 illegal structures and in southwest part of Suriçi 361 illegal structures, which totally correspond to the half were removed (Housing Development Administration [TOKİ] 2016).

But the work could not be finalized because of disagreements between Municipality and Central Government till today.

In 2012 two major situation, which have a direct effect to the property, have occurred. Firstly the conservation plan, which is on force today, was revised to avoid problematic issues that have been mentioned. As 1990 dated plan proposed, the squatting around the city walls were removed in a limited area and green belt could be arranged, also conservation works started in Inner City; some historic buildings arranged as touristic and cultural spaces. In revised plan in addition to these implementations it brings new regulations about building heights (buildings could not exceed the wall heights), reconfigures the morphology according to original locations of traditional houses, atriums, water sources, streets etc., projects lots for public use (green areas, playgrounds for schools or bazaars) and proposes to reduce population and development pressures (Revised Conservation Plan 2012).

Secondly, the “Law on Regeneration of Places under Disaster Risks” (2012) entered into force. This Law determines the principles of rehabilitation, discharge and renovation of places and buildings which are under natural disaster risks. Suriçi was announced as “Risky Area” by Central Government. Because of being a Risky Area the Ministry of Urbanization and Environment get a Master Plan prepared in 2013, which was luckily done by the planning company who worked on the conservation plan. It has been designed as an operational guideline for conservation plan (Master Plan 2013).

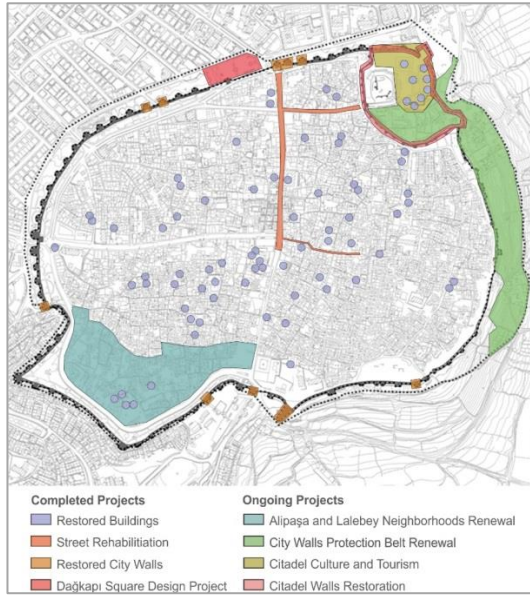


Figure 2: Maps of Conservation Projects

In 2014, the preparation of nomination documents to be included in UNESCO World Heritage List had started rapidly. In nomination period the Municipality and the Central Government worked coherently. In 2015 “The Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape” has inscribed in world heritage list. Also two buffer zones have determined; Suriçi and a protection border outside the cultural landscape (Unesco WHC 2015). Although Suriçi has significant values; the urban development in lacking quality and squatting disrupted the authenticity and integrity of the city. So it could not be included to world heritage. Within the nomination process management plan has been developed. In the context of the plan, nominated property has divided into two major management components which are Fortresses and the Gardens. It consists of six themes that focus on restructuring economic activities, conservation processes (for tangible and intangible heritage), planning activities, administrative improvements and risk management (Management Plan 2014). After the declaration of world heritage the investments and allocated resources increased.

From 2003 to 2015 totally 9.5 million euros was used up for survey and restoration of Fortresses (Governorate of Diyarbakir 2016). Although the attempt of preservation increased yet the works carried out did not succeed. Besides specific problems to Diyarbakir (owing to the large scale of properties, lack of an effective planning) also general problems on safeguarding and conservation in Turkey (limited competent technical

restoration personnel, the absence of traditional craftsmen etc.) the implementations could not be satisfactory. ICOMOS reported the inconvenient works in Advisory Body Evaluation in 2015.

Additionally, lack of conservation precision among people, miss-uses of cultural heritage have been another problem especially properties which are used for touristic and commercial purposes. For example the 9<sup>th</sup> Buttress is functioned as café and the user attached inappropriate wet spaces and architectural elements. With the rising profits, buttresses occupied by unauthorized people.

In all probabilities the problems mentioned above were surmountable but with the armed conflict things have become complicated.

### **Armed Conflict Since 2015**

With the invasion of Iraq in 2003 turmoil have started in the Middle East. The turmoil expanded by the conflict in Syria and the gaining power of ISIS. This changing balance affected Turkey's domestic and foreign political situation. Strategies of Turkish State and PKK has veered and peace process eased off, with the general elections in 2015 it totally frozen. Within this period, operations started in some districts where PKK is strongly organized. One of these district is the buffer zone of the World Heritage Property; Suriçi. It was announced that operation aims to remove ammunition storage areas, ditches and barricades in Suriçi. In September and November, 2015 a sequence of short term curfew was ordered and low intensity conflict emerged. Most of the inhabitants moved outside of the area. After December, 2015 a long term curfew began especially in east parts of Suriçi (more than 100 days) and conflicts intensified (Governorate of Sur District 2016). Some heavy weapons like mortars, explosives used in conflicts. To overcome the situation Military forces used massive vehicles like tanks. Six district, which embodies 84 monumental and 268 traditional houses, affected more deeply. In March, 2016 although State announced that operations were completed, still search operations are going on, so some districts are close to unauthorized access including Site Manager (personal communication with H. Aksoy and N. Soyukaya 17 April 2016). Because of limited access it is not possible to detect the latest status of the area mentioned and cultural properties. But to put a general view of the situation, there is going to be a summary about what appeared in the media, statements of authorities, on site survey and interviews done with two important actors representing Central Government (Governor) and Municipality (Site Manager) by authors.





Both of them pointed out that; there are damages in cultural heritage properties, some security measures have taken in the site. For this; the schools and some buttresses are turned to police stations. And the demolished buildings removed outside. After with the remark of Site Management Directorate in the case of rubble belonging to cultural properties a commission is set from Central Government experts to distinguish and reserve these materials. A special rubble disposal facility has specified and it has taken under preservation for re-examination. Damage assessment works have not started comprehensively. After each short term curfews site management experts have accessed and documented the current situation (5 times) but after the long term curfew Governorate does not allow the entrance to the area.

But there are different explanations between two actors. Mainly site manager's argument is that cultural properties are unconsidered for security, implementations and demolition are done destructing the urban fabric. Site manager claims that the streets are widened and some new streets and squares are opened to connect police stations to each other. Functioning of buttresses and schools as police stations, makes cultural heritage as a target. Although these implementations are approved by regional conservation council, these are not appropriate to conservation law and plan. The site is closed to independent conservation specialists (personal communication with N. Soyukaya 17 April 2016).

On the other hand governor claims that security and preservation are sustained at the same time. The implementations done by State are legal, appropriate to conservation law and approved by regional conservation council. Demolishment was occurred because of the terrorist attacks and bombings. The heavily damaged buildings are determined and their demolition decisions are taken by commission. Rubbles of cultural properties are preserved in-situ. None of the cultural properties are damaged consciously. In walls and buttress there are no significant damages. The reason for not letting the site management and independent conservation specialists to six districts is the problem of providing security. Primarily Central Government experts are preferred for damage assessment; site management will be included if needed (personal communication with H. Aksoy 17 April 2016).

### **Statements of Authorities**

Before operations finished prime minister declared that they wanted to make Suriçi to look like Toledo in Spain. This analogy has started some discussions about the process. Operations finished at 9th of March 2016 after that time, discussions started at local and national level for rehabilitation of the area. Most of the estates which were private ownership were expropriated by "urgent expropriation decision", which restricts objections of property owners, at 21<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.

At 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2016 prime minister declared more comprehensive rebuilding program of Suriçi. There were important emphasizes at this declaration. First of all prime minister announced that revision of conservation plan which was approved at 2012 would be complied. Property rights will be protected. Religious motifs emphasized. City walls will be repaired and demolished parts will be completed. Government would sustain encouragements and grants for the tradesman and owners of the properties. A long term credit mechanism was developed for tenants to buy their own houses which were built by Housing Development Administration in the city periphery (Hürriyet 2016).

Firstly, these declarations show that directing tenants to city periphery will change social fabric of Suriçi. There is a contradiction between decision of urgent expropriation and declaration of prime minister about property rights protection. This contradiction was clarified by governor that decision of urgent expropriation would be used at necessary conditions to accelerate rehabilitation process. In addition to this, Tender Law was changed at 14th of April 2016 so administration can negotiate for tender with the selected firms. A holistic project was not presented yet.

### **Summary and Suggestions**

Diyarbakır which hosts many civilizations in history embodies different cultures, significant heritage properties and natural features. Today the city which is surrounded with Fortress, Suriçi, is still an important center. Migration and urban development affected Suriçi in many aspects especially on safeguarding. In 1990's to prevent deterioration on urban fabric, fortresses and cultural properties some conservation attempts were started. After 2002 with the political and economic changes also rise in conservation consciousness, these attempts had speed up. Properly revised conservation plan, increase in the budget allocation for restoration works, cleaning of squatters are some examples of improvement. With the inscription of "The Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape" in world heritage list at 2015, it received its real value. This progression has stopped with the armed conflicts at the end of 2015.

At this point, the future of the landscape is flue. The announcements about rehabilitation show that there is an intention for safeguarding; but due to lack of clearness on what and how is going to be held makes the process suspicious. Legal modifications show that there will be an overdose intervention and uncontrolled transformation.

Addition to this, the political situation do not led all actors to work coherently about safeguarding and rehabilitation. Central Government do not entertain Municipality to all processes due to the thought of: "Municipality is under the effect of PKK". Municipality do

not trust to Central Government due to the thought of: “the things are done for security and raise of land rent”.

It should not have been like this.

One of the fundamental regulation in international area about armed conflict is Geneva Convention which consists of different kind of topics including protection of cultural heritage. It has prohibited hostility directed against the cultural heritage, to use of cultural heritage in support of the military effort, to make such properties the object of reprisals. PKK, at 1995, stated to undertake to respect the Geneva Convention (Sivakumaran 2012).

This regulation also references Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention which was signed in 1965 by Turkey. It gives responsibility to prepare in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict. It indicates that cultural heritage cannot be used for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage but it can be used in cases where military necessity imperatively requires. This means that if a side uses cultural property for its military purposes the other side can interfere even the conditions that cultural property can be damaged. In such conditions, cultural property shall be open to international control. Especially part of the convention which is titled ‘conflicts not of an international character’, article 19; sides of the conflict shall be bound to respect for cultural property. If it is possible by means of special agreements, sides shall endeavour bring in the force all part of the convention and the application shall not affect the legal status of the sides.

Before armed conflicts Turkish State must take precaution against this situation and in conservation plan and master plan the effects of armed conflict should be foreseen. Risk management plans considering man-made disasters should be developed.

By using cultural properties for its military purposes like storing ammunition, diking the streets and making barricades PKK did not act according to these conventions.

After operations finished, Turkish State must not make such properties the object of reprisals with using them as security points.

Whatever the struggle between Turkish State and PKK is, the cultural properties and landscapes etc. should not be the arena of the armed conflicts. According to these conventions by means of special agreements sides of the conflict shall be bound to protect the cultural property.

From now on, the rehabilitation process should made pellucid. It should be established a reliable environment for the actors related with conservation (Ministry of Culture and

Tourism, Governorate, Metropolitan and District Municipalities, non-governmental organizations, independent experts). The landscape should be handled with a holistic project concerning economic, social, spatial, cultural aspects. Cultural heritage are never more vulnerable than during times of conflict, the destruction of them causes irreversible damage to precious values. So rather than economic and political sensibilities conservative perspective should be featured.

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