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Abstract

**CONSERVATION AS A PROCESS OF REPRESENTATION:
THE KURDISH TEXTILE MUSEUM OF ERBIL IN IRAQI KURDISTAN**

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From 1975 to 1991 The Iraqi Central government destroyed ca: 4000 Kurdish villages and relocated its populations to “collective” towns in central and south Iraq. Some were relocated in Kurdish cities among them were Kurdish nomadic tribes. Iraq –Iran war ran from 1981 to 1988 and ethnic cleansing campaign from 1983 to 1991 (Anfal Campaign) All above led nomadic tribes to abandon raising animals and weaving traditions. By the mid 1980s the production of traditional weaving totally died out.

This paper discusses the ‘Weaving Project’ developed by Lolan Sipan, anthropologist and director of the Kurdish textile Museum of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Project supports the effort of local communities to stay autonomous and self sufficient while preserving their traditional knowledge and skills. It also addresses socio-cultural issues of representation through the conservation of tangible and intangible textile heritage.

It is argued that conflicts between ‘use’, ‘access’ and conservation is a critical challenge for national and international conservators who have to develop procedures and use resources adapted to this particular socio-cultural context. It is also demonstrated that the very principle of conserving intangible heritage, such as traditional skills, knowledge, practices and use of natural resources contributes to the preservation of tangible cultural heritage, such as the Museum textile collection and contemporary textile production.

The Weaving Project uses the Kurdish Textile Museum’s collection (textiles, looms and documentation) as a catalyst to build on the experience of institutional and local communities and to create a sustainable partnership between the nomadic tribes, the Museum and conservators. This paper focuses on the development, implementation and evaluation of a transfer of knowledge between representatives of the Kurdish Nomadic communities and national and international heritage professionals and takes into account how working with people who have very little notion of ‘modern’ conservation principles and practices requires a willingness to be adaptable in practical methods and materials and tact to adapt to different value systems.