Introducing *ACTOR* as a Learning Framework -
Merging Cultural Heritage Assessments with Risk Reduction and Disaster Recovery

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Conference Topics;
Heritage Risk Management,
Disaster Management and Education
Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction

Abstract

There is a general professional consensus that vulnerability and risk assessments are crucial tasks in any serious attempt to substantially reduce disaster losses and enhance the reconciliation or recovery in the post event phase. However, cultural heritage is often considered as an overarching element that *should be* assessed, rather than a permanent key component of the assessments. Research in disaster management noticeably illustrates how cultural heritage is increasingly at risk from disasters caused by natural and human-made hazards, as well as the effects of climate change. Still, disaster risk reduction interventions tend to overlook the importance of incorporating cultural heritage, as an independent and highly valuable component in order to increase the risk reduction. Furthermore, there is a lack of methodological expansion in order to merge disaster assessment and cultural heritage. These limitations serve as motivation for the introduction of the ACTOR framework (Assessing Cultural Threats, Obstacles and Resilience) ACTOR aims at merging cultural heritage assessments with risk reduction and disaster recovery, and provide disaster management students with a learning framework that considers how different impacts of cultural heritage affect disaster risk reduction, and how disasters and risk influence cultural heritage. The ambition of ACTOR is to outline a conceptual framework for cultural heritage in relation to disaster risk reduction interventions, and to introduce a methodological contribution to the field of disaster management education and training that places cultural heritage at the center of disaster risk reduction.

Background, aim and objectives for ACTOR

Cultural heritage is not limited to material objects that we can see and touch. It also consists of immaterial elements such as traditions or living expressions inherited from ancestors, oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and knowledge and practices concerning the skills to survive natural hazards[1].Intangible and tangible cultural heritage plays an essential role in how communities prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. Hence, it is disturbing how cultural heritage is increasingly the target of systematic and deliberate attacks in numerous conflicts around the world, including plundering of ancient artefacts on a massive scale. Tangible cultural heritage like historic monuments, archaeological sites and national museums are increasingly affected or destroyed by threats from both natural and human-made hazards[2]. The ongoing systematic destruction of cultural sites and artefacts because of hostile conflicts, and the progressive loss due to natural hazards or disasters such as floods, landslides, storms, fire, earthquakes and the effects of climate change, has become a major concern. In order to safeguard intangible cultural heritage we need different measures from the ones used for conserving monuments, sites and natural spaces. Protecting intangible cultural heritage means keeping it alive and regularly practiced with a transfer of knowledge within communities and between generations. The latter withholds consideration of human factors that need to be included in assessments and uncover a complexity that is difficult to safeguard.

Nevertheless, until recently conventional literature and research dealing with disaster risk reduction (DRR) have largely focus on the demographic, administrative, socioeconomic and political aspects of disasters, and hence been criticized for neglecting cultural elements in their strategies and DRR activities[3]. Several humanitarian actors have made their contribution to the debate and humanitarian agencies. United Nations organisations and scholars have increased their attention to not only the phenomenon of DRR, community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) and community-based disaster management (CBDM)[4], but also to the importance of culture in general and cultural heritage in particular, as an element of good practice in DRR, CBDRR and CBDM. The World Disasters Report from 2014 commenced an academic debate, when emphasizing how DRR must take account of all the causes of vulnerability – including cultural ones – as the starting point for risk reduction[5]. Furthermore, a comprehensive guide on risk preparedness for cultural heritage has been produced by the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)[6] and the Committee of the Blue Shield has provide guidelines to cultural heritage protection national authorities in countries and regions at risk[7].

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[1] UNESCO (2011) - "What is intangible cultural heritage?" https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003

[2] UNESCO, Heritage Emergency Fund (2016) Annual Progress Report, The impact of disasters and conflicts on heritage (pp 16-22) https://en.unesco.org/system/files/private_documents/hef_2016_annual_progress_report_en.pdf

[3] Kulatunga, Udayangani (2010), Impact of culture towards disaster risk reduction, University of Salford, Salford Manchester; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227640419_Impact_of_Culture_towards_Disaster_Risk_Reduction; Hoffman, S.M. and Oliver-Smith (1999), The angry earth; disasters in anthropological perspective, Routledge, NY, 1-16; Wisner, R., Blaikie P., Cannon T. and Davis, I. (2004), At risk natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters – 2nd edition, Routledge, London

[4] Luna, Emmanuel M. (2014) Community-based disaster risk reduction and disaster management, in Disaster Management International Lessons in risk reduction, response and recovery (pp 43-61)

[5] World Disasters Report 2014,Focus on Culture and Risk, http://www.ifrc.org/publications-and-reports/world-disasters-report/world-disasters-report-2014/

[6] Stover, Herb (1998) Risk Preparedness, Guide on risk preparedness for cultural heritage, ICCROM https://www.iccrom.org/publication/risk-preparedness-management-manual-world-cultural-heritage

[7] Citation; "Johnnides, Christianna" (2010). Disaster Preparedness for Cultural Heritage. EAP DRM Knowledge Notes; No. 14. World Bank, Washington, DC. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/10125

The overall international strategic attention towards cultural heritage protection is increasing, and many academic articles now specifically cover the link between culture and DRR. However most research articles and academic immersions regarding safeguarding cultural heritage are based on a particular context (e.g. case study of tsunami risk in Padang, Indonesia[8]). Despite the important contributions, they do not provide a broad insight into how cultural heritage is affected when working with DRR in general, but merely highlight the impact on cultural heritage in regards to the case they exemplify.

Despite a growing consensus that cultural heritage needs to be systematically embedded in risk assessments. There is still a lack of integration of cultural heritage assets into existing disaster management plans, and hence an effective use of preventive approaches that improve -or maintain the condition of heritage assets to ensure survival of the heritage and its significant messages during and after natural disasters. The level of preparedness for all types of cultural heritage, in regards to disaster risks and humanitarian crisis, is still very low in most regions of the world[9].

So how do we, as scholars and teachers, embrace this challenge and how do we transfer the complexity of cultural heritage to the students, and forward an approach that honor culture heritage in practice more than in rhetoric?

The intention of the ACTOR framework is to answer that question and mend the gap between theoretical high academia and practice. The framework emphasizes how cultural heritage constitutes a major resource on which to found sustainable social development, economic growth, and community resilience. In addition, that cultural sites or multi-religious antique buildings can act as a symbol of reconciliation and support cohesion and hope in the affected community and thus promote recovery. By doing so this work and the ACTOR framework supports the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Sendai Framework highlights the necessity of mutual knowledge sharing *and training* in order to implement new initiatives and promote local development, and emphasizes processes that include cultural heritage and supports the protection of cultural and other sites of historical, cultural heritage and religious interest[10].

Why ACTOR and why the focus on disaster management students?

Both culture and disaster risk management have become imperative concepts in the humanitarian world, as the future legitimacy and effectiveness of humanitarian aid rely on its ability to address culture mechanisms and understand what culture means in practice. Cultural heritage should not be isolated, but rather placed within the other disaster, development and livelihoods challenges. Hence, disaster management students are often encouraged to rethink risk actors and analyse the underlying factors of the risks that people are exposed to. However, there is a need for a framework to remember and transform the theoretical concepts into a useful practical tool throughout their studies and hopefully also later as practitioners. This is what ACTOR intends to do. The framework displays how and where cultural heritage

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[8] Brikmann, J.,Neysa .S & Fiedler, G. (2015) A culture of resilience and preparedness; the 'last mile' case study of tsunami risk in Padang, Indonesia, Cultures and Disasters, (pp. 235-255) Routledge

[9] Morini, Claudia (2014), La protezione internazionale ed europea dei beni culturali,(pp 105-116) http://docplayer.it/11208941-La-protezione-internazionale-ed-europea-dei-beni-culturali.html

[10] The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, cultural heritage, impact of disaster on and protection of: 5; 24(d); 30(d) http://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

provides important insights and opportunities for disaster risk reduction interventions, and how cultural heritage preservation can contribute to post-disaster rehabilitation and recovery.

By introducing the acronym ACTOR as a new learning framework, disaster management students are encouraged to embed culture and heritage throughout their analysis of ongoing crises, and to advocate the importance of cultural heritage as a central element of community resilience and local development. The framework illustrates the range of possible threats, obstacles and resilience factors that are often forgotten. The framework visualises, simplifies complex events, and helps the user get a better understanding of the current situation, which facilitates the planning process and the elaboration of disaster management plans.

The methodological approach and outline of the ACTOR framework

The ACTOR framework is the first attempt to place 1) cultural heritage at the center of DRR, CBDM and CBDRR and 2) the general risk perception at the center of the disaster management training. The framework does not constitute an in-depth overview, but serves, as a framework that can lead student's attention to cultural elements that otherwise would be neglected.

ACTOR is an easy to remember acronym that stands for: ***Assessing Cultural Threats, Obstacles and Resilience***. Each of these terms represents an approach or constraint that can assist students in their analysis and provide an overview of how risk and culture interacts with disaster management- and maybe even be the cultural trigger and creation of man- made crises in a given situation and context. Students are encouraged to use the framework when working on desktop exercises to evaluate and reflect on the humanitarian measures that were/are needed in order to remove the obstacles or strengthen resilience, and in particular how cultural heritage can increase or jeopardize community resilience or where cultural heritage is, threaten to be shattered. They need to assess the threats that a community or society culturally encounter before, under and after an event, and they need to address.

The ACTOR framework consists of two figures. Figure 1. Focuses on disaster situations caused by natural hazards and Figure 2. focuses on man-made compound disasters. The students' reflections and considerations will vary according to the character of the circumstances, the first consideration the students need to make is to characterize the hazards and select one of the two overarching approaches, being Figure 1 or Figure 2.

The, ACTOR, acronym is divided into three adapting terms, the **A**ssessing **C**ultural heritage is the overarching introduction. **T**hreats are placed ad the main analysis focal point, but really act just like an iceberg, only showing a third of the overall mass. Thus, the **O**bstacles and the **R**esilience is placed as under arching themes to reflection upon, when working with hazard-prone areas or reconciliation in local communities. In order to create consensus and promote a holistic understanding of the importance of cultural aspects in disaster management, ACTOR is presented in association with other models or acronym known to the students throughout the framework, there are places under each acronym alongside consideration concerning others human factors.
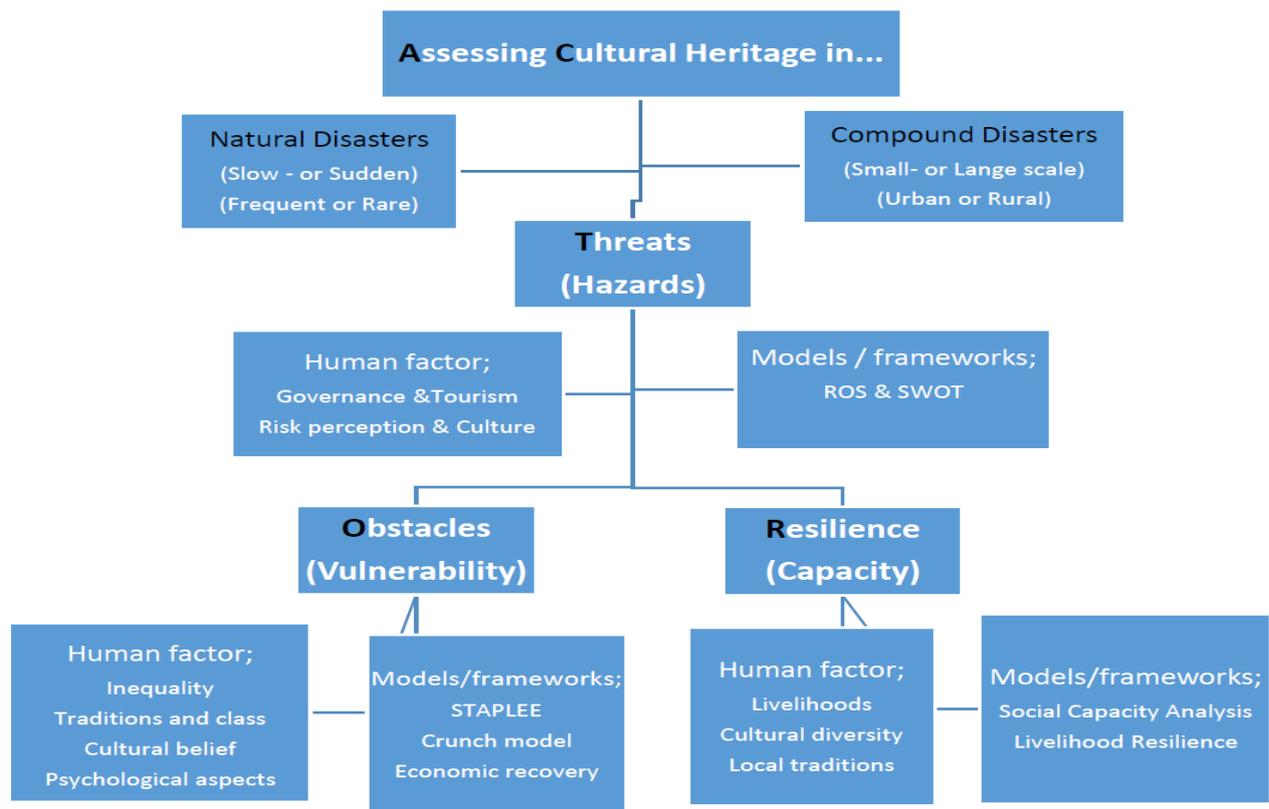
Figure 1, Assessing Cultural Threats, Obstacles and Resilience (ACTOR) in a Disasters Caused by Natural Hazards
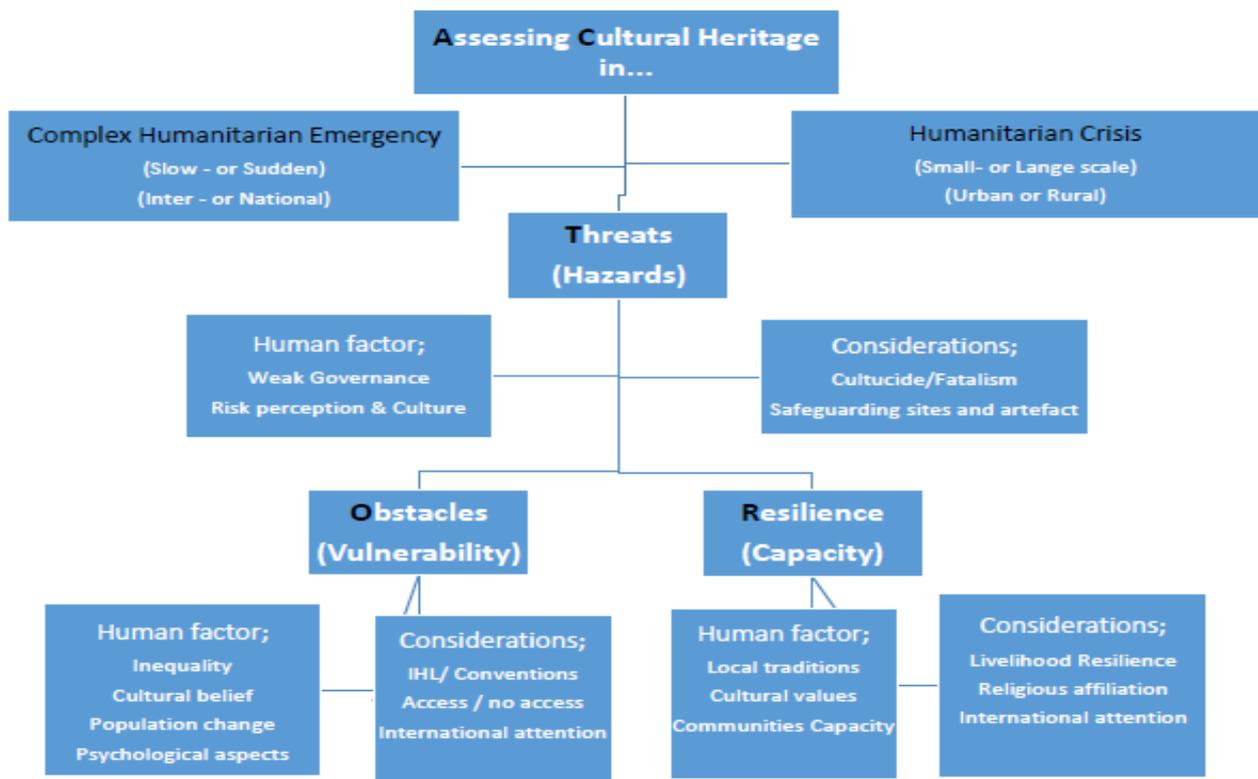

Figure 2, Assessing Cultural Threats, Obstacles and Resilience (ACTOR) in a Humanitarian Crisis

The main aim of the ACTOR framework is to provide a structural framework that systematically guides disaster management students in the analysis of the current state of culture preservation in a given disaster or hazard. ACTOR highlights how secondary (indirect) and cumulative cultural impacts are assessed, although it is almost impossible to identify all dimensions of cultural impacts because one change leads to another. Future patterns of vulnerability, both as long-term results of the impact on cultural heritage and due to other factors (e.g., climate change), should be considered in this stage. The students should use the ACTOR framework to estimate secondary and cumulative impacts.

The ACTOR framework means to simplify the procedures associated with culture analysis, and creates a space for greater engagement with the context, encouraging responsiveness to the realities of crisis or disasters on the ground. Even though the framework seeks to simplify, it can contribute with additional complexity, hence students are encouraged to be critical to the information they have and gather in relation to cultural heritage. When using the framework the students are obliged to use trustworthy databases, as well as local voices and cultural opinions, or be aware on the lack of the latter.

Students' engagement and understanding of the framework is vital, and the introduction should take place under supervision, and be use with cases various times throughout the introduction. The ACTOR introduction should furthermore be practiced alongside the use of others models/frameworks, and with reference to cultural theory and the complexities of DRR, CMDR and CMDRR.

Preliminary conclusion and next steps

The overarching aim is to provide a conceptual framework for disaster management students in relation to strengthening the overall knowledge of Threats, Obstacles and Resilience when they tend to support the protection of cultural and collective institutions and other sites of historical, cultural heritage and religious interest, in relation to DRR in local communities.

The ACTOR framework and this work in progress does not provide all the answers to these complex issues, which vary a great deal around the world. However, it is shows where the starting points are. It gives some indications of the direction in which we need to go and draws on examples of good integration of traditional and 'modern' ideas for achieving effective vulnerability reduction. Next stage will be to assess and incorporate ACTOR in the disaster management curriculum and review the framework after the use of cases in the classroom.

Consequently change notions, insert additional models or assumptions and alter the theory according to the student's' evaluations. The success of the Framework as a teaching tool is not just related to the desktop or classroom approach, but also dependent on an effective and incorporated practical approach. Hence, the next step is to introduce the use of the ACTOR framework as a new learning framework to practice partners and field workers and repeatedly reevaluate the framework in order to secure the best framework possible.