Living heritage as shared knowledge: advancing community-led reconstruction in post-earthquake Antakya

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Citation of Published Version

Pasta, F., Johnson, C., & Can, Ş. (2025). Living heritage as shared knowledge: advancing community-led reconstruction in post-earthquake Antakya. *Environment & Urbanization*, *37*(2), 440-464. https://doi.org/10.1177/09562478251365120 (Original work published 2025).

Abstract

This paper investigates *living heritage* as a crucial entry point for community-led post-disaster reconstruction, drawing on Architecture Sans Frontières–UK's (ASF-UK) work in post-earthquake Antakya, Turkey. As state-led reconstruction often disrupts local ways of life and overlook residents' needs, living heritage is proposed as a framework to broaden the range of perspectives included beyond technical expertise, providing a platform for constructive engagement within communities and among stakeholders. The paper situates this approach within critical heritage and participatory recovery debates, contextualizing challenges through Antakya's historical and socio-political dynamics. It outlines ASF-UK's ongoing collaboration with local civil society, framing living heritage as shared knowledge – the tacit and explicit relations connecting people, places, and practices. Technical assistance is reimagined as an interpretive role, documenting and visualising embedded community knowledge to enhance advocacy efforts. We argue that a living heritage approach supports inclusive, locally grounded reconstruction pathways in contested post-disaster settings.

1. Introduction

This paper reflects on the work of Architecture Sans Frontières–UK (ASF-UK)[1] in Antakya, Turkey, after the 2023 earthquakes, examining how a living heritage approach can inform post-disaster recovery and the role of socio-technical assistance within it. These reflections draw on ASF-UK's long-term engagement in the city, based on three small-scale participatory action-research projects conducted between 2023 and 2025 with local partners. This paper offers a first-hand insight on how a living heritage framework can open room for community-led planning and engagement with different stakeholders in post-disaster settings

Antakya, a historic and modern city in Hatay province, was the most affected urban area in the February 2023 earthquakes that devastated south-eastern Turkey and northern Syria. Though 200–300 km from the epicentres in Kahramanmaraş, ground amplification from alluvial soil and poor construction led to catastrophic destruction, with an estimated 85% of the city destroyed or severely damaged. Strong aftershocks, including a 6.4 magnitude quake, caused further collapses (Euronews, 2023). The official death toll of 23,000 in Hatay – out of 53,537 across the earthquake-affected region – is believed by many to be an underestimate (*Bianet*, 2023c). Around 200,000 people, from a pre-earthquake provincial population of 1.2 million, now live in container camps, informal shelters, or have migrated to other cities in order to have access to essential services (Evrensel, 2024; Aykurt, 2023).

Across Turkey, reconstruction after earthquakes is largely managed in a centralised manner by TOKI, the government's mass housing agency, which subcontracts to firms closely tied to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), in power for over two decades (TMMOB Mimarlar Odası, 2024). Antakya is no different; as of 2025, most of the debris has been cleared by construction firms in one the largest debris removal operations ever (Mavroulis et al., 2023); tower blocks are emerging on the outskirts of the city and land is being expropriated in the city centre, threatening to permanently displace residents unable to afford the new housing (Duvar English, 2023; Çılğın, 2024).

Antakya's historical background makes post-disaster rebuilding particularly contentious. As a region long marginalised both geographically and socio-culturally, it has faced a century of state-led cultural erasure and dispossession (Duman, 2015, 2023). Within this context, both immediate relief and long-term reconstruction efforts are deeply contested. As the reconstruction is being pushed forward with minimal local input, many fear the government is using the process to reshape the city's socio-spatial structure and demographic balance (Amaya-Akkermans, 2024;

[1] ASF-UK is a small NGO focused on community-led planning. ASF-UK has experience in post-earthquake recovery with work in Nepal in 2016 (see https://www.asf-uk.org/pages/23-nepal), but the work in Antakya marks its first engagement in Turkey. While the organisation is UK-based, most associates involved in this project are from Antakya or based in Turkey. The authors have been involved in this work in various capacities: two of them, affiliated with ASF-UK, have led the organisation's efforts on the ground from the outset; the third one has been engaged in recovery initiatives in Turkey since the 1999 Marmara earthquake. The three authors are currently working together to carry ASF-UK's work in Antakya forward.

Gürsel, 2024; Osterlund, 2024; T24, 2024). In response, grassroots movements have rallied around the slogan *Ma rihna, nihna hon* – in the local Arab dialect, "we haven't gone, we are here" – claiming a stake in the rebuilding while tying their resistance to displacement with broader struggles for cultural recognition (Altunok, 2023; Korur Fincancı, 2023; Aykaç et al., 2024).

Aims

This article reflects on ASF-UK's efforts to advance people-centred recovery in Antakya, working alongside local civil society in this complex socio-political context. Since mid-2023, ASF-UK has supported grassroots groups in creating spaces for planning and advocating reconstruction grounded in residents' needs. In contrast to central government-led redevelopment driven by technocratic narratives, ASF-UK and its partners have centred "living heritage" as a dynamic system of community knowledge, practices, and relationships that connect people to their environment. Rooted in local ways of life, shaped over time and continuously evolving, living heritage offers both a foundation for community mobilisation and a platform for constructive, non-confrontational engagement among stakeholders to reimagine the city's future.

Ultimately, by reflecting our work, this article aims to highlight the reciprocal relationship between living heritage and community-led recovery. It demonstrates that participatory methodologies are essential to sustaining the repair and adaptation of living heritage in the face of destruction and dispossession caused by disasters and top-down planning policies imposed from above. Simultaneously, we have found that strategically framing community-driven planning through a living heritage lens can strengthen community mobilisation and create spaces for critical engagement among different stakeholders, expanding the possibilities for participatory planning.

Process and Methods

ASF-UK's engagement in Antakya began in August 2023, six months after the earthquakes. As ASF-UK affiliates based in Turkey and abroad, we observed both the central government's dominant recovery narrative and the voices emerging from local communities, and in response, ASF-UK connected with grassroots organisations and local academics in Antakya. We began working with the concept of living heritage to help amplify the role of Antakya's residents as primary agents in reconstructing their city. Our work revolved around a two-way question: How can community-led planning contribute to repairing living heritage? And conversely, how can living heritage be harnessed to advance community mobilisation and planning?

So far, ASF-UK's work in Antakya has taken shape through three interlinked initiatives. First, a two-day public forum in November 2023 brought together local actors to identify urgent challenges and produced a Collective Statement calling for social, ecological, and cultural concerns to be central to the reconstruction agenda (ASF-UK et al., 2024). Second, in 2024, ASF-UK collaborated with Architecture for All (Herkes İçin Mimarlık/HiM) and Hatay Earthquake Solidarity (Hatay Deprem Dayanışması/HDD) on the "Reviving Living Heritage" project.[2] As part of this, ASF-UK facilitated participatory planning workshops in Çekmece neighbourhood (ASF-UK and

[2] The project was supported by the Civil Society Support Foundation and Turkey Mozaik Foundation.

HDD, 2024). Third, in 2025, ASF-UK partnered with Civil Dreams Association (Sivil Düşler/SD) to support a Dom community, by documenting their lives, housing, and neighbourhood pre-earthquake, to advocate for equitable post-earthquake relocation.[3]

Our approach in these projects has broadly followed *Change by Design* (CbD), a flexible methodology developed by ASF-UK and adapted to diverse global contexts, which is rooted in community-led planning and community architecture (Luansang et al., 2012). CbD operates across three interconnected scales – household, community, and city/policy – and unfolds in four stages: diagnosing, dreaming, developing, and defining (Frediani, 2016). In Antakya, CbD has provided a structure for exploring elements of living heritage at personal, collective, and urban levels through a range of participatory activities with residents, practitioners, and civil society representatives. These have included one-to-one interviews, participatory mapping, collective design and visioning, stakeholder forums, and public events such as exhibitions and presentations. Together, these activities helped assess current conditions, articulate aspirations, and outline potential pathways forward.

Living heritage has been a consistent framework throughout these efforts. However, ASF-UK's engagement remains constrained by funding, capacity, and the piecemeal nature of project-based work shaped by evolving partnerships. This paper, therefore, does not present findings from a systematic investigation with predefined methodology and objectives. Rather, it reflects on the potential of living heritage as a recovery framework, grounded in practice-based and ongoing "dirty research"[4] (Shafique, 2024) conducted in a complex and shifting context. While sharing some of the insights and learnings emerging from ASF-UK and its partners – often through trial and error – we also seek to situate this grounded work within broader theoretical conversations on living heritage, community-led planning, and socio-technical assistance.

ASF-UK adopted a living heritage framing in Antakya as it allowed diverse resident groups to resist displacement and assert cultural rights through a less confrontational lens than terms like eviction or dispossession. This approach broadens the focus beyond preserving physical structures to include the social practices, relationships, and forms of knowledge that surround them – elements often overlooked in formal planning. Indeed, "Every resident and stakeholder, from local inhabitants to professional organisations, has valuable insights to contribute to the dialogue on living heritage" (ASF-UK and HDD, 2024, p.1), bringing typically excluded perspectives into the conversation. It also approaches the city, its history, and culture as dynamic and continually reshaped by people's interactions with the built and natural environment (Ibidem). From this view, reconstruction is not only about restoring the physical past but also about valuing and sustaining everyday practices into the future.

Structure of the article

[3] The Dom are a marginalized peripatetic community. In this paper we are not bringing material from this work, which is currently ongoing.

[4] Dirty research refers to an embedded, reciprocal, and co-produced approach to urban knowledge-making that challenges extractivist, colonial research paradigms and recognises theory and action as intertwined in transformative practice (Shafique, 2024).

The paper is structured in six parts. Following this Introduction, Section 2 reviews the literature to situate “living heritage” within broader discourses of participatory planning and community-led recovery that inform ASF-UK’s approach. Sections 3 and 4 provide the context of Antakya based on existing literature and findings emerging from fieldwork: Section 3 traces historical events and structural conditions that contributed to the scale of destruction and the contentious nature of reconstruction, while Section 4 outlines the current recovery landscape, highlighting the often conflicting initiatives by government, civil society, and residents. Together, these sections show why living heritage is central to the contestation around rebuilding. Section 5 presents ASF-UK’s engagement in Antakya, with a focus on Çekmece neighbourhood, where we sought to establish a precedent for community-driven planning in post-earthquake recovery. Here, we combine an account of ASF-UK’s activities and findings with a reflection on them, proposing an understanding of living heritage as *shared knowledge* – collective values, practices, and behaviours embedded in community life. Thus we frame our role as *interpreters*, documenting, visualising, and articulating this knowledge to make it actionable towards advocacy. Finally, Section 6 concludes with a reflection on the potential of defining living heritage as a form of shared knowledge to guide socio-technical assistance and expand the room for community-led planning in post-disaster recovery contexts.

2. Literature review: Living Heritage and community-led post-disaster recovery

In this paper, *living heritage* is proposed as a framework for equitable recovery that contrasts with dominant state-led, mass housing approaches that often marginalize local socio-cultural formations. Unlike top-down paradigms, *living heritage is grassroots-driven, rooted in local knowledge systems and ways of living that are already embedded – both implicitly and explicitly – within communities*.

In developing this paper, we began to reflect on how the term *living heritage* – which we have been working with and experimenting on the ground for nearly two years – relates to existing literature and how it is positioned within current theoretical debates in participatory planning and disaster recovery. In the following section, we outline the key points emerging from this reflection.

Living heritage in critical discourse

In recent years, critical heritage studies have dismantled the idea of “heritage” as an objective, universal category, exposing instead its Western and colonial foundations (Hall, 1999; Byrne, 2014). In its institutional form, heritagisation processes often reify the very socio-cultural formations that produced it, imposing selective values and representations, instrumentalising local knowledge and practices for economic gain, and which are often contributing to the displacement of communities (Smith, 2006; Gonzàlez, 2014). This approach highlights how the "enclosure of heritage" by capital and the state disrupts the inherent connection between communities and their heritage, thereby hindering its active maintenance and renewal (Gonzàlez, 2014; Benesch et al., 2015). As such, heritage - through its governance by nation states, institutions, and the private sector - is frequently a driver of dispossession and gentrification (Harvey, 2002; Herzfeld, 2010). In these contexts, heritage is often understood as the restoration

or reconstruction of physical structures or historic city centres tied to a specific era, often devoid of the people who currently inhabit these spaces.[5]

Beyond this now widespread critique, scholars have also recognised that "heritage now has a stake in, *and can act as a positive enabler* for, the complex, multi-vector challenges that face us today" (Winter, 2012, italics added). From this perspective, alternative conceptualisations of heritage aim to reframe it as a tool for emancipatory, bottom-up action addressing broader social injustice. Through the concept of "heritage as commons", for instance, Gonzàlez (2014) frames heritage as the collective outcome of community-based relationships, emphasising its role in sustaining both cultural continuity and livelihoods. He calls for professionals to work *with*, rather than *on*, communities, asking: "What heritage processes work towards building community and new forms of common life?" (2014, p.384). Using the term "insurgent heritage", Novoa (2022) highlights how communities' local knowledge challenges state-led heritage preservation and planning, offering plural perspectives that open space for alternative futures and forms of citizenship.

"Living heritage" has been used by Ziedan (2022) in the context of Syria during the conflict to conceptualise societal behaviour in which people activate community resources and legacy-based knowledge to find viable, collectively responsible solutions in times of crisis. At its core, living heritage focuses on "human needs, common interests, inherited legacies, social energy, and solidarity" (p.321) – how people connect, collaborate to solve problems, make decisions, and take leadership. Zeidan examines how communities restore disused irrigation channels or develop alternative water sources amid infrastructure failure as practices of living heritage. In contrast to mainstream conceptions of heritage, which often prioritise preserving physical structures over repairing social relationships, and frequently constrain people's capacity to shape their environments through everyday practices, living heritage is sustained and repaired fluidly. It resists rigid distinctions between tangible and intangible, outstanding and ordinary values, or the necessity of state intervention. Ultimately, "living heritage is about answering the needs of communities and protecting the interactions between people" (Zeidan, 2022).

Going beyond the mainstream dualistic conceptualisation of tangible and intangible heritage, living heritage offers an expanded understanding of cultural heritage as a social construct, simultaneously incorporating both tangible and intangible elements of built and natural environments: "an *open-ended process* of production and transformation of symbols and meanings throughout history, sustained by its rooted links to communities, their socio-spatial practices, and local identities" (Al-Harithy, 2022, p.9, emphasis added).

Living heritage as a framework for community-led recovery and planning

[5] Several high-profile cases in Turkey illustrate how "heritage" can be used as a framing to justify gentrification and displacement. Notable examples include the historic Romani neighbourhood of Sulukule in Istanbul, where residents resisted expropriation and demolition (Uysal, 2012; Kocabas and Gibson, 2011); the remaking of Ankara's citadel and surrounding areas (Öktem, 2019); and the post-conflict reconstruction of the walled city of Sur in Diyarbakır (Genç, 2021).

From an urban perspective, these critical heritage readings intertwine with insurgent planning – radical planning practices by organised social movements that challenge the oppressive logics of neoliberal governance (Miraftab, 2009). Such practices demonstrate that "other and more collective forms of inhabiting and relating to each other and to urban space are possible" (Roy, 2011). Indeed, insurgent planning recognises that everyday acts of resistance by marginalised communities generate alternative spatial practices and socio-spatial dynamics capable of disrupting dominant power relations (Canedo and Andrade, 2024). In our understanding, living heritage frames precisely these "everyday practices and spaces" as a foundation for collective mobilisation, enabling residents to articulate a shared vision for their neighbourhoods and city's future.

Post-conflict and post-disaster contexts are indeed moments of intense socio-institutional reconfiguration and contested redefinition of heritage, identity, and community. On the one hand, such crises open opportunities for large-scale historical rewriting by top-down actors; on the other, heritage remains deeply connected to efforts to preserve collective memory and lifeways (Al-Harithy, 2022). Building on this tension, our engagement with living heritage seeks to carve out a space where heritage, recovery, and community-led planning intersect. Indeed, even though the importance of community participation both in heritage preservation and in post-disaster recovery has been increasingly acknowledged, the potential for an integration between these elements remains underdeveloped.

Community participation in preserving and recovering cultural heritage has gained traction, with institutions like ICCROM[6] arguing that local involvement benefits both heritage and society (Court and Wijesuriya, 2015). In Asia, the Community Architects Network shows how socio-technical assistance enables urban poor communities in heritage areas to develop alternative strategies (CAN, 2017). These people-centred processes position residents as active participants in shaping and preserving heritage – emphasising local knowledge, craftsmanship, and traditional techniques – while also using heritage discourse to advocate for more inclusive development and counter the commodification and exclusion driven by narrowly defined notions of "built heritage." In some post-disaster contexts, such as Hunnarshala's work in India after the 2001 earthquake and Lumanti's in Nepal after 2015, heritage has become a platform for advancing broader housing rights (ASF International et al., 2024).

In parallel, the significance of community-led reconstruction has been consistently emphasised for over 50 years, with key publications from the 1980s showing that recovery succeeds when local communities actively participate (UNDRO, 1982; Maskrey, 1989), even though many countries still lack the decentralised governance and funding mechanisms necessary for large-scale, community-driven rebuilding. Professional organisations play a vital role here: Boonyabancha and Archer (2011) contend that disaster survivors should be seen as agents of change, with professionals supplying tools to facilitate that transformation. [7]

[6] International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property.

[7] In Turkey, the housing struggle led by the Düzce Earthquake Victims' Housing Construction Cooperative – founded by survivors of the 1999 Düzce earthquake – and the collaborative construction of housing and

Yet the potential to integrate heritage, recovery, and community-based planning into a common framework remains underexplored. An expanded understanding of living heritage moves beyond conventional notions of tangible or intangible heritage, which tend to treat it as the mere *setting* or *outcome* of community involvement. Instead, bringing instead to the fore its *processual* nature — the ongoing participation of residents in shaping their environment and envisioning the city they wish to build, grounded in a "body of sedimented practices and knowledge" (Zeidan, 2022). This aligns with the idea of the "freedom to shape one's own environment" – within self-formed social groupings and at a pace dictated by local resources – as a foundation for producing a habitat that reflects a community's values and needs (Turner and Fichter, 1972).

As such, living heritage becomes a lens for articulating reconstruction grounded in people's histories, their attachment to home and land, and their collective aspirations (Stanley-Price, 2007). Recovery, as Campanella (2006) notes, is not merely about physical repair but about the resilience of residents reclaiming their neighbourhoods, maintaining and rebuilding social ties. Living heritage, therefore, points to a form of urban rebuilding where the recovery of the social fabric is inseparable from material reconstruction.

Grounded in critical heritage scholarship, this expanded understanding of living heritage shares a concern for epistemic justice and a critique of the coloniality of power and planning. It is inherently decolonial as it facilitates granular, place-based knowledge production rooted in everyday practices sustained over time (Tironi et al., 2022) and is informed by an awareness of historical power structures shaping people's agency and the government's social contract with different groups (Siddiqi and Canuday, 2018). In post-disaster recovery, a living heritage lens asks: What forms of knowledge and values inform reconstruction? Which ways of life are sidelined or erased, through both physical destruction and top-down rebuilding? And how can the practices of repair, networks of collaboration, and modes of endurance that people deploy individually and collectively after disaster be harnessed and built upon?

The next section outlines Antakya's contested context, providing background for the analysis that follows. Here, living heritage is central to residents' struggle to rebuild their city in line with their cultural values and rights, resisting state-led dispossession and urban transformation that extend a decades-long history of cultural erasure.

3. Antakya in context: from the earthquake back

While the scale of destruction in Antakya can be traced to geographic and geological factors as well as substandard construction practices, understanding the city's reconstruction requires attention to its complex history and multilayered identity. This section and the next one describe how government-led reconstruction efforts unfold within a broader system shaped by profit-

a neighborhood with the Düzce Hope Workshop (Düzce Umut Atölyesi) stand as a concrete example of local resistance and solidarity supported by socio-technical assistance (Gümüş, 2017; Johnson, 2011).

oriented construction dynamics, a top-down planning vision, and a long-standing assimilationist agenda in the region. Situating the post-earthquake urban remaking within this context helps explain why living heritage emerges as a central element in local responses to externally imposed plans, and as a framework for envisioning a reconstruction that reflects the values and aspirations of Antakya's indigenous communities.

Antakya and its surrounding province occupy a peripheral position within Turkey's territory, and are home to diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities – including, besides Turks, also Arabs, Alawis, Christians, Doms, Kurds, as well as small Armenian, Jewish, and other populations. The city's composite character, often diverging from the state-sanctioned national identity, is the outcome of its long history as a border region.

In the late Ottoman era, the *sanjak* of Iskenderun (Alexandretta), where Antakya is located, was part of the Aleppo *vilayet*, which in 1921 became part of French-mandate Syria. Like most Ottoman regions, it had a diverse demographic makeup that defied any nationalist narrative.[8] Amid the Empire's disintegration, the nationalist leaders of the emerging Turkish Republic included the region – naming the Sanjak "Hatay" – within their planned national borders. After a brief period as the "State of Hatay," France ceded the region to Turkey, which annexed it in 1939 following a contested referendum,[9] sixteen years after the Republic's foundation.

Antakya's late incorporation into the Republic initially spared it from early nationalist policies. However, after the annexation, at least a fifth of the province's population – primarily Christians, Alawis, and Armenians – left, mostly relocating to Syria and Lebanon (Duman, 2015, p.364). Assimilation and cultural erasure measures targeting non-Turkish/non-Muslim minorities soon followed,[10] soon followed, with territorial policies playing a key role. Place and landmark names were Turkified,[11] and the state pursued demographic engineering by redistributing vacated lands and settling groups considered loyal – such as Turkmenis from outside the region – in strategic areas formerly inhabited by departed minorities (Duman, 2015). This pattern continued in various forms over time.[12] Urban interventions also reflected a colonial logic; for instance, after the 1980

[8] According to a 1936 census conducted during the French mandate, the *sanjak* had a population of 219,080, comprising 38.9% Turks, 28.3% Alawi Arabs, 11.4% Armenians, 10.3% Sunni Arabs, 8.2% Greek Orthodox Arabs and other Christians, 2.21% Kurds, along with small Circassian and Jewish communities (Duman, 2023).

[9] During the pre-referendum annexation period, Turkey resettled one million Sunni Turkish speakers in Alexandretta and northern Iraq (Doğruel 2005).

[10] Government-led Turkification policies included enforcing the use of Turkish while banning Arabic in public, promoting marriages between non-Turkish women (particularly Alawites) and Turkish men, imposing behavioural and dress codes, assigning Turkish surnames to all citizens, and restricting access to state institutions and higher education to Sunni Turks (Mertcan, 2014; Duman, 2015; Can, 2019).

[11] Hatay, The Republican toponym for the entire province, refers to a nationalist imaginary – based on shallow scientific ground – according to which the local Arab Alawi population were the descendents of the Hitites, an ancient civilization which, in turn, was rebranded as "pre-Turkic" by the nationalist historians crafting a "national past" for the nascent Republic (Can, 2019).

[12] Turkey's 1934 Settlement Law aimed to create a demographically homogeneous national territory by settling Turkish (or Turkified) migrants in non-Turkish areas, encouraging the emigration of non-Turkish minorities from regions where their presence could be diluted, and preventing their expansion in other areas (Quote). As late as the 1980s, Turkic groups from Afghanistan and Turks from the Trabzon region were resettled on the outskirts of Antakya (Duman 2016:48).

military coup, a military base was built beside the Arab Alawi neighbourhood of Armutlu, marking its separation from the adjacent Sunni-majority area and asserting control (Navaro-Yashin, 2014).

Historically marginalised during Ottoman rule, the Arab Alawis, the largest non-Turkish ethno-religious group, largely embraced the Republic's secular, modernist ideology, which offered relative socioeconomic inclusion in exchange for allegiance to its civic nationalism, where every citizen of Turkey was considered a "Turk". Yet, Arab Alawis – as other minoritised groups in the country – were systematically barred from substantial economic and political advancement, while the province overall faced persistent underinvestment and economic stagnation (ASF-UK and HDD, 2024).

In many Alawi-majority districts, support for the Kemalist state narrative has remained strong, while leftist movements, including socialist and revolutionary groups, continue to hold influence (Duman and Can, 2024). However, since the rise of the Islamist AKP in 2002 and the shift towards Sunni-Turkish nationalism, Arab Alawis have become increasingly vulnerable as political opponents to the regime's growing authoritarianism. The war in Syria, Turkey's involvement, and the influx of Sunni Arab refugees intensified local tensions and sharpened sectarian boundaries (Dağtas, 2018; Can, 2019), while the border closure and declining trade with Syria further strained Antakya's economy.

Over the past two decades, Antakya's multicultural identity has been publicly promoted, with AKP government backing, as a "cradle of civilization" and a "city of diversity," emphasizing a narrative of tolerance and coexistence (Dağtas, 2020; Can, 2019). Yet, beyond this sanitized and depoliticized portrayal, it is crucial to recognize that Antakya's cosmopolitanism is shaped by complex historical processes and power relations, resulting in what Can (2019) describes as a "fragile diversity." In this context, difference is continuously negotiated in everyday life, with social balance upheld through often implicit arrangements, including carefully maintained settlement patterns and spatial boundaries (Can, 2019).

Understanding the historical background of Antakya's multicultural society – including how discrimination based on ethno-religious identity and political affiliation has shaped its urban landscape, and how this delicate equilibrium has been strained over the past two decades – is crucial to grasp what is at stake in the reconstruction and how post-earthquake dynamics are unfolding along ethno-sectarian and politicised lines. In this context, many Antakya communities fear that reconstruction is being used by the AKP government to assert greater control over the city, continuing a longstanding pattern of state-led assimilation, dispossession, and resettlement policies (T24, 2024; Hatay Depremzede Derneği, 2024; Ehlen Dergisi, 2024).

4. The earthquake aftermath

The post-disaster response was widely seen as profoundly inadequate. Alongside logistical breakdowns and institutional unpreparedness (Soylu, 2023), multiple civil society accounts and independent reports described deliberate withholding of life-saving interventions in areas

predominantly inhabited by groups not aligned with the government (Bianet, 2023a, 2023b, Can, 2023, Ehlen Dergisi, 2024). Over time, reconstruction investments appeared to disproportionately benefit pro-government districts and communities, while civil society actors working to support marginalised populations often faced obstruction or restrictions from authorities (Ehlen Dergisi, 2024; Rudaw, 2025).[13]

In this context, civil society has mobilised: individuals and organisations from across the country converged in Antakya, civic platforms emerged, and community groups, professional organisations, and local and national NGOs played a crucial role in addressing needs left unmet by the state – from emergency shelter and basic services to cultural protection and coordination efforts among residents (BAYETAV, 2024).

The Turkish state's post-disaster reconstruction approach has been widely criticised for prioritising speed and scale, outsourcing projects to contractors under the oversight of the Ministry of Urbanisation and TOKI (TMMOB Mimarlar Odası, 2024). Such a centralised model reinforces the interests of the construction sector, a pillar of the AKP's accumulation-based power system (Tuğal, 2022; Yeşilbağ, 2022). This profit-driven, populist strategy emphasises the mass production of permanent housing for survivors – narrowly defined as housing units – while neglecting the broader urban and ecological context (TMMOB Mimarlar Odası, 2024; Hatay Depremzede Derneği, 2025). Residents are treated as passive recipients, and resources are channelled into hastily planned apartment blocks that are unaffordable for many, at the expense of mid-term solutions that could support the city's gradual revival (Tezer, 2025)[14]. Individual and community needs are frequently sidelined, while the protection of cultural heritage is reduced to the restoration of a few high-profile monuments, with little regard for the broader social and cultural fabric (ASF-UK et al., 2024).

Before the earthquakes, Antakya lacked a comprehensive urban plan, and like many other cities across Turkey, development was guided by zoning plans that are easily overruled amid a lack of coordination among institutions (Sengezer & Koç, 2005; Aydın et al., 2025; Tezer, 2025). The earthquake recovery has done nothing to address this; post-disaster reconstruction is unfolding in a fragmented and often opaque manner, with overlapping processes and limited accountability (Soylu, 2024; TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası, 2023; TMMOB Mimarlar Odası, 2024). Based on our participatory research – including public forums and workshops – and field observations, we identified five concurrent activities shaping urban development in Antakya: government-led developments; the Old City and New City centre masterplan; plot-based redevelopments following zoning plans; temporary shelter-induced sprawl; and residents' own makeshift solutions (Box 1; see also ASF-UK et al., 2024; ASF-UK and HDD, 2024).

[13] Hatay, which suffered some of the most extensive destruction, was among the provinces described by local organisations and residents as having been particularly neglected (Hatay Depremzede Derneği, 2025).

[14] 146,000 housing units are planned for by TOKI in and around Antakya (Hatay Depremzede Derneği, 2024)

Box 1: Processes influencing urban development in post-earthquake Antakya

Government-led developments: The Central Government, through the Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation, the Mass Housing Administration (TOKI), Emlak Konut, and the new Urban Transformation Directorate, is leading post-earthquake development, largely under the State of Emergency, bypassing regular oversight. TOKI, in coordination with the government Disaster and Emergency Management Administration (AFAD), is building mass housing on agricultural land, offering apartments at favourable rates to families with proof of pre-earthquake homeownership. These projects expand the urban footprint, encroach on historic landscapes, and undermine agricultural livelihoods. They have also been criticised for expropriating land predominantly in Alawi-majority villages (Bianet, 2023d; Osterlund, 2024; Gerçek Haber Ajansı, 2025). Meanwhile, the Ministry has designated severely damaged urban areas as "reserve areas" for state-controlled redevelopment, granting authorities sweeping expropriation powers and overriding local planning regulations (Duvar English, 2023; Çılgın, 2024). These measures sparked widespread protests and were suspended in many areas, though plans remain unclear.[15]

"Hatay Masterplan": The Turkish Design Council (Türkiye Tasarım Vakfı, TTV) was tasked by the government with developing the Hatay Masterplan, in partnership with national and international firms including DB Architects, Foster+Partners, Buro Happold, and KEYM. Initially presented as an ambitious vision for the metropolitan region, it drew media attention but lacks a legal framework. Implementation, carried out by government contractors without TTV oversight, remains uncertain, and appears limited to the "Risk Area" of Old Antakya and a "pilot area" in New Antakya's core (Süveydan, 2024). While some listed buildings in Old Antakya are being restored, large parts of its historic urban fabric, including vernacular structures, have been bulldozed, with remnants discarded without documentation (TAÇDAM, 2023). Many fear redevelopment will commodify heritage and reduce Antakya's centuries-old multicultural legacy to a tourist-oriented space, reinforcing pre-existing gentrification pressures (ASF-UK et al., 2024).

Local zoning plans: Zoning plans remain in effect post-earthquake, despite their widely acknowledged flaws and criticism from professional chambers, who partly blame the extent of the damage on poor planning adherence. Hatay's metropolitan zoning framework emerged as a patchwork of uncoordinated city and town-level plans which were merged when the province gained Metropolitan City status, in 2014 (Tezer, 2024; Aydın et al., 2025). Politically drawn district boundaries created overlapping jurisdictions (Ehlen Dergisi, 2024), further complicating planning. Corruption and nepotism have long driven zoning violations in Turkish cities, while frequent plot-based changes, further enabled by amnesties legalising unregulated

[15]The revised legislation, enacted in November 2023, grants the newly established Urban Transformation Directorate broad authority to designate "reserve areas" for earthquake-resistant housing, even in already developed zones. This allows the government to rapidly expropriate and demolish existing structures, often bypassing local urban plans and disregarding the condition of inhabitable standing buildings (Çılgın, 2024).

development, have fuelled unchecked urban expansion over the past two decades (Cifuentes-Faura, 2024). Reconstruction on existing plots, or *yerinde dönüşüm* ("transformation on site"), continues much as it did before the earthquake, under the same flawed governance structures.

Temporary shelters: Much of the displaced population now lives in emergency shelters, primarily container cities, which have reshaped Antakya's geography into a fragmented archipelago of temporary settlements, accelerating green space loss and cementification. Administered by AFAD with support from NGOs and local governments, these settlements, often on green or agricultural land along major transport routes, are often far from residents' original neighbourhoods. Allocation largely ignores Antakya's community-based settlement patterns. Conditions are harsh, with power cuts, flooding, poor insulation, overcrowding, and restrictive rules. Many residents have modified containers to improve their living spaces. The government faces criticism for prioritising mass-produced TOKI housing while neglecting sustainable mid-term solutions, forcing many to endure severe hardship.

Self-built makeshift solutions: In response to the crisis, many residents are creating their own solutions with the resources at hand. Across Antakya, people are setting up self-built structures, placing containers and tents on vacant land, and constructing prefabricated buildings. For many, improvising a shelter near their former homes, with limited support from NGOs and solidarity networks, is preferable to relocation to distant container cities, where autonomy is significantly curtailed – even though such relocation is often required to access government assistance. These uncoordinated and unsupported efforts, developed outside formal planning processes, are nonetheless in aggregate reshaping the city. While many of the structures are makeshift, there are also numerous durable buildings erected with significant investment, which are likely to remain in the long term.

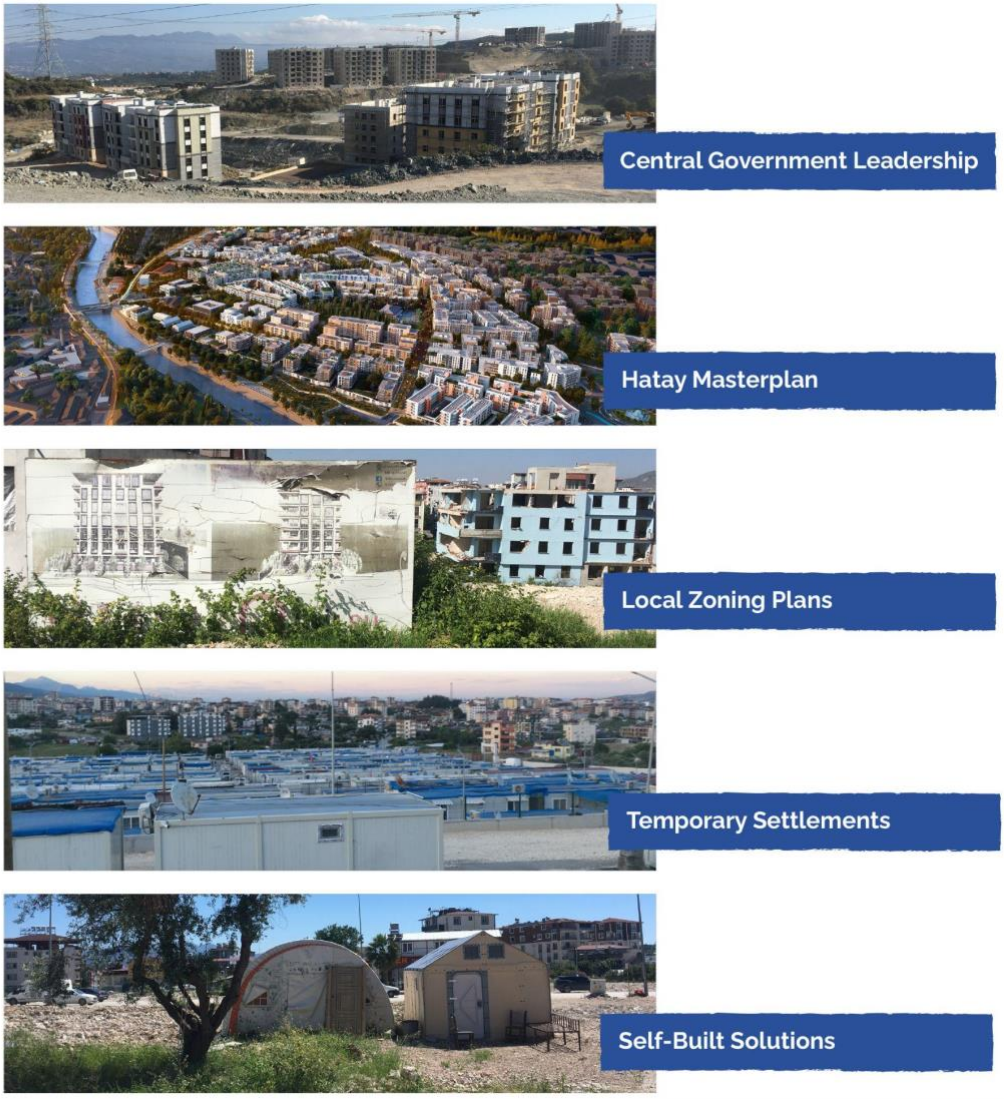


Figure 1. Images from Antakya showing five key processes of urban development reshaping the city in the earthquake aftermath (ASF-UK).

As the government's reconstruction efforts appear to bolster the construction–real estate sector, many local actors in Antakya have raised concerns about subtler agendas involving demographic engineering, dispossession, and the reallocation of land and resources (Ehlen Dergisi, 2024; Hatay Depremzede Derneği, 2024; T24, 2024). While there is widespread opposition pointing to the inadequacy of top-down reconstruction and calling for recovery models grounded in local needs and participation (see Duman, 2023; Süveydan, 2024; Batuman, 2024), few initiatives have engaged directly with communities or managed to build sustained, community-led alternatives. Coordination among civil society remains limited, and efforts to apply collective pressure on authorities have so far struggled to gain traction, leaving a gap in community-driven recovery.

5. “What makes Antakya is its people”: Working with living heritage in post-earthquake Antakya

During ASF-UK’s workshops in Antakya, the concept of living heritage was introduced through the *asma altı* (literally “under the vine”), a common vernacular space in the area (Figure 2). Typically a semi-open space beside or on top of a house, it is shaded by a vine canopy supported by a purpose-built structure. In Antakya’s hot Mediterranean climate, the *asma altı* provides a cool, shaded area for resting, eating, and gathering. Here, herbs are hung to dry, black coffee is shared with friends, and household chores are done in company. It is also the setting for *mangal* nights, convivial gatherings typically accompanied by music and Antakya’s renowned *meze*, often made with herbs from the nearby house orchard. Among Arab Alawis, these gatherings usually include *boğma rakı*, a strong, homemade alcoholic drink, produced and sold under the counter within the neighbourhood.

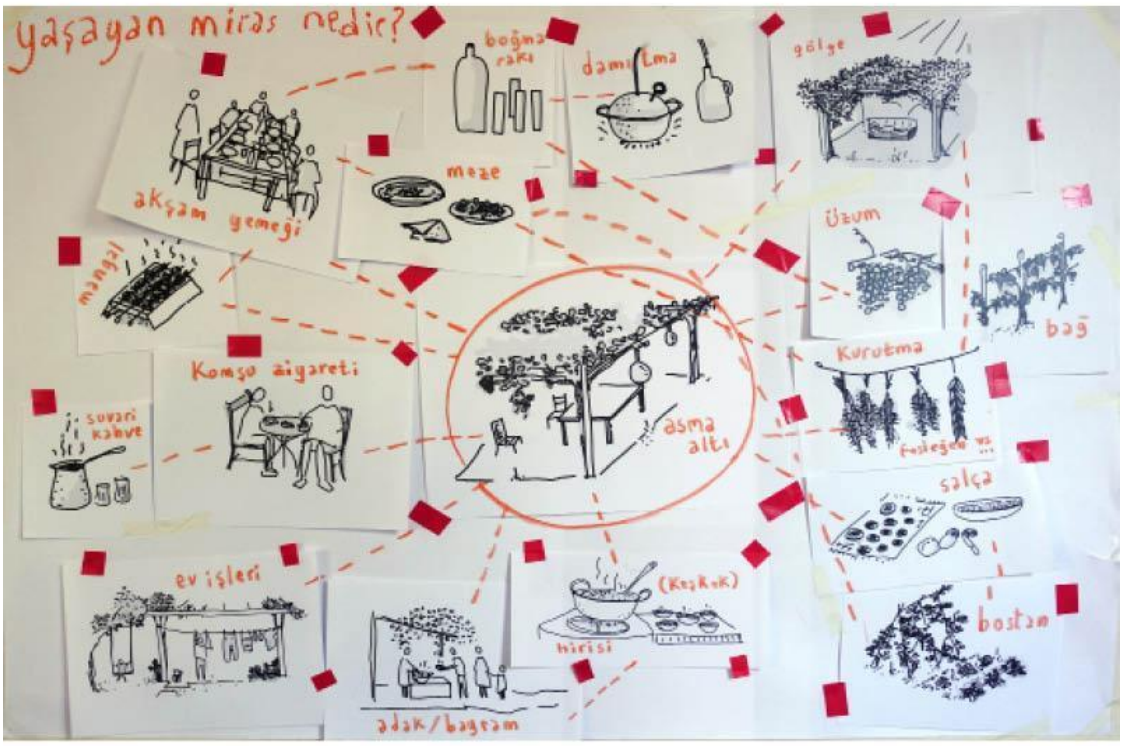


Figure 2. “What is living heritage?” (ASF-UK)

The *asma altı* is a physical space, its structure and function tied to local climate and geography. But it comes to life through interaction between people and the environment. It is a node in a web of knowledge that connects people, places, and practices. The *rakı* (a local alcohol), for instance, is the product of unspoken knowledge passed down through generations – just as who makes and sells it in the neighbourhood is understood informally. The structure supporting the vine, its placement, and the cultivation itself all rely on local know-how. Likewise, the recipes, the social ties that bring people together, and the conversations around the table are inseparable from the

community. In the working definition that we employed in the field, this interplay of tangible and intangible elements, giving meaning to one another, is living heritage. The earthquake has inevitably disrupted these connections. Yet, the system is not broken entirely: living heritage endures and adapts. Across Antakya, residents are not only rebuilding their spaces but also repairing and carrying forward their heritage.

Setting off with this working definition, this section provides an account of ASF-UK's activities and findings, alongside a reflection on their significance, with a specific focus on the work in Çekmece neighbourhood.

The "Living Heritage" Forum and "Repairing Living Heritage in Çekmece"

Amid the chaotic landscape of stakeholders and processes described in Section 4, in November 2023 ASF-UK co-organised a two-day public forum under the slogan "Antakya'yı Antakya Yapan İnsanlarıdır" (What makes Antakya is its people).[16] The event was designed to foster exchange and learning among grassroots and civil society organizations and built environment professionals involved in the city's post-earthquake reconstruction. Over 30 participants joined the forum, engaging in a range of activities such as site visits, collaborative group work and open discussions.

The forum's main output was a collective statement outlining six main challenges currently affecting Antakya's living heritage and potential ways forward to collaboratively address them (ASF-UK et al., 2024). These challenges were: Lack of basic infrastructures and increasing depopulation; ecological destruction and public health hazards; encroachment on natural and collective spaces; loss of sense of place, memory, and vernacular heritage; displacement, gentrification and touristification; personal safety and security (ibid). This collective statement aimed to frame a common ground for people and organisations to come together and explore ways to place Antakya's people and living heritage at the centre of the city's future.[17]

Forum participants agreed that the next step was to create a tangible example of what community-led reconstruction in Antakya could look like, both to advocate for a more inclusive, collaborative process and to empower residents and their organisations to lead in repairing and sustaining the city's living heritage. Given the capacity limitations of involved stakeholders, we focused on a single neighbourhood. After discussions with Hatay Deprem Dayanışması (HDD),[18] which has a base in Çekmece neighbourhood, the area was selected as a pilot site for several reasons.

[16] Herkes İçin Mimarlık (Architecture for All/HiM) focuses on socially oriented architectural practices in Turkey; the organisation contributed to the Forum with activities design and facilitation.

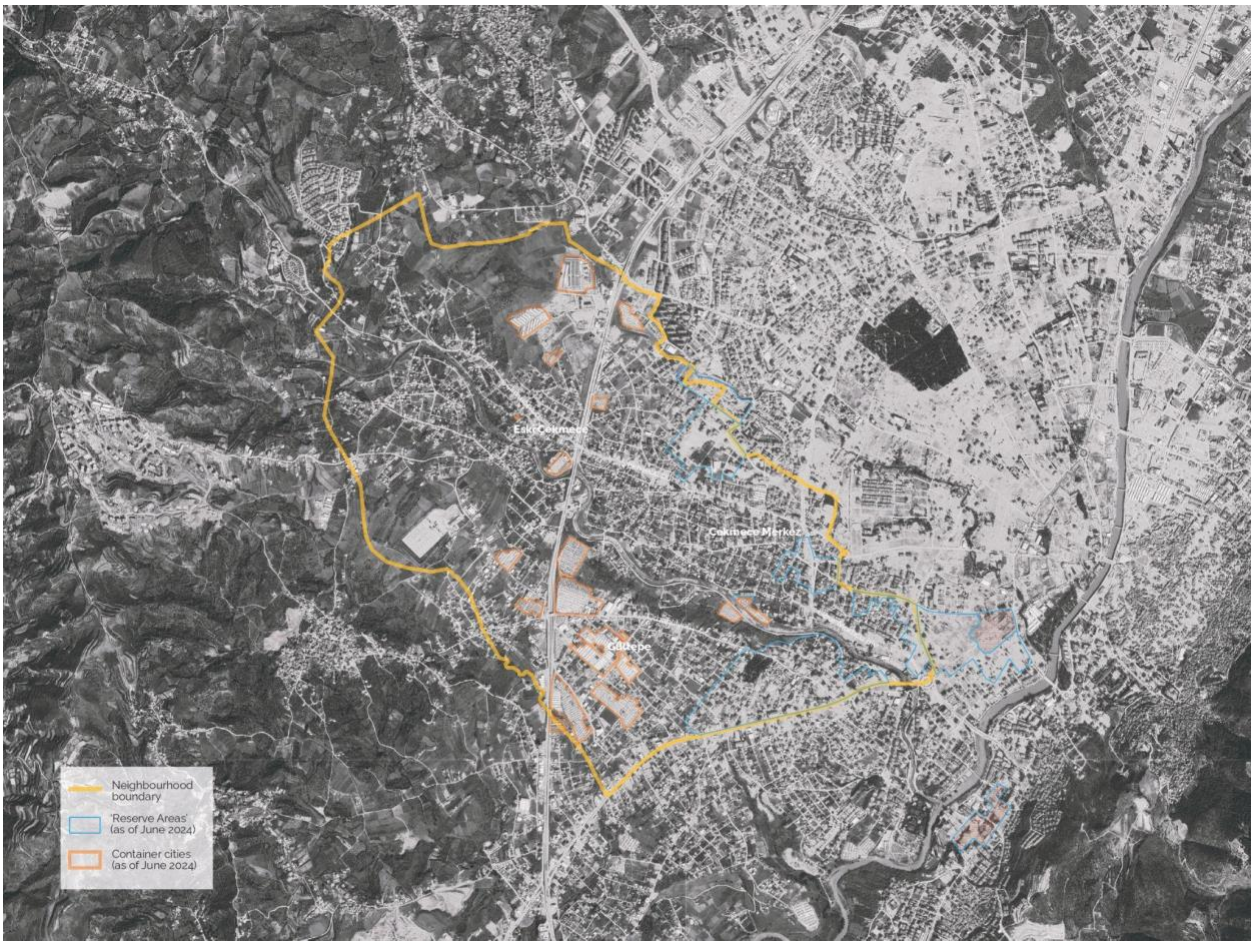
[17] The statement was jointly signed by professional bodies (e.g. the Hatay Chamber of Architects, Hatay Chamber of City Planners), grassroots groups (e.g. Hatay Earthquake Solidarity, Karaçay Coordination), and platforms such as Nehna and Hatay Ecology Platform. While united in critiquing government-led reconstruction in Antakya, these actors hold differing visions for the future and levels of commitment to grounded community engagement. The Collective Statement sought to establish a shared diagnosis and advocate for a reconstruction process based on collaboration between policymakers, technical bodies, and community groups.

[18] Hatay Deprem Dayanışması (Hatay Earthquake Solıdarıty/HDD), formed after the earthquakes, engages in education, cultural events, and advocacy across Hatay.

Spanning 8.5 square kilometres in Defne district, it includes diverse urban conditions – from dense central zones to rural outskirts – reflecting broader post-earthquake challenges. Çekmece's strong history of activism, including HDD's presence, made it an ideal site for community-driven reconstruction (Figure 3). Despite heavy destruction, many residents remain near their homes and are actively rebuilding. However, much of Çekmece has been designated as a "reserve area," enabling government expropriation and demolition. This has made it a key site of resistance against these policies, which have raised broader concerns across Antakya (ASF-UK and HDD, 2024).[19]

Figure 3. Landscape of Çekmece, showing debris from destroyed buildings in the foreground, and a container city in the mid-ground. 31.05.2024 (Credits: Author).

[19] Following extensive social mobilization, many of the "reserve areas" in various parts of Çekmece have been rescinded since July 2024. (Antakya, 2024; SoL Haber, 2024).



Map 1. In yellow, Çekmece administrative boundaries within Antakya's urban area (ASF-UK). The top right shows cleared, debris-free zones in central Antakya; the far left, a new TOKI development in the Toygarlı foothills.

Following the forum, HDD, ASF-UK, and HiM launched a collaborative project, "Reviving Living Heritage in Antakya", to demonstrate community-led reconstruction and influence policy. The project had three components: HiM led the co-design and construction of a community space in Çekmece; ASF-UK facilitated participatory planning for reconstruction; and HDD documented, disseminated, and advocated for these efforts. The core of ASF-UK work was a two-week workshop in June 2024 with 25 participants from Antakya and beyond, testing participatory methods and exploring inclusive reconstruction pathways. This section reflects on our direct experience with that process.

Living Heritage as Shared Knowledge

During the diagnosis phase, we explored threats to living heritage and residents' coping strategies at three scales: city, community, and dwelling. At the city level, a group walk through Çekmece to Antakya's centre and a public dialogue with residents and civil society representatives unpacked pre-earthquake urbanisation patterns, current developments, and key actors. At the community level, participatory mapping, transect walks, and spatial drawings across three neighbourhood

zones identified main challenges and the ongoing responses put up by residents. At the dwelling level, twenty-five in-depth household drawing interviews captured pre- and post-earthquake routines and living arrangements, as well as future aspirations. These methods revealed how residents navigate the challenges brought about by the disaster and the ensuing reconstruction.

For instance, an elderly woman who lost her home set up a container and tent in a public park with the support of her spouse and children. Refusing relocation to remote container cities, she transformed her space into a vegetable garden with a sitting area and continued to visit the vine arbour of a former neighbour, gathering grape leaves to make sarma. Similarly, a group of relatives repaired damaged family properties – a series of low-rise buildings along a main road – and began living in them. They set up containers in an unbuilt olive grove behind to shelter additional family members and planted vegetables in the adjacent field for sustenance. The group also closed the alley to traffic, repurposing it into a shared living space for gatherings and celebrations (Figure 4).

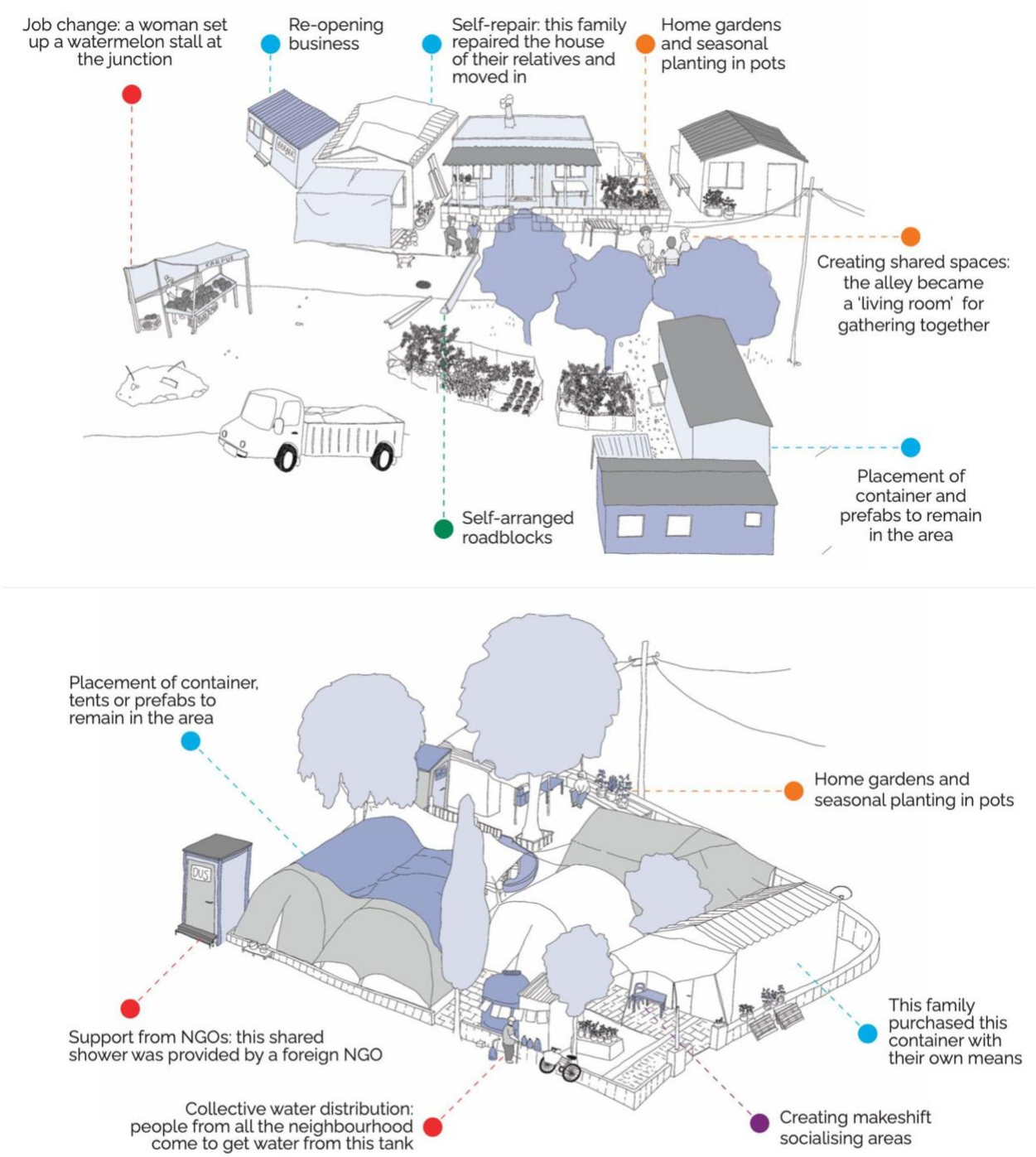


Figure 4. Visualization of rebuilding living spaces in Çekmece (ASF-UK).

In a landscape of widespread destruction, living heritage expands our focus beyond housing units and infrastructure to the processes of reinvention, adaptation, and transformation that shape the city's reconstruction – of which these are but two examples. The diagnosis phase documented how, throughout the emergency phase, residents responded to displacement, infrastructure

failures, environmental degradation, and livelihood loss by recreating social spaces, gathering in tent clusters and container camps, adapting and expanding shelters, organising protests and legal actions, organising water distribution systems, establishing subsistence gardens, and re-opening small enterprises.

In aggregate, these practices demonstrate how Çekmece residents actively rebuild their way of life, carrying forward their living heritage. Living heritage provides a lens through which to interpret people's largely uncoordinated initiatives as a form of reconstruction, framing small-scale, everyday practices of repair as political. Documenting, visualising, and communicating these diverse strategies, whether individual or collective, reveals that Antakya's people are playing a leading role in the reconstruction of their city (Figure 5). Yet, these efforts are largely unsupported, as public authorities prioritize funding for container cities and mass-housing blocks.

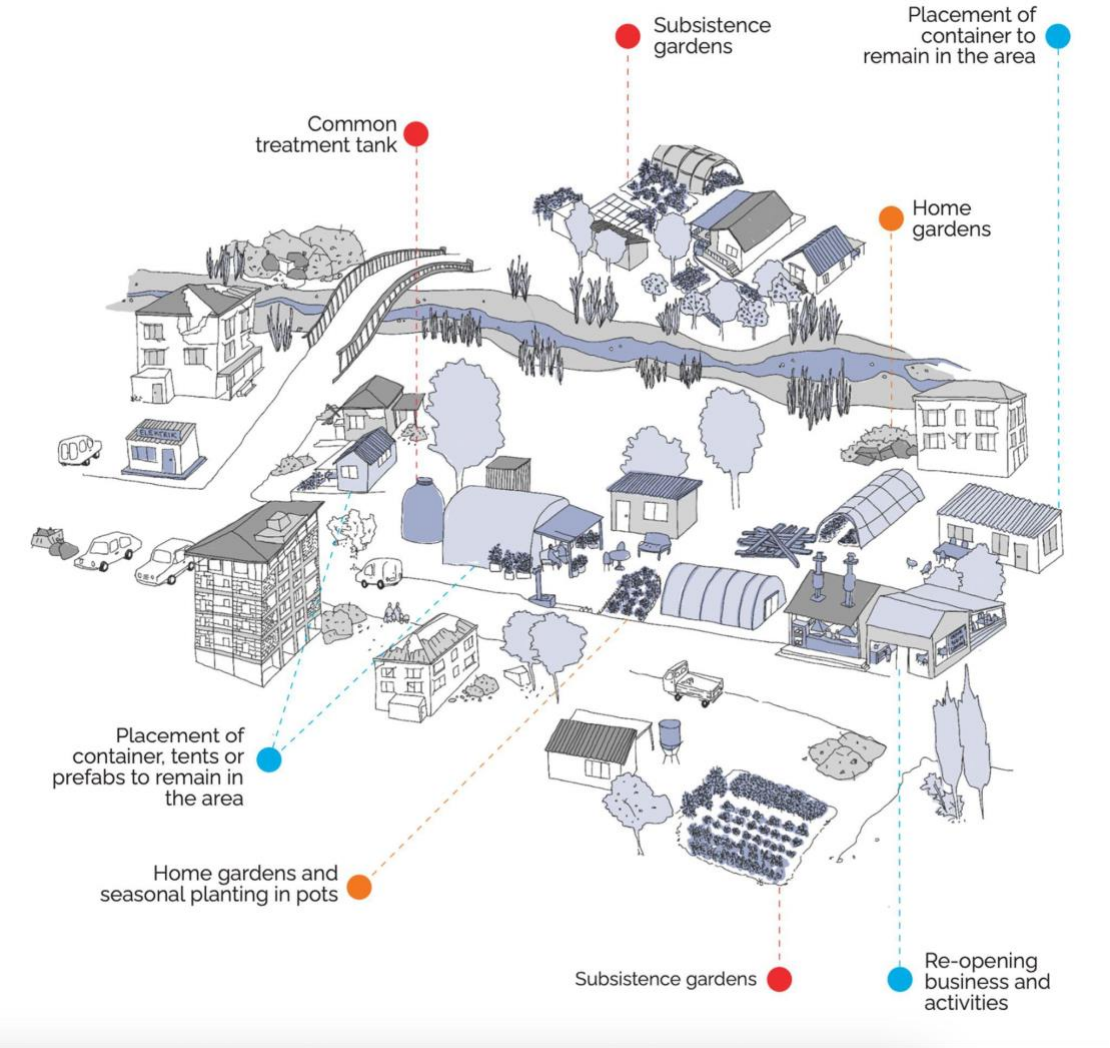


Figure 5. Visualization of rebuilding living spaces in Eski Çekmece (ASF-UK).

Without uncritically romanticizing residents' unsupported recovery efforts as examples of autonomous self-reliance, re-centering them highlights the need to engage with these practices rather than dismiss or obstruct them. Repairing living heritage as a collective planning endeavor means working with the people – complementing their resources and initiatives, building upon their resilience and agency, and developing ways to critically integrate their contributions into formal planning frameworks. To achieve this, technical planning expertise should open to other forms of knowledge, often tacit and unrecognized, that are embedded in community relations and shape how a city develops and sustains its evolving culture. We refer to these forms of shared knowledge – collective values, practices, and behaviours embedded in community life – as "living heritage" precisely to frame them as a legacy on which to tap for recovery.

Interpreting as Socio-technical Assistance

Building on diagnostic insights, a "dreaming" exercise enabled around 35 Çekmece residents, divided into seven groups, to envision their future neighbourhood and explore small-scale reconstruction pathways. Assuming roles of imaginary characters based on real-life situations, participants used modeling exercises to represent living spaces, identify challenges and responses, and imagine possibilities beyond current constraints. These physical models conveyed complex realities such as prolonged displacement, coping strategies, and infrastructural struggles. Each group articulated aspirations and concrete steps for change (Figure 6), which were synthesized into six shared goals and refined in a subsequent citywide stakeholder discussion. These goals included improving temporary shelters; developing permanent housing; organising transport and infrastructure; providing social, cultural, health, and education services; and enhancing economic opportunities (ASF-UK and HDD, 2024).

Figure 6. The "dreaming activity" in Çekmece, 08.06.2024 (Credits: Author).

These visioning activities gathered insights from different dimensions of our work in Çekmece and from different groups involved in the field. For example, at the dwelling level, residents remade vegetable gardens near shelters; at the community scale, dispersed urban agriculture formed a coping infrastructure for economic hardship; and at the citywide level, participants discussed agricultural land loss due to rapid urbanisation before and after the earthquake. The dreaming activity united these elements around a shared demand for low-rise houses with gardens, calling for zoning modifications.

We connected with local authorities and professional organisations to present community findings and showcase the viability of alternative reconstruction approaches. At the workshop's close, a public exhibition and talk in a municipal space allowed Çekmece residents, ASF-UK, and HDD to engage directly with municipal representatives. Participants displayed and presented their materials to an audience of locals, officials, and civil society groups (Figure 7). The December 2024 inauguration of the HiM-built community centre further brought together residents, NGOs, and officials, providing a platform to screen HDD's videos on the community-planning process.

Figure 7. Closing event and exhibition at Çekmece Neighbourhood House: a resident presents their model to representatives from Defne Municipality, ASF-UK, Antakya Disabled Associations, Turkey Design Council, Antakya Environment Protection Association, and other stakeholders. 11.06.2024. (Credits: Gökhan Şahin).

These knowledge-sharing events reflect a broader rethinking of our role as civil society actors and activist researchers, not as conventional providers of "technical assistance," but as intermediaries operating between grassroots mobilisation, decision-making, and technical support. As an external organisation with limited resources and local embeddedness, ASF-UK

lacks the expertise and institutional position to translate collective demands into formal regulations or provide direct technical planning or construction advice. Local professional chambers and universities are better placed for that.[20]

However, a living heritage approach recognises that urban knowledge is far more complex than what professional disciplines codify and that traditional technical institutions in Antakya currently lack both the will and capacity for people-centred urban development. Positioned between technical institutions, grassroots groups, and residents, ASF-UK chose to focus on highlighting overlooked forms of knowledge, developing pathways to translate them into actionable strategies, and opening communication spaces among stakeholders who might otherwise not share a common language.

Thus, a better term for our socio-technical assistance role is "interpreters." Rather than importing external knowledge and adapting it, we focus on uncovering and understanding knowledge embedded within the community. Workshop methods and outputs – cardboard and plasticine models, drawings, maps, photos, and stories – are devices to document, articulate, and visualise living heritage so that it can be more effectively conveyed. As interpreters bridging different languages, our role is not to create meaning but to translate it, accepting the inevitable slippage this entails (McFarlane, 2006). This process also generates new knowledge through interaction among involved actors.

Although many irreversible decisions have already been made and reconstruction is underway, the process in Antakya will unfold over decades. It is too early to know whether ASF-UK's efforts will have lasting impact, as this depends on who adopts the approach, what channels for community-led development emerge, and what unforeseen dynamics unfold. Nonetheless, the approach has been fruitful in two important domains. First, it helped articulate local demands that can inform advocacy and engagement. As one HDD activist said, "If someone now comes to Çekmece and asks, 'What kind of neighbourhood do you want to live in?', we know how to reply."[21] Second, the *Reviving Antakya's Living Heritage* project demonstrated to local authorities the concrete outcomes of local–national–international collaboration around participatory planning.

While engagement with central government-aligned actors has been limited, our experience suggests that a living heritage approach, though unlikely significantly shift the reconstruction process in the short term, can expand grassroots capacity and room for manoeuvre. Building on this means testing the approach across similarly affected neighbourhoods, supporting collaboration, and sharing knowledge across communities to recentre Antakya's living heritage in recovery efforts.

[20] However, in our experience these institutions have largely refrained from directly supporting grassroots movements, often restricting their engagement to policy-level critique.

[21] This quote is from Mert Aslanyürek, who introduced the Çekmece work to the Dom community at the start of a "Living Heritage Forum" held in Büyükdalyan I Container City on 18 May 2025, as part of our ongoing engagement with the Sivil Düşler Association.

6. Conclusion

Amid deepening authoritarianism and a highly centralised planning system, Turkey today presents an increasingly difficult landscape for community-driven urban development. In post-disaster Antakya, this challenge is compounded by historical discrimination and chronic underinvestment tied to ethno-religious identity and political affiliation, factors that have long shaped the city and now influence its reconstruction. Two years after the disaster, as much of Antakya remains uninhabitable, exhaustion and urgency further undermine participatory efforts (Süveydan, 2024).

Against this backdrop, ASF-UK's ongoing work seeks to demonstrate to local authorities and stakeholders that Antakya's residents are already shaping reconstruction and should be recognised as active contributors rather than passive beneficiaries. They hold deep, place-based knowledge of their built environment and a vision for the city's future, even if not articulated in formal planning terms. This paper has discussed how framing this knowledge through the lens of living heritage allows us to widen the range of voices included in shaping reconstruction discourse and practice, while also enabling engagement with diverse stakeholders and decision-makers in ways that avoid direct confrontation yet open space for critical dialogue.

As a form of shared knowledge, collective and distributed, living heritage is arguably often implicit *precisely because it is shared* within a community through ordinary practices and unspoken forms of transmission. To harness this heritage towards advocacy, however, it might require some form of articulation *in order to be shared*: within the community, as a basis for shared claims; with allies and technical teams, to develop concrete alternatives; and with authorities, to influence decisions and policies. Socio-technical assistance as *interpreting* involves practicing participatory planning methodologies to make residents' implicit knowledge legible and translatable into concrete planning objectives and actions, and increasing both local and international visibility to support community-based organisations in engaging with planning processes and strengthening their advocacy.

As top-down contemporary planning and authoritarian governance reshape cities in ways that disrupt local ways of life and marginalise alternative forms of knowledge, ASF-UK has proposed living heritage as an enabling framework to operationalise an insurgent planning approach. In this sense, the paper has examined how the ongoing work in Antakya demonstrates that living heritage functions both as a methodology and as an outcome of community-based recovery. It is an outcome because meaningful post-disaster recovery extends beyond reconstruction, requiring the repair and care of place-based relationships and communal lifeways (Cementeri et al., 2021). But it is also a methodology, as the shared knowledge, solidarity, and collective action required to rebuild a city in line with its residents' values are themselves expressions of living heritage.

We believe post-disaster planning has much to learn from this, and much to contribute. As partly external allies, socio-technical assistance should offer the tools to read, interpret, and translate people's knowledge into inclusive and sustainable recovery pathways, shaped by context and local actors. Without advocating for a straightforward application of a living heritage framework elsewhere – considering that living heritage is inherently contextual – this reflection from Antakya

aims to appeal to grassroots groups, planners, and decision makers to engage recovery through living heritage as a flexible, locally grounded, and collaborative framework.

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