

Rejuvenating cultural heritage in the wake of catastrophe

Most philanthropists would hesitate to put forward their funds, or their names, to repair a city that remains in the grip of such volatility as that engulfing Aleppo today



Firefighters douse flames rising from the roof at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris (file photo)



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When one of the oldest and most famous structures of religious significance in Europe went up in flames last month, the world was watching, and many wept. Social media platforms were also ablaze with pictures and comments, with people racing to express an array of feelings: Shock, disbelief, sadness and grief mostly. Given my

scholarly interest in religious music, and having written about Aleppo and its musical cultures, I received a number of messages from friends around the world.

The messages conveyed sorrow for the loss friends were experiencing as the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris was being engulfed by the horror of flames; but they also contained mentions of Syria. The dominant sense of loss was reminiscent of that expressed when well-known structures such as the beautiful streets of Old Aleppo were consumed by destruction and fire.

While the smoke was still subsiding at Notre-Dame, news of donations from around the world came pouring in. The flood of funds to repair the fragile Gothic structure has been astounding, bringing together 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) in the first two days, according to the New York Times. The star-studded donor list featured contributions from the likes of the owner of Yves Saint Laurent and Gucci; though global luxury brands were not the only benefactors rushing to fill a restoration funding gap the city had been struggling to bridge.

Capital is among many forms of input that continue to flow in support of the French cathedral. Along with emotions, much knowledge came about to satisfy the world's curiosity about the significance of a treasured church that took more than 100 years to build in medieval Europe. It might be possible to understand how cash moves faster than knowledge, but the volume and speed at which monetary benefaction was amassed has not gone down well with all observers.

Some have objected to the implied neglect of human life in the rush to save buildings and art; others remarked on the apparent double standards philanthropy displays in relation to human catastrophe. What no one seems to deny, however, is that the astonishing flow of capital for the cathedral repairs has shed a new light on what wealth management can tell us about human behavior during crises.

What interests me here is how people think and behave in relation to what we call "cultural heritage," particularly in the face of catastrophic events. This current, and first installment of a four-part column, touches on the immediately tangible sides of our shared cultural heritage — what scholars call "material culture." In the remaining parts, I will touch on the types of heritage that take forms other than those of physical objects, what (for the lack of a better name) is called "intangible culture." The focus in this series is on music, as I draw examples from the Notre-Dame Cathedral of Paris and the old city of Aleppo.

These two scenes of probably continue to haunt the world for some time. In some circles at least, people in equal measures at the commercial streets of Aleppo, the faltering roof of the cathedral, the same could be said for Aleppo — or attempts to set in motion in the

The millions (even billions) of the Parisian monument are results. Indeed, the fruit of restoration process will be according to French President Emmanuel Macron. The emotional head of the world that the beautiful city of Paris hosts in 2024. In Aleppo, by contrast, let alone attractive. In the wake of catastrophe, the only chance of the high likelihood that most philanthropists would forward their funds, or their names, to repair a city that remains in the grip of engulfing Aleppo today.

While hesitation based on thinking is understandable, there may be other ways when it comes to fragile settings. As an interested party, I enjoyed visiting the floodplain of the river Seine as I have tried to find the global nature of in both places noteworthy.

The variety of backgrounds, religions, interests, ages, and whose opinions I encourage. I cannot help but think, in place so much that they (cash mountains in the sea) see it restored to its beauty, not draw on these emotions of mountains so that love return to life and again. It had been for hundreds of years. Perhaps this may be the best which belongs to the world, my hope. After all, maintaining heritage has never been boring mega-brands with

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Workers take part in restoration work at the Saqatiya market in the old quarter of Syria's second city of Aleppo