

Cultural Heritage in the Gulf: Blight or Blessing? A Discussion of Evidence from Dubai, Jeddah and Doha

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In the Gulf and after gaining independence in the 1960s and 1970s, many cities witnessed a staggering rapid urban growth. The urban centers that formed the central parts of these cities underwent the continuous pressures of destruction and redevelopment. A large number of these centers were often demolished and replaced by alien, imported, high-rise buildings. The urban cores that escaped complete demolition survived as isolated pockets in the middle of hybrid environments.

This dilemma raises the important question: is this surviving cultural heritage a blight or blessing? To elaborate:

Is it “blight” and an obstacle that stifles our cities from moving forward to aspire toward a bright and prosperous future, or is it a “blessing” as an asset that can act as a catalyst to promote our cities while maintaining strong roots in their past? Accordingly, what should be the future of these surviving historic centers? Will they be demolished to pave the way for more ambitious growth, or can they be conserved and sustained for present and future generations? Will the historic city, as the heart of urban life and the main protector of our cities’ identities, survive and continue to exist within the

emerging global cities of today and tomorrow?

This paper attempts to highlight the importance of dealing with these issues of conservation and development, by raising and discussing the following question: How can our cultural heritage be a setting for appropriate conservation and development in emerging global environments? In order to discuss this issue, three historic centers in Gulf cities—old Dubai in UAE, old Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, and old Doha in Qatar—will form the cases for this research.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Urban Conservation; Sustainability; Tourism

Introduction

Historic centers present a rich cultural heritage, ranging from neighborhoods, streets, and plazas that reflect the past. Unlike the modern alien high rise towers, historic buildings and urban elements uncover long chapters of history and events that increase local pride and cultural identity. In addition to housing, the most significant buildings found in historic centers include mosques, *madrassas*, caravanserais, *khans*, *hammams*, forts, and palaces. Unlike museums—where the past is displayed, but not touched—historic cities and urban cen-

ters are places where life is bustling (Anglin 1).

During the late 1960s, when most of the Gulf countries gained independence, the initial goal of many governments was to change the image of the Gulf city from that of underdevelopment and poverty to that of modernity and prosperity. In order to accomplish this, they launched large-scale redevelopment projects to catch up with the modern world. However, numerous historic quarters and buildings were sacrificed along the way. Historic centers, strategically located in major cities and capitals, were seen as “obstacles” in the face of rapid modernization. Therefore, in many Gulf cities, complete historic areas were totally decimated, including Old Abu Dhabi and Al Shindagha in Dubai, and Fareej Al Slat and Msheireb in Doha.

Most historic centers that survived this wave of demolition faced issues in adapting to the needs and aspirations of the present. Most of the remaining historic centers suffer from over-occupation by low income tenants, lack of maintenance, neglect, decay, and lack of concern from the local and central authorities. Moreover, a lack of appropriate city planning and changes in consumer tastes have worsened the situation to

such a degree that these historic centers have been transformed into “slums” (UNESCO 5-7). The task of restoring these historic areas from blight to blessing, through conservation and development, needs to be urgently addressed before they disappear forever. With land values rising, these surviving historic patches face multiple pressures from their owners, tenants, and outside developers, to tear them down for massive and more profitable redevelopment projects.

The viability of a historic center depends on how its position, function, and values can be sustained within the rapidly growing and changing urban system, particularly with respect to modern districts. Central cores once bustled with life because they provided a diversity of services within a small area and lay within easy reach for pedestrians. Today, the introduction of vehicular roads has caused major disruptions to the old fabric of cities, destroying many significant historic districts and buildings.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine whether it is possible to reconsider both the cultural and economic functions of the remaining historic centers and districts in the Gulf. Despite their fragmentary survival, these historic areas should be seen as a blessing and not a blight,

and their life and identity should be sustained through appropriate urban regeneration strategies.

Cultural Heritage in the Gulf

Slum clearance in the name of modernity and improving the wellbeing of the population is a major cause of the erosion and destruction of cultural heritage in the Gulf. Lack of planning in historic areas has given developers and owners the ability to quickly erode this cultural heritage for maximum financial return. This trend has been stressed by Fethi:

Many historic areas and buildings were demolished overnight, or burned down by their owners for this greedy reason. But, when these market forces are properly controlled and channeled, say for cultural tourism, then these very destructive forces can become saviors of heritage. (55-56)

Thus, the tensions between change and constancy, and the conflict between the goals of conservation and development, may be reconciled.

In the Gulf during the 1960s and 1970s, modernization was thought of as synonymous to Westernization; this resulted in a rejection of traditional values in architecture and urban design. The massive importation of foreign Western building

styles, planning regulations, and traffic techniques without any well-thought adaptation to local conditions caused the wholesale clearance of historic and traditional areas. Ronald Lewcock, a well-known conservationist with a long experience in the Arab world, wrote in 1990:

Contemporary city administrators and regional urban planners are loath to become involved in cultural preservation or adaptive reuse of old buildings [...] The architects and planners because almost all their training is in the provision of new buildings, new suburbs or new towns on virgin sites—they have practically no training in ways of improving existing buildings [...] On a practical level, both the politicians and the planners would generally prefer to clear an area in order to begin anew without all the attendant problems, complexities [...] that urban and building conservation involve. (34-35)

Under the impact of high density, many historic areas and centers deteriorated rapidly. The estimated number of historic cities or urban cores that survived in the Arab world, with varying states of conservation, is 200 to 250 (Fethi 49). Despite some level of decay, these historic remnants are still significant; with appropriate policy, they can still become vehicles for

enhancing and sustaining local identity and pride, while not hindering the ongoing growth of the cities.

The main reasons and arguments for conserving urban heritage in the Gulf (see fig. 1) can be classified into two categories. First, urban heritage helps forge individual community and national identities, enabling people to define who they are (Boussaa, "Search for Identity"). Secondly, urban heritage may have economic importance, as people increasingly seek to reuse historic areas and buildings as resources for trade, tourism, and other economic activities.



Figure 1: Showing the conservation efforts in Fareej Al Fahidi in Dubai which started in 1996.

Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

Urban conservation policies are usually area-based, through the designation of conservation areas. The conservation of a

historic urban center is not an isolated and individual project. Rather, this includes a series of projects—not only physical, but also social and cultural. They should all be combined together to respond to the local needs of the community (Orbasli 18). There is a growing understanding that most of the historic cities in the Gulf are facing multiple pressures. Competing demands for land use, introduction of new economic activities, and marketing of heritage resources place a heavy burden on local heritage players. The latter strive to find appropriate ways to manage these surviving old cores. During recent years, new policy mechanisms have emerged to reconcile the conflicting demands of conservation and development by applying sustainable development policies to minimize any further losses in cultural heritage resources (Strange 229).

Historic urban centers represent a great economic, social, and cultural investment that would be unwise for the community to waste. One reason for conserving urban heritage is its potential rehabilitation, and heritage tourism can be a major catalyst and incentive for urban conservation. Developing historic areas for tourism and commerce requires transition of conservation from a political, cultural, and social level to that of economic development.

Trade patterns in historic Gulf cities are rapidly changing; small workshops and craft activities are being displaced because they are seen as too noisy and unsanitary to be left in the heart of cities, which are preparing to welcome tourists. In many historic cities, local crafts and activities are being replaced by “souvenirs” and “coffee” shops because these kinds of shops generate more income—a trend known as gentrification. This trend happened in the historic city of Sanaa in Yemen, where the local craftsmen were displaced from the inner city to provide enough space for tourist amenities.

Urban heritage must be viewed as a blessing, as it is a primary actor in maintaining and regenerating the lost cultural identities of the Gulf cities. Familiar buildings such as mosques, souqs, and *ma-drassas* represent shared cultural values. They are more important than unfamiliar and alien objects in creating a “sense of place.” New developments in the social and technological field are only to be rejected if they destroy the historic environment. Change requires a strong relationship with the past in order to integrate and harmonize the old and new. Therefore, a marriage between conservation and development may be capable of improving the quality of life.

Urban conservation carries two main benefits with it: identity and utility, which refer respectively to conservation and development. A sense of identity needs to be enhanced to withstand the radical effects produced by rapid growth and globalization. Utility means keeping the heritage resource alive through an appropriate adaptive reuse program, involving elements such as tourism, trade, administration, and other economic activities. Urban conservation has become an important issue in the Arab world. Interesting conservation attempts can be found in cities like Sana’a, Tunis, Baghdad, Fez, and Aleppo. In the Gulf, the Sultanate of Oman has succeeded in preserving most of its urban heritage. Other Gulf countries are trying hard to save their cultural heritage as well, as can be seen in Dubai, UAE; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; and Doha, Qatar.

The Historic City of Dubai, UAE

Dubai, the second largest city in the UAE, is the most cosmopolitan and economically open city in the Gulf; it is less oil-dependent than UAE’s capital Abu Dhabi. Dubai is located at the crossroads of ancient Arabian trade routes midway between Europe and the Far East. The emirate lies on an area of 3,885 square kilometers, corresponding to 5% of the UAE; the present population numbers a

total of 2,248,908 persons as of May 2014 (“Population and Vital Statistics”).

With the exception of the traditional mountainous Hatta village, Dubai is a semi-desert, with one of the most spectacular harbors in the region. Dubai Creek, called locally “*Khor Dubai*,” is ten kilometers long and divides the city into two parts. The southern side is called Bur Dubai, which comprises three main historic districts: Shindagha, Al Fahidi, and Batsakia. The northern part includes old Deira, the new central business district, and the international airport. *Al Abra*, the traditional *dhow* crossing over the creek, is still largely used to commute between the two banks of the creek, Bur Dubai and Deira.

Rapid growth in the years following the formation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971 turned Dubai into a vast complex of construction sites. Roads, power lines, telephone lines, streetlights, and drainage were laid down within decades. While this rapid development improved the wellbeing of residents, on the way it sacrificed many significant chapters of the city’s cultural heritage. The rapid urbanization that followed during the 1970s threatened the historic center of Dubai with complete extinction. Today, the old core survives as disparate small parts in the city; only 371

historic buildings have survived from an original number of 3,000 (Bukhash). In Dubai, as elsewhere in the UAE and the Gulf, urban conservation has been enlarged from an initial concern with the protection of individual buildings and monuments to the conservation of groups of buildings and areas. During the last decade, heritage conservation has been increasingly seen as a valuable policy instrument in helping to regenerate many historical districts such as Shindagha and Bastakia. This trend has become synonymous with urban revival, since conservation of the urban heritage can help fulfill economic objectives as well as respond to social and cultural needs. Reconstruction of Al Shindagha forms an interesting example in revitalizing old Dubai.

Revitalization of the Shindagha Heritage Area

The original residence of the ruling family, Al Maktoum, was in the Shindagha district situated at the mouth of the creek, which was developed into the Sheikh Saeed's house, built around 1896 (al-Rostomani 30). The Shindagha area was completely swept away after a decision by the Dubai authorities in 1991 to launch a vast highrise redevelopment project along the creek. However, rehabilitation of Beit Sheikh Said from 1984

Program Type	Proposed Activities
Heritage Revival	Marine Heritage: Diving village, Traditional <i>dhow</i> s museum, Planetarium, Water living species exhibition, Abra stops.
	Inland Heritage: Heritage Village, Exhibition area for popular folklore, Exhibition area for traditional methods of building, Exhibition of photos and historical documents, School for traditional crafts.
Cultural Activities	Large Auditorium (2,000 seats), Exhibition rooms for contemporary artists, Seminar and video rooms, Offices for the heritage associations.
Tourism Activities	A hotel built with a traditional style (<i>Khan</i>), Traditional restaurants and cafes, Traditional market (Souq), Tourist information centers, Health center, <i>Abra</i> stops for sea cruise and sport.
General Services	Administration, Police, security and emergency units, Mosques, Public toilets, Parking areas.

Table 1: The Shindagha Revitalization Program. Author: Djamel Boussaa.

to 1986, and accompanying conservation awareness that was well-publicized through media, conferences, and newspapers, discouraged the higher and local authorities from implementing this project. They finally opted to develop the whole area for heritage tourism, as shown in table 1 and in figure 6.



Figure 2: Showing the Diving Village in Shindagha. Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

The revitalization of the historical Shindagha area goes back to March 1996. The project aimed at retracing the history of Dubai through the establishment of a tourist heritage village along the creek. The village is composed of two main zones; the first one, located at the beginning of the creek, is a marine heritage zone, with the Diving Village as its center point (see fig. 2). The second part is the Heritage Village (see fig. 3), where the historical ruler's residence Beit Sheik Said al Maktoum can be found (Bukhash).

In addition to these two heritage villages, a long pedestrian walk was proposed along the creek. The path starts from the Shindagha fort and ends at the creek entrance. Many gathering places and activity areas were established between the two ends of the walk. With the wise integration of appropriate lighting to enhance the traditional image of the area, the whole surroundings have contributed to creating an important attraction for global and local visitors. The construction work lasted one year, and the two heritage villages were opened to the public in March 1997, thus coinciding with the opening ceremony of the Dubai Shopping Festival. Since then, it has become the main hub of heritage and folklore activities that are performed during the annual Dubai Shopping Festival and other occasional celebrations.

The Dubai Shopping Festival is one of the world's largest family festivals. Every year since its launch in 1996, this event has attracted millions of people from around the world, a large portion of whom take the opportunity to visit old Dubai. During these festivals a number of major venues are designated, ranging from the Global Village to other sports and recreational venues. The Heritage Village and Beit Sheikh Saeed in the historic district of Shindagha and Fareej Al Fahidi are considered the main heritage venues during

the festival. This annual event has injected new life in the once-forgotten Shindagha area. Today, it attracts many tourists and locals to the Shindagha, and Al Fahidi areas. In short, after long years of neglect and blight, the area has become a blessing to the inhabitants of Dubai and the UAE (Boussaa, "Historic Centers").



Figure 3: Showing the Heritage village in Shindagha. Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

The Historic City of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Jeddah, the second-largest city in Saudi Arabia, is located on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, in a valley that ranges in width from 5 to 12 kilometers. It lies on a coastal plain between the *Al Sarawat* Mountain range to the east and the Red Sea to the west. Jeddah is the last port to survive on the Red Sea coast that continues to host numerous ships arriving from all parts. The city of Mecca is about 90 kilometers inland from there, and the re-

gion's climate is generally hot and humid, with minimal rain. The population of Jeddah is around 4,324,982, double the population of Dubai ("Population").

Its traditional role of trading coupled with its proximity to Mecca provided Jeddah with the opportunity to become an important national center. The main characteristics of Jeddah can be listed as follows (Abdu, Salagoor and al-Harigi 119):

- A center of sea, air, and land communication;
- Commercial and business center;
- Second diplomatic city of the kingdom;
- *Haj* and *Umrah* reception center;
- An educational health and cultural center.

As a major reception center, Jeddah remained a walled city for nearly 1,000 years. Its vast harbor had for centuries handled vessels carrying cargo to different ports worldwide, as well as ships transporting pilgrims to the holy mosques in Makkah and Medina. When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, Jeddah became one of the main ports on the trade route between the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean. Its merchants handled a regular volume of commerce with other Arabian ports, along with ports in India, Egypt, Africa; and Liverpool and Mar-

seilles in Europe. As a result, the city's wealth increased dramatically, and Jeddah's inhabitants became prosperous and cosmopolitan.



Figure 4: Demolition of houses for vehicular access and parking space. Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

The discovery of oil in 1936, and the beginning of its exportation in 1938, brought about an unprecedented pace of change. Economic changes resulting from the oil boom of 1973 coupled with rapid development created new physical environments in Saudi Arabia in general, and Jeddah in particular. As a cosmopolitan city, Jeddah witnessed colossal urban growth within a very short timespan. While this was beneficial to the local population as it improved their living conditions, it was implemented at the expense of many chapters of the city's cultural heritage.

During the decade 1970 to 1980, the number of cars multiplied by about twenty times. This brought vehicular access, along with parking problems and traffic congestion inside the confines of Al Balad (see fig. 4). Large avenues such as Al Dhabab Street were superimposed over the old. While the new streets facilitated accessibility for cars, many historic buildings in the way were "simply" wiped out. For instance, Beit Al Baghdadi—one of the significant palaces, built in 1881—was destroyed for widening a narrow street (King 48).

Jeddah doubled in size between 1974 and 1980, with new shopping centers, office buildings, and apartment blocks springing up everywhere. The area of the city grew from 1.5 square kilometers in 1947 to about 1,200 square kilometers in 1998—a growth of 800 times over fifty years (Abu-Ghazze 229). In order to meet the increasing need for housing and other services, speedy construction was seen as essential. There was no time to think of saving the city's cultural heritage; historic buildings were either swept away or left to deteriorate. For instance, Bab Mecca—the main gate of Jeddah—was only recently reconstructed after being demolished (King 46). Jeddah has now grown far beyond its ancient limits; but Al Balad re-

mains clearly defined and still survives as patches within modern Jeddah.

With weak planning controls in place, and the intention of many rich people to profit from the land available in Al Balad, highrise towers replaced the traditional, low-rise buildings. These tall steel, concrete, and glass towers dominated areas of particular historical or cultural value and interfered with the traditional skyline, affecting the image and distinctiveness of the city. The result was a hybrid environment of conflicting styles of old and new, highrise and low-rise, traditional and modern building materials. Because of the uncertainty about the future of Al Balad, some owners allowed their dwellings to deteriorate deliberately in anticipation of redevelopment.

Al Balad, covering an area of 62.45 hectares, has been radically altered. The sea which used to directly link with Al Balad has been blocked by a number of mushrooming highrise towers. Most of the surviving structures were built during the nineteenth century. Older buildings are rare, while the street pattern goes back to the sixteenth century. In addition to houses, a number of old souqs, caravanserais, and mosques still struggle to survive (ICOMOS 85-86).

Al Balad: Conservation Attempts

The massive destruction that occurred greatly threatened the cultural identity of the city. In order to stop this, attempts to save Al Balad began in the early 1970s. Conservation of old Jeddah formed one part of the city's 1973 master plan, which was prepared by the RMJM (Robert Matthew and John Marshall Consultants). To implement the conservation plan, a merchant's palace, three town houses, and a caravanserai were selected for a demonstration study. A number of rehabilitation projects have been launched since 1982; these involved particularly the Jukhdar, Nassif, Ba Haroon, and Sharbatly houses. The decision of King Faysal to restore Beit Nassif provided an enlightened and inspiring model for other forthcoming restoration projects. After more than a century of hard use, with as many as hundred people occupying the house at one time, Beit Nassif was still standing. The artisans working on the restoration of Beit Nassif and other historic buildings were determined to return this house to its original form (see fig. 5). Following its restoration in 1987, Beit Nassif was first reused as a public library with room for 16,000 books; however, in 1996 it reopened to the public as a museum that displayed the main historic artifacts of old Jeddah ("Nasseef House").



Figure 5: View of rehabilitated Beit Nassif (1987) and the enhanced outdoor environment.

Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

Extensive awareness efforts were launched to gain the support of the rich families and younger members of Jeddah's community. Two key aspects were used to increase this awareness: the provision of efficient services such as piped water inside the old buildings, and the creation of a series of landscaped areas with plants, fountains, benches, and pavements. This contributed in enhancing the "image" of the historic area. However, limited resources, along with a complex system of multi-ownership, made the results of these efforts insufficient to achieve holistic rehabilitation of the whole area (Abu-Ghazze 237).

Despite the level of dilapidation affecting many historic buildings, the fascinating and intricate *rawashins*, or projecting lat-

ticed windows adorned with intricate woodworks—though now intermingled with newly inserted air conditioning window units—imparted a special character to the old center. Most of the dwellings were about seven stories high, similar to the old Yemeni houses of Sanaa and Shibam. This work awakened Jeddah's inhabitants to the advantages of conserving Al Balad. About five hundred traditional houses still survive, and the policy of demolition of anything that was old—so vigorously pursued in the early 1970s—has been abandoned. As a result, Al Balad constitutes a unique attempt toward urban conservation for promoting tourism within one of the fastest-growing cities in the world (see fig. 6).



Figure 6: Enhancement of the urban space by shading areas and paving the external sidewalks.
Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

From Deterioration to a World Heritage Site

While Jeddah is constructing the world's highest tower, efforts to conserve its oldest Al Balad area are failing. Since most of the remaining historic buildings in Al Balad are private, efforts to undertake repairs and restoration are being undertaken by private parties. On the one hand, the Jeddah municipality by law cannot intervene unless it buys these properties. On the other hand, the community blames local authorities of not giving enough consideration to the old center. As a result, nearly a quarter of the houses in Al Balad have disappeared due to neglect and deterioration. Most of the houses are crammed with foreign laborers, beggars, and illegal immigrants of Al Balad's estimated 40,000 inhabitants, fewer than 5% are Saudis (ICOMOS 85-86).

The severe pressures on Al Balad represent a serious threat for its revitalization. Furthermore, owners are discouraged from undertaking any maintenance because, once a building has been demolished and replaced with a new structure, this can generate up to 50,000 Riyals, compared to 2,400 Riyals at present. Most of the owners are aware of the value of the land they are sitting on, and are waiting for the first opportunity to replace their old



Figure 7: Slow restoration work in Al Balad.
Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

houses with new structures. Already a decade ago, the number of houses was reduced from 600 to 150, translating into a loss of ten houses every year (see fig. 7).

The government has bought and restored some properties in the area, including a thirteenth-century mosque and Beit Nas-sif—but it states that purchasing the rest of the remaining buildings would not be possible. Instead, it is planning to provide loans for property purchase, like done previously during the 1980s. In order to boost comprehensive restoration work, the Jeddah municipality prepared an application to include Jeddah on the world heritage list. This could stop the cycle of dilapidation and deterioration of Al Balad. A second step would be to promote Jeddah as a major tourist attraction, in addi-

tion to its role as a reception center for millions of people coming for *haj* and *omra*. Heritage tourism can still emerge as a primary catalyst of development in Al Balad. The financial input that tourism might deliver to Al Balad inhabitants could act as an incentive for conservation work. However, strong management is needed to avoid the expansion of fake and inauthentic structures, which can further erode the character and identity of the historic center that visitors are searching for. For example, Souq Al Alawi and Al Nada and other souqs could be promoted for local trade, crafts, and tourism. Al Balad can be revived into a sustainable living heritage by reinstating a mixture of residential, commercial, and tourism activities. In its 38th Session in Doha, Qatar during May 2014, UNESCO added Al Balad on the World Heritage List.

The City of Doha: Historical Background¹

Qatar's capital Doha is also the country's largest city, with more than 80% of the nation's population residing in Doha or surrounding suburbs. It is also the administrative and economic center of the country, with a population of 2,068,050 at the end of November 2013 ("Population Structure"). The city of Doha was founded in 1825 under the name of Al-Bidaa. The

name Doha came from the Arabic *ad-dawha*, which may have been derived from *dohat*—the Arabic word for bay or gulf—referring to the surrounding Doha bay. In 1820, Major Colebrook described it as follows:

Guttur—Or Ul Budee [Al-Bidaa] once a considerable town, is protected by two square Ghurries near the sea shore; but containing no fresh water they are incapable of defense except against sudden incursions of Bedouins, another Ghurry is situated two miles inland and has fresh water with it. This could contain two hundred men. There are remaining at Uk Budee about 250 men, but the original inhabitants, who may be expected to return from Bahrain, will augment them to 900 or 1,000 men, and if the Doasir tribe, who frequent the place as divers, again settle in it, from 600 to 800 men. (Rahman)

The city of Doha was bombed three times, which resulted in the disappearance of numerous historic buildings and areas. First, it was bombarded by the British vessel Vestal in 1821. It was bombed again in 1841, and the village was completely destroyed in 1847 after a battle against Al Khalifa of Bahrain near Fuweirat.



Figure 8: View of Al Koot Fort near Souq Waqif.
Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

The Turkish fort Al Koot (see fig. 8) was built by the Ottomans in 1880 adjacent to Souq Waqif and near the main *maqbara* (cemetery) to secure Doha. A small force was garrisoned at Al Koot, but this left with the signing of the protection agreement of 1916 between Great Britain and Qatar. Subsequently, Al Koot Fort was used as a prison for some time. Al Koot fort became home for the guards who patrolled the souq at night, a service paid for by the traders who refused to pay taxes in the souq. All this illuminates how Souq Waqif is deeply rooted in history and was established well before 1880 when the Ottomans built their fort. According to Mr. Mohamed Ali Abdulla, an Art designer from the Private Engineering Bureau in charge of rehabilitating Souq Waqif, the

latter goes back to the 1850s. (Abdulla, "Interview").

In 1916, the city was made the capital of the British protectorate in Qatar. During the early twentieth century, much of Qatar's economy depended on fishing and pearling, and Doha had about 350 pearling boats. However, after introduction of Japanese cultured pearls in the 1930s, the whole region—including the town of Doha—suffered a major depression, and Qatar was plunged into poverty. Oil was discovered in 1939, but its exploitation was stopped between 1942 and 1947 due to World War II and the Bahrain embargo. Oil exports and payments for offshore rights that began in 1949 marked a turning point in Qatar. The 1950s saw the cautious development of government structures and public services under British tutelage.

During the 1960s, new administrative centers sprang up to manage the vast oil revenues. The Government House, which opened in 1969, is today considered to be one of Qatar's most prominent landmarks. Following the withdrawal of the British, the State of Qatar declared its independence on September 3, 1971. Doha as the capital of the new state became a massive construction site attracting thousands of foreign experts and workers employed in

construction. Since then, Doha has witnessed a most extraordinary expansion in real estate, international banking, and sporting and tourism activities. This is evidenced by the many modern towers, malls, hotels, and seats of power scattered throughout the city, and through huge developments like the Pearl—a whole commercial, residential, tourist, and leisure complex beyond the West Bay area. The physical development of Doha and the various conurbations of the peninsula have been accompanied by extensive preparatory work, which led on many occasions to the destruction of the Gulf's cultural heritage.

Souq Waqif: From Survival to Revival

Located behind the Corniche off Grand Hamad Street, Souq Waqif is a showpiece of traditional architecture, handicrafts, and folk art, and was once a weekend trading area for the Bedouin. The origins of the souq date from the time when Doha was a village, and its inhabitants gathered on the banks of the Mushaireeb *wadi* (river) to buy and sell goods. Waqif means standing; this refers to how the merchants and inhabitants were obliged to do their businesses standing because of the water flooding on both sides from the Wadi Mushaireeb, and pouring into Al Khrais area in the souq before reaching the corniche.

Souq Waqif is a maze of alleyways covering a wide area, with separate sections selling perfumes and traditional forms of Qatari national dress, luggage, tools, general hardware and gardening equipment; tents and camping equipment; kitchenware, spices, traditional sweets, rice, nuts, and dried fruits. This souq is renowned for selling traditional garments, spices, handicrafts, and souvenirs. It is also home to dozens of restaurants serving cuisines from all over the world. Although this market dates back to the 1850s, it has been recently restored to its original character. It is now considered one of the top tourist attractions in Doha and Qatar.



Figure 9: Restoration Work in Souq Waqif.

Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

The private engineering bureau of Diwan Amiri was in charge of turning the souq from blight to blessing. The rehabilitation of the souq started in 2003 (see fig. 9).

Since most of the buildings in Souq Waqif were privately owned, the government bought these buildings from their owners for the project. After a detailed survey, it was found that two-thirds of the buildings were authentic; however, one-third of the historic buildings had been demolished and replaced by modern structures (Abdulla, "Souq Waqif"). The strategy adopted in conserving Souq Waqif consisted of the following measures and actions:

- Restoration of the old part of the souq;
- Replace the foreign new structures with reconstructions of the old ones;
- Modernize the infrastructure of the souq;
- Remove all the advertisement signs and all that disturbs the authentic image of the heritage area.

In order to achieve authentic rehabilitation, local building materials were used, such as Chandal bamboo on the roofs, and glass doors were replaced by traditional wooden doors and windows. After seven years of work, the dream of rehabilitating Souq Waqif has become a real blessing to the local community. It is a living heritage in the middle of a global environment; this has strengthened its position as a major hub for the Qatari people, and all residents of Doha. People go to

Souq Waqif for shopping, entertainment, and gazing. Souq Waqif has become a major attraction for all tourists and official visitors to Qatar.

Recently, Souq Waqif has become a major hub for art galleries and workshops, hosting several art galleries and local concerts during holidays and special celebrations. In addition to shops, cafes, restaurants, and hotels, the Souq Waqif Art Center is located in the restaurant area. The center combines a selection of small artistic shops with a number of exhibition rooms laid out around a long, narrow courtyard.

Beginning in 2004, the souq started to be rehabilitated according to traditional Qatari architecture techniques, using local building materials. Currently enjoying the last phase of rehabilitation, Souq Waqif is a major tourist attraction. There has been a souq on this site for centuries, as this was the spot where the Bedouin would bring their sheep, goats and wool to trade for essentials. It was a scruffy warren of concrete alleyways in recent years, but now its tourism potential has been recognized and it's been cleverly redeveloped to look like a nineteenth-century souq, with mud-rendered shop fronts and exposed timber beams. Despite "densification" of the area, the chief business of the souq continues unabated, and it remains

one of the most bustling and thriving traditional markets in Doha.

The revitalization project was based on a thorough study of the history of the market and its buildings, and aimed to halt dilapidation of the historic structures and remove a number of inappropriate altera-



Figure 10: Souq Waqif; a Living heritage day and night, and a major landmark that reinforces the local city identity. Photo: Djamel Boussaa.

tions and additions that reduced its authenticity. The Private Engineering Office in charge of rehabilitating Souq Waqif attempted to revive the memory of the place. In order to achieve this, modern buildings were demolished, metal sheets on roofs were replaced with traditional roofs of danjall and bamboo with a binding layer of clay and straw, and traditional strategies to insulate the buildings against extreme heat were reintroduced (see fig. 10).

Some new features were also introduced, such as a sophisticated lighting system that illuminates the market's streets. In complete contrast to the fake heritage theme parks that are mushrooming in the region, Souq Waqif is a traditional open-air public space that is used by shoppers, tourists, merchants, and residents alike, being kept as a living market day and night, thus becoming a blessing to the Qataris and expatriates after long years of neglect and decay.

Conclusion

When opting for heritage tourism in the Gulf cities, a cautious approach is needed with respect to the local traditions and customs of the host community. Therefore, strict management of heritage tourism should be established in order to maintain a balance between social and economic needs. Overemphasis on the tourist function creates pressures for new services and associated development, sometimes to the detriment of the local population, and can damage significant cultural assets. It is therefore important for tourism capacity to be carefully managed and controlled in a sustainable manner.

Diversity in both a social and functional sense helps increase harmony and vitality; therefore, it must be maintained and encouraged. Social diversity in the three old

cores is a sign of stability and a healthy, thriving urban environment. For example, the formation of slums and gentrification are two phenomena with similar effects, and both must be prevented. Functional diversity has always been a main characteristic of old centers. The historic centers of Dubai, Doha, and Jeddah should not be conceived of simply as physical entities, functional containers, an accumulation of goods and commodities, or a pattern of land uses. They should be primarily a setting for social interaction and cultural expression. Functional variety should be maintained, through the permitting of mixed uses.

Setting objectives for sustainable development is about establishing a sensitive balance between sociocultural and economic interests, between conservation and development. One way to avoid this is to see conservation as part of a much wider development process. Effective action to promote the management and rehabilitation of cultural heritage in the Gulf requires the adoption of a holistic policy based on the following assumptions:

- The Gulf cultural heritage is an expression of the lives of people who live and work there; therefore it should be inhabited;
- Historic cities and areas must function in such a way as to improve the condi-

tions for their inhabitants;

- Free market forces must be controlled inside historic cities;
- Urban conservation should be an expression of sustainable development;
- Action must be taken to promote economic development in old areas through heritage tourism.

Urban conservation with environmental concerns is also a key feature of sustainable development. This implies that development in the historic cores should be limited, but not to the point of stifling their economic vitality. Most heritage players recognize that such places cannot revitalize themselves without some kind of intervention. This means regulating and managing the physical and social fabric upon which their local identity and economic success are predicated.

Urban conservation strategies should discourage static preservation, which attempts to "fossilize" the past and turn our historic centers and districts into "blight" as open-air museums. There is a need to conserve and develop historic areas, to become "blessings" thriving and bustling with life. To achieve this, sustainable development policies should be introduced through housing, tourism, trade, and other economic activities. Heritage tourism in the Gulf is a way of fostering a major in-

centive for the survival and regeneration of regional cultural heritage.

In the three old cities examined, total preservation should not be the panacea. Where needed, some change of use may be introduced, but that should remain on a small scale. Since very few old buildings have survived, demolition should be avoided whenever possible, and should typically be chosen as a solution only for unsound buildings.

Urban conservation does not mean merely preserving a building, but also reviving its spirit and life. It means being flexible enough to adapt the objectives of rehabilitation to the needs of modern living, while respecting the local community's values. Rehabilitation of public areas is important and essential, as they add to the quality of a neighborhood and to the way in which people interact and identify with their locality. It is therefore paramount that rehabilitation includes public areas to strengthen people's sense of belonging and interaction.

Compared to Al Fahidi and Al Balad, rehabilitation of Souq Waqif presents a more successful example of sustaining cultural heritage in the present global cities in the Gulf (Boussaa, "Rehabilitation"). After long years of dilapidation and neglect, it has become a sustainable living heritage in the heart of Doha. Despite threats of the

expansion of high-rise developments around the historic environment, it is a strong statement and a message that a cultural heritage can survive despite the rapid emergence of global environments in the Gulf.

Most of the historic centers in the Gulf have been fragmented through unwise redevelopment and slum clearance projects. However, there is still the possibility to develop measures to reconstruct a unity in the dislocated urban fabric. A combination of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and new infill projects which respect the local traditional character should be developed.

Historic urban cores in the Gulf should become "blessings" by forming places in which people live, pursue their work, and enjoy their leisure time; they are not museums. They are primarily settings for social interaction and cultural expressions. Functional variety should be maintained through the permitting of mixed uses within individual and group buildings. For example, souqs and bazaars can be promoted for local trade, crafts, and tourism. Each declining historic area can be revived into an attractive living heritage by reinstating a mixture of residential, commercial, administrative, and tourism activities, thus transforming it from "blight" to "blessing."

The financial input that tourism can deliver to host communities can act as an incentive for launching more conservation work. But overemphasis of the tourist function might create pressures for new services and associated development, sometimes to the detriment of the local population, and can damage significant cultural assets. It is therefore important for tourism capacity to be carefully managed and controlled in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, strong management is required to avoid the proliferation of inauthentic structures, which can further erode the character of the historic center.

Change is *sine qua non* for revitalizing the surviving cities and environments; thus urban conservation should strive to make our urban heritage "blessing" and not "blight" by inserting new beating hearts in our historic centres. While change should be encouraged, it must be gradual, enabling assessment of the policy at intermediate levels, and thus allowing modification and adjustment when necessary. Transforming the Gulf cultural heritage from blight to blessing is about establishing a sensitive balance between sociocultural and economic interests, between conservation and development. Restoration of individual monuments without conserving or rehabilitating their historical contexts and economic forces is

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meaningless. It will eventually deprive the historic city of its "inhabitants," and will end as an open-air and lifeless museum. This should be avoided if we intend to sustain a future for what survives of the Gulf's cultural heritage.

From these three case studies of Dubai, Jeddah, and Doha, the surviving old cen-

ters should continue to be examined as part of the present-day dynamic reality, not as static objects of contemplation and tourist attraction. Urban conservation should aim to create harmony, avoid undesirable uses, and maintain the existing human scale of buildings, as well as their functional and cultural values. This means

searching for new active methods to transform historic centers in the Gulf from blight to blessing, through an integrated conservation and development approach.

Notes

¹ This part of the article is a reworked and updated version of Boussaa, "Rehabilitation."

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