

The Sustainability of Historic Buildings in Achieving Economic Diversity: A case study of Qebah Palace

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Abstract

Al-Qassim Region has a diverse range of heritage buildings and sites, as mentioned in many references. King Abdul Aziz Palace in Qebah town is one of the significant historical buildings which were built by order of King Abdul Aziz in 1351 AH in Al-Qassim Region — sustaining the historic buildings as an approach to economic diversity adopted by Saudi Vision 2030, to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil. This paper aims to discuss the sustainability of historical buildings in Al Qassim Region with the help of the implementation of conservation policies in order to enhance the diversity of the economy.

Keywords: sustainable; historic buildings; heritage and conservation; economic diversity

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1.0 Introduction

The country is moving forward especially in developing the economic sector sources to reduce the dependence on oil. In line with the Saudi vision 2030 to the diversify sources of the economy, by safeguarding the old buildings which have architectural and historical significance, adopted in 2016 (K.S.A, 2016).

The paper discusses the implementation of policies, how it helps to ensure the sustainability of the historical buildings in heritage areas and the responses of the local residents. It focused on Qebah town, Qassim Region. The government believed that it has played its vital roles to ensure economic diversity by adopting various strategies.

The paper is elaborated in three sections. The first section concerns the historical background of the area, as one of the oldest heritage sites in the Kingdom. Furthermore, Al-Qassim has been recognized as the number one province in the Kingdom in organizing festivals and events, within a rich in heritage, nature, and traditional handicrafts, and its geographical location makes it the hub of diverse cultures and various festivals (SCTA, 2014). The second section presents and interprets the role of the local government in the survival of the buildings. In both steady structure of the old buildings and the policies imposed by the local authorities particularly on King Abdul-Aziz historic building. The third section discusses the local residents' responses to the conservation policies and the suitability of the old structures to the current requirements.

2.0 Literature Review

The orientation on Diversification of "domestic economy is one of the most important programs that was adopted by Saudi vision 2030 in 2016. From Saudi vision 2030, it is clearly expressed that areas which possess ingredients an attractive character and strong sense of identity must be maintained and enhanced and, where practicable, other areas are enhanced to provide an improved sense of identity and place. This includes historical building and heritage sites (K.S.A, 2016). This part provides a review of background information on the study area on Sustaining heritage sites and safeguard historical buildings. It begins with a definition, the importance and the conserved of heritage sites to achieve sustainability, giving an introduction to the conservation issues on these heritage sites, also in this part the study reviews the conditions of the case study (King Abdul-Aziz palace) that it was identified as historical heritage building based on local authority, Qebah Municipality (SCTA (2012)

Undoubtedly, heritage is a reflection of society and culture. Studying of heritage will show the experiences of previous generations, in other word a simple and broader understanding of heritage is: "something passing from generation to generation." (Rahimah Abdul Aziz 2017). Thus, heritage is a unique and irreplaceable, which places the responsibility of preservation on the current generation. Old and historic buildings were the product of several aspects of natural and human interactions. It's a symbol of cultural identity and heritage of a specific community of particular. Safeguard the old buildings which have architectural and historical significance, is one of the trends to the diversify sources of the economy which adopted by Saudi vision 2030 (K.S.A, 2016).

Over the past three decades, tourism exports have been a primary driver of the increasing economic growth in many emerging and developing countries. Therefore, Saudi vision 2030, stated that heritage areas with an attractive character and strong sense of identity must be maintained and enhanced the diversity of the economy in the country. However, increased tourism revenues do not automatically translate into structural transformation and broad-based economic development. Drawing on cross-sectional data, this study gauges the extent to which tourism has contributed to economic diversification in a large sample of developing countries.

According to Nola Abboud, Al-Qassim province is the wealthiest region in Saudi Arabia; it has more than 400 cities, towns, villages, and Bedouin settlements, ten of which are recognized as governorates (Nola Abboud, 2012). Qebah town has been mentioned in many references as one of the oldest heritage towns in Al- Qassim region, where the oldest reference pointed out to Qebah town (Mandhur, 2009). Also according to SCTA (2012), emphasized that Qebah town has many historic buildings, since the Abbasid period, including the oldest road that started from the city of Kufa in Iraq and ran to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Zubaydah road is widely famous in Qebah town as being constructed in the reign of Harun Al Rashid and was named after his wife Zubeida.



Figure: 1 Location of King Abdul-Aziz palace
(Source: Qebah Municipality, 1995).

Furthermore, it is one of the most important tourist areas in Al-Qassim, where it is characterized by desert tourism and the primary destination for snorkeling enthusiasts and wild trips with its nature, valleys, and forests. Moreover, Qebah town has a beautiful atmosphere almost in the spring season, where it is covered with a greenery surface, whether sandy or mountainous, and its unique location between the desert and the mountainous terrain made it attractive. Al-Qassim province has been recognized by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage as the number one in the Kingdom in organizing festivals and events, with an anniversary number of 173 events in 2014 (SCTA, 2014) The geographical location of Al-Qassim Province makes it one of the richest in heritage, nature,

and traditional handicrafts, in Saudi Arabia. King Abdul Aziz Palace was built more than 70 years ago with a total area of 7500 square meters constructed of folded clay within a one-meter thickness of its walls. It is located in the center of Qebah town of Al-Asayah Governorate in Qassim. See Figure 1. It is considered one of the most prominent landmarks in the region, which was built for security reasons (SCTNH, 2017).

According to the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is an integral part of UNESCO's overarching mandate to foster equitable and protection of the World Heritage Sites. UNESCO has approved policies to achieve this goal, which ensures sustainable conservation of heritage areas, as stated in the document "Transforming Our World: Sustainable Development Plan 2030" (UNESCO, 2015), which also coincided with the Saudi vision of 2030 as the Kingdom is part of this world that shares this responsibility. Conservation policies maybe are different from one country to another depending on the economic and social circumstances. By considering various studies on conservation policies, evidence suggests that different nations have their own cultures, beliefs, norms and values. The overall objective of any conservation policy is how it helped to ensure the sustainability of the historic buildings in the heritage areas, and the responses of the residents. Furthermore, in adopting any conservation policy, it was emphasized by scholars that personal attributes such as cultural context, information, education, and sense of place influence have a significant role in the success of this policy, any conservation policy is how it helped to ensure the sustainability of the historic buildings in the heritage areas, and the responses of the residents. Following the conservation principle, the practice of building conservation should maintain as much as possible the original building structure and fabric (Macdonald, & Cheong 2014). According to the United Kingdom guidance (UKIC, 1983), any conservation policy should be taken to conserve heritage buildings is preserving the authenticity of the heritage base on the original or historical evidence. In other word to save the nature of an object includes evidence of its origins. Various studies emphasized by scholars, that any conservation policy of historic buildings must keep its original character as much as possible (Bagader, 2014, Al Saud, 2013, and Zalina, 2009). Thus; the enforcement of conservation policies is another aspect that can help to ensure the survival of historic buildings. However, the management of the compliance of the policies is not an easy task. This is particularly difficult if the historic buildings are public properties (Wan Ismail 2012). Saudi Commission for Truism & Antiquities (SCTA, 2014) has made a survey and in-depth studies to a lot of victorious Arabs and international experiences in the field of developing a conservations heritage policy, which represent the historical building with an environmental, cultural, and economic dimension. SCTA came out with their policy taken in consideration the state authority is responsible for the general policy in respect of the planning of the development and use lands as well as buildings within the area of every local authority in the state. The current policy, decide that conserving heritage buildings is based on the historical and cultural factors, taking into consideration the uniqueness of the architecture of the historic buildings as a historical and cultural contribution. In the current policy, three approaches always apply in the conservation of heritage buildings, restoration, preservation, and reconstruction.

To sustain the character of a historic site we should consider preserving the original fabric because by that we do a significant sustainable development (Rypkema, 2006). Looking to the historic preservation as a tool of change in the built environment which will lead to contributing to the environmental, social and economic sustainability than we have achieved the ultimate goal of preserving the historic site, the sustainability goals could adhere if it helped to the elements of environmental, economic, and social by engaging it to the historic preservation field. Bearing into consideration the influence of the social concerns that usually trump the economic and the environmental factors as well. (Avrami, 2016). Understanding the conditions and factors that are producing heritage tourism advantageous to the local community in social and economic phases, while at the same time is not damaging to the actual environment, the state of preservation of cultural heritage and the obligation of their safeguarding for future generations. (Throsby, 2016). The tourism factors of rural areas signify a source of tourism influence, nevertheless, with what, which is a combination of advantages and sacrifices. Notwithstanding the comfort and belief of the depth of the relationship between tourism and community life and regional development from residents is a sensitive issue to deal with in heritage planning field. (Dana, et.al., 2014). The consequence, attractiveness of tangible and intangible heritage and any good traded before, during and after cultural can affect growth and development, although it should be considered that heritage tourism contributes to the development of local economies but under specific, complex conditions and factors. (Lazrak et al, 2014; Li & Hunter, 2015). Sustainable development has implications for growth, and cultural tourism can still have a positive effect on both development and growth, as economic and political system openness with the flows of international tourists is vital (Capello, et.al., 2011; Robinson & Picard, 2006). Festivals can frequently remain unexploited to provide opportunities for sustainable local economic development. Also, some festival scenarios do, however, indicate a closer match than others to the model of sustainable local economic development activity (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). With several evidence, tourism can influence growth: it increases jobs, personal income, taxes, investments, and foreign exchange, from cultural and creative industries to clusters, from cultural capitals to world heritage sites, from events to community - based performances (Arezki, et.al., 2009; Salazar, 2012). The added values of tourism may be national and international. International tourism is investigated with particular concern about the significance of this variable thanks to the tourism receipt (Belloumi, 2010; Tang, 2013).

For a couple of years, cultural and heritage tourism has been under investigation. There have been concerns about content, attracting factors, motivations, preferences, emotions, and searching for authenticity (Bravi & Gasca, 2014; Ramkisson, et. al., 2011), Cultural and heritage tourists whose experiences range from events to cultural capitals, from creativity to creativity innovations, from art exhibitions to world heritage sites (Teodorescu et al, 2015; Patuelli, et.al., 2013; Di Lascio et. al., 2011). Growth is boosted at the local and national level: heritage tourism leads local community - based growth when the community is engaged and mainly believes in culture, tourism and its promotion, its marketing and its impact as an out - of - crisis exit strategy (Salazar, 2012). Marketing at strategic level must also: enhance local population's long - term prosperity; joy visitors by maximizing their satisfaction; maximize

local small business profitability and maximize multiplier effects; optimize tourism impacts by ensuring a sustainable balance of economic benefits and socio-cultural and environmental impacts (Buhalis, 2000). Executives and policy experts must take account of the opportunity to create and facilitate a unique heritage place of identity through a branding process (Morrison & Anderson, 2002; Knox, 2004). This distinguishes it from its competitors. The place brand identity should include and express the values of heritage and culture while taking into account the aspirations, needs, and motivations of potential future and regular tourists (Misiura, 2006). Politicians and planners know that historic cities need regulatory mechanisms to maintain and enhance the fabric on which their historicity and economic vitality are based. Conflicts over land use, significant changes in the nature of local economies, and ongoing consumption of historical assets place considerable pressure on those distinguishing features that make historic cities attractive places to visit, enjoy living, end up working, and start investing. The extent to which sustainable development policies can contribute to managing change in historic cities has been brought into focus by such pressures (Strange, I. 1997). Essentially, cities in developing countries need to remember a broad multilateral strategy to manage conflicts that arise between conservation and development needs through acceptable degrees of change (Licciardi & Amirtahmasebi, 2012). While for cities to succeed in such premises, sustainability principles must be included in the planning systems, using all available resources at play. Among these resources is the built heritage, which should be considered an incubator for inclusive growth, as well as considering the concept of heritage conservation as an interpreted vitality for sustainable development (Rypkema, 2004). So many local authorities believe that cultural heritage assets as trying to ensure a higher standard of living for the local community and extending the criteria for assessing heritage significance to include social value assets for that community (Du Cros, 2009).

3.0 Methodology

A case study on King Abdul-Aziz palace, Qebah is a good example that represents the status of this historical heritage building, therefore, has been applied as the research methodology since it was identified as heritage historic building based on local authority (Qebah Municipality, 1995).

Drawing from the review of literature with respect to the study strategies used in similar studies, the study methods adopted for this study were both quantitative and qualitative surveys (Osuala 2001).

This present part of methodology discusses the procedures and explains the practical field research methodology adopted for data collection, processing, and analysis as well as presentation and interpretations of field results and findings. The case study technique is applied in order to examine the real situation of conservation policy focusing on King Abdul Aziz palace, where the context of the historic buildings within heritage areas. The main principal survey techniques used were site observation, photographs, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires (both formal and informal).

To examine the sustainability of historical building (King Abdulaziz Palace), the implementation of any conservation policies in the area of study, and investigate the significance of culture and built heritage as part of development growth in the country and al Qassim Region in particular. Where, the in-depth interview was conducted with three officials and five administrators in the local authority, who are also familiar with the case study area while the questionnaire was distributed to 70 of the local residents.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Case Study: King Abdul-Aziz Palace (Observation)

From the observation and the site visit to the case study area, it becomes clear that the King Abdul-Aziz palace was an important historical building which is considered as one of the most prominent landmarks in Al Qassim region, it was built for security reasons such as controlling the smuggling operations that damage the national security of the Kingdom.

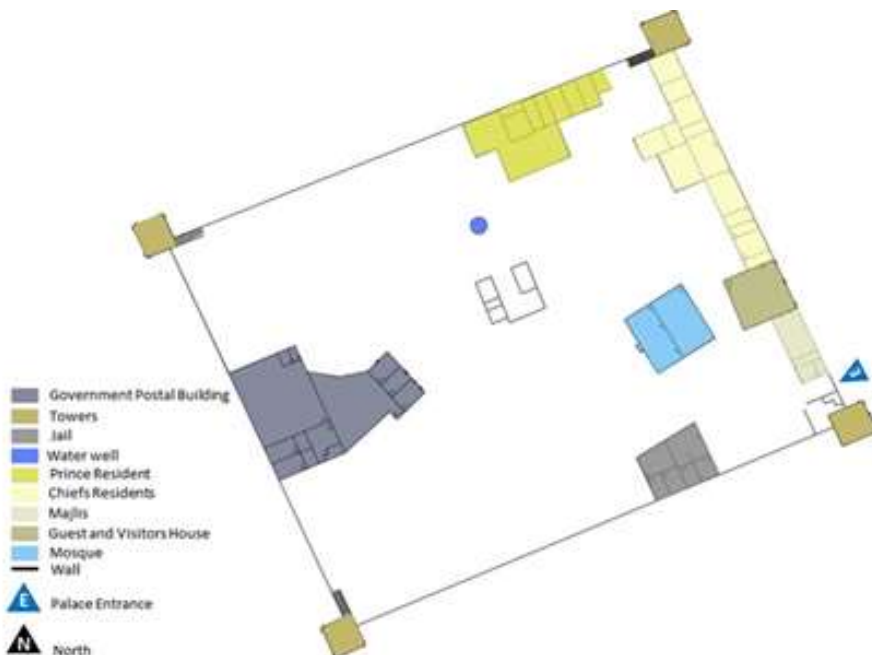


Figure 2 Components of the palace
(Source: Author)

The palace consists of several different buildings which are the main components of the palace as shown in Figure 2 and it is as follows:

1. An external wall in the shape of a rectangle (100 × 75 m) with four Conical shaped towers with a base of 6 m they used as an observation and defense towers.
2. Prince residence,
3. Hospitality building, kohugi houses, and chefs area
4. The prison.

The government owns the palace; it was built by the traditional method using local materials. Clay was used for walls and finishing works; stones for foundations; palm leaves for ceilings; and timber for doors and windows. The main entrance to the palace is located in the southeast corner of the palace (see Figure 3). All its details and elements are in their original condition. See Photo 1 & Photo 2. The external walls of the palace are in good condition. See Photo 3. But by observation, all upper buildings and ceilings are rundown. See Photo 4. This is related to that the palace has been restored and maintained more than 30 years ago. From the observation above, the study concluded that King Abdul Aziz Palace suffers from some neglect and has not been maintained for a long time. This is due to the shortage of conservation policies studies within the historical buildings, and the absence of proper Conservation Policies to preserve the historical buildings in heritage sites. Photo 4 shows the exterior walls of the palace is on the main street, by street side, and looks in good condition.

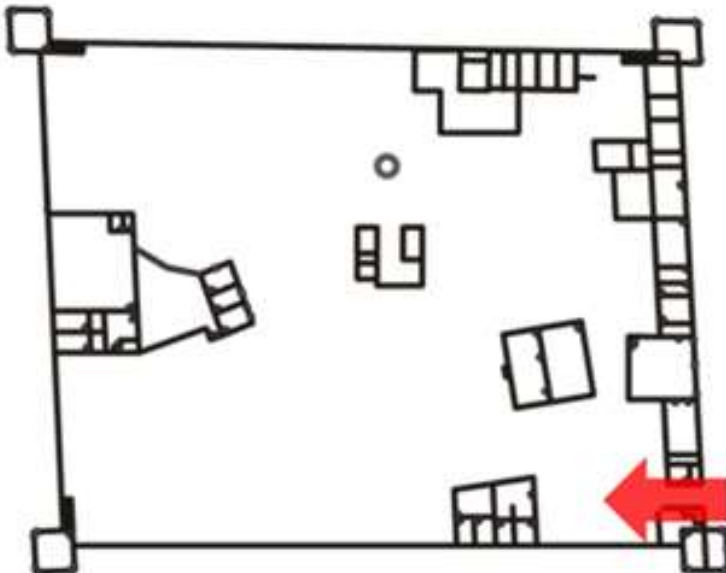


Figure 3 Red arrow shows the main entrance to the palace.
(Source: Author)



Photo 1 Local materials for construction
(Source: Author)



Photo 2 The main gate of the palace
(Source: Author)



Photo 3
(Source: Author)



Photo 4
(Source: Author)

4.2 Case Study: King Abdul-Aziz Palace (Interview)

This part present and discusses the result of the analysis of the data derived from the interview with the local authorities, and officers, as well as those responsible for concepts and issues of heritage conservation. The questions asked in these interviews were about the, (i) most essential problems faced the historic buildings within the heritage conservation sites (ii) study on implementation and application of conservation plan by the local authority.

The case study is unique with a combination of architectural and cultural significance within the heritage area. Participants cited several problems with the historical buildings and heritage areas sites. Findings from the Local authorities that the structure plan of the area it is a general policy related to landscape, townscape and there is no any specific programs or conservation policies implemented by the local authorities in the area, except some restoration work have been done in the past. Some of them indicated that the absence of an overall heritage conservation framework and guidelines added with no single body with overall responsibility for devising or implementing conservation policies makes the situation dangerous. There are needs to provide further attention to aspects of modern development that have visually and physically changed alongside aspects of community involvement in heritage conservation and integrity of historic areas.

4.3 Case Study: King Abdul-Aziz Palace (Questionnaire Survey)

The authors had explained to the residents and introduced what the study was about. It is an essential pace to verify on the resident's basic knowledge on conservation heritage buildings and whether they have any interest on the matter. It is a necessary measure as the residents themselves will mostly be the initiator for the success of the heritage building conservation efforts later. Residents' opinion on the importance of heritage building and why heritage buildings in Qebah should be conserved is discussed in the survey as shown below:

Resident's perception was used as a measurement tool on the importance of heritage

building conservation in Qebah town using a five-point Likert scale in the first section of the survey. The perceptions answers were categorized from "Not Important" to 'Very Important,' whereas the unsure respondents could select the option "Neutral." Table 1 shows the level of importance in the conservation of heritage building among the residents.

Various reasons have been received from the residents during the pretest survey, but only five reasons are listed then for the final questionnaire as indicated in the above table. It is surprising to know that most respondents have favorable agreement on the importance of conserving heritage buildings in Qebah town where most of them have responded 'Important' and 'Very Important.' It is a positive remark to be considered as this result may point to a high level of awareness from the residents on saving heritage buildings in Qebah town. This was supported earlier by the interviews conducted with the officials and the officers. First and foremost, heritage buildings are said to be important as tourism landmark, and attraction in the town of Qebah with 67% of respondents chose 'Very Important.' This is consistent with what the local authority mentioned in the previous part of the study, as Case study area is one of the richest and oldest heritage area in Al- Qassim Region, and it has been recognized as the number one province in the Kingdom in organizing festivals and events and a specific occasion that made by the local government on prompting Qassim region by organizing various events and festivals are held in the markets, museums, and other locations as per the nature of the event. Such festivals and the most famous hosted in Qassim are the Buraidah Recreational Festival, and the Al-Mithnib Summer Festival.

Table1. Level of importance in the conservation of heritage buildings among local residents

Importance	Not Important	Slightly Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important
To protect the scenic beauty of the historic building	3%	3%	12%	30%	52%
As tourism landmark and attraction	2%	1%	10%	20%	67%
To sustain history and narration of the city's existence	1%	4%	15%	57%	23%
To document all the past architecture	2%	5%	17%	27%	49%
As living evidence for the future generation	2%	3%	12%	25%	58%

(Source: Author)

According to 57% of respondents, they claimed that heritage buildings were desired to sustain history and narration of the town's existence. They agree and believe that heritage buildings are the living evidence to document all the past architecture for the benefit of the future generation. This is Affirms as living buildings are the only physical evidence of history. A percentage of the respondents where else answered 'Neutral' to the question about the importance of heritage buildings. It can be assumed that their opinion can be considered incorrect as they are not sure about the historical facts of the buildings due to various

reasons. As to compare the 'Neutral' respondent's characteristics with the whole sample, the 'Neutral' respondents do not refer to any significant degree. However, based on Table 1, minimum respondents think that heritage buildings have the least importance. This can be seen with the shortage 'Slightly Important' and 'Not Important' percentage of respondents. In other words, it can be seen the difference between those who do believe in the importance of heritage buildings in Qebah Town with those who do not. It is a positive start to the research, with the knowledge that respondents or to be more accurate, the residents, are all very encouraging in conserving those precious heritage buildings found throughout the Qassim region.

5.0 Conclusion

It can be concluded that there is a lack of awareness among the local authority on some policies imposed by the government regarding the historic buildings. Therefore, efforts need to be done. On the other hand, this study has led to the result that, there is the importance of conserving the heritage buildings in Qebah town to the residents. Besides functional as tourism landmark and attraction to the region as all, heritage buildings are efficient in protecting the scenic beauty of Qebah town.

However, the lack of resource of knowledge and exposure to the residents on any conservation efforts throughout the country especially heritage sites like Qebah town is to look into. Residents both with the local authority awareness should be seriously harnessed through promotions and educations nationwide.

The study recommends the Continuous promotion should be held via mass media and events such as newspaper, television, radio, brochures as well as the internet to create more awareness among all level of society. Overall, the findings of the research suggest that the building within the area were well sustained and the buildings can be a part of the economic diversity. The residents had both positive and negative perceptions on the Neglecting building (King Abdul-Aziz Palace), but the majority of them find the historic buildings as suitable places to improve their life with some strategies are thus needed to ensure the continuation of sustainability.

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Future Research

The study paves the way for future research in historic building conservation policies. As preliminary studies have indicated some conservation policies, a wider generalized survey can be conducted on a larger sample size that addresses these issues and deeper understanding of specific issues can be further probed. Improved understanding of the conservation policy issues can help to further refine conservation strategies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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