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メタデータ	
	言語: eng
	出版者:
	公開日: 2017-10-05
	キーワード (Ja):
	キーワード (En):
	作成者:
	メールアドレス:
	所属:
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2297/48388

The Evolving Role of Modern Urbanistic Heritage in Shaping Sustainable Public Realm:
The Case of Abu Dhabi

Adnan Husnéin[1*]
1 ALHOSN University
* Corresponding Author, Email: a.husnein@alhosnu.ae

Key words: Modern heritage, Gulf urbanism, public realm, public participation

Abstract: Governments are increasingly recognizing the contribution that cultural heritage makes to the social wellbeing of diverse groups living within progressively multicultural towns and cities. This could not be more evident than in the case of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE—a city which has undergone a significant transformation in the last five decades and has been known for its cultural diversity. Several government initiatives and community programs are being launched to promote more sustainable alternatives to urban development. Recognizing the urgent need to safeguard the surviving stock of modern buildings dating back to the late 1960s, the Abu Dhabi government launched the Modern Heritage Preservation Initiative five years ago. This paper explores the role that built cultural heritage can play to improve the public realm within sustainable urbanism. It considers the changing definitions of urban*istic* heritage before outlining the broad contribution this cultural resource can make. Insight gained from participating in public workshops and interacting with government agencies and community organizations is presented. This is followed by case studies that highlight some of the trends and challenges to the preservation of urban heritage and the creation of quality public spaces. The paper concludes with a discussion of the shortcomings of existing approaches to urban development and suggests a holistic approach to achieve a greater understanding of how to integrate physical public realm heritage conservation into sustainable urbanism.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Following the rapid urbanization process experienced by the Gulf region through its oil wealth, from a confederation of semi-nomadic tribes surviving on a basic subsistence economy into a futuristic post-modern landscape, several of these countries began to pay more attention to their urban cultural heritage (Husnéin, 2016; Al-Nakib, 2013; Melhuish, Campkin, & Ross, 2014). This recognition was not only manifested in the academic scholarship but also extended to the public sphere (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2011a, 2011b). In the case of the United Arab Emirates, a clear distinction between the pre-oil and post-oil periods is clearly reflected in the local social and physical characteristics of the urban environment. A continuum of layers of urban growth can be traced in this transition. And while Abu Dhabi, the seat of the federal state formed in 1971, embarked on the most ambitious wave of urban

renewal (Urban Planning Council (UPC), 2011), this enormous undertaking has prompted the need to address major issues and concerns associated with preserving local heritage and culture. Abu Dhabi city makes for an interesting case study as the entire city—with the sole exception of the eighteenth-century Al Hosn (fort)—dates from the mid-twentieth century (Damlūji, 2006). In addition, Abu Dhabi owes its modern-day achievements to the masses of expatriate workers and professionals taking up residence there, forming a highly multicultural population that has indirectly contributed to the urban culture (Yildirim & El-Masri, 2010).

While cultural heritage is considered a major element of quality of life and, by extension, of quality public realm, the conventional methods of identifying and safeguarding urban heritage are not designed to deal with less visible features of cityscape, such as street configurations. However it is often exactly these features that offer a city its distinctive character and bestow a sense of belonging that is at the heart of its identity. Prevailing definitions of 'urban heritage' are narrow and depend on conventional notions of what constitute architectural and historical value and thus 'urban heritage'. Likewise, the concept of 'sustainability' proves to as nebulous. Its limited 'three pillared' model identifying environmental, economic and social dimensions fall short in addressing the cultural aspect of the built environment.

Nevertheless, several government initiatives and community programs have been launched to promote more sustainable alternatives. Recognizing the urgent need to safeguard the surviving stock of modern buildings dating from the late 1960s, the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (now known as Tourism and Culture Authority or TCA) launched the Modern Heritage Preservation Initiative in 2011. It is aimed at the conservation of the built environment and the promotion of a local sustainable urbanism. Furthermore, the Urban Planning Council's *Estidama* initiative, launched two years earlier, offers a role for culture to play as a fourth pillar in guiding urban development and, by extension, in preserving built heritage.

Building on previous research centred on what constitutes a modern urban heritage in Abu Dhabi (Husnéin, 2016), this study examines the role that built cultural heritage can play within the sustainable urban development of quality public realm. A wider debate within the community has ensued in recent years over preserving Abu Dhabi's 'late modern' landmark buildings linked to the early stages of the capital's boom. Indeed, the urban and architectural legacy of the country's independence, a modernist statement brought forth in the 1970s and 1980s, is severely endangered.

In order to gain a better understanding of the modern heritage urbanscape, one must consider the underlying cultural dynamics which predicate on value systems, attitudes and behaviours of the stakeholders participating in the public urban realm and discourse. Consequently, a series of questions arise. What is considered to be urban*istic* heritage in Abu Dhabi? How is this cultural patrimony being managed and who are the stakeholders involved? To which planning framework does an integrated conservation practice and approach belong?

While this paper explores the concept of cultural heritage within the UAE context, it attempts to evoke the need to consider the role of public realm in heritage and renewal in Abu Dhabi: how can we define public space and how to define heritage? What does the public realm look like in a place as new as Abu Dhabi? With local citizens representing almost a fifth of the Emirate's population per mid 2015 estimates (Abu Dhabi e-Government Gateway, 2016), whose public space is it? And, in a place with only one

extant vernacular edifice—namely Qasr Al Hosn, what else can be considered heritage? The latter question has been investigated by the author in a recent study that made the case for Abu Dhabi's late modern heritage (Husnéin, 2016).

To seek answers to these questions this exploratory study employs a multi-case study research strategy. The methods include narratives and analyses written by experts; interviews of officials at the Urban Planning Council and the Tourism and Culture Authority; participation in public workshops in collaboration with the Salama Bint Hamdan Foundation; mapping exercises; and walks conducted in a semester-long planning design studio. The latter involved an urban inquiry of a project site employing direct observation, photography field notes, unstructured interviews with citizens, and mapping to handle the generated data. The analysis follows cross-case design. My claims are based largely on descriptive data gathered through fieldwork and organized around basic concepts from the social sciences. Given the intent of the research, these concepts offer enough direction to discuss general trends and possibility of alternatives.

The study further draws upon urban spatial theory and sustainability discourses as they pertain to spaces, places and cultural material heritage (both tangible and intangible). This allows for the examination of the capacities of objects, places and practices of heritage to persist. Such scrutiny, in turn, has implications on cultural heritage management in a way that would be mindful of the city's progress.

The following sections will first introduce the concepts of 'urbanistic heritage' and 'public realm'. An overview of competing views and emergent attitudes will be discussed against the backdrop of the regulatory setting. Three case studies signifying Abu Dhabi's late modern heritage and the public realm they help shape are further explored to shed light on the neglected yet important episode of the city's evolution. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of relevant themes that attempts to engage the ongoing debate over the genesis of cultural heritage and the values which underpin conservation decisions and landmark designation process in shaping and maintaining a distinctive, active, and sustainable public realm.

2.   THE ROLE OF URBANISTIC HERITAGE

The concept of cultural heritage has constantly evolved in the global context since the birth of this modern notion in the 19th century exemplified in Camillo Sitte's introduction of the urban approach (Collins, Sitte, & Collins, 1986). It was not until the advent of Gustavo Giovannoni's *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* (1931) that heritage began to be understood in an *urbanistic* sense and to feature in planning discourse especially by the middle of the twentieth century. In fact, the original term 'urban heritage' has been attributed to Giovannoni, who also played a leading role in defining an original strategy for the safeguarding and the enhancement of urban heritage on an urban scale, without overlooking the significance of urban development (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012). To him, a historic city is, at once, a monument and a living tissue. Thus, 'urban heritage' began to transcend the curatorial notion of single monuments and museums. Giovannoni considered the old city as historic monument. But he also held that the old city and the contemporary city cannot be separated from each other as they both form part of the whole contemporary urban phenomenon.

The implications of this relevant conceptual milestone continue to be addressed nowadays.

However, Gonçalves (2007) argues that the term 'urban' is a diffuse concept and its diffuseness eventually lent itself to urban heritage conservation. Instead, he espouses the concept of 'urbanistic heritage' since 'urbanism' signifies urban space and the processes of change over time, andencompasses social and cultural attributes. Key to his argument is that though urbanism the comprehension of the urban phenomenon is diverted towards a 'rational domain,' rather than a diffuse understanding that does not differentiate between what is spontaneous and what is not. He links 'urbanistic heritage' to the idea of 'identity' based on rational attributes, as in the case of easily identifiable traces of city wall or street or a square that persists through time despite the changes in the urban fabric. In fact, this concept combines the idea of identity with the concept of city as an 'endless changing process.' Therefore, 'urbanistic heritage' is a concept that is apt to function as a catalyst for promoting a proactive approach to urban renovation "involving both cultural and urban policies; residents and non-residents' interests; private and public interests" (Gonçalves, 2007).

As such, heritage management considers not only the listing of buildings or their expressed meaning and value, but also, as Giovannoni emphasizes, the urban ensemble, including the structure and the activities of its inhabitants within and without, to be of cultural importance. According to Giovannoni, 'heritage management' should be incorporated into the broad notions of urban planning and development, and as such people are to be considered part of the city. The promotion of the significance of integrating heritage management into broader policies of planning was echoed in cultural policy by UNESCO as early as the 1960s (Veldpaus, 2015). This paradigm shift becomes quite evident and relevant considering the potentially significant role of the public realm in sustainable urban development.

3.   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PUBLIC REALM

The quality, role, and significance of the public realm have always been limited and disputed (Harvey, 2001; Lefebvre, 1994; Whyte, 1980). This view is particularly crucial against the growing privatization of public places and the rise of the virtual public realm influenced by new forms of information and technology.

The role of the public realm in the evolution of the urban is at the core of Henri Lefebvre's writings. To Lefebvre (1994), the city is a place where inhabitants encounter each other, where they realize their differences and may be forced to confront and manage these differences, and where they engage their creative potential in communal *oeuvres*. In the city, he observed, everyday life arranges itself primarily around transactions of all varieties: buying, playing, traveling, and labouring. According to Lefebvre, the purpose of the city manifests itself in the often fleeting day-to-day activities, and in the often unnoticed everyday shared places. This is what he describes as 'spatial practice'—the cohesive patterns and places of social activities.

The significance of the urban public realm as a place of everyday activities has been underscored by both Lefebvre and Crawford. Everyday life is connected to urban design through everyday experiences of physical space—a space that is configured spontaneously between ill-defined and

contested boundaries of home (private), institutions (public), and workplace (third place) (Chase, Crawford, & John, 1999). Such a space assumes the vigour of everyday public experiences. This, De Certeau (1988) has termed the 'practice of everyday life.' De Certeau criticized the bureaucratic view of public officials and planners for viewing space as a frozen and static entity, neglecting in the process the small dynamics that brings life to the city. In response, he attempted to establish a discourse between the institutional structures in charge of planning and managing urban space and the everyday users of the space. Thus, through the conception of everyday space, research in everyday urbanism attempts to re-establish the neglected linkage between the human sense of everyday urban milieus and the public realm.

As development continues in Abu Dhabi, the public realm is expected to provide the various amenities needed to ensure a high quality of life. The public realm is the physical and symbolic link between people, and achieving these demands would require efficient utilization of public property and right of way as well as productive partnerships on privately owned land. According to Danish architect and author Gehl (2011) "The presence of other people, activities, events, inspiration, and stimulation comprise one of the most important qualities of public spaces altogether." Thus, the public realm can be recognized as not only a place but also an experience.

Nonetheless, how is the public realm being perceived locally? In the pre-1962 oil era, the public realm constituted a clear organic structure: each tribe clustered in a traditional neighbourhood system known as a 'fareej'. The fareejs were connected by narrow passages (or 'sikka') that led to the 'baraha' (or plaza) on which the main mosque or a souq opens (Urban Planning Council (UPC), 2007) These traditional uses of public space—the meeting place, marketplace and traffic space— all coexisted in balance (Gehl & Gemzøe, 2001).

Today, nothing remains of this vernacular structure. Based on the fact that approximately 81% of the population living in the Abu Dhabi region consists of migrants and foreigners (Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi (SCAD), 2016), urban governance is being increasingly challenged to preserve local traditions and cultural values, while defining a new urban image for an internationally connected hub. The main landmark projects, such as sporting venues, world-class museums, and major real estate developments, do not reflect the various social groups, and are often not accessible to a large part of the population.

In 2011, the Urban Planning Council released its 'Abu Dhabi public realm design manual' (Urban Planning Council (UPC), 2011) to provide an international best practice approach and act as a planning tool and benchmark for public areas. Despite its claim that the public realm will serve "the diverse, multicultural population," it is not clear how the manual will actually take into account the diverse population which has generally been overlooked by local planners and aggressive developers. As urbanist Elsheshtawy (2004) observes, despite the UAE's celebrated cultural diversity "no real effort is made to resolve social problems, address concerns of [expat] lower class, or try to make the urban environment more 'liveable'". Without access or participation in the public spaces of the city, there is little or no sense of belonging. The absence of an all-inclusive urban development vision will pose the biggest challenge to establishing a coalescing society that sees Abu Dhabi its current and future home, which, in turn, would promote the development of a distinct urban identity for the city. In applying a more holistic approach to urban planning, only then

would the planning process be seen as integral to creating, analysing and understanding space. This cannot be overstated when it comes to the public realm, for it is a continuous process of placemaking.

In the early decades of nation building (throughout the 1970s and 80s) everyday practical spaces developed into a zone of possibility and potential transformation of publicness as illustrated in the following case studies. It is for this reason that this study attempts to highlight the importance of the public realm in the existence of Abu Dhabi's late modern heritage since the new sanitized versions of development do not make room for spontaneity and imagination. Before presenting the case studies, it would be beneficial to gain insight into the local regulatory setting in order to appreciate the emergent attitudes towards urban heritage and the competing views of modernization and preservation.

4.   REGULATORY CONTEXT AND ATTITUDES

According to Yildirim and El-Masri (2010), the development of stakeholders and activities in Abu Dhabi can be traced back to archaeological excavations in the mid-20th century and the establishment of the Centre of Documentation and Research to record the Emirate's history and resolve territorial issues. Later on, the Department of Antiquities and the Al Ain Economic Development and Tourism Promotion Authority were created, which, in turn, solicited UNESCO's support in preparing the Abu Dhabi Cultural Heritage Management, Strategy. Completed in 2005, the 5-year Strategy promoted an integrated approach to the management of the Emirate's cultural heritage, culminating in the creation of Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) (Abu Dhabi e-Government Gateway, 2015). The founding Law no. 28 of 2005 charged ADACH with a broad mandate towards this end, and situated it among several new and upcoming Abu Dhabi government agencies that have been geared to guide Abu Dhabi's ambitious future development. In that same year, the government of Abu Dhabi enacted a law granting citizens the right to buy and sell real estate property. This law set a landmark change of policies which reflects the drive towards gradual liberalization of its land ownership policies (Sadek, 2014). Shortly thereafter, the government lifted the development restrictions. However, it soon realized that without a comprehensive plan, the Emirate risked repeating Dubai's speculative excesses and incoherent urban form.

4.1   Dawn of a new era

By 2007, the government was poised to unveil its ambitious vision to transform Abu Dhabi into a major global capital. Underlying it was a desire to diversify Abu Dhabi's economy beyond its virtually exclusive dependence on the hydrocarbon sector. This new outlook ushered in an era of state and developer partnership (Sadek, 2014). To oversee the city's transformation, the Urban Planning Council (UPC) was established by Law no. 23 of 2007. Its mandate was to direct growth through development policies and plans at all levels of planning; ensure compliance of developers' proposals with those plans and policies; and lastly, enhance coordination among the various government agencies and developers (Urban Planning Council (UPC), 2007). Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 (a.k.a. Vision 2030) called for

"setting an international example of cutting-edge sustainable growth—that which filters all decisions through environmental, social, and economic criteria" (Urban Planning Council (UPC), 2007).

Vision 2030 and its policy agenda has been followed by sectoral iterations that produced an ensemble of visions, plans, and policies covering every aspect of the Emirate's transformation—including the Council for Economic Development's Economic Vision 2030, the Environment Agency's Environment Vision 2030, and the Department of Transport's Surface Transport Master Plan, and so forth. Further, the plan claims to be "grounded in the cultural and environmental identity of Abu Dhabi" and focuses on "striking a balance between conservation and development" without "unnecessarily tearing buildings down" (Urban Planning Council (UPC), 2007). UPC has also developed the *Estidama* program, which is Abu Dhabi's edition of the LEED system calibrated to the particular environment of the region. Estidama takes into consideration environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability at the community, development and villa levels. An essential tool to advance this program is the Pearl Rating System, which measures a project's compliance with Estidama. However, it has not been clearly defined how cultural heritage features within this agenda, i.e. in terms of the social, environmental and economic 'pillars' of sustainability. This may be a point that will be addressed among the agencies in future deliberations, as the Environment Agency and ADACH have many procedural and practical relations in effect.

4.2   Modern heritage preservation initiative

ADACH's Modern Heritage Preservation Initiative, launched in 2011, is wide-ranging and aims first at setting a framework for the future on how to deal with the late modern architectural and urban stock. Its objectives are mainly to safeguard a collective memory of the emirate and preserve its historic evolution for posterity by establishing preservation guidelines and developing effective strategies. The challenge of the project is to raise awareness on the value and importance of this type of heritage, garner public interest and support, and reconcile the constant drive for urban renewal with the aims of preservation (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2011a).

A year later, in 2012, ADACH was integrated with the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA) to form the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA) (Thomas, 2012). This restructuring was seen by some as indicative of a shift in the emirate government's policy toward engaging culture and heritage more actively in economic development. The Abu Dhabi government also demonstrated strong will in adopting the Abu Dhabi 2030 Policy Agenda. Although cultural heritage is given an important role as one of the main subject areas in the agenda at policy level, the level of implementation has revealed challengesI is often not clear how conflicts arising between the mandates of different agencies will be resolved and how the government's priorities will be negotiated.

Moreover, recent research (Getty Conservation Institute (2010)) reveals that "conflicts between heritage needs and development needs" have as yet not been fully resolved either in the fields of both conservation and urban management. Heritage is frequently perceived as a hindrance to the city and local community development. In this regard, TCA has endeavoured to act as a 'resource' and not just the 'stick' by developing the tools to help other agencies and communities do a better job at maintaining the balance between development pressures and conservation needs.

Generally, as shown later in one of the subsequent case studies, TCA's ability to slow down development is doubtful and quite challenging at best. However, when met with opposition, TCA would need to evaluate the controversy and have all the pertinent studies in place while working in tandem with stakeholders on gaining important allies in higher places. Furthermore, these longstanding concepts may still motivate preservation efforts but the real task lies in practice. An assessment of the management policies and practices is paramount. This becomes especially pertinent in view of the projected effects of climate change and population growth as forecasted in a recent summit (Habitat III, 2016).

Moreover, global doctrines and professional standards of heritage conservation have become ubiquitous around the world, yet their varied interpretation is predicated on cultural milieus and the degrees of practice attained. This lends itself as both a challenge in terms of safeguarding the values that heritage presents, and an opportunity when considering the numerous options for conservation methods offered by virtue of cultural diversity. Hence, approaches can be customized to avoid importing foreign models to milieus far from their original source with no regard to the particular needs of local settings.

4.3   Emergent attitudes

The dominant role of the Abu Dhabi emirate government extends to funding development and conservation projects. But that does not preclude municipalities from exercising their regulatory capacity which leaves its mark on the urban landscape. For example, during the 1980s, Department of Town Planning guidelines demanded that façade treatment of new, especially residential, buildings incorporate 'Arab/Islamic' motifs. The outcome was dismissed by critics as superficial and lacking consideration for the supposed regionalism and underlying principles of Islamic architecture (Damlūji, 2006).

Likewise, the misappropriation and literal application of features of traditional architecture such as wind towers and desert forts have produced unintended consequences, misrepresenting the identity of the built heritage. Here, the quality and role of design professionals becomes key as they interpret and reproduce the regional cultural identity (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2014). In fact, there are some examples of architectural modernism in Abu Dhabi from the 1960s-80s, which have provided an appropriate response to local cultural and climatic conditions, such as the Taxi Stand discussed later (Damlūji, 2006; Husnéin, 2016). It is important to recognize this layer as part of the urban heritage, to complement and provide continuity to the older pre-oil era sites and buildings, which are more readily accepted as national heritage. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to see stakeholders do so for modern buildings. Damlūji (2006) provides some insights into this, such as the conventional architectural education in the region having been oriented towards structural engineering, and the influx into the region of architects from different backgrounds and senses of aesthetics during the post-oil decades resulting in the experimental nature of the architectural profession ((Damlūji, 2006). More recently, many Western-trained professionals have been recruited to the newer public and private sector agencies established in the mid-2000s. These professionals have been advocating context-sensitive design as global best practice, instead of the conventional, narrower focus on operational and 'engineering' aspects of urban projects more typical of the

Middle East region. This is a salient instance of the multi-cultural character of the stakeholder ecosystem in Abu Dhabi at work.

Interestingly, as indicative of this earlier attitude towards the late modern heritage, the previous logo of the Abu Dhabi Culture and Heritage (ADACH) depicted a silhouette of a camel joined by what appears to be traditional costumes with some brandishing swords or sticks. The emblem is remarkably devoid of any references to the modern markers that contributed to Abu Dhabi's national narrative. This observation was discussed with TCA's Amel Chabbi (Building Conservator) and Dr. Husam Mahdi (Building Conservatory Supervisor) before the new logo was unveiled. The replacement logo for the newly established TCA, however, does not have any depiction of animate or inanimate objects (Figure 1). Instead, it displays a simpler form that employs the name of Abu Dhabi in Arabic calligraphy enclosed in a pseudo-ellipse. The same logo is used by other Abu Dhabi government agencies (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2014).

Figure 1. ADACH old logo (left) and new (Source: TCA)

The local heritage discourse is polarized. There are those who see heritage limited to only what has been around them in the pre-oil era; those who envision it in cordoning off Qasr Al Hosn, organize a festival, bring in the sand dunes, some water and boats, sheep and camels, and elderly Emirati ladies making baskets or traditional sweets; and those who see Formula One (Abu Dhabi Grand Prix) as the quintessential embodiment of heritage. While the tourism industry is selling an image of Abu Dhabi it does so by showing off the ultra-modern, when in fact, the true essence for Abu Dhabi society is embodied not in the 'product' but in the process as the' journey of transformation'. Alternatively, to be an Emirati is not by only portraying the Arab Bedouin with a falcon on shoulder and camels in the background, to be an Emirati is to embrace the present by celebrating the journey (Formula one in the TCA logo!) (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2014). This latter discussion brings in clear view the relevance of 'urbanistic heritage' to the public realm since as discussed earlier it fuses the idea of identity into the notion of the city and its historical formative elements of transformation.

5.   CASE STUDIES

Three particular case studies, as a research strategy, are highlighted here to illustrate issues related to the role of urbanistic heritage and the associated public realm (Figure 2). On one side of the debate is the need to develop modern and comfortable facilities; on the other, is the protection of key threatened edifices deemed vestiges to the city's recent past. These conflicting goals of modernization and preservation need to be reconciled in

order to reverse what some has described as the "vicious cycles of Abu Dhabi's urban renewal" (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2011b).

Emblematic of this passionate debate are a three-decade-old bus station and taxi stand, the industrial warehouse district at the Mina Zayed Port, and the Cultural Foundation sharing the same city block as the eighteenth-century Fort. All three 'heritage' sites and buildings with complex stakeholder relations sit in a prime location ripe for replacement.
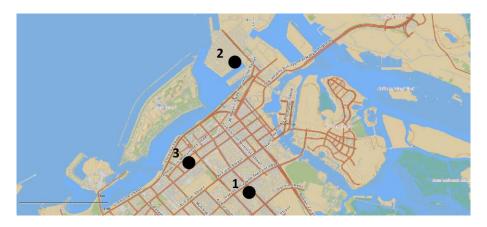

Figure 2. Locations of case studies: (1) bus station and taxi stand, (2) warehouse district and mina zayed port, (3) cultural foundation and block w17 (Source: *Abu Dhabi Geoportal*)

These case studies explore the notion of publicness in various urban manifestations and scales which includes a city block representing its historic core (cultural foundation), an industrial warehouse (district) that ties the city to its maritime past, and a public transport facility, which plays an important role in connecting the city to its environs and other faraway destinations.

Two main criteria have been considered in the selection of the case studies: (1) they are representative of the late modern urbanistic heritage and (2) that they are relevant to the everyday life in the public sphere. By 'late modern', the study refers to urban and architectural vestiges from the nation building era of the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas the public realm, as a place of everyday urbanism, becomes the overarching discourse that ties these case studies together.

Once the case studies were identified, various data collection techniques were employed, ranging from historical narratives to interviews and visual analyses. While the case of the bus station and taxi stand engaged structured text (writings, guides, news articles, conversations with academic Deborah Bentley), and photography, the port and warehouse district involved unstructured texts (individual interviews, conversations with curator Michelle Bambling), and graphics. The types of qualitative data in the case of the cultural foundation and heritage district used structured and unstructured texts, in addition to the walking and mapping activities conducted during a semester-long studio exercise. The latter also involved conversations with building's architect Hisham Ashkouri, UPC's former planner Ahmad Sadek, and academic Yasser Elsheshtawi). This method helps bring about an understanding of context, people, and interaction of various actors with the built environment. Lastly, relevant themes were drawn across the cases to draw out patterns from the concepts and insights.

5.1   The bus station and taxi stand

The Abu Dhabi Bus Station (Figure 3) can be seen as an example of conflicts that arise between the mandates of different agencies. A major urban landmark of modern architectural heritage in downtown Abu Dhabi, the Bus Station was designated for protection in 2011 by TCA (then ADACH), but also scheduled for replacement with a new facility as part of the bus transportation development plans of the Department of Transportation (DoT). Several rounds of negotiations between the two contending agencies began in relatively uncompromising tones but later evolved into more subtle discussions seeking acceptable design solutions. Fortunately, the debate favoured the side of preservation, as it was raised to the level of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council Various briefings on the significance of the station prompted key transportation officials to reconsider the redevelopment scheme. Eventually, TCA's plea to preserve the Terminal, bolstered by its own Emirate-wide Modern Heritage Preservation initiative, brought about a favourable outcome (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2014).

Figure 3. Bus Terminal (top) and Taxi Stand (bottom)

Known for its mint-green colour, the terminal opened for business in 1989. It was designed by Bulgarian architect Georgi Kolarov for the architecture firm Bulgarconsult A&E. The modernist building has two ramp-like prongs that meet to form the interior that house the ticketing stand and some shops. These wings are held by arches reminiscent of ancient viaducts. The interaction between the interior and the exterior is also part of the building's charm. At any time of the day, there are people sitting out under the structure and inside the terminal. There are deep, but narrow windows on all sides of the interior providing natural light. Devoid of any references of stereotypically Islamic or local architectural motifs, the Terminal stands in

stark contrast with the rest of the landscape—a quite stimulating experience. Yet in a landscape that seems to grow vertically unchallenged, the Bus Terminal along with its appended Taxi Stand, are "refreshingly disjointed" from the city.

A closer look at the Taxi Stand reveals a sense of playfulness that is quite remarkable. The roof's brise-soleil filters (Figure 2) dampen light into the mint-green covered area below that is quite soothing. While the passive solar design was established using modest means available at the time of its construction in the early 1980s, it is now back in trend following the Urban Planning Council's *Estidama* (sustainability) initiative (Urban Planning Council and Economic Council (UPC-EC), 2011). From the sight of lounging Subcontinental drivers, it is clear that the space has become homely, at least to these marginalized groups who form a sizable proportion of the population. A close observation of this everyday space highlights inhabitation, action, and appropriation.

If the renovation plans were to go ahead it would almost certainly displace the current informal system and threaten the community that has made that space its own—the result is urban fragmentation. And thus, in the words of Elsheshtawy: "The city is … being re-created through the gaze of the tourist, the look of multi-national corporations, and the stare of real estate development companies. In such a context it becomes quite natural for developments to become isolated and fragmented islands." (Elsheshtawy, 2004). So instead of considering this legacy an impediment, DoT should work with TCA on policies that perceive the urbanistic heritage as a constructive asset generating an essential part of a creative urban dynamic that would guarantee its sustained vigour and the inclusion of its diverse communities.

Cultural sustainability entails reconsidering the interconnected roles of government agencies, experts and when possible residents (linking the set of values and judgements of specialists and the set of common knowledge), and increasing the participation of the population in defining heritage and heritage policies, in order to improve community life and promote a sense of ownership.

5.2   Mina Zayed port and the warehouse district

Inaugurated in 1972, Zayed Port has been Abu Dhabi's premier commercial port for the past four decades. It is located on the northeastern side of the island and spans over 535 hectares (Abu Dhabi Ports (n.d.)) para. 1). Following the transfer of all container traffic to Khalifa Port in 2012, Zayed Port became part of a comprehensive development plan to establish the capital city as a world-class cruise destination. It houses a new cruise terminal building which opened in 2015 (Figure 4).

The 13,000 square meter cruise terminal was designed by the international firm BDP. The designers re-used an existing warehouse structure and overlaid it with modern materials and fittings. The new and expensive building boasts "traditional Arabic ornaments, colors, and shapes, combined with modern architectural elements defin[ing] the building's distinctive style which celebrates the UAE's cultural heritage and pays tribute to its long maritime history". In addition, the distinctive lattice roof structure takes inspiration from the native 'ghaf' tree, while "wooden features inside reflect traditional dhow sailing vessels." (BDP, 2015).

It must be noted, however, that the scope for adaptive reuse of this type of modern industrial heritage is as yet somewhat limited. This is due to factors

related to the substandard physical construction techniques of some early modern period buildings, as well as the absence of a sufficient culture and industry supporting the idea. However, as more value on the full range of heritage assets is placed by the government, developers and the local community, it will be easier to develop methods of regenerating and integrating them within a culturally sensitive urban development.

Figure 4. Cruise Terminal-Mina Zayed (Source: (BDP, 2015))

While future plans for the adjacent Warehouse District has not been officially announced, an initiative funded by the philanthropic Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation is seeking to create a cultural space at the epicenter of Mina Zayed. With the help of the Danish design firm Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), a couple of industrial warehouses were converted into a multipurpose venue which was completed in 2015 (Figure 5). The project will serve as a grass-roots cultural destination for the capital. As part of a newly created urban plaza, Warehouse421 is becoming a cultural hub that fosters the local art and cultural scene and supports the perceptive processes, in order to reinforce the UAE's creative community. The various cultural programs and artistic projects explore themes of memory and transformation which play a strong part in the evolution of Abu Dhabi. This is a unique opportunity for a public realm to invigorate the local and wider community to experience all aspects of culture in a distinctive and original space. Its location within the port vicinity also invokes ideals of national history and tradition.

With proper attention, such projects may extend to the formation of new ecosystems, including the conversion and adaptive reuse of redundant structures and disparate elements of the industrial past as well as integration of new buildings, infrastructures and landscaping.

It is hoped that an initiative such as this will serve as an impetus to re-envisioning the future development of the historic industrial district. This type of infill development and adaptive reuse would also act as a catalyst for the improvement of the public realm.

The Mina Port Zayed district has been for many decades a popular destination for tourists, locals and expatriates. It is one of few remaining public realms where one would always enjoy a true Arabic hospitality and a good bargain. It is host to a number of attractions including the vegetable and fruits market, carpet souk, plant nurseries, and the Iranian souk. There is also a fish market, which gets its daily supply from the fishermen sailing their traditional dhows back with their catch. The sight of shop owners and

fish sellers haggling customers and the sometimes staunch smells and commotion add an air of spontaneity, ruggedness and an organic feel to this particular public realm and urbanistic heritage, which explains its popularity. Therefore, any future plans for this area should consider the need for participation in developing a sense of social inclusion in order for public realm heritage to continue to thrive in the present and into the future.

Figure 5. Artist rendering of the Warehouse421 and vicinity (Source: *visitabudhabi.ae*)

Sad memories of the long gone, but not forgotten, Central Souk (1968-2005) still linger. The Souk served as a popular and affordable shopping centre. It is noteworthy for its casual and pleasant social engagement between patrons. Its replacement, the luxurious and sanitized Central Market, was built at the expense of people and uses that make it an interesting place to be. Great cities thrive not just on great public spaces but on interconnected diversity. For Abu Dhabi, in order to realize its Vision 2030, this means addressing not only its demographic heterogeneity (ethnicity, class, profession, and so on) but also its diversity of building types and uses, from all eras of its urban history. This will consequently raise issues of governance related to heritage management. Warehouse421 is in a unique position to facilitate and thus contribute to public discourse, interactivity and innovative community development.

5.3   The Cultural Foundation and heritage district

On the occasion of the annual Qasr Al Hosn Festival held in February 2015, the author and his planning studio were invited by the 'Lest We Forget' initiative to host a public workshop at the Cultural Foundation (Figure 6). Students grappled with issues related to understanding modern urbanistic heritage in the local context. They sought ways to 'stitch' the historic Qasr Al Hosn monument back into the urban fabric along with its neighbouring Cultural Foundation building. The studio/workshop themed "An Exploration of Abu Dhabi's Urban DNA One Block at a Time" (Husnéin, 2015) proved to be a great opportunity for students to interact with the public and get a sense of how others viewed and reacted to the question of preserving late modern heritage. Participants were keen to learn more about the city's recent attempt to reconsider its urbanistic heritage in the face of rapid development.

Figure 6. Public workshop at the Cultural Foundation

In one studio exercise students were tasked with studying a residential city block in the Al Khalidiya district (designated Block W17 on Municipality maps), which is believed to have been outlined in the 1968 master plan. Initial investigation of the site has shown that it may contain samples of the earliest surviving residential villas in the city. And, in the manner of Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur* or the urban explorer (Benjamin, 2002) students were asked to walk through the site and experience first-hand the bewildering networks of internal streets which vary from one superblock to another. Students recorded what they encountered in direct observations, identified few denizens and compared notes. As it were, many of the residents work around nearby Electra (Zayed the First) Street. This is a friendly, quiet greener neighbourhood that reflects the low density of Abu Dhabi in the 1970s and 1980s. Here you may find a gaggle of children playing pick-up soccer in one of the relatively safer corners of the block— typically landscaped strips of leftover right-of-way next to the main roads. Walking through the wall of high rises into the superblock's interior, the instant calm was almost bucolic as the villas, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the city, were hardly noticeable from outside the superblock.

This was also a lesson in how the block functioned in terms of connectivity, permeability and wayfinding. Closer inspection of the neighbourhood revealed possible encroachment on the alleyways by residents making it the more difficult to navigate your way around. The author maintains that "[t]hese subtle, 'ordinary' actions were investigated by De Certeau (1988) whose theory of everyday life holds that individuals constantly remake and revalue their lives, cultures, and surroundings within broad socio-economic constraints" (Husnéin, 2016). According to de Certeau, both 'ordinary' facets of life and the individual and societal systems are important to consider.

Students were encouraged to search for themes such as existing building typologies. Students compared aerial photos with data collected about the various building types. One objective was to determine if there was indeed extant courtyard housing which was associated with the early Shaabi (folklore/public/national) housing projects era. At times, students asked occupants if they could took further looks. Indeed one or two examples were

identified in the area. Many houses were transformed to accommodate a new mostly low income clientele. Studio participants were accordingly able to read the urban morphology as a palimpsest "encoding the various layers of the block's evolution and ultimately Abu Dhabi's story" (Husnéin, 2015). In fact, the studio exercise revealed that "a palimpsest not only manifests itself in plan but also three dimensionally as one gazes across the cityscape at the layering of successive buildings representing various phases of Abu Dhabi's development" (Husnéin, 2016). One interesting finding during the studio exercise was the need for "an urban viewscape mapping for building envelope height and location" which would act "as a development criterion in assessing the significance of a possible cultural heritage site" (Husnéin, 2016).

Figure 7. The Cultural Foundation c. 1981
(Source: ARCADD, Inc. / Hisham Ashkouri Architects via *www.thenational.ae*)

Sitting on one of the oldest blocks in the city is the Cultural Foundation (Figure 7) which dates back to 1977. It was one of the earliest civic-minded projects, strongly linked to the era of nation-building, which attempted to bridge an apparent gap—the public realm—which constitutes our everyday experience of urban places. It housed the first national library and served as a significant community and art centre. It brought people together to exchange practices and ideas. The Cultural Foundation was almost torn down in 2010, but the government of Abu Dhabi, opted against the idea. The contemporary building is considered one of the foremost examples of modern architecture in the UAE situated on the same city block as Abu Dhabi's most significant historic building—Qasr Al Hosn. It was designed by The Architects Collaborative (TAC) in 1977 which was based in Cambridge, MA, and founded by Walter Gropius.

Modern architecture and urbanism might not appeal to many people, but they are important to the heritage of Abu Dhabi and part of the city's urban history. A general lack of awareness and appreciation was specifically identified as one of the threats faced by Abu Dhabi's late modern built heritage (Chabbi & Mahdy, 2011a). It is incumbent upon public agencies, such as TCA and UPC, and academic and research institutions to bring this important matter to the attention of the public. The cultural aim would be to introduce the late modern architectural and urban heritage into people's lexicon.

Refreshingly, Yasser Elsheshtawy, upon his appointment as curator of the UAE pavilion at the 2016 Venice Biennale, chose the theme of the aforementioned Shaabi housing—a seemingly mundane episode yet fascinating aspect of local architectural history to represent the UAE. He stated that "We would like to show the diversity of the architectural and urban landscape of the Emirates and to show people that it isn't just about iconic buildings and skyscrapers and shopping malls" (Leech, 2015). In delivering 'heritage' from the unique and the outstanding, to include the 'ordinary' (as suggested by Certeau and Elsheshtawy), the underlying premise is that issues of defining and planning for heritage could play a central role in determining 'social policies' for the UAE.

6.   RELEVANT THEMES

A major theme that surfaces from the case studies is indeed the way the remains and memories of the past—heritage—not only represent the past, but live—or should live—in the present. They are the backdrop of everyday life, the landscape of people's lives, and some case studies show how history and heritage need to be viewed as essential components of the daily life of the population. Dealing with the heritage does not mean only focusing on the past. Heritage must be articulated with the needs and aspirations for modern life, most particularly as multicultural and rapidly developing cities as in the Gulf where the influx of temporary populations of tourists, workers and expatriates brings additional complexity.

As a multicultural setting, there is a definite need to underline the idea of cultural sustainability in the Gulf, whether between global and local influences, between and within communities, or between inhabitants and visitors, or inhabitants and experts. There is room in Abu Dhabi's urban experience and heritage management to enable wider and more diverse groups of people to explore their perspectives, to ensure that dominant narratives are countered by an array of alternative or changing points of view. There is a consensus that the aim is to increase the representation of plural and multiple experiences—in contemporary Emirati society—through increased tolerance for difference and wider appreciation of the 'palimpsestic identity' of towns and cities. It is also important to ensure that more people feel that they belong where they live. There is a need to promote social sustainability by cultural and democratic means and not only (as often seems to be the assumption) by economic ones.

The case studies demonstrate The idea that revealing and enhancing ordinary heritage, and at the same time pursing people-centered rather than object-centered approaches for heritage preservation, can help with community building and contribute to social cohesion and understanding. The case of warehouse421 may, in fact, demonstrate ways in which sharing heritage strengthens relations between communities between neighborhoods and between generations. Enhancing local heritage and making people aware of and concerned about the existing heritage is viewed as a resource for the well-being of the residents/inhabitants. Developing participation processes, educational activities and collaborative work creates place-identity and reinforces sense of place.

In terms of taking ownership of heritage, sustainability means including the living community in the heritage process and taking into account the cultural vitality of the population. It supposes selecting from the past (and perhaps modifying present-day behavior) and finding ways to ensure (not

merely physically but also symbolically) that the past contributes to the quality of life, as shown in the cases of the 'bus station', and 'block W17'. This involvessome recognition that heritage can be owned by everyone.

Finally, the paper raises several governance issues related to heritage management. It underlines the need for participation in developing a sense of social inclusion for heritage which can be controversial. As the case studies have demonstrated, cultural sustainability means reconsidering the interconnected roles of government agencies, experts and when possible residents (linking the set of values and judgements of specialists and the set of common knowledge). In this vein, an integrated heritage conservation practice and approach would belong to a top-down urban planning approach tempered by a strategic and communicative model—a bottom-up perspective. Increasing the participation of the population in defining heritage and heritage policies would improve community life and promote values of tolerance and peace.

7.   CONCLUSION

Abu Dhabi's 'urban history' or lack thereof, presents a unique situation—a city resurrected in the modern era of nation-building with the aid of a diverse demographic. Decades of aggressive development left most its late modern heritage at the mercy of the bulldozer and ventured into threatening the public realm. Recent activism bolstered by government initiatives may turn the tide in favor of an emerging philosophy that will be able to strike a balance between development and preservation.

Urban or rather *urbanistic* heritage is increasingly regarded as a potential and relevant contributor to the economic and social development of communities. Hence, heritage management would tend to social and spatial refinements while supporting the present qualities of the built environment, which holds cultural, aesthetic and economic values for any community. As such, a structure of broad participation becomes vital for achieving balance between conservation and development endeavors. The public realm is an integral part of that civic experience, as well as the architectural edifices.

As the case studies have shown, the spaces between the buildings are vibrant features that have a distinctive and unique character, whether they are conduits to move through (e.g., streets), or places that gathers people (e.g., plazas). The public realm can actively serve as a 'canvas' that serves to unite the old and the new improving the legibility and coherence of the centers of our cities.

However, the realization of a good public realm becomes a question of its contextual design approach and its manageability—a common concern for all case studies. For example, the taxi stand is not just a transitional space to pass through, rather it is a space that entices people to slow down or pause to experience the place. Likewise, the cultural foundation was and hopefully will reclaim its role as a place that will in its own way enrich the lives of people using it—a lesson that can definitely inform the development of the 'warehouse district'. There already exists Warehouse421 with its potential role to become an urban catalyst that would reinvigorate the area highlighting its historic industrial heritage. One is reminded also not to merely focus on aesthetics, beauty and functionalism at the expense of the liveliness promised on the urban designer's drawing board (Gehl & Gemzøe, 2001). Stitching the cultural foundation and the historic fort back into the

city fabric offers an opportunity for city planners to reinvigorate their roles in shaping a sustainable public realm at its cultural heart.

One cannot also overlook the complex issues that shape the heritage experience in this part of the world—issues which include the highly political nature of its cultural heritage activity. The leadership agenda is potentially in conflict with that of local academics, historians and thinkers, which makes presenting a collective, representative and diverse narrative a difficult path to tread. Becoming aware of the historical meanings of urban heritage is the basis for a culturally sustainable development. This would occur when urban communities are able to understand the meanings of all historical components of their townscapes and to develop their urban heritage culturally and economically, realizing in the process an integrated cultural landscape.

The chief argument in this paper is that cultural heritage is not stagnant and has latent dynamic elements that can be fully synergized through an integrated planning process to make the city as a space of cultural diversity, infused with a sense of place, sustainable environment and economic prosperity. The challenge, however, is to reverse the definition of cultural heritage from a set of relics to a set of tools that awakens the innovative dynamic process to consider all possibilities of *urbanism* and so to forge an adequate city environment. Accordingly, the value of heritage buildings and sites needs to be recognized as a true incentive to guide the planning of cities that currently have no reference, to escape urban fragmentation and enhance the quality of public realm.

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