

## **Contribution of Society and Owners of Buildings in Conservation of Architectural Heritage in the Arab World. (Case Study: “Rawdat Sudair, Saudi Arabia”)**



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### **ABSTRACT**

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This research aims to study the experience of local people in conserving architectural heritage and to benefit from that in preserving other historical sites.

The need for this study is important because:

- Conservation of cultural and architectural heritage is not merely a government responsibility.
- The participation of local people in architectural conservation has many benefits.
- Motivating people to preserve architectural heritage is the responsibility of cultural and educational bodies.

The study discusses historical architectural sites in Saudi Arabia. It concentrates on the inhabitants' and owners' role in the conservation of architectural heritage, since, nowadays most of the historical sites were taken care of by the governments. The tools of this research are better than the previous working methods, because, previous models neglect the inhabitants' and owners' role in the conservation of architectural heritage, Methods of this study include literature review, site visits, and interviews with inhabitants and visitors of the Case Study. It also includes site visits to similar historical sites, lectures highlighting the importance of architectural heritage to improve public awareness and to motivate people to take part in the conservation of architectural heritage. The study found conserving, preserving, or rehabilitating traditional buildings cannot be the duty of the owner only or the responsibility of the governments alone.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The aim includes improving public awareness about conserving architectural heritage, which leads to encouraging the private sector to share in conserving architectural heritage. Besides, this research is about the traditional buildings in old villages. Despite the importance of traditional multi-story residential buildings, this paper will not consider their conservation and restoration.

Possibly the most essential cause behind architectural conservation is to recognize a buildings' historic significance and to keep it alive for coming groups - particularly for future generations. When building conservation has been neglected, a society's linking to the past is missing, because such preservation helps to keep societies together.

Some people consider conservation a waste of wealth; In fact, it isn't since building conservation creates very sound economic sense. On the contrary, when a building is demolished, the old ingredients are thrown away and new materials need to be obtained and brought to the site, which is an enormous waste of wealth and time.

In Arab countries, there are only a small number of specialists with satisfactory know-how and practice in architecture conservation. Further, there is slight public awareness of its fundamental principles. Also, there is a lack of skills necessary for conservation missions.

The importance of this study comes from people thinking

that conservation of the historical buildings is the responsibility of governments. Thus, awareness of people is important to encourage people to take part in this responsibility.

Methods of this study include:

- Literature review.
- Site visits for the case study.
- Interviews with inhabitants, owners, and visitors of the Case Study.
- Site visits to similar historical sites.
- Interviews with inhabitants, owners of the other architectural sites.

This research is divided into five parts including the introduction. The first part is the introduction which explains the significance, limitation, problem, aim, and value of this study. The second part goes over the literature review. Where the third part deals with the historical sites in Saudi Arabia. The fourth part analyses the case study. And the last part of the study is the conclusion.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Researchers undoubtedly won't find everything that has been written on the architectural heritage, however, many books and papers discuss this issue. Nevertheless, the most relevant to public awareness is rare. Though, researchers

found several papers on conserving Saudi architectural heritage. Also, they found several regional and international studies about people participation in conservation:

In Saudi Arabia, an important study discussing the importance of conservation had been done by Zami and Bubshait [1]. Their study focuses on heightening the importance of conserving the rich architectural heritage of Dhahran. It studies the architectural details of buildings, taking Dhaharan Mosque as a sample; it also discusses the different detailed architecture.

Another study done by Atiyat [2] discusses the local experience of Saudi Arabia and Jordan in conserving architecture. The study made a comparison between the local experiences of each country. It noted the urban architectural heritage comes with individual formations as a physical result of the area's topography, jointly with the backgrounds of the inhabitants.

Abou [3] studies on Rehabilitating Villages and Heritage Sites with Integrating Cinematic Environment for Urban Heritage in Saudi Arabia. The study concentrates on the vocabulary and values of heritage in Saudi Arabia; it studies travel through time and the way of using it in rehabilitating heritage villages; thus, achieving preservation and consolidation of the architectural identity of Saudi Arabia.

At the regional and international level, researchers benefited from different studies some of them are:

Kandakji [4] from the University of Aleppo did a study about "Design for Intervention in Historic Buildings in the Old City". She went deep in detail in discussing the standards and details of traditional buildings. The examples she took were from the old cities in general specifically from the city of Aleppo in Syria.

Lamaie [5] Mustafa from Egypt studied: "General Strategic Plan for Heritage Preservation". In his study, he discussed the fundamentals and principles of conserving architectural heritage; the study concentrates on the different types of planning including the strategic ones.

Internationally, Jopela [6] from South Africa studied: Conventional Custodianship: a useful framework for heritage management in southern Africa? The study discussed a particular concern of conservation and Supervision of Archaeological Locations on "Archaeological site management in sub-Saharan Africa". The study discusses the importance of conservation of archaeological sites. It concentrates on the management as an important part of the rehabilitation.

Another study was done in America by Macdonald & Cheong; the study is about. The Role of Public-Private Partnerships and the Third Sector in Conserving Heritage Buildings, Sites, and Historic Urban Areas [7]. The research discusses the architectural heritage of buildings, the architectural heritage of cities, and the architectural heritage of historic urban spaces.

Another study on awareness of the public about cultural and architectural heritage had been done in Indonesia by Dharmasanti and Dewi [8]. It is about the Awareness of Buildings Owners to Conserve Cultural Heritage Area. The results of this research reveal the awareness of the people owning the traditional buildings is still at a doubtful stage. It shows that people already understand that it is important to conserve this architectural heritage. Nevertheless, they have not been able to do it best since still obstacles that get in the way [8].

Besides, most of the studies show the need for government

intervention. Thus, stressed creating an interaction between the government organizations on the one hand and the inhabitant on the other.

### 3. HISTORICAL SITES

Saudi Arabia has many traditional heritage sites. Government authorities preserved most of them. Some of preserved villages and palaces are:

- Turaif Quarter, and other parts of Ad Diriyah.
- Al Ward Heritage village, Al Taif
- Al Aasda, a village located in Makkah.
- Al Ghat village near Riyadh.
- Um Al Ajras village in the west of Eiqaillah.
- Al Hadethah is within the northern part of the Kingdom.
- Souq Al Majlis, part of the old town of Almuznab at Al Qaseem.
- Al Musmak palace (1902), and Al Muraba Palace (1932) in Riyadh.
- Shoubra Palace (1907) in Taif.
- Saggaf Palace in Makkah.
- Al Khuzam Palace (1928) and Nasif House (1872) in Jeddah.
- Old Eimrah Palace (1942) in Najran.

Usually, governments conserve carefully the palaces and houses of Saudi kings, princes, and governors. An example of these is the governor's palace in Najran built in the first half of the twentieth century. Another example was the Fort of Abha, which had been built in the nineteenth century [9].

Nowadays, Saudi government encourages cultural tourism in many ways, and noticeable efforts are being made for development. This encouragement could be a result of heritage management. For this, three factors play important roles: First are laws, rules, and policies, second are the institutional organizations. The third is the implementation and application of the cultural heritage sites at the local level. "These three features comprise the heritage management in Saudi Arabia, from national to local levels [10]."

Importance of legislations because people need to make sure heritage is obtainable for future generations. Legislations help classify what is eligible for conservation. Law and regulations help specialists classify and group architectural heritage: their types, features standards and needs. Therefore, governments need to establish and update the legislations so conserving heritage is appropriately appreciated and applicable.

The second factor is the institutional organizations. Mostly, institutions can be defined as the procedures which involve the regulations governing decision-making practices. Institutions have various stages, from the personal level, to the country and international level. Institutions led to an additional sustainable use of properties and means.

The third factor is the implementation of the cultural sites at different levels. In the existing implementation, architectural heritage is not visibly considered as a development means, and application of heritage has not been accomplished. Because, the legislations on heritage is not appropriately consistent with international standards.

All studies about architectural heritage in countries like Saudi Arabia face different challenges and faults. First, the limited supplies, especially sources that collect great and small cultural and architectural heritage. For instance, as for as

architectural heritage is concerned, most of the researches concentrates on the geographical regions. Other limits were the freshness of tourism in the country, especially in statistics, documentation, and data about the cultural heritage sites [10].

Different buildings, sites, villages had been restored for a new use or for the sake of taking care of the architectural heritage. An example of such preservation efforts is the village of Ayoun al-Jawa (Figure 1). It became a museum that represents the style of life in old times as a trip through time (Figure 2) [3].



**Figure 1.** The architectural heritage in the village of Ayoun al-Jawa

According to Dethie and many other researchers, the building material of most of the architectural heritage in the Arabian Peninsula is ordinary stone and clay [1].

The conservation of Architectural heritage in Saudi Arabia through emerging economic planning has a remarkable influence on total development economy. However, this promotes creating new jobs in the different governmental organizations and improves tourism of the country [11].



**Figure 2.** Ayoun al-Jawa, as a museum that represents the style of life in the old times

It is important to notice the participation of owners can be seen in different examples. Such examples show the cooperation between the house-owners and the different governmental organizations. For instance, Badeeb House was restored to become a museum. Preservation work took place without governmental observation. Thus, ran to settle a couple of problems [11]. The building had been converted into Althyafah Coffee and Tea Museum that have been restored focusing on using historical principles and ethics (Figure 3) [12].

Saudi Arabia preserved many examples of buildings and historical sites. Mostly, conservation used to be done by the government, some of these examples are in Ashager historical village and Ad deriyah, Riyadh. (Figure 4) [13].



**Figure 3.** Badeeb House converted to Althyafah Museum before and after



**Figure 4.** Ashager historical village & Streets of the old city Diriyah near Riyadh



**Figure 5.** Al-Mašmak Fort in Riyadh and Palace of Saudi governors in Najran

Another example of the traditional buildings that have been restored and rehabilitated by the Saudi government is the well-known Al Masmak Palace. Builders used local and traditional building materials and architectural features. Besides, the Saudi governor's palace in Najran has been restored with its all interesting architectural features. (Figure 5) [9].



**Figure 6.** Restored palace in al-Diriyah (left) and Al Gaat (right)

in Riyadh (Figure 7) [9].

Further, Saudi governments concentrate on conserving the traditional architectural heritage all over the country. Besides, different ministries, organizations, and bodies made great efforts towards conservation. Also, the private sector did some efforts in preserving such heritage; although these efforts took other forms, such as setting up new buildings with different new buildings material, mostly concrete. In Riyadh one can see new concrete buildings built in the same traditional style, imposing the architectural features like those found in old buildings, copying local styles. (Figure 8) [9].



**Figure 8.** Modern concrete building in traditional style in Riyadh



**Figure 7.** Traditional buildings at al-Dirah in Riyadh

Other examples are found all over the country; some of them are those palaces restored in al-Diriyah, Riyadh, and those in Al Gaat. (Figure 6) [9].

However, many traditional villages and sites include different important historical buildings. Those traditional buildings have great architectural values, thus need to be restored and rehabilitated. Most of these buildings are damaged or even destroyed, most of them need to be conserved, and therefore, it is important to raise public awareness for conserving such sites. Some examples of such sites and buildings are the traditional buildings in al-Dirah area

#### 4. CASE STUDY: RAWDAT SUDAIR HERITAGE VILLAGE

The following case study is an example of how to engage people in the conservation of architectural heritage. Thus, this research proposes to engage people and the private sector in architectural conservation.

Sudair or Sudayr is a historical region in the center of Saudi Arabia. The location of the village is nearly 150 km north of Riyadh. In the past, Sudair depended on the valley's ability to keep rainwater, and its people mainly subsisted on cultivating grains and dates. On the other hand, Rawdat Sudair is one village of the Sudair region. Recently, local people with their efforts preserved the village.

The conservation works at Sudair village started by the government. The process started with studying and documenting the existing Al-Dakhlah Mosque. Then, Saudi experienced companies in the conservation of architectural heritage have carried out the first phase of restoration. The plan took into account using local traditional materials. However, restoration works included new sections and facilities. Furthermore, they emphasized the traditional architectural characteristics of mosques regarding design, materials, climate and culture. The restoration process has conserved the architectural features of the mosques: stucco ornament and traditional roof and the courtyard. Restoration projects started because of the fashion towards erecting new mosques, ignoring most of the traditional mosques, and from time to time even destroying them to build new mosques in their location. Further, the government efforts concentrated the conservation of traditional mosques and stressed the architectural features in their design.

This study discusses the experience of inhabitants and owners of properties in Sudair. It studies the positives of this effort to mirror it on other historical buildings and sites.

Further, it is necessary to notice the architectural heritage comes with individual growths as a normal effect of the area's topography with the roots of the inhabitants [2].

Sudair village is an extraordinary example of the conservation of architectural heritage. It is a sample of cooperation between owners and governments. Although the role of the government in Sudair case was insignificant. The government's role was to make the procedure easy with minimum intervention. Nevertheless, the case study of Sudair is a good sample for private participation in preserving the architectural heritage.

In this issue, the main important step in preservation is the awareness of people. The buildings conserved in Sudair show matured understanding of architectural conservation. The buildings remain in their original shapes, the towers are preserved in their original shape (Figure 9).

Awareness about architectural heritage is influenced by the inhabitants' visits to architectural sites. The people who visited historical buildings are more aware about conservation than others. And, they have more positive way of thinking concerning architectural conservation. Therefore, institutions, schools, universities and government authorities should encourage people to visit traditional and historical sites in order to promote public awareness among the society, mainly the young generation.

Despite the successful efforts put in preserving the historical village of Sudair, awareness of building owners in the other parts of the country is low. This means, more efforts and tries are needed to encourage people to raise awareness about conserving the architectural heritage. Further, this was noticed in other countries where studies show the owners of traditional buildings still have low-level awareness that is uncertain to preserve their buildings. People do not have enough awareness about conservation [8].



**Figure 9.** Entrance of the village of Sudair with important towers

Concerned laborers used the local material for making the streets inside the village. One can see stones used for different types of walls; they also used stones for the pavement of local streets, like the traditional style used in the original village (Figure 10).

The walls constructed with stones used to be covered with mud or clay (Figure 11). This is a common characteristic of the Saudi traditional buildings. Most of these buildings throughout the country, rather, throughout the Arabian Peninsula have this feature: thick walls with mud plaster. The main reason for thickening these walls is the environmental comfort, in addition to the privacy.

Further, all architectural features used in the local buildings in their original shapes were preserved as they were in the original shapes: Stairs, pathways, doors, windows, and all other features.



**Figure 10.** Different types of stone walls, and local streets paved with stones



**Figure 11.** Thick walls with mud plaster as a common feature of Sudair buildings

An interesting tour from shade to sun to shadow can be seen easily in the village. This journey takes the person from open paved streets to narrow ones, and then passes through shaded internal roads with a clear difference between the temperature between open streets and shaded streets and the interior spaces of different buildings. (Figure 12).

Another building material is wood, which is used mostly for windows, doors, and other openings. Also, they used wood for building roofs, in the traditional way of building roofs. Nevertheless, one can notice the use of this technique in most of the neighboring countries, including other countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the countries in the Middle East. (Figure 13).



**Figure 12.** A combination of shaded paved streets and different types of openings



**Figure 13.** The wood is used for windows, doors, and roofs in Sudair traditional buildings

The way to build or erect a roof with wood is through tree trunks. These trunks stand as beams in a parallel way; then, the reed sticks cover trunks in a crossing shape; afterward, both are covered with mud.

This case study (Sudair) shows that people can take part in the conservation of architectural heritage; however, awareness is important to encourage people to engage in these efforts.

The attitude of people towards awareness of architectural heritage is important. The meaning of awareness is the way of thinking or behavior of the people about a specific issue. Though, awareness about architecture urges people to know and understand the existence of architectural heritage around them.

People in Saudi Arabia afford to take care of their traditional buildings; thus they need more awareness about the importance of heritage to take care of it. Therefore, researchers

and concerned people should look for a high level of awareness. Some authors say that person is considered to have a high level of awareness about conserving architectural heritage if he or she fulfills the followings [8]:

1. Have fundamental knowledge about architectural heritage, and understand conservation plans and related legislations.
2. Respect the rights of traditional buildings.
3. Have a willingness to preserve traditional buildings and accept their significances.
4. Have a concern for traditional buildings without affecting the surrounding environment nearby them.
5. Have the support of governments through concerned legislations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Researchers found many samples of Saudi historical architectural sites. However, different governments preserved some of them outstandingly. But many others still need more effort.

All building inside Sudair village is owned by local people. People there decided to go through the conservation efforts independently. They funded the projects of buildings conservation without any support from the government. Thus, their experience is an ideal case to follow. It stands as a helpful sample for improving the awareness of people about conserving architectural heritage.

Sudair sample can be copied by other owners of different traditional buildings and old sites in the country. People can follow this sample to take care of the buildings they own. Though, conserving, preserving, or rehabilitating those buildings cannot be the responsibility of the owner only or the responsibility of the governments alone.

Engagement of the local owners in conserving architectural heritage needs both: the willingness of owners and the government's incentives. The awareness of people is the source of willingness. The governmental support and incentives are necessary, because of variations in the affordability of owners. Since, affordability influences their ability to restore, conserve or preserve their traditional buildings. Therefore, the role of governments takes place in preserving and conserving the architectural heritage. The government responsibilities are two types: physical one through monetary support and legislation, and social one through encouragement and raise of awareness level.

Architectural conservation includes long and complicated procedures. It faces many obstacles such as different locations and conditions of the buildings, heritage issues, the influence of the environment, the presence of modern buildings around the old ones, and other limits enforced by government rules. Furthermore, conservators face technical, administrative, economic and social issues. In addition to the shortage of skilled labors, lack of workers training, and lack of cooperative work among different organizations and authorities. However, lack of awareness is the most important challenge facing Architectural conservation in the Arab World.

This research leads to projects that can make income by the following:

First: Contacting social societies and owners of the old houses in historical villages to encourage them to use such studies to start conservation for their old villages.

Second: Suggest similar proposals to concerned

organizations, such as towns, departments, and societies to share in conservation and to encourage owners to conserve their buildings.

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