

Empowering Economic Development by Promoting Saudi Arabia's Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Saudi Arabia is known for its unique historical heritage mainly in western regions such as the tombs and the castles. Some of these features are significant to Islam. However, other sites can be traced back during the pre-Islamic period. Saudi Arabia also has specific landmarks such as the Arabian Peninsula and pre-Islamic Fort towns. Other natural landscapes such as the volcanoes and historical wells are some of the important features for tourist attraction. Preserving Saudi's heritage should be a priority. This is important in creating a vibrant community and also sustains the local economies. The proposed program is to rehabilitate and preserve some of the country's rich cultural heritage and raise awareness of the importance of specific historical sites which forms part of the people memory and a national pride.

Keywords: heritage, Saudi culture, documenting, historical sites, rehabilitate, 2030 vision

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1. Introduction

Many countries are majorly recognized for their economic growth but, not cultural heritage. Saudi Arabia is known for its various features such as oil reserves and military strength, however, its rich cultural that binds its citizen people have not been vibrant. Unfortunately, the government focuses on enhancing the national economy through its natural resources. Although Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 recognizes the importance of promoting its rich Arabic culture and social heritage, the country is yet to stand out as a distinct country with a deep-rooted identity. Various initiatives have been outlined in the vision 2030 to identify several areas that the country can benefit from investment and engaging the people of Saudi Arabia. It's through this idea that the proposal seeks to recognize the importance of promoting the country's rich Arabic culture and social heritage to build a vibrant society and also achieve a thriving economy. To achieve a vibrant society Saudi Arabia needs to focus more on the people and the culture. This can only be possible through a series of commitments. The paper aims at documenting and recording important features to show the modern-day Saudi Arabia to the world.

2. Documentation and Recording the Islamic Historical Sites

Documenting includes showcasing the historic growth of urban spaces. Documentation is an important exercise in this program because it acts as the best reference for future generations. Documentation is a strategy that seeks to explain the origin of a culture. Madinah is one of the key cities in Saudi Arabia known for its hidden gems. It is a historical landmark with ancient wells (Valeria & Elena, 2014). Also, one of Saudi Arabia's natural features of basalt lava is found in the Madinah. These are some of the important features that form part of Saudi Arabia's rich cultural heritage. With reference to Saudi Arabia, it will to explore, document, and highlight the region's beauty. Documentation will include in-depth research on ancient sites that need to be preserved. The process seeks to incorporate specialists in the history of Prophet Muhammad's life, geographers, and geologists during the documentation and recording process.

3. To Rehabilitate Prophet's Hijra Route

The story of Hijra is retold constantly so that people can learn important lesson's regarding the region's culture and history. Therefore, plans should be made to rehabilitate the historical mountains of Makkah to promote the culture of pilgrims who visit the site. Historical sites in the holy city such as the Jabal, Gahr, and Thawa where prophet Muhammad and his friends escaped from the enemies during their journey to Madinah is of importance to Islam and Saudi Arabia's heritage (Sadr, 2016). Pilgrims contribute millions in revenue to Saudi Arabia GDP. Business travelers, foreigners, and Muslim adherents gather annually in these cities for hajj, with more than 1.9 million people recorded to have visited the three cities of Jabal, Gahr, and Thawa as tourist sites (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Residents living in these areas can benefit from the rehabilitation of various historical sites and routes. Hence, we plan to establish buildings around these the mountains. The new buildings will house small exhibition centers to display antiques. Since the mountains are of historical importance as a place where Prophet Muhammad set off the historical journey, here is a need to promote this culture, with a focus on understanding the true meaning of some of these historical sites. We also need to preserve these sites for the future generations, especially those that represent Saudi Arabia's rich heritage

4. Registering Islamic Historical Sites

Maintaining proper records for all the historical sites will be another major undertaking of the program. Hence, there is a need to work closely with the commission for tourism and the national heritage commission in an effort to preserve Saudi's cultural heritage. The two holy mosques are of importance hence the need to register them as internationally recognized spiritual sites (Sadr, 2016). Some of the recently identified archeological sites within various regions need to be formally registered. Although several archeological sites have been previously registered on the national register of antiquities, especially at Mecca, the documentation process is meant to reveal other sites that form part of Saudi heritage (Petraglia, 2015). The registry will be done electronically and will be protected and preserved in a central location. Currently, several archeological sites are yet to be registered despite several documentation processes showing many historical sites in Saudi Arabia. By using digital maps, we will facilitate the process of protection and preservation important documents by registering all the historic sites that covers all the provinces and municipalities in the Saudi region.

The Saudi government has heavily invested in tourism by rehabilitating most of historical sites all over the regions. By now, the government formally recognizes several archaeological sites. However, the process has been slow due to lack of advance technology to map out new sites. So far the government has managed to register 26 historical sites mainly in Mecca region (Radke & Al-Senan, 2015). The proposed program aims at establishing partnership with UNESCO to solicit for incentives to assist in these efforts. It is our hope that by using state of the art technology we can document and register the entire historical monument all over the regions. Our previous research revealed that other important sites in several regions are yet to be registered. The digital registry will also archive the documentation and images of several cultural heritage sites. The program aims at finding better ways of managing antiques and museums by working collaboratively.

The program aims at establishing a centralized and accessible information center that would offer information to researchers and specialists. Part of the program initiative is to update the digital register on a periodic basis. Notably, the role of citizens in the reporting of archeological sites for registration will be key drivers that will help the program achieve the outlined objectives. The program will establish branches and offices in various regions that will create awareness to citizens on their role as partners in the preservation and protection of Saudi Arabia's heritage (Valeria & Elena, 2014). The paper seeks to propose to build modern museums and national archives to house historical photos and several artifacts that represent our culture. This initiative will involve paper publication, videos, digital media, and use of websites as strategies of promoting Saudi Arabia's cultural history. The center will include a museum of ancient information tools and other ancient equipment, with an aim to attract various people both locally and internationally including researchers and archeologists, as well as individuals and other parties interested in the Saudi culture, artifacts, and heritage.

5. Rehabilitation of Museums and Building New Museums in other Provinces

The project aims at complimenting governments' efforts in preservation of Saudi culture. Our major focus will be maintaining our national identity through archeology. Hence, there is the need to invest in archeological research. A research and restoration process will be an important step in this program. The research program will involve experts from national, region and local museums. Expert opinion will guide the rehabilitation process and also help in identifying new sites for registration (Rico, 2016). The proposed program will adopt digital software to identify and update Saudi archeological sites on the computer and also store information as inventory. Some of the unique features to be identified include Islamic inscriptions, prehistoric sites, dam, water systems, and other important artifacts within the country (Exell & Wakefield, 2016). The construction of the new museums in other districts will include building specialist museum such as Arab coffee museum, camel museum, and ethnographic museum within the existing archeological sites. The construction of a museum of education history is meant to hold international and local exhibitions to share our vibrant culture (Almuhzzi, Alriyami, & Scott, 2017). Establishing a network of experts will be key in strengthening the collaboration process between national museums with the regional museums as a process of enhancing cooperation in managing historic features in different regions (Rico, 2016). All these efforts are meant to preserve and protect archeological resources.

6. To Develop and Transform Various of Islamic Heritage Sites

The historical palace of Al-Zaher is in the holy city of Makkah and is an important symbolic representation of Islam. The palace was established in 1944 as the King's headquarters where he would meet leaders and pilgrims from other Islamic regions. The palace is a unique site for tourism. Its unique features offer a rich historical background of the Saudi people. The castle was built with carved stones using Islamic architectural designs, the internal distribution of rooms, villas and halls, and its external configuration makes a unique archeological site (Stephenson, Öter, & Ekiz, 2017). Although the castle is recognized by the locals as a significant monument, some of its beauty is fading away hence the need for renovation to restore its beauty. Due to the changing times, the Saudi government needs to pay close attention to its history and heritage. The government needs to invest more resources to uplift most of the destroyed archeological sites. Saudi has for a long time taken great pride in its

heritage. We intend to build an Islamic museum based on global standards and equipped with proper documentation that reflects the Saudi heritage (Excell & Wakefield, 2016). Some of the new landmarks will not only benefit citizens but also visitors. Islamic museums will offer a wide range of information for tourists to learn about the history of Islam. Modern technology will provide visitors with insights of the historical journey of Islamic civilization and culture (Stephenson, Öter, & Ekiz, 2017). Apart from their impressive view, the new archeological sites will become international attraction sites. The museums will host world-class libraries and research centers.

Currently, Saudi has more than 132 public and private museums, which is in line with Saudi's vision 2030 plan to boost tourism. This aims to rank the Saudi kingdom among the leading tourist destinations in the world. We recommend to establish a history educational museum in Al Masmak Fortress in Riyadh. Al- Masmak is among the leading museums and an important historic monument in the Saudi region. The Masmak Fort occupies a well-known place in the Riyadh's history. The Masmak Fort played a significant role during the reign of King Abdulaziz in 1319 (AlKadi, 2016). Although the museum of Al-Masmak has recently been renovated, we intend the adoption of a program that will transform the monument into a unique museum to take visitors and citizens through the historic journey of King Abdul Aziz. The new initiative is expected to expand Al- Masmak museum to host galleries that present artifacts of Arab kingdoms including the historic period of the Arab Peninsula (Bouchenaki & Kreps, 2016). Digital photos and unique futures will be included in this museum. Recent portraits and models of antiquities and Islamic inscriptions that represent specific historical periods are some of the additional features to be included in Al- Masmak museum.

7. Discussion

Makkah province is among the fast-growing regions in Saudi and is an attractive destination. Hence, plans are underway to transform the city to make it one of the investment hubs in the region. The government has encouraged both local and international business investment as part of its vision 2030. Notably, certain historical sites need to be revived. The Al-Aqeeq Valley has been identified by a team of archeologists who discovered the remains of ancient artifacts in Al-Aqeeq valley (AlKadi, 2016). Our proposition is to establish a museum in this area. Some of the unique features include the castle that dates back during the Umayyad period in the first century of Hijra. The castle covers approximately 1,200 square meters and stands on the mountain that overlooks the Al-Aqeeq valley. The castle's walls and general structure make it a unique building. Additionally, some of the main materials discovered in Makkah province are marble, glass, steatite utensils, and ceramic that prove how the Islamic ceramic industry developed during the first and second centuries in Saudi are unique antiquities found in Makkah province (AlKadi, 2016). Other artifacts such as metal tools used for decoration have been discovered in this area. Islamic pottery such as cups made from porcelain clay indicates that they are from the first and second centuries. These are some of the unique features in Saudi Arabia that should be preserved.

The Al Hoffuf area in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia is another unique feature in Shdegum Plateau. The Shdegum plateau covers a series of unique features such as 58 caves reported in the area that occupies more than 500 km. The Jabal Al-Qarah host caves are a unique attraction (Petraglia, 2015). The area is known for its beauty and cool weather. Hofuf areas are an important historical site because of Al-Qarah Mountain. The mountain offers a touch of the old civilization with the modern way of life (Petraglia, 2015). That is why we advise the establishment of an educational museum in Hofuf city to share the vibrant culture of the eastern province. The Hofuf region natural features include the world's largest agricultural oasis. The oasis has been widely recognized and registered as a historical monument under the UNESCO (Petraglia, 2015). The hot water springs and tracks of date are important landmarks found in the east.

Saudi Arabia historical sites are widely recognized and have promoted the growth of culture within the kingdom. However, for decades, Saudi has relied on its natural resources for growth and economic development. With the changing times, the kingdom needs to look for other alternative resources within to boost the economy (Radke & Al-Senan, 2015). Apart from oil, Saudi can utilize historical sites that make it distinct. Some of its uniqueness such as art can be showcased. Hence, the proposal seeks to revive Saudi's heritage and history. Although the government recognizes the rich culture and history, it has been slow in taking the advantage of some of its vast natural features.

Preservation of cultural heritage will contribute not only to the Saudi quality of life but also promote its cultural identity. Heritage sites and resources have not been well-maintained due to lack of appreciation and the locals failing to see the importance of these sites. The government agencies lack adequate support from the local communities to protect and preserve the varied cultures that represent Saudi. Stakeholders have failed to see the need to support the heritage of the Saudi. Although the government continues to invest in preservation efforts, lack of involvement of the local communities has limited its efforts (Almuhri, Alriyami, & Scott, 2017). Saudi citizens have failed to realize the benefits of these projects, which undermines the potential of the region's rich archeological heritage. To succeed in this project, there is a need to involve both private and public institutions to play a bigger role in supporting national projects that includes rediscovery, rehabilitation, and establishment of

new archeological sites.

Community involvement and education campaigns can effectively promote the vibrant Islamic culture of Saudi Arabia. Although protection and conservation of cultural heritage sites is a national responsibility, the involvement of other stakeholders is also crucial in the preservation process because lack of support from the local and the business community in the process might limit government efforts of persevering and sharing the Saudi's true national identity.

The appreciation of rich culture will ensure that the cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced at all times. It's the obligation of government agencies, private partners and citizens to preserve this rich heritage (Valeria & Elena, 2014). Historical preservation is important to Saudi Arabia as such, numerous projects have been undertaken to safeguard the architectural heritage in most of its provinces. These projects have been undertaken by the department of museum and antiquities as part of an extensive program to preserve prehistoric sites. The government departments have engaged stakeholders in mapping out new ancient sites and registering them under the UNESCO. Saudi Arabia is known for its rich culture and heritage which is vibrant in its historical activities (Exell & Wakefield, 2016). Although numerous institutions have been established in the country to preserve its cultural heritage, such as the department of culture and the ministry of culture and information, these departments do not support a wide range of cultural programs. Not much has been achieved in engaging the local communities and also the discovery of other important historical futures.

For years, the culture of Saudi Arabia is defined by Islamic heritage, its historical role as an ancient trade center makes it stand out within the region. These are some of the untapped features that can revive Saudi's economy. Although Saudi Arabia has evolved for years, their values and traditions are being adapted to suit the modern times, and this should not be done at the expense of its vibrant culture. Some efforts towards the preservation of Saudi culture have been supported by local partners who are keen in building a fruitful partnership with the government through documenting and rehabilitation of specific sites in several Saudi regions. For example, the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society in Riyadh supports the heritage sector. The Saudi authorities are actively engaged in the process of not only protecting and preserving the country culture, but also in supporting the cultural diverseness of Saudi through arts (Feighery, 2017). The authority aims at enhancing cultural programs that will retain Saudi national identity. The proposal aims at working with existing partners in order to contribute to the development of a vibrant society, which is in line with the country's vision 2030.

Various activities have been proposed that are crucial for preserving and promoting Saudi's long history of cultural heritage at the international level. There is a need to understand Saudi Arabia's history, especially the identity of its people from a historical point of view. For decades, Saudi has played an important role in the Middle East's economic development (Exell & Wakefield, 2016). Therefore, showcasing the country's culture and heritage presents various economic benefits. One of these ways is to identify several areas that the country can benefit from such as investment and engaging the people of Saudi. Through this idea, we seek to widen access to social programs that will in the long run build a vibrant society, as well as a thriving economy in future. Raising awareness of the importance of specific historical sites as part of the people's memory and a national pride will ensure that citizens are proud of their origin.

8. Conclusion

The government should play an active role in promoting existing historical sites and artifacts by reaching out to the regional and international arena and adopting strategies that will encourage people from outside Saudi Arabia to take an active role in engaging and preserving its rich culture. The proposed activities will promote the region's culture to a wide audience by exposing them to our distinct natural features. People are largely unaware of the country's magnificent museums and archeological sites that have the unique history of Islamic. Saudi has enormous untapped opportunities, its rich natural resources is not enough to sustain its future economy. However, the real wealth is in its people and its national heritage. Saudi rich natural resources are not the only pride of this nation, its Islamic faith that forms part of its national heritage is among the many symbols that needs to bring its citizens together. The Saudi nation's heritage is derived from Islamic teachings. Hence, there is a need to promote the deep-rooted national identity.

Saudi Islamic identity can be traced back from the ancient civilization and trade routes which presents the country's cultural richness and diversity. Preservation and restoration efforts are ways of recognizing the importance of our unique heritage and our national pride that includes the true Islamic and Arab values. It is our hope that this proposition program will be helpful to strengthen, preserve, and highlight the national pride of this country. Hence, we aim at not only raising raise awareness of the importance of specific historical sites but also promote the memory of our forefathers which forms part of our national pride. As the country seeks for better ways of boosting its economy, they need not to think further by combining the traditional systems with modern strengths to research the past and adopt innovation in future.

Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 recognizes the importance of culture and emphasizes the need for promoting a vibrant culture as a contributor to long-term economic growth. Improving the living standards of its citizens will

require a process that will be economically beneficial at while promoting our national identity. It is through the vision that we want to promote the rich culture and social heritage that distinguishes Saudi Arabia from other countries in the region. By implementing this program, we envision securing a suitable economy for the country. The government needs to take the leading role in the preservation efforts of Saudi culture. An effective initiative that supports partnerships between various institutions is the best solution of preservation of our rich cultural heritage.

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