

The Policies and Process of Preserving the Historical and Heritage Buildings in Dubai City: Case Study of Historical District

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Abstract

Preserving historical buildings is considered one of the major priorities in many cities in both developed and developing countries. Dubai is one of the major world cities that is experiencing rapid architectural transformations, thus the Dubai Municipality has taken the initiative to preserve historical buildings maintaining the culture and identity of the city's heritage. This initiative started in 1991 under a unit called 'The Unit for the Restoration of Historic Buildings', which expanded further in 1994 to become 'Architectural Heritage Department'. Over the years, the department has developed a mechanism of action, objectives, laws and strategies to keep abreast of progress and modernity in the field of repair, conservation and project management. In accordance with international and international standards while preserving the architectural character of the Emirate of Dubai.

This paper is a critical review to assert advantages and disadvantages of the policies and regulations that were set up by Dubai Municipality in terms of how they support the preservation of historical heritage and culture within the city. This paper is related to my PhD research, data was attained using existing documentations on policies, regulations, plans, books and available articles on historical buildings preservation. Findings show that the plan of work for preserving heritage and historical areas in Dubai is efficient and dynamic as it encompasses international standards and regulations while maintaining the cultural values of the city.

The analysis shed light upon potentially creative perspectives in terms of protecting and preserving heritage buildings in similar environments. The paper provides a solid foundation for future research on heritage buildings, related complexities and the strategies employed by different governments to make informed decisions.

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Keywords

Historical Buildings; Heritage Buildings; Policies; Dubai City; Plans

1. Introduction

Preservation of the architectural heritage and historic buildings is an objective strived for in many countries, both developed and developing. The heritage and historical sites symbolize, reveal and represent valuable and significant insights nations to the heritage of many countries (Salama, 2015). Therefore, they need special consideration in terms of legislation, regulations and politic visions which can be ensuring preserved since these sites for the future and present-day tourist attractions (Boussaa, 2014). Albeit several policies and guidelines regarding heritage preservation in many nations, there is no current consistent preservation approach, partly, because preservation of the heritage is a field which can be termed "interdisciplinary". Due to the diverse approaches to preserving architectural heritage and historical sites (Salama, 2015). Because of the several dimensions and aspects of the

preservation of heritage and historical sites, researchers and academics claim that future studies in heritage conservation should focus on comprehension of the factors that transform conservation, particularly, considering heritage stakeholders since their diversity of interests, beliefs and perceptions poses complicated concerns for the decision-making. (Amar et al., 2017). This is significant, especially in an age where technological advancement has started to influence decisions and processes within the built environment. This paper focuses on the value of the policies and regulations set by the Dubai Municipality relating to how they support the preservation of cultural and historical heritage within its city.

The preservation of historical and cultural heritage sites entails various tasks. Primarily, the implementation and realization of sustainable preservation of built heritage need appropriate policies and strategies that are well organized. However, the built heritage regulations, policies, and legislation vary from one country to another. For example, in several developed nations, the heritage sites or locations must have historical and significance value, thus, the first significant preservation policy is established on conserving the local or national identity. Another key policy element is for reclaiming the national identity which may have been lost due to whatever reason like in the case of Beirut project. The most important policy element which most nations are pursuing currently is using heritage and historical sites for tourism promotion. The other components or elements may include regenerating and safeguarding historic areas, Avrami et al., (2000). Comprehensive and inclusive built heritage legislation or policy can include all the mentioned ideas so as to make the most use of the potential these sites.

This research uses existing literature and primary evidence using documentation and plans obtained from the Architectural Heritage and Antiquates Department (AHAD) of Dubai Municipality. These documents are the general principles applied to historical areas, the general design principles for dealing with urban fabric and historical areas, planning principles and guidelines for dealing with historical areas, the requirements for the protection of historic buildings in Dubai, and the standards for dealing with facades in the historical area. It is essential to acknowledge that the above documents are only available in the Arabic language; this is due to the issuing authority. The documents that were relevant to the historical areas in Dubai were obtained For this paper which part of my PhD research.

2. Patterns of the historical and heritage preservation policies: an overview

According to (Dredge, 2006), there is not a specific policy which is suitable or appropriate for all the built historical and heritage sites in many countries depends on many factors such as social, cultural, economic, historical, architectural, urban and other factors that are related to these sites are considered in their broader contexts. Internationally, many organizations including the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM, 2018), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 2018) are seen as the pillars in the protection of the world heritage sites. When considered by Country-based, for instance, the national heritage act 2002 in the UK (National Heritage Act, 2002), the Law of the People's Republic of China on the protection of Cultural Relics (National People's Congress, 2007) and Heritage policies for the European Union (European Capitals of Culture, 1985). In its broader context, 'heritage' is not restricted to physical artifacts, but it extends to cover intangible heritage (e.g. crafts and rituals), natural heritage (e.g. geological and biological) and cultural heritage (EPRS, 2018). In the Middle East, protecting heritage is considered as a major form of preserving cultural identity and values, hence benefiting from developed countries' expertise.

On the one hand, in 2016, the British Council and the department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) funded countries such as Sudan, Lebanon and Egypt to safeguard and promote cultural heritage (British Council, 2017) where ICCROM and UNESCO are looking after the majority (if not all) the heritage sites in the Middle East. On the other hand, some Middle Eastern countries have established policies, departments and units to support protecting and preserving their heritage assets. Within the Arab world, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) has set rules and policies to protect historical areas and places (Alnaser et al., 1995). In Saudi Arabia, for example, Bagader (2016) attempts to summaries approaches to protect and preserve

the architectural, urban and historical built heritage, and they include:

- Restoration of the monuments: this approach concentrates on the restoration of the significant buildings or monuments like palaces, bazaars, castles, churches, and mosques, as well as various traditional dwellings. Even though this approach can be applied to all historical urban sites, it always focuses on specific buildings and leaving those that surround them.
- Heritage reconstruction: the reconstruction method has been pursued in the Arab countries because it preserves both the tourism levels and the site heritage. This approach can lead to the decline of historical sites which become lifeless museums, instead of enhancing the living concept of the heritage, Bagader (2016).
- Rehabilitation of the architectural heritage: this involves rehabilitating the economy and society of the heritage site as it was recently instead of recreating the past. This approach reflects the shifting of the international discourse since the 1964 Venice Charter towards preserving the whole context of the historical sites, Bagader (2016).
- The revitalization of the architectural heritage: the 1972 World Heritage Convention shifted the built heritage preservation concept towards the reuse of these sites for other functions and purposes to match the contemporary requisites of the economic vitality. There are several examples of such a pattern within Arab countries such as the Historic Jeddah, Old Fez and Old Cairo, Bagader (2016).

Although the above demonstrates different considerations towards the protection and preservation of cultural heritage within a large country scale such as Saudi Arabia. In Dubai, the approach has significantly differed. The policies and regulations were set as a government city-based rather than country-based. It is highlighting the needs to further investigate and the dynamics in Dubai that helped form these policies and how they support the heritage and historical preservation in Dubai city, this is the intention of this paper.

3. Heritage and historical preservation in Dubai:

Dubai City is one of the modern world capitals that has been rapidly transforming and developing since the 1990s. In Dubai, architectural preservation is relatively new and has been given significant attention only from the mid-1990s (Assi, 2015). The challenges to preserve Dubai's heritage have been immense. (Assi, 2015) highlighted that rapid urban modernization and development in Dubai city has negatively impacted upon the historical, physical fabric of the region. The main impact has been felt by the residents of Dubai who have experienced many changes during the first few years after the establishment of Dubai state, in terms of distancing them from their traditional and local environment. Additionally, the discovery of the oil in the 1970s (Darke, 1998) led to the displacement of many individuals from their original settlements in Deira, Shindagha and Al Fahidi (famous heritage districts in Dubai City) to more modern neighborhoods. Consequently, many (if not the majority) of the historic buildings and structures were abandoned (Boussaa, 2014; Assi, 2015).

Following the rapid transformations that have occurred in Dubai city, Dubai municipality started to consider the preservation Dubai heritage and historical buildings as one of its essential priorities (Assi, 2008), hence in 1991, a heritage preservation unit was established. From the successes that this unit had in preserving the heritage, it later became the Historical Buildings and Exhibitions Division within the Architectural Heritage Department (AHD) and was recently renamed the Architectural Heritage and Antiquities Department (AHAD). Over the years, AHD has made significant strides in attaining its mission and objectives for the implementation of studies, supervision, enlightenment and spreading awareness regarding cultural heritage (Dubai Municipality, 1997). In fact, Rashad Bukash (Former CEO of AHD Department) in light of AHD stated:

”We try to come as close as restoring it to its original form based on our studies and interviews. We even use the same material as the original buildings – coral stone, gypsum, mud etc. Everything is carried out exactly according to the rules of UNESCO and World Heritage Centre” “We have a total of about 712 historic building

in Dubai, and we have restored about 315 of them. We have a plan to finish the restoration of the remaining buildings by 2020” (The Tryptic Note, 2016)

4. Case Study: Renovation of Dubai’s Historical District:

4.1. Project aim and Ruler’s vision:

“Preserving our heritage and culture are part of our national responsibility,”

Sheikh Mohammed said (The National, 2018).

According to Reporter, 2015, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, in 2015 approved a plan to Develop Dubai Historical District renovating the oldest part of the Dubai city (Figure 1). This project aims to attract 12 million visitors by 2020. According to the statement, Dubai Municipality, Dubai’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing and Dubai Culture joint as an initiative to transform the area into a leading heritage and cultural centre within the city. This project finished by 2018, it focused around four districts Shindagha, alFahidi, Deira, and Bur Dubai covering around 1.5 square kilometers.

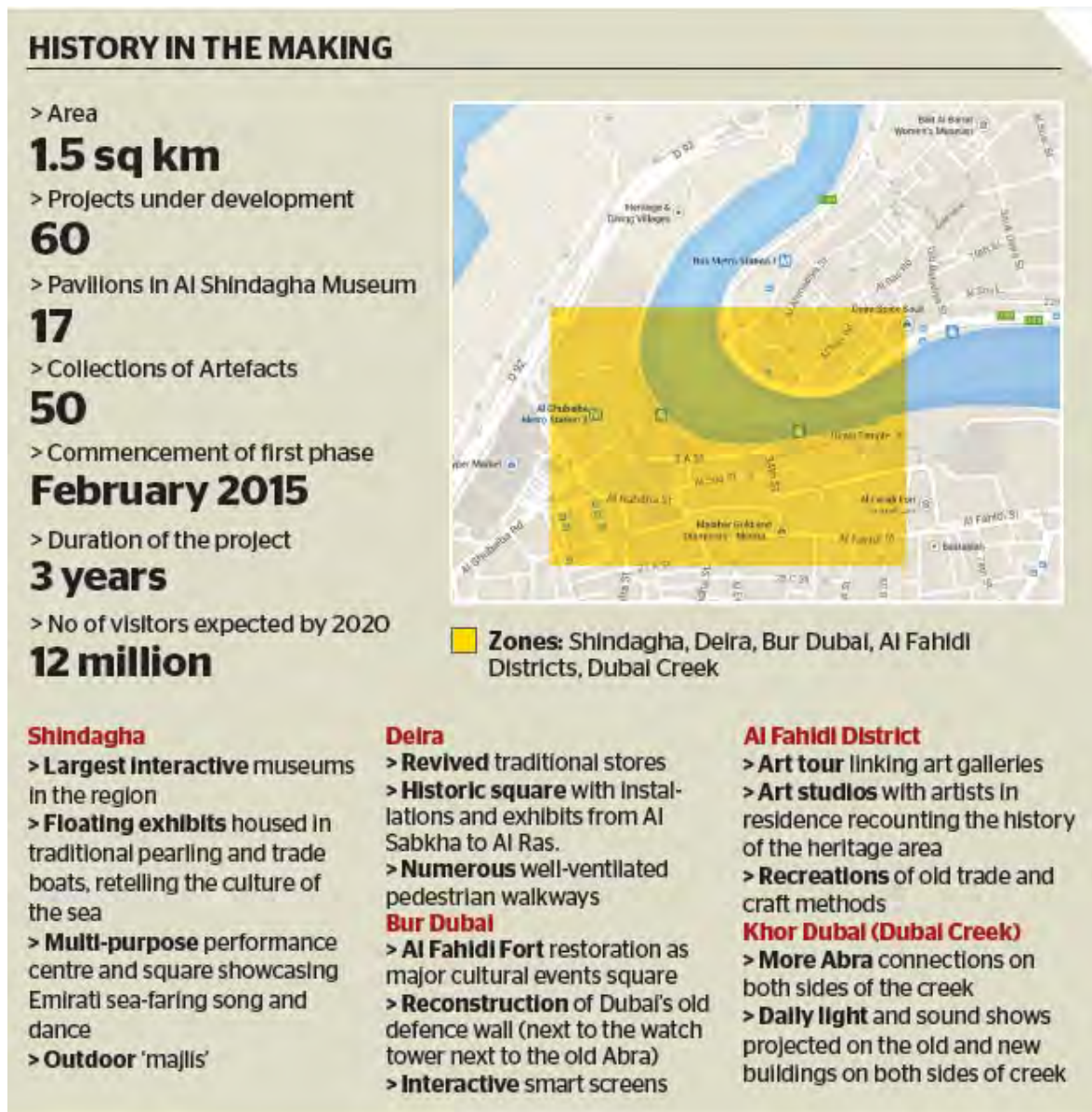


Figure 1. Develop Dubai Historical District project (Khaleej times, 2015)

The project was coordinated by Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM), Dubai Municipality and Dubai Culture. For the renovation of Dubai's historic district. According to Alkhaleej, 2015, there are five main Themes were applied:

The project was coordinated by Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM), Dubai Municipality and Dubai Culture. For the renovation of Dubai's historic district. According to Alkhaleej, 2015, there are five main Themes were applied:

- Theme 1: focusing on the UAE's heritage and traditions based on historical treasures and stories in the region.
- Theme 2: The promotion of UAE heritage through the protection and preservation of historic buildings.
- Theme 3: Providing new business opportunities by establishing content in traditional markets and activists.
- Theme 4: Reviving and celebrating traditional trade; providing cultural experiences for the community by the renewal of the old neighborhoods and establishing an educational center which introduces the UAE civilization contributing to the values of the UAE's social heritage.
- Theme 5: Design public facilities to ensure the preservation of the original components improving the experience of the visitors.

The Architectural Heritage and Antiquities Department is responsible for the urban renewal plan in Al Shindagha district, where they are responsible for the restoration of the mosques, the watchtower, and reconstruction of the houses that were demolished in the 1990s. In 2018, there are more than 150 historical buildings have been renovated including the house of Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum Al Maktoum in Shindagha. (The National, 2018).

4.2. Process of reconstruction of heritage sites in Dubai:

Dubai's Historical District is divided into areas (figure, 2) the main Handling standards are the Historic Area A (Old Markets Area - Deira and Bur Dubai), the historical area A (Ahmadiya area), Historic Area A (1960s), the historical area B and the creek facades and the interfaces of modern and heritage. (Documentations form AHAD). Requirements incorporated these areas for the protection of historic buildings in the Emirate of Dubai.

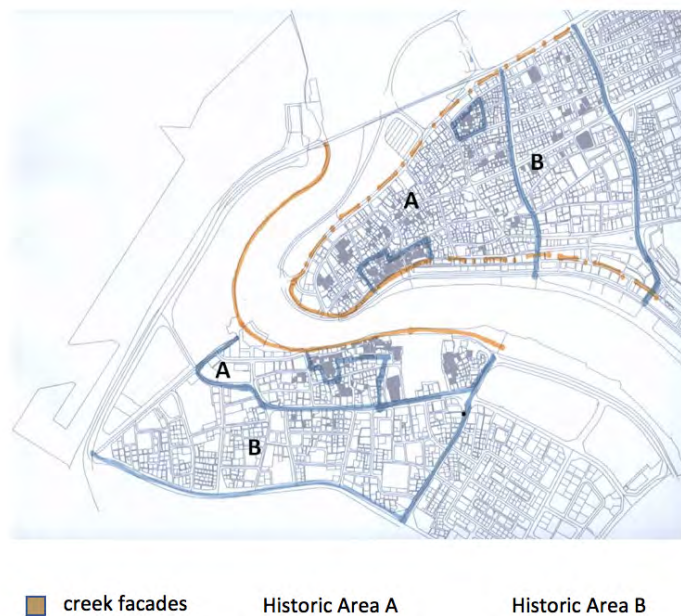
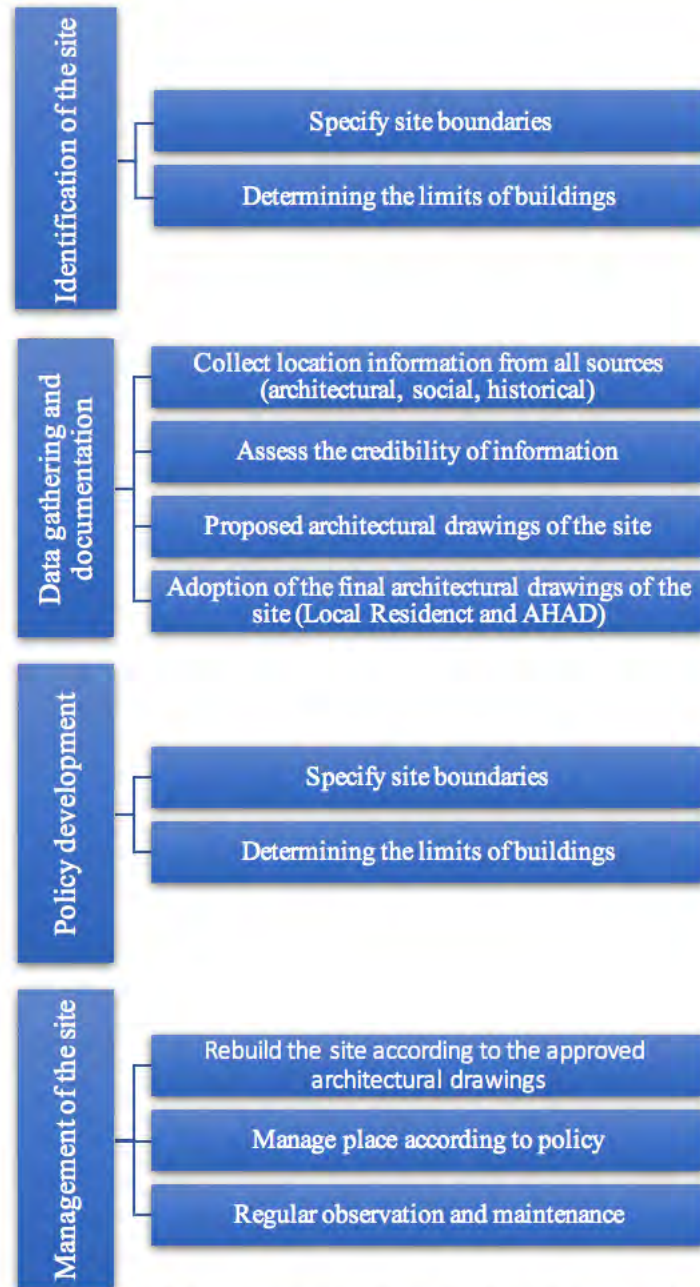


Figure 2. Dubai's Historical District divided areas (Documentations form AHAD)

Dubai can be seen as an excellent example of the conservation approach which is helping the re-establishment of authentic and original structures by carefully rebuilding heritage and historical buildings (Boussaa, 2014). The reconstruction projects of the AL Shindagha are being completed according to the highest international standards. This includes ICCROM, UNESCO and ICOMOS standards and policies (ICCROM, 2018; UNESCO, 2018; ICOMOS, 2018) and ALECSO (Alnaser et al., 1995). Although AHAD has been in charge of all the preservation and restoration within the heritage sites in Dubai old city, reconstruction and restoration processes follow embeds international ISO standards (ISO 9001-2008) in order to comply with the international quality assurance standards (Assi, 2016). According to Assi, E. & Rajab, M (2016), the proposed process of reconstruction in AL Shindagha distract to be completed in four main phases are (Figure 3): These phases are Identification of the site, Data collection and documentation, Policy development and Management of the site.



The reconstruction of the historic building adopted by AHAD-Dubai Municipality

Figure 3. The Polices to reconstruction of the historic Building adopted by AHAD-Dubai Municipality. (Assi, E. & Rajab, M, 2016).

In addition to the above AHAD flows, in general, the principles for dealing with historical areas (Documentation form AHAD), is to provide all means available to ensure the enrichment of the cultural value of the historic area enhancing the heritage and avoiding any change to the structure of these historic buildings. By determining the use of the buildings to ensures the preservation, the value of the building and its continuity within the urban fabric. It is necessary to identify the interventions and additions in these historic buildings, so it does not affect the reading of the building, and these interventions can be removed if needed. Also, to Emphasize the originality of materials and craft used to rebuild the historical buildings. The Architectural studies of the buildings to be repaired should be carried out on a historical basis showing the stages of its development in different periods. That can be considered the full assessment of the original elements and Considering the non-distortion of historic buildings, whether by writing or embossing, or to put ads on them, or to damage them in any way. (Documentation form AHAD)

5. Discussion and practical applications:

5.1. Flexible approach to maintain heritage intangible values:

The plan of work outlined in the previous section (Figure 4) can be argued as flexible in terms of preserving the heritage in the historical areas in Dubai. The social advantages for Dubai’s historic District are that most individuals consider historical houses as a significant part of the region’s identity and character. Similarly, most citizens of Dubai consider heritage as an essential part of the country’s culture and identity. This aligns with Wakefield (2012) who highlights the benefits and values of heritage, historic buildings, and sites viewed as significant to the local residents. As well as the consideration of the global requirement and rules (e.g. UNESCO, ICCROM) for the preservation of the urban heritage of Dubai’s city, the vision of the ruler of Dubai aims also to preserve the intangible heritage such as the social and cultural values, considered one of the priorities for the government. In Dubai, many individuals are interested in the aesthetics of the built environment.

Therefore, historic buildings and sites can create a positive impact on several aspects regarding the development of the community. Regeneration, economic growth, education, community engagement, and housing are some examples of aspects in which this historical and heritage sites can contribute positively towards. Thus, it can be stressed that the plans for the reconstruction of heritage sites in Dubai recognize heritage areas/districts on the map so that it can globally attract tourists and more importantly reflect the ancient heritage in Dubai. Socially, the historical and heritage assets always contribute to a regions identity and livability. There are other districts which are the focus for social activities like public halls, religious centers, parks, schools, and arts districts such as the transfer of the Al Fahidi area to an art district (Wakefield, 2012).

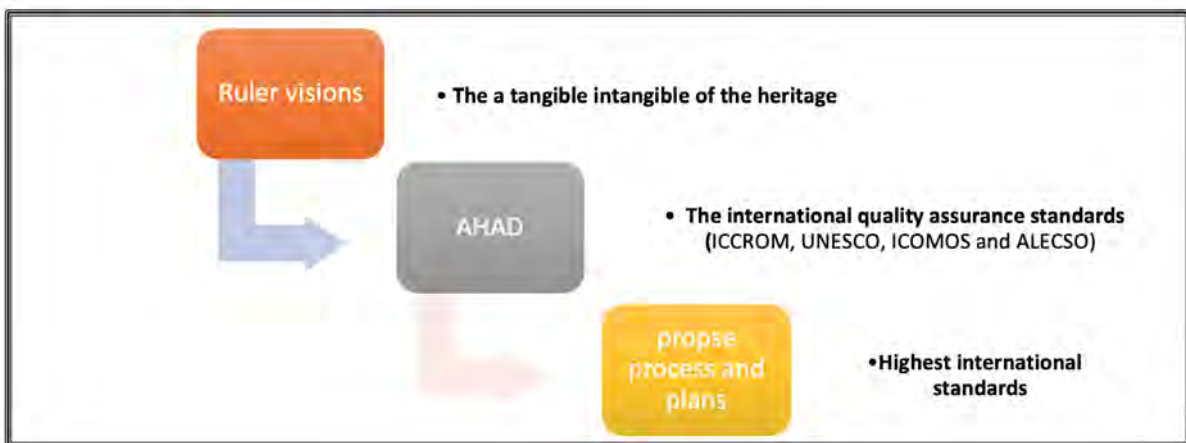


Figure 4. The process to approach the international standards for Renovation a Historical District

5.2. An approach to understand and maintain the city's identity:

The preservation of the historic buildings by the Dubai municipality has been supported by various policies, strategies, and regulations. These policies are meant to ensure that historical sites, buildings, and monuments are preserved instead of being destroyed. Dubai is aiming to become and continue being a significant world tourist destination. Therefore, there is a need to preserve the old structures and buildings with the aim of maintaining culture and identity. In applying these strategies and policies, the preservation of the building heritage can be completed in a time frame which supports both the design and theme of the buildings in that period. It is anticipated that by solidifying this approach, Dubai will be able to preserve its urban identity as the year's fold, avoiding the dominant technological advancements that continually impose pressures within the global market.

6. Conclusion:

In conclusion, Dubai and other cities in the Arabic Gulf region example of the rapid urban development in the modern and technological within the last decades. This is because these cities have rapidly developed from small merchant societies to flourishing commercial hubs mainly after the revenue of the oil in the region. The rapid development in terms of modernization and wealth has affected the economic and social structure resulting in the creation of urban environments which are fragmented. This paper demonstrates that the plan of work applied to Heritage preservation in Dubai support upholding the national identity and distinctiveness to reflected in the cultural values. Restoration of the historical and heritage sites is viewed as a plan to reunite the society with their history and culture by revitalizing its values, memories, and meaning of the region to facilitate identity, pride and a sense of belonging among the citizens of Dubai.

The perceptions required of the decision makers are recognized as one of the key factors necessary in order to achieve the sustainable preservation of the historic built heritage. Though, this significant factor is always overlooked and ignored in the history and heritage literature associated to how the perceptions of the decision makers drive the assessment and evaluation of these heritage sites, historic buildings, and monuments. With the escalating pressure to include different stakeholders in the process of decision-making, this research supports other ways to elicit a wider analysis regarding the perceptions of decision-makers and their significance towards the achievement of policy and realistic objectives for the preservation of the historical built heritage environment. In widening the preservation policies which impact upon the urban identity of the region, these are necessary to maintain the future.

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