

Reclaiming of the Historic Core of Jeddah as a National Heritage: Mapping the Transformations & Conservation Strategies since the 1970s

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Saudi Arabia - Jeddah waterfront (the historic core), (Jeddah Municipality, 2011).

The Issue

Jeddah is today the second-most important city in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after the capital, Riyadh. Its historic core is currently facing serious challenges that could threaten its survival for future generations. The high level of deterioration of buildings, combined with informal transformations being carried out by the occupants of traditional houses have led to a significant loss of character (Soilman, 2010). This has greatly contributed to the fact that the application to UNESCO to have old Jeddah listed as a World Heritage City (put forward by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities - SCTA) was turned down in 2010 by the UNESCO WHS centre (SCTA, 2011).

Conflicting visions are currently being proposed for the revitalization of the old quarters of Jeddah, including the development of a new neighbourhood "reproducing" the old centre as an attempt to reclaim the identity of Old Jeddah. Today, a cosmopolitan population of low-wage workers (most of them are non-Saudis) inhabits the historic core of Jeddah with only few buildings being occupied as the headquarters of various local organisations - governmental, commercial and other organisations.



These two photographs show the recent condition of the built environment in the historic core of Jeddah buildings (deterioration) (The Author, 2011)

Historical Background

Jeddah (also called Jiddah, Jaddah and Juddah) grew from a small primitive fishing settlement around 350 BC (100 hectares) (Pesce, 1974) to a modern metropolis in 2011 (30.800 hectares) (Jeddah.gov.sa, 2011), stretching along the seashore of the Red Sea. Once a small coastal city, Jeddah was completely transformed with the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula at beginning of the 7th Century. The city of Jeddah became an important gateway to the holy city of Mecca for Muslim pilgrims arriving by sea. It also developed as an important trading port leading to the rapid development of the city's urban form and architectural character (S. International, 1980). Jeddah has developed under different Islamic reigns (the early Muslims, Umayyad, Abbasid, Mamluks and Ottoman) and was characterised by a cosmopolitan population with a variety of ethnic groups. This has been reflected in the architectural character of the walled city, of which remains what is locally called today, "Al-Balad".

However, in 1947 city wall was demolished (Bokhari, 1983). No studies have been carried out so far in order to provide a chronological understanding how the old quarters of the City of Jeddah have evolved since the demolition of its city wall in 1947 when most native families left their traditional houses and moved to newly built quarters. This study will develop a new understanding of how the historic core of Jeddah has evolved and transformed by since the demolishing of its wall.



Jeddah in 1938 shows the old wall around the city (Saudi.ARAMCO.com, 2011)

Literature Review

This research will review the literature dealing with concept of conservation heritage from the theoretical and practical aspects by highlighting their different meanings, discourses and applications. The research will indicate the UNESCO's World Heritage Sites centre role of supporting the idea of conservation heritage and their methods of doing this. Then, the literature will explore the different patterns of conserving heritage in the Arab World by listing different examples.

Then, the research will critically review the available literature on concept of conservation heritage in Saudi Arabia and how this concept has been understood. To examine the Saudi understanding of preservation heritage Jeddah will be the case study by addressing and mapping the various stages of transformation in urban and architectural aspects that found in Jeddah's historic core and its relationship with the entire city from 1970 (from the first conservation master plan) until 2012.



This photo presents the authenticity of Jeddah's historic core architecture character (taken by Rob L. Wagner, 2008)

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to trace and map the various stages of transformations that the historic core of Jeddah has undergone from the 1970s to 2012.

The following objectives play a central role in the research:

- To trace, map and analyse the urban and architectural transformations that have occurred in the historic core of Jeddah that related to housing, road networks and contemporary urban fabric of Jeddah from 1947 (i.e., soon after demolishing the city wall) until 2012, in order to gain an insight into the underlying factors that led to shaping the current historic core and its old character.

- To discuss how urban and architectural heritage has been understood in Saudi Arabia generally and in Jeddah particularly, in order to preserve it, rehabilitate it and promote it; by studying the roles of each of the key actors that were involved in the conservation schemes that have been implemented in the period between the 1970s and 2012 (from the first conservation master plan that proposed by Robert Mathew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners "RMJM" in 1970).

- To analyse the roles of various stakeholders currently involved in the conservation, rehabilitation and revitalisation of the historic core of Jeddah, and investigate how the different current visions and scenarios are likely to affect the future of the historic core of Jeddah and other urban historic cores in Saudi Arabia.

Research Hypothesis

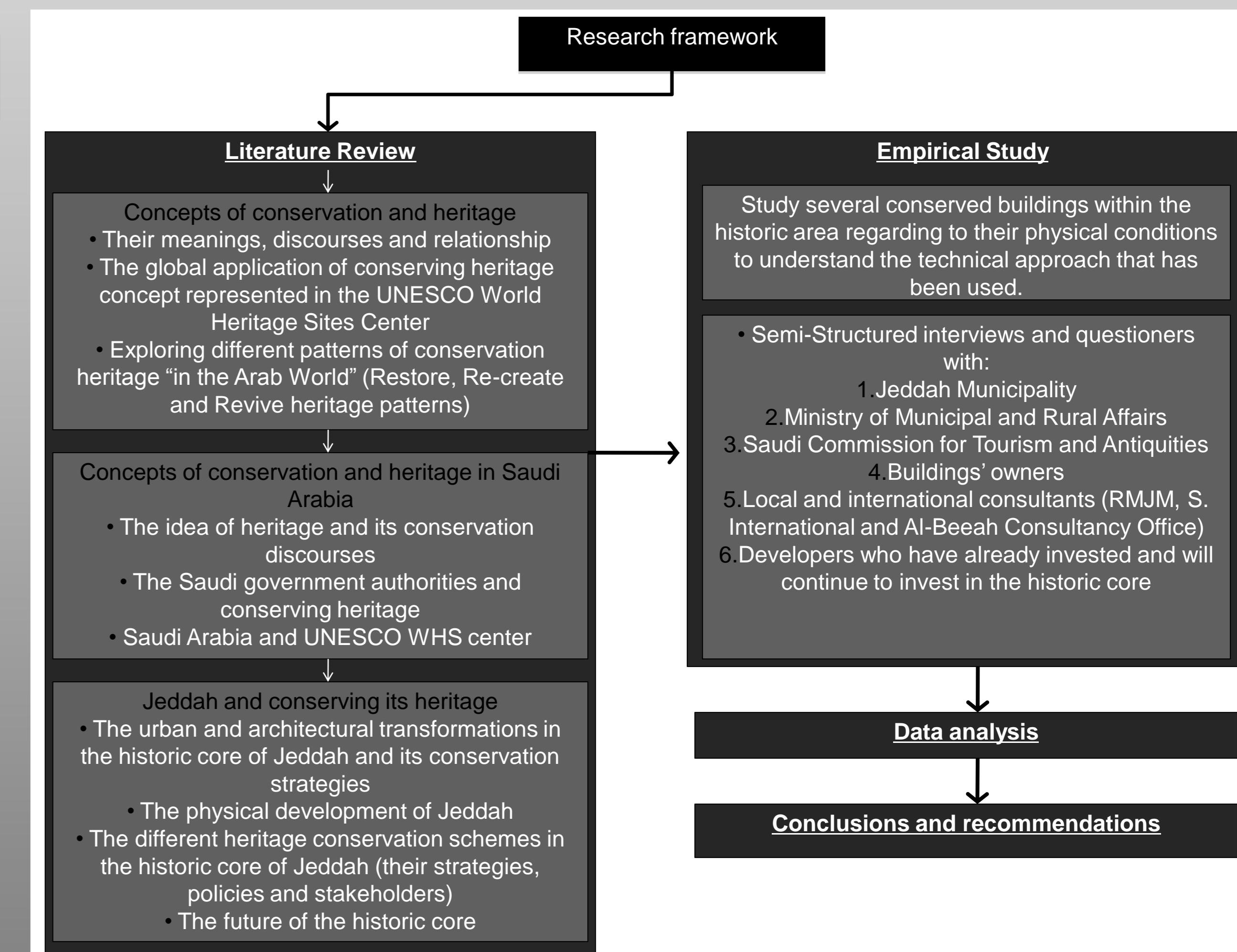
In order to achieve the aim of the research we need to develop an understanding of how conservation strategies and the vision of different stakeholders have contributed to the transformation of the historic core and its relationship the whole of the city. This will develop an understanding of how the concept of "conservation heritage" is being understood and used by different stakeholders to formulate future scenarios.

Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the key urban and architectural transformations that occurred in the historic core of Jeddah from 1947 (after demolishing the city wall) until 2012?
- What are the factors that shape the current historic core of Jeddah from 1947 until 2012?
- How is the concept of heritage & conservation involved in the content of Saudi Arabia? And how heritage is understood today?
- What are the conservation strategies that have been implemented in the historic core of Jeddah since the 1970s? And what was their impact on the urban fabric?
- How do the conservation strategies that have been implemented since the 1970s lead to shape and survive the current historic core of Jeddah?
- Who are the stakeholders of conservation and rehabilitation of the historic core of Jeddah? And what are their intentions and future visions?

Research Framework



References

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