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#### WORLD HERITAGE SITES WITHOUT HERITAGE

The inscription of the archaeological site of Madain Saleh on the World Heritage List in 2008 marked Saudi Arabia's first inscription in a region that is considered to be 'under represented' on the list. The cultural significance of the Arabian Peninsula is largely linked to the numerous trade routes that have used its ports and traversed it since prehistory, and the cultural dialogue between coastal and inland (desert) peoples. While the temporal nature of trade routes sometimes makes them difficult to define in the physical sense, until recently the port towns on the Red Sea and Gulf coasts contained significant evidence of the culture of exchange and cultural exchange. Furthermore, the geo-political location of cities as ports gives them a much deeper intangible and regional value that is arguably greater than the kit of parts of each individual city or port. The architectural styles are distinct not for their local characteristics but for the wide ranging influences they encapsulate. The pace and intensity of urban growth following the oil boom, followed by the more recent tourism and development boom has resulted in most historic urban quarters being demolished and at best being under serious threat.

Dubai is no exception and the demise of its historic urban fabric has been well documented. Like other coastal towns in the wider region, the heritage value of Dubai was not so much shaped by distinct monumental buildings or indeed elaborate architectural styles, but is a legacy of interchange, travel and trade. The underlying morphology of the early twentieth century city survives in parts, the fort, part of a historic neighbourhood and several souks have been heavily restored and there are plans to rebuild a neighbourhood that was demolished some twenty years ago. Dubai Municipality has (as yet informally) expressed an interest in making a nomination for inclusion on the World Heritage List. For a city that has invariably had everything that it wants from the tallest tower to the largest shopping mall, World Heritage Site status may be interpreted as just another 'must have'.

While this paper will debate the implications of such a nomination in terms of authenticity and integrity as defined in the Operational Guidelines of the Convention, it will also highlight two philosophical conflicts that such a debate encounters. The first is that which arises between a Euro-centric notion of authenticity as embodied in physical evidence and setting and a largely *laissez faire* attitude to building conservation locally, where cultural heritage is seen to be embodied in tradition, family values and kinship and not in the built environment. The second conflict, on the other hand, emerges within the locality between a legacy of exchange and connectivity and the conscious efforts today to compartmentalise places and seek localised identities. Ironically this is frequently undertaken by appropriating historic architectural styles and symbols.