

MEDIA & CULTURE



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MEDIA

A REORGANISATION OF GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES IN EARLY 2006 led to the closure of the Ministry of Information and Culture and to establishment of a National Media Council and a new Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development. The aim of these moves was to streamline the different and varied functions that previously fell under the remit of a single ministry. The Government also felt that the media and culture fields are both in the process of rapid development and it was necessary to take a fresh look at how government support could be most effectively structured.

NATIONAL MEDIA COUNCIL

The National Media Council was established to oversee media development in the UAE and to support media initiatives. All jurisdictions and responsibilities concerning media affairs that previously fell under the Ministry of Information and Culture were transferred to the National Media Council. In particular, the core media bodies of the old ministry, in the form of the Press and Publications Department, the External Information Department and the Emirates News Agency (WAM), are now under the authority of the National Media Council. In addition, the council has the power to cancel or suspend media licences if there are violations of conditions attached to these.

The Abu Dhabi-based council is run by a six-member board, including the chairman, deputy chairman and director general, that will serve for a term of four years. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was appointed as Chairman and Mohammed Abdullah Al Gergawi, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, as his deputy. Other council members include Abdul Rahman Mohammed Al Owais, Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development, Jamal Sanad Al Suweidi, Dr Amina Al Rustamani, Dr Hassa Lootah and the Director General, Ibrahim Al Abed.

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PRESS FREEDOM

A directive issued at the end of September 2007 by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, ending the criminalisation of press offences gave a great boost to freedom of the press in the region and to the future of open and independent journalism. The directive was announced by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the National Media Council, who underlined Sheikh Mohammed's view that no journalist should be imprisoned because of his or her work, pointing out that other procedures can be taken against any journalist committing an offence. He added that Sheikh Mohammed had instructed the Cabinet to speed up the issuing of a new press and publication law in light of amendments made by the National Media Council in collaboration with relevant organisations.

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Following the issuing of the directive, editors-in-chief of some of the UAE's top Arabic and English newspapers signed a code of ethics, defining the rights and duties of the press, and outlining their commitment to raise the standard of journalism in the country.

ABU DHABI MEDIA COMPANY

Abu Dhabi Law No. 13 for 2007 provided for the establishment of Abu Dhabi Media Company (ADMC), a Dh100 million public joint stock company wholly owned by the government of Abu Dhabi. Mohammed Khalaf Al Mazrouei was appointed as Chairman of ADMC, Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh, as Deputy Chairman, and Mohammed Omer Abdullah, Mubarak Hamad Al Muhairi and Abdullah Muslih Al Ahababi, as members of the board.

The law defines the company's role in carrying out all media-related activities, including broadcasting, production, marketing, advertisement and other associated services, plus provision of media services via the internet or any other medium and publishing

of newspapers and magazines in Arabic and other languages. The company's duties also cover the fostering and training of UAE nationals in all media.

Under the law, ownership of Abu Dhabi Satellite Channel, Abu Dhabi Sport Channel, Abu Dhabi Radio, Emarat FM Radio, Holy Quran Radio, *Al Ittihad* newspaper, *Zahrat Al Khaleej* magazine, *Al Super* magazine and *Majid* magazine, (all previously owned by Emirates Media Incorporated, EMI) was transferred to ADMC, along with all their assets. The broadcasting group's coverage extends from the Middle East to Europe and North America.

In a major development in September 2007, Abu Dhabi Media Company forged a strategic alliance with Aldar Properties and Warner Brothers Entertainment governing the creation of a theme park and hotel, jointly owned multiplex cinemas, a co-finance agreement covering feature film production and the development and publication of videogames, and the build-out of the infrastructure for Abu Dhabi's digital transformation. Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan stressed that the alliance 'is a clear testimony that Abu Dhabi has positioned itself as a hub for culture, media and entertainment. The new deal is poised to enhance the image of Abu Dhabi as a world-class cultural destination,' he said.

The ADMC also announced in mid-2007 plans to launch a new English language daily newspaper, based in Abu Dhabi. To be edited by a former editor of the London *Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper, whose title had not been announced as this *Yearbook* went to press, is expected to be launched early in 2008. A previous Abu Dhabi-based English language daily, *Emirates News*, part of the EMI group, ceased publication in early 1999, leaving the English language media dominated by publications from Dubai and Sharjah, and the launch of the new Abu Dhabi title is expected to result in increased coverage of news from the UAE's capital city.

EMIRATES NEWS AGENCY

Emirates News Agency, (WAM or Wakalat Anba'a al-Emarat) began operations in 1976. Since mid-2006 it has been under the authority of the National Media Council. The agency transmits news on

ADMC, Aldar Properties and Warner Brothers have formed a strategic alliance, positioning Abu Dhabi as a centre for culture, media and entertainment.





national, regional and Arab affairs and is a widely respected source for international media. WAM is a member of the Group of Arab Gulf Cooperation Council news agencies, the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA), the Islamic News Agencies Union, the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies and the Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA). Its headquarters is in the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi, with other offices in Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ra's al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Al Ain and Madinat Zayed.

WAM maintains a team of around 25 reporters outside the UAE, with offices in the Arab cities of Cairo, Beirut, Rabat, Riyadh, Damascus, Sanaa, Algiers, Jerusalem, Gaza, Khartoum, Amman, Baghdad and Tunis. Other offices and reporters are located in London, Paris, Brussels, Geneva, Moscow, Washington, New York, Tehran, Islamabad, New Delhi, Istanbul and Canberra. The agency also operates a website with services in both Arabic and English.

Since it was established, WAM has kept abreast of changes in technology and now distributes its news and picture services by satellite and internet, both locally and internationally. Over 90 per cent of its photographs are available in digital format, which has helped both to improve efficiency and to cut costs.



WAM provides daily news coverage of official and other events throughout the United Arab Emirates and is one of the key sources of information for all media establishments in the country. It provides coverage of around 85 to 90 per cent of official activities at home and abroad. In addition, WAM plays an important role in documenting development in the UAE, and in providing information to researchers and others.

WAM receives the transmissions of 30 Arab, Gulf and international news agencies and has cooperation and news exchange agreements with 20 Arab, Asian and international news agencies, part of an effort to strengthen collaboration between the media of the UAE and other countries.

Meanwhile, WAM, via a central news portal run by IPS, relays daily news in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Swahili languages to over 1000 newspapers and 2000 broadcast stations worldwide. A weekly UAE news digest in Japanese has also been added to the agency's news services. The IPS news portal can be accessed on www.ipsnews.net, while WAM's daily English news as well as selected news service in Spanish, Portuguese, Swahili and Japanese languages are relayed over the internet.

WAM organises regular training workshops as part of a long-term strategy for building the professional capacities of its editors and those working for other media outlets.

DUBAI MEDIA CORPORATION

HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum appointed a new board of directors to Dubai Media Corporation in April 2007: Ahmed Abdullah Al Sheikh is the new DMC Managing Director, while the other board members include Sami Da'en Al Ghamzi, Mona Al Merri, Ahmed Obeid Al Mansouri, Joseph Ghassoub, Dr Amina Al Rustamani, Raja Al Morad, Abdul Kadir Obeid Ali and Faisal Abdullah Abdul Rahman.

The board is entrusted with the task, among other responsibilities, of preparing DMC's operational strategy and developing the appropriate structures to enable DMD to discharge its mission in a transparent and objective manner.

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HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum at the Arab Media Forum 2007.

ARAB MEDIA FORUM

Inaugurated by Dubai Press Club in 2001, the annual Arab Media Forum is designed to open channels of dialogue between Arab and Western media in order to promote better understanding.

The Arab Media Forum 2007 was held at Madinat Jumeirah in April. The two-day event was built around the theme of 'Developing People, Developing Organisations' with experts highlighting the importance of training and retraining media professionals to meet the challenges of the information and technology explosion. The 2007 Arab Journalism Awards were presented to Arab media personalities and publications on the concluding day of the Arab Media Forum.

RADIO & TV

The UAE has over 20 radio stations – more than any other country in the Arab world. In addition to the channels now owned by ADMC, including Abu Dhabi Radio, Emarat FM Radio, Holy Quran Radio, there are radio stations based in Dubai, Umm al-Qaiwain Ajman and Fujairah.

Viewers in the UAE have access to over 200 satellite channels and more than 40 television stations broadcast from the UAE, a number that is steadily increasing. Abu Dhabi is a dominant force in the country's broadcasting profile with three major satellite channels in operation, including ADMC's Abu Dhabi Satellite Channel and Abu Dhabi Sport Channel.

FILM

In recognition of the significant role films can play in promoting the culture and heritage of the UAE and the region, ADACH signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 26 June 2007 with New York Film Academy to establish a world-class film and acting school devoted to developing the film industry in the UAE. The Abu Dhabi Film Academy, which is set to open in January 2008, will assist ADACH to foster and support regional artistic talent and to create an environment conducive to strong cultural and artistic expression.



Prior to the collaboration with the New York Film Academy, there was already a focus on film in Abu Dhabi and an awareness of the role the visual medium plays in society. One notable contributor was Masoud Amralla Al Ali, Artistic Director of the UAE Cultural Foundation and a world expert on Arab cinema. Al Ali founded the influential Emirates Film Competition, which is based at the Cultural Foundation and currently in its sixth year.

In line with the government's active encouragement of local and international filmmakers through the Abu Dhabi Film Commission and the Abu Dhabi Film Academy, the first Middle East International Film Festival was held in Abu Dhabi from 14 to 19 October 2007 with over 100 films from 38 countries competing for the coveted Black Pearl awards. Writing master-classes organised by the Film Financing Circle with Oscar-winner Paul Haggis, events bringing together international financiers and film chiefs to create new filmmaking opportunities in the Middle East, and a focus on films by Arab women directors were some of the highlights of the festival.

The Film Commission is very keen to showcase regional film at major international festivals and at the same time inform the world about the benefits of filming major productions, such as the recently launched 'The Kingdom', in Abu Dhabi. The long-term, multi-faceted strategic alliance formed between Aldar Properties, Abu Dhabi Media Company and Warner Brothers Entertainment in September 2007 will also have a profound impact on the development of the film industry in Abu Dhabi (*see above*).

Masoud Amralla Al Ali was appointed in 2007 as Artistic Director of the very successful Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), now in its fourth year. DIFF has as its theme, 'Bridging Cultures, Meeting Minds', and sees its role not only as a cultural ambassador of the UAE on a global level but also as a catalyst for future development of the film industry in the country. As well as showcasing local talent and introducing the UAE to world cinema, DIFF operates as a platform for networking between UAE and international filmmakers, producers and sales agents, bringing in the region of 1000 industry representatives from across the globe to Dubai. This not only benefits local talent, it also feeds into the nascent movie industry working out of Dubai Studio City free zone.

Presented by ADACH, the first Middle East International Film Festival launched the Film Financing Circle, which will become a significant annual conference on international co-productions.





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PRINTING, PUBLISHING AND ADVERTISING

The UAE is the regional hub for the publishing, printing and advertising industries and is expected to receive the largest single share of the estimated US\$1.7 trillion worth of business that is predicted for this sector in the Middle East by 2008. As a result, the UAE printing industry is expanding by 15 to 20 per cent annually with total worth estimated between Dh8 to Dh10 billion. Approximately 500 printing presses are operating in the country, many of which are expanding due to the high proliferation of local and foreign publications.

Advertising expenditure in the Gulf has been growing at 15 per cent per year. This is hardly surprising in an area with a high net-worth tax-free consumer base. The UAE has about 400 advertising agencies, but 90 per cent of the business is controlled by the top 20 companies, including the world's leading names. Standards are rising steadily in this booming market as recent creativity awards attest.

In particular, UAE agencies won multiple prizes in the first-ever Dubai Lynx awards organised by the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival in association with the UAE chapter of the International Advertising Association. In subsequent years Dubai Lynx will be run alongside a new event 'The Dubai International Advertising Festival', which will commence in 2008, bringing a series of high profile seminars and other initiatives aimed at giving creative inspiration, learning and networking opportunities to people working in the region. Entries will be invited from throughout the Middle East and North Africa region.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

The Government operates a strict enforcement policy of its copyright, piracy and patent laws, seeing the protection of creativity as a necessity in itself and essential to attracting foreign investment. A member of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), the UAE acceded to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property in 1996, following the implementation of three intellectual property laws in 1993.



The Government also works hand in hand with the Trade Mark Owners Council (TMOC) to strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights at the state level as the initiatives launched under the banner 'Supporting Innovation' marking World Intellectual Property Day indicate.

According to the Business Software Alliance (BSA), the UAE has posted the lowest software piracy rate in the region for the past ten years, and is the only Middle East entry to the worldwide list of 20 nations with the lowest piracy rates. Although government and business initiatives have curbed the spread of software piracy, growing consumer demand threatens to erode that progress. Not satisfied with this situation, the UAE authorities have stepped up efforts to further reduce software piracy levels in the country and have reinforced their association with BSA. Proposed measures include organising more awareness campaigns to create better understanding of the detrimental impact of software piracy, and ensuring rigorous enforcement of IPR and copyright laws.

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CNN Building in Dubai Media City.

A study on this subject pointed out that by bringing piracy down in the UAE by ten percentage points, the country could generate more than 667 new jobs and result in an additional Dh1.31 billion (US\$357 million) in contributions to the UAE's GDP. With the help of a ten-point reduction in its 34 per cent software piracy rate, the IT sector could grow to nearly Dh8.44 billion (US\$2.3 billion) by 2009, creating new business opportunities for entrepreneurs and new jobs opportunities for employees.

MEDIA ZONES

The UAE's first media free zones, Internet City and Media City in Dubai, have been a resounding success, so much so that demand for space exceeds the available places. A new entry to the market, the 4-million-square-metre International Media Production Zone (IMPZ), in which Dh1 billion (US\$272 million) was invested in the first phase, will cater to the printing, packaging and publishing sectors. Investment in the second phase, which comprises mainly offices, will approach Dh700 million (US\$190 million).

Work will soon commence on a 40,000-square-metre media free zone Creativity City in Fujairah catering for individuals and companies working in the media, communications, design and technology fields. As well as new investors, Creativity City will contain a number of already existing ventures such as Fujairah FM. Initial plans are for two sites.

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The UAE Cabinet decided at its meeting on 18 March 2007 that all free zones in the UAE are obliged to obtain the written approval of the National Media Council before the issuance of any media licences related to radio and television broadcasting activities and the publication of newspapers, magazines, periodicals and books. The Cabinet also indicated that all other related media activities in the free zones should comply with the effective relevant laws and regulations.

PUBLICATIONS

The UAE Government supports the production of a number of special books each year. In addition to publications prepared by individual ministries, dealing with matters of special interest, the *UAE Yearbook* is an annual publication produced in cooperation with the National Media Council. This unique series, of which the present volume forms a part, is published in Arabic, English, and French. The book covers a wide range of topics on the United Arab Emirates and seeks to focus attention on developments over the previous 12 months. The *UAE Yearbook* is accompanied by a booklet on the UAE and a DVD-rom containing a range of media resources on the country, in addition to several e-books.

UAEINTERACT

The website UAE Interact (www.uaeinteract.com) was one of the first to carry daily news stories on the UAE and has been in continuous operation for 11 years. All stories posted to the website are categorised by subject area and archived with the result that the site contains a huge database of searchable articles on the United Arab Emirates going back as far as 1997. Each year, new features are added and revisions are made to keep pace with fast-changing technologies.

A major upgrading of the website began in early 2007. This included the addition of nine languages, Russian, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Spanish, French, German, Italian and Portuguese, to bring the total number of languages accessible on the site to ten. These satellite websites are updated on a weekly basis and they contain a wide range of comprehensive information on the country, together with translated versions of the popular film on the Emirates: *Creative Energy – Shaping the Emirates*.

Meanwhile, an interactive mapping and routing system has been added to the main site, facilitating the planning of journeys throughout the seven emirates, and other new features are in the pipeline. UAE Interact is consistently listed by Google as the second most significant website after Wikipedia on the world wide web under the search word 'UAE'.

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UAE Interact is the official website of the National Media Council and is produced in ten languages.



The Government's objective is to ensure that economic growth results in the conservation and wider dissemination rather than the diminishment of the country's cultural heritage, which is worthy of special protective measures not only on the basis of its local significance but also because it contributes to the richness of global culture and heritage.

CULTURE & HERITAGE

Preservation of national values, culture and heritage are inextricably linked with national identity, knowledge of which provides a firm footing for the development of a secure and stable society at ease with its place in the modern world. The Government's objective is to ensure that economic growth results in the conservation and wider dissemination rather than the diminishment of the country's cultural heritage, which is worthy of special protective measures not only on the basis of its local significance but also because it contributes to the richness of global culture and heritage. However, as *Abu Dhabi Executive Council Policy Agenda 2007/2008* points out, without the appropriate intervention, cultural resources are threatened with dilution by rapid urban, demographic and economic development.

ABU DHABI AUTHORITY

Preservation of culture is one of the core areas of interest of the recently established Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH), an independent culture heritage management body whose brief is to promote, preserve and regulate the rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the emirate. ADACH has total responsibility for the management of the emirate's complex cultural heritage sector, including its rich resource of archaeological and palaeontological sites, unique cultural landscape, traditional architecture, oral and written expression, customs and handicrafts. In the words of Abu Dhabi's *State of the Environment* report: 'its formation has created the opportunity for improved integrated cultural resource management and, in so doing, has brightened the sector's outlook. The lack of adequate legislation at local as well as federal levels has hindered the protection of cultural resources. Until very recently, no single authority has had the mandate to manage cultural resources. Instead, various organisations undertook this work largely on an ad hoc and unplanned basis'.

In this context, ADACH held a series of consultation workshops in 2007 to assist in drafting a law to protect, regulate and manage



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cultural heritage in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The new law will enhance the role of ADACH, but it will be wider in scope than Law No. 8 of 1970 governing archaeological affairs, which it will replace. In the meantime, ADACH is gathering detailed and reliable baseline information on Abu Dhabi's cultural heritage in order to assess its condition and establish appropriate planning and protection mechanisms. At the same time, it is developing the necessary procedures to regulate and monitor archaeological excavations, and is working in close collaboration with federal and local authorities involved in the implementation of culture and heritage policy.

To fulfil its mandate: 'ADACH will coordinate with a range of public and private entities, including the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority, as cultural and natural heritage is central to the Government's ambitious tourism strategy and the positioning of the Emirate as a unique Arabian destination; the Department of Transport, as efforts to promote culture and heritage sites will rely on the ability of the transport system to get people to and from the sites conveniently; Ministry of Education, Abu Dhabi Education Council and individual Education Zones to ensure local culture and heritage is taught appropriately in schools and higher education institutions, through a formal curriculum or other resources; private property developers to ensure new real estate and property developments consider the impact on natural and cultural heritage, ensure cultural and heritage assets are protected and also enable the promotion of these assets as resident and tourist attractions.'

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MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Education and cultural preservation as a solid foundation for a confident, outward-looking people sure of their national identity are also central themes in the 2008/2010 strategic framework unveiled by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development. The ministry's plans mirror the key objectives of the *UAE Federal Government Strategy*, which places a special emphasis on innovation and creativity in youth as a major catalyst for development.



The recently launched *UAE National Cultural Encyclopaedia*, which will help document the nation's cultural heritage, is one of the ministry's most important current initiatives in furtherance of its brief. The ministry's other plans include a number of strategic partnerships with federal and local organisations to celebrate cultural endeavours across the country and promote contributions by the local community.

In March 2007 the UAE Cabinet formally decided to set up a National Council for Tourism and Antiquities under the aegis of the ministry. The council will oversee the development of archaeological and historical sites in the country with a view to making them more accessible to the public.

DUBAI STRATEGIC PLAN

The *Dubai Strategic Plan 2015*, which dovetails with the federal government strategy, also stresses the need to increase awareness of local culture and strengthen the sense of belonging. Proposals have been put forward to promote cultural life in Dubai by upgrading the cultural sector's regulatory framework; increasing awareness and interest in Dubai's cultural activities; encouraging and nurturing national talent; developing high-quality facilities, including theatres, movie houses and museums, to attract international art and culture events; and encouraging and supporting the initiatives of the private sector that aim at enhancing the cultural and artistic momentum.

CULTURAL INNOVATION

The Government's commitment to keep alive the UAE's rich heritage and culture benefits UAE society in many ways, not least of which is the direct economic gain from defining the country as a cultural destination, albeit one that is also taking on 'an international mantle' as the country is coming of age. This is nowhere more evident than in the development of Saadiyat Island, which is the cornerstone of Abu Dhabi's ambitious plans to develop the emirate's tourism potential, with cultural tourism, this time with an added global twist, being the driving force behind the imaginative project.

Saadiyat's Cultural District will contain a series of spectacular innovative buildings designed by some of the world's leading

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architects: Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Abu Dhabi contemporary art museum, Tadao Ando's Maritime Museum, Jean Nouvel's Louvre Abu Dhabi, and Zaha Hadid's Performing Arts Centre.

At 30,000 square metres, the Abu Dhabi museum will be the only Guggenheim in the Middle East and North Africa region and will be larger than any existing Guggenheim worldwide. The museum, which will be completed by 2012, will form its own major collection of contemporary art and will also exhibit masterworks from the Guggenheim Foundation's global collections.

On 6 March 2007, the Abu Dhabi government and the French Government entered into an historic 30-year cultural agreement to establish the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which will exhibit major artefacts in archaeology, fine and decorative arts from all periods, but focusing on the classical era. The agreement provides for long-term loans from the Louvre and other major French museums. Temporary exhibitions will also be organised annually and will be included in the programme of international exhibition exchanges between major international museums.

A powerful new cultural agency, the French Museums Agency, has also been established to steer the development of the planned Louvre Abu Dhabi. The agency, headed by Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière, publisher of the periodical *Revue des Deux Mondes*, will collaborate with the Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC). Former Centre Pompidou executive director Bruno Maquart will serve as executive director of the new agency, which is expected to supply expertise in the areas of restoration, curatorship and exhibition design, as well as provide training for the museum operating body that will be in charge of the Louvre Abu Dhabi. The long-term goal is to see UAE nationals fully trained in these specialist fields.

The district will also contain a new heritage museum in honour of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the design of which has yet to be decided from submissions by 13 of the world's top architectural practices. The Saadiyat cultural district will also house a Biennale Park with 19 pavilions devoted to culture and the arts. The latter, which will not be built until the last phase of the Saadiyat's master plan in 2017, is loosely based on the Venice Biennale.



The architecture of the Cultural District and the island itself constitutes a bold cultural statement. To quote Frank Gehry: 'There's a great opportunity for infrastructure to be designed here rather than just engineered. It's not been done anywhere in the world since the 19th century. It's never happened in contemporary times, perhaps the odd bridge here and there that's beautiful, but they have an opportunity here to make a statement and not just with individual buildings, but as an entire coherent city'.

OPERA, MUSIC & ART

Abu Dhabi's international cultural profile has not been placed on hold until Saadiyat's Cultural District is constructed. In the meantime, the emirate is playing host to cultural undertakings that will help position Abu Dhabi as the region's cultural and entertainment capital, such as the Middle East premiere of AIDA Monumental Opera on Fire, which was performed in the open air on 29 March 2007 at the lavish West Park garden in Emirates Palace Hotel in Abu Dhabi in association with the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA), and Georges Bizet's world renowned opera, Carmen, staged from 8 to 11 November 2007 under the patronage of Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of

An artist's impression of a completed Saadiyat Island development shows the new Cultural District in the foreground. The project is expected to draw considerable international attention to Abu Dhabi as a major destination.

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Al Ain Classical Music Festival is a yearly event featuring classical music concerts of a high artistic standard.



Al Ain Classical Music Festival.

Presidential Affairs. Emirates Palace Hotel also showcased cultural and artistic masterpieces from Russia in the Kremlin exhibition.

The Abu Dhabi Music Foundation brings top artists and orchestras from Europe and elsewhere to Abu Dhabi and is also instrumental in organising the Al Ain Classical Music Festival, a yearly event featuring classical music concerts of a high artistic standard by internationally acclaimed orchestras and artistes. The festival has managed to attract consistently larger crowds, but plans announced recently for the city, including the setting up of an arts and cultural complex (*see below*), will enable the festival to expand with the ability to host the best of Arabic and Western orchestras and musicians at various historical sites in the city.

International performers are also regularly featured in Dubai, particularly at Theatre Madinat Jumeirah and Media City amphitheatre. In addition, plans for an Opera House in Dubai are under discussion. Supported by the Dubai Cultural Council, which sponsors and develops cultural infrastructure in Dubai, the proposed opera house will be built on a man-made island in the Creek.

International and regional visual artists were to the fore also in 2007. Sharjah, which was designated UNESCO Cultural Capital of the Arab World in 1998, has a long history of involvement with the arts. Sharjah Biennial 8, held from 4 April to 4 June 2007, entitled *Still Life: Art, Ecology and the Politics of Change*, presented attempts by visual arts and film to address the growing social, political and environmental challenges of the world. The biennial not only provided a venue and a platform for presentations, exhibits and discussions, but also actively commissioned artists to produce new work corresponding to the topic at hand to stimulate wider involvement with the issues.

Organised in conjunction with ADACH and Abu Dhabi's Tourism Development Investment Corporation (TDIC), artparis – abu dhabi art fair featured modern and contemporary masterpieces as well as an extensive collection of Arabian art at an exhibition and sale that took place from 26 to 29 November 2007. Based on a similar event that is held annually at the Grand Palais in Paris, 47 European and international art galleries exhibiting more than 3000 works of 700



artists from all over the globe registered their participation in the prestigious event. Among the paintings on display were masterpieces by Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Marc Chagall and Joan Miro. While the entire collection was conservatively valued at over US\$400 million (Dh1.4 billion), there was something for all enthusiastic art collectors and art lovers, including informative seminars on art appreciation and how to invest in art.

Dubai's cultural profile was considerably enhanced by the staging of DIFC Gulf Art Fair from 8 to 10 March 2007 at the Jumeirah Madinat arena, bringing together a very fine collection of contemporary and modern art from 50 of the world's top art galleries for the region's first major international art fair. In addition, the fair featured an excellent education programme and a forum for artists, collectors, curators, artists and philanthropists to express their views on art in the Middle East. The fair, which has been renamed Art Dubai, will take place from the 19 to 22 March 2008.

CULTURAL FOUNDATION

The Cultural Foundation has long been a cultural oasis in the centre of the capital. Enjoyed by young and old, UAE citizens and expatriates alike, the main building is a dramatic white structure resplendent with arches and colonnades, within which are lecture halls, libraries and meeting rooms, as well as ample space on its three floors for displays and exhibitions. Fountains play in an open courtyard and the whole structure is surrounded by leafy gardens.

Perhaps the most important part of the Cultural Foundation is the National Library, which has well over a million books, most in Arabic, although there are also collections in a variety of foreign languages. Most of these are available for consultation by the public, once a simple registration process has taken place. However, some of the rarer items, including a fine collection of Qur'ans, can only be examined with special permission.

A dedicated children's section is particularly popular and an open-plan area occupies much of the ground floor, this being used on a regular basis for exhibitions, which include national and international art exhibitions, displays of old photographs of the

The Cultural Foundation has long been a cultural oasis in the centre of the capital, enjoyed by young and old, UAE citizens and expatriates alike.



Traditional henna painting on hands.





International theatre is frequently staged in Madinat Jumeirah, whilst Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre in the Mall of the Emirates is the venue for plays, musicals, lectures, classes and art exhibitions for the local community, mostly appealing to a largely expatriate population.



Emirates, handicrafts, archaeological artefacts and a wide range of other items. There are also rooms on the first floor suitable for smaller events and an area outside the tastefully designed restaurant is dedicated to the sale of local handicrafts.

The two large theatres are used for a range of cultural activities, including classical music concerts, some staged by the Abu Dhabi Music Foundation; film shows, including regular film seasons from individual countries or directors; plays, and film festivals (*see below*). The Emirates Natural History Group, the UAE's oldest environmental non-governmental organisation, has held its open meetings in the Cultural Foundation on a twice-monthly basis for 20 years. Other voluntary groups also make use of the facilities, including a gardening group and chess enthusiasts.

THEATRE

The first play was staged in the UAE about 50 years ago and a Theatrical Association was formed in 1971. In order to give a much-needed boost to the indigenous theatre industry, which has been stagnating for some time, ADACH cooperated with the Theatrical Association to stage a two-week theatrical season commencing with the opening of *Al Buqsha* at the Cultural Foundation in July 2007. All the plays, most focus on social issues and massive changes in traditions and lifestyle, had previously been staged at the Sharjah Theatre Festival in April. Sharjah already hosts a lively theatrical community and the association opened two new branches in Fujairah and Abu Dhabi in September 2007.

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EMIRATES HERITAGE CLUB

A number of organisations in the UAE are entrusted with the task of preserving and disseminating the country's heritage to the young generations that would otherwise be unfamiliar with the

customs and traditions of their ancestors. One of the most committed is Emirates Heritage Club (EHC), which organises heritage exhibitions, oversees heritage centres and collaborates with all other UAE institutions sharing the same interests. Activities organised by the club for all age groups not only cover traditional sports such as camel racing, boat racing, falconry, and traditional skills like tent-building and coffee-making, but also contemporary sailing, equestrian, shooting and other sports. EHC is instrumental in organising competitive events in these fields, as well as youth camps on the island of Al Sammaliah, north-east of Abu Dhabi City.

Heritage research is conducted through EHC's affiliate, the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History in Al Ain, and environmental research through the Department of Environmental Research (DER) on Al Sammaliah. DER is primarily concerned with coastal biodiversity, conservation and sustainable development of coastal habitats. EHC formed the Amateur Astronomers Group (AAG) in May 1998 to spread astronomy awareness among all categories of society. Another affiliate, Emirates Sailing Academy (ESA-ESS), was set up in July 2000.

THE EMIRATES CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The ECSSR, founded in 1994 in Abu Dhabi, is an independent institution dedicated to the promotion of academic research and empirical enquiry. ECSSR serves as a focal point for scholarship on political, strategic, military, environmental, economic, and social issues pertinent to the UAE, the Gulf, and the greater Middle East through the sponsorship of research and studies conducted by scholars from around the globe.

The core of its work lies in identifying and analysing issues of vital significance, predicting future trends and devising management strategies to cope with such issues. As well as maintaining and training its own staff of researchers, it hosts conferences, symposia, workshops and lecture series renowned for the eminence of the participants and the quality of their content and influence. Integral to the success of ECSSR's research programme are the annual

Emirates Heritage Club helps to preserve traditional sports such as camel racing, boat racing and falconry.



Lt. General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Interior, addressing the Annual Conference of the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research.



The core of ECSSR's work lies in identifying and analysing issues of vital significance to the UAE and the region.

Trend Assessment Reports prepared in the centre's various units which, by providing a survey of major international and domestic developments and their possible implications, become a powerful tool in the task of prioritising the goals for the following year.

The ECSSR's publishing activities have made it a major source of specialised scholarly publications in the region. As well as publishing monographs in its *International Studies Series*, it also publishes the proceedings of conferences, symposia and lectures in *Emirates Occasional Papers* (an English series) and *Strategic Studies* (an Arabic series). In addition to these and other publications, ECSSR translates into Arabic works of importance to the centre and its audience, both regionally and globally.

Recent publications include books such as *With United Strength*, an authoritative biography of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan; *The Three Occupied UAE Islands: The Tunbs and Abu Musa*; *The Long Road from Taif to Jeddah: Resolution of Saudi-Yemeni Boundary Dispute*; *Iraq: Reconstruction and Future Role*. *The Gulf Oil and Gas Sector: Potential and Constraint* is one of the latest publications in the ECSSR Energy Conference series. Earlier titles have covered issues such as Gulf oil in the aftermath of the Iraq War, risk and uncertainty in the changing global energy market and the dynamics and trends of Asian energy markets. The latest book in the ECSSR Annual Conference series is *Arab Media in the Information Age*. Topical issues covered earlier in the series include the impact of the information revolution on Arab society, educational challenges confronting the Arab world, leadership and management techniques in the information age and human resource development in a knowledge-based economy.

Other titles are *Education Technologies and Their Impact on the Educational Process: A Case Study of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSC), UAE University*; *Governance and Globalization: An Economic Perspective*; *In the Shadow of Just Wars: Violence, Politics and Humanitarian Action*; *NATO's Growing Role in the Greater Middle East*; *The Religious Right and US Middle East Policy*; and *The Role of Water Exports in Iranian Foreign Policy Towards the GCC states*.

SULTAN BIN AL OWAIS FOUNDATION

The Dubai-based Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation was established in 1988 under the umbrella of the UAE Association of Writers and Men of Letters. The foundation became an independent cultural institution in 1992. Its objectives include fostering Arab talent and culture by presenting biennial awards for poetry, fiction, drama and literary criticism, in addition to a 'Cultural and Scientific Achievement Award'.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

There has long been an awareness that historic buildings are cultural assets of the nation that should be preserved to provide a touchstone for future generations and a window into the world of yesterday.

Spearheaded by ADACH, Abu Dhabi's oldest building is set to become a cultural heart for the nation following a multi-million dirham project. Qasr Al Hosn, also known as the White Fort, will become a repository and museum depicting all aspects of UAE culture and a place for all Emiratis to celebrate national triumphs. The fort was originally built as a watchtower to guard a waterhole in 1761, becoming a fully fledged fort on what is now Abu Dhabi Island in 1793 when the site was settled. It remained as the residence of the Al Nahyan family until 1966, when Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan became the first ruler to live outside its walls. Since then, the fort has first housed the emirate's police and, later, the Centre for Documentation and Research, which has now moved to a purpose-built complex that also houses the national archives.

Al Ain has a full complement of impressive forts and heritage structures, including the Eastern Fort, located within the compound of Al Ain Museum; Murabba Fort, which used to be the police headquarters and a prison; and Jahili Fort, the latter a large restored fort in the city centre that has a distinctive corner turret with four levels or terraces. ADACH is creating a data centre here, which will include an exhibition of old photographs of the Al Ain area, as well as information about heritage and cultural sites, government offices and cultural activities in the city.

There has long been an awareness that historic buildings are cultural assets of the nation that should be preserved to provide a touchstone for future generations and a window into the world of yesterday.





Over on the East Coast, at Kalba, an enclave of Sharjah, the former house of the local ruling family has been carefully restored, as has a rectangular Islamic fort nearby, while work is also under way on the restoration of a larger fortress at Khor Kalba, which may rest on the site of a fort build by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century AD.



Fujairah Fort has been recently restored.

A purpose-built cultural centre is also planned for the Qattarah oasis, Al Ain, while a number of historic buildings are being restored that can be used for cultural activities, such as hosting visiting artists and cultural evenings, thereby contributing to the development of cultural tourism in Al Ain. The renovation of two historic buildings, the Hadi Al Darmaki house and the Al Jahili mosque, has been completed in accordance with the international standards laid down by UNESCO, and the refurbishment of Al Ain Museum and Al Ain Palace Museum is now under way.

Dubai intends to restore over 300 historic buildings in the emirate by 2010 as part of the government's architectural conservation plans. Where appropriate, buildings will be submitted for inclusion to UNESCO's approved list of heritage sites. At least three historic districts in Dubai, Shindagha, Bastakia and Hatta Heritage Village, are already under consideration by UNESCO. The Shindagha area alone contains around 65 heritage sites, whilst Al Bastakia has around 55 heritage sites, over half of which have been restored. Amongst these buildings are Sheikh Saeed house – an elegant late nineteenth century, two-storey building of Arabic design, complete with four wind towers, housing a unique collection of rare coins, photographs, stamps and documents; Bait Al Wakeel – Dubai's first office building dating back to 1934 and now housing a museum devoted to Dubai's fishing and maritime traditions; Al Ahmadiya School – Dubai's first regular school, established in 1912 and now a museum of education.

The restored Al Fahidi Fort in Dubai was originally the ruler's residence; it subsequently became an arsenal, then a jail, and is now a thriving interactive museum with a wide range of archaeological and ethnographic exhibits. Dubai Municipality's old headquarters has also been re-opened as a museum following a renovation programme. The two-storey building, which offers glimpses of local history, was originally built in the mid-1950s.

Historic buildings in Dubai are also used for commercial purposes to generate some income and support their restoration. A hotel is being run in one of the restored buildings, while others are used for restaurants and coffee shops. Some of the restored buildings have also been rented out for residential purposes.



Sharjah's renovation and restoration of architecturally acclaimed heritage buildings and an old souq in the Sharjah Arts Area and Sharjah Heritage Area have earned it international acclaim. Many of these fine buildings house art, Islamic and ethnographic museums, including the country's first national art gallery, and one is also home to The Emirates' Fine Arts Society. Nearby is Sharjah Fort or Al Husn. Built by Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi in 1820, this carefully renovated fort was the residence of the ruling family for many years. It was torn down in 1969, but the present ruler, himself a prominent local historian, has restored it with the help of old photographs and documents, his own notes and the assistance of elderly residents. It now houses a museum. Al Mahatah Fort at the old airport site right in the centre of Sharjah displays aviation memorabilia.

Over on the East Coast, at Kalba, an enclave of Sharjah, the former house of the local ruling family has been carefully restored, as has a rectangular Islamic fort nearby, while work is also under way on the restoration of a larger fortress at Khor Kalba, which may rest on the site of a fort built by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century AD.

The eighteenth century fort in Ajman switched in 1970 from being the ruler's palace and office to housing the local police force. In 1981, it changed function once again to become a museum displaying an interesting collection of archaeological artefacts, manuscripts, old weapons and reconstructions of traditional life.

Situated alongside Umm al-Qaiwain's Creek, its main gates flanked by two impressive old cannons, Umm al-Qaiwain Fort, formerly the ruler's residence but now restored as a museum, is one of the most atmospheric in the UAE. The upper floor includes a high-ceilinged *majlis* (a meeting room and a place to receive guests) elegantly decorated with carved wooden balconies. The lower level is occupied by a cooking area and store rooms.

The beautifully renovated Ra's al-Khaimah Fort behind the Police Headquarters on Al Hosn Road in the old town was the residence of the ruling family until the early 1960s and houses an intriguing collection of archaeological and ethnological artefacts, although plans are being drawn up for the construction of a purpose-built museum.

The beautifully renovated Ra's al-Khaimah Fort behind the Police Headquarters on Al Hosn Road in the old town, was the residence of the ruling family until the early 1960s.



Traditional windtowers provided natural cooling.

Fujairah's Department of Archaeology and Heritage recently completed the renovation of another major site at Awhala in southern Fujairah, where a Late Islamic fort sits on top of the foundations of a much larger Iron Age fortress.



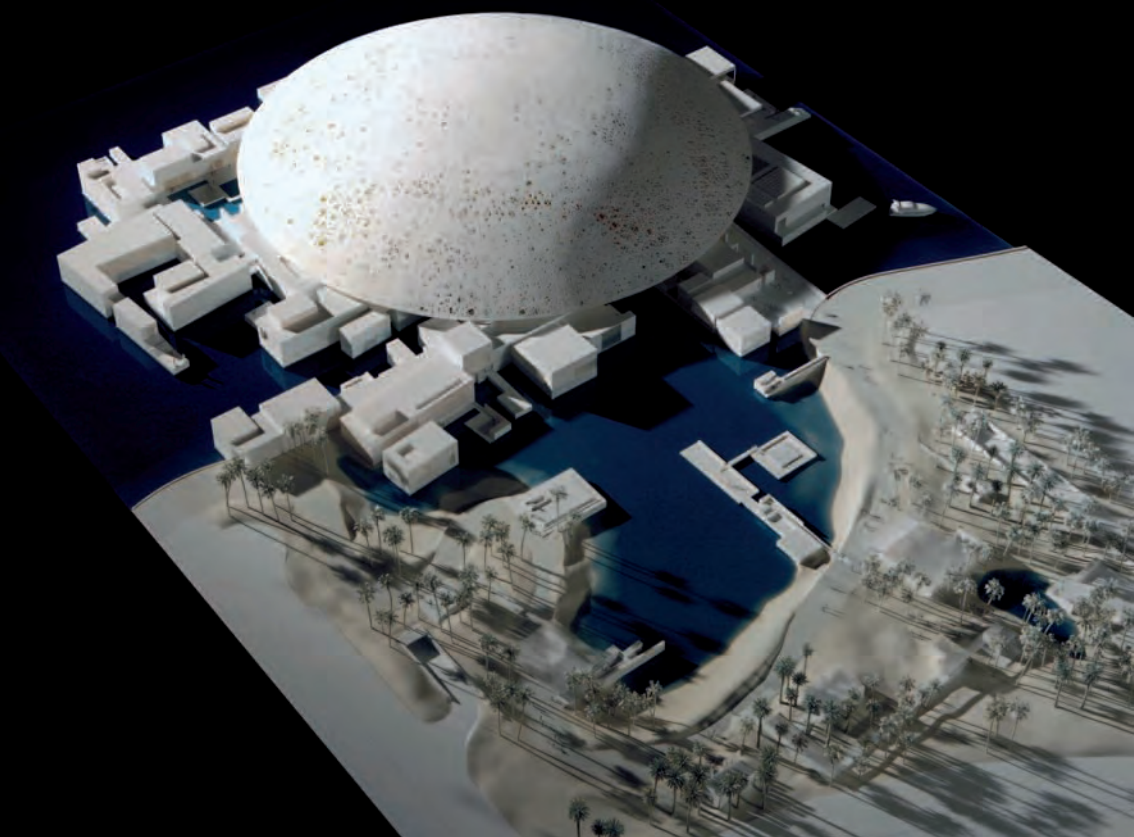
An important series of surveys has been undertaken in Ra's al-Khaimah Emirate over the years, documenting mountain villages, towers, mosques, the old houses of the palm gardens of Al Nakheel and Shimal, and the traditional buildings of Ra's al-Khaimah City. Archaeologists from the Ra's al-Khaimah National Museum are researching and cataloguing all traditional structures and the more important of them are being earmarked for restoration.

The Emirate of Fujairah also has its fair share of historic buildings, particularly impressive forts and other defensive structures on the coast and traditional routes through the major wadis. Work by the Department of Archaeology and Heritage on the restoration of Fujairah Castle, begun in the late 1990s, was completed in 2000, while many of the adjacent buildings, including walled courtyard-houses once occupied by members of the ruling family, have also been restored. The whole area is to be surrounded by a new wall, within which a number of new buildings will be constructed to act as a focus for the heritage of Fujairah. These are expected to include a three-storey museum, an amphitheatre, a souq, a mosque, a restaurant and a children's play area.

The department recently completed the renovation of another major site at Awhala in southern Fujairah, where a Late Islamic fort sits on top of the foundations of a much larger Iron Age fortress. Work also commenced on restoration of the Late Islamic palace and adjacent buildings in Wadi Hayl, around 13 kilometres west of Fujairah City. Once the residence of a junior branch of the ruling family, this is one of the best-preserved sites of its type in the whole of the UAE.

WORLD HERITAGE SITE

ADACH's Cultural Landscapes division has indicated that the Jebel Hafit area near Al Ain, a region of outstanding natural beauty with an abundance of archaeological sites, could become the UAE's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. The summit of the 1240-metre mountain is accessed by a 11.7 kilometre-winding road with breathtaking views. The rocky outcrop and surrounding area is home to popular hot springs, cave formations, as well as endangered wildlife, and boasts a restored fort and archaeological



ruins at nearby Mezyad, in addition to ancient stone tombs that date back thousands of years.

The UNESCO scheme has the backing of the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) as well as government officials. However, although the UAE is working closely with UNESCO, a formal application cannot be processed until the UAE passes a federal law regulating cultural heritage.

MUSEUMS

In addition to the large number of historic buildings that house museums, which have already been discussed, the UAE has a rich selection of purpose-built, modern museums dedicated to specific subject areas, such as archaeology, natural history, science, popular medicine, astronomy, numismatics, philately, Islam, traditional jewellery, policing and aviation.

Sharjah is well known for its museums, heritage and environment centres, which include a number of world-class displays, not only of local interest but also dealing more broadly with the culture

A model shows how the Louvre – Abu Dhabi will look upon its completion.



The Breeding Centre is focusing on the breeding of endangered Arabian species with the hope of re-introducing some of the rarer species into the wild.



and science of the Islamic world. Sharjah Museums Department oversees and coordinates the many museums in the emirate in order to foster a fertile environment for their future development and consolidate Sharjah's reputation as an attractive cultural and leisure destination.

Sharjah's Planetarium specialises in astronomy and celestial navigation; its Police Museum has a good collection of armaments, riot and combat gear and models of old walls and forts; its Archaeological Museum is a modern, lively interactive museum tracing the history of Sharjah from ancient times; the Science Museum has 50 excellent interactive exhibits covering physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy; whilst the Discovery Centre is the first interactive 'hands-on' children's museum in the UAE and a very popular venue. Meanwhile, the grounds of Sharjah Desert Park contain the Natural History Museum, a Children's Farm, the Arabian Wildlife Centre and the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife.

Sharjah's Natural History Museum opened in 1995 and was immediately very popular because of its state-of-the-art exhibits. Lively with light and sound effects as well as interactive video displays, the exhibits deal with local habitats, plant and animal life, geology and marine life. Outside are wildflower and formal gardens. The Arabian Wildlife Centre is an impressive modern zoo that displays local wildlife in their natural habitats. Most of the displays can be viewed from inside an enormous climate-controlled building. Exhibits include a reptile house, a huge aviary with free-flying birds as well as rock-hopping hyrax, a night house with many desert mammals, an 'Ibex Mountain' overlooked by the restaurant, and a corridor with huge windows looking out onto enclosures for hamadryas baboons and large predators such as wolves, cheetahs and the Arabian leopard.

The Breeding Centre is focusing on the breeding of endangered Arabian species with the hope of re-introducing some of the rarer species into the wild. This is where, for the first time in the UAE, captive breeding of the Arabian leopard was achieved. For obvious reasons, this particular centre is not open to the public.