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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
GOVERNMENT OF SHARJAH
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE & INFORMATION

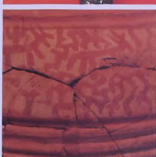
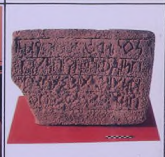
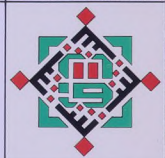
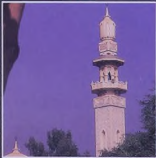
OUR CULTURE

NEW REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

30th April 1981 - 30th April 1995
15 YEARS OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT



1995



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It is the responsibility of those who are in charge of education, instruction, culture, information and social uprising, to promote and consolidate the values of Science that prevail our world, without ignoring the principal values on which the Muslim Arabic character depends; the values of belief and faith through which we remain as a nation of good deeds.

Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassemi
Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah

* On the occasion of the 8th festival of Childrens culture, on 14th February 1992.



Department of Culture and Information Publication
P. O. Box : 5119 SHARJAH U.A.E - Tel 541116 - 528265 - Fax : 362126 - Telex : 68508
Publications designed by : TALAL MOULLA

Our Culture **New Realities and Perspectives**



30th April 1981 - 30th April 1995
(15 years of Cultural development)

CENTRE FOR ARAB GULF STUDIES

April 1995

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

14 MAR 1996

Department of Culture and Information
(15 years of Cultural development)



I - FOUNDATION

Through history, Sharjah has played a significant role in the development of culture in the Gulf area. Being one of the most important centres, Sharjah has, through the years, attracted a great number of authors, scientists, thinkers, students and knowledge seekers. What strengthened the Emirates position was the early introduction of education. The first school was established in the beginning of the century and in 1934 the first library was opened by the late Ibrahim Al Midfa.

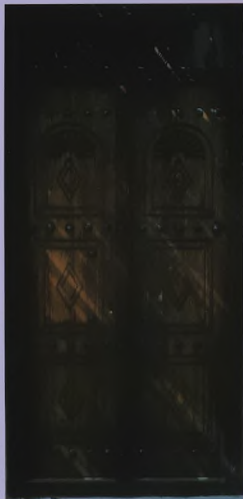
The first newspaper in the country was published by Al Midfa. An Islamic forum, a cultural and intellectual club, was also established in Sharjah, drawing authors, poets and intellectuals from the Gulf area and other parts of the Arab World. The number of clubs and centres of culture have also enhanced the cultural and scientific development of the Emirate.

In order to maintain its leading position, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassemi, issued an Emiri Decree on the 30th of April 1981, establishing the Cultural Department, later known as The Sharjah Department of Culture and Information. Since the creation, the department has attempted to focus on the enrichment of the individuals cultural uprising in terms of an Arab/Islamic perspective, with a larger humanitarian understanding.

The Department of Culture & information The role and goal

The Emiri decree no:20, issued on 30th April 1981 established a department of culture and guidance in Emirate of Sharjah to promote:

- Culture (including talks, seminars, conferences, supervising Africa Hall and public libraries, and coordinating with the Ministry of Culture and Information.
- Arts (including theatre and theatre groups, folklore ensembles, art exhibitions)
- Sports (including sports clubs and promotion of sports among youths)
- Restoration and conservation of national heritage by supervision of national museums,



folklore collections, care for social clubs and women societies in the Emirate.

- Information (including promotion of Diwan Al Amiri and local departments, co-operation with similar institutions to fulfill the positive media coverage of the activities.

- Tourism (including the Sharjah Tourist Centre).

Since 1981, major changes took place and some of the main responsibilities were transferred to other departments and the name of the department itself changed to Department of Culture & Information. The Department developed its sec-

tions to meet the changing society and to take new roles. Special attention was given to childrens culture, youth and women. Due care was also given to talents and creative abilities. Important cultural manifestations were initiated such as Sharjah Drama Festival, National Art Festival, Sharjah Arts Biennial, SharjahBook Fair etc. Importance has also been given to cultural relation and co-operation within the UAE and abroad. Planning questions were raised, policies co-ordination and bilateral activities were discussed with related establishments in other Emirates. Annual cultural programmes became clear in the cultural life. Interest to statistics developed, objectives and viability of activities were closely observed with the hope of

- knowledge of positive and negative aspects and values of the programmes and their appeal to the public.
- raising of adequate social workers
- trial of new administrative and organizational form .}



Main objectives :

Department of Culture & Information is mainly concerned with :

- defining priorities of the cultural works according to the needs of the national development plans.
- safeguarding national cultures and heritage
- development of creative abilities
- consolidation of Islamic and Arab values to give national identity
- consolidating science and scientific knowledge to give birth to better social, cultural and political development of the country.
- consolidating scientific and archaeological



researches, establishing co-operation between various cultural institutions.

In order to fulfill the objectives, the Department adopted three kinds of cultural activities :

- 1.) Major Cultural Events
- 2.) Medium Cultural Events
- 3.) Minor Cultural Events



Major Cultural Events:

The aim is to provide an intellectual and serious cultural backgrounds with the scope of large public turn up, in a period of not less than 7 days suitable for different age groups. Some good examples are the Sharjah Book Fair (13 sessions), Child Festival (11 sessions), Sharjah Drama Festival (6 sessions), Sharjah Arts Biennial (2 sessions) and National Art Festival (1 session).

Medium Events :

Significant activities organized in close collaboration with the local, regional and pan Arab cultural institutions to enrich the local culture. Examples are : Short story and novel symposium, poetry festival, disabled cultural days, annual art exhibitions, Bahrain cultural week, 1st GCC cinema symposium, Gulf women artists exhibitions, etc.



Minor Events:

Gathered in the annual cultural seasons based on monthly programming of various activities which includes film screening, dramas, music concerts, exhibitions, workshops, specialized programmes dedicated to youths, women, handicapped, etc.. Slide lectures, talks, seminars and various cultural and literary affairs are planned to host important intellectuals and literary experts on the Arab Culture. Science, Heritage and environmental programmes are also considered.



Organizational aspects

The Department of Culture & Information has got a flexible administrative network. Collective administration is always available and cultural planning is gradually getting importance. The main divisions of the department are planning, Culture, Art, Archaeology, Libraries, Heritage and childrens cultures besides General Administration which includes finance, planning, cultural relation, information, advisory committee, technical committees, experts etc.



Venues and facilities:

Through its 15 years of activities the department has succeeded in availing the cultural life with the following institutions:

- Sharjah Cultural Centre (includes the theatre hall, lecture & seminar hall, exhibitions hall and Central library.
- The Library
- Africa hall (a theatre hall for general lectures, talks, seminars, performances such as dramas, music concerts etc.)
- Childrens culture centres (multi activity centres for children in Sharjah (5 centres) and the eastern zone.
- Museum (Sharjah Art Museum, Heritage Museum, Archaeological Museum, Shar-



jah Planetarium)

- Libraries (Central Library, Public libraries in Kalba and Khorfakkan, childrens libraries in all the childrens culture centres)

- Under construction (Khorfakkan theatre, with 500 seats capacity, Kalba theatre, with 500 seats capacity, children centres in Talaa and Riqa areas (to be opened soon), children centres in eastern zone.

- Fairs and exhibition centre suitable fro most of our major cultural events is under construction. Another central library is also under construction. A new premise for the department is under planning.



II. CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

(1) Mass Culture

Since its creation, the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information concentrated its effort on presenting lectures and discussions, hoping to attract a audience, whereby encouraging the interaction between the speakers and the public. A number of intellectuals and thinkers from the Gulf and the rest of the Arab world were invited to participate in such meetings. At the beginning, these events were mostly held at the Africa Hall, opened on 14th February 1976, as the facilities capable of holding such events were limited. However, in recent years more



centres have been set up providing a vast array of cultural events. An annual program of cultural events is now a regular feature provided by the department.

(2) The Arts

The department has also given its support to the various artistic genres, folklore, drama, cinema, music, painting, as they lay an integral role in the cultural arena. This has also provided support for the local artists and local talent, and helped in preserving the national heritage in the country. The department has hosted to a number of local and international groups, intensifying the interaction between the various nationalities through the language of art. The performances have proven to be extremely popular.

(a) Drama

The department has also provided a lot of support to the local theatre groups through drama festivals, seminars and workshops. The Sharjah Drama festival has enriched the national, Gulf and Arab arena through the performances, seminar and workshops.



(b) Fine Arts

In recent years, various exhibitions have been held in the emirate of Sharjah, in which various local and expatriate artists participated. The department has also invited a number of Gulf and Arab artists to exhibit, providing them with the facilities needed to make such exhibitions successful.

The Sharjah Arts Biennial organized on international basis, its 1st session in 1993 and 2nd session in 1995 is to be considered as a radical change in the artistic life aiming the reshaping of Art by improving Arts education, exhibitions, galleries, criticisms, media, childrens art, etc.

During the 2nd session of the Art Biennial, His Highness The Ruler of Sharjah inaugurated the Sharjah Art Museum (Bait Al Sarkal) in Al Shuwaihiyeen old area. This new museum attempts to provide encouragement to the local artists and to draw exhibitors. It will also function as gathering centre for artists, forums, seminars, galleries, promotional fairs as well as centre for training and art education for all levels. The whole museum and its surrounding areas will be arranged for art galleries, artists private galleries, art centre and for various cultural activities.



(c) Music and Drama

In collaboration with local and Arab and foreign music institutions, the department has held a number of performances by various Arab and world artists. The music concerts and folk & traditional evenings have proved to be extremely successful.

A Cinema Club is established and film screening are taking place regularly.

The department is also studying the establishment of a training centre for theatre arts and crafts soon to provide specialized courses and training for theatrical groups, amateurs and children of both sexes.



(3) Childrens Culture activities

In February 1984, the first Childrens Cultural Festival was held and since then has become a yearly event. The festival has succeeded in giving the child the role he or she deserves in the community. In 1987, a specialized department in the development of children was established. The department concerns itself with the cultural and moral development of the child, and oversees the cen-



tres and their events in the various parts of the Emirate.

Plays, painting exhibitions, workshops, carnivals and seminars are a few of the events held during the festival.

There are currently more than 10 centres for children in the Emirate and plans for the establishment of specialized centres are in process.

(4) Literary activities

(a) Sharjah Book Fair

The Sharjah book fair is one of the most important cultural events in the Gulf and the Arab World. His Highness The Ruler of Sharjah hopes that the success the fair is enjoying will one day lift it to international standards.

Intensive preparation and correspondence with the various publishing houses, book shops,

institutes and various individuals are undertaken every year by the department. The first fair took place in 1982 and has since grown and now hosts a select number of authors and intellectuals. Cultural literary symposiums is a regular accompaniment to the fair to which prominent figures from Arab world, poets and scholars are invited. Special programmes for children are also conducted during the fair period.

(b) Al Rafid journal

In November 1993, the department began publishing Al Rafid, a quarterly cultural journal, encompassing studies, reviews on literature, arts and heritage written by Arab scholars and translators. The journal aims to contribute in a positive manner to the pan Arab culture.

(c) Cultural publications

Specialized studies in the fields of culture, heritage, arts, literature, drama, childrens literature are also planned by the department in the near future. The department has more than 25 publications to its credit. Plans to print annual cultural magazines, annual archaeology journal, an art magazine, childrens magazine and an year book are underway, which is expected to appearing during next year.



III. PRESERVATION OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HERITAGE

(a) Archaeological sites:

Co-operation with archaeologists specialized in the region has yielded a number of excavations and studies on the sites in the Emirate. The department has also established the archaeological museum, a leader in archaeology restoration.

Plans for various educational museums in various locations are underway.

(b) Heritage

In order to preserve the heritage of the Emirate, the department has undertaken studies of various locations and restored a



number of old fortresses, castles and mosques. The department plans the establishment of a Heritage house in different areas in the near future.

Sharjah city won the Arab City Award because of its restoration work of the old neighborhoods near the old souk in Sharjah. There are plans to transform the area into a cultural and tourist site. Traditional crafts and arts are going to be re-established. Folk studies, collections and documentation shall also be available in specialized centre in the area rendering services to the interested scholars.

IV. CULTURAL VENUES AND FACILITIES

Various centres, libraries and exhibition halls have been set up by the department in order to promote and facilitate the cultural events.

(a) The Sharjah Cultural Centre

The Sharjah Cultural Centre, a beautiful landmark building in Sharjah, is built to house a theatre hall, with a seating capacity for 700 persons, a central library with more than 90,000 titles and two halls for exhibitions and symposiums.

(b) Africa Hall

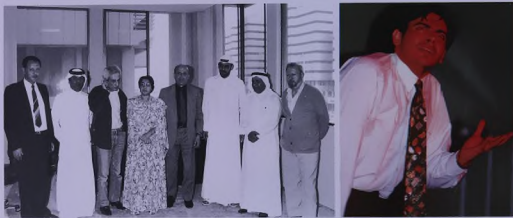
This is one of the oldest theatrical hall in Sharjah with a seating capacity for 600 persons. The Hall was given its name following the first Arab-African seminar on co-operation, held on its premises in December 1976.

(c) Childrens Culture Centres

There are five centres for children in Sharjah city, in Riqqa, Talaia, Rifaa, Samnan and Khaza-



miah. There are also five similar centres in Khorfakkan, Dibba, Kalba, Wilaia and Ghail. The centres aim at encouraging children to develop their talents and habits of reading and scientific abilities. The age group allowed to these centres are from 5 to 12 years. Activities vary from music to scientific activities, fine arts, literature, Islamic studies, dram, folklore, excursions etc.



(d) Public libraries

A public library was established in Sharjah in the early 80s with more than 90,000 titles and publications. In addition two public libraries have been established in both Khor Fakkan and Kalba, each containing more than 40,000 titles. These libraries besides the Central Library in Sharjah are serving the large public and students of the UAE. In order to meet the growing interest in reading and researching, a new public library is under construction in Sharjah.

(e) Theatres and exhibition halls

In addition to the 2 theatres and 2 exhibition halls of Sharjah, plans are underway to construct theatres and exhibition halls in Kalba and Khorfakkan areas as well.

(f) Sharjah Archaeological Museum

The above museum houses findings from various excavations sites in the Emirate, spanning the period between pre-biblical times and until the late Islamic ages.

(g) Bait Al Naboudah (Heritage Museum)

After its renovation the famous Naboudah house in old souk area of Sharjah was transferred to a Heritage and popular traditional museum in 1994. The house contains several halls exhibiting traditional lives, arts and crafts. The museum is a part of a market area called Arsa, known since 18th century as a main market area in the Gulf.

(h) Bait Al Sarkal (Sharjah Art Museum)

The Sarkal house which hosted in the past the British Agent in Sharjah is transferred to an Art Museum which will help promote art education and appreciation among the public. It is planned that the surrounding areas are to be used for art galleries and training centres in the near future.

(i) Planetarium

Those interested in astronomy and marine life can visit this scientific planetarium. School children and the public can make use of the facility for their studies and knowledge.



V. NEW HORIZONS

The department is planning to establish new museums for sciences, environment, Islamic arts, civic life, marine and desert life to facilitate better education to the new generation and at the same time to enlighten foreign visitors. The department is also planning to extend its cultural services to other parts of the Emirate to make possible the participation of the intellectuals, specialists in its planning and execution of the programmes. It is important that both the government and the private sections should take care of Culture seriously. Consumers of the cultural products should take part in its promotion and development. Culture is the way of life. It has a prominent place in the development of any country.



The Culture Department in Sharjah is the oldest governmental institution in the country. It succeeded, in a very short time, in transferring the city of Sharjah in to a cultural capital of the UAE, thus keeping a first place in the cultural field, both qualitywise and quantitywise.

- Abdul Khaliq Abdallah & others. Civic Society UAE, Sharjah. Sociological Society & Ibn Khaldoun Centre, 1995, PP.107-108.

