The Value of Continuous Innovation of Saudi Culture for Sustainable Development

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Culture is continuously being created and changed. It is a socially constructed learning and development tool created by the people, with a strong long-term cross-sectional impact on the economy and society. It is also a unique resource and capital, with the potential to be of high value in today’s creative economy. Saudi Arabia is culturally rich, authentic and diverse. Since the formation of the modern nation state in 1932 and the discovery of oil, the country’s economic and social conditions have continued to evolve and culturally adapt, with a result of a complex social structure. The oil revenue helped build cities with high-rise buildings, and introduced BMW’s to the once desert tracks. However, the changes that have taken place have only been on the surface of society, with countless possibilities for development still to be pursued.

The social and cultural structure in place today does not provide sufficient opportunities for people to explore new ideas, and question their own development due to barriers put in place by the people themselves in the name of preserving culture and heritage. At the same time efforts to embrace the challenges of globalization as opportunities for local development, have been minimal. Also, the country’s ‘rentier-state’ structure has impacted individual attitudes, behaviors, and cultural identities, where there is a lack of motivation to experiment with new elements of the existing culture, and to create and seek open and constructive dialogue for change.

Saudi Arabia’s rich culture can be utilized creatively for the progress and development of society and the economy due to the role and influence it has in people’s everyday lives. Policy makers have the opportunity, and society has the potential and energy to be innovative in defining the role of Saudi culture, as it can be: the foundation for public policies; an investment for sustainable growth and development; and a legitimate base for the country to actively participate with the international community through cultural dialogue on global sustainable development.

Through looking at the past and present cultural structure, as well as current human needs in Saudi society, the presentation will answer the following questions:

1) Why should policy makers in Saudi Arabia adopt culture as a foundation for sustainable development?
2) How can Saudi society open cultural dialogues internally, and promote the exploration of new elements, and innovation of the existing culture for social and economic progress?
3) What possible impact can the culture strategy for public policy have on the local and the international community?