Urban heritage in the Middle East: Heritage, tourism and the shaping of new identities[1]

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Introduction

The Middle East is home to some of the world's oldest cities dating back to the early civilisations of the fertile crescent (Mesopotamia) and the Nile valley. It is the centre of the old world order where trade routes intertwined and collided with one another, and where not only goods, but also ideas, ideologies and interventions were traded, and settlements grew and thrived at the major intersections up until modern times. Today, some of these once great cities have turned to dust, others into major archaeological sites, and some of them into small settlements that are a distant shadow of their former glory. Others, on the other hand, are now embedded into the fabric of buzzing twenty-first century metropolises such as Cairo and Istanbul in an uneasy juxtaposition of historic layers with development pressures fuelled as much by lucrative real estate propositions as by need.

No two of these cities are the same, yet somehow in their own way they each intrigue travellers with the sense of the exotic shrouded in an oriental mystique. Fuelled by a newfound engagement with the Orient, the great centres of Islamic civilisation and scholarship emerged on the European consciousness as destinations to be visited from the eighteenth century onwards. Thus, gentlemen visitors mingled with traders in the *souqs* and bazaars of Cairo, Istanbul, Aleppo and Jerusalem, sketched mosques, fountains and public baths and further fuelled an orientalist allure and an appetite for it back home. Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism has been much debated, but still continues to manifest itself in the expectations of the modern-day tourist to the region, though often through a series of carefully assembled visual ques that build on pre-conceived narratives.

Many of the early travel destinations of the region have continued to feature as tourist destinations in different ways and guises up to the present. Many of them, having survived intact up until the middle of the twentieth century, have experienced profound and seismic changes to their economic, political and social structures. Several unfortunately have fallen victim to the many conflicts that have enveloped the region over the past century, while others continue to do so. All of these factors influence the ways in which they are perceived by tourists today and how city authorities have started to shape their historic districts to specifically serve a growing tourism market. No two of these cities are the same and each and every one has experienced a different trajectory of growth, stability and conflict and an equally different engagement with history and heritage. Meanwhile, the larger forces of globalisation, neo-liberal economic policies and investor and consumer interests are shaping cityscapes across the region.

This chapter examines urban heritage tourism, which constitutes a growth market for MENA. It specifically considers influences that can often be traced back to the aftermath of the 1974 oil crisis and the neo-liberal economic practices that followed. But it has not only been global economic developments and local geopolitics, but also worldwide shifts in conservation theory and worldview, not least by post-modernism, that also influences the ways in which urban heritage is preserved, presented and packaged for tourism consumption (Orbaşli 2017).

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The predominant form of cultural tourism to the region was borne around its ancient sites, fuelled by nineteenth century European antiquarian interests. To this day countries like Jordan, Egypt and Israel focus much of their tourism promotion offers on their ancient built heritages (Timothy 2014). Nonetheless, a growing recognition that historic settlements are also of tourism interest has played a significant role in safeguarding and supporting the conservation of historic urban quarters and traditional settlements.

A review of literature from the 1980s and 1990s illustrates a collective concern for the future of urban heritage in the Islamic World under pressures of development and ambitions of modernisation (see for example Abu Lughod 1980; Lewcock 1978; Rghei & Nelson 1994; The Aga Khan Trust for Culture 1990). Tourism makes a rare appearance in many of the discussions where the condition of the built fabric and the livelihood needs of local communities take centre stage. Furthermore, it was being argued that the urban form and the social networks that were at the heart of the eponymous 'Islamic' city generated different conservation challenges and require different approaches (Antonio, 1981). Most commonly, campaigns for conservation have had to contend with forces of rapid urban development and a general social ambivalence towards historic urban quarters associated with a past and more 'primitive' era (Warren & Fethi 1984).

In the same way that not all so called 'Islamic cities' have developed in the same way, so does each geographical sub-region face its own specific challenges when it comes to urban conservation. As the protection of historic urban neighbourhoods has become accepted over time, a number of distinct trends are, however, emerging in the way they embrace tourism. By identifying and elaborating on a number of typical scenarios of urban heritage tourism in the Middle East, the chapter aims to capture the essence of urban tourism in a fast moving and often volatile region. These are presented under a number of overarching headings, but many of these situations and scenarios are often interwoven or overlap. Many of these cities are anything but socially homogeneous, and politics, minorities, representation and identity are often very closely linked to what is preserved, how it is preserved and moreover how cultural heritage is presented to tourism.

The chapter evolves around two theoretical standpoints: firstly that although the survival of historic urban quarters cannot be solely attributed to tourism, tourism is increasingly shaping the ways in which urban heritage is preserved and constructed; second is a continuing Orientalist narrative that is evident both in the visitors' expectations when travelling to the region (Bryce, 2007) and in the way that cultural heritage is presented and interpreted by local actors in recognition of commercial opportunity. It further emphasises the inherent conflict between notions of privacy that determine the urban form and character of many Islamic cities with expanding commercial activity that alters the physical character and counteracts the meaning of place (Orbaşlı, 2007).

There are inevitably some generalisations in this text given the constraints of a single chapter to adequately cover a large geographical area and to address the timeframe that is necessary to understand and contextualise current developments. The chapter has also deliberately omitted the great cities of pilgrimage that also characterise the region, from the two great holy cities of Makkah and Madinah to others such as Jerusalem, Mahshad, Karbala or Najaf.[2]

[2] There is much debate on whether pilgrimage is also a form of tourism and in many of these cities pilgrimage visits are also combined with visitation of a more touristic nature. However, it was felt that the specific conditions of the pilgrimages and the impacts on the historic fabric, organisation and presentations of the cities would warrant a chapter in their own right. This phenomenon is discussed in other chapters in this book.

The changing face of the Medina

In the latter half of the twentieth century when there were heated discussions on how to save the historic quarters of the Islamic world that were being threatened by loss of interest, general dilapidation and development pressures, the various *medina*, or historic walled cities of North Africa, became forerunners and standard bearers for an emergent conservation movement. Holistic approaches, sensitive revitalisation projects and local community-centred approaches resulted in a number of award-winning projects with a social conscience. The medinas of Fes in Morocco and Tunis in Tunisia stand out in particular. In both cases, the formulation of two organisations, ADER-Fès and the *Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis* (ASM), played an important role in developing and implementing regeneration projects within the old towns. Although both organisations continue to play an important part in the conservation and management of their respective cities, their focus has markedly shifted to fostering tourism growth.

Depending heavily on external funding from the likes of the World Bank or the EU, the ASM is rare for the region for its continuity and as acting as a knowledge bank for the various and often external programmes (Nardella & Cidre 2016). The early achievements of the ASM were recognised by two Aga Khan awards for the regeneration projects it instigated in the Medina. However, over time there has been a very definitive shift towards tourism, observed in a growth of tourism related businesses but also in the way in which ASM and its funders have been prioritising projects. Sanitation and beautification programmes for designated 'tourist' routes have included urban realm improvements that go beyond recognised conservation practices to promote embellishments to building facades to emphasise historic character.

For the walled city of Fez, the World Heritage Site listing of 1981 also marked the start of a three-decade long rehabilitation process that was driven by local need and an understanding that the city was a dynamic place that would continue to evolve within its medieval structure (Radoine 2003). A World Bank loan in 1993 was notably not only a game changer for the old town of Fez, but also marked a shift in World Bank funding policy in that cultural heritage was recognised as having development value, though one that was exclusively linked to tourism. The outcome, according to one observer was that: 'many places with great archaeological and historical value are now nothing more than a zoo for tourists to visit […] the original inhabitants have been replaced by bazaars and Ali Baba's adventures to build up a new façade based on "extraordinary" or exotic scenes' (Radoine 2003: 473). The same pattern is repeated through many other examples from Salt in Jordan to Tripoli in Libya where World Bank and other donor funds for conservation have singularly focused on increasing the appeal of these often secondary towns to tourism as an economic development vehicle (Daher 2007).

Tourism undoubtedly provides opportunities to re-use buildings that would otherwise be redundant and establish ways in which their rich heritage and characteristics can be preserved and to an extent remain accessible, whist also providing visitors with unique experiences (Orbaşli 2000). The conversion of North African *riads*, or Damascene courtyard houses, into exquisite hotels and restaurants became a common trend and a sought after visitor experience. Popularised in Cairo, Egypt, since the 1980s as historic hotels, often with romantic associations, were revived and old palaces converted into boutique hotels, an influx of Gulf investors have rapidly turned old properties into objects of intense property speculation in some areas (Salamandra 2004). So popular have these types of hotels been that in Istanbul's historic peninsula there has been a proliferation of fake heritage hotels hoping to capture the market's appetite for this type of accommodation. In Morocco too an increasing flow of foreign capital attracted to cultural tourism returns is driving a boom in the construction of new *riads* alongside conservation projects (Lee 2008).

Some visitors, finding that staying in a historic *riad* was not enough, started to restore historic houses in the old medinas as second homes and holiday accommodation. The growing trend of foreign home ownership initially popularised in Marakesh, has spread to places like Fes and in the early years of the millennium also extended to cities like Aleppo and Damascus, often depicted in lavishly illustrated articles in magazines such as *Interiors Today*. While foreigners arrive with ready capital to restore the old houses, local and incomer perceptions and expectations of the historic quarters have to be carefully balanced for these neighbourhoods to maintain their urban dynamic (McGuinness & Mouhli 2012). The common morphological character of the Islamic city regularly sets apart market places and commercial town centres from residential neighbourhoods, which are seen as places of privacy for their tight-knit communities. The presence of foreigners amongst their midst, or even tourists milling around has further diminished the appeal of older quarters as living environments for locals (Orbaşlı 2007).

The declining and reinvented urban quarter

The *medina*s of Fez and Tunis still remain exceptions compared to the dilapidation and development pressures many other historic towns in the region have suffered over the past 40 years. For many it has been a case of gradual decline. As middle class inhabitants frequently moved out to better housing in newly developing city and suburban areas, the older neighbourhoods became home to immigrants, many of them attracted from rural areas to seek better work opportunities in the burgeoning cities. This often led to multiple occupancies and sublets with very little incentive to maintain the buildings that were being considered out of fashion (Lewcock 1978).

Warren and Fethi (1984) succinctly explain the predicament of the old quarters of Baghdad, Iraq, where the old houses and quarters neither served the purposes of the smaller modern family nor did they fit the image of modern and contemporary lifetyles. In their dilapidated condition and often inherited by numerous of siblings and cousins, they had become more burden than asset. Inheritance plays an important role, as in the Islamic system, all property is divided amongst offspring, resulting in joint ownerships that within two generations can escalate to a substantial number of shareholders. This fuels a loss of interest and abandonment and makes redevelopment into modern and higher apartments that afford each stakeholder an independent unit an attractive proposition.

Across the region as the old urban quarters became redundant, pressures to demolish and rebuild also prevailed and continues to do so in many instances. Where heated campaigns - often spearheaded by academics - have been successful area-based conservation legislation has been introduced and attitudes towards the protection and conservation of historic urban areas has started to change. The added benefits of tourism though have certainly played a role in accelerating conservation efforts (Khirfan 2014; Rhei & Nelson 1994). From the 1990s onwards a growing focus on urban heritage as a tourism product alongside ancient sites in countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey often started with a small number of prominent houses being conserved to function as museums as was the case in Salt, Jordan (Khirfan 2014) and Saida, Lebanon, for example (Daher 2007). Consequently, cities across the region are also competing to obtain the coveted designation of UNESCO World Heritage Site.

However, where tourism development has been the primary driver, the emphasis has been on streetscape beautification rather than a holistic approach to the urban fabric, thus jeopardising environmental and social values of places. Growing commercial interest generated by tourism also impacts on surrounding land value and loss of traditionally residential uses to the expansion of often unregulated commercial activity that can negatively impact the heritage value. Located at the heart of a thriving coastal tourism destination on Turkey’s south coast, Antalya is just one example of a historic quarter that

has become fully transformed into a tourism playground. Even conservation area status and well-meant urban planning efforts to protect the historic walled town could not stop residential areas becoming taken over by commercial activity as private money and developers flooded into the area and rapidly displaced the locals (Orbaşli 2000).

A similar trend is recorded in Egypt, where 'many state-led schemes focus on superficial conservation, of a kind concerned mainly with sanitizing the old fabric. In pursuit of tourist dollars, such schemes appropriate the urban fabric and permit heavy traffic through it, overlooking some important subjective qualities, such as community well-being' (Sedky 2009: xix). This is also the experience of Eskişehir's Odunpazari district in Turkey where a street sanitisation project instigated by the local municipality has created a remodelled destination filled with souvenir shops, though in this example largely serving the domestic tourism market. Interestingly with a new generation now attaching nostalgia value to these quarters, their growth as tourism destinations is also being supported by growing domestic markets of day and weekend visitors. In pre-conflict Damascus, the conversion of old courtyard houses into restaurants also had an appeal to the local Damascene audience, as many were local and family run and closely linked to the area (Daher 2007).

A more organised tourism-led urban conservation approach was that taken for Old Acre in Israel, where a master plan deliberately aimed at turning the World Heritage City with its Crusader heritage into a managed tourism attraction (Khirfan 2015). The development process that followed focused very specifically on the physical infrastructure of the city and visitor management measures and facilities, whilst little attention was placed on social services or the economic development needs of its local, predominantly Arab population (Shoval 2013). Khirfan (2015) notes that although the initial plans took little notice of the predominantly Arab inhabitants of the old quarter, it is the Arab markets that are amongst the most popular attraction for many visitors because it is a means of engaging with the real life of the place which for most visitors is actually what makes these places interesting.

In Cairo, it is the government authorities who are pushing through major projects to restore historic buildings in the old quarter and sanitise their environment. This is also seen by some commentators as a deliberate intent to 'refashion the historic centre', clearing it of the 'merchants, artisans, and residents who live in – and give life to – this nucleus of Cairo so that large groups of tourists […] will be able to traverse it along designated paths as quickly and summarily as possible' (Williams 2006: 270). To this end, businesses have been moved and livelihoods and social networks lost. Ironically of course, just as in Fez, Tunis and Acre, it is this 'life' and activity, which the visitors are really interested in seeing, that is being obliterated.

As these historic quarters transform into tourism destinations they also go against the inherent character of the Islamic city with its distinct separation of public and private spaces. As the social meaning and value attached to privacy is eroded, the spatial organisation that is presented to visitors takes on new characteristics. 'Where residential gives way to commercial then the social balance, the spatial characteristics and most importantly the sought after character will be lost' (Orbaşli 2007: 174). And once commercial and entertainment venues are introduced into a neighbourhood, then locals living nearby leave as it becomes culturally problematic to share residential life with such functions and the influx of outsiders they attract. In Najaf, Iraq, hotels being built to house pilgrims have become a deterrent to locals who feel that the privacy afforded by the traditional neighbourhood structure is compromised (Abid 2016). Williams (2006) also points out that the creation of open spaces within the tightly-knit medieval heart of Cairo overlooks the fact that traditionally open spaces were provided in the inner courtyards and were private family spaces.

As cultural tourism becomes a bigger economic sector, the beneficiaries of this economic growth in historic towns often end up being a small select number of players with access to capital and political backing, and it empowers only some interests (Daher 2007); for a majority of local inhabitants the growth of tourism has resulted in displacement or further marginalisation. The promised socio-economic development at times highlighted in regeneration schemes is barely realised, whilst at the same time the much sought after living city aspects are also irreversibly lost.

Hip and trendy urban quarters

A comparison is often made that in Western societies a longer period of industrialisation has resulted in a nostalgia for the past, which in turn has led not only to the protection of historic buildings but an active desire to live in them. The argument is that with time a sense of nostalgia and a sufficient distancing from the past and any associations of 'backwardness' will see them being revived. This has indeed been the case in several metropolitan areas in MENA as art quarters are shaped and popularised by a middle class intellectual elite. What often starts as an alternative to commercialised mainstream living and the coming together of like-minded 'creatives' quite soon develops into areas with natural appeal to the tourism market.

The Ortaköy neighbourhood in Istanbul, Turkey, first attracted the attention of a small group of writers and architects who could see the potential of the run-down buildings which they started to renovate. With its attractive location on the shores of the Bosphorous, before long the area became a popular destination with its waterfront cafes and arty vibe. In an era where places also become rapidly popularised via social media, these types of areas became attractive to tourists seeking supposedly 'alternative' experiences beyond the more monumental heritage attractions.

A similar pattern is observed in Amman, Jordan, where one of the older neighbourhoods linked to its historic downtown has started to become popular with affluent residents from West Amman. Amman, by comparison a city lacking the elevated historic past of places such as Damascus or Aleppo, has turned to a more recent colonial heritage for both identity and tourism attraction, making the architectural heritage of the 1930s to 1950s the focus of conservation and reuse (Jacobs 2010). Starting around Rainbow Street and the conservation of the modernist Rainbow Cinema, old houses have been converted to restaurants or other cultural and linked retail uses. The once middle class area is in part being re-discovered and in part romanticised. While the initial attraction was a mingling with residents of the area, gentrification is gradually turning the area into an entertainment district with a 'a new social identity for the upper middle class' (Daher 2007: 39). In contrast to the car-dominated city, it notably creates a rare public walkable environment.

Meanwhile in Ortaköy, demand has outstripped supply, and the area has become overcrowded and the art/souvenir products mass produced with reviews that now refer to the area as a 'tourist trap' –crowded, noisy and overpriced—especially by those who remember its earlier appeal. Meanwhile, long-forgotten areas such as the historic Fener neighbourhood are rapidly transforming with cafes, restaurants and antique shops into new destinations. This is not only a story of growing tourism interest in historic neighbourhoods, but one of gentrification and the displacement of local residents.

For many of these cities, the gentrification of older districts into hip urban destinations, initially for local consumption but with growing tourism appeal, is also a notable shift in the tourism narrative from major monuments of antiquity and the Islamic period, to a much more recent social history and a domestic scale of architecture.

The repackaged heritage quarters of the Arabian Gulf

The countries of the Arabian Gulf region (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen and Oman) have been relative latecomers to the recognition of the heritage value of historic urban quarters and their tourism potential. This growing interest in urban heritage conservation often combines tourism interests with a means for defining and celebrating local 'identity'. For a culture where 'cultural heritage' is more likely to be transmitted between generations through intangible heritage in the form of beliefs, traditions and pastimes, there is an emerging recognition that culture and identity may also be embedded in historic fabric, including that of the urban vernacular heritage.

The rapid urbanisation and modernism that followed the oil boom that enriched the region often resulted in a swift shift from traditional neighbourhood to modern villa and high-rise living. The character of the old towns was quickly eroded as they were surrounded by new high-rise buildings that sharply contrasted with the horizontal layout of the historic buildings to an extent that they engulf them. The reclamation of the shoreline, as seen in Manama, Bahrain, has also deprived many historic areas of their connection to the sea and essential character (Ben Hamouche 2008). Like Sharjah, UAE, or even Jeddah's Al Balad district in Saudi Arabia, they have become isolated islands within the modern cityscape surrounded by heavy traffic arteries.

The conservation of Dubai's Bastakiya quarter set an example for a number of conservation and development projects that would have a defined agenda of appealing to cultural tourism. A largely abandoned residential quarter, Bastakiya houses were renovated and adapted to new cultural uses ranging from institutional headquarters to art galleries and cafes (Coles & Jackson 2007). Basktakiya today exemplifies many of the problems faced by tourism in the private-public urban form traditionally favored in Islamic cultures. Each of the buildings as originally serving residential purposes clearly face inwards to open courtyards with deliberately blank external walls. The streets, once the domain of playing youngsters, are eerily quiet with only small openings through which the new functions have a means of engaging with a passing public. This not only makes it difficult for tourists to navigate, but is equally frustrating to traders in attracting business. Yet to open up the facades would run contrary to the traditional character of the area.

Perhaps for this reason, many other initiatives in the region have started off by focusing on their traditional *souq* and commercial areas. In Doha, Qatar, the Souq Waqif has been sanitized, largely rebuilt and transformed as a 'showcase for Doha's past'. The project went beyond the removal of modern additions and through renovations created 'an original that never existed' in which the past is idealized so as to appeal to tourists (Adham 2008: 240). The conservation of Manama Souk in Bahrain has been similarly criticized as being a 'simplistic' project, which has ignored the socio-economic fabric in favor of 'the visual effects of design' that 'recalls some symbols of the oriental city' (Ben Hamouche 2008).

These two projects highlight a growing ease in the region for carefully managed heritage tourism projects that are more concerned with a singular narrative than authenticity (Orbaşli 2015). Heritage is thus readjusted to conform to a specific narrative or destination ideal. Sharjah's old quarter, for example, is largely rebuilt with altered plot boundaries to serve the purpose of a tourism district used for festivals with the additional advantage of adequate space for car access and parking.

Unlike historic urban districts noted elsewhere, displacement of local populations has rarely been the case in the Gulf region, as many of these districts already lay abandoned. Though far from an advantage, this abandonment has also meant that these places are devoid of the social structures and networks that have made many other historic settlements in the wider region attractive to tourism. Thus, what is presented to visitors becomes a carefully selected

and curated narrative in a somewhat sterile and artificial environment, though one that is innately safe.

Constructing the new heritage

These re-formulated historic quarters of the Gulf region are not the only narratives that are changing or being deliberately re-worked. In both Istanbul and Cairo, predominantly Western style and colonial neighbourhoods from the early twentieth century are now the focus of conservation efforts and are seen to be adding value to real estate developments. However, preservation efforts often compete with real estate developments that randomly replicate historic styles to serve a growing tourism-linked commercial demand. Consequently, in these more complex cities, reconstruction and imagined or replicated heritage is not just a case of seeking simpler past roots and vernacular style, but a replication and reconfiguring of more sophisticated semi-colonial styles that are just as much about generating and portraying new identities as they are about celebrating the past.

Most profound, in this respect, is the redevelopment of central Beirut following 15 years of civil war. A multi-million-dollar reconstruction project spearheaded by a development company vehicle known as Solidere drew on public and private investment to reshape the city centre. Both the intensions and the outcomes of the project are seen from different perspectives as sound financial investments, identity building and creating a tourism destination. Nagel (2002) considers part of the aim to generate a new collective memory of the once cosmopolitan Beirut following a bloody civil war, although this act of nation-building was simultaneously delivering financial benefits to the city's elite. Ultimately the rubble of the conflict was replaced with a carefully planned new quarter, of open public spaces, some of them incorporating archaeological sites as part of the tourist attractiveness. However, what remained of the old *souqs* was demolished to make way for a car park, with a new reimagined *souq* on top of it, which is in effect a modern shopping mall (Makdisi 1997). Whilst many of the new landmark buildings were high-rise towers, old *khans* were reconstructed and a select number of buildings restored, many of them only following a public outcry (Sawalha 2011). The work of Solidere in Beirut is derided by its critics as a vulgar neo-liberal restructuring (Daher 2007), the re-writing of history (Nagel 2002), and creating a new type of space that lacks any form of historical depth or meaning (Makdisi 1997), erasing memories in doing so.

The Solidere approach notably provides a solution for overcoming the complicated web of ownership and fragmented property rights in Islamic inheritance (Gavin & Maluf 1996). An approach that is gaining ground in other large cities and already evident in several of Istanbul's historic districts where redevelopment through land amalgamation under the name of urban regeneration is proving lucrative to developers. At the time of writing there are already unconfirmed rumours that similar 'grand development' plans may already be on the table for cities like Aleppo, Syria, where hundreds of years and layers of history have been badly damaged in recent atrocities.

Prior to the conflicts, Aleppo had become a popular tourism destination, and growing tourism provision in the world-famous *souqs* in the commercial heart of the city with the favouring or prioritisation of conservation projects with tourism-related outcomes (Khirfan 2015). How the reconstruction of Aleppo will play out will also have wider implications for the reconstruction and re-interpretation of urban heritage in a much wider region. Whether driven by investment value or the need to re-establish an urban identity, tourism as a lucrative beneficiary will undoubtedly play a role in shaping the outcome. Reconstruction, whether for an urban or for a monument/archaeological site, creates a singular narrative; and it will be this singular narrative that tourists will experience, as they do in Beirut or in Dubai's Bastakiya.

Conclusion

Today tourism in the region is also marked by regular volatility caused by economic cycles and political unrest and uncertainty, a shift in visitor profile from European and Western to Gulf State and Asian markets and finally direct mandates for heritage to deliver a profit as a driver of development. Some of these are a reflection of international trends, others markedly specific to the region.

This chapter has illustrated how tourism to the cities of MENA has changed significantly over the course of the last century. While an element of the 'exotic' and the flavour of the Orient is still upheld, this is now largely in the imagination of the travellers and the deliberate packaging and representation of the destination by the locals. Even in the vast expanse of Istanbul's Grand Bazaar or the Walled City of Jerusalem, the everyday hustle and bustle is being replaced by souvenir businesses exclusively intended for the tourism market.

For the rich urban heritage of the region, war is not the only threat; the genuine article is rapidly disappearing and under threat like never before. Although the urban heritage is now more widely being acknowledged, not least due to tourism, the levels of abandonment seen in the Gulf region are also widely spreading. This may partly be due to the fact that the older buildings and quarters are seen to be too far removed from modern-day amenities and living standards. However, gentrification and a notable shift from residential to commercial uses spearheaded by tourism development is also playing a significant influence in depopulation. Historic neighbourhoods are thus evolving from once lived in places to re-imagined and increasingly re-produced environments being served up for tourism consumption. While selected methods of preservation and presentation are said to blur the distinction between what is genuine and what is fake (Orbaşli 2015), further consideration is needed as to how 'genuine' an urban place can be without its social infrastructure and ultimately what this signifies in terms of the visitor experience.

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