

Museology Education In The GCC States: Emerging Directions And Missed Opportunities

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Abstract

This study aims to illuminate the landscape of museology education in higher institutions across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, while also uncovering the challenges these institutions face in offering specialized programs and courses for aspiring museum professionals.

Carried out as a descriptive and analytical inquiry, this study entailed a thorough examination of the academic provisions within the field of museology across both governmental and non-governmental universities within the GCC states. Moreover, it involved an evaluation of GCC museums, considering factors such as their geographical distribution, thematic coverage, and how these aspects shaped the educational direction of GCC universities concerning museology.

Key findings of the study highlighted that currently, there is only one dedicated academic program for museology across all universities in the GCC states. Other than this, only a limited number of courses are available, typically nested within broader archaeology or history programs, rather than comprehensive museum studies courses. These offerings often fall short of providing more than rudimentary introductions to museology. Furthermore, the study exposed the absence of museology curricula in some history and

archaeology departments within public universities. A significant factor influencing this landscape is the scarcity of employment opportunities, leading universities to hesitate in establishing dedicated departments or programs in museology.

The study also presented forward-looking recommendations to strengthen museology education in the region. These suggestions are aligned with the evolving political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics within the GCC states, aiming to foster cultural sustainability and enrich heritage management curricula.

Keywords: Museology, GCC states, Education, Archaeology, Museum studies.

Introduction

Museology exerts a profound influence on how societies grasp their cultural legacy, actively participating in upholding the principles that underpin societies' pathways towards sustainable development. This dynamic field stands as a pivotal catalyst, aiding societies in constructing and solidifying their individual identities (Falk, 2016; Newman & McLean, 2006; McLean, 2005). In contemporary times, museums, housing collections that seamlessly blend natural and cultural, material and immaterial, collective and personal dimensions, emerge as pivotal institutions on society's frontlines, entrusted with safeguarding heritage against the erosive forces of time, as well as environmental and cultural challenges.

Museums share an intrinsic link with heritage management (Carman, 2015). Within this domain, they preserve, explore, restore, interpret, and accentuate an array of holdings that mirror heritage's diverse forms of expression. Simultaneously, they offer present generations a means of connecting with their roots (Golding, 2016), unraveling the circumstances, contexts, and data that have shaped their present. Moreover, these institutions shoulder the weighty responsibility of transmitting heritage to forthcoming generations.

In the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), museums have now assumed a paramount role in safeguarding both natural and cultural heritage, emerging as pivotal instruments for influencing the identity-molding processes of these

societies (Al-Hammadi, 2020; Wakefield, 2020a; Prager, 2015). Given the swift transformation resulting from their significant development since their oil-exporting inception, each nation within the GCC endeavors to carve out a unique identity distinct from neighboring entities (Al-Belushi, 2015). Concurrently, these nations grapple with the challenge of maintaining a balance between conserving their cultural heritage and meeting the demands of progress and advancement (Al-Zo'by, 2019; Erskine-Loftus et al., 2016; Al-Belushi, 2015; McClellan, 2012). To address these complexities, museums stand as crucial tools, harnessed to this end.

The genesis of the initial museums in the region can be traced back to archaeological endeavors conducted by foreign missions, resulting in the accumulation of collections encompassing artifacts, ethnographic artifacts, and ecological samples. These early acquisitions later formed the foundation of the first museums in the GCC states (Al-Belushi, 2014; Rice, 1994). In subsequent years, the burgeoning of infrastructure, a surge in developmental initiatives, and escalating threats to natural and cultural heritage heightened the emphasis on museums. They became principal bastions for heritage preservation and the reinforcement of identity values among the populace. As a consequence, museums experienced growth both in terms of numbers and thematic diversity.

Nonetheless, despite this trend, the focus on educating about museums has not matched the fervor for establishing new institutions. This is evident in the notably limited availability of museology programs and courses offered by higher education institutions, particularly universities, across the entire region.

Al-Belushi (2014) highlights the striking resemblance between universities and museums in the GCC states, as they emerged in tandem following the era of oil exploration and export. Both institutions share fundamental orientations and educational goals; however, they have functioned independently since their inception. Remarkably, there have been few concerted efforts from either side to foster genuine collaboration. Notably, museums lack the workforce necessary for their systematic operation and management, a resource that universities could potentially provide. Conversely, the potential educational and research opportunities that museums could extend to university students and researchers have largely been underutilized.

Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to illuminate the current state of museology education within higher education establishments across the GCC states. The paper seeks to pinpoint the challenges these institutions encounter while attempting to establish programs and courses dedicated to training specialists in the field of museums. Furthermore, the paper endeavors to propose strategies to enhance museology education in the region, aligned with ongoing political, social, economic, and cultural developments. This alignment aims to ensure cultural sustainability and fortify heritage management curricula.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive analytical approach, encompassing a comprehensive examination of governmental and non-governmental universities' websites across the GCC states. The primary objective was to discern the scope of academic programs and courses related to museology offered by these institutions. Additionally, an analysis of GCC museums was undertaken, encompassing an evaluation of their geographical distribution, thematic coverage, and the resulting influence on the directions taken by GCC universities with regard to dedicated academic programs in museology. The data collection for both surveys was carried out from June 1st to June 15th, 2023. It is important to note that the study encountered challenges attributed to some university websites lacking comprehensive information, including course descriptions and study plans.

Literature Review

The global literature addressing teaching of museology demonstrates an expanding interest in this interdisciplinary realm (Thomas et al., 2018; Latham, 2017; Tišliar, 2017; Charman, 2013; Lorente, 2012; Seth, 2011). This body of work underscores the significance of teaching museology, as it equips professionals with the requisite skills and expertise to engage effectively in the museum sector (Lorente, 2012). The teaching of museology has evolved over time, adapting to the methodologies employed in preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting natural and cultural heritage. These methodologies are in a constant state of flux, driven mainly by shifts in society and advancements in technology. Societal changes wield influence over museums' missions, visions, and objectives, aligning them with the evolving demands, aspirations, and

foresight of society for both its present and future (Chynoweth et al., 2020). This transformation often finds its reflection in the subjects integrated into museology academic curricula. Concurrently, ongoing technological advancements, including the utilization of digital tools and virtual reality, are shaping fresh avenues for museum presentations (Cassidy et al., 2018), compelling educational institutions offering museology programs to reassess their curricula and syllabi.

Research underscores the importance of cultivating balanced museology curricula that seamlessly blend theoretical grounding with practical application (Lorente, 2012). This harmony is pivotal in nurturing a workforce capable of realizing museums' objectives and adeptly addressing the persistent challenges stemming from societal shifts and technological progress.

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the integration of cultural sensitivity within museology curricula (Kreps, 2015), recognizing that museums mirror society's cultural diversity. Equipping students with tools that foster an understanding of societal cultural nuances, and encouraging equitable engagement with museum objects and exhibits, substantially aids museums in interacting respectfully with various cultural contexts. This approach ensures a level of cultural representation that is respectful and equitable.

Several studies have delved into museums within the GCC states as a whole (e.g. Al-Hammadi, 2020; Wakefield, 2020b; Sachedina, 2020; Exell, 2019; Prager, 2015; McClellan, 2012). However, a scarcity of research exists when it comes to exploring the teaching of museology in these states.

Al-Belushi's study (2014) is one of the few rare examinations that have addressed museology education in the GCC states. Her study centered on the relationship between museums and universities within the region. Notably, both these institutions emerged in the region after the commencement of oil exploration and export. While they play pivotal roles in heightening awareness about heritage, encompassing both natural and cultural aspects, the linkage between these entities remained obscure, lacking clear strategies for collaboration and coordination. The study revealed a distinct separation between museums and universities, with minimal efforts to establish academic programs that could equip

museums with proficient staff for their management. Similarly, museums often did not fully realize their potential as educational, academic, and research entities, largely focusing on educational aspects.

Regarding the teaching of museology in the GCC states, notable research gaps are apparent. It is imperative to investigate the factors contributing to the separation between museums and universities, especially the constraints surrounding the availability of academic programs and courses specifically dedicated to museology. Additionally, there is an essential need to delve into pedagogical strategies customized to the varied heritage of the region, examine how museums are adapting within the dynamic transformations of GCC societies, and understand their influence on museology education. Consequently, this study endeavors to bridge some of these research gaps, with a particular emphasis on scrutinizing the academic programs offered by universities in the field of museology.

Museums in the GCC States

Origins

The inception of museums within the GCC states marks a relatively contemporary development, born from the region's profound transformations following the discovery and exploitation of oil resources. The establishment of museums in this area is intimately tied to the systematic archaeological endeavors that commenced in the mid-20th century.

These archaeological ventures yielded vast collections of unearthed objects, some of which sustained damage, while others found their way to Western museums, where they remain exhibited to this day (Al-Belushi, 2014). As the region stabilized and its global engagement burgeoned from the latter half of the 1960s, a heightened appreciation for cultural heritage emerged, accompanied by a growing realization of the necessity to safeguard it. In response, these nations initiated endeavors to conserve their cultural legacy, particularly those artifacts that had been transferred abroad. This initiative led to the establishment of cultural institutions, including museums, entrusted with the pivotal role of preserving and managing heritage. Notably, the earliest of these museums were conceived by non-specialist European enthusiasts (Rice, 2002).

The inception of the first museum in Saudi Arabia occurred in 1966 (Department of Antiquities and Museums, 1975). This museum encompasses archaeological and ethnographic collections that depict the historical trajectory of the Arabian Peninsula. Starting from ancient stone ages and traversing through early Islamic periods, it culminates with the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, the Kingdom developed a network of regional museums, including notable ones in Jizan, Najran, Al-Ula, Taima, Al-Jawf, and other cities (Rice, 2002). Subsequently, a network of regional museums was established, including notable ones in Jizan, Najran, Al-Ula, Taima, Al-Jawf, and other cities (Rice, 2002). The Saudi National Museum, based in Riyadh, was inaugurated in 1999. Notably, as early as 1902, a private museum was initiated within a Jeddah citizen's home, showcasing an array of local, Arab, and Asian artifacts alongside ethnographic pieces (Al-Ansari, 1971).

In Bahrain, archaeological expeditions conducted by Danish missions in the mid-fifties across sites like Qalat Al-Bahrain and the Barbar site yielded an extensive trove of archaeological discoveries. These findings formed the core of the first temporary antiquities exhibition slated for construction in 1967. Subsequently, this exhibition was transformed into the "Bahrain National Museum," officially inaugurated in Manama in 1970. Notably, in 1988, the National Museum underwent a transformation with the construction of a new building overseen by Danish architects (Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, 2023). Additionally, the very first public exhibition of artifacts, which lasted only a few days, took place in 1957 at Al-Hidaya School in Muharraq, a collaborative effort between the Bahraini government and the Danish Archaeological Mission (Bahrain National Museum, 2004; Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, 2023).

In the United Arab Emirates, the first museum, named the "Al Ain Museum," was established in 1969, formally commencing operations in 1971 (Abu Dhabi Culture, 2023). Towards the close of the 1960s, a folklore museum found its roots in Dubai within the historic Al Fahidi Fort. Additionally, museums surfaced in Ras Al Khaimah in 1987 and Ajman in 1991, both situated in restored historical castles (Musameh, 1999).

In the Sultanate of Oman, the pioneering "Omani Museum" emerged in 1974 as a repository for artifacts amassed by

members of the Omani Historical Association during their field explorations (Al-Belushi, 2008). Subsequent to this, a series of museums came into existence, including the National Museum, which was officially opened in 1978 (Ministry of Information, 2023). Further, some of these museums found residence within restored historic homes in old Muscat, harkening back to the nineteenth century. Notably, the new National Museum opened in 2015, finding its place in the historic Muscat region (Ministry of Information, 2023).

In Qatar, the first museum emerged in 1975 as the "National Museum of Qatar," situated on a restored historical site in Doha that originally served as the ruler's residence in 1901 (National Museum of Qatar, 2023). This museum housed an array of artifacts, ethnographic materials, and dedicated sections illustrating the narrative of the region's interaction between land, sea, and mankind over time. In 1984, the Museum of Popular Traditions was unveiled in Doha, adding to Qatar's cultural landscape (Al-Khulaifi, 2000).

As for Kuwait, the earliest museum made its debut in 1957, located within the Prince's Palace in the Eastern Region. This institution showcased ethnographic tools that illustrated the evolving human-environment relationship in Kuwait through history. Notably, some of the discoveries unearthed by the Danish mission on Failaka Island were later incorporated into the museum's collection. In 1983, the museum transitioned to its current location (Kuwait Government Online, 2023).

The Current Museum Landscape

Across the GCC states, a considerable number of museums exist. However, it's apparent that these museums are primarily centralized in capitals and major cities (Al-Belushi, 2014). Many cities and residential areas in the Arab Gulf nations still lack museums today. Additionally, most of the museums in these countries are government-run, except for a few established through initiatives, private resources, and individual efforts of heritage enthusiasts. Furthermore, not all government museums were established by institutions dedicated to heritage and culture; some were founded by other government entities like municipalities and military agencies.

The majority of museums in these nations share a similar trait—they are comprehensive museums. Only a small fraction focuses on a single specialized theme. This tendency can

perhaps be attributed to the museums' founding purpose, which revolves around shaping and reinforcing national identity. As a result, museum designers aim to encompass various facets of the country's natural and cultural heritage, spanning both historical and contemporary perspectives. Consequently, these multi-faceted museums house exhibition halls showcasing topics like geology, minerals, plants, animals, and the region's evolutionary journey through civilization over time (Al-Belushi, 2014).

Recently, there has been a notable inclination within the GCC states to establish branches of internationally renowned museums. This initiative seeks to broaden the prospects of cultural tourism and transform the region into a global cultural hub. Particularly noteworthy are the instances of the Louvre and Guggenheim museum branches located on Saadiyat Island in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

The inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi took place in 2017. This expansive museum showcases a diverse array of artifacts, artworks, and thematic displays encompassing social, cultural, and historical dimensions from various global cultures throughout history. It emphasizes themes that resonate universally across humanity, highlighting both commonalities and differences in human experiences (Louvre Abu Dhabi, 2023).

The Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art, slated to open in 2025, is set to exhibit a collection of modern and contemporary artworks. The museum's mission is to contribute to the shaping and reinforcement of a comprehensive narrative of art history on a global scale. This museum intends to transcend conventional definitions of global art based on geographical distribution. Instead, it aims to emphasize the connections between local, regional, and international art hubs. The museum's governing body intends to celebrate not only the cultural identity of Abu Dhabi but also artworks from other countries in the Middle East, West and South Asia, and North Africa (Abu Dhabi Media Office, 2021).

While the establishment of Western museums in the GCC states has sparked debates concerning cultural, social, and economic consequences, as well as issues regarding cultural identity and authenticity, it signifies the region's aspiration to foster global engagement, cultural interchange, forge

international partnerships, and enrich the local cultural landscape. These museums offer both residents and visitors the chance to engage with a diverse array of global art, history, and culture.

In a broader context, the museum sector is experiencing substantial growth in the region today (Al-Belushi, 2014). Numerous specialized museums have emerged, including the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, inaugurated in 2008 (Museum of Islamic Art 2023), and the Sharjah Archaeology Museum, serving as a permanent repository of artifacts discovered in the Emirate of Sharjah. Furthermore, the Calligraphy Museum in Sharjah, the sole museum dedicated to Arabic calligraphy worldwide, underscores the continuous progress in the GCC states' museum landscape (Sharjah Museums Authority, 2023). This ongoing development underscores these nations' commitment to heritage preservation, cultural nurturing, educational platforms, and fostering intercultural dialogue.

Museology Education Landscape in the Arabian Gulf

Prior to delving into the discourse on museology education, it is imperative to furnish an overview of the establishment of universities in the region. The inception of universities in the area traces back to the early half of the 20th century, with King Saud University in Saudi Arabia taking precedence as the region's first university, inaugurated in 1957 (King Saud University, 2023a). Soon thereafter, Kuwait University was established in 1966 (Kuwait University, 2023), succeeded by Qatar University in 1973 (Qatar University, 2023), and the United Arab Emirates University in 1976. Sultan Qaboos University of Oman was inaugurated in 1986 (Sultan Qaboos University, 2023a), while the University of Bahrain emerged, initially comprising multiple colleges with its oldest component commencing operations in the late 1960s (University of Bahrain, 2023).

Subsequently, a significant multitude of universities, both public and private, came into existence within these countries. Moreover, international university branches were established as partnerships, including Sorbonne University and New York University in Abu Dhabi, and institutions like Georgetown University and Texas A&M University in Qatar. These institutions predominantly prioritized technical disciplines such as engineering, medicine, science, and technology, aiming to produce skilled professionals equipped to meet the region's

rapid development needs (Al-Belushi, 2014). Furthermore, these universities incorporated some humanities disciplines pertaining to the region's history and culture. Generally, public universities offered most humanities programs, while private universities primarily focused on science-related fields, given the heightened employment opportunities they offered compared to humanities programs.

The interconnection of education and employment prospects caused both public and private universities to be hesitant in offering certain majors, such as archeology and museology. Nonetheless, the extensive and diverse archaeological wealth of the region, coupled with the nations' aspiration to nurture their national identities, prompted the establishment of history and archaeology departments in certain public universities. Initially, these departments emphasized theoretical facets and explored the impacts of neighboring civilizations. This approach was partly due to the fact that the instructors, hailing from Arab countries like Iraq, Sudan, Egypt, and Jordan, lacked familiarity with the ancient regional history, which was predominantly documented through Western perspectives at that time, thus influencing their cognitive foundation (Potts, 1998). Regrettably, some of these departments were eventually shuttered or experienced enrollment freezes after brief durations. This was attributed to a dearth of job prospects for graduates, coupled with students' reluctance to pursue these programs. Instead, they preferred disciplines aligned with the prevailing economic landscape in the region (Potts, 1998; Al-Belushi, 2008).

In contrast, private universities generally did not prioritize offerings related to archaeology and museums. Instead, their focus remained directed at technical domains such as engineering and computer science (Al-Belushi, 2014). Nevertheless, these areas played a pivotal role in matters concerning heritage preservation and the reinforcement of national identity values for successive generations.

The survey conducted within this study has unveiled that only a single academic program dedicated to museology currently exists among all universities within the GCC states. This program is the Bachelor of Arts in Museum Studies and Art History, exclusively provided by the University of Sharjah. Situated within the Department of History and Islamic Civilization at the College of Arts, Humanities and Social

Sciences, this program spans four academic years and is delivered in Arabic.

The requisites for this program comprise a total of 7 courses, with "Introduction to Museum and Heritage Studies" being the sole course specifically related to the field. The remaining courses encompass various subjects, including art history, Islamic history, and social anthropology. The mandatory courses specified by the department encompass a range of topics, including Research Methods for Museum Studies, Museum Management and Marketing, Museums and the Tourism Industry, Museums and Their Users, Collection of Museum Collections, Museum and Education, Collection Management and Maintenance, Training, Student Exhibition Project, and Special Graduation Project.

Complementing these core requirements, the department's elective courses offer six options, selected from a catalog that notably encompasses museum-related subjects such as digital museums, tangible heritage preservation and management in the GCC region, art galleries in the GCC region, museum collection presentation, cultural resource interpretation, heritage management and preservation, digital and virtual museums, museum and cultural heritage tours, and museums and society.

Observing the distribution of the study plan, it is evident that students do not engage with museum-related content during their first year. In the second year, they encounter only two courses: "Introduction to Museum Studies and Heritage" and "Research Methods for Museum Studies." Progressing to the third year, courses encompass museum management and marketing, museums and the tourism industry, museums and their users, and museum exhibits. Concluding the program in the fourth year, students delve into courses concerning museums and the educational process, collection management and maintenance, training, the student exhibition project, and the special graduation project.

Furthermore, the list of courses highlights a practical facet facilitated through three courses, each worth 3 credit hours: the training course, student exhibition project course, and special graduation project course.

Apart from this program, the offerings predominantly consist of a limited selection of courses integrated within programs primarily focusing on archaeology or history rather than museum studies. These courses essentially provide basic introductory insights into museology. Among such departments, for instance, are the Department of Tourism and Heritage at the United Arab Emirates University, the Department of Archaeology at Sultan Qaboos University in the Sultanate of Oman, and the Department of Archaeology at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia.

Within the curriculum of the Department of Tourism and Heritage at the United Arab Emirates University, two courses stand out: "Introduction to Museology" and "Introduction to Archaeology and Museums." The "Introduction to Museology" course aims to familiarize students with both the theoretical and practical facets involved in museum operations. It encompasses a broad overview of the history and evolution of various museum types, delves into the cultural, legal, and ethical challenges confronting modern museums, and explores practical aspects related to fundamental museum functions such as acquisition, preservation, display, and education (UAEU, 2023a). On the other hand, the "Introduction to Archaeology & Museum Studies" course covers aspects like archaeological surveys and excavations, techniques for handling archaeological cultural artifacts encompassing methods of documentation, preservation, classification, and chronological arrangement. Additionally, this course emphasizes the basics of museum preservation and the management of archaeological collections, compares different museum typologies, elucidates museum display methods and strategies, scrutinizes the socio-cultural and economic significance of archaeology and museums, and imparts techniques for illustrating archaeological sites and findings for scientific reporting and museum exhibition purposes (UAEU, 2023b).

In the Department of Archaeology at Sultan Qaboos University, a lone course titled "Museums" is offered as part of the Master of Arts in Archaeology program. This course acquaints students with the fundamental aspects of museums encompassing their diverse types and objectives. It delves into various collections and exhibits within museums, the intricacies of managing, arranging, and presenting them, as well as the requisite personnel essential for museum operation. The curriculum also

delves into museological theories, providing students with practical exposure to museum dynamics (Sultan Qaboos University, 2023b). Similarly, the curriculum for the undergraduate program, which is currently inactive, also incorporates a single course named "Museology." The course outlines the theoretical and practical fundamentals of museology, exploring museum types, their roles and missions, museum management, specialized fields within museums, collection development and preservation, documentation and registration procedures, museum architecture and facilities, as well as the intricacies of curating exhibitions. The practical facet of this course transpires within the Sultanate's museums. Beyond this, the department also offers two other courses intersecting with museology: "Management of Antiquities and Heritage" and "Management of Archaeological Heritage in Oman" (Sultan Qaboos University, 2023b).

Additionally, the Department of Archaeology within the College of Tourism and Antiquities at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia offers a single course named "Introduction to Museology" (King Saud University, 2023b).

The survey further uncovered that several history and archaeology departments in public universities lack any curriculum on museums. Notable instances include the "Bachelor of History" program at the College of Arts in the University of Bahrain, the "Bachelor of History" program within the Department of Humanities at Qatar University, and the program within the Department of History and Islamic Civilization at the University of Sharjah, all of which are devoid of any museum-related courses.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that, after a brief period, previously offered programs such as the Master of Arts in Museum Studies at Zayed University and the MA in Museums and Gallery Practice at University College London in Qatar, were discontinued.

The Master of Arts in Museum Studies program, launched collaboratively by Zayed University and the University of St. Andrews in 2012, is among the initiatives that were discontinued shortly after their commencement. Taught in English, this program concentrated on aspects of museum management and operation, exhibition design, contemporary Western art, Islamic design art, and heritage in the Emirates. It

delved into the fundamental theories underpinning object management within museums, site administration, mass communication programs, effective engagement with cultural center visitors, as well as analytical methodologies, interpretation techniques, and strategies for museum presentation. The curriculum aimed to equip graduates for roles as museum curators and designers of exhibitions and museums (Zayed University, 2012).

Another noteworthy program in museology in the region was the Master of Arts program in Museum and Exhibition Applications offered by University College London in Qatar (UCL), inaugurated in 2010. Unfortunately, this program was discontinued a few years after its commencement, with the college discontinuing its operations in 2020. The UCL also provided specialized training initiatives for individuals working in Qatari museums, enabling them to specialize in this field. These programs encompassed practical training for students within Qatari museums and archaeological sites, enabling them to apply their theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios upon graduation (UCL, 2023). Through the MA in Museums and Gallery Practice, the UCL delivered courses designed to furnish students with practical skills relevant to collection management and conservation within museums, as well as methods for museum interpretation and analysis, and applications of digital technologies in museum contexts. The program also introduced students to the principles of safeguarding cultural heritage, with a focus on the heritage of the GCC states and neighboring areas. The curriculum also incorporated practical training periods for students within museums (UCL, 2023).

Viewed from a broader perspective, it becomes apparent that the instruction of museology is primarily limited to a single academic program offered exclusively by the University of Sharjah. In contrast, other offerings within history and archaeology departments at public universities are characterized by a meager collection of courses often labeled as mere "introductions" to museology. This situation starkly contrasts with the region's abundant natural and cultural heritage and is misaligned with the region's commitment to reinforcing its cultural identity.

According to Al-Belushi (2014), the absence of academic programs centered on museology can be attributed to three

primary factors: the limited number and distribution of museums, the sluggish pace of museum development, and the paucity of job opportunities in the field. Despite the present existence of a reasonable number of museums in the Arab Gulf states, this count remains relatively low considering the region's geographical expanse and demographic figures. This is especially evident when evaluating the land area of each country alongside the vast deserts and challenging terrains that separate cities and settlements across these nations. Additionally, there exists a pronounced concentration of museums within capitals and major urban centers, resulting in a notable scarcity in other areas.

Furthermore, the gradual advancement of museums is evident in their constrained roles and activities, primarily revolving around archiving, exhibition, and raising awareness. Most museums function primarily as galleries, lacking essential laboratories for analysis, restoration, research, and categorization of their holdings. The limited scope of these museum activities corresponds to a restricted availability of employment opportunities within them. This could potentially explain why departments of archeology and history refrain from offering comprehensive programs related to the subdisciplines of museology (Al-Belushi, 2014).

Challenges and Considerations

According to Al-Belushi (2014), there exist several challenges that pose obstacles to the teaching of museology within the GCC states. These challenges encompass the limited availability of job opportunities for graduates specializing in museology, the encroachment of new cultural paradigms from external regions that deviate from the local geographical and cultural contexts, the prevalence of a commercial culture that drives people towards rapid wealth accumulation, and the prioritization of careers and professions distant from the realm of museums in the curricula of many private universities.

Scarcity of Job Opportunities

The restricted number of museums, especially in regions distant from capitals and urban hubs, coupled with the narrow array of organizations dedicated to antiquities and museums that can absorb these graduates, contribute to the scarcity of viable career options for museology graduates. Furthermore, the limited scope of specializations, roles, and responsibilities undertaken by existing museums compounds this challenge.

Influence of Foreign Cultural Trends

Despite being situated at the crossroads of ancient civilizations and boasting an illustrious maritime history that facilitated interactions with neighboring cultures, the GCC nations have undergone a transformation in their cultural fabric due to the wealth of oil. This has introduced new cultural currents, primarily from the West, which have impacted various aspects of life, such as architectural styles, clothing preferences, and consumption patterns. This modern influence often exerts a more significant appeal compared to traditional heritage, particularly among newer generations who lack firsthand experience of the pre-oil era. Consequently, their engagement with museums, heritage, and antiquities tends to hinge on information disseminated through educational curricula, media broadcasts, and publications. Bridging the gap between contemporary youth and their cultural heritage remains a challenge requiring further efforts.

Pursuit of Rapid Wealth and Commercial Culture

A prevailing commercial culture has fostered a mindset focused on swift wealth accumulation. Individuals tend to gravitate towards lucrative careers in commercial sectors, telecommunications conglomerates, and oil corporations, which are perceived as shortcuts to financial success. Consequently, many opt for educational paths aligned with these industries, such as banking, oil-related disciplines, aviation, communications, etc. This trend, in turn, dissuades students from pursuing museology programs.

Commercial Orientation of Private Universities

An overview of the academic offerings of private universities in the GCC states underscores their commercial orientation. Emphasis is placed on fields like computer science, engineering, oil studies, accounting, marketing, tourism, hospitality, and communications. This trajectory aligns with citizens' preferences and aspirations while mirroring the prevailing economic and social circumstances within the region. Given this landscape, it is unlikely that private universities will prioritize programs related to antiquities, heritage, and museums, unless there is a parallel effort to create a demand for their graduates in these domains.

Future Directions

Anticipating the future trajectory of museology education in the GCC states presents both a promising potential and a challenge, owing to the dynamic nature characterizing these societies today. Yet, even amidst this uncertainty, certain future trends can be extrapolated based on the current situation, as outlined by Al-Belushi (2014):

Nostalgia

As the materialistic and consumer-oriented culture becomes more dominant, people in the GCC states may increasingly yearn for the past and seek refuge in its embrace, similar to patterns observed in industrialized societies. This longing is evident among the elderly who reminisce about traditional knowledge, now overshadowed by technology. A significant portion of the past that is likely to draw people back is the very heritage preserved and exhibited in museums. Consequently, museums are poised to transcend their current limited roles and assume greater importance in the future.

Deepening Awareness of Museums' Significance

The proliferation of museums throughout the region is expected to foster a heightened appreciation among community members for the pivotal role museums can play in enhancing their quality of life. Such increased awareness is likely to stimulate efforts towards their development and an augmented societal role.

Deeply Entrenched University-Museum Relationship

With clear inclinations towards the establishment of new museums in the region, surpassing the current count, the resultant surge in employment opportunities for museology graduates is anticipated to propel universities to introduce specialized departments in museology. This evolution could facilitate a more cohesive and interactive nexus between museums and academic institutions.

Growth of Cultural Tourism

In the midst of geopolitical tensions encompassing the GCC states, the region has experienced a noteworthy upswing in tourism, predominantly within its domestic sphere. This upsurge in tourist activities is poised to create a need for more museums, particularly in regions situated far from major urban hubs and capitals.

Potential key directions

Museology education in the GCC states is poised for transformative growth. As the region's expansion and diversification continue, several key directions for its advancement are evident:

Technological Integration

A pivotal facet lies in embracing modern museum technologies. Academic programs should focus on training students to proficiently use digital tools, virtual and augmented reality, and interactive displays, positioning these innovations as indispensable tools in museum development.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Museology education can benefit from cross-disciplinary collaboration with fields like anthropology, history, architecture, and digital arts. This approach empowers students with a holistic perspective, enabling them to effectively address the intricate challenges inherent in modern museum management, thereby promoting innovative solutions.

Moreover, these efforts align with the surging significance of heritage tourism and the economic dividends it offers. The integration of local communities into museum operations is another crucial thrust, fostering positive interactions with society and enhancing inclusivity. The nurturing of ongoing professional growth through education pathways ensures museum workers remain up-to-date with evolving best practices and technologies. Additionally, forging international partnerships with experienced museology educators provides students with diverse perspectives and enriches their educational journey. By embracing these trajectories, museology education in the Arab Gulf states is positioned to cultivate skilled museum professionals equipped to navigate the dynamic realms of cultural heritage management, exhibition design, and community engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the current status of museology education within higher education institutions throughout the GCC states, investigated the hurdles these institutions face in delivering specialized programs and courses for aspiring museum professionals. The survey conducted as part of this research has unveiled several notable findings. Presently, a sole academic program for museology education is available

across all universities in the GCC states: the BA program in museum studies and art history at the University of Sharjah. In addition to this, a limited number of courses are incorporated into programs predominantly centered on archaeology or history, lacking a comprehensive focus on the field of museum science. Notably, some public universities' history and archaeology departments do not offer any courses in museology. Moreover, former programs like Zayed University's MA in Museum Studies and University College London in Qatar's MA in Museums and Gallery Practice have been discontinued. The challenge of aligning education with future job opportunities has led universities to exhibit reluctance in offering specialized majors such as archaeology and museology, consequently contributing to the scarcity of related courses. This scarcity of employment prospects has further dissuaded the establishment of dedicated museology departments.

Considering these observations, the study puts forth the following recommendations:

- Enhance public understanding of the importance of museums.
- Strengthen the bonds between universities and museums.
- Establish dedicated departments or institutes exclusively focused on museology education.
- Provide students with competencies in contemporary museum display technologies.
- Foster interdisciplinary collaborations between museology programs and diverse fields.
- Center museology academic curricula on promoting community engagement within museum operations, highlighting inclusivity, cultural representation, and reverence for heritage.
- Integrate courses in museology programs for the ongoing professional development of museum personnel.
- Cultivate partnerships with international institutions with extensive experience in museology education to enrich students' learning journeys.

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