

Intangible Heritage of Alexandria: Potentials for Tourism Attraction

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ABSTRACT

Alexandria is the second largest city in Egypt with a rich history and reputation as a cosmopolitan city that gathered- throughout its history- various groups of different nationalities, ethnicity and languages. Therefore, in addition to its wealthy history and affluent tangible heritage, it is also privileged to have varied prospering intangible heritage.

The five domains of intangible heritage that were identified by the UNESCO Convention in 2003 could all be manifested in the Heritage of Alexandria. These domains included: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices (including rituals and festive events), knowledge and traditional craftsmanship.

The present research aims to present the manifestation of these domains of intangible heritage in Alexandria based on data collection from resources, interviews and questionnaires. It intends to explain how that intangible heritage is maintained and practiced and who knows about it or who benefits from it. It also aims to explain how the varied intangible heritage of the city could be promoted, marketed and used for the benefit of tourism. The study reveals that the intangible heritage of Alexandria could be linked to the events' agenda of the city and could easily enhance local tourism. It could also deepen the national loyalty and sense of identity of the Alexandrians. Moreover, it could be well used to create innovative thematic tours, walking tours and creative events that could attract tourists.

Key Words: Intangible heritage, thematic tours, Alexandria

INTRODUCTION

Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great in 332 BC on a site that was previously known and used during the Pharonic period known as Rhakotis; which was one of several villages that guarded the coastline from possible incursions. The facing island of Pharos was a landing stage of International navigation (Morcos et al, 2003). The city was used as capital of Egypt during the Graeco-Roman period; thus its political importance grew accordingly. It also became a major commercial centre of the ancient Mediterranean. With its lighthouse and active commercial, artistic and scientific activities it remained the richest and most prosperous city in the Mediterranean for decades.

By the beginning of the Islamic era the city witnessed a drawback in importance; since the Arabs abandoned the city as a capital and established Al-Fustat instead. The city regained its importance gradually by the Fatimid period as it was used as a military harbour and commercial port. Many of the old buildings were renovated, new mosques and madrasas were built and a large number of Moroccans migrated to Alexandria and settled in it (Al-Shayal, 2000). The city also attracted the attention of the Ayyubid sultans who aimed to guard it from the Crusades; therefore, it was visited, protected and new buildings were added (Al-Shayal, 2000).

But the golden age of the city during medieval times was during the Mamluk Sultanate when the city regained its leading role as a commercial centre. Egypt was controlling the trade routes between East and West and Alexandria was one of the major transits and ports. It attracted merchants from Europe and Asia; especially that the Mamluk sultans were keen to have diplomatic relations with countries working on trade and gave their merchants benefits and incentives while staying in Egypt (Al-Ashqar, 1999). This was the real beginning for various foreign communities to settle in Alexandria. During the Ottoman period, large communities of Greeks, Italians, French, British in addition to Syrians and Moroccans lived in Alexandria. They benefited from the advantages given to them by the Ottomans to encourage trade and enforce political relations with their counties (Haridi, 2004; Ibrahim, 2013). Such communities continued to live in Alexandria till present times and the mix between them and their mingling with the Egyptians gave the city its cosmopolitan nature.

Therefore, the heritage of Alexandria is the result of a long history and was created by the contribution of the citizens and other nationalities who also considered themselves Alexandrians as a result of their long attachment with the city. The rich history of the city and its unique cosmopolitan nature differentiated Alexandria from other cities of Egypt and distinguished its tangible and intangible heritage.

INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF ALEXANDRIA

The heritage of Alexandria is the result of many eras, each with its own features. The tangible heritage include many archaeological sites such as the Roman Amphitheatre, the necropolis of al-

Shatbi, the catacomb of Kom al-Shokafa from the Graeco-Roman period, many mosques from the Islamic and Ottoman era in addition to other monuments from modern times such as the court house and various squares and private buildings. Such sites were previously studied in detail (Al-Shayal 2000, Bayomi, 2013).

The focus of the present research is the intangible heritage of Alexandria which is not yet defined nor studied. The UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) defines intangible heritage as: *“the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”*.

Based on that definition the intangible heritage could be presented through 5 manifestations (Ballard, 2008):

- Performing arts such as traditional music, dance and theatre.
- Oral traditions and expressions.
- Social practices, rituals and festive events.
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature.
- Traditional craftsmanship.

As a result, the intangible heritage is more related to people rather than to monuments. It is expressed by practices rather than by material object. Above all, it defines the national identity and fosters the feeling of belonging and continuity (Smith, 2006; Ruggles and Silverman, 2009).

Since the history of Alexandria was created throughout different eras and various ethnic groups and nationalities participated in its formation; the intangible heritage of the city is varied, diverse and unique. It could best reflect the cosmopolitan identity of Alexandria and recalls the accumulating layers of its history. Therefore, I'll try to present some of the manifestations of the intangible heritage of Alexandria.

PERFORMING ARTS

The origin of Alexandria is the village of Rhakotis which was inhabited by fishermen; therefore, fishing was the oldest profession of the original Alexandrians. Fishermen spent most of their times making fishing nets or on their boats in the sea for fishing. That profession which requires patience and persistence made them create their own way to entertain themselves; especially in the sea. Many songs about the sea, hours of waiting for fish and homesickness were created by fishermen, some of which were even accompanied with dances (figure 1). Such traditional old songs are still

memorized and repeated by old Alexandrians and the dances are performed with the traditional costume of fishermen.



Figure 1: A traditional dance of fishermen

Performing arts in Alexandria were also connected with the famous singer and composer *Sayed Darwish* who was born and died in Alexandria (1892-1923). He was considered the father of Egyptian popular music and was attributed for renovation in music and theatre. He composed songs, operettas and produced plays for theatre. His apparition of social matters and the allusions to the political situation of colonial Egypt were the reason of success of his works. He also composed traditional aesthetic music such as *Adwâr* (long metric composition in colloquial Arabic) and *Muwashahât*. Above all, *Sayed Darwish* composed the music for the Egyptian national anthem. (Ibrahim, 1958; Sahab, 1996) The music of *Sayed Darwish* is a special Alexandrian signature of music and it marks the heritage of Alexandria with a unique feature.

Another form of performing arts that was connected with Alexandria is the cinema; since the Egyptian cinema industry began in Alexandria. The first screening of a motion picture in Egypt was in Alexandria in 1896. Then, the famous Alexandrian photographers *Aziz* and *Dorés* made the first cinematic film in Alexandria in 1907 which was a documentary film. Many films were made and even the first Chamber of Cinema Industry was established in Alexandria in 1927 (Awad and Hamouda, 2007). The industry improved and Alexandria participated in that improvement with its actors, directors and producers. Alexandria was also an essential element in the Egyptian classical cinema; since it was the famous resort of the rich society in Cairo. *Stanly*, *San Stifano* and *Beu Rivage* were the prominent beaches where most of the movies of 1940s till 80s filmed (figure 2). The harbor was another renowned location for action and crime movies. So many classical films were filmed in Alexandria in that era. Such films could be a rich source of information about the life of the upper class in Egypt, the old buildings of the city; some of which are still existing and the fashions and styles of clothes and hairstyles at that time. Since Alexandria was the home of so many foreign communities; they were looked upon as a source of fashion and elegance. That's why the movies showed the upper class in Egypt bragging with spending the summer or at least the weekends in Alexandria and inspiring their clothes from their friends there.

Many actors, actresses and directors were from Alexandria. The prominent director *Youssef Chahine* is a good example: His mother was Greek, his father was Lebanese and he was born in Alexandria in 1926. He was raised in Alexandria and his attachment and passion to it were witnessed in his movies, some of which were directly connected with the city and its people such as “Alexandria..why?”, “Alexandria again and again” and “Alexandria-New York”. *Shady AbdelSalam* is another well-known director who was born and lived in Alexandria. He worked as director assistant in many important films such as “the Pharaoh”, “the Civilization” and “Cleopatra” and his greatest achievement was his movie “the Mummy” (Awad and Hamouda, 2007). Many other famous actors and actresses were from Alexandria such as: Omar Sherif, Shokry Sarhan, Hind Rostum, Nahed Sherif, Madiha Kamel, Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz and Samir Sabry.

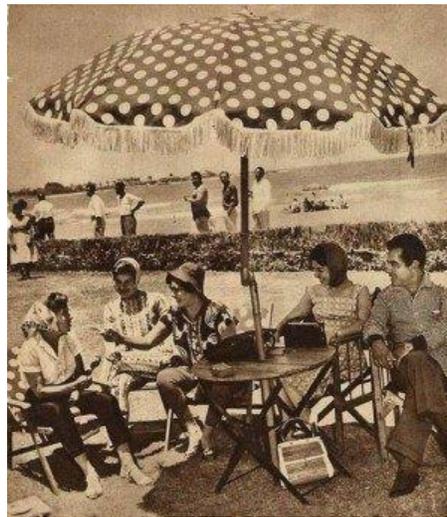


Figure 2: A scene from a movie of *Farid al-Atrash* in Alexandria

Moreover, the list of artists who were associated with Alexandria is long and it includes non-Egyptians who were born and lived in Alexandria or even lived in the city but they were all attached to it and influenced with its unique spirit. The list includes the Greek poet *Constantine Cavafy* who was born in Alexandria in 1863 and lived most of his life there till his death in 1933. He was a writer and poet and considered one of the greatest contemporary Greek poets; therefore his poetry was translated to many languages. His house for the last 25 years of his life in Alexandria was transformed into a museum filled with many of his possessions. *Georges Moustaki* is another artist whose parents were Greeks who lived in Alexandria; where he was born in 1934. He learned French in Alexandria and traveled to France where he gained fame. He was a composer and singer and wrote and composed for many famous French singers. The Greek singer *Demis Roussos* whose father was Greek and mother was Italian; they were born in Alexandria and so was Demis (in 1946), also spent part of his life in Alexandria.

Other artist lived part of their lives in Alexandria such as *Lawrence Durrell*; the British writer who wrote his famous novel “Alexandria Quartet” that was about events and characters in Alexandria before and during World War II. The novel was ranked number 70 on the list of 100 best English novels of the 20th century.

The common factor between all those musicians, composers, writers, singers, poets, actors and film directors is their passion to Alexandria that was expressed in a way or another in their works. That’s why their works relates to the city and narrates part of its story. Their works also reflect the homogeneous mix between the Alexandrians and the city and how the city influenced their taste and style of art. Thus their work is a unique part of the intangible heritage of the city.

ORAL TRADITIONS AND EXPRESSIONS

The Alexandrian dialect is a unique heritage of the city that is still living till today. The remarkable about such dialect is that it bears witness to all nationalities that lived and influenced the city. It contains so many words from Italian, Greek, Moroccan or Turkish languages. The words were used in the daily life communications till they became part of the dialect. The Alexandrian dialect is marked with the use of plural instead of singular form of first person; influenced with the Moroccans who lived in Alexandria. It also includes many Greek and Italian words and names for things such as *frisca* (a fresh desert sold on the beach- Italian), *tromway* (Tram, Italian), *kat* (storey of a house-Turkish), *karakon* (police station- Turkish), *zalabia* (fried desert with sugar or honey-Moroccan), *mastaba* (seat in front of houses and shops- Greek) ...and many other words are still used till today (Table 1). Although all that words come from other languages, most of the new generation of Alexandrians don’t know that and they think the words are all Arabic.

Table 1: Arabic Words used in Alexandria that were originally derived from foreign words

Word in Arabic	Transliteration	Translation	Foreign origin
استبيننا	estabina	all right	sta bene (It.)
جومه	goma	rubber	gumme (It.)
ماستيكا	mastika	showing gum	mastica (It.)
مانفستو	manafesto	small book	manifesto (It.)
سكولا	skola	school	scuola (It.)
باسطا	pasta	pastry	pasta (It.)
كولة	kolla	glue	colla (It.)
السطا	alista	all ok	alla lista (It.)
بالو	ballo	troubles	ballo (It.)
روبابيكيا	robabekia	old things	roba vecchia (It.)

جونبلا	gonella	skirt	gonna (It.)
فاترنا	vatrina	show case	vetrina (It.)
جوانتي	gwanti	gloves	guanti (It.)
ماركة	marca	brand	marca (It.)
صالة	sala	reception hall	sala (It.)
بريمو	primo	first	primo (It.)
ترسو	terso	third category	terzo (It.)
جيلاتي	gilati	ice cream	galato (It.)
فريسكا	fresca	sort of desert	fresco (It.)
موبيليا	mobilia	furniture	mobilio (It.)
فاتورة	fatura	invoice	fattura (It.)
بنك نوت	banknote	money	banconota (It.)
برافو	bravo	Well done	bravo (It.)
بوسطة	bosta	Post office	posta (It.)
بيجاما	pyjama	Sleeping clothes	pyjama
كراكون	karakon	Police station	
بروفة	prova	fitting room	prova (It.)
أفوكاتو	Avokato	lawyer	avvocato (It.)
تياترو	Teatro	theater	teatro (It.)
فيزيتا	visita	payment for a doctor visit	visita (It.)
روشتة	roshetta	prescription of medicine	ricotta (It.)
فالسو	falso	false or fake	falso (It.)
انتیکا	antika	old and precious	antica (It.)

The oral traditions of the Alexandrians also include stories related to certain places such as the stories about ghosts and evil spirits that appear in the cemetery area (al-Amoud) and in the Ghosts building at Roushdy.

Recently, some oral traditions were transformed into epigraphy such as what happened everywhere in Alexandria after the January Revolution. Comic drawings, political quotes, mottos and slogans were extensively used to present ideas and thoughts on the walls of buildings especially in large squares and important streets.

SOCIAL PRACTICES

Another manifestation of the intangible heritage of the city is witnessed in social practices. The Alexandrians have their own funeral practices that many of the old women tend to maintain such as visiting the cemetery every Thursday after the death of a close relative for at least 40 days. They also visit the deceased in the beginning of every lunar month and in the annual anniversary of death. They bake special cookies or bring fruits to distribute them among poor people asking for mercy for the deceased. Although such practices are related to death, such visits to the cemetery are social gatherings for women that include family members, relatives, friends and even neighbors who participate as a sign of courtesy to the grieving family.

Sufi practices are also part of the intangible heritage of Alexandria because they are related to the well-known religious Sufi Abo al-Abbas al-Mursi who lived and died in Alexandria. Abo al-Abbas was originally born in Marsia (now Murcilla) in Andalus in 1219, then he moved to Tunisia where he learned the Sufi thoughts from his master Abo al-Hasan al-Shazli. He moved with his master to Alexandria in 1242, where they settled near Kom al-Dikka and used al-Attarin mosque to spread the Sufi thoughts. Al-Shazli had his own Sufi method and after his death, Abo al-Abbas was his successor and follower who worked for more than 30 years in Alexandria to spread that method. Abo al-Abbas became himself a master for other students such as al-Bousiri, Yaqout al-Arsh (his son-in-law) and ibn Ataa Alsakandari who consequently became famous Sufis and religious masters in Alexandria. When Abo al-Abbas died in 1287, he was buried at the cemetery of Bab al-Bahr and only in 1307 a mosque was built on the tomb to commemorate him. The mosque was renovated in 1596 but it fell into disrepair. The existing mosque was built in 1942 and two other mosques were built for his students al-Bousiri and Yaqout al-Arsh (Al-Sandoubi, 1944; Bayoumi, 2013). Due to the efforts of Abo al-Abbas and his students, al-Shazlyia Sufi method was spread in Alexandria and from it to other parts in Egypt. As a result, many Sufi practices and events were held in Alexandria; especially in the anniversary or the birth of Abo al-Abbas. Events for reading the Quran and practicing Sufi rituals were always held in the mosque in addition to a large festival (*Moled*) for 3 or 7 days (figure 3). Most of the Alexandrians believe in the intercession of Abo al-Abbas, thus, they visit the mosque for prayer for healing or mercy for a dead person. They feel optimistic towards visiting the mosque and prefer to hold their wedding ceremonies (or at least the official part of it) in the mosque of Abo al-Abbas. Al-Shazlyia Sufi method was influential till present time that other subsidiary methods were created from it such as al-Gazolyia method in 1952 by Gaber al-Gazoli, whose method was also practiced in the mosque of Abo al-Abbas (Ahmad, 2012).



Figure 3: Moled (festival) of Abo al-Abbass and sufi practices during the festival

KNOWLEDGE

The know-how is an important part of the intangible heritage because it is only preserved in the heads and hands of their owners. It could be passed from generation to another; or else, it would disappear. One of the manifestations of the intangible heritage of Alexandria is the know-how to make fishing nets. Such heritage is as old as the city itself. But only few old fishermen still preserve that heritage.

On the contrary, the know-how to cook sea food is widely spread among the Alexandrians and it is very well preserved and maintained. Actually the Alexandrian cuisine was influenced with Greek, Italian, Turkish, Syrian and Moroccan cuisines. Nevertheless, Alexandria sea food is ranked of top of traditional dishes. *Fried fish* or *grilled with oil* and *Tageen* all with *Sayadia rice* and *fried eggplants* are all typical Alexandrian dishes (figure 4). Other famous Alexandrian dishes include *Kebda Iskandarani* (Alexandria liver), *Koshari Iskandarani* (Alexandrian koshari) and *Gollash*. Luckily, there's no house in Alexandria that didn't preserve the know-how of these dishes. The Greek cuisine had its influence on the Alexandrian cuisine as well and the Alexandrians still cook some dishes following the Greek recipes such as *Mahshi* and *Bastrami*. The Greek club in Alexandria and some famous Greek restaurants, such as "Atinious", were and still are the best places to taste the Greek dishes.



Figure 4: Various Alexandrian sea food dishes

TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

Another essential part of the intangible heritage of Alexandria is the traditional craftsmanship. Some traditional crafts were practiced in the city; some of which are as old as the city itself such as making fishing nets, while others date back to medieval times such as making gold jewellery and leather bags and shoes. The former is the oldest craft that was practiced in Rhakotis and is still practiced in the same location; now Ras el-Tin district, by very few old fishermen. New boats equipped with modern equipments and nets threaten that craft with extinction.

Leather products were also made in Alexandria since the English made a large factory for dying leather in west Alexandria during the 19th century. Many small factories worked in that craft in downtown area and they sold their products in nearby shops. That craft is also threatened with imported Chinese bags and shoes that are made of artificial leather but are way cheaper than the natural-leather products. The markets of the city were flooded with imported products and thus many of the skilful craftsmen abandoned their work. On the contrary, making gold and silver jewellery is a craft that is still practiced and al-Sagha district is very famous for skilful craftsmen and small factories for gold jewellery. That craft is still surviving and flourishing.

POTENTIALS FOR TOURISM

The examples of intangible heritage of Alexandria presented in the present study are just few of many. The city is fortunate to have long history and vivid heritage covering all aspects of life and relating to all communities that inhabited the city and participated in its activities. Unfortunately, that heritage, especially the intangible, is not utilized for the benefit of tourism.

Heritage tourism is based on nostalgia for the past and the desire to experience diverse cultural landscapes and forms. It attracts tourists who search for personally rewarding and enriching experience (Prideaux and Kininmont, 1999). The manifestations of intangible heritage could best serve that meaning to create new experiences for tourists.



Figure 5: A suggested tour related to Durrell's quartet

Thematic tours could be a chance to create a wide variety of tours offering diverse experiences that can suite a wide range of tourists. A “Greek Tour” can start from al-Shatby tomb then goes to the Greek cemetery, the museum of Kafafis and ends in Atinious restaurant. The “Italian Tour” can start at the mosque of Abu al-Abbas mosque –which was built by the Italian architect Mario Rossi- then walk through Shrief Street famous for its Italian-style buildings and visit Alexandria Library to attend a performance by an Italian singer or musician. A “Sufi Tour” can start at al-Attarin mosque then go to the mosques’ square or Midan al-Masaged to visit Abo al-Abbas, al-Bousiri and Yaqout al-Arsh mosques and participate in sufi rituals and festivals and ends with a relaxing walk on the beach. A “Fishermen Tour” can start at al-Anfoushi cultural centre to watch a performance of traditional dances than go to the harbour area to see the ships and boats building area in addition to making fishing nets, then a visit to Qaytbay citadel and ends with seafood meal at one of the traditional restaurants in Ras al-Tin. “Lawrence Durrell Tour” can start at his house and walk through the sites and places he mentioned in his quartet. This idea was started by Alexandria Library and a map was created for the tour (figure 5). Similar tours could be designed about Sayyed Darwish or Yousif Chahine. Unlimited number of tours could be offered, with various themes, to appeal to all interests of local and international tourists.

The **Alex Agenda of events** could also be developed to present all the aspects of intangible heritage of the city. Concerts for the works of the famous artists (Sayyed Darwish, Demis Roussos and George Mostaki) should be held, poetry nights for the works of Byram al-Tounsi and Cavafy should be organized and regular performances of traditional dances should be presented. Alexandria Opera House, Alexandria Library Arts Centre in addition to cultural centers in the city should all participate to house such events and should organize their efforts to present that heritage in the most appropriate and appealing form. The marketing of the agenda should be on local and international levels to attract tourists not only Egyptians.

The **Alexandrian cuisine** could best be invested for tourism: all hotels and restaurant should adopt traditional dishes and set them on their menus. They should promote traditional Alexandrian cuisine and consider it as an asset to attract tourist. Events and competitions related to cuisine could also be organized between hotels and restaurants to attract tourists.

Those are just some ideas to use some aspects of intangible heritage for the benefit of tourism. But there are so many other potentials for intangible heritage to be used for the benefit of tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

Alexandria is rich with its tangible and intangible heritage. The latter is varied, diverse and affluent. The five main domains of intangible heritage have their manifestation in Alexandria. The unique feature of these manifestations is that they represent all the communities that lived in the city and thus they reflect the unique cosmopolitan identity of the city. The intangible heritage can provide a wide variety of potentials for tourism. Thematic tours, walking tours and various events

could be created based on that heritage. If marketed and promoted, such activities can easily attract local and international tourism. Moreover, highlighting the intangible heritage and presenting it is a way to preserve that heritage from extinction, especially that most of it is no longer practiced nor remembered. That means, preserving and presenting the intangible heritage of Alexandria is a protection to the unique cosmopolitan identity of the city and a favour for future generations of Alexandrians.

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