

# A L - A H S A

## UNESCO Creative City of Crafts & Folk Art 2015-2019 Monitoring Report

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Al-Ahsa dates back to 6000 years B.C, known as the largest self-contained palm tree oasis in the world. With over 2.5 million palm trees, Al-Ahsa is located in a strategic location connecting East and Southeast Asia through the ancient Silkroad, which was central to the economic, cultural, political, and religious interactions between these regions. Besides the prosperity of such resources, underneath Al-Ahsa's grounds lies the largest oil field in the world (Ghawar), enabling essential merits that produced and sustained an outstanding cultural heritage, combining the human with their surrounding very-old oasis. This has resulted an organic formula enriching creativity and culture as the city's motto.

The inherited rich cultural assets has formed a wide range of handicrafts and folk arts that has qualified Al-Ahsa to become a member of UCCN. Once joined this inspirational network, people of Al-Ahsa became very delighted & honored with this designation, as it goes in line with their ambitions towards the local creativity and culture based society.

Creative Al-Ahsa became brand name for the local society reflected in participatory efforts that has resulted a marked-presence and contribution in global events organized by UCCN. Realizing more importance and driving more priority towards promoting and preserving local traditional crafts, particularly knowledge-transfer from old artisans to young generations.

This connection has influenced a growing number of youngsters participating in a number of events and activities related to culture and creativity. During such events, the UCCN objectives always took part of the awareness and content of these gatherings.

The growing important role of creativity and culture in local sustainable urban development plans has been crowned by two major achievements:

- 1- Designation of Al-Ahsa oasis as a world Heritage site 2018.
- 2- Selecting Al-Ahsa as the Arab Tourism Capital in 2019.

## 2

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- 2.1. Name of the city: **Al-Ahsa**
- 2.2. Country: **Saudi Arabia**
- 2.3. Creative field of designation: **Crafts and Folk Art**
- 2.4. Date of designation: **11 Dec 2015**
- 2.5. Date of submission of the current report: **Dec 2019**
- 2.6. Entity responsible for the report: **Al-Ahsa Municipality**
- 2.7. Previous reports submitted and dates: **N/A**
- 2.8. Focal point of contact:

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Al-Ahsa Municipality

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Al-Ahsa Municipality

## 3

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE NETWORK'S GLOBAL MANAGEMENT:**

- 3.1. Number of UCCN annual meetings attended in the last four years: **4**

**2016 (Östersund, Sweden)- Mayor & Focal Point.**

**2017 (Enghien-les-bains, France) - 3 delegates including Mayor & Focal Point.**

**2018 (Krakow-Katowice, Poland) -2 delegates including Focal Point.**

**2019 (Fabriano, Italy) - 3 delegates including Mayor & Focal Point.**

- 3.2. Hosting of a UCCN annual meeting and dates: **N/A**

3.3. Hosting of a working or coordination meeting addressed to one or more specific UCCN creative field representatives: **N/A**

3.4. Hosting of an international conference or meeting on specific issues salient to the Creative Cities with a large participation of members of the network: **N/A** (planning to host an annual cluster meeting within our next 4-years action plan)



3.5. Financial and/or in-kind support provided to UNESCO's secretariat in order to ensure the management, communication and visibility of the UCCN:

1. **Financial contribution (10,000\$) to support UCCN, 24/07/2017**
2. **Financial contribution (5,000\$) to support UCCN, 30/11/2019- 1<sup>st</sup> installment**
3. **Financial contribution (5,000\$) to support UCCN, (near future)-2<sup>nd</sup> installment**

3.6. membership of the steering group and period: **N/A**

Planning to be a member of the steering group in the next period.

3.7. participation in the evaluation of applications:

**2017 : 1 city**

**2019 : 3 cities**

#### **4 MAJOR INITIATIVES IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE UCCN:**

##### **4.1. Creative Al-Ahsa Festival:**

This event was launched a year after the designation of Al-Ahsa to UCCN, located in the traditionally built village, the main objectives of this festival are:

- Promoting the cultural role in city life and tourism through best practices of crafts and folk art artisans shows.
- Encouraging new generations to practice local handcrafting including wide female participation through gastronomy activities.

This widely anticipated festival (attended by more than 1500 visitors daily) is continuing annually for the third year consecutively. This big event attracted young artisans and artists became a focal tourist place and contributed strongly to ensure the important role of culture and creativity into public interest.



#### 4.2. Handcrafts Training:

Increasing training initiatives for artisanship through many institutions, colleges and training centers, aiming to transfer knowledge and experience from old artisans to new generations including female and youths. That contributes to meet two of the SDG'S # 1 (No Poverty) and # 5 (Gender Equality). The other main result is the production of new developed craft products that include creativity and meeting contemporary needs.



#### 4.3. Researches and Studies:

King Faisal University conducted more than 10 scientific researches dealing with the development of handcrafts and its role in local development such as:

- The importance of documenting local traditional crafts in order to promote national income through cultural tourism.
- Rule of handcrafts to change mental image about tourism in Al-Ahsa.

A booth at the University library is devoted for crafts and folk art books and periodicals as well as UNESCO publications available for public and interested Researchers.

#### 4.4. Castle of Crafts:

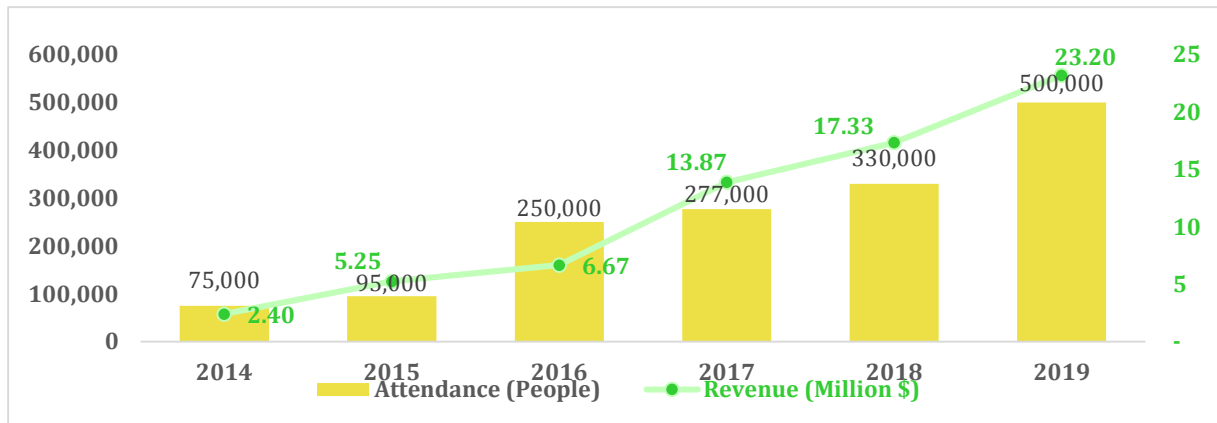
The biggest traditional designed craft project in the Gulf region almost completed including over 100 craft shops and big yard for folk arts shows with a total area of 12000 m2 and total cost of 4.7 million dollars. The objectives of this vital project are:

- Promoting crafts and encouraging experiences sharing between old and young artisans and a point of competence between the craftsmen to produce creative products.
- To be a cultural tourism focal point especially after the historical release of tourist visas to Saudi Arabia launched this year.



#### 4.5. Palmdates Annual Festival:

Al-Ahsa name is always accompanied by dates; this main palm tree product is another title of Al-Ahsa, that is why the annual date festival was launched back in 2014, but after Al-Ahsa designation to UCCN, this festival jumped to a higher level in terms of number of visitors, Total sales and number of activities included. That is owing to the strong role of craft and folk arts participation and other cultural activities like design and fine arts.



*Al-Ahsa Dates Festival Growth in terms of number of visitors & revenue*

An attractive booth devoted for Creative Al-Ahsa team included annually in this largest festival in the city. The impact of this festival was larger revenues generating income for artisans families, unprecedented female participation in dates industry and festival activities, more public awareness about the UCCN objectives as well as the importance role of culture and creativity in sustainable development efforts in the region.



#### 4.6. Society of Culture and Arts Initiatives:

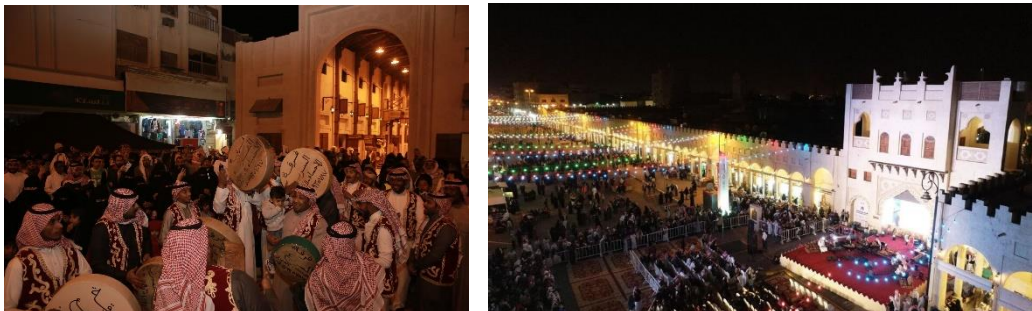
Since the designation of Al-Ahsa in UCCN, this society started to launch number of programs and initiatives to support Al-Ahsa commitment to meet UCCN goals. Those programs include but not limited to:



- The establishment of Reading team (THINK) which is composed of intellectual people to share assessment and discussion of some famous international books and tales, spreading their activities to neighbor countries i.e. Bahrain.
- The society with cooperation with Abdulmunem Al Rashid charitable establishment implemented a wide craft training workshop included 300 trainees to get experience and skills from the talented local artisans.
- A new interested group formed a musical orchestra for the first time in Al-Ahsa showing number of participations in local and international events concentrating on the development of traditional local folk arts.

#### 4.7. Alqaisaria Bazaar Festival:

With the aim of utilizing the core of the city to put culture at the heart of local events, the famous traditional bazaar( Alqaisaria Market) has been adopted by its open street yard to host an annual festival called (Alqaisaria Festival). Aiming to promote the role of culture and creative industries like crafts and folk art in the city life in general and drags attention towards the goals of sustainable development to the public in particular.



#### 4.8. Manufacturing Machines and craft tools:

In order to help artisans of crafts in Al-Ahsa, the Technical College started to manufacture a local pottery-making machine. In addition, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Industrial Institute has started to produce the necessary tools needed by the artisans.





#### 4.9. Civilization Land Events:

Gastronomy, literature and music took major part in the events organized and hosted by Al-Ahsa Tourism Company implemented in the civilization land on the famous Gara caves. The place has a panoramic view over an endless scene of palm trees and the fascinating mountain. Gastronomic dishes competitions, live poet shows accompanied by open-air libraries (book and coffee) Took place almost every week all around the year. In addition, the place now hosts music concerts initiated for the first time in this location.



#### 4.10. Cultivation of 3 million trees:

In order to overcome the hot weather conditions due to climate change, Al-Ahsa launched a multi sectorial campaign to plant about 3 million trees within and on the peripheries of the city and on the borders of Al-Ahsa oasis, which complies with the SDG # 13 and # 15.

This campaign had a wide participation by public/ private and civil society. Another parallel environmental campaign launched also to release hundreds of the local famous bird (Hasawi Balbool) from their cages to their natural environment.



#### 4.11. Creative Al-Ahsa Team and Work Plan:

Once Al-Ahsa was designated in UCCN, a major team was formed from the following departments: Al-Ahsa Municipality, King Faisal University, Chamber of Commerce, Tourism authority, Municipal Council, Culture and Arts Society, Technical college, Social Development Centre and youth authority. This team has adopted a comprehensive plan aims to meet the UCCN objectives on the local and international level as well as the promotion and development of handicraft and folk arts in Al-Ahsa.(a copy of this plan is attached)



#### 4.12. Communications and awareness:

A wide communication and awareness plan has been implemented to the public awareness of the UCCN objectives; the importance of sustainable development goals and the role of culture and creativity in public life through the following means:

- launching a website devoted for creative Al-Ahsa in two languages English and Arabic (<https://unesco.alhasa.gov.sa>)
- Using social media (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram) for public awareness.

 UNESCO.ALHASA.GOV.SA  
 @HASACREATIVITY  
 ALHASA CREATIVITY  
 ALHSAACREATIVITY  
 CREATIVE AL-AHSA  
 CREATIVE.CITY@ALHASA.GOV.SA

- Devoting a booth for Creative Al-Ahsa within the main festivals and events that occurred in Al-Ahsa In particular and Saudi Arabia in general providing media materials and explanations of the objectives of the UCCN and the United Nation sustainable development goals.
- Translation, publication and distribution of the main leaflets issued by UCCN.



## 5 MAJOR INITIATIVES IMPLEMENTED THROUGH INTER-CITY COOPERATION TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE UCCN:

### 5.1. Al-Ahsa/Dubai Partnership:

A preliminary understanding with city of Dubai as a key step towards signing a partnership agreement, based on the cooperative initiatives between Al-Ahsa city of crafts and folk art and Dubai city of design to best utilize the out products of palm trees in Alaa Zahar oasis to produce innovative craft products that meet actual needs and contribute to environmental protection.

### 5.2. Al-Ahsa/Aswan Partnership:

A partnership agreement between Al-Ahsa and Aswan city of crafts and folk art has been signed based on mutual exchange of crafts materials and artisans visits between the two cities to share experience and practices.

### 5.3. Icheon International Workshop of Crafts and Folk art:

Right after its designation to UCCN Al-Ahsa city started effective participations in the first international crafts and folk art workshop organized by Icheon city (South Korea) in May 2016, sharing with our presentation of local practices and exhibiting samples of Al-Ahsa craft products.





#### 5.4. First Annual Cluster Meeting (Paducah, USA):

Four representatives from Al-Ahsa including the Mayor, participated in the first annual meeting of the crafts and folk art cluster held by Paducah city, Kentucky, USA, (September, 2017) the participation included presentations and craft creative products of Al-Ahsa as well as effective role in roundtable meetings discussions and workshops.



#### 5.5. Tunis Meeting of Cultural industries Development:

Al-Ahsa city participated in the first West Arabic Countries Meeting about the development of cultural industries held in Tunis (26 to 29 March 2019) organized by ALECSO( Arabic league of education, culture and science organization) which invited all Arab Creative Cities including Al-Ahsa to launch an effective coordination and cooperation between those cities.



#### 5.6. Launching communication platform among Arab creative cities:

During Tunis meeting Al-Ahsa initiated a platform that links between Arabic creative cities through their focal points in order to: share best practices, exchange expertise and coordinate efforts related to meet UCCN objectives.



### 5.7. Remote video meetings:

Al-Ahsa city participated three times in the periodical video remote conferences organized by our cluster coordinator (Icheon city) to discuss mutual interests, exchange ideas and share best practices.



### 5.8. World Urban Forum 9 (WUF9):

Upon an invitation from UCCN, Al-Ahsa Focal Point participated in the UNESCO training event (Culture and the City) within the World Urban Forum 9 held in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur on 12 February 2018.

### 5.9. Second annual cluster meeting (Icheon, South Korea, April 2018):

Presented by its Mayer and focal point Al-Ahsa was effectively present in the second annual meeting of the crafts and folk art cluster showing Al-Ahsa practices in this field and participating in roundtable discussions about employing creativity and culture to meet the goals of urban sustainable development and UCCN objectives.



### 5.10. Weifang Summit Forum of Crafts and Folk art(April,2019):

Al-Ahsa participated in this forum discussing the participants commitment to UNESCO Creative Cities Network common mission statement, mutual partnerships, exchange cooperation and professional training.



### 5.11. World craft and folk art capital summit forum (Suzhou, China, April 2019):

Mayor of Al-Ahsa and the focal point attended this international forum to promote corporative initiatives between participating cities in crafts and folk art. Our participation included a presentation and showing craft samples in the accompanying International exhibition.





### 5.12. Third Annual Cluster Meeting (Kanazawa, Japan, October 2019):

Al-Ahsa was presented by three representatives including the mayor and focal Point discussing the scheduled issues and share experiences aiming to meet UCCN mission statement and discuss the designation of the next 4th cluster annual meeting hosting city.



## 6 Estimated Annual Budget for the Implementation of the Proposed 4-year Action Plan:

### 6.1 Operating the new craft training centre:

The new craft castle project is almost finished, more than 100 craft shops are ready to be delivered to the chosen craftsmen and women with the operation of the training centre attached within this project to train new generations and exhibit best creative products.

### 6.2 Translating UCCN publications to Arabic language:

UNESCO and UCCN have issued very valuable publications in English and French mainly, Arabic versions is necessary for Al-Ahsa and other Arabic Creative cities. Al-Ahsa plans to implement this duty within its action plan.

### 6.3 Rehabilitation of a Neighbourhood square in Hofuf city:

The aim of this vital project is to develop an attractive traditional urban environment to host touristic places and events specially craft shops and folk art yards.

### 6.4 Hosting an annual cluster meeting:

Al-Ahsa now has the experience and eligibility to host an annual meeting for the crafts and folk art cluster which includes now about 50 creative cities.

### 6.5 Artesian exchange visits:

This program aims to exchange best practices with other creative cities and gain necessary knowledge and skills for the local artisans.

#	Project	Annual Budget
1	Operating Craft Training Center	\$ 125,000
2	Translating UCCN Publications to Arabic	\$ 12,500
3	Rehabilitation of a Neighborhood Square in the old city	\$ 500,000
4	Hosting an annual Cluster Meeting	\$ 200,000
5	Artesians Exchange Visits	\$ 15,000
6	Communications & Awareness Plan execution	\$ 5,000
<b>Total Budgeted items</b>		<b>\$ 857,500</b>