

ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE UAE: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES FOR IDENTITY PRESERVATION

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Abstract

This article delves into the multifaceted challenges confronting the preservation of Armenian identity within the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It investigates the pivotal role of community organizations and initiatives dedicated to safeguarding Armenian cultural heritage, while also addressing the complexities posed by the increasing prevalence of mixed marriages. Furthermore, the article scrutinizes the contributions of cultural, educational, and religious institutions in upholding Armenian identity, alongside the operational hurdles encountered by Armenian schools. Moreover, this research offers valuable insights into the formidable task of identity preservation and community cohesion confronting the Armenian diaspora in the UAE. By examining the extent to which Armenians in the UAE are assimilating, integrating, or experiencing segregation, this study aims to delineate potential areas for intervention and support to ensure the enduring vibrancy of the Armenian community.

Keywords: preserving, Identity, language, mixed marriages, repatriation, citizenship

Introduction

Outlining the significance of preserving Armenian identity in the UAE, drawing from historical contexts, and emphasizing the multi-dimensional nature of identity preservation.

The Armenian community in the UAE is a relatively recent addition, having been established in recent years. Despite its youth, the preservation of Armenian identity stands as a paramount concern for its members. This encompasses various dimensions, including national, social, civil, linguistic, religious, and cultural identity, as well as the community's rights and privileges within the UAE.

Over the past century, since the formation of traditional diaspora communities in the Near and Middle East during the 1920s-1930s, Armenian intellectuals, public

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figures, and political leaders who survived the genocide have consistently emphasized the challenges of preserving Armenian identity. They voiced concerns regarding the potential loss of traditions, customs, language, education, and upbringing, highlighting the ongoing struggle to maintain identity components.

It is important to note that Armenian communities across different regions grapple with the task of preserving their identity in diverse ways. As generations progress, the challenges evolve. For instance, while second-generation survivors in some regions face significant difficulties in maintaining their national identity,¹ in the Armenian communities of the Middle East, it is the fourth or fifth generation that shoulders this responsibility.

The challenges of identity preservation are not unique to the Armenian community. Globalization has brought forth widespread identity issues impacting various communities. Armenians, like many others, face similar challenges in maintaining their identity amidst globalization's influences. Consequently, well-established and active communities have developed mechanisms to safeguard their identity and its various aspects.²

In the context of the UAE specifically, the Armenian diaspora grapples with existential issues and a myriad of identity challenges. Globalization has led to the erosion of national values, an uptick in mixed marriages, decreased engagement in national-cultural and national ecclesiastical activities, and difficulties in preserving the Armenian language. Notably, the prevalence of mixed marriages extends beyond the Armenian community, resonating with other ethnic groups within UAE society, such as Filipinos,³ Americans, Indians,⁴ Arabs, and others, highlighting a shared experience among diverse communities.

Background:

Historical context on the formation of Armenian communities in the Gulf countries, highlighting the initial influx of Armenians and their contributions to the region's development.

The formation of Armenian communities in the Gulf countries traces back to the latter half of the 20th century. In the 1950s, with the onset of oil production, a few Armenians began working in the burgeoning oil companies in the region.

During the 1960s, a significant influx of young Armenians from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and, to a lesser extent, Jordan and Iraq, migrated to Sharjah-Dubai in pursuit of employment opportunities. This period marked the genesis of a burgeoning Armenian

¹ Sardaryan 2015: 81.

² Sardaryan 2015: 81.

³ Collier 2019.

⁴ Srinivas & Sekher 2013.

presence in the UAE, characterized by a strong work ethic and a sense of resilience amidst displacement.

In the 1960s, informal gathering spots like the Persian restaurant in Dubai served as focal points for young Armenian artisans. While the community lacked formal cohesion, Armenians demonstrated mutual interest and willingness to support one another in navigating the challenges of employment and settlement in a new cultural milieu. Additionally, some Armenians occasionally attended Catholic Indian Church services held near the Wadi Nile hotel in Dubai, indicating early attempts at maintaining religious and communal ties.

Despite being relatively unknown to the local Arab and expatriate communities in the region during the 1960s, Armenians garnered a positive reputation among Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese Arabs, both as hardworking, entrepreneurial individuals and skilled craftsmen. These established relationships played a crucial role in integrating Armenians into the local community, gradually fostering mutual respect and appreciation for Armenian contributions.

This current study aims to address gaps in knowledge by highlighting the lack of previous research or literature on the topic.

1. The National Identity of Armenians in the UAE Region

Factors shaping Armenian national identity, including historical roots, cultural influences, and perceptions of homeland among diaspora Armenians.

The Influence of Armenian Independence:

The independence of Armenia and statehood have shaped the political identity of Armenians in the UAE region, particularly among the younger generations.⁵ The significance of this influence not only within Armenia but also extends to the diaspora communities worldwide.

Factors Shaping National Identity

National identity, much like other forms of collective identity, is a dynamic and multifaceted concept influenced by a range of factors. These factors include significant differences in identity between individuals residing in their homeland and those in the diaspora. Key influences on national identity encompass historical roots, dialectal variations (such as Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian), and linguistic distinctions (between Armenian-speaking and non-Armenian-speaking communities). Additionally, historical memories, cultural symbols, preferences, work ethics, and moral values play crucial roles in shaping and defining national identity.⁶

⁵ Jebejian 2016.

⁶ Demirchyan 2013.

Furthermore, the diaspora has undergone diverse transformations, with the imprint of host countries and cultures evident in customs, cuisine, music, perceptions of Armenian identity, worldviews, and, notably, the sense of belonging within each community.⁷ This suggests that individuals from a single nation can harbor multiple “homelands,” indicating the existence of more than one fundamental national identity and sense of belonging.

For example, a member of the Armenian diaspora may perceive their homeland as their host country, their ancestral village in the Ottoman Empire, their birthplace in the Middle East (or elsewhere), their current country of residence or citizenship, Armenia itself, or the abstract notion of Armenia, often encompassing a combination of these identities. Despite the diversity and potential conflicts among these identities, a pervasive sense of Armenian belonging persists. In essence, a common bond unites various diaspora communities and connects the entire diaspora to Armenia, and vice versa.⁸ This phenomenon extends to Diaspora Armenians residing in the UAE.⁹

A noticeable trend in recent years is the burgeoning sense of national identity among Armenian youth. This entails a deepening connection to their homeland and a conviction that they belong to Armenia. An increasing awareness of this sense of belonging and its significance is observed among young Armenians. In this context, Armenia wields significant influence over the shaping of national identity, particularly among the younger generation.

Diversity within the Diaspora

The UAE is a melting pot of diverse nationalities, encompassing Armenians among its vibrant tapestry. Within this multicultural landscape, significant differences exist among various nationalities in terms of spiritual values, identities, historical narratives, religious beliefs, customs, and cultural practices. Each nationality brings its unique essence to the mosaic of the UAE’s cultural landscape.

Despite these differences, each nationality maintains its distinct national identity while enriching the UAE’s broader cultural fabric. This interplay of diverse identities and cultural contributions fosters a dynamic and inclusive society, where individuals from different backgrounds coexist and thrive.

Multiple “Homelands” and Sense of Belonging

Armenians in the UAE are dedicated to preserving their national identity amidst the country’s diverse cultural landscape. Unlike individuals from some other nationalities who may adopt Emirati citizenship and become known as Emirati nationals, Armenians

⁷ Panossian 2006: 316.

⁸ Panossian 2006.

⁹ Jebejian 2018.

in the UAE maintain their original nationality. They are not typically referred to as Emirati Armenians, unlike the naming convention for individuals from other countries such as Syrian Armenian, Lebanese Armenian, or Iraqi Armenian.

It is essential to recognize that Armenian communities across the diaspora are not uniform; each has its unique characteristics and experiences. However, what binds them together is their shared Armenian identity, which transcends geographical and cultural differences.

In contrast, the formation of identity in the United States provides an interesting parallel. The United States of America was established in the territories of the 13 former British colonies, lacking a distinct American nation and identity at its inception. Initially, “American” was primarily a geographical designation. The residents of the newly independent American republic hailed from diverse backgrounds, including English, French, Spanish, and representatives of indigenous peoples. Over time, these disparate groups coalesced into a collective identity as Americans, leading to the establishment of the United States of America, or simply America as the state's name.

This comparison underscores the complexity of identity formation and belonging, illustrating how different historical and cultural contexts shape individuals’ perceptions of their national identity.

2. Challenges in Preserving Armenian Identity in the Diaspora and the Armenian Community in the UAE

Internal and external challenges faced by the Armenian community in the UAE, such as mixed marriages, diminishing educational leadership, and assimilation pressures, integration, segregation and globalization

The challenges confronting the Armenian community in the UAE encompass various factors, including the issue of mixed marriages, which extends beyond the diaspora and is prevalent globally. Additionally, there exists a growing concern among experts regarding the Armenian presence in the Middle East.

It is crucial to acknowledge the substantial contributions made by Armenian communities in the Middle East over the years. These communities have served as bastions of Armenian culture, producing a wealth of educators, linguists, clergy, and other dedicated individuals proficient in Western Armenian, Armenian history, art, and more.¹⁰ Their influence has reverberated across the diaspora, particularly benefiting Armenian communities in the West, including those in Europe and America.¹¹

However, despite the historical stability of Armenian populations in countries like Syria and Lebanon, there has been a noticeable increase in emigration among Armenian specialists in recent years. This trend has resulted in a diminishing pool of Armenian experts and a decline in the quality of education and intellectual leadership within diaspora communities, including those in the USA, Europe, and the UAE.

¹⁰ Mkrtumyan 2023.

¹¹ Sayegh 2015.

Consequently, there is a pressing shortage of Armenian language instructors and specialists, posing a significant challenge to the preservation of Armenian identity.

In the context of the Armenian diaspora in the UAE, numerous challenges are encountered, mirroring those faced by diaspora communities globally. These challenges include:

Assimilation: Evidence suggests minimal voluntary assimilation among Armenians in the UAE, indicating resilience against societal pressures and structural inequalities. Consequently, there is limited adoption of Emirati cultural practices, language, and social norms among the Armenian community, preserving their cultural identity over time.

Integration: Armenians in the UAE actively maintain their cultural heritage, balancing participation in broader society with the preservation of their distinct identity, language, religion, and customs. Integration involves engaging with Emirati society while safeguarding their Armenian heritage.

The Armenian community in the UAE has seamlessly adapted to the dynamic changes brought about by the country's rapid development and modernization, doing so without external pressures to assimilate. This unique integration has allowed Armenians to engage fully in the life of the UAE while preserving their distinct cultural identity.

Cultural Integration: Armenians in the UAE maintain a strong sense of cultural heritage, actively participating in the country's cultural, social, and economic spheres. By doing so, they enrich the larger Emirati community with their unique traditions and values, contributing to a multicultural society while fostering ties with their own heritage.¹²

Economic Participation: The Armenian community has made substantial economic contributions to the UAE, particularly in the realms of business, trade, and specialized professional services.¹³ Many Armenian entrepreneurs¹⁴ and professionals bring diverse expertise to the UAE's economy, fostering growth and innovation across various sectors.¹⁵

¹² A celebration of Armenian art in Abu Dhabi Artists take inspiration from social and political shifts as well as personal identity <https://bit.ly/3ZRI1IH>, Anna Seaman, May 19, 2015.

¹³ Organic produce straight from the UAE's greenest of farms, <https://bit.ly/4fhsH5c>, Feb 01, 2013. <https://bit.ly/4fgrLOR> – pdf <https://bit.ly/4fgWlrd> – pdf

¹⁴ Manar Al Hinai's talks with local entrepreneur entrepreneur Dr. Rocco Arzoumanian, <https://bit.ly/3ZTMBYl>, 24 Jan 2017

¹⁵ Dikran Tchablakian becomes owner and CEO of combined retail businesses in the UAE, <https://bit.ly/4gbzdf5>, May 17, 2010: Digital lifestyle is more of a necessity today, <https://bit.ly/4gdWpJx> September 12, 2013: Dikran Tchablakian, <https://bit.ly/49BLiI0> / April 17, 2013. Sayegh, A. and Menkechian (Mangassarian) Ch., Report: "The Online Presence of the Armenian Community in the UAE", presented at the Haigazian Conference on "Armenians of the Arab Gulf Countries" at Haigazian University on December 6, 2022. Haigazian University Press 2024, Armenian Diaspora Research Center – Armenian Diaspora VIII, p. 217 <https://bit.ly/4fgrLOR> – pdf <https://bit.ly/4fgWlrd> – pdf

In summary, the Armenians of the UAE exemplify a balanced integration, blending active contributions to Emirati society with a deep commitment to preserving their national identity and heritage. This dual dedication highlights a thriving cultural resilience, allowing Armenians to flourish in their new environment while maintaining close ties to their roots.

Segregation: Social isolation, inequality, and segregation are notably absent within the Armenian diaspora in the UAE. Armenians, alongside individuals of other nationalities, share educational spaces, fostering inclusivity and community integration. Minimal barriers to social and economic integration contribute to a cohesive communal experience.

Globalism: The interconnectedness of nations and peoples worldwide impacts the Armenian diaspora in the UAE in various ways. Globalism facilitates cultural exchange, exposing Armenians to diverse influences within the UAE's multicultural environment. Access to international economic opportunities contributes to socio-economic integration, albeit accompanied by challenges such as competition and market fluctuations. Mobility and migration foster exposure to different cultures, languages, and lifestyles, shaping Armenian perspectives and identities. Technological advancements enable diaspora Armenians to maintain connections with their homeland and global communities, fostering transnational identities and networks.

Identity Preservation: Identity challenges within the Armenian diaspora are influenced by external factors as well as internal dynamics. These internal struggles compound external challenges, heightening the complexities of identity preservation.

In conclusion, while the shortage of staff in educational institutions presents a notable obstacle to the preservation of Armenian culture, Armenian day-schools in the UAE demonstrate commendable efforts in navigating these challenges and preserving Armenian cultural heritage within the diaspora.

3. Characteristics of the Armenian Population in the UAE (Based on Their Countries of Origin)

The demographic composition and societal integration of Armenians in the UAE, emphasizing unique community dynamics and historical ties.

The Armenian community in the UAE traces its roots back to the 1960s¹⁶ when young Armenians from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and, to a lesser extent, Jordan and Iraq, sought opportunities in Sharjah and Dubai for the betterment of their families. These early settlers brought with them the rich traditions and strong communal bonds characteristic of the diaspora experience. Many had first-hand experience with union work and were influenced by the spirit of pan-Armenian unity fostered during the national awakening of the 1970s and the advocacy efforts of the Armenian National Committee. These positive influences played a crucial role in organizing and uniting the

¹⁶ Menkechian (Mangassarian) 2022: 47-48.

community without divisions, setting a unique precedent in diaspora history. Armenian traditions continue to be upheld and passed down through families within the Armenian colonies of the UAE and beyond.

The unity of the Armenian community in the UAE is notable for its departure from the typical formations seen in other diaspora communities. While Armenian communities elsewhere often coalesce around patriotic associations and political parties, the situation in the UAE differs. Here, community organization is primarily under the religious umbrella of the Armenian Apostolic Church. This distinction is fundamental and shapes the collective identity of Armenians in the UAE.

Unlike diaspora communities in other regions, such as Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, where patriotic unions and cultural associations play significant roles, the Armenian community in the UAE lacks such formal groups. Instead, civil society frameworks exist within the community, albeit with restrictions and influences from certain quarters.¹⁷ Instead, civil society frameworks exist within the community, albeit with restrictions and influences from certain quarters¹⁸. Despite these differences, all Armenians in the UAE, regardless of their party affiliations in their home countries, are eligible to participate in community elections and committees since 1977, demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity and representation.

Under the rights of national minorities, all minority groups in the UAE are referred to by their religious affiliation or nationality. For example, the Christian community is known as the Christian Armenians in the Arab press.

In the UAE, Armenians are officially recognized as the Armenian Church-Armenian community (Al-Knise Al-Armeniye lil Chelie Al-Armeniye - the literal translation from Arabic). Operating within the historical and national constitutional framework, the Armenian community in the UAE is represented and governed by the spiritual-religious authority, which also serves as its representative to the state.

The absence of formal political party structures or overt ideological influences within the Armenian community in the UAE¹⁹ underscores its unique character. Individual ideological and party affiliations remain personal convictions, exerting no mandatory conditions on collective community life. However, it is acknowledged that ideological influences may be transmitted within families, particularly for individuals born to parents from countries with strong political affiliations.

Efforts to preserve Armenian identity in the UAE primarily revolve around the activities of churches and cultural institutions. While cultural events may be infrequent, weekly Sunday Masses serve as important communal gatherings.²⁰ However, living and working conditions in the UAE differ significantly from those in individuals' countries of

¹⁷ Dakessian 2016.

¹⁸ Dakessian, Antranik, "Globalization and changing identity", interview on YouTube (Armenian), boontvofficial, boon.am, <http://tinyurl.com/mr3da4ny>, Erevan, 2016

¹⁹ "UAE Armenian Community" website, www.emahay.com

²⁰ Kochunian 2015.

origin, leading to migration and settlement in the UAE for many Armenians. Despite the transient nature of residency in the UAE, some Armenians have established deep roots in the country over several decades, integrating into civil and domestic life.

Despite the lack of a pathway to citizenship for diaspora immigrants in the UAE, individuals adapt and navigate their circumstances, often with plans to migrate elsewhere for citizenship benefits or familial reasons. Ultimately, individuals of any nationality will find ways to thrive and adapt within the contexts they find themselves in, whether in their homeland, diaspora communities, or temporary residencies like the UAE.

4. Interfaith Marriages in the Armenian Community of the UAE

The prevalence and implications of mixed marriages within the Armenian community, addressing legal frameworks, cultural considerations, and community responses.

The prevalence of mixed marriages in the UAE is increasing, not only within the Armenian community but also among Emirati men marrying foreign women. According to data from the Federal National Council (FNC), 57 percent of marriages in recent years in the UAE were mixed marriages.²¹ This trend is observed not only among Armenians but also across the UAE among residents from diverse backgrounds. The conducive working conditions and opportunities for establishing connections in the UAE have facilitated the formation of relationships between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, leading to a rise in mixed marriages.

In 2021, Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, introduced Law No. 14 of 2021, which legalized civil marriage for the first time in the region. Civil marriage is currently available only in Abu Dhabi²² and is open to individuals of any religious affiliation, except for local Emiratis. This landmark legislation has provided an alternative avenue for couples to formalize their unions,²³ supplementing traditional church weddings and state-registered civil marriages.²⁴

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in mixed marriages within the Armenian community of the UAE. Approximately 70 percent of church marriages now involve couples from different cultural backgrounds, while the remaining 30 percent comprise marriages between two Armenian individuals. These mixed marriages have led to the formation of new families, with many enrolling their children in Armenian schools, such as the kindergarten and preschool of the “Ohanessian” day school. The

²¹ “Residence visa for working in the UAE”, <http://tinyurl.com/y5tndy4b>, U.ae (previously government.ae) is the official portal of the UAE Government, launched in May 2011.

²² “Abu Dhabi Civil Family Court”, “Civil Marriage”, Article (4) and (5) of Law №14 of 2021, <https://bit.ly/4gA3xj9>.

²³ “Abu Dhabi Civil Family Court”, “Civil Marriage”, Article (4) and (5) of Law №14 of 2021, <https://bit.ly/4gA3xj9>.

²⁴ <https://www.adjd.gov.ae/en/Pages/CivilFamilyCourt.aspx>.

growing presence of young mixed-marriage families is viewed positively by community leaders.

Mixed marriages within the Armenian community encompass unions between Arab Christians and Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, or Evangelical couples, as well as couples consisting of an Armenian individual and a foreign Christian from various regions. In the UAE, individuals seeking marriage are required to submit an application to the municipal authority and declare their intent to marry. Legal requirements for civil marriage licenses are fulfilled by some couples, followed by church ceremonies to confirm and bless the marriage.

Armenian churches in the UAE conduct weddings for individuals of the Christian faith, irrespective of their Armenian heritage, with the couple receiving a marriage certificate afterward. Many couples prefer to have church ceremonies in different countries, and there is a growing trend of diaspora Armenian couples choosing to wed in Armenia.

Armenian couples of the Armenian Catholic faith can marry without discrimination in Armenian Apostolic Churches in the UAE, with the option of involving non-Armenian Catholic clergy in the ceremony. However, Armenian couples from Armenia must present a state-certified civil marriage certificate to marry in Armenian Apostolic Churches in the UAE.

It is important to note that in the UAE and within the Armenian Church, there are no religious marriages between Islam and Christianity, unlike in some other parts of the world. While there is no official information about marriages between Armenian and Muslim couples within the Armenian community of the UAE, such unions are not confirmed.

For additional details, you can find information about the population percentages in the UAE here.²⁵

In conclusion, mixed marriages present both challenges and opportunities for the Armenian community of the UAE. While they contribute to cultural diversity and the formation of new families, efforts to preserve Armenian identity remain crucial. The Armenian Church plays a central role in maintaining cultural heritage and spiritual connections among Armenians in the UAE, serving as a vital anchor for the community's identity in the diaspora.

5. Internal Processes of Maintaining Identity

Educational initiatives and cultural institutions driving Armenian identity preservation in the UAE, highlighting the role of language, religion, and community engagement.

The Armenian community in the UAE has made concerted efforts to cultivate a sense of patriotism and cultural belonging among the younger generation. Religious and

²⁵ Same link as mentioned above. The standard civil marriage fee is 300 AED (USD 81.69). The express marriage service at a cost of AED 2,500 (USD 680.71). 2021

national leaders, along with educational and cultural institutions, have collaborated to ensure that children maintain strong ties to their homeland and develop a desire to contribute positively to their nation.

At the forefront of shaping identity within the Armenian community is the Armenian School in the UAE. This educational institution serves as a primary hub for fostering a strong bond between family and society. Teachers play a pivotal role in fulfilling the mission of education, with language holding particular significance in shaping national identity, especially for smaller nations like Armenians.

The Armenian day schools in the UAE have a clear mission to teach the Armenian language, which is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of national identity. While some may argue that language is intrinsically tied to identity, it's important to recognize that this notion is not absolute, particularly for Diaspora Armenians. The Arab world provides a pertinent example, where diverse national identities coexist despite sharing a common language. Nonetheless, language remains a vital conduit for connecting individuals with their nation's history, culture, and values, fostering a sense of national consciousness.²⁶

Armenian education and language will continue to be prioritized within the community,²⁷ as they equip individuals with the knowledge and awareness necessary to engage with national issues and uphold their cultural identity. This commitment to Armenian education dates back to the establishment of the first National Administrations in Dubai-Sharjah and Abu Dhabi in 1980, ensuring that Armenian students in the diaspora receive quality education despite living outside their homeland.

Generous contributions from community leaders and benefactors have been instrumental in the development of Armenian educational infrastructure in the UAE. His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi's donation of land for the construction of the first Armenian Apostolic Church in Sharjah²⁸ and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed's support for building an Armenian church in Abu Dhabi exemplify the commitment to preserving Armenian culture and heritage.

In recognition of community benefactors, such as Mr. and Mrs. Harout Ohannesian and Mr. Ara Khanoyian, the Armenian Community Council constructed its own school building within the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church complex in 1998.²⁹ The opening of the St. Nahadagadz Armenian church complex in Abu Dhabi in 2016,³⁰ along with the establishment of the Ara Khanoyan National One-Day Armenian School, further underscore the dedication to Armenian education and identity preservation in the UAE.

²⁶ Kurtoghlian 2018.

²⁷ Kurtoghlian 2018.

²⁸ Kurtoghlian 2018.

²⁹ "New Church a Haven for Abu Dhabi's Armenian Population", "The National News", <https://bit.ly/3BwOuli>, Jan 04, 2015.

³⁰ "Sheikh Nahyan opens Armenian Church in Abu Dhabi", May 07, 2016, "The National News", <https://bit.ly/3BwOuli>

In conclusion, the Armenian day-schools in the UAE play a vital role in nurturing Armenian identity and culture. These educational institutions serve as pillars of the community, ensuring the continued existence and vibrancy of the Armenian people in the diaspora.

6. The Role of Armenian Churches in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, UAE, in Preserving Identity

The significance of Armenian churches as cultural and religious centers emphasizes their role in fostering community cohesion and continuity.

The church stands as a pivotal institution within the diaspora, wielding significant influence in preserving the Armenian identity for over a century. Its enduring commitment and steadfast dedication underscore its indispensable role.³¹

In the UAE, where movement and change are constants, both church structures and educational institutions have emerged as bastions of the Armenian community, unwavering in their mission to safeguard Armenian identity.

Armenian communities across the diaspora, including those in the UAE, grapple with the imperative of survival, acutely aware of the looming threat of assimilation. Amidst this challenge, the Armenian Apostolic churches in the UAE, along with their associated national complexes, serve as vital religious and national hubs for Armenians. These institutions stand as bulwarks against cultural erosion, diligently preserving the essence of Armenian identity in the diaspora.

As pillars of strength and resilience, Armenian churches in the UAE provide not only spiritual solace but also serve as focal points for communal unity and cultural continuity. Through their unwavering commitment to upholding Armenian traditions and values, these churches instill a sense of belonging and pride among diaspora Armenians, reinforcing their collective identity in the face of external pressures.

7. External Factors Contributing to Armenian Identity Preservation

The influence of Armenia-UAE connections, citizenship policies, and technological advancements in sustaining Armenian identity in the diaspora.

The link between the Armenian community in the UAE and Armenia stands as a bulwark for the preservation of their national identity. Facilitating the opportunity for Diaspora Armenians to acquire Armenian citizenship has been instrumental in fostering a deep-rooted connection to their ancestral homeland, identity, and heritage. Granting citizenship to Diaspora Armenians through constitutional provisions has played a pivotal role in safeguarding their identity and affirming their rightful belonging to the homeland.³²

³¹ Tchilingirian 2023.

³² Kandaharian 2016.

8. Recommendations for Sustaining Armenian Identity in the UAE and Diaspora

Provides practical suggestions for maintaining Armenian identity, including cultural integration, technological innovation, repatriation incentives, and community engagement.

It is imperative to consistently integrate cultural diversity and national perspectives into the fabric of all diaspora communities, including the Armenian community in the UAE.³³

Embracing modern technology presents a promising avenue for upholding Armenian identity, particularly for Diaspora Armenians. Utilizing contemporary technological platforms enables individuals to maintain strong ties with Armenia while engaging in remote work opportunities, thus preserving their connection to their heritage.

However, it is essential to supplement online interactions with offline networking and recognition forums to foster deeper engagement.³⁴

Repatriation is often viewed as a commitment to the preservation of Armenian identity. In recent years, Armenian families residing in the UAE have increasingly chosen to relocate to Armenia, while others opt to send their children to countries like Canada **for higher education, aiming to eventually obtain citizenship**. These trends raise pertinent questions about identity dynamics within the UAE diaspora. Furthermore, **some Armenian families in the UAE opt to send their children to pursue higher education in Armenia, further reinforcing their connection to their homeland**.

Living in the diaspora, particularly in the UAE, presents unique challenges, including the issue of integration into the host environment. However, it is essential to acknowledge that individual experiences vary, shaped by personal choices and environmental influences. Thus, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to navigating identity preservation within the diaspora context.

Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize the crucial importance of safeguarding Armenian identity amidst the challenges posed by globalization, underscoring the indispensable role of community institutions and strategic planning.

In light of the intricate challenges outlined in the research paper “Armenian Cultural Heritage in the UAE: Strategies and Challenges for Identity Preservation”, it is evident that preserving Armenian identity stands as a paramount endeavour amid a myriad of complex obstacles. These challenges, ranging from mixed marriages and dwindling educational leadership to assimilation, integration dynamics, segregation

³³ Tenbelian 2023.

³⁴ Kalsahakian 2023.

concerns, and the overarching forces of globalization, emphasize the urgent need for concerted efforts to preserve cultural heritage and foster community cohesion. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of these challenges, it becomes increasingly clear that community institutions must play a pivotal role in cultivating resilience and strategic foresight. By confronting these challenges directly and implementing proactive measures, the Armenian diaspora in the UAE and beyond can navigate the complexities of identity preservation while charting a course toward sustained cultural vitality and collective resilience.

The Armenian community in the UAE demonstrates a remarkable balance of resilience and adaptability amid the evolving challenges and transformations of the 21st century. With strong community structures and a commitment to cultural preservation, Armenians in the UAE have integrated effectively within Emirati society while maintaining their unique identity. The emergence of new community groups, as well as patterns of emigration and immigration, reflect a dynamic, evolving Armenian presence that not only strengthens internal bonds but also enhances their role in the UAE's multicultural society. Through their contributions to the social, economic, and cultural landscape of the UAE, Armenians continue to play a vital role in enriching the nation's diverse cultural fabric, bridging their heritage with the collective growth of their adopted homeland.

In the diverse landscape of the UAE, efforts to preserve Armenian identity and strengthen Armenian culture are observed through revitalized Armenia-Diaspora connections and the cultivation of Diaspora national-cultural identity. Just as other Armenian communities endeavour to uphold their cultural and religious heritage, the Armenian community in the UAE serves as a bastion of religious, educational, and cultural values, contributing to the social fabric of the nation. Nonetheless, this remains an ongoing challenge for Diaspora Armenians.

Despite the transient nature of residency in the UAE, where citizenship remains elusive for most, the Armenian identity perseveres through the efforts of the church, educational institutions, and cultural initiatives. While the presence of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE plays a moral role to some extent, the enduring maintenance of Armenian identity rests on the resilience of community institutions.

In a world marked by migration and geopolitical shifts, religion continues to serve as a unifying force, especially in conservative countries like those in the Middle East. As Armenians navigate these complexities, preserving their identity remains a paramount concern, requiring steadfast dedication and strategic foresight.

The UAE is a unique model for integration, as it hosts an exceptionally diverse array of communities from around the world while maintaining a structured approach that allows people to retain and celebrate their unique cultural identities. Unlike many nations where integration may blur or blend cultural distinctions, the UAE provides a supportive environment that encourages communities to engage with their heritage, often with the help of local institutions and government-sponsored initiatives that promote cultural diversity.

Thus, while cultural preservation amidst integration presents challenges, the UAE's multicultural ethos, coupled with proactive community-led efforts, creates a resilient structure through which Armenian and other different communities not only integrate but thrive, celebrating their heritage and ensuring it endures for future generations.

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