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Will the Saudi's 2030 Vision Raise the Public Awareness of Sustainable Practices?

^aMohammed S. Al Surf*, ^bLobna A. Mostafa^a*Effat University, Jeddah 21478, Saudi Arabia*^b*Effat University, Jeddah 21478, Saudi Arabia, Menia University, Menia, Egypt*

Abstract

Public awareness on the concepts of sustainable practices has been the main challenge in the way of better, healthier, affordable and environmentally sound urban projects. Lack of public awareness fueled by the lack of interest by stakeholders developed a vicious cycle, hence delaying the gears of the sustainable development in Saudi Arabia. In the other hand, societies that adopt the sustainability concepts succeed in many ways to accomplish their national development plans. This paper will focus on the current status of the public awareness levels after an initial study that showed that more than 52 percent of the sample from Saudi public doesn't know what is the meaning of sustainable cities. The research method will be of a qualitative nature utilizing on-line surveys to collect responses from a wide range of the Saudi society. The outcomes show that in the past five years (2010-2015), the level of awareness has increased but at a discouraging rate. It is the main recommendation of this paper to further increase the collaborative efforts from all Saudi stakeholders; authorities, universities and civil society following the new 2030 Saudi vision to help raising the public awareness on the importance of leading and applying the core means of sustainability within their cities in design, construction and life style itself while Saudi Arabia is undergoing huge development.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +966504740023; fax: +966126377447.

E-mail address: moalsurf@effatuniversity.edu.sa

1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a core of interest in late Modernity and Postmodernity. One of the main pillars for sustainability is the people, individuals, groups and communities. Those capable of producing cultural expressions of their inner dynamics, both of an immaterial and of a material nature. Thus, peoples' capacity for aggregating translated into groups, communities, societies, institutions and organizations. Civil societies and social movements and the ways in which these patterns percolate across the world are presenting, beside others, some of the main stakeholders who plan, run and affect the sustainable development process. Stakeholders include community members, civil societies and authorities, play many roles that obstruct from pushing the sustainable development's plans forward, and holding them back.

Saudi Arabia is one of the developing countries in the Middle East and Gulf region who created its own development plans, believing that implementation of sustainability would be easier as the country is still undertaken the development process while the construction rate is higher than ever. Within this process many issues are raised; the integration of local material and the methodology of how the historical buildings were built must be considered together to achieve the full outcome of having sustainable and affordable buildings, the use of natural resources. Lately, in June 2016, as the new Saudi Vision 2030 was formally approved and announced, local engineering bodies and the government started working together to legislate the concept of sustainability in order to secure the future generations. The understanding and knowledge of the community regarding the concept of sustainability and how it can be applied is also crucial to the success of the implementation.

“Saudi Vision 2030 is a wide-ranging privatization and economic reform program that aims to reposition the Kingdom's economy away from its dependence on oil export revenues and Government spending. It encompasses strategic objectives, targets, outcome-oriented indicators and commitments that are to be achieved by the public, private and non-profit sectors in the Kingdom. Some of the more ambitious targets cited in Saudi Vision 2030 include:

- Cutting the Kingdom's dependence on sale of hydrocarbons by 2020 through the development of non-oil sectors;
- Increasing the Kingdom's overall non-oil government revenue from SR163 billion (\$43.5 billion) to SR600 billion by 2020, increasing it further to SR1 trillion by 2030;
- Increasing the private sector's contribution from 40% to 65% of GDP; and
- Raising the Kingdom's share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from the current 16% to 50%.” (Almasoud, 2016)

Due to rapid expansion in population in urban area and increasingly higher inflation rates of the economy, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is going through a vigorous transition stage concerning the infrastructure, with particular emphasis on residential housing (Taleb & Sharples, 2011). While “Urbanization in the Arab region has been fueled by high fertility rates, substantial rural-urban migration, international labor migration and the concentration of economic activity in urban areas”, El-Batran (2008).Timewell (2011) Agrees that the high urbanization rate is fueled by the high rate of urban and population growth with great expansion in major cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah. But fortunately, this expansion is coupled with various kinds of economic development. This helps by attracting investments in major cities and other growth centers.

Rapid growth in cities around Saudi Arabia has led to several dilemmas that have risen from the late 1970's during the “oil boom phase” (Garba, 2004, 593). The resulting problem due to the immense growth of that period resulted in the demand for services from residents were much greater than what the government could respond to. Gamboa (2008) states a cause of this problem which is the use of no-interest loans. Saudi Arabia, which experience a rapid rate of urbanization, government departments should implement the concept of sustainability and enforce laws and regulations. In the case of Saudi Arabia, as well as many other developing countries, economics is not the only issue. The quickly diminishing availability of resources must also be considered. Potential methods that may be applied to sustainable projects in Saudi Arabia include the full use of the site design and optimum orientation, passive ventilation design, natural lighting and harvesting solar energy.

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