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Sustainable Socio-Cultural Guidelines for Neighborhood Design in Jeddah

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Abstract

The current paper¹ aims at developing a set of design guidelines that promotes the concept of socially sustainable neighbourhoods in Saudi Arabia. Nowadays, several rating systems and urban design codes around the world set guidelines for urban design development and particularly in neighbourhood design. The research problem is; these rating systems cannot be applied in the context of Saudi Arabia without considering its local social and cultural aspects. The paper resulted as a reaction to the abbreviation of socio-cultural aspects in neighbourhood design approaches. The paper presents a set of design guidelines adjusted to fit the context of Jeddah City.

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1. Introduction and research problem

The population growth and the urban neighbourhood development in the cities around the world are inevitable. Today, many neighbourhoods around the world are suffering from several problems. These problems affected the culture, social interaction, economic aspects as well as environmental impacts. Accordingly, urban development should address social and cultural aspects of each particular community within the environmental and economic contexts.

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Recently, new neighbourhood design approaches and systems are emerging to address neighbourhood problems. These approaches and systems appeared to guide city planners and developers to better address nowadays problems with solutions. A well-known design approach is Sustainable Neighbourhood Development. One example of Sustainable Neighbourhood Development is New-Urbanism. The concept and principles of New-Urbanism approach were adapted by some noted international rating systems such as LEED for neighbourhood development. Other notable regional assessment tools are Pearl in UAE and QSAS in Qatar.

Previous studies raised several important points. On one hand; traditional ways of design in the Middle East and West have better addressed their own cultures and natural environments. On the other hand since the modern period in 1950; Middle Eastern design approaches specifically in KSA followed Western foreign ways of design. Moreover; the modern period presented influential aspects causing severe harm to the built environment of Saudi Arabia. Many opposition attempts to modern approaches towards sustainability appeared; abbreviating socio-cultural aspects and became environmentally oriented to Western environments. Due to the previous; regional attempts have emerged aiming to address their own socio-cultural aspects and climatic conditions.

Saudi Arabia is considered the largest country in the Gulf region. The large area of the kingdom includes various types of topography, climatic conditions, social and cultural aspects¹. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was divided into four main regions, each having its own socio-cultural and environmental significance; due to its large area². The central region (Najdi Model) includes the capital of KSA; Riyadh city. Western region (Red Sea Basin Model – Hejazi Model) that includes an important commercial trade sea port and a gate of the two holy mosques; Jeddah city³. The Eastern region (Arabian Gulf Model-Shargawi Model) which hosts most of the petroleum industry in the kingdom⁴. The final region is the Southern region (Al-Sarah Model).

In a society such as Saudi Arabian society, socio-cultural aspects are major considerations. The term socio-cultural aspects combine both social and cultural factors which indicate "the unity between society and culture which forms a system or set of rules that govern the human behaviour of a group of people"⁵. Socio-cultural in relation to the built physical environment; the physical environment should be designed according to a set of rules that reflect and respect the culture of inhabitants to increase social relationships and interactions.

Saudi design approaches are still following Western approaches which may cause lack of socio-cultural aspects and climatic considerations to continue in the design of Saudi neighborhoods. In brief; current neighborhoods are not related to the socio-cultural aspects of Saudi communities which correspondently made it socially unsustainable.

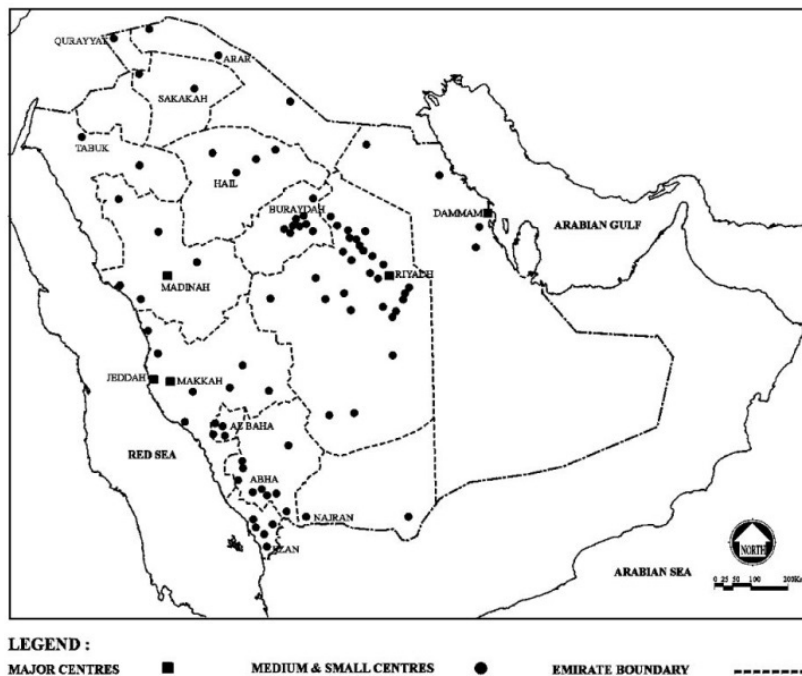


Fig. 1. Major Urban Areas in The Kingdom⁶

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