

المعهد العربي لإنماء المدن
Arab Urban Development Inst.

SEVENTH ISSUE
NOVEMBER, 2024

BY THE ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

PUBLIC MARKETS AS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DRIVERS IN CITIES

THE INTERVIEW
His Excellency the Mayor of Muscat, Ahmed Al Humaidi, speaks from his experience in managing Public Markets in the City of Muscat

URBAN INSIGHTS
Experts' insights on Public markets and their significance
Toolkits for Planning and Managing Urban Markets

CITIES IN ACTION
Projects and Initiatives in Arab Cities on the Management of Public Markets

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SEVENTH ISSUE

PUBLIC MARKETS AS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DRIVERS IN CITIES

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EDITORIAL

PUBLIC MARKETS IN ARAB CITIES: BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

By Dr. Anas Almughairy - Director General

Public markets have always been at the heart of Arab cities, embodying their rich heritage and the essence of their cultural and historical legacy. They are not merely venues for commerce but spaces where life unfolds, communities connect, and local traditions and economies thrive. As Arab cities undergo rapid urban transformations, the challenges faced by such vital spaces become more apparent. This sparks further questions and unveils critical facts. How can we preserve the authenticity of our historic markets? Simultaneously, how can they adapt to meet the demands of contemporary urban life?

While public markets celebrate traditions across Arab cities, they are also actively addressing modern day challenges. Cities are making concerted efforts to adopt sustainability and community engagement principles. These concepts highlight the significance of these spaces, treating them as vital hubs that bridge rural economies with urban consumers, promote environmentally responsible trade practices, and foster inclusivity and social bonds.

Historical markets are not only architectural marvels but also living testaments to a shared heritage. They underscore the essential role of municipalities in supporting restoration and revitalization projects while preserving these spaces' historical and economic vitality. These markets connect us to the past, reminding us that their success stories are not solely rooted in physical infrastructure but also in the human interactions and exchanges that make them unique. They demonstrate how the interplay of tradition and modernity can create functional and cultural spaces, transforming them into vibrant centers of daily life.

However, traditional markets face intense competition from modern shopping centers and digital platforms. For these markets to flourish, they must embrace modernization while emphasizing their inherent strengths in cultural diversity and community richness. Undoubtedly, digitization presents innovative opportunities for traditional markets by enhancing their efficiency, operational capacity, and integration

into supportive virtual platforms. These advancements ensure their sustainability and relevance within the rapidly evolving urban landscapes of our contemporary cities.

In this edition of MUDUNUNA, we highlight the efforts and challenges of Arab cities in organizing and developing their markets and commercial activities. We feature an exclusive interview of the Mayor of Muscat, His Highness Mr. Ahmed Al-Humaidi, about his experience managing public markets in the city. This issue also includes a thought-provoking article by Mr. David K. O'Neil, a global leader in public market revitalization, who discusses the rejuvenation of markets in today's cities. Additionally, Dr. Ali Ismail delves into the exceptional efforts by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and Aleppo Municipality in restoring the historic Souq Saqatiyeh. Dr. Mansour Al-Assaf explores the evolution of public markets in Riyadh. Furthermore, the Cities in Action section, that features various cases and experiences of cities in managing, reviving, and renewing public markets across the region, including cities such as Beirut, Ramallah, Sohar, Sfax, and Hofuf.

We are also pleased to spotlight the activities of the Arab Urban Development Institute over the past two months. The institute had a notable presence at the 12th World Urban Forum (WUF12) in Cairo this year, hosting networking sessions and discussions. It participated in the accompanying Urban Expo, inviting Arab and global organizations and cities to join its initiatives, fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and partnerships. During the forum, the institute signed several formal partnerships, including agreements with the Egyptian Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities, the Housing and Building National Research Center, the Urban Training and Studies Institute, and Metropolis - an international network of major cities.

Recent partnerships include a significant collaboration with Bloomberg Philanthropies for the "Global Mayors Challenge " initiative, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR International) to enhance municipal capacities, and Technical University Dortmund for research and knowledge exchange. The institute also participated in the Livable CitiesX Summit at Dubai's Big5Global exhibition. During the visit, the Institute signed a cooperation agreement with Ajman Municipality and Planning Department, and held an introductory meeting with the Executive Director of Expo City Dubai.

Moreover, we are excited to announce a momentous event, the "Arab European Cities Dialogue" Forum (AECD). This pioneering initiative invites mayors from various Arab and European cities to engage in high-level discussions in the host city of Riyadh. The forum aims to foster the exchange of ideas, practices, and experiences, facilitating networking and cooperation between Arab and European cities and between cities and international financial institutions. During the Cairo World Urban Forum, the initiative was formalized through a memorandum of cooperation signed with Platforma and VNG International, in the presence of His Highness the Mayor of Riyadh, the Mayor of Utrecht, the Mayor of Nouakchott, and other international institutions.

As for training and capacity-building, the institute successfully implemented the second phase of its "Executive Program in Innovation and Urban Management" (EPIUM) in partnership with SALAR International in Stockholm, Sweden. It also conducted specialized training workshops for Arab municipalities in Muscat and Najran.

INTERVIEW

MAYOR OF MUSCAT
AHMED AL HUMAIDI

In dialogue about Muscat's experience with Public Markets

Mayor of Muscat Municipality since February 2022, His Excellency brings over 22 years of extensive experience in real estate, investments, communications, project management, and business development. He has held several positions at "Muscat National Development and Investment Company" including as CEO from 2021 to 2022, Director of Development, Director of Supply Chain and Procurement, Director of Corporate Communication and Marketing, and General Manager of Asset Management. He also served as the General Manager of "Taameer Investments," a subsidiary of the Golden Group Holding, from 2014 to 2018. He was a member of several boards, including the "Muscat Securities Market" from 2011 to 2014, and participated in the National Program for Bracing the Economic Diversity "TANFEEDH" in 2016. He holds a Master's degree in Business Administration, Management, and Marketing from the University of Hull.



Photo: His Excellency Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Humaidi, Mayor of Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman and Muscat in particular are of great importance as an important economic hubs linking the markets of Asia, Africa and the Middle Eas. Commercial activity and Economic diversity have contributed to shaping Muscat's urban identity. In this issue of MUDUNUNA, that focuses on the management of urban markets and commercial activities, we interview His Excellency Mr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Humaidi, Mayor of Muscat, to share the municipality's efforts in this domain.

Based on Muscat's experience, how do you see the importance of urban business activities and the role they can play in driving economic development in cities?

Urban business activities play a vital role in driving economic development in cities, and this is evident from the experience of Muscat and other cities. The importance of these activities can be summarized in several key points, including promoting innovation and competitiveness, as cities and capitals represent an ideal environment for spreading innovation by encouraging interaction between companies and consumers, which enhances innovation and competitiveness in the market.

In the capital, Muscat, an improvement can be seen at the level of business services, such as e-commerce, and an increase in diversification in trade offerings, which increases market efficiency and stimulates business growth, which in turn contributes to the diversification of the local economy through key sectors such as tourism, trade, education, and health.

Urban business activities represent a key pillar in driving the economic development of cities by promoting economic diversification, creating jobs, improving infrastructure, and increasing investments. These activities play a pivotal role in strengthening Muscat's position on the economic and social front, as a prosperous and vibrant modern urban city, that is viewed as a successful model for many cities seeking to develop their business activities and diversify their economy. Citizens and residents of Muscat Governorate witness the diversity of economic activities, which makes the city more resilient to economic fluctuations and enhances its ability to attract tourists and investors. In addition to stimulating local and international investment, urban areas are usually an attractive center for both local and foreign investments. By encouraging business activities, local and foreign capital is attracted in various sectors, such as retail, tourism, and small and medium industries. As the capital of the Sultanate, Muscat is considered a magnet for investments through large-scale commercial and tourism projects such as retail complexes and modern tourist facilities.

Urban commercial activities are not only limited to economic aspects but have a significant impact on the social fabric, as they contribute to the development of society by providing places for communication and entertainment, such as commercial complexes and markets, as well as being a center for cultural exchange at the local and international level.

The Municipality plays an important role in monitoring markets, whether in terms of price control, food safety and licensing. What are the main challenges it faces in this regard, and what are the ways to deal with them?

Municipalities play a pivotal role in monitoring markets, especially in terms of food safety and regulation of licenses, as these tasks are considered to be one of their inherent competencies, in order for them to maintain the health and safety of consumers. However, price control is not part of the municipality's tasks, as other governmental bodies play this role.

Muscat Municipality faces some challenges in this area, which can be summarized in the following key points:

First, concerning food safety, several challenges lie in the detection of products that do not comply with health standards, in addition to the lack of awareness among some traders regarding the importance of food safety. Muscat Municipality deals with these challenges through periodic inspection, training, awareness, and cooperation with various health authorities and other relevant authorities.

In addition to this, there are challenges in issuing licenses, regulating businesses to comply with standards and requirements, as well as issues regarding unlicensed businesses. Muscat Municipality works to address these challenges through periodic inspection and review and digitization of procedures to make the licensing process more efficient. Of course, this point is of great interest to various government entities within the government's digital transformation program.

Moreover, there are various other challenges in the general control of markets, emerging from the continuous increase in population density in the Governorate of Muscat, which is witnessing rapid population growth.

The Master Plan of Greater Muscat focuses on the establishment of service and commercial centers that reorganize the urban form of the city. Can you tell us about these projects and how the municipality works with representatives of the private sector to attract traders and encourage them to invest in them?

The Greater Muscat Master Plan, supervised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in the Sultanate of Oman, focuses heavily on reorganizing the urban form of the city through the establishment of integrated service and commercial centers aimed at achieving sustainable development and improving the quality of life for residents and visitors. In general, these projects and the roles of municipalities in dealing with the private sector involve improving urban infrastructure and granting all licenses for building, construction, as well as operating various investments. The municipality plays a significant role in encouraging private investments in commercial and service projects through providing facilities and reviewing procedures periodically in line with economic and technical variables. This is in addition to the key role played by Muscat Municipality, where it seeks to attract the private sector to implement investment projects for the development of the facades of parks and gardens in exchange for bearing the cost of construction and maintenance throughout the contract period.

The historic souks of Muscat and Seeb are among the oldest in the Gulf, and these markets have undergone extensive work to rehabilitate them and make them more attractive to tourists. What are the most prominent projects that have been completed and what impact have they particularly had on artisans in these markets?

Historic souks in Muscat Governorate, such as Muttrah Souq and Seeb Souk, are important to the city's cultural, historical, and economic heritage. They are social and cultural centers that witness a long history of trade and traditional crafts. In recent years, these markets have undergone extensive work to rehabilitate and organize them to become more attractive to tourists and investors while preserving their authenticity and heritage spirit. The most prominent projects completed in the historical markets are as follows:

Rehabilitation of Muttrah Market

Muttrah Souq is one of the oldest markets in Muscat and the Arabian Gulf region. In recent years, a comprehensive rehabilitation project has been implemented for this market to improve its working environment while maintaining its traditional character.

• Infrastructure improvement: The project included significant improvements in public utilities such as electricity, water, and sewage networks. Roads and walkways within the market have also been renovated to facilitate the movement of visitors.

• Street lighting and beautification: The lighting in the market has been improved at night, making it more attractive to tourists and visitors during the evening hours. Some new architectural elements, such as traditional motifs, have also been installed in public places.

Development of Seeb Market

Souk Seeb is another traditional market of historical significance that has also witnessed development projects aimed at improving commercial and service facilities, including the following:

• Expanding commercial spaces: The market has been expanded, and the spaces allocated for trade have been increased to accommodate a larger number of merchants and create a comfortable environment for shopping.

• Rehabilitating shops: The shops have been renovated while preserving the traditional character of the place, using building materials similar to the original materials used in the market.

• Enhancing infrastructure: Water and electricity networks and access to the market have been improved, making it easier for traders to operate in a more structured and modern environment.

The impact of projects on artisans in the markets:

The most prominent effects of these projects on the craftsmen are as follows:

1. Improving the ergonomics for craftsmen organization and professionalism

Artisans working in Muttrah and Seeb markets have significantly benefited from the organization provided by these projects, such as creating comfortable workplaces within the restored souks. These places offer a better environment for artisans to display their products in the best way, with modern equipment that makes work easier.

2. Supporting traditional crafts

A business environment conducive to growth and sustainability has been provided for traditional artisans by improving market infrastructure. These projects also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage by investing in traditional crafts.

3. Increasing marketing opportunities and expansion attracting tourists

Improving facilities and services in Muttrah and Seeb markets has helped increase tourist traffic, providing greater opportunities for artisans to sell their products to local and international tourists. The market is a major tourist destination in Muscat, contributing to promoting Omani handicrafts.

4. Achieving sustainability and preserving crafts

By rehabilitating markets and providing the necessary support, many traditional crafts have been preserved, thus supporting the sustainability of Omani crafts.

Is there a trend in Muscat Municipality to privatize operations or control commercial markets?

Muscat Municipality is moving towards privatizing some aspects of operations and monitoring of commercial markets, and this is part of the Government of Oman's strategy to enhance economic efficiency and sustainability and expand the role of the private sector in the management of public projects and services. This trend includes some operational activities in markets and malls, in addition to the privatization of some of the control functions currently carried out by Muscat Municipality.

For example, privatization of operations in commercial markets focuses on handing over the management and operation of specific markets and complexes to private companies or running them through public-private partnerships. This approach helps improve the quality of services provided and enhances efficiency in market management. Additionally, other aspects of markets may be covered by privatization in the coming years, such as food safety control. In some markets, cooperation may be made with private companies or independent bodies to carry out health inspections of food products to ensure their safety and quality. Some activities related to licensing or monitoring traders' compliance with regulations may be delegated to private companies under the supervision of Muscat Municipality.

Municipalities usually face challenges in regulating seasonal markets and street vendors. Can you tell us about Muscat's experience in this regard?

Regulating seasonal markets and the movement of street vendors in cities is a constant challenge for municipalities, due to the need to strike a balance between facilitating commercial activity, and maintaining public order and public safety. Muscat Municipality is making unremitting efforts to organize these activities in line with the city's aspirations to be a modern, developed and vibrant place, while preserving its cultural and environmental essence.

1. Seasonal markets in Muscat

Seasonal markets in Muscat are witnessing a high level of commercial activity during religious occasions such as Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha, as well as during national and cultural events. Muscat Municipality adopts a structured approach to ensure that these markets are organized in a way that does not negatively affect the daily lives of citizens and residents. The most prominent procedures followed by Muscat Municipality in organizing seasonal markets are as follows:

• Allocate specific places: Specific locations are identified to host seasonal markets so they do not affect traffic or stationary commercial activities. These sites are often located in open areas or hub malls and are pre-equipped with the required infrastructure.

• Temporary Licenses: Muscat Municipality grants temporary licenses to vendors and participants in seasonal markets after verifying that they meet health and environmental standards. It is ensured that these vendors follow good business practices and food safety standards.

• Regulate opening hours: In some cases, opening hours in these markets are limited so as to help regulate visitor traffic and reduce congestion, especially in densely populated locations.

• Quality control: The quality of products offered in the market, whether consumer goods or food products, is monitored to ensure the safety of consumers.

The impact of these markets:

The key influences that stand out are the following:

• Stimulate the local economy: These seasonal markets boost business activity and provide job opportunities for citizens and residents. It also contributes to the revitalization of tourism in Muscat during events.

• Supporting local industries: These markets provide ample space to display local products, such as Omani handicrafts, traditional cuisine, and agricultural products that contribute to spreading Omani culture.

2. Regulation of street vendors

The movement of street vendors is a major challenge, especially in commercial areas or tourist areas with a high turnout of visitors and citizens. On the one hand, these activities provide business opportunities for many individuals, but on the other hand, they may lead to undue congestion or negatively impact public order. For this purpose, Muscat Municipality has taken the following steps to regulate the movement of street vendors:

• Allocating specific locations: Muscat Municipality tries to identify unique areas for street vendors, such as some commercial streets or public parks, where these places are allocated to sell products within specific controls. This helps avoid their ad-hoc spread in other areas that may cause traffic congestion or health risks. An integrated project called "Masar" has also been established, as a market in several vital areas that are densely populated dedicated to street vendors and food trucks.

• Issuance of official permits: Street vendors must obtain official permits to conduct their trade at their designated locations, where compliance with health standards and commercial licenses is verified.

• Limit permitted activities: Defines the commercial activities allowed for street vendors, such as food products, handicrafts, or daily necessities, while ensuring that products that harm public health or cause environmental pollution are not displayed.

• Field Control: Muscat Municipality is intensifying field monitoring to ensure that street vendors adhere to the controls related to cleanliness and order while following up on the movement of vendors to ensure that the specified limits are not exceeded.

3. **Challenges facing Muscat Municipality in this context:**

The most noticeable challenges facing Muscat Municipality in this context are as follows:

• Maintaining Public Order: Despite the organization of seasonal markets and the movement of street vendors, the biggest challenge lies in the optimal organization of these activities, especially in crowded areas, where traffic congestion or distortion of the general landscape may sometimes occur.

• Product Control: Product safety is one of the challenges faced by the municipality, especially in seasonal markets, where food products are monitored to ensure that they are safe and adhere to health standards, especially in times such as Ramadan when demand for food is high.

• Environmental Conservation: Cleanliness and waste management are among the most prominent challenges in regulating seasonal markets and street vendors. Vendors and shoppers often leave waste that may affect overall hygiene if waste collection is not managed effectively.

In conclusion, we would like you to speak to the readers of the issue about the aspirations of the city of Muscat to achieve sustainable urban development?

Muscat Municipality strives to make Muscat a smart and sustainable city based on balanced urban development that enhances the quality of life of its residents and responds to future challenges within the framework of Oman Vision 2040. Sustainable urban development is the cornerstone of our aspirations to create a vibrant urban environment, innovation, and sustainable economic growth while preserving the city's cultural and natural heritage. Also, we aspire to be a modern urban model, balancing the preservation of its identity with openness to technological innovation and environmental practices. Additionally, we aim to enhance environmental sustainability and improve resource efficiency through the development of smart urban facilities, such as improving public transport systems, enhancing infrastructure, expanding green spaces, and building a safe and healthy residential and commercial environment that provides citizens, residents, and visitors with a comfortable urban experience.

The private sector also has a pivotal role in our partnership to achieve sustainable development by investing in green projects and sustainable technology, which contributes to raising the economic and environmental sustainability in the city. We seek to improve our business environment and support SMEs to ensure that urban growth remains inclusive and diversified. At the same time, we ensure that human development remains at the heart of our aspirations while enhancing community participation in decision-making and encouraging citizens to be active partners in the urban development and planning process. Muscat Municipality is committed to developing policies that ensure social justice, sustainable development, and economic diversification so that Muscat can keep pace with the future and respond to its challenges while preserving its cultural and environmental values that are the foundation of our Omani identity.

URBAN INSIGHTS

External Article

REVIVAL OF PUBLIC MARKETS: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE



David K. O'Neil

Beginning his career reviving markets in his hometown of Philadelphia, PA, David has worked with over two hundred, new and historic market projects around the world. He is a founder of the markets program at Project for Public Spaces in New York City. He amassed the world's largest collection of global market materials, which was recently acquired by the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/market.polo/

Public marketplaces are making a comeback around the world. People everywhere love markets: they bring us together, showcase local culture and open the doors of economic opportunity for small business.

The best markets, big or small, are authentic and reflect local character, people, and products. Markets exist in many forms, evolving over time to suit their locations, from temporary open air markets to market sheds, market halls and complex market districts.

For centuries, public markets have been the dominant commercial form for public gathering, barter, and exchange. Today's shopping choices are vast, and the success of a public market is not guaranteed. With fierce competition, markets must leverage their inherent advantages to stay relevant in the ever-changing urban landscape.

Cairo's Khan El Khalili Souq and Bazaar is an ancient, highly relevant example of a thriving market district. I first visited Khan El Khalili in 1979, before I had any idea that markets were to become my life's work. Time spent wandering her labyrinthine aisles buying daily essentials when I, a stranger with little money, was seminal and helped form my vision of how a true market feels and functions.

Like a beautiful garden, the work of planning and maintaining a successful market is never complete. There are universal ingredients that help make a market successful.[1] The right location is essential. You cannot expect a market to make a bad location better. A poor location will not perform well enough for vendors to make enough money. The right vendors are the backbone; without them, no market succeeds. The right public spaces promote social interaction and provide flexible space for events and promotions.

The right physical connections help the flow of customers, providing easy access for walking, public transportation, biking, and cars. And don't forget community connections – people like to see familiar faces in a market; it makes them feel welcome. Vendors that reflect the community's makeup increase the participation of customers from those same communities. The merchandise mix of the market needs to be thoughtfully monitored and adjusted to stay in sync with changing desires and consumer trends. Everything that happens in a market has a cost, and management must constantly be attuned to the capital costs, rents, operating expenses, and vendor sales levels to avoid getting into financial jams.

"Like a beautiful garden, the work of planning and maintaining a successful market is never complete"

Public marketplaces are truly 'for the public good' and not solely operated to make money. Some are highly profitable, but they are an exception. A basic goal is to be operationally self-sustaining and, if possible, put aside surpluses to fund capital improvements. A market's success is not judged solely by its balance sheet but by how well it serves the community. Many markets receive operating and capital contributions from their municipality. Supporting a public market financially is no different than providing subsidies for a park, library, school, or other public benefit institution. As the popularity of public markets increases, new sources of financial aid are opening up from foundations, corporations, and even wealthy individuals.

While architecture and design can enhance atmospherics and operational efficiencies, the inner energy of markets is generated by people, measured in intimate exchanges and small gestures of kindness, with every transaction a win for buyer and seller. Benefits radiate internally to vendors, customers, and visitors and flow outward, increasing real estate values in surrounding commercial areas and neighborhoods. The economic benefit of public markets is profound.

For instance, Seattle, Washington's Pike Place Market was valiantly saved from brutish urban renewal fifty years ago by farsighted volunteer citizens. Today, Pike Place Market is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the world and an inspiration for other cities to 'save the market'. Pike's market district comprises 9 acres, supporting 450 independent businesses and generating more economic activity than Seattle's costly stadium projects[2].

In Barcelona, Spain, the entire city is planned around a series of forty-three architecturally handsome market halls whereby no citizen is more than a ten-minute walk from a local market. This egalitarian market grid ensures every neighborhood can access healthy, useful goods and services. Each market is undergoing thoughtful, distinctive renovations to ensure Barcelona's marvelous market system endures for generations to come[3].

Vietnam has just taken the bold step to support and encourage markets nationally. This policy resulted from heritage markets being threatened with removal for 'modern' projects. Once threatened by demolition, Hanoi's longstanding and popular Chau Long Market is now being renovated with government funding. Revitalized, well managed public markets rank very high on the list of what makes city living enjoyable[4].

The rebuilding of Souq Waqif in Doha, Qatar, after a terrible fire in 2003, is another example of government investing in markets as a great civic gesture for all people. Souq Waqif is a magnet for residents and visitors worldwide who experience a kaleidoscopic market brimming with heritage and hospitality.

Low-cost and comparatively simple, temporary markets have exploded in popularity. These include farmers' markets, night markets, art, book and craft markets. These ephemeral delights 'pop up' in closed-off streets, parking lots, parks, and flexible outdoor spaces. Temporary markets are often the first step towards establishing a permanent, year-round public market.

Women and minority populations are discovering markets as friendly, safe and welcoming places to start small businesses. There are more and more success stories about how markets ease the way for women and minorities to enter the economic playing field and how income from their market businesses improves the lives of their families[5].

Market benefits include mental well-being. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US discovered how local markets provide a lifeline to people living alone, especially senior citizens whose cherished market visits keep them from sinking into loneliness or depression. Markets provide access to meet people, catch up on gossip, exchange ideas, and always buy and sell.

"A market's success is not judged solely by its balance sheet, but rather by how well it serves the community"

As the renaissance of markets gains traction, so does the understanding of how they work, what makes them successful, and how they must be safeguarded. All markets must constantly stay relevant and the Arab world is superbly positioned to breathe new life into its souqs, infused with a refreshed optimism and entrepreneurial spirit.

Note:

Anyone interested in the current state of markets may want to participate in Project for Public Spaces' **12th International Public Markets Conference** in Milwaukee, WI, USA, June 12-14, 2025. It is the largest global conference for public markets around the world. Registration opens in February—learn more here.

Endnote

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External Article

REVIVING ALEPPO'S SOUQS: A PATHWAY TO URBAN RECOVERY



Dr. Ali Esmaiel

As Head of the Aga Khan Cultural Service in Syria (2006-2023), Dr. Ali Esmaiel guided cultural preservation in Damascus and Aleppo with a deep commitment that earned the Aga Khan Trust for Culture the ICCROM Sharjah Award. A Chevening Scholar with a Master's in International Business from the UK and a Ph.D. in International Management from the US, Dr. Esmaiel combines academic insight with a heartfelt dedication to safeguarding heritage and fostering community pride.

Public markets are more than just places of trade; they are lifelines for cities, hubs of community interaction, and symbols of cultural identity. In the Arab region, souqs hold a special place as vibrant centers of life, commerce, and tradition. Aleppo's Souq Saqatiyeh is one such market, telling a story of recovery, resilience, and the power of community collaboration.

Souq Saqatiyeh is part of a network of over 30 interconnected souqs in Aleppo's Old City, stretching over 13 kilometers. Dating back more than 500 years, these souqs have shaped Aleppo's identity, economy, and social fabric. The Old City has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1986, with Aleppo regarded as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

When conflict in Syria destroyed large parts of Aleppo, including the historic Souq Saqatiyeh, it left a void in the city's cultural and economic life. For local shopkeepers who sold spices, vegetables, and meat at the market for more than a hundred years, the destruction was more than a loss of livelihood. "This market isn't just a place to sell goods," they say. "It's part of who we are."

The restoration of Souq Saqatiyeh, completed in 2019, involved a series of technical and structural processes aimed at preserving the souq's historical integrity while meeting modern safety standards. The project required detailed craftsmanship to restore the souq's distinct stone arches, woodwork, and interiors. The restoration was funded mainly by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, with participation from local partners.

Engineers initially assessed weakened foundation walls and archways, stabilizing them with lime mortar, a traditional material known for its flexibility with ancient masonry. Steel brackets and anchors were discreetly embedded to support stone arches, combining traditional methods with modern reinforcements to ensure long-term durability.

"Public markets play a vital role in revitalizing economies, fostering social cohesion, and preserving cultural heritage"

Locally sourced materials were central to the project. Stone from Aleppo's quarries replaced severely damaged parts, blending seamlessly with the existing structure. Skilled artisans restored wooden storefronts, doors, and shutters using strong pinewood, preserving the souq's original character while supporting the local economy.

The project followed a phased approach. Initial structural reinforcements addressed safety, followed by artisans restoring architectural details using historical records as a guide. Throughout, shop owners shared insights into the souq's original layout and customer flow, which helped align the restoration with both historical accuracy and modern needs.

The rehabilitation of Souq Saqatiyeh provided a foundation for economic recovery in Aleppo, creating over 100 jobs and increasing foot traffic by 30%. Souq Saqatiyeh is expected to generate tens of millions of Syrian pounds annually in tourism revenue, and its success has paved the way for rehabilitating six nearby souqs, reinforcing the area's role as a commercial and social hub.

The souq now draws visitors for its vibrant shops and rich history. International recognition came when the project won the ICCROM Sharjah First Prize in 2020 for its contributions to heritage preservation.

Souq Saqatiyeh's restoration symbolizes Aleppo's resilience. Public markets like this are essential to community life in Arab cities, offering places for people to connect, share experiences, and maintain traditions. The restored souq plays a role in rebuilding Aleppo's social and cultural networks.

Aleppo's experience underscores that rehabilitating historic markets requires a collaborative approach involving local authorities, community organizations, and international partners. These stakeholders must balance heritage preservation with modern needs, ensuring that restored spaces are both functional and culturally authentic.

The success of Souq Saqatiyeh shows that heritage-led urban development is essential for long-term recovery. Public markets play a vital role in revitalizing economies, fostering social cohesion, and preserving cultural heritage. As cities across the Arab region navigate urbanization and recovery, Aleppo's journey provides a blueprint for resilience.

By integrating traditional values with modern infrastructure, Aleppo ensures its souqs remain vibrant and relevant for future generations. Souq Saqatiyeh stands as a beacon of hope, resilience, and the enduring power of communities.

External Article

EVOLUTION OF RIYADH'S MARKETS



Mansour AlAssaf

An Editor and writer for Al-Riyadh newspaper, he has led a number of television works as a content maker and supervisor of a number of multiple programs, short stories, and dialogues. He has participated in many seminars and lectures at the Saudi Association of Institutions and Institutions.

In the 50s, the city of Riyadh witnessed the era of openness to modern construction methods and materials and began to replace its old buildings of mudbrick and clay with blocks and reinforced cement. This acceleration would not have happened without the opening of the train station, connecting the ports of the Eastern Province to the newly opened Riyadh Airport, which facilitated the transport of goods.

Riyadh's markets, much like its government buildings, experienced a rapid transformation in construction methods and materials. Small clay shops and stalls were replaced with long-arched buildings and spacious stores, with this transformation being reflected in the markets of Al-Wazir Street.

These modern markets, constructed in the early 1950s, accommodated most of Riyadh's merchants. The market management announced its incentives for investors, encouraging them to transition from traditional street markets to modern shops equipped with metal "roll-up" doors. This shift bolstered investor confidence, especially among those with a forward-looking perspective on the economic transformations Riyadh was undergoing at the time.

The markets of Al-Wazir Street were the talk of Riyadh's residents; and why wouldn't they be? They emerged with their modern style, offering apartments, rooms, and residential units above the more than 100 stores. These residential units provided safe housing, close to public amenities, with a high level of luxury. Al-Wazir Street with its markets, shops and tall buildings gained prominence as of the 1960s, becoming the capital's cultural and commercial center. Within a few years, this kind of development attracted people away from Al-Thumairy Street, that was the most prominent in Riyadh in the 1950s, serving as a hub for shopping, finance, and business. But this dominance did not last. In fact, we often say that Riyadh witnesses the emergence of a new prominent street every decade. Hence, by the 1970s, the spotlight shifted again to Al-Assarat Street , before it moved to Al-Siteen Street, and then to Al-Mutanabbi Street. These two streets proudly represented the city of Riyadh throughout the 1980s. Following that, Al-Takhassusi Street came into the picture, then Al-Tahlia Street, and now Prince Turki Al-Awwal Street stands out as Riyadh's prominent thoroughfare.

The markets of Thumairy Street and Al-Wazir Street, adopted a classical architectural style. Shops had high roofs and were fronted by arches, and the upper floors of buildings were constructed with setbacks that allowed for long corridors in front of the shops, providing shade for pedestrians and shoppers. This architectural style was common in previous civilizations, but it was also a practical and safe design, especially with the emergence of modern roads, cars, and sidewalks. Hence, in the 1950s, Riyadh's old markets transformed from basic stalls and small shops built from mud and palm fronds, into Qaysariyas (arcaded markets) and spread into large commercial areas. It is during this period, that markets such as Al-Hilla, Al-Suwaiga, Al-Soug Al-Sagheer (the small market), Ibn Kulaib's Qaysariya, Kuwaitis' Haraj, and Al-Batha Market emerged. Each of these markets, which began to attract capital and investors, has its own unique story that would take a long time to detail here. However, their presence, the expansion of their shops, and the increasing number of visitors wouldn't have been possible without - first and foremost, thanks to God Almighty - the establishment of safety and security. This is the environment that both traders and shoppers seek.

I must mention here that in 1964, a grocery store opened in the Al-Malaz neighborhood that operated in a style similar to a "supermarket." It offered its customers home delivery services through phone calls, a development ahead of its time, almost as if it were mimicking the modern delivery app services we see today.

The economic boom that the country experienced in the 1970s significantly contributed to the development and expansion of markets in Riyadh. This period saw the strong emergence of supermarkets and grocery stores. Names such as Al-Sadhan Stores began to appear, followed by the Panda chain, which opened its first branch in 1979 on Prince Sultan Street in Al-Olaya Neighbourhood, then a second branch on Khurais Road. Panda continued its expansion before its competitor, Al-Sadhan Markets, grew in neighborhoods such as Al-Malaz and later Al-Rabwa. This was also the era when the first Saudi store modeled after the American shopping experience made its debut. Meanwhile, Al-Jawhar Markets opened in Al-Olaya neighbourhood (where Al-Faisaliah Tower now stands) in late 1980. This marked the beginning of comprehensive markets that brought together groceries, ready-to-wear clothing, electronics, and stationery under one roof in enclosed spaces. At the time, these markets were considered the most prestigious and luxurious in Riyadh. Shopping there, or even just visiting, was a source of pride for the city's affluent residents and the bourgeois class.

By the mid-1980s, Hussam Markets opened along Khurais Road, four years before the inauguration of the Gulf Bridge. These markets aimed to address a gap in catering to the needs and demands of foreign workers in Riyadh. This development coincided with the economic boom of that era, which led to a significant influx of expatriate labor, particularly from Korea and East Asia. Workers from such regions made up the majority of Hussam Markets' clients. However, the markets soon faced competition from Euromarché, which opened just months later in 1981.

The 1980s also marked the expansion of grocery stores and supermarkets in Saudi Arabia. Brands like Sadhan, Panda, Hussam, Euromarché, Tamimi, Al-Amro, and Al-Jazeera were at the forefront, emerging in tandem with the rise of modern shopping centers for clothing and fashion. This era saw the advent of the "mall" concept and enclosed shopping complexes equipped with central air conditioning, such as Al-Aqaria, Khairia, Al-Shoala, Makkah Markets, Najoud Markets, and others.

The eighties also witnessed the return of women's markets, which appeared at the same time as the early days of Riyadh's formation as the capital of the Kingdom. The women's market adjacent to the Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque was famous for its handicrafts and products. The phenomenon of women's markets returned to the eighties, with the appearance of the women's market in the Rabwa neighborhood, coinciding with the Rozna market in the Namar neighborhood, in addition to multiple other similar markets. These developments represented a shift in social dynamics, as families adapted to these modern, climate-controlled shopping environments, which transformed the retail experience during this decade.

Lastly, as one can see through the case of Riyadh, the transformation of markets has deeper implications than just a change in architectural styles. It is an expression of profound economic, social and cultural transformations in a society and its aspiration in dealing with the challenges of modernity and change.

TOOLKITS FOR PLANNING AND MANAGING PUBLIC MARKETS

Public markets play a significant role in supporting local economic systems in a city and have the potential to serve as vibrant public places. However, given the range of stakeholders involved in the functioning of public markets and the complex institutional systems required to effectively manage them, public entities need the right tools to develop and operate successful public markets.

This issue of Mudununa provides a comprehensive overview of toolkits and guides developed by various international organizations to help municipalities better understand the processes required to successfully develop and manage public markets. The toolkits in this section represent a variety of thematic concerns, from supporting informal livelihoods to revitalizing public markets to measuring and assessing markets to ensure their sustained operation.

1

Toolkit 1:
Reimagining Public Space to Support Main Street Retail: Municipal Action Guide

2

Toolkit 2:
Multi-Sector Market Assessment (MSMA) Guidance and Toolkit

3

Toolkit 3:
How to Measure Progress Towards Downtown Revitalization and Engaging Public Spaces

4

Toolkit 4:
Supporting Informal Livelihoods in Public Space: A Toolkit for Local Authorities



National League of Cities, ©2021

https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CS-Reimagining-Public-Space-Action-Guide_v5.pdf

Toolkit 1:
Reimagining Public Space to Support Main Street Retail: Municipal Action Guide

Main street economic activity in cities is highly integrated with the performance of public spaces and the extent to which they engage visitors. This Municipal Action Guide highlights the ways in which cities can repurpose public spaces to enhance their main street retail and in doing so, address the needs of communities.

Starting with a historical reflection on retail and the built environment, the Action Guide stresses the importance of critically reimagining public spaces. It discusses their role as a promoter of health and safety in cities, as a means of serving community needs, and as a driver for creativity and entrepreneurship. In reimaging them, the guide prioritizes four key values that serve as a foundation for reimagining public spaces. These include the extent to which they are accessible to all, their ability to enable visitor engagement and interaction, their adaptability for various community uses, and their role in facilitating social cohesion.

The guide then dives deeper into the recommendations for reimagining public spaces, focusing on 3 key elements: developing a community vision, creating strategies and action plans, and launching and assessing programs. It supports this framework by providing a case study of the Night Market in the City of Milwaukee in Wisconsin.



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ©2020

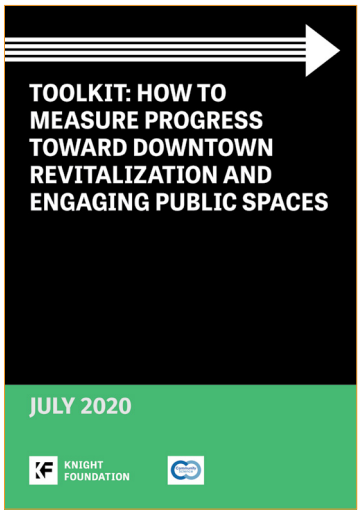
https://www.unhcr.org/media/multi-sector-market-assessment-companion-guide-and-toolkit

Toolkit 2:
Multi-Sector Market Assessment (MSMA) Guidance and Toolkit

The development of public markets is highly reliant on a comprehensive understanding of context and prior planning in the face of expected scenarios, particularly in cities facing crises. The MSMA toolkit has been developed to facilitate practitioners conduct comprehensive market assessments in all kinds of contexts, including emergencies, in low- and middle-income countries, as well as in remote access areas.

It helps identify trends affecting supply chain and market access, the current situation at the time of the assessment, and the expected situation during which the market development program is to be implemented. In doing so, it seeks to facilitate the timely functioning of markets, and transparent, consensual, and evidence-based decision-making processes.

The framework is designed along 5 key steps that guide the assessment team through the data review and collection process, risk analysis, report development, and monitoring. The section on each step outlines the purpose of the suggested action, the key questions to be addressed, and the primary actions required to complete the step. They are also supported with case studies from various cities where the assessment was successfully applied. A consolidated toolbox is provided with the document, containing 14 ready-to-contextualize data collection, analysis, and reporting tools that can support the market assessment process.



Knight Foundation, Community Science, ©2020

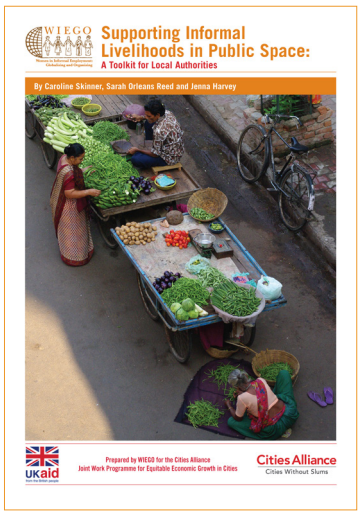
https://knightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/KF-Toolkit-Measuring-Progress-toward-Downtown-Final.pdf

Toolkit 3:
How to Measure Progress Towards Downtown Revitalization and Engaging Public Spaces

Downtown revitalization is an important component of commercial development in cities. For it to be integrated effectively with the city, public entities need the right tools to ensure their efforts are successful. This toolkit is the result of a concentrated effort to understand which metrics indicate progress or success when it comes to downtown and neighborhood revitalization. Aimed at city leaders, it seeks to support them in promoting equitable recovery of cities as hubs of social, economic, and civic life.

Following a review of existing research on downtown revitalization, equitable economic development, and public space activation, the toolkit draws 4 key conclusions on measurement strategies. These include determining the flow of people in the study area, studying the general economic trends of the site, measuring the diversity of users and the extent to which they interact with one another, and evaluating the level of attachment people have with the place.

Based on this, it highlights leading effective downtown development strategies ranging from creating business improvement districts, developing branding initiatives, expanding employment opportunities, promoting tax credit programs, and investing in mixed-use development. To facilitate public entities, the toolkit also provides a comprehensive list of metrics, corresponding to the respective downtown development strategy.



Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and Cities Alliance ©2018

https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Public%20Space%20Toolkit.pdf

Toolkit 4:
Supporting Informal Livelihoods in Public Space: A Toolkit for Local Authorities

The informal economy plays a significant role in public spaces, and the effective engagement of stakeholders from this sector can contribute to creating vibrant and successful public markets.

This toolkit has been developed to help city officials and other local authorities adopt an inclusive approach to managing public spaces that is mindful of local livelihood activities and the urban informal workforce. While it focuses primarily on street vendors, it recognizes a range of actors that contribute to urban systems in public spaces.

The toolkit is based on the work done by WIEGO over the past 20 years. It has focused on capacity building, knowledge sharing, and policy advocacy among informal worker organizations. It is structured along 4 key ideas that elaborate on the size and role of street vendors, developing an evidence framework for inclusive planning, establishing regulatory mechanisms, and building a participatory governance system.

As an overarching principle, the toolkit urges city governments to recognize street vendors and other informal sector organizations as legitimate partners in cities' design and governance processes. To assist readers, the toolkit also consists of samples of street vendor census, survey questionnaires, and street trading model bylaws.

CITIES IN ACTION



Souk El Fallaheen, Ramallah
©2024 Media Arabia

Farmers and Seasonal Markets in Beirut, Ramallah, and Amman

Farmers and seasonal markets are community hubs where local farmers and artisans sell fresh, seasonal products directly to consumers. These markets promote sustainable farming, support local economies, and advocate for reduced environmental impact by adopting sustainable farming practices. In this article, we explore the souks of Beirut, Ramallah, and Amman that offer a space for people to connect with their community and enjoy the unique flavors and traditions of the region.

Founded in 2004, Souk El Tayeb began as a weekly farmers' market in downtown Beirut, offering local farmers and producers a platform to sell organic food products. This open-air market, held every Saturday at Beirut Souks, fosters connections across Lebanon's diverse communities. Managed by a non-profit cooperative, Souk El Tayeb represents farmers and cooperatives from different regions of Lebanon.

Over time, Souk El Tayeb has grown into a dynamic social enterprise, expanding its mission beyond the farmers' market. It now runs national and international projects to preserve Lebanon's culinary traditions, rural heritage, and natural environment. Central to its work is supporting farmers, women, and local communities while fostering peaceful interfaith relations. The organization champions sustainable farming practices, ensuring fair trade for producers and safeguarding Lebanon's food traditions for future generations.



Souq el Tayeb, Beirut
©2020 Bernoulli Finance

Souk El Tayeb diversified its activity into a series of initiatives, including the Farmers Market, which showcases local production; Tawlet, a network of restaurants where regional chefs share their culinary stories; Beit, guesthouses that celebrate local traditions; Dekenet, a store promoting farmers' products; and Matbakh El Kell, a kitchen established after the Beirut port explosion (August 4th, 2020) to provide meals to those in need.

The enterprise also runs a Capacity Building Program (CBP) in partnership with organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Women's Program Association. This program helps vulnerable communities develop entrepreneurial skills. Additionally, through its "Cash for Work" initiative, Souk El Tayeb offers temporary employment to 75 workers from disadvantaged areas. Its work is supported by donations, fundraising, and grants from local and international sources.

Since 2004, Souk el Tayeb has collaborated closely with municipalities, regional authorities, and organizations to organize and implement events. These partnerships involve providing venues and ensuring accessibility to the market through administrative registration and security measures. Over the years, Souk el Tayeb has worked with approximately 12 rural Lebanese municipalities and local producers in their hometowns. Its partnerships span diverse sectors, including foreign government agencies, local ministries, municipalities, the United Nations, NGOs, international organizations, banks, intergovernmental organizations, universities, and the private sector.

In the heart of Palestine, the West Bank and Jerusalem mobile markets have long been vital to community life. Known for their vibrant atmosphere and affordable prices, these markets are key gathering spots, offering a wide range of locally produced goods. Among these is Ramallah's Souk El Fallaheen (Farmers' Market), which continues the tradition of fostering connections between farmers and consumers.

Every Saturday, the Farmers Market gathers dozens of Palestinian farmers from across the West Bank. This initiative, launched in 2010, allows small-scale farmers to sell their produce directly to consumers, bypassing intermediaries who often take a large share of the profits. Organized by the Sharaka Initiative, the profitable space promotes organic farming, encourages the use of native seeds, and reduces reliance on genetically modified crops while also creating social bonds with their communities.

The Sharaka initiative offers itself as a way to revive the love for agriculture among the youth and reinforce the value of local, organic food. The market not only strengthens the local economy but also supports farmers' resilience against a dire situation in the context of occupation, giving them a financial incentive to remain on their lands.

Inspired by the success of Souk El Fallaheen, similar markets have emerged in other cities like Nablus, Birzeit, and Al-Bireh. These grassroots markets provide a sustainable alternative to traditional retail, offering a space where farmers and consumers can build lasting connections. With plans to expand into cities like Bethlehem and Jenin, the movement continues to grow, strengthening the local economy and fostering a deeper appreciation for Palestinian agriculture and heritage.

Another market, Al-Harjah, is held every Friday and has been organized by the Ramallah Municipality since over 13 years. It serves as a platform for Palestinian artisans to showcase their traditional crafts. From pottery and embroidery to wood carving and glass making, the market celebrates the rich cultural heritage of Palestine, encouraging craftsmen to continue their traditional trade that faces extinction risk. By doing so, it not only promotes local artistry but also revitalizes the Old City's economy and tourism.

Similarly, Ramallah's Babouriya Market is another weekly market held every Saturday, borrowing from the concept of both the farmers' and Al-Harjah markets, offering agricultural products and handicrafts. Along with the market, visitors can enjoy Palestinian dabke, traditional music, and family-friendly activities. Relaunched in 2020, Babouriya continues to embrace a tradition that dates back to the 1970s, celebrating Palestine's vibrant cultural heritage.

These markets would not be possible without the direct support of the municipality, which serves as the main organizer of these events. Ramallah Municipality plays a crucial role by providing public spaces, such as open plazas and streets, as venues for local vendors to sell their goods. The municipality ensures inclusivity through a selection process and open calls, charging affordable fees to encourage participation. Additionally, the municipality promotes these markets not only within Ramallah but also beyond its borders, reaching other cities in Palestine through city-wide media channels.

Nestled in one of the charming alleys of Rainbow Street in the historic Jabal Amman neighborhood, the annual Jara Market has been a summer destination for local and international visitors since 2004. It runs from June to August and has become a beloved tradition, reflecting the deep historical, cultural, and economic ties of Jabal Amman to the broader Ammani community.

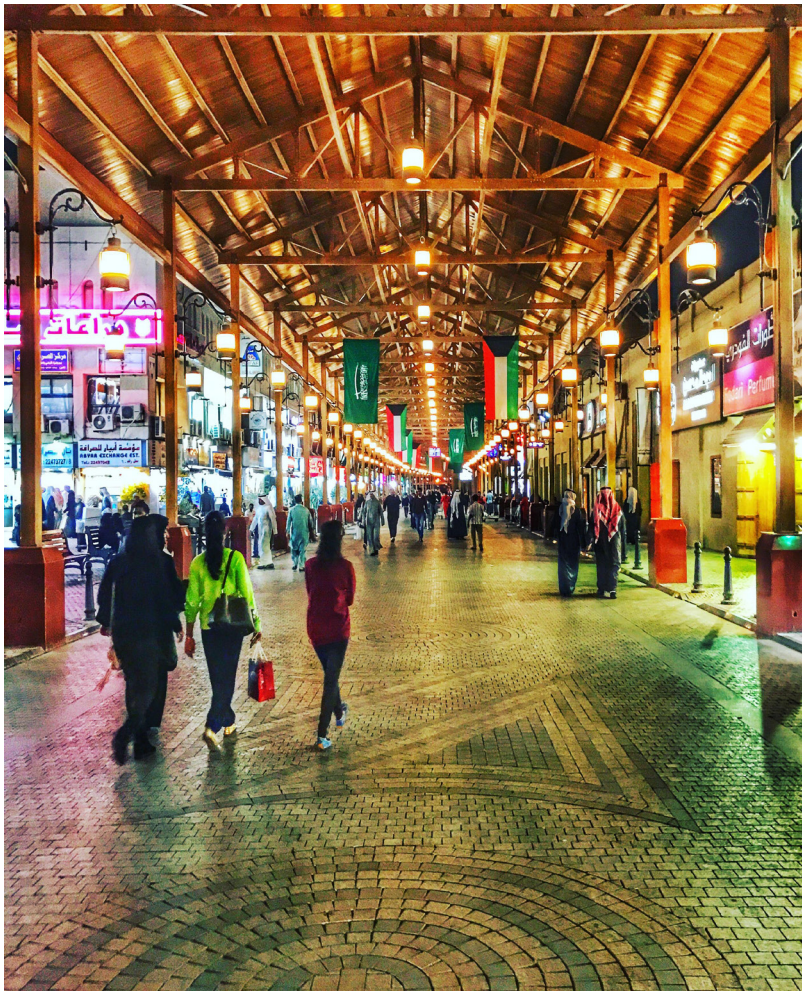
The market is supported by the Greater Amman Municipality, serving as a strategic partner by providing essential facilities, including venues and registration services. Additionally, the municipality offers media support through its official channels and collaborates with private radio stations and media outlets to promote the event. This market also has been supported by a private telecommunications company, Zain, through a Public-Private-People Partnership. The company sponsors the Jabal Amman Residents Association, and through this partnership, the market empowers artisans and craftspeople, providing them with a platform to showcase their talents and sell their handmade goods. These products symbolize cultural heritage and preserve Jordan's traditions for future generations. In addition to promoting local crafts, the market also highlights Amman's tourism potential, particularly Jabal Amman, a prominent and iconic destination known for its historic buildings and unique architectural charm.

Jara Market features a diverse range of shops offering handicrafts, homemade food products, clothing, accessories, books, and paintings. This annual event has become a cultural and tourist landmark, drawing Jordanians, Arabs, and international visitors alike, providing a vibrant window into the rich and colorful tapestry of Jordanian culture.



Souq Jara, Amman
©2024 Expedia

Project 2



Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Kuwait
©2018 mirzafab | Reddit

Historical Markets in Kuwait, Doha, and Sohar

The renovation of central markets revitalizes cities by preserving heritage, supporting local businesses, and creating vibrant public spaces. Modern interventions enhance safety, accessibility, and community connections, making markets economic and social hubs that reflect the city's identity. This article showcases Al-Mubarakiya Souq in Kuwait City, Souq Waqif in Doha, and the Historic Friday Market in Sohar.

Souq Al-Mubarakiya is one of the oldest souqs in Kuwait City and served as the center of trade prior to the country's discovery of oil. It was established over 120 years ago by Kuwaiti merchants who brought their goods from Iraq, Africa, and India. At the time, the souq also housed Kuwait's first public court, led by the then ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, after whom the market was named. Over the years, it remains a significant historical market in Kuwait, hosting a variety of goods ranging from herbs and spices to clothing and accessories.

In 2022, the market was almost completely damaged by a fire that destroyed most of the shops. In response, the Ministries of Public Works and the Municipal Affairs, in coordination with the Kuwait Municipality, initiated the Mubarakiya market reconstruction project. The project is intended to run along 2 phases: the first stage, which consists of design, spanning 5 months, and the second stage of implementation, spanning 13 months.

As a first stage of the reconstruction, excavation was carried out for the installation of municipal infrastructure in coordination with multiple entities.

At this time, the project team discovered historic columns that were buried underground and these were submitted to antiquities and historical building specialists for further study. A decision was also taken to convert the remaining archaeological and historical buildings on-site into a museum highlighting the Mubarakiya area's architectural history; this museum will also house some of the ancient rocks found on-site during the excavation stage.

Kuwait Finance House offered financing for the rebuilding of 17 buildings in the affected area, in addition to developing some of the neighboring buildings in the market, at an estimated cost of 8 million dinars (USD 26 million). It was proposed that viable historic construction material found on the site be used for the rebuilding. The reconstruction is expected to be completed in 2025.

Another significant historic market in the Arab world is Souq Waqif in the city of Doha. It was originally a weekend market for local Bedouins, who would sell meat, wool, and milk along the banks of the Msheirib wadi. Following urban expansion and rapid population growth, however, the souq fell into decay, with new buildings that appeared incompatible with its traditional form.

As in the case of Souq Al-Mubarakiya in Kuwait in 2003, the market was met with a fire that destroyed most of its infrastructure. Following this, the Souq Waqif rehabilitation project was launched, which sought to restore the market's cultural and heritage value. This involved restoration and reconstruction of old buildings, infrastructure modernization, and removal of all forms of visual pollution, such as advertisements. Led by the private engineering Bureau of the Amiri Diwan, the project demolished a number of new alien buildings, replaced metal sheets on roofs with traditional roofs of bamboo, clay, and straw, and glass doors with traditional wooden doors and windows. Additional new features, such as street lighting, were also introduced. Following seven years of rehabilitation work, the souq emerged as a living heritage at the heart of a global city, inviting shoppers, tourists, merchants, and residents alike.

In the case of Sohar City in Oman, the North Batinah Municipality has launched a renovation project for the Souq al Juma (Friday Market). Located centrally in the Wilayat near the historic Sohar Fort and other popular markets, this site is a vital attraction for locals and tourists.



Souq Sohar, Al Batinah
©2024 Holidify

One of the market's unique qualities is its position in Al-Hajrah, near Sohar Fort, the sea road, and the Fort Market for traditional trade and crafts; it is also just a few kilometers from modern shopping complexes, making it a vibrant destination for visitors. The market relies heavily on Omani vendors, offering an authentic local shopping experience.

The renovation aims to expand the market's capacity, streamline the display of local products, and enhance the infrastructure to reduce congestion. Additionally, the improvements will ensure that the market can operate smoothly during challenging weather conditions, such as rain and floods.

The Municipality believes this project will strengthen the market's role as an economic driver for the community. The project covers 2,276 square meters and includes paving a 1,655-meter road, extending asphalt to 17,260 square meters, and constructing a 1,050-meter drainage channel. The revitalized market will enhance commercial activities in Sohar and attract visitors seeking traditional Omani goods from both the Wilayat and the governorate.



Souq Waqif, Doha
©2022 Souq Waqif, Doha

Project 3



Cairo Friday Market
©2021 Masrawy News

The Challenges of Informal markets in Egypt and Morocco

The informal economy, particularly in large cities, plays a crucial role in supporting livelihoods and enabling wider access to the employment industry. However, lack of adequate physical and regulatory infrastructure often affects the economic stability of those employed in this sector. This article explores initiatives in Egypt and Morocco where efforts have been made to address the challenges of informal economic systems by upgrading informal markets and integrating street vendors into the formal planning process.

The city of Cairo is home to a vast number of informal markets, strategically located in a wide number of spaces all around the city, especially around transportation hubs like metro stations and even in cemeteries. Several of these require complex systems of management, as they often operate outside formal mechanisms, sprawling without adequate infrastructure and subsequently harboring a hazardous environment. To address this, the local administration in Cairo has launched two initiatives. The first requires re-planning of existing markets, with the plan to intervene in markets that have spread in an ad-hoc manner. The second initiative focuses on the development of several new 'model' markets at various locations across the city.

One of these model markets, the 'Tunisian Markets Complex' saw completion in 2021, covering an area of approximately 60,000 square meters and located one kilometer away from the old Friday market that was

removed by the government. Its proximity to the former setup allows for a relatively smooth transition for both vendors and buyers. It consists of several sub-markets, focusing on selling furniture, ceramics, sanitary ware, building materials, car scraps, and even animals. It contains a total of 640 shops, 4 fire engines, a police and monitoring station, and several administrative buildings. Beyond physical infrastructure, the market is also managed through the engagement of contractors for general cleaning, waste removal, security, and quality assurance.

According to local news outlets, vendors were pleased with the new market, particularly for its enhanced safety and security mechanisms. The development of the market, including its structure, interior, and utilities, was done through funding from the Informal Settlements Development Fund – now the Urban Development Fund – for a total cost of 300 million Egyptian Pounds (USD 5.9 million).

Struggling with a similar challenge related to local street vendors, in 2015 Morocco launched the National Program for the Rehabilitation of Street Vendors. The implementation of this program took place in Rabat through the building of pilot souqs. However, given the complexity of the systems by which the informal economy operates, as well as various challenges in the form of land scarcity, lack of funding, and limited awareness, the program could not reach all its desired outcomes. Out of 430,000 vendors targeted across the country, only 124,000 were relocated to formal souqs. Following the results of this program, the country proposed several measures to ensure the effective inclusion of vendors in the formal economy. Some of these measures include the development of national legislation and regulations to govern street vending activities, the provision of mobile equipment for vendors, and the setting up of a vocational training system to build the capacities of street vendors and enable them to integrate their businesses with emerging digital tools.

Parallel to this, in 2017, another initiative in Morocco took place in the city of Salé with the aim to enhance local economic activity. An old souk in the neighborhood of Tabriquet was transformed into a modern market following a 5-year construction period and a USD 35 million investment. Named 'Souk Assalihine', the market spans an area of 23 hectares, hosting a commercial complex with 1,070 properties, a central market with over 400 shops, and other facilities such as parking and green public spaces. The project also consists of a financing component that provides health insurance, funding for traders to acquire equipment, and a budget to encourage and support local entrepreneurship.

The range of initiatives across the two countries indicates that there is attention being given to economic inclusion for workers in the informal economy. However, given the diversity of stakeholders and the stronghold of existing informal economic systems, each program is faced with a set of challenges that require further action.



Souk Assalihine, Salé
©2024 المؤشر المغربي | Google Maps

Project 4



Central market of Tunis
©2019 Tom Armstrong | Google Maps

Cases from Algiers, Tunis, and Sfax

Renovation and Digitization of Municipal Markets

With the growth of cities, the importance of central markets and their role in the local economic system has gained significance. Several cities in the Arab region have taken extensive measures to ensure successful operations of their municipal markets, ranging from interventions to enhance the efficiency of the markets to completely revamping infrastructural and upgrading the entire market. This article discusses three markets from Algiers, Tunis, and Sfax, where the local authorities have led revitalization efforts.

The Wilaya of Algiers has launched renovation projects for several markets in the city, aiming to restore those that have fallen into disrepair over the years. One of these, the Three Clocks Market in the municipality of Bab El Oued, dates from the colonial era but was demolished in 2019 following an assessment that declared it a red zone, posing a risk to the safety of citizens. Approximately 300 traders were affected by the closure and relocated to the Saïd-Touati market.

After 4 years of construction, the market was upgraded to a commercial complex of 4 floors, equipped with two freight elevators, and designated spacious areas for fruit and vegetable stalls as well as for fishmongers. Cladded with gray stone on the first two levels, the building is glazed mainly on the upper levels. It is constructed using a metal frame, making the building stand in contrast with the rest of the historic district.

The vendors and residents expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the renovated market, particularly its compliance with hygiene standards. Due to its affordability, the market sees visitors from all over the city of Algiers, particularly during Ramadan, which is when the market re-opened in 2023.

Similarly, the municipality of Tunis in Tunisia is rehabilitating its central market, Fondouk El Ghalla, that was established in 1891 and is an integral part of the country's heritage. In 2007, following 4 years of renovation work, it was re-launched to improve consumer experience, enhance the physical design and infrastructure of the market, and limit the former market's impact on the environment.

With a total cost of 6.5 million dinars (USD 2 million), the work included the restoration of market halls, shop fronts, building elevations, and water drainage networks. The equipment and fixtures utilized in the market were upgraded to align with modern specifications. The rehabilitation also consisted of interventions in the market's open spaces, such as the installation of shades, and the associated fish market was redeveloped entirely as well. All the technical studies and restoration of the central hall in the market were carried out by the Association for the Preservation of the Medina (ASM), given their expertise in historical monuments.

In addition to the central market, the municipality of Tunis is also working on four other municipal markets. These include the markets in El Intilaka, El Hafsia, Cité Ibn Khoudlounk, and El Mellassine. The major works include the construction of fruit and vegetable sale outlets, fish and poultry sale points, and the development of parking lots.

Sfax, a city in Tunisia, is working on rehabilitating its vegetable and grains wholesale market. Originally created in 1981, the market covers an area of 80,000 square meters with 60 shops, and a daily visitor count of 5000 people. Between 2012 and 2024, it underwent multiple rehabilitation initiatives, including expansion of market area, development of a new administrative building, and installation of digital screens in the shops.



Central market of Tunis
©2024 Tom Armstrong

What makes this market rehabilitation stand out is the adoption of digital tools to ensure the efficient functioning of the market. The transaction systems, from consumer sales to inventory management, were entirely digitized. Electronic systems were established for the weighing of goods, and surveillance mechanisms were installed throughout the market. Exit and entry points were also equipped with sensors to ensure monitoring and security.

These initiatives indicate that municipal authorities continue to play a significant role in ensuring the sustained functioning and management of central markets, and through various forms of interventions, they can enhance the quality of these markets to better serve the needs of citizens.



Three Clocks Market in Bab el Oued
©2024 Bab El Oued | Facebook

Project 5



Craftsmen Market, Al-Ahsa
©2024 Al Fakharia

Reviving Traditions
The Role of Handicrafts Markets in Al Hofuf and Abha

This article highlights the crucial role of handicrafts in society, showcasing its reliance on human skill and creativity over machinery. These crafts demand dedication and exceptional talent, offering cultural value and a vital source of income for many families. Government institutions actively promote this tradition to support artisans and preserve living heritage. We narrate the experiences of two Saudi cities, Hafouf and Abha, in embracing and celebrating their rich handicraft legacy.

To preserve heritage and traditional crafts and build on Al-Ahsa's 2015 presence in UNESCO's Creative Cities Network for crafts and folk arts, the Artisans Market "Souk Al Herafien" was established in 2020 in the heart of Al-Hofuf's historic district. Designed in the distinctive architectural style of Al-Ahsa, the market spans over 12,000 m2 and features 215 parking spaces. It is divided into two sections: 86 shops for dry crafts and 26 larger shops for water-based crafts, both connected by roofed pathways with natural lighting and ventilation.

The market also includes a central courtyard inspired by traditional local homes, surrounded by arcades, with a coffee shop and a bakery. An adjacent circular plaza serves as a hub for cultural festivals and events, celebrating the region's rich heritage and folk arts. This unique design positions the market as a key architectural and tourism landmark.

The "Souk Al Herafien" provides a dedicated space for artisans to showcase and market their work at affordable rents, contributing to the sustainability of traditional crafts and their transmission to future generations. The municipality facilitates artisan registration online, ensuring adherence to craftsmanship standards.

"Fatat Al-Ahsa Association" launched the "Etlad " initiative, offering a platform for artisans to learn, share experiences, and innovate. In alignment with Saudi Vision 2030 and the upcoming "Year of Crafts" in 2025, the initiative emphasizes developing crafts using modern techniques to enhance creativity and economic potential.

Through 20 specialized workshops, artisans are trained in skills like wood carving, weaving, pottery, and perfume making, alongside courses in design and marketing. The initiative also features partnerships with government and private sectors, as well as family enterprises , and includes a children's section to foster creativity, affirming Al-Ahsa's role as a child-friendly city and a global hub for cultural heritage.

Similarly, Abha is undertaking significant efforts to revive and promote traditional crafts as part of the Asir region's cultural identity. The National Program for Crafts and Handicrafts (Bare'a), under the General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage, is leading initiatives to spotlight Asir's crafts within the Arab world through structured projects and partnerships.

The Heritage Authority, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and the Asir Development Authority, recently documented and analyzed the decorative designs of Asir's crafts. This project produced photographic archives and artistic studies of traditional motifs and developed four classification pathways for analyzing heritage designs and creative applications for modern artisanal products.

The initiative revitalizes crafts such as Al-Qatt Al-Asiri , wooden carvings, and traditional jewelry, aiming to merge heritage with innovation. By developing contemporary products inspired by traditional motifs, the project supports sustainable development for artisans, designers, and creative youth.

Abha is supporting artisans and boosting tourism by showcasing its rich crafts heritage, including traditional Al-Qatt art, silverwork, stone-and-mud construction, and innovative forms like decoupage and recycling. Key initiatives include establishing a crafts center in Al-Muftaha Village through heritage organization partnerships, offering training programs with institutions like Nafisa Shams Academy , and fostering talent through festival participation. The Abha Chamber of Commerce further supported this effort by hosting a four-day handicrafts exhibition featuring 36 artisans, providing local women a platform to market their products and highlighting the role of handicrafts in driving economic growth and preserving cultural heritage.

Additionally, the Tuesday Market in Abha is a blend of history and commerce. This bustling hub offers pottery, textiles, aromatic plants, and traditional tools, reflecting Asir's heritage. It connects past and present while attracting tourists and supporting the local economy.

Through these efforts, Abha is strengthening its cultural identity, boosting local livelihoods, and positioning itself as a key destination for cultural tourism.



Al Muftaha Arts Village, Abha
©2024 Amal | Google maps

Project 6



Central Market in Manama
©2018 Julia Inserro

Restructuring Major Wholesale Markets in Rabat and Manama

The active functioning of wholesale markets supports a range of economic activities and local livelihoods in a city. With evolving development paradigms, several cities have led efforts to restructure the format of their wholesale markets. This article explores the cases of Rabat in Morocco, and Manama in Bahrain to highlight various interventions being carried out in the Arab world when it comes to the restructuring of wholesale markets.

In Morocco, the Ministry of the Interior recently announced the creation of a new generation of wholesale markets, aimed at improving trade infrastructure and meeting international standards. The plan involves three key areas: restructuring the national wholesale network, modernizing market services, and implementing a more efficient management model. The goal is to establish 12 new regional wholesale markets for fruits and vegetables across the country. The first such market is expected to be completed in Rabat by the end of 2023, with additional markets under construction in Fez, Berkane, Marrakech, and Inezgane.

The reform aims to address challenges in the fruit and vegetable trade, including outdated infrastructure and excessive reliance on intermediaries. Alongside the wholesale market overhaul, the Ministry of the Interior is collaborating with the Ministry of Industry and Trade to develop a rehabilitation program for local

markets. There are currently 822 local markets in Morocco, including 753 in rural areas and 69 in urban centers. Between 2021 and 2022, 62 million dirhams (USD 6.2 million) were invested in renovating several weekly markets.

The new Rabat-Témara-Salé wholesale market will be located near the ring road connecting Rabat to Tangier and Fez. This market will serve around 3,580 vendors in the agricultural and agri-food sectors and supply surrounding areas like Tiflet, Khémisset, and Rommani. The total cost for the project is estimated at 550 million dirhams (USD 55 million).

The fish market in Tamesna, financed by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), is already operational. Covering 20,000 m2, it replaced the outdated El Akkari fish market and cost 71 million dirhams (USD 7.1 million). Additionally, with a total investment of 550 million dirhams (USD 55 million), a new fruit and vegetable market will be built in the industrial zone near El Youssoufia.

In the city of Manama in Bahrain, the central market is undergoing transformation in light of growing economic activity and the limited capacity of the market's current infrastructure to adequately serve the population. The Manama Central Market is Bahrain's largest and most prominent market and is set for relocation within the next six years.

The new market is expected to accommodate future growth, including more warehouses, shops, stalls, offices, and modern amenities like cafes and restaurants. The new site will also host more advanced logistics infrastructure such as loading zones, administrative buildings, and other facilities. The relocation is targeted for completion by 2030 and the Bahrain Real Estate Investment Company (Edamah) has invited bids for the Central Market Master Plan Project.

However, currently, while the market is still running, there has been significant investment in the market's renovation. The annual upkeep of the market costs up to 1 million dinars (USD 2.6 million) The ongoing works on the 141,000 m2 site include organizing truck parking in collaboration with the private sector, as well as offering shaded loading and selling zones. The development of the facilities includes providing shading for the fish market which occupies an area of 932 m2. Other interventions consist of installing solar panels and upgrading LED lighting as part of efforts to reduce electricity consumption. Additionally, work is underway to step up air-conditioning maintenance work and increase the number of compressors in the meat market.

The authority is also working to increase green spaces as part of national afforestation initiatives. The new market is expected to have solar panels and LED lights, as well as a greater number of green spaces for visitors to enjoy. The central market's great success and operational efficiency are expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing both the city's and the country's economic value.



Rabat-Témara-Salé Market
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OUR NEWS

AUDI TAKES THE STAGE AT THE WORLD URBAN FORUM 12

Along with Saudi Arabia's delegation that participated in the World Urban Forum, and headed by His Highness the Mayor of the Riyadh Region, President of the AUDI, the Institute strengthened its presence in WUF through the organization of a series of dialogue sessions that discussed prominent issues and trends in the field of urban development. AUDI also held over 30 meetings with cities, international organizations and government agencies, and established strategic partnerships with a number of international entities.

AUDI in Urban Expo

AUDI's booth at WUF12 emerged as a dynamic hub for dialogue and knowledge exchange, attracting over 1,500 visitors. The booth showcased the Institute's diverse range of initiatives, from sustainable urban planning and design to innovative financing mechanisms and capacity building programs. Through interactive displays, presentations, and expert discussions, AUDI highlighted the transformative impact of its work in the Arab cities.



AUDI's booth at the Urban Expo at WUF12 in Cairo
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Dr. Anas Almughairy, Director General of AUDI, speaking at the session 'Toward Future Cities; Putting Quality of Life and People wellbeing at the Core of Urban Planning'
©2024 Arab Urban Development Institute

7 events

AUDI has taken a leading role in shaping the future of urban development by leading and participating in a series of influential events.

1. Toward Future Cities; Putting Quality of Life and People wellbeing at the Core of Urban Planning

Organized by the Quality-of-Life Program and its respected partners, this event emphasized the critical importance of quality of life and human well-being as foundational elements in urban development strategies. It explored methodologies for embedding these principles into urban planning and long-term foresight, specifically focusing on enhancing the quality of life for those living in urban areas.

AUDI's Director General, Dr. Anas Almughairy, joined the Panel discussion exploring innovative approaches to urban planning that prioritize human well-being and quality of life

2. AI for People-Powered Cities: Transforming the future with Data-Driven Precision

Organized by Al Riyadh Region Municipality in collaboration with AUDI, along with Bogotá's Secretaría Distrital del Hábitat and Secretaría Distrital de Planeación, this event discussed the transformable power of AI to revolutionize urban development and prioritize citizen engagement. Discussions centered around how data-driven solutions can create smarter, more responsive cities that empower citizens and optimize urban services.

AUDI's Director of Capacity Development and Training, Dr. Montaser Hiyari, moderated the panel discussion, guiding conversations around how data-driven solutions can create smarter, more responsive cities.

3. Connective Threo-Practical Approach for Better Urban Future

Organized by AUDI in partnership with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Jordan Office, this event was held as a powerful demonstration of what collaboration can achieve in moving beyond theoretical discussions to real-world actions that make a difference.

AUDI's Director of Capacity Development and Training, Dr. Montaser Hiyari, moderated the panel discussion, directing the conversation on enhancing the effectiveness and outcomes of urban initiatives through collaboration and local adaptation of theoretical approach.

4. Urban Practices Sharing Platforms: Reimagining Urban Development Through Collaboration

Organized by Metropolis in collaboration with AUDI, the event drew attention to the transformative power of collaborative knowledge-sharing platforms in advancing inclusive, sustainable, and resilient urban development at a global scale to the conversation

AUDI's Director of Urban Policy Research Program, Dr. Jihad Farah, joined the panel discussion exploring how collaborative efforts can reshape urban development practices and improve outcomes.

5. Adaptive Public Spaces Key Ingredients for Optimizing Public Space Activation, Safety and Accessibility

Organized by Cairo University and UN Habitat, this event examined the crucial role of public spaces in urban development, focusing on their activation, safety, and accessibility. It explored how adaptive public space planning can enhance urban livability, especially in high-density, mixed-use areas, by creating inclusive and accessible spaces for all citizens.

AUDI Urban Expert and Project Manager, Dr. Hassan Elmouelhi, participated in the panel emphasizing the importance of public spaces in promoting social cohesion, improving public safety, and driving local economic development.

6. Downtown And Placemaking Action for Sustainable Urban Development;

Organized by the National Organization for Urban Harmony and its partner, this event addressed strategies for creating inclusive and resilient urban spaces, particularly in city centers and historically marginalized public spaces.

AUDI Urban Expert and Project Manager, Dr. Hassan Elmouelhi, facilitated the panel discussion on the importance of downtown revitalization and placemaking for sustainable urban development.

7. Urban renewal, the neighborhood as a catalyst for local actions and initiatives

AUDI was invited by the National Urban Renovation Agency (NURA) in Morocco (affiliated to the Ministry of Planning, Housing and Urban Policy) to present the "Participatory Greening of Neighborhoods in Arab Cities" Urban Living Lab project as part of a panel on "Urban Renovation: the Neighborhood as Catalyser of Local Action and Initiatives". The panel was set within the Moroccan pavilion and sought to consider different approaches to transforming existing neighborhoods to improve their quality of life.

Dr. Jihad Farah presented the Urban Living Lab, focusing on how tactical greening interventions and public-private-people partnerships could improve the overall quality of the urban space and foster social cohesion and a sense of empowerment in the neighborhood. Other interventions included presentations captured the perspectives and approaches of different types of actors including the director of NURA, a representative of UH-HABITAT.

AUDI's active participation at WUF12 underscores its role as a catalyst for urban innovation, driving dialogue and collaboration that contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By championing sustainable practices and empowering municipalities across its extensive network, AUDI continues to lead the charge in shaping resilient and inclusive cities across the Arab region.

LAUNCH OF THE ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE

The Arab Urban Development Institute, in partnership with the Riyadh Municipality, officially announced its pioneering initiative, the 'Arab European Cities Dialogue (AECD)'. The AECD is an inter-regional initiative that fosters collaboration and networking between mayors and other representatives of Arab and European cities, alongside international and financing organizations. It aims to contribute to the dynamic between the Arab region and Europe by harnessing the potential of city to city cooperation and partnerships for resilient and sustainable development.

Planned for May 2025, it will bring together over 120 mayors from Arab and European Cities and engage them in an insightful dialogue on a number of issues that are of significance to municipal urban development. It is designed around 4 primary themes: Environment and Climate Change, Investment and Local Economic Development, Livable Cities, and Digital Transformation. To formally establish the initiative, a formal Memorandum of Understanding was signed between AUDI, Platforma, and VNG International at the World Urban Forum in Cairo, under the patronage of His Higheness the Mayor of Riyadh, the Mayor of Utrecht, the Mayor of Nouakchott, Mayor of Cairo, and other city networks and international organizations.



Signing of the Arab European Cities Dialogue (AECD) Memorandum of Understanding at the World Urban Forum 12 in Cairo
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ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE DELEGATION STRENGTHENS REGIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE UAE

A delegation from the Arab Urban Development Institute visited the United Arab Emirates, where it participated in the Livable CitiesX Forum and concluded a number of agreements and partnerships to enhance the Institute's international presence.

Livable CitiesX

AUDI was honoured to partner with dmg events and participate in the upcoming Liveable CitiesX event in Dubai, UAE, held from the 26th to 28th November. Dr. Almughairy represented AUDI at the Liveable CitiesX Summit, participating in a panel discussion on 'Evolving Cities: How changing population dynamics



Panel for 'Evolving Cities: How changing population dynamics are shaping how we live and work in urban environments' at the Liveable CitiesX in Dubai
©2024 dmg events

are shaping how we live and work in urban environments.' Other panel members consisted of Lufuno Ratsiku, Board Member and Non-Executive Director of City Power at Johannesburg, Sameer Daoud, Managing Director of KEO Infrastructure, Lutz Wilgen, Head of Design Management at Masdar City, and Dr. Akram Award, Partner and Global Lead for Smart Cities at Boston Consulting Group.

The session was moderated by Gurminder Singh Sagoo, Managing Director of Egis (UAE & Oman), who engaged the panel in an insightful discussion on what it means for cities to be livable, how population growth is impacting urban development, and what the various industry experts are doing in their respective fields to keep up with these changes. Dr. Anas highlighted AUDI's critical role in supporting Arab cities transition into livable and inclusive spaces, while acknowledging the challenges posed by the varying level of resources across the region, from highly developed urban centers to cities struggling with basic infrastructure. The panel members further contributed with their insights on the role of energy, infrastructure, sustainability, and design in transforming the landscape of cities.

Dubai Expo

As part of strengthening partnerships with leading regional institutions in the fields of urban development, a delegation from the Arab Urban Development Institute visited Expo City Dubai Authority. The Director General of the Institute met with the Executive Director of Expo City Dubai, Ms. Nadia Verjee. During the meeting, the two entities discussed common visions on addressing challenges and investing in opportunities in Arab cities. Innovative projects and initiatives of common interest and cooperation were also reviewed.



Left to Right: Ms. Lana Abdelhameed, Ms. Misha Mittal, Mr. Andrew White, Ms. Nadia Verjee, Dr. Anas Almughairy, Ms. Alba Fernández Collado, Mr. Timothée Néron-Bancel, Ms. Nasra Al Rahma, Ms. Fatima Jaafari
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AUDI'S NEW PARTNERSHIPS

As a regional organization with a network of over 650 cities, AUDI is engaged in multiple partnerships, seeking to facilitate urban development efforts across the region and internationally. In the last two months, AUDI has developed a relationship with a number of international organizations, and has signed formal partnership agreements to move forward with a shared agenda for the future of cities.

Municipality of AlBaha:

As an essential part of its support activities for the municipal sector, the Arab Urban Development Institute will organize specialized training courses to help develop the capabilities of Al Baha Municipality employees. These courses aim to improve municipal work and better support urban development priorities in Al Baha. An agreement between AUDI and the Municipality of AlBaha was established that includes identifying areas of urban policy research that the Municipality is interested in, as well as engaging the Municipality in events and conferences held by the institute.

Housing and Building National Research Center (HBRC), Egyptian Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities

The collaboration includes the organization of conferences, workshops, and knowledge-sharing events to foster the exchange of expertise and best practices in sustainable planning in the Arab region.



Partnership agreement between AUDI and the Municipality of AlBaha, signed by Dr. Anas Almughairy, Director General of AUDI, and Dr. Ali bin Muhammad Al-Sawat, Mayor of AlBaha
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Signing of the agreement between the Arab Urban Development Institute and the Housing and Building National Research Center, Egypt
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AUDI and HBRC will also work together to develop and implement training programs designed for municipalities, professionals from the private sector, and organizations in Egypt and other countries. These programs will aim to enhance skills and build capacity in sustainable urban planning and development. Additionally, the partners will work on the production of publications on sustainability, urban development, and other themes that fall under their common focal areas.

Government of Ajman

In November, AUDI strengthened its partnership with the Government of Ajman through a formal cooperation agreement with the Municipalities and Planning Department. The signing ceremony, attended by His Excellency Abdul Rahman Mohammed Al Nuaimi, Director General of the Department, marked a shared commitment to enhancing urban development in the emirate. Following the agreement, the delegation toured key sites in Ajman Municipality, including rehabilitation of housing projects and newly developed pedestrian-friendly areas in the city center, showcasing efforts to transform the emirate into a more accessible and livable place.

Metropolis

The collaboration between Metropolis and AUDI aims to exchange insights from urban practices sharing platforms to identify lessons and synergies. They will co-design and implement an Urban Finance Forum during the Arab European Cities Dialogue in Riyadh in May 2025. A seminar will be organized to raise awareness among GCC metropolises about the benefits of enhancing the international presence of cities, fostering further collaboration. Additionally, they will explore joint activities at international city events and facilitate urban policy exchanges to address challenges through shared experiences and solutions.

Bloomberg Philanthropies

In line with its mandate to strengthen linkages and provide technical support, the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) has signed an agreement with Bennett Midland in November 2024 to enhance the participation of Arab cities in the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayors Challenge.

Bloomberg Philanthropies is dedicated to improving lives by focusing on five key areas: the arts, education, the environment, government innovation and public health. The organization works to make a positive impact in over 700 cities across 150 countries.

One of Bloomberg Philanthropies' flagship initiatives is the Mayors Challenge. This competition encourages cities with populations of over 100,000 to innovate in areas such as public transportation, waste management, housing, emergency response and more. The challenge offers a prize of $25 million, which will be distributed among 25 winners.

As part of the collaboration AUDI hosted an introductory webinar on the Global Mayor Challenge in the last week of November 2024. Over 35 Arab cities participated, marking the official launch of AUDI's activities in this initiative. AUDI will provide advisory services to these cities throughout the application process, helping to develop competitive proposals that contribute to sustainable urban development, increasing the visibility of Arab cities and elevating their presence on the global stage for their innovative potential.

SALAR International

The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) partnered with the international arm of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities' and Regions (SALAR International) to elevate the capabilities of municipalities and local authorities across the Arab region. This collaborative endeavor, formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), aims to foster knowledge sharing, capacity building, and innovative solutions for urban challenges.

SALAR International is a global leader in local government development, is dedicated to strengthening local democracy and good governance worldwide. With a rich history of international cooperation, SALAR International promotes sustainable development, human rights, and social justice



Partnership agreement between AUDI and the Municipalities and Planning Department of Ajman, signed by Dr. Anas Almughairy and His Excellency Abdul Rahman Mohammad Al Nuaimi
©2024 Government of Ajman

By combining their expertise and resources, AUDI and SALAR International will work together to:

- Enhance Capacity Building: Implement comprehensive training programs to equip municipal staff with the latest knowledge and skills.
- Facilitate Knowledge Sharing: Foster the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions between Arab cities and Swedish municipalities.
- Explore Joint Projects: Collaborate on initiatives that address common urban challenges, such as climate change, sustainable transportation, and affordable housing.
- Promote Policy Development: Conduct joint research and develop evidence-based policies to inform decision-making.

Technical University Dortmund

The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) continues to forge strong partnerships with prestigious global academic institutions to advance sustainable urban development in Arab cities.

In this context, AUDI is proud to announce its partnerships with TU Dortmund University, a prominent German institution known for its expertise in urban planning, spatial development, and interdisciplinary research. This collaboration represents a significant step toward advancing sustainable urban development and fostering innovation in the Arab region and globally

Formalized through a memorandum of agreement, the partnership outlines several key areas of cooperation, including:

- Joint Research: Collaborative research initiatives addressing pressing urban challenges such as climate change adaptation, sustainable urban planning, and affordable housing among others.
- Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building: Facilitating the exchange of research findings, publications, and academic materials, along with implementing joint international training programs, masterclasses and workshops to enhance the skills, improve knowledge and expand exposure for Arab Municipal Leaders and Professionals.
- International Collaboration: Fostering international collaboration through the exchange of academics and administrative personnel professionals.



Memorandum of Understanding between AUDI and SALAR International, signed by Dr. Anas Almughairy, Director General of AUDI, and
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AUDI PRESENTS AT THE CLIMATE-RESILIENT URBAN FUTURES SYMPOSIUM

In partnership with the Technical University of Berlin, Cairo University and Ain Shams University, and through the funding of the COSIMENA program of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), AUDI organized a Symposium on "Empowering Young Academics to Shape Climate-Resilient Urban Futures in Arab Cities". The Symposium was held as a side event of the World Urban Forum, in the DAAD building in the Zamalek neighborhood In Cairo on Nov. 10-11 2024. The Symposium aimed to bring together young and more seasoned urban researchers, academics and practitioners from the Arab region and Germany to discuss research agendas and approaches to integrate urban, climate and resilience-related issues in urban planning education programs. It included 12 different presentations and a workshop.

From AUDI, Dr. Jihad Farah, Director of the Urban Policy Research program, gave a presentation on the need to integrate the "crisis" dimension in urban planning, especially in relation to urban infrastructures, by learning from humanitarian contexts. Also, Dr. Hassan El-Mouelhi, director of the "Participatory Greening of Neighborhoods in Arab Cities" Urban Living Lab project, gave a presentation on the action-research project AUDI is leading in Amman and Port-Said and Tunis.



Dr. Jihad Farah, Director of the Urban Policy Research Program presenting at the Symposium
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EPIUM PHASE 2: STOCKHOLM'S URBAN EXCELLENCE

In partnership with SALAR International, AUDI has successfully concluded the second phase of its Executive Program in Innovation and Urban Management (EPIUM). Building on the foundational knowledge and skills gained during the inaugural phase in Berkeley, California, a cohort of 30 distinguished Arab municipal leaders embarked on an intensive two-week study tour to Stockholm, Sweden.

This phase, aptly named "The Mastery," provided participants with a hands-on opportunity to explore advanced municipal management practices. By immersing themselves in Stockholm's renowned urban landscape, they gained invaluable insights into sustainable urban development, innovative solutions, and best practices.

Phase Key Highlights:

Immersive Site Visits: Participants visited iconic urban development projects, such as the Stockholm Royal Seaport, Slussen and Hagastaden, gaining firsthand experience of sustainable urban planning and design.

- Expert-Led Sessions: they engaged in insightful discussions with renowned urban planners, policymakers, and municipal officials, learning about cutting-edge solutions to current urban challenges.

- Practical Workshop: Participants actively participated in a workshop on climate resilience focusing on how to localize the practices for the Arab context.

- Knowledge Exchange: Through peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities, participants shared experiences, challenges, and solutions with fellow municipal leaders and city officials.

By combining theoretical knowledge with practical experience, EPIUM empowered participants to become innovative leaders in urban development. This program is a testament to AUDI's commitment to fostering excellence in urban management and contributing to the sustainable development of Arab cities.



Second phase of its Executive Program in Innovation and Urban Management (EPIUM)
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SPECIALIZED TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Centered to its mission, and in alignment with its strategy, AUDI is working towards implementing a set of specialized training programs that aim to build the capacities of municipal professionals, enable them to use the latest technologies, and encourage the exchange of experiences and knowledge. This aims to contribute to formulating more effective urban development policies.

Through these training programs, AUDI continues to play a pivotal role in equipping municipal leaders with the tools and expertise needed to drive sustainable urban development.

Recent Training Workshops included:

- **[In-Person] Municipal Leadership Training Workshop in Muscat, Oman**

A 3-day immersive training workshop, delivered by AUDI in Muscat, municipal leaders and decision-makers in Muscat Municipality. The workshop was designed to equip participants with the essential tools and strategies to navigate the critical first 100 days in office and beyond.



Municipal Leadership Training Workshop in Muscat, Oman
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The workshop delved into a wide range of topics, including visionary leadership, effective team building, strategic prioritization, financial management, public engagement, and leveraging technology for efficient service delivery

Through a combination of expert-led sessions, case studies, and interactive exercises, participants gained valuable insights and practical skills to navigate the complexity of municipal governance. Renowned experts, including former mayors and seasoned municipal leaders, shared their experiences and best practices.

- **[In-Person] Cities Humanization Training Workshop in Najran Municipality, Saudi Arabia**

Last October, AUDI conducted a two-day training workshop for Najran Municipality, centered on the principles of human-centered urban design. The workshop aimed to empower participants with the knowledge and tools to create cities that prioritize the well-being and experiences of their residents.

The event delved into the core concepts of human-centered design, exploring why cities that focus on human needs are crucial for enhancing quality of life. Participants also gained insights into emerging trends in urban design, including potential challenges and future opportunities.

Through this expert-led session, case studies, and interactive exercises, attendees learned practical skills such as measuring the success of urban design projects, leveraging the power of aesthetics and public art, and utilizing analytical tools to optimize urban environments. The ultimate goal was to equip participants with the ability to design inclusive, accessible, and dynamic urban spaces.



Cities Humanization Training Workshop in the Municipality of Najran, Saudi Arabia
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CITIES IN ACTION: WEBINAR ON EVALUATING THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ALGIERS (2010-2019)

The Arab Urban Development Institute organized its sixth session of the Cities in Action webinar series on 1st October, 2024, in the presence of several urban deveopment specialists and professionals. Dr. Abdullah Dhaifallah, moderator of the webinar and Professor of Urban Planning, began the session with an overview of the webinar series and highlighted its importance in enriching the discussion on urban development across all Arab cities. He also stressed that the benefit of these sessions lies in identifying pioneering urban development projects and exchanging ideas on mechanisms and the elements of success.

Eng. Amine Benaissa, an architect, urban planner and associate professor at Paris-Sorbonne University, began with a discussion on the city of Algiers and its



Webinar on evaluating the Strategic Plan for Algiers (2010-2019)
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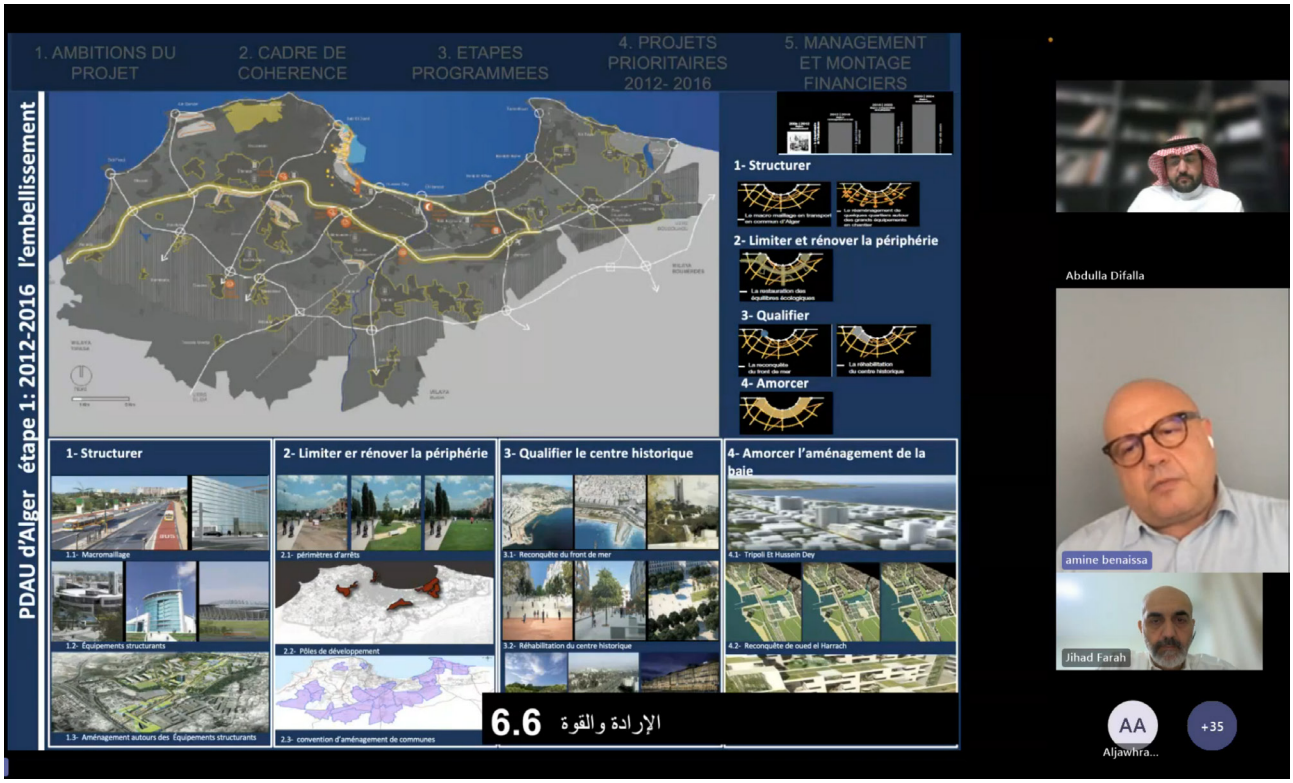
ambitious strategic vision to promote development and regional integration, pointing out that the Algerian government announced a new strategic vision in 2006. This vision aimed to promote economic and social development in the country, taking advantage of its strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea. The strategic plan was built based on economic, social, and political ambitions.

He pointed out that statistics indicate remarkable demographic growth in the education sector, as the number of students increased from less than 1,000 in the early sixties to more than 1.5 million today, reflecting the burgeoning demand for education.

Eng. Amin reviewed a significant project in the Mediterranean that aims to achieve economic and social integration among the countries of the region. It is a "micrograph" network project, he said, which is based on the organization of the metropolitan city of Algiers through the construction of new roads, and a plan has been put forward to restructure public transport to improve the quality of services. He added to the importance of working under the framework of flexible engineering in developing new projects.

Eng. Amin discussed new projects in Algiers, starting with the construction of a new center around the medical campus in Warsaw, the construction of a legal campus, and a new center around the Great Mosque. He emphasized the need for social cohesion and economic development to create new areas, with the principle of rehabilitation and the relationship between development and sustainability. Development projects in Algeria include roads, waterfront, and parks, focusing on combining tradition and modernity.

Finally, Eng. Amin asserted that the Algerian Government is committed to the principles of sustainable development, and the concerned authority organized mobile exhibitions to present the strategic plan and participated in the discussion of projects to enhance cooperation to achieve the desired goals. This step marks a milestone in Algeria's journey towards a more sustainable and integrated future. At the end of the meeting, Dr. Abdullah Dhaifallah thanked the attendees for their valuable interaction and participation, praising Engineer Amine Issa's prominent role in evaluating the Strategic Plan for the Wilaya of Algiers. He stressed the importance of continuing these meetings to enhance cooperation and knowledge exchange among specialists in urban development.



Webinar on evaluating the Strategic Plan for Algiers (2010-2019)
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CITIES IN ACTION: WEBINAR ON THE JOURNEY OF DEVELOPING THE SUSTAINABLE CITY OF MSHEIREB

The Arab Urban Development Institute organized its seventh session of the Cities in Action webinar series on 29th October, 2024, in the presence of several urban development specialists and professionals.

Dr. Abdullah Dhaifallah, moderator of the webinar and Professor of Urban Planning, began the session with an overview of the webinar series and highlighted its importance in enriching the discussion on urban development across all Arab cities. He also stressed that the benefit of these sessions lies in identifying pioneering urban development projects and exchanging ideas on mechanisms and the elements of success.



Webinar on the journey of developing the Sustainable City of Msheireb
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The meeting began with a presentation by engineer Fatima Mohammed Fawzi, architect, urban planner, and member of the Board of Directors of the Department of Architecture at Qatar University.

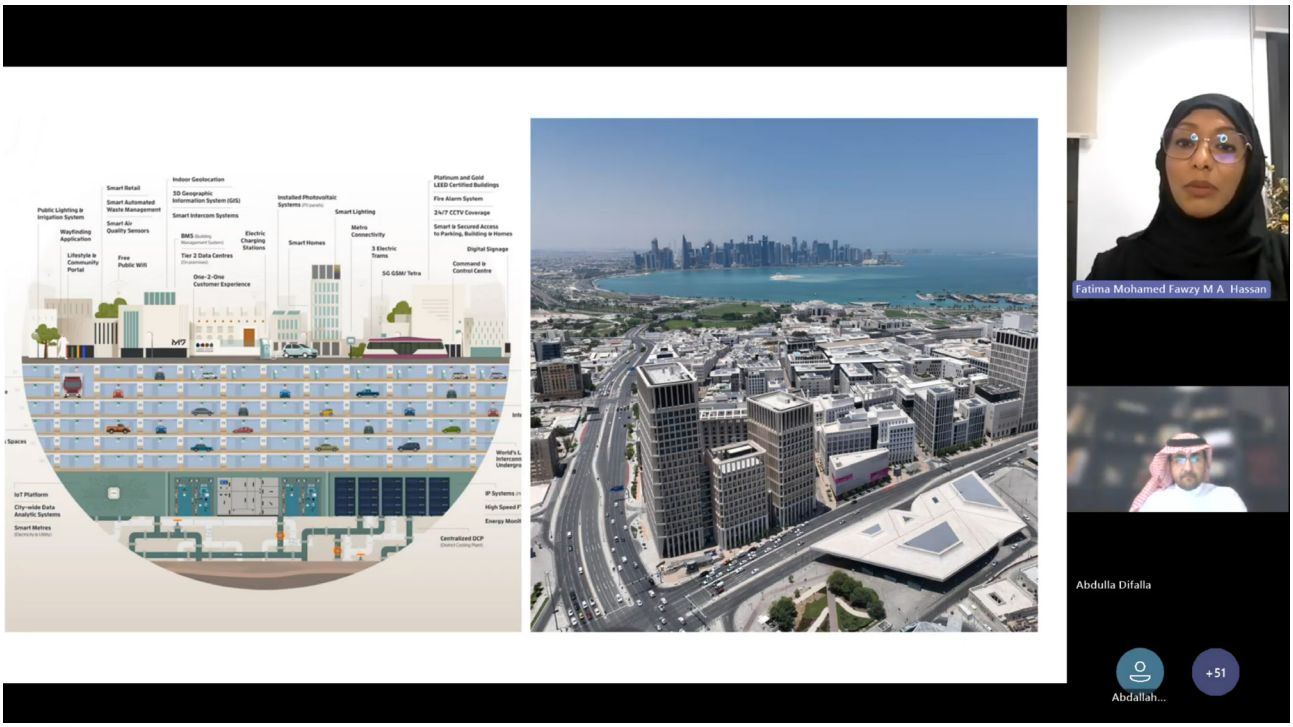
It reviewed the vision and objectives of the Msheireb Heart of Doha project, the principles of the city's master plan, and the project's experience in developing a modern country architectural Qatari identity based on sustainability principles.

Engineer Fatima explained that the development of Msheireb Sustainable City came with the efforts of Msheireb Real Estate Company, chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser's Board of Directors. The company worked to strike a balance between innovation and the requirements of preserving culture and local heritage.

The engineer addressed the master plan of the suburb of Msheireb, which resulted from three years of research with the participation of a selection of major engineering companies and global houses of expertise. The blueprint combines traditional Qatari architecture with modern contemporary design to create a new architectural language. The project is distinguished by its buildings obtaining "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design" (LEED) Gold and Platinum certificates, reflecting its commitment to the highest sustainability standards. The project also entered the Guinness World Record for containing the world's largest underground parking lot, with a capacity exceeding 10,000.

Engineer Fatima asserted that the project "Msheireb Heart of Doha" aims to be a role model and a global benchmark for sustainable urban development.

At the end of the meeting, Dr. Abdullah Dafiullah thanked the attendees for their interaction and valuable participation, commending the outstanding role of engineer Fatima Mohamed Fawzi in leading this exceptional presentation about the development journey of Msheireb. He stressed the importance of continuing these meetings to enhance cooperation and knowledge exchange among specialists in urban development.



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Riyadh 11452
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

P.O Box 6892,
Diplomatic Quarter

T. +966114802698
mudununa@araburban.org

araburban.org

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