

Retrofitting traditional neighborhoods in Doha

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Rapid urbanization in Doha during the past few decades has resulted in the disappearance of traditional neighborhoods that were replaced by modern mega real-estate developments, public buildings and projects. More traditional neighborhoods are threatened to be demolished to allow the construction of new real estate projects due to their land value and strategic locations. The most threatened areas are the ones located in the old city center adjacent to historical sites. There is a need to preserve these environments as they represent stages of Doha's urban development and history. This paper presents strategies and proposals to preserve and improve one of Doha's unique traditionally built environments. A group of graduate students from the Masters of Urban Planning and Design program at Qatar University carried out an in-depth study of one of the threatened traditionally built environments in Doha as part of Urban Planning Legislation course requirements. The area, known as Old-Mushaireb, located near the under-construction Msheireb, Downtown Doha and the renovated touristic attraction Souq Waqif, was the residence of many old Qatari families. It has a strategic location in the heart of Doha surrounded by main roads, namely; the A-Ring Road, Wadi Musheireb Street and Abdul Aziz Bin Ahmed Street. It contains large number of traditional houses, and historical and modern buildings. The perimeter of the area is occupied by mixed-use buildings constructed after the discovery of oil. The heart of the area contains a large number of traditional houses occupied by low income migrant workers. Each house is occupied by a large number of individuals with no adequate hygienic nor living conditions. The narrow streets and old fareejs are in a deteriorated condition lacking proper pavement and sewage system. Many buildings are either abandoned, deteriorated or neglected with no proper maintenance. The condition is not acceptable neither for the poor workers nor for the unique traditionally built environment and houses that are deteriorating rapidly and are on the verge of collapsing. The aim of this project was to study the area and introduce legislation to preserve and enhance the quality of the built environment that would consequently enhance the human experience and use of space. The goal was to make the area a national and tourist attraction representing a stage in the physical evolution of the built environment in Doha. Another objective was to ensure a quality experience in an attractive heritage place that would respect all age groups using a sustainable approach. The area was surveyed and documented applying urban planning and design methods and practices. The team members analyzed the area and proposed a preservation and improvement strategy that addresses the following components: 1) historical preservation, 2) safety and security, 3) children, 4) territoriality, 5) senior citizens, 6) walkability and 7) streets and parking. The study provides a model for a comprehensive strategy to retrofit, improve and preserve traditionally built environments that represent important stages of Doha's urban development.

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