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## Neighborhoods and Social Interactions: The Case of Al-Najada Area in Doha

Rana Awwad<sup>1</sup>, Bassma Eissa<sup>2</sup>, Reem Awwaad<sup>2</sup>, Raffaello Furlan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jordanian Engineers Association, Jordan GBC, Emirates GBC, Qatar GBC, QA

<sup>2</sup>Qatar University Alumni, QA

Email: rana.awwad@gmail.com

### Abstract

Cities provide places for people to live, work, learn and socialize. As urban environments, cities nowadays are typically characterized by urban sprawl in which open public spaces (1) are neglected and/or (2) social interactions are discouraged. In fact, the encouragement of social interactions among neighbors is a vital factor implementing livability among city dwellers. Recent evidence suggests that social interactions occur infrequently in contemporary urban neighborhoods. Therefore, it is worth investigating how communities can be designed in the future with the aim to increase social interactions. Al-Najada area in Doha provides a useful case study because it is a traditional area, built based on formal social structures aiming to the formation of social interaction in old neighborhoods (Fereej).

The research investigates how the urban fabric of Al-Najada area can be studied and investigated in order to enhance social interactions and become an effective sample of sustainable development. Also, it examines the factors that contribute to socially sustainable development in the regeneration of Al-Najada as a traditional asset in the heart of Doha. Literature review is conducted on topics of sustainable urbanism, urban sociology, and built heritage to learn about design implementation in order to enhance social interactions within the urban fabric of neighborhoods. Therefore, content analysis, site observations, and walking tour assessments are adopted as the main research methods in order to investigate how social interactions at Al-Najada area can be encouraged, namely how the spatial form can be implemented in order to enhance social interactions.

As understood from the reviewed literature, environment-behavior studies depend on experimental investigations. Sustainable urban development that constitutes a major part of environment-behavior studies is tested and

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measured through site observations, semi-structured interviews, and walking tour assessments. Also, illustrative sketches are used as common and intuitive method for communicating spatial information and knowledge. In this study, observations and walking tour assessments are the main methods to collect data. Also, morphological analysis of Al-Najada area is considered to understand its spatial configuration and the physical elements that define it. Collectively, these methods help in gathering relevant personal, behavioral, cognitive, and spatial data to achieve the research objectives. The main technique of data presentation and analysis is illustrative images of a 3D massing model developed for Al-Najada area.

The research study findings lead to the definition of a set of recommendations for a design approach, based on smart planning and design guidelines, aiming at implementing Al-Najada neighborhood case in order to facilitate social interactions. The recommendations are genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with concise neighborhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of Al-Najada area. Al-Najada area should be re-planned according to the following guidelines in order to implement social sustainability:

1. Al-Najada area should have a variety of functional attributes that contribute to a resident's day-to-day living (such as residential, commercial, or mixed-uses).
2. Al-Najada should accommodate multi-modal transportation (such as pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles, metro, etc.).
3. Al-Najada should have design and architectural features that are visually interesting.
4. The Qatari history and heritage adaptation is recommended in future design guidelines.
5. It should encourage human contact and social activities.
6. It should promote community involvement and maintains a secure environment.
7. It should promote sustainability and responds to climatic demands.
8. It should have a memorable character.
9. The accessibility and smooth transition from one neighborhood to another should be enhanced.
10. Special attention to the neighborhood-targeted residents must be considered.
11. Municipal attention and follow up is a must for producing and implementing a set of proposed design guidelines and legislations that to be implemented in the regeneration of Al-Najada and other such like neighborhoods.

It is worth to mention that this research is submitted as a paper for publishing in an international journal and currently in the review stage.

### Keywords

Sustainable Urbanism; Social Interactions; Al-Najada; Doha; Traditional Neighborhood