

A Traditional Settlement in a Modernized City: Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract : Transition in the urban configuration of Arab cities has never been as radical and visible as it has been since the turn of the last century. The emergence of new cities near historical settlements of Arabia has spawned a series of developments in and around the old city precincts. New developments are based on advanced technology and conform to globally prevalent standards of city planning, superseding the vernacular arrangements based on traditional norms that guided so-called 'city planning'. Evidence to this fact are the extant Arab buildings present at the urban core of modern cities, which inform us about intricate spatial organization. Organization that subscribed to multiple norms such as, satisfying gender segregation and socialization, economic sustainability, and ensuring security and environmental coherence etc., within settlement compounds. Several participating factors achieved harmony in such an inclusive city—an organization that was challenged and apparently replaced by the new planning order in the face of growing needs of globalized, economy-centric and high-tech models of development. Communities found it difficult to acclimatize with the new western planning models that were implemented at a very large scale throughout the Kingdom, which later experienced spatial re-structuring to suit users' needs. A closer look the ancient city of Yanbu, now flanked with such new developments, allows us to differentiate and track the beginnings of this unprecedented transition in settlement formations. This paper aims to elaborate the Arabian context offered to both the 'traditional' and 'modern' planning approaches, in order to understand challenges and solutions offered by both at different times. In the process it will also establish the inconsistencies and conflicts that arose with the shift in planning paradigm, from traditional-'#39;cultural norms', to modern-'#39;physical planning', in the Arabian context. Thus, by distinguishing the two divergent planning philosophies, their impact of the Arabian morphology, relevance to lifestyle and suitability to the biophysical environment, it concludes with a perspective on sustainability particularly for in case of Yanbu.

Keywords : Yanbu, traditional architecture, Hijaz, coral building, Saudi Arabia

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