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SOCIO - CULTURAL FACTORS SHAPING A TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENT - CASE STUDY:
AL DIRAIYAH, SAUDI ARABIA

Abstract

Socio-cultural factors are the primary factors that shape our physical environment. Although Saudi Arabia is one of the few countries that the people live with their traditions and share the same ideals, they are also one of the few countries possessing all the latest facilities. On the other hand, most of the "imported" architectural solutions do not fulfill the socio-cultural needs of the people. This research tries to point out the main factors to be considered in creating new physical environments, by bringing out the architectural responses in a traditional settlement.

Introduction

This paper tries to investigate how social and cultural factors affect the design of built-environment. The settlement chosen is a traditional town which once contained the residences of the al-Saud rulers and their retinue, as well as government buildings, forts, castles and stables.

Al Diraiyah is located 15 kms NW of the modern Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh. The town at present time consists of two parts, the modern town and the historical town. The research was carried on in the al Turaif district that has some impressive buildings which have survived till today.

The settlement site actually is a flat hill-top, standing like an island in Wadi Hanifa, surrounded on all sides with palm and athel tree farms and vegetable gardens that supplied food for the community. The settlement has a compact form with narrow and winding streets that establish shadowed space for the pedestrians throughout the day.

Spatial Organisation due to Socio-cultural Value Systems

Islam, which literally means "devotion to God", governs every aspect of worldly life. Anything that one needs to follow during his actions is clearly stated in the Holy Quran. Thus, it was islam that formed the social and cultural structure of the society.

The society, at first, began as a collection of the tribe members. At those times power was the most important factor for survival. Mohammad Abdulwahab's new islamic movement was very effective in turning to real islamic values and rules. Al Diraiyah flourished after this movement and acted as the first capital for Saudi Arabia.

The influence of religion on the settlement pattern and the design of individual buildings can be clearly seen.

The surrounding agricultural fields were the major areas of work, thus men spent most of their time in the fields. As an islamic obligation, a muslim must pray five times a day at certain intervals, at sunrise, noon, afternoon, evening and night. So, there is a very strong functional relation between the house, the mosque and the fields. Thus,

the mosques were located at the periphery of the settlement making it easy to reach from the houses and the fields.

Privacy, being a virtue in Islamic life, played an important role both in the design of the settlement and the houses.

The privacy needed for the whole settlement was achieved by not allowing foreign merchants enter the settlement and thus an open-bazaar area was provided just outside the main entrance of the settlement.

None of the houses had any openings to outside except the doors, and the houses on the same street did not have their main entrances facing each other. This was the first step in providing privacy. The second step was the provision of a central courtyard with all rooms looking inwards and enclosing it. Thus, the outdoor living space became as intimate as any room in the house. On certain occasions courtyards were used for large private social gatherings and family celebrations.

The courtyard was reached through a bent entrance to ensure the privacy of the courtyard and the rooms enclosing it. The bent entrance provided such architectural qualities that male guests could enter the male reception rooms (MR- Arabic Majlis) without seeing the women or being seen by them.

In some houses there were two reception rooms for male visitors, the second being in the upper floor having access to the roof so that it could be used during cool summer nights. The stairs leading to the second MR were located close to the first MR to ensure privacy. Male reception rooms were only used by male visitors. Women were not allowed to enter this room unless male visitors were those stated in the Holy Quran.

The family usually spent their time in the family courtyard or in other rooms shown as bedrooms (BR) on plans. These rooms had only carpets or mats for the floor covering and mattresses for sitting and sleeping. As they preferred to sit crosslegged on the floor, mattresses were quite sufficient for sitting, eating, and sleeping. These rooms had multi-purpose characteristics due to the furniture used.

The rooms were all inward looking and mostly did not have any openings to outside, exceptions being for the upper floors. If there existed any opening in the ground floor, they were placed high to avoid overlooking by passer-bys or neighbours. Mudbrick parapets around the roof were made high to avoid intrusion of privacy for the family sitting or sleeping on the roof on cool summer nights.

Within the community woman was a member of the women society. They had their own special gatherings, but separately from men. Their another chance to see the world, besides helping their husbands in field work, was the water-wells which became social gathering points. Women, when there were no men around, usually sang songs on the way back home, carrying the water containers on their heads or on animal back.

The structure of the family depended on the number of wives, as the religion accepts marriages up to four. Monogamy was usually practised by the poor or servants.

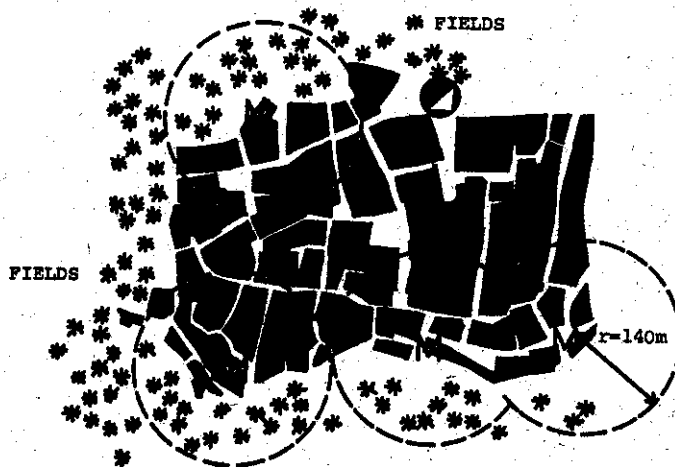
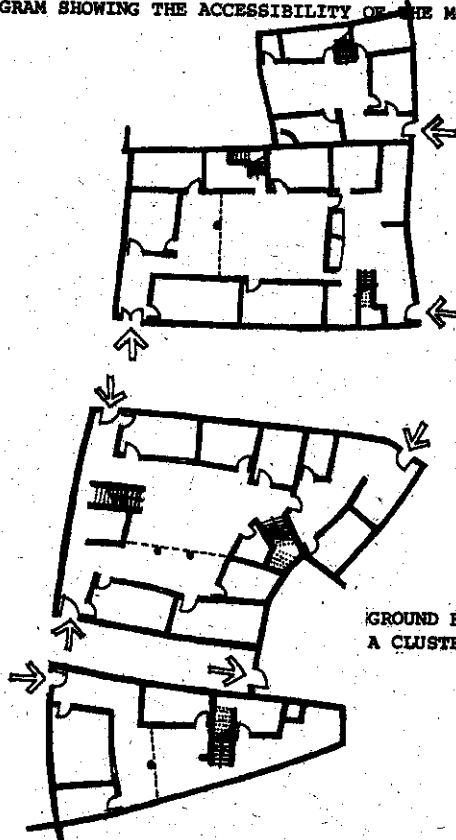


DIAGRAM SHOWING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE MOSQUES.



GROUND FLOOR PLANS OF
A CLUSTER OF MUDBRICK HOUSES.

The main source of income and also living was agriculture. This was also one of the main reasons for the choice of the site as the valley (Wadi Hanifa) provided water and a cultivable land. Agriculture, mainly based on palm dates, was the first and major income source.

Animal breeding took the second place, the major species being camel, goat, sheep, and horse. Camels were used for transportation, and horses for fighting. They bred camels, goat and sheep for their meat, milk and wool.

Trade was also a common way of income for most people. There were two open markets (bazaars), one being at the center of the settlement while the other was outside.

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THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTARINESS OF MIGRATION

Summary:

The subject of this article is the influence of the degree of subjective voluntariness of migration on the consequences of the migration for the migrant. The event "migration from a large city to a new town" is analysed with help of the attribution theory, a psychological theory originally developed by Heider. The analysis shows that the degree of voluntariness is an important variable and that attribution theory can be of use in framing the theory about migration.

Introduction and theory:

Migration has been and is the subject of a lot of research. This research is mainly of sociological, demographical and geographical nature. Psychological studies are rare. This article is a contribution to the last category.

Migration theory centers around migration as a decision making process, in which the potential migrant compares plus, zero and minus factors associated with the area of origin with plus, zero and minus factors associated with the area of destination, taking into account intervening obstacles and personal factors (Lee, 1966:49-50; Ter Heide, 1965; De Jong and Gardner, 1981). Frequently this decision is considered as voluntary (e.g. Michelson, 1977; De Jong and Fawcett, 1981:49), although the possibility of a compulsory migration gets some attention (e.g. Rossi, 1955: 134,135; Van Engelandorp Gastelaars, 1978). Even in countries with a housing market only partly regulated people can be or feel compelled to migrate. It is therefore worth while to study the consequences of the degree of voluntariness of the migration with respect to the migrant. The psychological theory called "attribution theory" pro-