

Redevelopment of Informal Areas and the Urban Identity of the Holy City of Makkah

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Abstract

The holy city of Makkah, currently home to about 2.2 million inhabitants, has witnessed massive spatial change in the past three decades. This change was (and continues to be) driven by the ever swelling numbers of pilgrims (Haj and Umrah), the Kingdom's relentless drive to upgrade the city's urban and physical capacity, and more recently the onslaught of private, public and private/public developers attempting to tap on the enormous financial potential of the city's massive religious appeal. These dynamics, most notably over the past three decades, have contrived to introduce phenomenal change to the urban and spatial identity of the holy city.

Over the past thirty or so years, some traditional, well established inner and outer city residential neighborhoods witnessed steady and predictable expansion. Other areas however, notably in and around the holy 'Haram' became home to informal settlements housing 100's of thousands of Saudi and more dominantly non-Saudi nationals. These areas now present a major spatial as well as socio-economic challenge to the holy city.

The paper will trace the beginnings of these areas and their growth in recent years, their unique social and economic dynamics and finally, and perhaps more importantly, review the city's recent policies and plans to address the challenges presented by these areas. These policies and plans are currently lead by the Holy City 'Imarah'² and Municipality who have recently adopted innovative but sometimes controversial redevelopment modalities involving private developers and sub-developers. Such modalities have generated strong debate both within and beyond the holy city. Within this context, the paper will first look at the global urban situation and extent of the challenge (the population numbers and physical extent of such informal areas within the boundaries of the inner city), examine the recently prepared slum/informal area redevelopment legislation, and approaches, some of the current redevelopment projects (notably in and around Jabal Al Sharashef), formulate conclusions and eventually put forward general, policy level recommendations that may facilitate more sustainable and less spatially intrusive redevelopment modalities.

Keywords: holy city of makkah, slums, informal settlements, redevelopment, urban identity

1. Introduction

1.1 The Urban Condition and Informal settlements

United Nations report, 'World Population Prospects, key findings & advance tables, 2015 revision' indicated that world population had reached 7.3 billion in 2015, marking an increase of one billion people since 2003 and two billion since 1990. The report also projected that in 2016 only, 83 million people will be added to the world's population with the total expected to reach 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100.³

Source: Based on United Nations, 2014b.

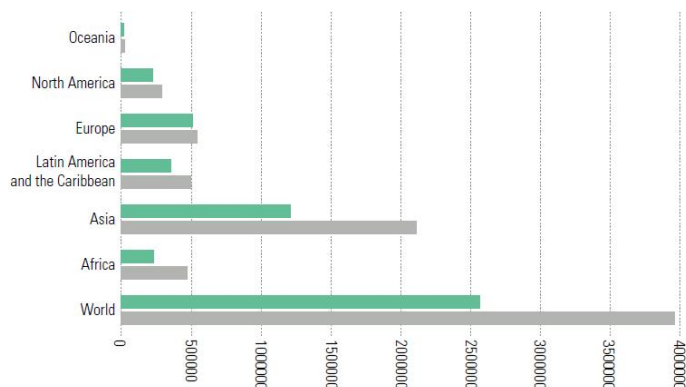


Figure 1: Urban population at mid-year (1995-2015)

This remarkable universal population growth was/is accompanied by an increase in

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² Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is composed of 13 such Imarah's (provinces) and each is headed by a Prince (governor) appointed by Royal decree. Currently; Prince Khalid bin Faisal Al Saud is the Governor of Makkah Province.

³ World Population Prospects, key findings & advance tables, 2015 revision, United Nations

proportion of people residing in cities, or in other words, 'urban population'. "Since 1990, the world has seen an increased gathering of its population in urban areas. This trend is not new, but relentless and has been marked by a remarkable increase in the absolute numbers of urban dwellers—from a yearly average of 57 million between 1990-2000 to 77million between 2010-2015. In 1990, 43 per cent (2.3 billion) of the world's population lived in urban areas; by 2015, this had grown to 54 per cent (4 billion). The increase in urban population has not been evenly spread throughout the world. Different regions have seen their urban populations grow more quickly, or less quickly, although virtually no region of the world can report a decrease in urbanization.

Asia has by far the highest number of people living in urban areas, followed by Europe, Africa and Latin America (Figure 1)."⁴ With the majority of urban population growth rates being recorded in developing countries, nowadays; over 70% of the world's urban population resides developing countries, which also host an overwhelming proportion of total world's population (82 per cent of the world's population). Moreover, it is estimated that, between 2010 and 2015, some 200,000 people on average will be added to the world's urban population each day. Worth noting is that 91 per cent of this daily increase (some 183,000 people) is expected to take place in developing countries.⁵

World Cities faced many challenges amidst this enormous urban population growth; one of the most persistent urban issues over the past few decades has been the growing number of urban residents living in slums and informal settlements. Vast population growth, migration from rural areas to urban areas, lack of affordable housing for the urban poor, weak governance (particularly in the areas of policy, planning, land and urban management resulting in land speculation and grabbing), economic vulnerability and underpaid work, discrimination and marginalization, and displacement caused by conflict, natural disasters and climate change are some of the factors behind formulation of such slums and informal settlements.⁶

Informal settlements – 'are residential areas where 1) inhabitants have no security of tenure vis-à-vis the land or dwellings they inhabit, with modalities ranging from squatting to informal rental housing, 2) the neighborhoods usually lack, or are cut off from, basic services and city infrastructure and 3) the housing may not comply with current planning and building regulations, and is often situated in geographically and environmentally hazardous areas. In addition, informal settlements can be a form of real estate speculation for all income levels of urban residents, affluent and poor. Slums are the most deprived and excluded form of informal settlements characterized by poverty and large agglomerations of dilapidated housing often located in the most hazardous urban land. In addition to tenure insecurity, slum dwellers lack formal supply of basic infrastructure and services, public space and green areas, and are constantly exposed to eviction, disease and violence.'⁷

Informal settlements and slums are now an internationally recognized challenge, and they exist in most parts of the world. "UN-Habitat's estimates show that there are 881 million people currently living in slums in developing country cities compared to 792 million in the year 2000 – and all the while the enabling approach has been in force. By 2025, it is likely that another 1.6 billion will require adequate, affordable housing."⁸

These areas remain as a main persistent challenge facing cities, especially in developing countries. UN Habitat's report, 'The Challenge of Slums 2003' implied that in 2001, while about 31.6% of the world's urban population resided in slums, the majority were in developing regions, accounting for 43% of the urban population, in contrast to 6% in developed regions.

⁴ World Cities Report 2016 'Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures' United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Page 6

⁵ State of the World's Cities 2012/2013 – Prosperity of Cities, World Urban Forum edition, UN Habitat, page 26

⁶ Habitat III issue papers '22 – Informal Settlements', United Nations conference on housing & sustainable urban development, New York, 31 May 2015.

⁷ Habitat III issue papers '22 – Informal Settlements', United Nations conference on housing & sustainable urban development, New York, 31 May 2015, Page 1.

⁸ World Cities Report 2016 'Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures' United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Page 51

Regionally; 30% of the urban population in Asia, home to half population of the world, resides in slums representing about 60 per cent of the world's slum dwellers, while 61.7% of urban population in Africa lives in slums (about 20 per cent of world's slum dwellers), but this is growing quickly and in Latin America resides 14 per cent of total world's slum dwellers. In Arab countries, proportion of population residing in informal areas vary from one country to another; in some countries informal areas (slums) are limited to isolated pockets while in other countries over 90% of urban population suffer from at least one form of housing deprivation.

Source: UN-Habitat, Global Urban Observatory Urban Indicators Database 2015.

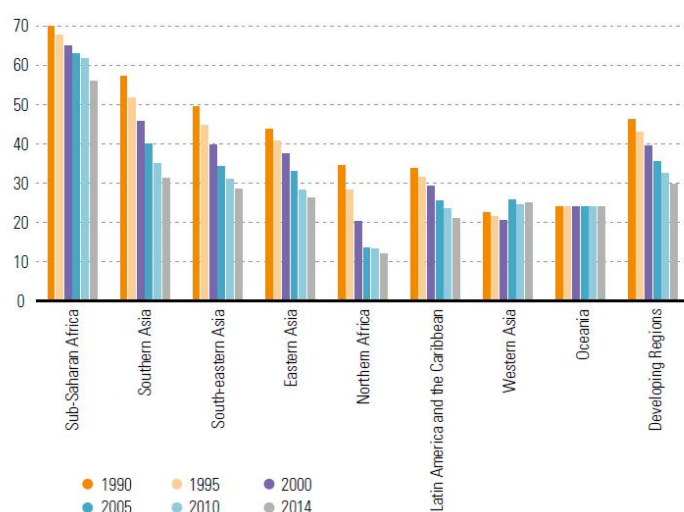


Figure 2: Percentage of urban population living in slums (1990-2014)

Informal settlements and slums are internationally recognized as a main limitation to urban prosperity and sustainable development; efforts on international and local levels were invested in facing this challenge. “In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, world leaders pledged to tackle this immense challenge, setting the specific goal of achieving ‘significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020’. This means addressing not only the needs of slum dwellers for shelter, but also the broader problem of urban poverty, especially unemployment, low incomes and a lack of access to basic urban services.”⁹

“Although the proportion of the urban population residing in slums today is lower than it was some two decades ago (Figure 2), the absolute number of slum dwellers continues to increase (Table 1). This clearly demonstrates the failure of cities to keep pace with urban growth.”¹⁰

Table 1: World Urban slum population at mid-year by region (thousands)

Region	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007	2010	2014
Developing Regions	689,044	748,758	791,679	830,022	845,291	871,939	881,080
Northern Africa	22,045	20,993	16,892	12,534	13,119.1	14,058.3	11,418
Sub-Saharan Africa	93,203	110,559	128,435	152,223	163,788	183,199	200,677
Latin America & the Caribbean	106,054	112,470	116,941	112,149	112,547	112,742	104,847
Eastern Asia	204,539	224,312	238,366	249,884	250,873	249,591	251,593
Southern Asia	180,960	189,931	193,893	195,828	196,336	195,749	190,876
South-eastern Asia	69,567	75,559	79,727	80,254	79,568	84,063	83,528
Western Asia	12,294	14,508	16,957	26,636	28,527	31,974	37,550
Small island developing states	382	427	468	515	534	563	591

Source: UN-Habitat, Global Urban Observatory Urban Indicators Database 2015.

As such, it must be acknowledged that most cities around the globe are affected, to some extent, by the phenomenon of informal settlements and slums. Holy Makkah is not alone.

⁹ The Challenge of Slums, United Nations, 2003, page 5

¹⁰ World Cities Report 2016 ‘Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures’ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Page 57

1.2 Urban Identity

'Urban' normally refers to what is in, relating to, or characteristic of a town or city. 'Identity' is the fact of being who or what a person or entity is. As such, 'Urban Identity' describes the characteristics and unique features that relate to a city; making a city what it is and differentiating it from other cities.

'In Kevin Lynch's work *The Image of The City*, a city is described as a form of temporal art in vast scale. Over hundreds of years of human settlement, different cities have formed distinctive identities. City identity is defined as the sense of a city that distinguishes itself from other cities. It appears in every aspects of urban life.'¹¹

'At a time when many places are beginning to look alike, effective urban design policies and strategies have the potential to reinforce local character and create places with identity. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the concept of identity is needed and an understanding of the ways through which it can be achieved without reducing the concept to an aesthetic dressing possesses a great importance. In relation with experience of a city, place-identity leads to 'urban identity'. This paper sees Urban Identity as the result of complicated interaction between the social, economic, physical and environmental. A view supported by Oktay and Bala who argue that Urban Identity is thought to be formed not only through identifiable and memorable formal attributes, but through the meaning attached by the users of the city, concerning all elements of the built, natural and social environment.'¹²

Built elements refer to buildings, streets, avenues, monuments and all forms of human-made components of the city, while natural elements refer to characteristics such as the city's landforms, topography, climate and natural resources, wherein social elements refer to characteristics related to settlers of the city, such as socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics.

The same components contribute to the livability of a city and its success; as UNEP's 2007 report 'Livable Cities: The Benefits of Urban Environmental Planning' explains that ' a successful city cannot operate efficiently in isolation from its environment. It must balance social, economic and environmental needs. A successful city must offer investors security, infrastructure and efficiency, and should also put the needs of its citizens at the forefront of all its planning activities.'¹³

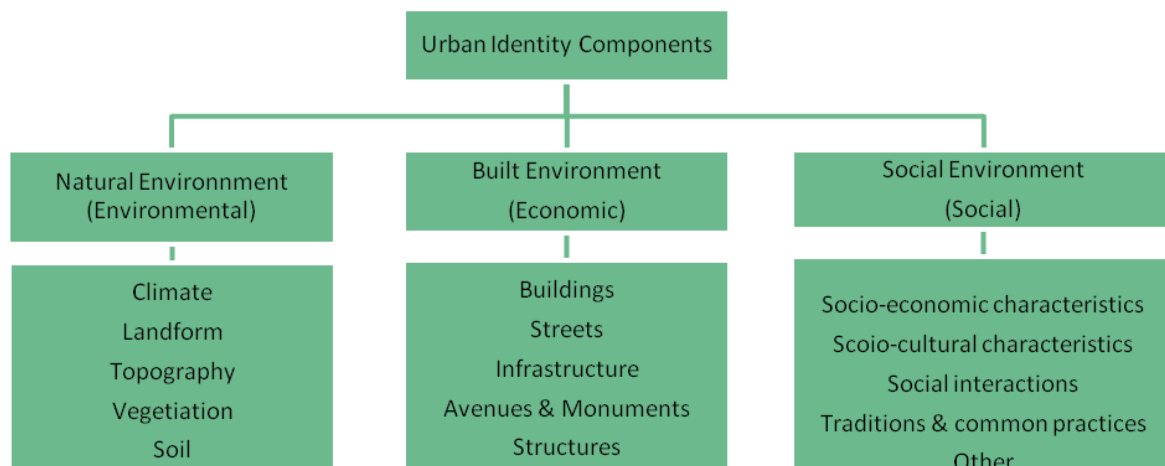


Figure 3: Urban Identity Components

An in-depth discussion of Urban Identity is beyond the scope of this paper. The above –brief- discussion was merely to highlight the close interaction between the social, economic, physical and environmental which generates Urban Identity. To highlight that disturbing any of those main elements disturbs urban identity.

¹¹ Recognizing City Identity via Attribute Analysis of Geo-tagged Images, Department of Urban Studies and Planning Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Page 1. (2014)

¹² A holistic research approach to measuring urban identity: Findings from girne (kyrenia) area study, Derya Oktay and Havva Alkan Bala.. Archnet-IJAR, International Journal of Architectural Research. Volume 9 - Issue 2 - July 2015 - (203)

¹³ Livable Cities: The Benefits of Urban Environmental Planning, The Cities Alliance, 2007. Page xvii.

1.3 The Holy City of Makkah

Available resources suggest that history of Makkah can be traced back to around 2000 BC, the time when holy Kaaba was first established by Prophet Abraham and his elder son (Ismail)¹⁴. Ever since it was established; Kaabah has remained as a place of sacred worship and the nucleus of the city.

During the 4th Century AD Makkah was performing as an urban center attracting migrants from Yemen. In the 5th Century, the famous Quraish tribe took control of Makkah and slowly turned the city later (during the 6th Century) into a regional center for trade. By the 7th century, with the arrival of Islam, Makkah began to take shape as the Capital of Islam and the main destination for practicing holy rituals of Haj & Umrah. A change that was to have a historic and major impact on the city's growth & prosperity.

Over many centuries, mountainous & dry nature contributed to a fairly restrained geographic expansion of the city; until the year 1955 it remained at below 700 hectares in area mainly consisting of spontaneous and scattered settlements in areas surrounding the Holy Mosque. See Figure 4.¹⁵

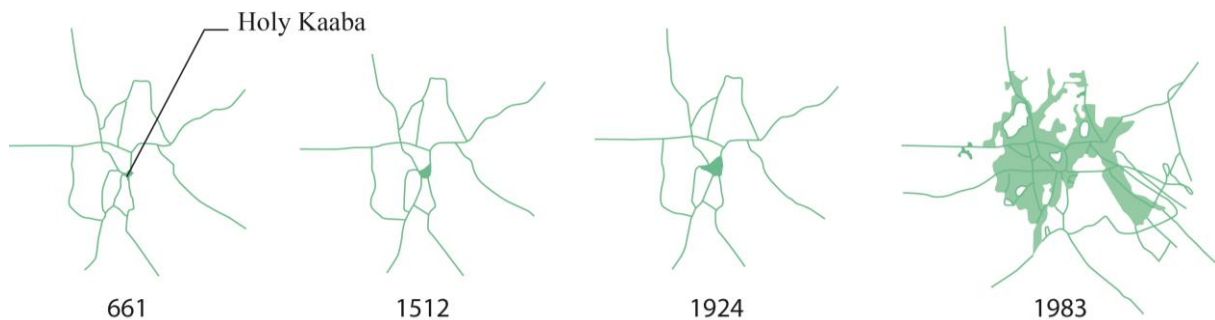


Figure 4: Al Kaaba, nuclei of the holy City of Makkah growth

After the discovery & extraction of oil, the city began to witness rapid growth. Oil revenue facilitated elimination of parts of surrounding mountains which enabled expansion within these areas in addition to financing the construction of road networks connecting the city to neighboring cities & regions. By the year 1986, the total built up areas of the Holy City had increased by around six times: to cover about 4,721 hectares. See Figure 5¹⁶.

During a rapid growth phase, spanning the period between 1955 till around 1986, plans were put to expand the city outwards, which required moving and/or demolishing residential units and in some cases neighborhoods that existed in the center around the holy mosque forcing residents to migrate from the center towards peripheries.

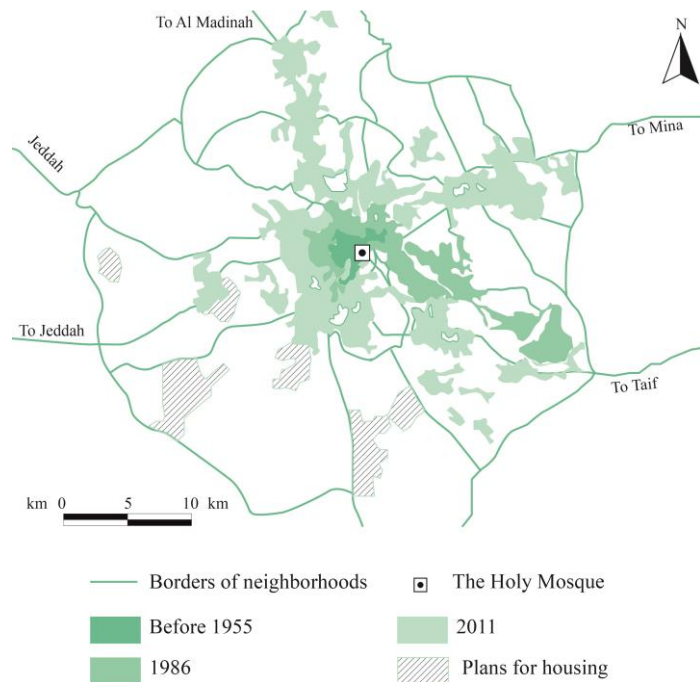


Figure 5: Geographical expansion of the holy City of Makkah (before 1955 – 2011)

¹⁴ History of holy Makkah & the holy Mosque, Ibn Al Dyaa', 1997 (تاريخ مكة المشرفة والمسجد الحرام، ابن الضياء' دار الكتب العلمية للنشر والتوزيع، 1997)

¹⁵ Produced by author based on 'A Critical Spatial Analysis of Residential Planning in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, Ibrahim Alkhalidy, Graduate College of Marshall University, 2009, page 20'

¹⁶ Produced by author based on Impact of Pilgrimage (Hajj) on the Urban Growth of the Mecca, Ibrahim Elsayed Ascoura, Journal of Educational and Social Research, Vol. 3 (2) May 2013, page 260.

Along with this migration, various and ambitious road projects were initiated/accomplished and it was mainly during that period, that significant informal areas began to form and emerge such as the neighborhoods of Jarwal, Al-Hendawyah and Tundpauy.

After 1986, annual growth rate of the built up area began to slow: down to about 8% having peaked at nearly 11% during the previous rapid growth phase. Several expansions and enlargements to the central area and the Holy Mosque area took place accompanied by construction of ring roads and major tunnels in and around the city. On the other hand, informal areas (slum) also continued to expand with the majority of population being non-Saudi.¹⁷

Nowadays the city of Makkah, regarded as the holiest place on Earth for Muslims - place of birth of Prophet Muhammad and destination of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, is capital of Makkah province (Imarah). The city is home for about 2.2 million inhabitants from over 80 nationalities, and destination for well in excess of 10 million people annually that come to perform the holy rituals of Hajj and Umrah.

The latest Masterplan for the Holy city of Makkah and the holy sites 1462 Hijri (2040) released by Makkah Development Authority in 1430 Hijri (2009), suggested that the city's growing population is expected to reach 3.8 million by the year 2040, and estimated, for the same target year (2040), that 14.8 pilgrims are expected to visit the city for Hajj & Umrah. The vision of this plan is to transform the city into one of the most modern and beautiful cities in the world while protecting & preserving the Holy sites and their development.



Figure 6: Holy Kaabah, Makkah, 2015

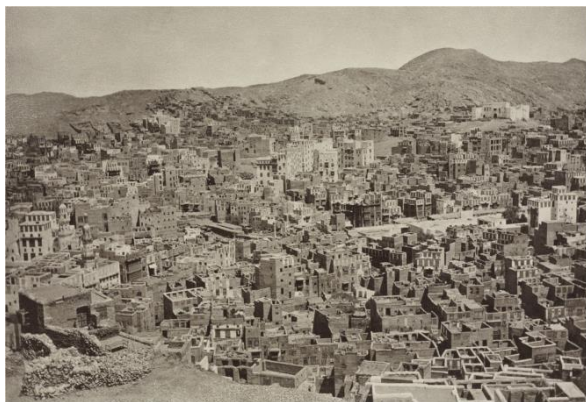


Figure 7: A view of the city of Makkah, 1887



Figure 8: A view of the city of Makkah, 2014

¹⁷ Impact of Pilgrimage (Hajj) on the Urban Growth of the Mecca, Ibrahim Elsayed Ascoura, Journal of Educational and Social Research, Vol. 3 (2) May 2013

2. Current Situation Analysis

2.1 Informal Areas in the Holy City of Makkah - Figures & Facts

Informal settlements in and around the city of Makkah cover 16 primary locations and involve about 65 settlements.¹⁸ Varying calculations of 'Informal Settlement' population sizes as well as widely varying calculations of the percentage area they occupy relative to the city of Makkah can be identified. (About 60% according to author's visits; as little as 23% according to Makkah Development Authority, to about 40% according to the Makkah Urban Observatory).

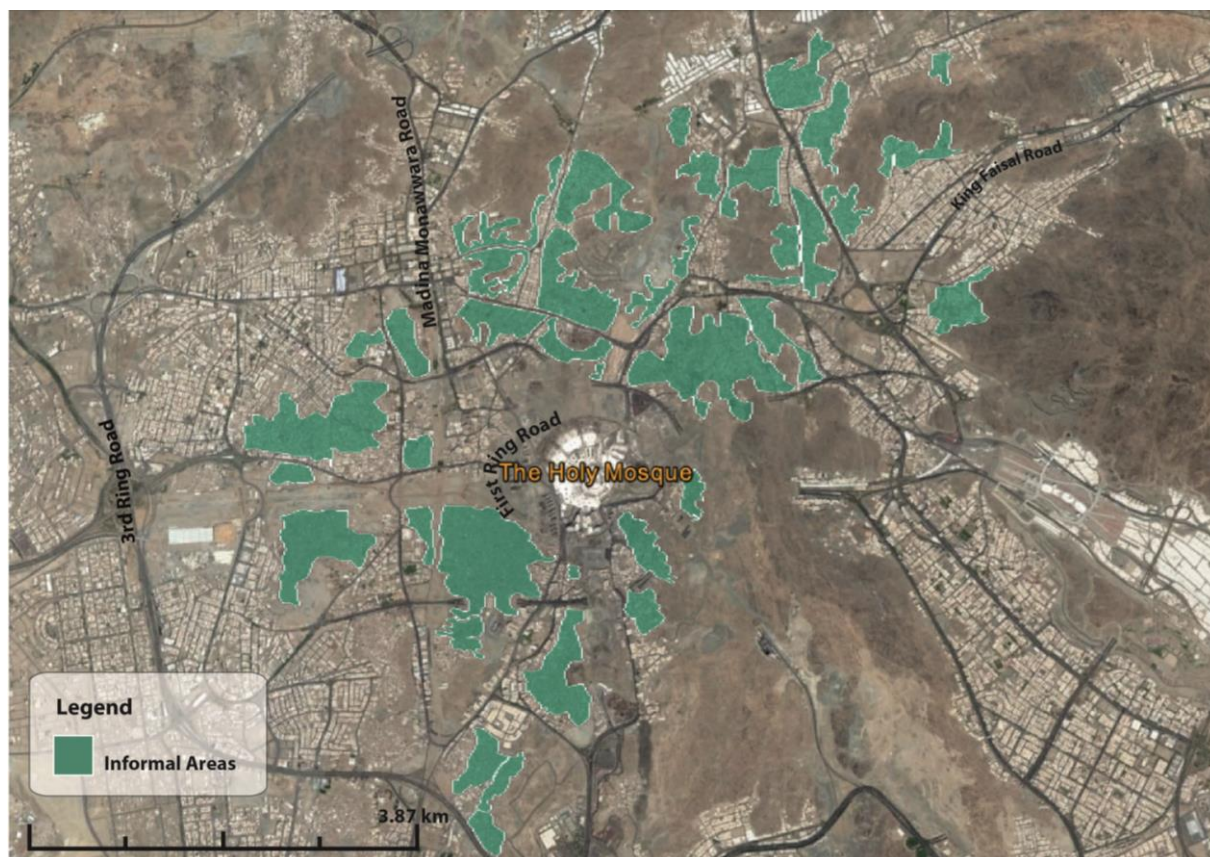


Figure 9: Rough illustration of informal areas spread and locations in & around the central area of Makkah in 2015, produced by the author.

A quick examination of available spatial and demographic evidence suggests informal settlement populations constitute around 40% of Makkah's total population (estimated at 2.2 mil circa 2015) with their areas occupying a similar percentage of total city footprint.

Growth at today's rates suggests that by the year 2040 well over 1.5 million people will be living in informal areas in and around the city of Makkah. An alarming scenario.

Three unique features distinguish Makkah's 'Informal Settlement' scene from the vast majority of global cases: 1) Majority of their residents are non-Saudi nationals, 2) in the vast majority of cases, those non-Saudi nationals are illegal residents of the Kingdom, and 3) those illegal residents rent from Saudi owners who have proper, legal deeds for land/property and who charge some form of rent on their non- Saudi residents.¹⁹

¹⁸ Derived from field & desk research conducted by author in 2015/16

¹⁹ Ibid 14

A document and field assessment conducted by author, suggests Most of Makkah's informal areas share the following social, economic, physical characteristics:

- Situated on sites of difficult and (or) hazardous terrain; mostly seen on areas adjacent to or overriding mountains or steep hills.
- Suffering from inadequate road networks: highly congested with an average street width of (3-5) meter, and with poor pedestrian facilities.²⁰
- Short on basic amenities and public services (such as educational & health facilities but also open or public spaces). Fact that around 80% of their total areas are occupied by residential land use, about 6% for commercial use illustrates this acute shortage.²¹
- Exhibiting poor building integrity in terms of overall structural conditions, ventilation and orientation, as well as aesthetic quality. Most structures consist of one to three stories.²²
- Are home to high crime rates, social isolation and degraded socio-economic status; Brig. Mansour Obaid Al-Wafi, Assistant Chief of Police in Makkah said that these slums have become hotbeds of crime. "In 2011, about 38 percent of all crimes occurred in such neighborhoods," he said. "Residents of these neighborhoods are unemployed, with no education and very poor." ²³
- Nevertheless, in most cases are connected to city utilities (i.e. electricity, sewage, water systems & paved streets)²⁴ and they
- Are located at strategic locations within the Holy City.
- In spite of above shortcomings, available evidence (including site visits by author) points to relative social cohesion, tight social ties, and housing affordability.



Figure 10: A view of the city of Makkah



Figure 11: A view from an informal settlement in the holy city of Makkah

2.2 Current Governance and Legislative Framework

Document reviews conducted by the author in and outside Makkah confirmed the engagement of a large number of institutions in the in management and prospective development of informal areas in Makkah including Makkah's Municipality and Emarah, line ministries such as Housing, a number of committees and sub committees at both regional (Emarah) and local (municipality) levels in addition to entities, agencies, public stakeholders and other bodies such as Makkah Development Authority, Al Balad Al Ameen (a PPP development venture owned by Makkah Municipality), and the Urban Observatory.

The principle legislative reference for informal settlement redevelopment in and around Makkah is the 2008 'Bylaw for Informal Settlement Redevelopment' 'لائحة تطوير المناطق العشوائية بمنطقة مكة المكرمة', which was introduced in May 2008 by Makkah's Municipality for developing slums in the province of Makkah. The bylaw was introduced in response to the persistent and growing challenge of informal areas in and around the city, and was meant to set an overall and legally binding framework for the redevelopment process. It contains eight main sections: 1- Definition and types of informal areas. 2- Development strategies. 3- Implementation strategies. 4- Methodology for property disposition an expropriation. 5- Urban and physical dimension of informal settlements

²⁰ AL-Shareef, M. (2003). The squatting development in Makkah AL-Mukkaramah characteristics, problems and solutions

²¹ Ibid 20

²² Ibid 20

²³ <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/workshop-focuses-makkah-slums>

²⁴ Ibid 20

development. 6- Social & housing dimension. 7- Economic dimension and, 8- General rules for preparation of redevelopment master plans.

The bylaw defines informal settlements as: settlements that fall within the province's administrative borders and that have spread randomly over either public or private properties without conforming to planning policies, formal land division plans or schemes, leading to scattered and random growth. The bylaw indicates that areas of such settlements range from small groups of residential units to large neighborhoods. The bylaw states that informal areas in Makkah are categorized under one of the following types: 1 - Slums that have a high investment potential and thus can encourage private sector to participate in their development; 2 - Slums that do not have investment potential and do not encourage private sectors to participate in their development; 3 - Slums that have self-improvement and development potentials; and 4 - Slums that needs fractional but urgent improvement/upgrading. Based on the first rule in the regulation, a survey to evaluate the social and economic condition should be prepared before any development process. The reason behind such a survey is to protect household rights either as owners or renters. Their rights include real estate indemnification and suitable displacement.

The bylaw sets seven 'principles' that should be applied in setting our redevelopment strategies: 1- Improving the social and economic conditions for existing inhabitants, identifying and addressing their residency status and enhancing their access to education, health facilities...etc, 2- Stimulating investments opportunities and introducing to urban improvements to enhance economic viability and thus better such areas into the city, 3- Adapting new Building codes to enhance efficiency, 4- Facilitating the legislative procedure to obtain property deeds for resident landholders after development, 5- Finding effective ways to prevent expansion of existing informal areas or emergence of new slums, 6- Adapting sustainable development principles, and: 7- Supporting the involvement of privet sector in the development process. While these rules appear very useful and conducive to positive redevelopment, they also appear too generic and could benefit greatly from additional detail and specify.

Finally, the bylaw promotes the establishment of 'governmental companies' (a form of Private Public Partnership) to lead and sponsor redevelopment and regeneration. The function of such companies is to coordinate with private sector developers and urban regeneration entities/companies. Based on this for example, and in 2009, 'Albalad Alameen Development and Urban Regeneration Company (ABAM)'²⁵ was established.

The Bylaw is without doubt a useful and important tool, however it is argued in this paper that, in its present shape, the 'Bylaw' does not stand on solid ground since it falls in a somehow grey area between the 'statuary' and the 'regulatory' in terms of legislation in. It falls short of being a clear cut and binding legislation and as such it is seen here as an 'support and guidance tool' which is in urgent need for higher level and binding legislation to ensure proper and solid application and enforcement. To the best of the author's knowledge such higher level, binding legislation is currently lacking.

3. Overview of Current Redevelopment Initiatives

There is currently just one initiative that has attempted to deal with informal settlement redevelopment on the ground: Jabal Al Sharashef Redevelopment handled exclusively by Al Balad Al Ameen and initiated by Royal Decree in Nov 2013. The scheme aims at completely redeveloping Al-Sharashif Mountain area and is currently in site clearing/property compensation mode with a projected completion date for this first phase by middle of 2016.

Total project area is about 1.7 million square meters, that set at distance of only 500 meters from the Holy Mosque, bordered by King Abdul-Aziz Road & Jabal Omar project from the north, by Ibrahim Alkhaleel Street from the east, by cross of Ibrahim Alkhaleel Street from the south and by Jorhum Street from the west.

²⁵ 'لائحة تطوير المناطق العشوائية بمنطقة مكة المكرمة', 2008 'Bylaw for Informal Settlement Redevelopment'

Jabal Al Sharashif informal settlements site was set high priority for redevelopment by virtue of its relative large size, its close proximity to the Holy Mosque and the poor urban conditions it exhibits.²⁶

As can be derived from released information about the project, the redevelopment is clearly an investment driven 'mixed use mega-project' venture which is designed to be home for a wide variety of commercial, hospitality and residential activities that take the form of a new modern central quarter in central Makkah. It will consist of a higher density development schemes on the edges and medium to low density schemes in other locations. The project is ambitious and impressive in its generic design sense as well as in its attempts to survey and document the socio-economic and cadastral and legal profile of the area's inhabitants and well as their cadastral status. However and on the other hand, the redevelopment venture raises some fundamental questions about approach, guiding planning and design principles as well as urban identity.

The project does not appear to illustrate serious efforts to redevelop the site according to its original/traditional spatial spirit nor does it reflect tangible empathy towards original land owners or towards present residents. It also raises the question as to its adherence to the first and perhaps most important redevelopment 'principle' stipulated in the Bylaw, that of 'improving social and economic conditions of *existing* inhabitants, improving their access to services...etc'. For a start, it is highly doubtful if any of the existing inhabitants can afford to live in such upscale development and even more difficult to find anywhere in the released material about project, if the new scheme indeed contains any resettlement strategy for those that will have to relocate. This being said, it must be acknowledged that when the majority of residents are 'illegal aliens' then the resettlement challenge becomes greater. Nevertheless, this critical social-economic dimension (heavily linked to urban identity) appears lacking in the scheme's redevelopment philosophy. Another element which touches closely on urban identity is the final

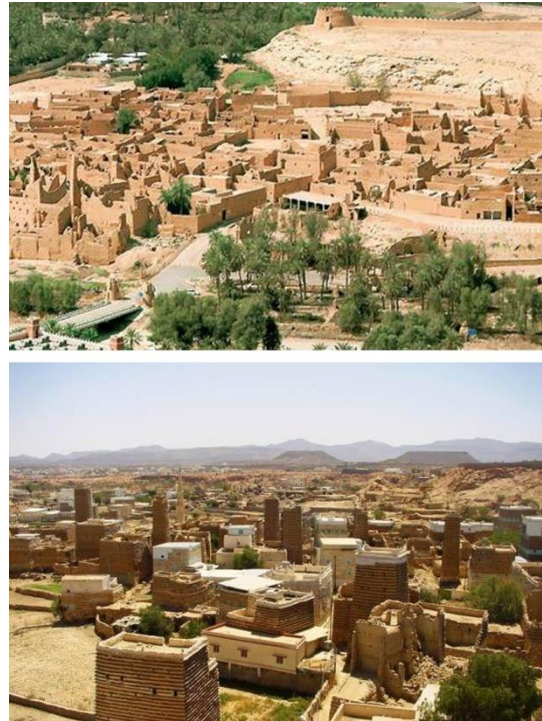


Figure 12: Images representing Saudi architectural style



Figure 13: Jabal Al Sharashef redevelopment site: before and according to published scheme schemes' physical/architectural character which does not appear to relate sufficiently to the urban identity of the holy city (or the rich Saudi-Hijaze architectural tradition) or their spiritual essence and values.

²⁶ <http://albaladalameen.com.sa/ab/enproject.php?mid=49&msid=0>

Finally, the site's unique natural albeit difficult terrain presented and acknowledged in the analysis part of the scheme, appears to have been largely overlooked in the final design product. See figure 14.



Figure 14: Jabal Al Sharashef mountain site, in analysis and design phases

4. Summary

Informal settlements, over the past few decades have become a universal urban challenge. In the holy city of Makkah this challenge has reached alarming levels with up to 50% of the city's urban footprint occupied by such areas. Available statistics also suggest that upwards of 50% of the holy city's population live in such areas which suffer from relatively poor infrastructure and service provision, from overcrowding and which display poor building and environmental conditions. While the challenges brought about by such areas cannot be denied, this paper also argues that informal areas bring some urban strengths and benefits that should not be overlooked in any redevelopment scheme: social cohesion, easy and affordable accommodation and a 'safe haven' for first time Haj and Omra arrivals.

It is positively noted in this paper that local Saudi authorities in and around Makkah (Imarah, the Municipality and the Urban Observatory) have, in recent years, both acknowledged and started tackling the challenge presented by informal areas in the city. It was also well noted that some redevelopment schemes (Jabal Al Sharashef for ex) are under way and that redevelopment is being guided and supported by legislation- the Bylaw-. It was however also clear that much work is required to raise the level of: legislative frameworks, technical content of redevelopment approaches and implementation modalities in order to effectively and prudently meet the challenge whilst at the same time preserving holy Makkah's urban identity.

Within the above context, this paper puts forward the following SWOT analysis which illustrates perceived strengths and opportunities and well as the more obvious weaknesses & threats presented by informal areas in and around Makkah. It is suggested in this paper that redevelopment (or upgrading) efforts, while addressing the more obvious weaknesses and threats, must also acknowledge and capture the positives represented by 'strengths' and 'opportunities', a process which would help preserve urban identity in its holistic sense: Social, economic as well as physical.

Table 2: SWOT analysis of informal settlements challenge in & around the holy city of Makkah

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1st stop for Haj and Umrah visitors providing low-cost & affordable housing. ▪ Social cohesion. ▪ Vibrant mix of different cultures and different land uses ▪ In most cases; established connectivity to public utilities ▪ High density promoting passive sustainability ▪ Close proximity to employment opportunities (holy Haram redevelopment) ▪ Legal land parcels owned mostly by Saudi nationals presenting strong possibilities for change of ownership, transfer of deeds and compensation. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor building conditions. ▪ Lack of open/public spaces. ▪ Poor provision of urban services (education, health,...etc). ▪ Overcrowding. ▪ High crime rates. ▪ Most occupants (residents) are non-Saudi nationals requiring significant integration of legal and immigration procedures into redevelopment policies.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rich international redevelopment/upgrading experience to draw on. ▪ Good awareness of the gravity of challenge by provincial (Imarah) and local institutions. ▪ Increasing professional understanding of the challenge by local institutions (Makkah Municipality and Urban Observatory) ▪ Prime locations for sustainable, responsible and economically viable redevelopment within the holy city ▪ Availability of some redevelopment 'guidelines and controls'. (Bylaw) 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economically over-driven redevelopment prompted by prime location of some areas, especially those close to holy Haram. ▪ Absence of a national framework to govern & manage redevelopment and/or upgrading of informal areas. ▪ Little integration (marginalization) of informal areas within latest city masterplan (2008). ▪ Lack of binding and detailed redevelopment legislation. ▪ Gaps in present redevelopment guidelines and controls, especially re preservation of urban identity

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

While presenting some immediate and short term benefits to the huge numbers of Haj and Umrah visitors and indeed providing much of the workforce currently engaged in redevelopment projects city wide, informal areas nevertheless present a critical urban challenge to the holy city of Makkah. This challenge must be addressed quickly and vigorously if its negative physical, social and economic impacts are to be arrested for the time being and avoided in the foreseeable future.

The informal settlements' challenge has been acknowledged by Province (Imarah) and City authorities and while recent redevelopment efforts by local authorities (notably Makkah Municipality, Makkah Urban Observatory and Makkah Development Authority) must be commended, gaps on policy, legislation and implantation levels remain. It is suggested here that the trend set by the first major redevelopment scheme (Jabbal Al Sharashef) raises concerns towards its potential negative impacts on city identity and on current residents and land owners. It is suggested here that implementing the following recommendations will go some way towards plugging these gaps and towards promoting more effective, more sustainable and more 'local identity' driven redevelopment:

On a national level:

1. Drafting a national policy for guiding redevelopment of informal sites across the kingdom.
2. Drafting a national legal framework (legislation) for controlling and regulating informal area redevelopment across the kingdom.

On a local (Makkah) level:

3. Establishment of one, common, standardized and approved demographic and spatial data base for all informal areas in and around the holy city.
4. Review of current Bylaw with particular emphasis on enhancing the following sections:
 - 'Classification of Informal areas': Introducing a more flexible classification that addresses social and physical typology in addition to economic potential.
 - 'Redevelopment modalities': these must include 'upgrading' in addition to complete redevelopment, these modalities must also contain clear and convincing tools to preserve Makka'h urban identity in its three main dimensions: social, economic and physical.
 - Cementing the principle of 'no forced evictions', instead encouraging that of participatory and consensus based resettlement.
 - 'Sustainability': Integration and promotion of clear and more precise guidelines. In this context the newly released Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) are a good source to tap on.

& introducing the following new sections to the Bylaw:

- Mandatory requirement to produce a SWOT analysis for any informal area prior to redevelopment. This analysis must form the backbone on which the redevelopment modality and context of any specific are being built.
- Mandatory requirement to explore ways and means of preserving local, social, economic and physical identity when redeveloping or upgrading any informal area.

END

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