The Resilient Historic Cities of Sharjah and Doha – Urban Regeneration and the Search for Identity in a Global World

DJAMEL BOUSSAA ⓘ

BOUZID BOUDIAF ⓘ

JIHAD AWAD ⓘ

MUNA SALAMEH ⓘ

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

ABSTRACT

Urban regeneration is a dominant approach to sustain resilient historic centers and cities. This paper focuses on two urban regeneration projects in the Gulf: old Doha Qatar and old Sharjah UAE. It is based on exploring the main concepts related to identity and sustainable urban regeneration in a global world. The investigation aims to undertake a comparative analysis of these projects, which will help to extract lessons for future interventions in other historic cities. This study is unique in tackling the relationship between urban regeneration and identity to counterbalance the globalization trends that may create major threats to historic cities. The areas chosen present some similarities in terms of decisionmakers, in both of them there is a duality from the cultural identity point of view. The approach to the research objectives is based on two methodologies:

- Deductive: a theoretical investigation based on the properties of the urban regeneration, definitions, objectives and the dilemma of implementing it. This combines literature reviews, key figures in the urban conservation field and the place identity, social identity and identity process as theories for cultural models of the historical center.
- Inductive: a comparative analysis of two examples that have been through some metamorphoses. The study looks to elicit the images of the historical areas structure to support the theoretical propositions of surface and deep structural city elements. The conclusion is based on an analysis of the case studies.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Jihad Awad

Department of Architecture, College of Architecture, Art and Design, Ajman University, UAE

j.awad@ajman.ac.ae

INTRODUCTION

By 2050, nearly 70% of people will be living in cities in which historic centers still form their beating hearts (WHO 2023). Historic centers represent places where several activities can happen including residential, trade, leisure and tourism. Most of the historic landmarks are located in the heart of historic centers where land is highly expensive, and struggle to survive in a fierce global world. During recent times, rapid and uncontrolled development has caused fragmentation and deterioration to historic areas of which are affecting the community values. Today, urban regeneration is seen as a potential remedy to revitalize and renew what remains from these declined and obsolete historic centers and districts (Madandola and Boussaa 2023). Therefore, the regeneration process is introduced in areas facing social decay and economic regression, such as Old Sharjah and Doha.

Since 1970's most of the Arab countries; particularly the Gulf countries; have been through an extraordinary and drastic urban development. This urban development was done on the detriment of the historical towns and areas to such an extent that it was threatening their existence, even more the identity of their communities. Local citizens moved to new districts on the outskirts of the city, building laborious villas with garages accommodating for 3–4 cars. Expatriates in need of housing rented the houses vacated by their original inhabitants and owners. Market forces drove many historic buildings to demolition to be replaced later by multi-story buildings, built of concrete, steel and glass, introducing a new type of urbanism from the low-rise and compacted houses to mid- and high-rise, fragmented and isolated buildings reflecting the new ideology based on the wealth and modernization if not westernization.

The traditional urban pattern has been modified to accommodate cars. One of the main causes of deterioration of the historic towns in Sharjah (Al Muraijah) and Doha (Msheireb) is the unexpected increase of the density of these areas due to rapid urbanization. The increase of the density is mainly due to the fact that the local people moved to the new districts with more facilities and a European style, leaving the historical areas to the low income migrants and most of them were labors ending by having over-crowded houses (more than ten persons in one room). Cities are a mixture of physical and social structures; people shape the physical structures of cities, yet at the same time, it shapes people's activities, life-styles and cultural identity throughout time. Even though urbanization is affecting the urban landscape and identity negatively, globalization can accentuate threats to the identity of urban areas (Kaymaz 2013). The low income labors considered their occupation of the houses as temporary and transitory, adding to the lack of maintenance are behind the decay and dilapidation of the areas ending by looking as urban slums. This

phenomenon, until the mid of the 1990's, was observed in most if not all the historic areas in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

This paper will explore the urban metamorphoses of the historic urban areas in Sharjah (UAE) and Doha (Qatar), which encounter various challenges to sustain in a global world. Today, in most of the Gulf cities, the historic centers represent less than 10% of the territory of each city. The approach to the research objectives is based on two methodologies. The first one is deductive; it is a theoretical investigation based on the understanding of properties of the urban regeneration, definitions, objectives and the dilemma of implementing it as much cultural as technical. The properties of the urban regeneration, as a strategy of intervention, will be illustrated through the descriptions of the chosen areas (Sharjah & Doha). Literature review and the ideas of key figures in the urban field and place-identity, social identity and identity process as theories for cultural models of the historical center are explored here. The second one is inductive; it is a comparative analysis of Doha and Sharjah as examples of historical settlements that have witnessed similar challenges to survive while they reacted differently.

The innovative aspect of this paper is in the methodology that was undertaken to explore an in-depth comparative analysis between the two approaches followed in Doha and Sharjah. This has resulted in extracting major lessons and recommendations that are aimed to be followed in other urban regeneration projects in historic cities of the Arab world. This paper identified two main directions undertaken to preserve a local identity as the case of Sharjah and create a new identity inspired from the past in the case of Msheireb in Doha. While many similarities have been found in the political support and management of the two projects, the outcomes are very different as the objectives set were different also.

THE HISTORIC CENTERS: BETWEEN METAMORPHOSES AND PRESERVATION

The concept of identity defines the individuality of either people or objects from various perspectives and it is more associated with social science, it can relate to the identity of people, politics, ethnicity and place (Kaymaz 2013). The encyclopedic dictionary of "Urban Planning" defines identity as the expression of distinguishing features of a being, which are unique to it that has to be in relation with others to be understood (Kaymaz 2013). With the beginning of this Century, more than 50% of the world population is living in the urban areas. The number of cities over one million inhabitants is also increasing and led to the development of the polycentric cities. The phenomenal growth of cities in the Arab world has led to the formation of cities within a city as the case

of Dubai for example having different villages or cities such as Global Village, Knowledge Village, or Academic City, Healthcare City. In fact, such structuration is the reinterpretation of what was developed in the beginning of the XX Century with the ideas of the Zoning. The historical area that constitutes the historical center is in fact a unique blend of culture, cultural heritage, and local traditions that are shaped in authentic masses and voids determined mainly by the physical environment (in terms of climate, availability of the material, the topography, the precipitation mainly) by the local practices (in terms of know-how and technologies) of the inhabitants: the combination and interaction of these aspects shape and illustrate the identity of a city. However, how can these values survive in an emerging global world?

The connection between culture and identity is based upon the spatial level and not only on social relationships (Stephenson 2008). Urban heritage defines identity of cities, which is developed over time, including the symbolic meaning of people, be it either citizens or visitors, because of the historical events associated with it. This is why urban heritage is considered of great importance as it marks the identity of a city. The strategies used in the urban conservation and revitalization of the Medina of Fez and Aleppo (or what we use to have before the war in Syria) illustrate that urban identity is determined with the environment and socio-cultural features of a city. Geographical characteristics, architecture, local traditions and life styles are the components completing the urban identity of a city and the smallest unit constituting urban identity is the neighborhood (Boussaa 2018, 2021; Boussaa, Alattar and Nafi 2021).

Globalization, Prefabrication, Industrialization and Universalization were seen, mainly by the "nostalgic" or conservative, as major threats to the authenticity in terms of meaningful and distinctive cultural identities of the developing cities. Universal templates of urban design often yield into complicated problems of sustainability and unsuitability in the end, whereas the local heritage and cultural practices provide direct inference into how to utilize them in urban design. Architects like Rasem Badran through his work in Riyadh, or Norman Foster with the development of the central market and Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, or Leon Krier in his work on the European city (a city within a city) for example, promoted the unique local identity of a city into the global arena is a vital role urban design must be entitled to achieve. Cultural districts in the city present physical evidence of local patterns and vernacular ways of living. They also present architectural and urban manifestation of the identity of a place. Those districts are laboratories of urban solutions and layers of the local lifestyle and tradition, which can become a source of influence to modern urban design proposals. They are an opportunity to emphasize on, strengthening the traditional local culture, and present it in a globalized modern manner (Boussaa, 2015, 2017).

Since 1990's and with the introduction of a new typology of cities dealing with the International City leading the competition between the cities. Among these cities, we distinguish three categories: the first one can be illustrated through the cases of Paris and Vienna where their museums, galleries, theaters and operas are the main magnets of the tourists and these two cities are classified as cultural cities and the main actions are dealing with the preservation of heritage; the second category is the regeneration of Bilbao from an industrial to a touristic city. This regeneration was done through deep transformations and changes of activities and infrastructures of the city; and the third category is the Development of International museums developed by famous architects giving to Abu Dhabi the vocation of a cultural city at the international level. It is important to understand the concept of a collective identity of a city in the globalized world we live in. It is a challenge to present the authentic and local identity of a city, as well as the current plural identity of the multicultural society of the 21st century city.

Urban identity in an urban environment is to a greater or lesser degree defined by the environment's elements and activities or events taking place within that environment (Cheshmehzangi and Heath 2012). Therefore, urban identity can be defined as the intuition of the user, concerning the unique appearance of a city, which unifies environmental, historical, socio-cultural, functional, and spatial values in an urban space. In that sense, whether negative or positive, the impacts of the urban developments and differentiations, on physical environment and the user, cause to differ the impression about the urban space and the identity features. In addition, urban identity can be known as the all components that distinguish one city from others.

URBAN REGENERATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Urban regeneration is a set of actions and efforts done to reverse the decline of urban areas or historic cities by both improving the physical structure and stability, more importantly and elusively, the socio-economic aspects of those areas. To be able to have a full understanding about urban regeneration, one must understand the wide spectrum of activities that relate to dealing with a historic city. Urban regeneration is associated with actions of conservation that can be taken at an urban fabric level; it can be used interchangeable with the terms of rehabilitation and redevelopment. Adaptive reuse is a newer concept of historic city interventions of keeping the original while addressing the new. Al Fahidi and al Shandagha districts in Dubai are very illustrative cases for the adaptive reuse: the actions taken in these districts consisted of classifying the different houses

whether in terms of values or priority of intervention. The strategy adopted was the adaptive reuse by rehabilitating the houses into different urban activities destinated mainly to the tourists (museums, galleries, restaurants, administration). Adaptive reuse is thought to be one of the most suitable forms of historic conservation.

Urban regeneration can be described as, "a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of an area that has been subject to change" (Roberts 2000: 17; Roberts and Skyes 2000). Furthermore, urban regeneration encompasses the procedures and methods of redesigning spaces in a certain area. The initiatives of urban regeneration in this chain of procedures are planned to evolve the physical situation of places, raise economic prosperity and environmental sustainability, in order to have better place for life. It should be observed that it is different from urban renewal, urban rehabilitation and urban redevelopment (Roberts 2000). Particularly, urban regeneration is used in the process of conserving the deteriorated building stock, improving the conditions in poor neighborhoods and city's infrastructure. In addition, it aims to prepare the city for creative economies through comprehensive improvements.

According to the Aga Khan Historic Cities Program, urban regeneration is considered the most effective when the intervention is needed on a larger urban scale, and requires rehabilitation and regeneration. "Defining physical action zones in historic cities, determining the needs of historic settlements and sites, and setting the role of municipalities, planners, communities and investors are all keys to the urban and physical rehabilitation choices that are being made today" (Jodidio 2015). We distinguish three main types of urban regeneration; the first is dealing with the revitalization of the concerned area functionally that means that the main action consists of conserving the physical environment and changing the activities. The urban regeneration is an opportunity to boost the economy of the concerned area or the city by modernizing the commercial activities and removing or adapting the reuse of the activities seen as incompatible with the objective to achieve the full commercialization of the concerned area. The main purpose from the diversification of the activities is the cost recovery from the different actions in the long term.

The second type of urban regeneration is to keep the area in use mainly in terms of housing. This type of urban regeneration is concerned with reducing the physical actions to the minimum with the objective to preserve the authenticity and character of the area and ending by rehabilitating the area physically mainly and sometimes physically and functionally. From the physical point of view, the urban regeneration should lead us firstly to restore the monuments and listed buildings; the second

objective is upgrading the infrastructure. The latter has another impact dealing mainly with the fluidity in terms of transportation (bearing in mind that mechanical traffic is one of the reasons for weakening the structure of the historical area), so the plan of impact of transport is a must because the mechanical traffic is also a source of atmospheric pollution and the condensation of the gazes on the facades affects negatively the buildings in the concerned area. The plan of impact of transport is a tool to control and increase the sustainability of the concerned area. Moreover, Gibson and Kocabas (2001) argue, "urban regeneration is a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach that embraces the three aspects (economy, equity and environment). Moreover, urban regeneration maintains economic competitiveness, reduces inequality, protects, and embraces the environment, which suggests a new generation of partnerships for policy development and delivery. The latter, includes innovative configurations of public, private and NGO sectors in more equal relationships". Generally speaking, there may be three reasons for urban regeneration to take place: (UNEP 2004: 7).

- **Imposed regeneration,** after a long period of abandonment of derelict land (e.g. London Docklands), or severe dilapidation of living conditions in a district. The imposed regeneration consists of changing the area physically and functionally. In such urban regeneration, the existing stock of buildings whether in terms of typology or state is considered as incompatible with the location or the vocation of the area. The objective of the imposed regeneration is the creation of jobs, after noticing the decline of the activities or the functional migration; such objective is achieved through the injection of some projects that are source of creating jobs and will have a great impact on the area by giving a vocation (even being a pole at the city level) and this inject "mega-project" will be seen as a magnet of the development of auxiliary activities.
- **Opportunistic regeneration,** where public and private investors are on the lookout for available land for a big project (e.g. Barcelona, Athens). The Olympic games in the case of Barcelona or Athens were a support for the urban regeneration. The opportunistic regeneration is based on some "mega-projects" (Olympic games in such cases requiring huge areas for the landscape and stock for housing) with the objective to enhance the historical area(s) by upgrading the infrastructure (mainly for the pedestrian). The opportunistic regeneration is a set of actions leading to the metamorphose of the area.
- **Preventive or prospective urban regeneration,** in areas where the social and economic fabrics are

deteriorated (e.g. Istanbul, Aleppo, Alexandria). The preventive urban regeneration consists of revitalizing the concerned area. The revitalization relies on the rehabilitation of the physical environment, so it consists of upgrading the infrastructure, preserving (conserving and restoring) the buildings with the injection of activities compatible with the vocation of the area as a touristic one.

The concept of urban regeneration is concerned with the three aspects of social, physical and economic contexts (Couch 1990). In reference to Table 1, urban regeneration as a process consists of three main phases: (1) Remediation/ infrastructure, (2) Development and (3) Investment. This process is concerned with areas of the following features: (1) Located within the inner part of the city, (2) secondary nature of sites, (3) contrary impression from neighboring land uses, (4) associated social and environmental problems and (5) perceived low return and high risk (Colantonio & Dixon 2011). In order to tackle the different approaches of regeneration, this paper will focus on two urban regeneration projects in the Gulf; old Doha in Qatar and old Sharjah in UAE.

THE CASE OF DOHA IN QATAR

Qatar is a small country in the Gulf (Figure 1), covering approximately an area of 11,610 km² (World Data Info), with a total population of 2,703,972 as of 31 July 2023 (Planning and Statistics Authority). As a city-state, Doha is the capital city; it is home for about 2 million inhabitants, which represents 80% of the total population (FAO-AQUASTAT 2008). Urbanization in Qatar has had its modest beginning in the early 19th century. Due to the emergence of pearl trade, a number of small

urban villages, with a population slightly exceeding 10,000 inhabitants developed along the coast to form later the city of Doha.

In 1900, the population of Doha reached around 12,000 and had about 350 pearling boats. During the 1930s, the Japanese developed the cultured pearls, which had a sudden negative impact on Doha and other Gulf cities economies. The latter, suffered a major economic depression and Qatar was agonized from poverty, which forced many Qatari families to migrate to
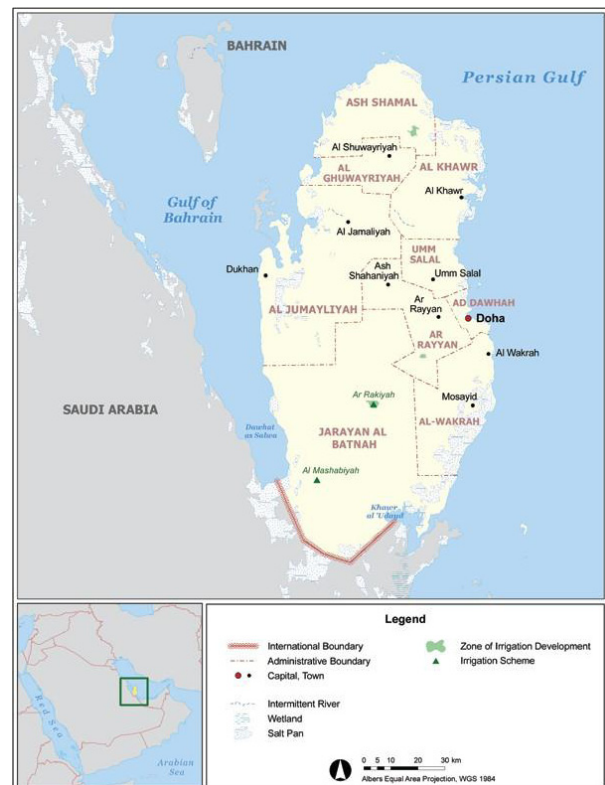

Figure 1 Map showing Arabian Peninsula and Qatar (FAO-AQUASTAT 2008).

REGENERATION PHASE	MAIN ACTIVITY	CHARACTERISTICS	INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT	FUNDING OPTIONS
Remediation/ infrastructure	Site assembly Site remediation Infrastructure provision	High cost High risk Potential for high return	Certain institutional activity through bond issues	Higher yielding or protected bonds. Indirect property investment. Private equity Bank finance
Development	Construction of property asset. Letting property to tenants	Debt-financed High risk (notably in the early stages). Potentially high return Lack of income stream Uncertain capital values	Bank-lending dominant. Limited institutional involvement	Direct property investment. Indirect/direct property investment. Private equity Bank finance Bonds
Investment	Sale of occupied property asset in the investment market	Secure revenue streams Capital value growth Lower risk Returns above bonds Diversification benefits	Main entry point for many institutions. Under-weight in regeneration property	Quoted equity Indirect/ direct property investment – including Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) Private equity

Table 1 Characteristics of the three phases of regeneration (Colantonio & Dixon 2011).

neighboring countries such as Kuwait and Bahrain. The oil discovery in 1939 and the start of its exportation in 1949 has been the driving force for massive growth in Qatar. Public and private companies created the infrastructure needed to boost the oil industry. In 1950, oil revenues were 1 million US$, five years later they were 3.5 million, and reached 70 million by the sixties and this provoked an unprecedented growth of the city (Adham 2008: 226).

The first cement shipment to Doha arrived in 1949, and real development began in 1955 when a power plant was built to provide free electricity to all the city dwellers. During the period (1950–1970) the city of Doha expanded 10 times and reached an area of 12 Km2. The first master plan was launched in 1972 and to implement it, towards the end of 1970s, most of the old districts were demolished such as Fareej Al Slata. The original inhabitants who had their houses destroyed moved out to the periphery of Doha to reside in housing provided by the government. With the influx of migrants during the 1970s and the lack of houses to accommodate them, what remained from the old Doha neighborhoods became the only refuge in districts such as Al Asmakh, Msheireb and Al Najada (Figure 2) (Boussaa 2014). Due to over occupation, high density and lack of maintenance, coupled with a lack of concern from the local authorities, almost all historic districts fell into disrepair and decay to become later urban slums. Therefore, what will be the future of what remained from these historic centers? Will they be demolished or regenerated to extend their life for future generations?

In 1995, Sheikh Hamad, the Emir father took power with a vision to promote Qatar internationally. Since the mid-1990s, globalization emerged as the city embarked on an unprecedented rapid urbanization and construction pace which was reflected by an explosive expansion of the city. The new focal point of development in the West Bay is the corniche, with government buildings being constructed as the new landmarks. More than 50 high-rise projects were completed in less than one decade. All kind of spectacular towers can be seen as reflecting the new global district of Doha. For instance, a number of high-rise landmarks have mushroomed in the West Bay area, namely the 232 m Burj Qatar designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel, the 215 m Al Bidda Tower designed by GHD Consultants and the 200 m Tornado tower designed by SIAT Consultants (Figure 3).

All these formed a hybrid of towers with different images and each one trying to create a distinctive image. As a result, this created a mixture of styles and characters that generated more confusion and disorientation. In order to counterbalance the globalization trends in Doha, the first comprehensive urban regeneration of Souk Waqif was launched during the period 2004–2010 (Figure 4). Following this first experience, under the direction of Shaikha Moza the present Emir's mother, a second urban regeneration project started in 2008 in the historic Msheireb.

Figure 3 View of the mushrooming high-rise towers in the West Bay area (Photos by authors).

Figure 2 Remaining old districts in Doha. (Courtesy of Qatar Museums).

Figure 4 View of the restaurants area in Souk Waqif (Photos by authors).

THE MSHEIREB HEART OF DOHA REGENERATION PROJECT

One of the aims of Qatar National Vision 2030 plan is the preservation of cultural heritage, culture, traditional values and identity. Regeneration of Msheireb (Figure 5) during the period (2008–2018) is a large-scale project, which has replaced an old neighborhood named *Fareej* Mohamed Bin Jassim. The intervention "is to initiate large-scale, inner-city regeneration that will create a modern Qatari homeland rooted in traditions and to renew a piece of the city where global cultures meet but not melt" (Law & Underwood 2012). The aim of this project is to bring back the Qatari families to downtown after their massive departure during the 1950s and 60s. The intention is to foster and restore the idea of a community life inspired from the traditional neighborhood "*fareej*". The Msheireb Master plan aims at recreating the heart of Doha, and it intends to improve the environment and boost the economy activity of the decayed area (Figure 6).

The Msheireb project headed by her Highness Shaikha Moza and patronized by Qatar Foundation is to launch a large-scale project over an area of 31 hectares, same size of the Heart of Sharjah. Four houses have been restored and reused in an attempt to keep traces of the original site. In addition to these new destinations, important heritage clusters such as the Eid Ground have been rehabilitated. The diversity of heritage and new structures has emerged to make the experience memorable. According to K. Underwood, vice-president with Aecom, Shaikha Moza said: "Our architecture is simple and elegant, it's not ornamentation, pattern, colour; it's not Morocco or the Alhambra." For us the
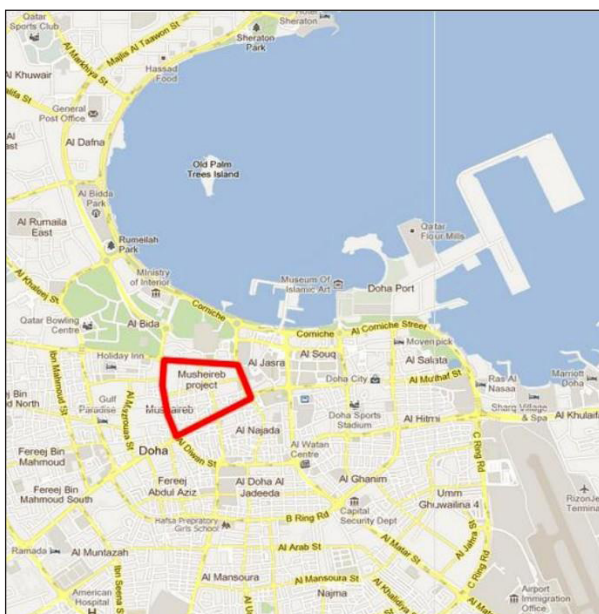

Figure 6 The Msheireb Development in Doha (Hunter 2011).

most important thing was looking at the history. In 1947, it was just a fishing village, then the 1950s oil and gas money hit and there were big urbanisation and eventually suburbanization issues" (Hunter 2011). "Historically the old courtyard houses were sustainable, with little fenestration on the outside and thick walls to stop solar gain; socially it was great because everybody talked to each other," explains Underwood (Hunter 2011). In response, the master plan seeks to create an 'urban village' of horizontally and vertically mixed uses, which will allow a more socially integrated and car-free lifestyle. According to Underwood, "the approach of Msheireb to establish a distinctive identity and character is not based on transcribing from the past; instead it draws from a thorough study of the local architecture. Lessons from the past enabled the establishment of 7 principles as a guide for the design of the master plan; timelessness, diversity and unity, form and geometry, aspect of home, aspect of street, designing for climate and elements of architecture" (Law & Underwood 2012: 143).

Urban regeneration of Msheireb is based on maintaining the original urban layout of the area as a way of understanding the city and revealing its authentic character of creating an articulation between the past and present (Figure 7). Msheireb area is located near Souk Waqif, where the old wadi 'Msheireb' (river) used to pass through. The project is considered as the world's first sustainable downtown regeneration. Regeneration of Msheireb highly considered the social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects. The main objectives of the Msheireb urban regeneration can be summarized as follows; (1) Encourage a sustainable way of living with usage of public transport, high density and mixed use; (2) minimize the dependency on fossil fuels; (3) create integrated, walkable neighborhoods accommodating

Figure 5 Location of Fareej Msheireb in Doha.

both locals and expatriates; (4) modernize the city with a local, traditional land cultural sense (Law & Underwood 2012: 133).

The project focuses on a mixed-use walkable development where all activities are close and convenient to encourage people to walk. It is divided into five different quarters with different uses (Figure 8): (1) The Diwan Amiri Quarter; (2) The heritage quarter; (3) Retail Quarter; (4) Mixed-use and residential quarter; (5) Business Gateway. The first district consists of the Emiri Diwan Quarter, which is the institutional part of the Royal complex which will host the National Guard and other services. The second district is the Heritage Quarter, which encompasses four rescued traditional houses reused into four museums, a mosque and cultural activities. The third district is the Retail Quarter; it
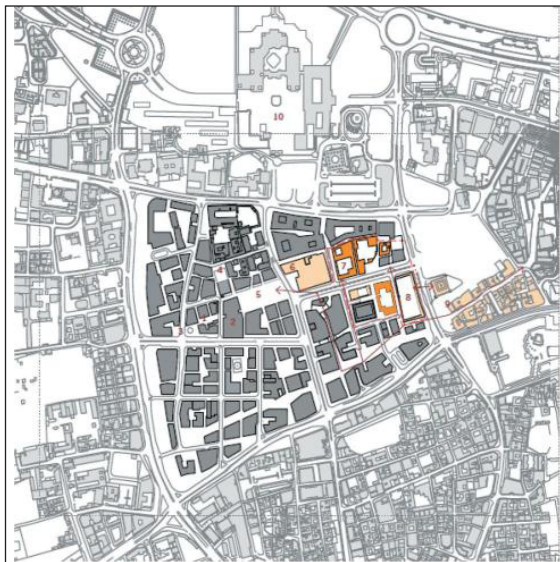
Figure 7 Respecting the original urban pattern in Msheireb (Msheireb Properties).

Figure 8 Master Plan showing the five main zones (Msheireb Properties).

is a business-oriented quarter full of a range of business opportunities and governmental representatives to ease future investments in the city. The fourth district is a Mixed-Use Residential Quarter neighboring the commercial quarter and contains the main *baraha* (plaza) as the main breathing area of the project in addition to residential buildings, offices, and other dynamic activities. The most luxurious spaces in the project and city of Doha can be found in the fifth district called the Business Gateway Quarter (Gharib 2014; Msheireb Properties).

The project explores the social meanings and values embedded in the original traditional fabric. A thriving residential/commercial center with facilities and amenities is proposed in the master plan. Streets and districts are designed as a group rather than being isolated from each other. The compact layout makes it easy to create shaded streets and plazas that encourage people to walk and interact. The scale of the intervention is between the high-rise and the low-rise houses of Al Asmakh and Souk Waqif, with structures reaching 10–12 stories on Msheireb and Kahrabaa streets.

The new *fareej* has a unique urban diversity with well spacious city houses that are easy to access. One of the major criticisms is the decimation of a complete historic quarter; from which only four houses from the old district have survived. In addition, thousands of low-income inhabitants have been displaced from this area. It can be said that more sympathy could have been observed towards the original *fareej* where more houses could have been sustained to reflect strongly the historic identity of the city. Msheireb marks another alternative that counterbalances the high-rise developments in the West Bay.

THE CASE OF SHARJAH IN THE UAE

The Emirate of Sharjah is the third largest of the seven emirates in the UAE, situated in the northern part of the country. with an area of 2,590 km² (Figure 9). It occupies 3.3% of the total area of the UAE. The population of this emirate is approximately 1.8 million as per the Sharjah Census 2022 report. It is the only emirate that lies on both coasts; the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. The emirate of Sharjah is ruled by H. H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, continuing the legacy of Al Qasimi rulers since 1600 AD (The United Arab Emirates' Government portal). Sharjah has proven its status as a world-class center of business, science, knowledge, tourism, heritage and culture (Government of Sharjah).

In 1820, Sharjah was destroyed by the British but was rebuilt later (Anderson 1991: 24–26), so the age of the oldest houses is estimated to be around 120–140 years. Before the discovery of the oil, the development of Sharjah was based on the trade activities and transactions of products and goods. In the 19th century, Sharjah was
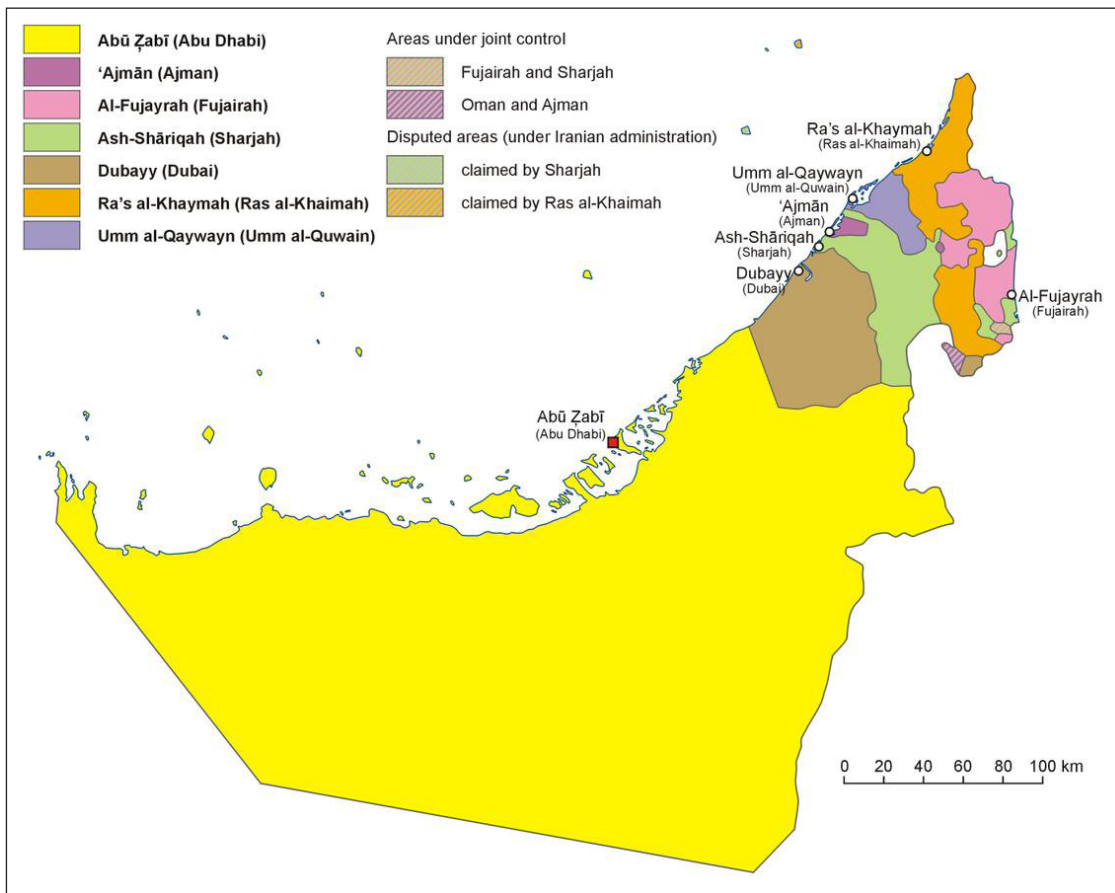
**Figure 9** Location of Sharjah, UAE (Commons.Wikimedia.org).

composed of four neighborhoods called *Furjan (*plural of *fareej)*: Al Muraijah, Al Shuweiheen, Mujarrah and Al Sharq. The trade activities and transactions of products were developed along the *khor* (creek) and ending by having linear *souqs* (markets) strengthening the relation between the *khor* and the city (Rab 2011; Heart of Sharjah). For defensive purposes, Sheikh Sultan Saqr Al Qassimi erected in 1820 a protective wall for the *fareej*. Al Hosn as the main building as a residence of the ruler and space of refuge for the whole population in case of attack; it is one of the reasons of being central (between Muraijah and Al Shuweiheen). Later on, some transformations were done ending by having Al Hosn in the middle of one of the main streets and dividing the area in two main zones (Figure 10). These transformations ended by isolating Al Hosn from its immediate environment and turning it as an island used for the regulation of the vehicular circulation (Hadjri and Boussaa 2007).

There was a very strong relation between the fareej and the khor (water) that was their main source of income whether by fishing, pearling or trading, such relation led to that linear development. From the beginning of the 19th century, the growth of the agglomeration was along the khor and the inland development started with the first airport built by the British at the end of 1930's (Anderson 1991). In 1960's, one can notice that the linear development of the souqs in direct relation
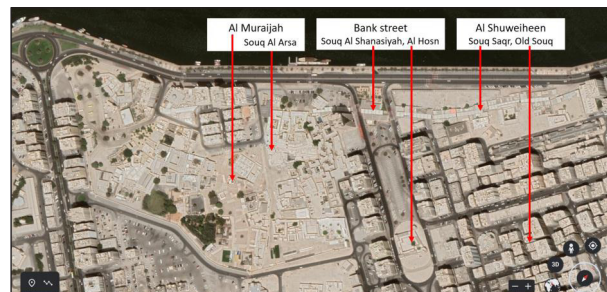
Figure 10 The Bank street (with Al Hosn) separating the two areas Al Muraijah and Al Shuweiheen.

with the khor highlighting that one of its main activities was trading. On the other hand, there are two kinds of commercial activities in each zone: Souq Al Arsa and Souq Al Shanasiyah in fareej Al Muraijah and Souq Saqr and the Old Souq in the fareej of Al Shuweiheen (Figures 10–14). A major part of the historic district was demolished, and around 173 historic dwellings were wiped away. The two furjan, Muraijah and Shuweiheen count 85 listed buildings, which were built before 1970, 44 are unregistered and more than 30 have been already restored (Rab 2011). High- and mid-rise towers were built on both sides of the Bank Street, thus dividing the historic area into two smaller neighborhoods, Al Muraijah and Shuweiheen. These modern towers hide the low-rise courtyard houses in the two areas; in addition, these
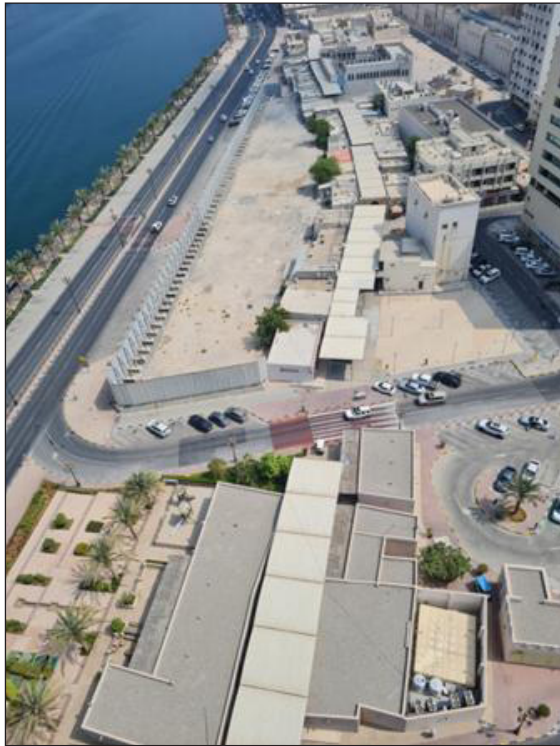
Figure 11 The linear souqs of Al Shanasiyah, Saqr and Mohammed along the khor.

Figure 12 High- and mid-rise buildings in the historic areas of Muraijah and Shuweiheen.

Figure 13 A view of Sharjah historical core (Kubat et al. 2012; Kubat et al. 2014).

towers are contrasting with the existing houses whether in terms of typology or styles.

Despite being neglected for a long time, the old part of Sharjah is still highly significant. The existence of historic architecture set against the background of modern buildings is a main example of struggle between globalization and cultural heritage. This clearly can be observed in Sharjah along the Bank Street area, where the 17 buildings form a contrast with Al Hosn fort. Before 2010, there were several issues in the historic area, for instance: environmental degradation and traffic overcrowding that makes the area unattractive for public. Moreover, due to some regulations that stopped the function of trade and the related activities, the port has lost its life and activities and consequently has some negative impacts whether economically or socially. The loss of place identity led the government, in addition to the demarcation of the heritage area in 1990, to reconsider the regeneration of the historical structure of units and rebuilding of the lost old body, inclusive the wall of city and the fort.

HEART OF SHARJAH PROJECT

Heart of Sharjah is a cultural heritage project that aims to preserve and restore the old city composed by the four furjan (Muraijah, Al Shuweiheen, Mujarrah and Sharq) and return it to its 1950s state. The strategic objective is to regenerate the area for tourism, trade, and further revitalize the heritage district as a vibrant cultural destination (Rab 2011; Heart of Sharjah; Shurooq). This will be implemented by restoring the historical buildings within the area, reconstruct or construct new buildings in Sharjah's traditional architectural style, and the restored houses will be converted to a variety of activities such as museums, hotels, cafes, markets, restaurants and art galleries (Shurooq; Heart of Sharjah; Rab 2011). In the plan of conservation of the area, all the buildings that are situated within concerned area and considered as incompatible, as they do not fit in with the overall historical atmosphere of the area, will be demolished (Figure 14).

The strategic objective is to combine engaging points of tourism and trade and further revitalize the heritage district as a vibrant cultural destination by restoring historical buildings within the area. In addition, construct new buildings that have the same traditional architecture of Sharjah and converting some of the old houses to museums, hotels, cafes, markets, restaurants and art galleries. The project will preserve local traditional architecture and will provide visitors with the experience of the old-time Sharjah (Jumah 2020; Heart of Sharjah; Rab 2011). The project is on the list of candidates to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site when the project is completed. Planned over a 15-year period, to

be completed by 2025, Heart of Sharjah is the region's largest historical preservation and restoration project (Heart of Sharjah). It is centered on the restoration of the old Sharjah Souq district.

The first of the project's phases is already underway (Figures 15 & 16), and "Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) has set up a joint committee – comprising representatives from leading governmental and private bodies – to oversee the implementation of this first phase" (Heart of Sharjah). In addition to the restoration of the Sharjah fort (Al Hosn), which was almost demolished in the 1970s, the first phase of the project involved the Souq Al Arsa, Souq Al Shanasiyah, as well as several important merchant's houses including Bait Al Naboodah, the Sharjah Heritage Museum and Al Eslah School (Kubat et al. 2014). Some
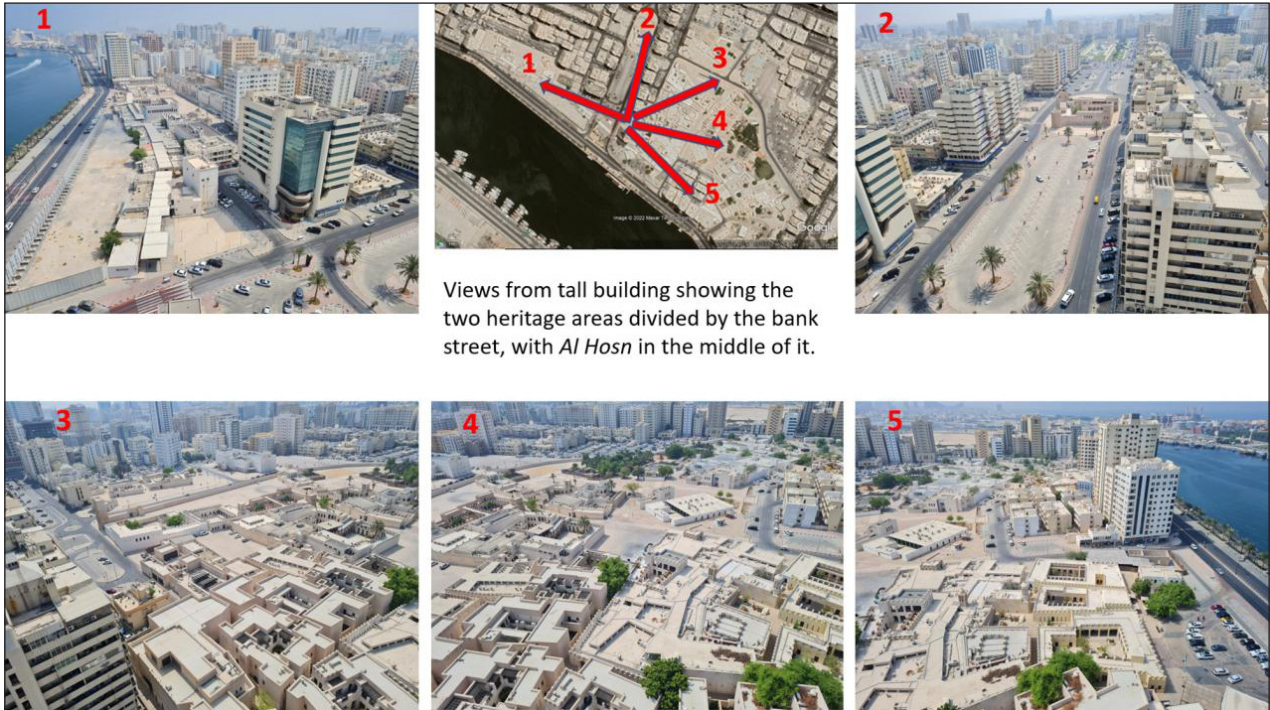

Figure 14 Views of the heritage area on both sides of the Bank Street.

Figure 15 Phases one and two of the project (source: Jumah 2020, based on Heart of Sharjah).

Figure 16 Phases three and four of the project (source: Jumah 2020, based on Heart of Sharjah).

of the old buildings will be rehabilitated into museums, shops, hotels, retail and cafes. The restored historic structures are home to six museums in Sharjah where they attract global and local visitors. The restoration of Al Hosn symbolically represents the heart of the city and the birthplace of the ruler, and reconnects the districts of Al Muraijah and Al Shuweiheen that were interrupted by the Bank Street, which is perpendicular to the khor. Therefore, this intervention will revitalize the link between the city and the khor (that was one of the main sources of income for the population). The reconnection is based on a pedestrian network for the tourists mainly and the activities generated by such network. In terms of strategy, the first phase is the intervention with less constraint in terms of accessibility or development of infrastructures.

The second phase, in continuity with the previous phase, will focus on Al Muraijah district. The main actions taken are the removal of some incompatible modern buildings that were in front of Al Hosn; this intervention is done with the objective to strenghten the link between Al Hosn and the reconstructued area. In this phase, the physical actions in Al Muraijah are clearly determined such as the implementation of some mid-rise buildings, the construction of the infrastructure with the rehabilitation, identification and readaptation of some historic houses into restaurants, cafes, art galleries with the provision of car parks and playing areas for children. From the typological point of view, all the buildings are low-rise buildings, so implicitly the resident population is less but the footprint is higher. In this phase, the link, mainly pedestrian, between the khor and the perpendicular Bank Street is achieved.

In the third phase, the main actions are along the two main streets in the area: the continuity between the two souks (Al Arsa & Saqr) is achieved through the connection of the Bank Street to the one perpendicular to it. The second action is the reduction of the density by removing the remaining modern buildings in front of Al-Hosn. The typology of the buildings is low-rise with courtyard instead of the existing mid- and high-rise buildings. Most of the proposed activities are for cultural and touristic purposes developed as alleys and promenade for the pedestrian changing the urban-scape of the area. The actions are achieved through the reconstruction of some buildings

with the reconversion and readaptation of some streets to alleys and promenades. So, the regeneration is mainly physical and functional.

In the fourth phase, the physical metamorphosis operated in the area is achieved through the adoption and reproduction of the traditional typological and architectural language. The targeted population is the tourist with the objective to increase the awareness of the residents about the values of the tangible and intangible objects. The regeneration consists mainly of revitalizing the waterfront area by connecting the khor to the city and injecting a set of cultural and touristic activities. This last phase consists of removing all the mid- and high-rise buildings in the area and defining the skyline of the Bank Street and along the khor. The buildings along the southern limits of Al Muraijah are reviewed and developed as mid-rise buildings leaving the first levels to urban activities as recommended in the design brief of the area (Figure 16 right). The project includes a variety of facilities such as a boutique hotel (Al Bait Hotel), which will offer a unique experience, mixed-use traditional Arabic retail shops, traditional and open-air souqs, art galleries, museums and archaeological sites, along with visitors' center, restaurants and children play areas (Heart of Sharjah).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO REGENERATION PROJECTS (TABLE 2)

Msheireb project started in 2008, while the Heart of Sharjah project began in 2015, which means 7 years later. The periods of the two projects are different, while the Msheireb one lasted at least 10 years the Sharjah one is due to last at least 15 years. Both projects had a strong political support; the Msheireb project is backed up by Shaikha Moza, the present Emir's mother, in Sharjah the project is supported by the ruler's daughter. The areas of intervention in both Doha and Sharjah are approximately the same 31 hectares. In terms of objectives, the Msheireb project intends to bring back the original Qataris to downtown, so housing is an important part of the project in addition to other activities, cultural, religious, administrative and retail. In Sharjah, the main

CITY	TIME FRAME	AREA (HA)	APPROACH	TYPE OF URBAN REGENERATION	STAKE-HOLDERS	POLITICAL SUPPORT	TARGET	ADAPTIVE REUSE
Doha	2008–2020	31	Massive demolition of historic buildings	Imposed urban regeneration	Msheireb Properties	Emir's mother Shaikha Moza	Regeneration and return of the original Qataris	Mixed Use for Tourism, trade, and housing Included.
Sharjah	2010–2025	31	Demolition of the adjacent modern buildings	Prospective urban regeneration	Shurooq	Emir's daughter	Regeneration and inscription on the UNESCO list	Mixed use for tourism and trade and housing not included

Table 2 Comparison between the two urban regeneration projects (prepared by authors).

aim is trade and tourism, while the focus is to respect the past in terms of style, as the area will be proposed to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

It is important to note that the approach of regeneration in Sharjah had more sympathy to the existing cultural heritage, while in Msheireb the tabula-raza approach demolished most of the historic buildings as what remained only four historic buildings. In Sharjah, most of the remaining historic buildings have been preserved and rehabilitated, while new buildings have been constructed to be in harmony with the existing historic buildings. In Sharjah, the project took decisions that are more powerful by pulling down the adjacent tall buildings of the Bank Street in order to create a continuity between the old and new buildings. In Msheireb, despite the great efforts of bridging the gap with the past, tall buildings of more than 12 stories blocked the views to the adjacent low-rise historic quarters such as Al Asmakh and Souq Waqif. This can be explained by the need to generate more money through renting of the apartments and offices in the tall towers.

The two cases are dealing with their regenerations; however, the approaches and strategies are different. The comparison between the two cases can be listed as follow (Tables 3 and 4):

In the case of **Sharjah**, the regeneration is based on the development of a comprehensive revitalization:

- The strategy of intervention is smooth and progressive and avoiding the tabula- raza; increasing the built-up area in terms of foot-print; and housing is not the main program in this project of regeneration;
- Reviewing the status of the Bank Street and reconnecting the two furjan districts: Al Muraijah and Al Shuweiheen; by reducing the density of the population and developing low-rise buildings and removing some modern and mid- or high-rise buildings;
- Strengthening the link between the khor and the two districts; by encouraging and creating opportunities for the pedestrian to turn around in the whole area (the two districts and the Bank Street); and developing mainly the cultural and touristic activities;

- Using an architectural language referring to the traditional architecture and the contemporary technology;

Concerning the **Msheireb** project, the main characteristics are:

- Demolition of most of the survived historic buildings and only 4 survived;
- Respect of the original historical urban pattern when developing the master plan;
- Subdivision of the district into five distinct zones;
- Mixed-use activities in the district;
- Diversification of the typologies of the buildings with different heights;
- Creation of areas and circuits for pedestrian only;
- Flexibility in the intervention;
- Different actions in different zones may be launched in parallel;
- The intervention requires enormous financial and technological supports;
- Unlike Sharjah, housing is an important part in the regeneration project.

In all urban areas where urban regeneration is efficient, it is important to know that there may be winners and losers, and attempts must be made to control the degree of these uneven outcomes. It is furthermore important to determine which groups will benefit from urban regeneration: permanent residents, employees, occasional visitors, or urban tourists. While it is not easy to evaluate the success or failure of any urban regeneration project whether in Doha, Sharjah or elsewhere, urban regeneration assessment matrices must be developed, and should include:

- "the relevant qualitative and quantitative criteria,
- the tools and cost/benefit indicators over the short, medium and long term, concerning such major options as the creation of play or leisure areas,
- the positive or negative external effects of urban regeneration projects,
- the alignment of urban composition options with the practices and life style of the inhabitants, such as in the creation of public space, which may impact traditional habits and customs,

CRITERIA/AREA	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE	COST/BENEFIT	EXTERNAL EFFECTS	SUSTAINABILITY	APPROACH
Doha	Dense	Mixed-use including Residential	Positive feedback	Technological	Positive	Top Down
Sharjah	Reduction of the density	Homogeneous and nostalgic	Positive feedback	Smooth intervention	Positive	Top Down

Table 3 Comparison between the two urban regeneration projects (prepared by authors).

CITY/ASPECT	DOHA	SHARJAH
Main Activity	Residential	Tourism Cultural
Physical Improvement	Demolition of most of the area for the development of a new housing area.	Rehabilitation of the existing traditional and historic buildings. Removing the incompatible buildings.
Economic Development	Modernization of the area. The attraction of the new residents is achieved through the improvement of the quality of life in the area.	Economic growth achieved through the diversification of the activities related to the cultural tourism. Involvement of the private sector in the process.
Environmental Actions	New infrastructures based on a sustainable transport system.	Upgrading and development of new infrastructure based on the pedestrianization of the area.
Institutional Involvement	Comprehensive plan of regeneration based on subdivision of the area into zones with flexible and simultaneous interventions.	Plan of regeneration based on progressive and clear phases.
Character	Architectural mixture of the buildings.	Low-rise building with traditional architectural language.
Strategy of Action	Imposed but flexible urban regeneration.	Prospective and progressive urban regeneration

Table 4 Main characteristics of the two urban regeneration projects (prepared by authors).

- the reconciliation between sustainable development objectives and the need of populations for tradition, while avoiding the museumification of old city districts and maintaining the quest for new economic activities;
- The role of local inhabitants remains one of the weak links of urban regeneration and requires research for new means of intervention at all stages of urban regeneration operations" (UNEP 2004: 25).

CONCLUSION

It appears that there are more potentialities in relying on urban neighborhoods or districts rather than individual historic landmarks when striving to reinforce an existing urban identity or create a new one. The continued debate on image making and symbolism in architecture are generally derived from the need to search for a local place identity in the emerging global world. Therefore, old districts should be the starting points to direct and control future urban regeneration of a city, rather than relying on single disparate monuments or iconic landmarks.

Following the cases of old Doha and old Sharjah, the Heart of Sharjah focuses on culture and tourism related combinations of institutional, retail and hospitality uses, while Msheireb Downtown more generally mixed-use office, retail and real estate. Msheireb has taller mid-rise buildings that result in greater density than in the case of Sharjah, which respects the height of the existing traditional houses of one and two stories. The Msheireb project was bolder in innovating a new identity inspired from the past, while Sharjah was more precautious towards the past. The latter, might have been influenced by the need to nominate the regenerated site to become a world heritage site.

In future opportunities for regeneration, planners must consider the historical importance of the city, its cultural themes, and modern concepts of regeneration such as considering the need for diversity and environmental protection in addition to rehabilitating housing, creating and enhancing open spaces and city landscapes, adding new functions to the old district and redeveloping decayed buildings, and creating economic factors, such as infrastructure and roads, with which to invest in the new functions.

Through these two cases, it is illustrated the different approaches of the urban regeneration. The main recommendations for the regeneration of historical areas are:

- Development of a comprehensive plan of regeneration;
- Clear phases in the implementation of the plan of regeneration;
- Flexible approach with the intention to review and readapt the plan at the end of each phase;
- Mixture and diversification of activities with the insertion of the traditional art and craft;
- Involvement of the public in the process with the objective to increase the awareness of the public;
- The regeneration strategy should be developed by focusing on the pedestrianization of the district;
- The architectural language should be referred to the traditional architecture with the use of contemporary technologies.

The role of culture and identity is central to any regeneration process, including both tangible and intangible components, which in turn must be considered in the planning phase. To achieve this, all the inhabitants and stakeholders need to be involved in deciding about the future of old historic cities, which means a bottom up versus a top down approach needs to be applied in future

regeneration projects. There must be collaboration and a participatory approach in order to encourage people to care about their past, buildings, activities, symbols and meanings, which all should participate in retrieving or reconstructing a city's place identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Djamel Boussaa orcid.org/0000-0002-2635-569X
Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, College of Engineering, Qatar University, Qatar

Bouzid Boudiaf orcid.org/0000-0001-9339-8975
Independent researcher, Ajman, UAE

Jihad Awad orcid.org/0000-0001-9270-9241
Department of Architecture, College of Architecture, Art and Design, Ajman University, UAE

Muna Salameh orcid.org/0000-0002-8337-8601
Department of Architecture, College of Architecture, Art and Design, Ajman University, UAE

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