

**Research Paper**

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Social Sustainability and Globalization; and the Role of Souq Mutrah in Muscat-Oman**Fatma Hilal Al-Habsi***Master of Science in Islamic Art, Architecture, and Urbanism program at Hamad bin Khalifa University in Qatar.**Email: fatma.alhabsi@gmail.com***Abstract**

This study examines the impact of globalization on the historic urban fabric of Mutrah, with a specific focus on the coastal neighbourhood of Sur al Lawatiyah and the development of the *souq* Mutrah in Muscat, Oman. The city's urban design reflects its challenging and fractured history, marked by fortified walls, towering forts, and a dense, clustered urban fabric, particularly during and after the Portuguese occupation. Additionally, the study explains how social sustainability, one of the key pillars of sustainability, has been affected by globalization. Despite being separated from the surrounding neighbourhoods by massive walls and gates, the *souq* Mutrah, located in the middle, is a crucial public space for people to gather, making it an essential element in Islamic neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, the study examines the effect of the *souq* Mutrah's development on the surrounding neighbourhood of Sur Al-Lawatiyah. The *souq* has been redesigned and transformed into a larger market that attracts people from all over the world, reflecting the city's multi-cultural identity. Although some residents have created physical and social boundaries to protect themselves from visitors, the *souq* remains an important public space for locals to gather, trade, and work. Ultimately, the study concludes that the *souq*'s development has increased social interaction and the sense of space without negatively affecting the surrounding neighbourhood's identity or way of life.

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Keywords*Globalization; Neighbourhood; Market; Social sustainability; Sustainable communities.***1. Introduction**

The development of urban spaces and marketplaces plays a crucial role in shaping the social, cultural, and economic fabric of a community. One such example is *Souq* Mutrah in the coastal city of Muscat, Oman. This historic marketplace has undergone significant changes in recent years, influenced by factors such as globalization, tourism, and the evolving needs and preferences of residents and visitors.

In this study, I delve into the impact of *Souq* Mutrah's development on the surrounding neighbourhood, particularly focusing on the Al-Lawatiyah neighbourhood. Al-Lawatiyah is a residential area characterized by a closed space with restricted access, fortified walls, and small dwellings. The neighbourhood's physical and social landscape has been shaped by its proximity to the *souq*, which serves as an important public space for local gatherings and community interactions. As the city of Muscat has experienced rapid growth and transformation, the development of *Souq* Mutrah has become an integral part of the urban dynamics. The main aim of this study is to apply a framework for studying

social sustainability in *Souq* Mutrah and its impact on the surrounding neighbourhood of Sur al Lawatiyah. The study also has the following related objectives:

- To understand the impact of globalization on Omani neighbourhoods, particularly in Mutrah.
- To identify the concept of social sustainability in neighbourhoods and marketplaces.
- To analyze the effects of *Souq* Mutrah's development on the social fabric and cultural preservation of the surrounding neighbourhood.
- To explore the residents' perceptions and experiences of the *souq's* development, considering factors such as privacy, community cohesion, and the preservation of their identity.

To achieve these objectives, a combined research methodology consisting of a historiography study and a qualitative study will be employed. The historiography study will investigate the history of Oman, the impact of globalization, and the interactions that have shaped the old neighbourhoods over time, with a particular focus on the history of Oman during the Portuguese occupation. The qualitative study will involve collecting and analyzing various types of data, utilizing phenomenology to describe and study the structure of human experience, the meaning of objects, and their relationships with other elements (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). The study will be approached in three phases: data collection, data preparation, and analysis. Information will be gathered from journals, books, articles, and other relevant sources. Additionally, a case study of *Souq* Mutrah will be conducted to examine the social sustainability within the *souq* and its influence on the surrounding neighbourhood of Sur al Lawatiyah.

By shedding light on the intricate relationship between *Souq* Mutrah's development and the surrounding neighbourhood, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamics of urban change in the context of globalization and cultural heritage preservation. The findings will not only inform future urban planning strategies but also provide valuable insights into the delicate balance between development, social sustainability, and the preservation of local identities within historic urban neighbourhoods.

2. The Impact of Globalization on the Old Costal Settlements in Mutrah

Oman has a geological history dating back over 800 years and contains the most attractive vernacular and traditional heritage within the Arabian Peninsula, such as forts, castles, and traditional settlement quarters (Hegazy, 2015, p. 2). The diversity of Oman's heritage can be attributed to its strategic location on the Silk Road, which attracted numerous tribes and foreign forces throughout its history, leaving their mark on the urban fabric and building design (Figure 1). For instance, the scalloped arches on the minaret of Mutrah's mosque reflect Mongol architecture, as depicted in figure 2 (Benkari, 2017; Hegazy, 2010). The dwellings in Oman were built with traditional Omani architecture and influenced by pre-Islamic, Islamic, Persian, and Portuguese styles (Hegazy, 2015, p. 3). The trade routes also impacted traditional lifestyles, including language and clothing such as the national dress, "*dishdasha*", which ensured continuity in the urban context and influenced other countries under Oman's rule, such as Zanzibar (Hegazy, 2010).

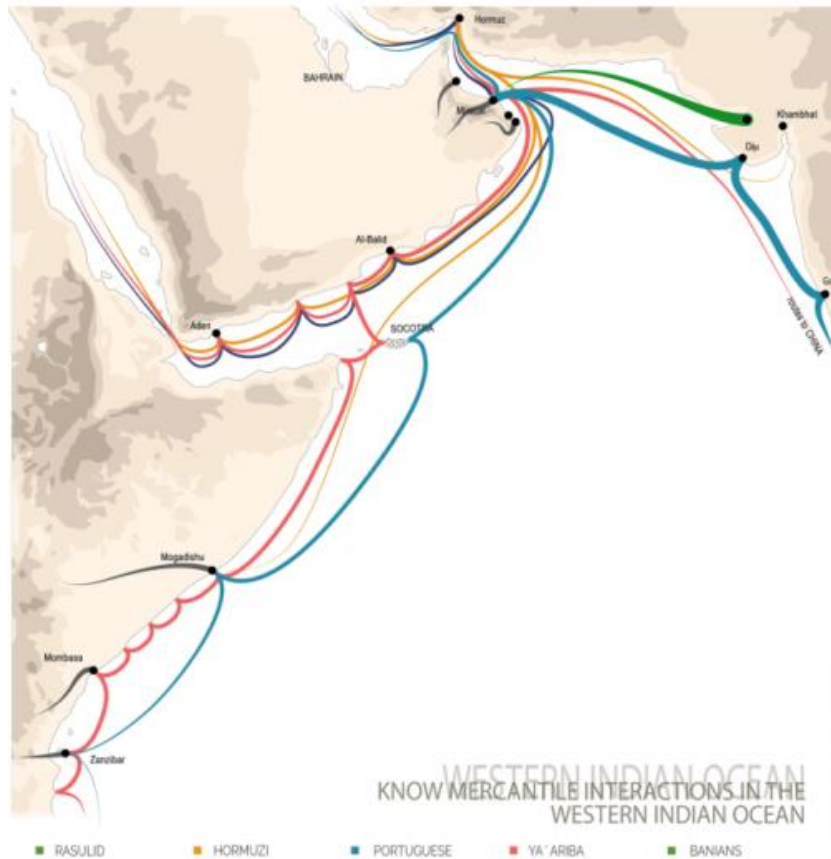


Figure 1: Interaction between traders in the western Indian Ocean. Source:(Bandyopadhyay et al., 2016).



Figure 2: The lavish Minaret in Mutrah's Mosque. (Photos by the Author,2022).

During the first global era (1440-1770 C.E), European power colonies such as Great Britain, France, and Portugal controlled the trade routes in the Indian Ocean and conquered massive lands and numerous ports (Al-Mahrouqi, n.d.). In the sixteenth century, Oman was occupied by foreign armies such as the Persians and the Portuguese (Al-Belushi, 2013). Around the coasts, the Portuguese settled and built military structures (Benkari, 2017). They recognized Mutrah's best location, which is to the south of a harbour protected by two mountains. The Portuguese constructed the famous twin forts, Jalali and Mirani forts, on each of these mountains and made Muscat one of their strategic centres in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean (Gaupe, 2008).

Mutrah was a commercial district, or the heart of Oman's trading empire, filled with Baluch and immigrant merchants (David, 2018). The houses in Mutrah neighbourhoods were clustered closely together and belonged to one tribe and the same ethnic group. However, the most famous district and the only surviving example of historic buildings in Mutrah is "Sur al Lawatiya," the Shiite community. It encompassed its fortified wall, with expansion moving vertically rather than horizontally throughout time due to the challenges of procuring neighbouring construction plots. It consists of 218 houses ranging in height from three to four storeys and contains flat-roofed buildings with small windows on the street sides (Dinteman, 1993; Hawker, 2008b). Whitewashed exterior surfaces, recessed pointed arches, profuse latticework on the windows (known locally as *Mashrabiyyah*), and pen-tiered balconies are characteristics of the historic houses in Muscat (Figure 3), which are mostly similar to those in Zanzibar and Mombasa (Hawker, 2008b).



Figure 3: Mutrah, Sur al Lawatiyah neighbourhood (Photos by the Author, 2022).

According to Salma Damluji in her book *The Architecture of Oman*, the Portuguese are assumed to have founded the settlement of Sur Lawatiyah because a Portuguese army is mentioned there in the seventeenth century (Damluji, 1998). However, al-Ya'arubi Imams freed Oman's coastal areas from the Portuguese in the 17th century under Imam Nasir bin Murshid (Al-Belushi, 2013). This period saw the involvement and development of most of Oman's traditional settlements, which had consolidated their strategic defensive character, highly influenced by Portuguese defence methods (Benkari, 2017). However, the Ya'ariba Imamate ended in 1737 due to a civil war, allowing the Persians to retake Oman (Al-Belushi, 2013). During the Persian occupation, the most popular irrigation technique was underground tunnels from aquifers, which the Persians had first used during the 2500 B.P. Achaemenid dynasty (Wilkinson, 1977).

In 1970, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's accession heralded the start of Oman's modern period (Al-Belushi, 2013). Over the past two decades, spurred by the oil boom, fast modernization, and pressures for fast growth, trade liberalization, and information and communications technology, people have moved from their old houses to newer and nearby residential areas in search of employment opportunities and modern infrastructure (Al-Belushi, 2013; AlSayyad, 1995). Although not all houses were abandoned, this affected the pillars of sustainability, namely economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Urban development encompasses not only physical changes in cities but also economic, social, and cultural transformations and their underlying reasons (Benkari, 2017).

3. Problem Statement

Around the world, most countries are losing their national identity, moving from vernacularism to globalism (AlSayyad, 1995). However, in Oman, the Omani identity persists, thanks to the slower and more controlled urbanization process, which was more carefully managed than in other Arab countries like Dubai and Doha (Benkari,

2017). Ronald Hawker, in his book *Traditional Architecture of the Arabian Gulf: Building on Desert Tises*, argues that the architecture of the Arabian Gulf evolved in response to social and environmental factors in the 18th and 19th centuries. The links between the tribe, trade, and outside powers shaped houses, mosques, market centres, and fortified buildings that provided protection and a place for worship, business, communication, exchange, and shelter from the harsh Gulf climate (Hawker, 2008a).

According to Ismael David, the neighbourhood of *Sur al Lawatiyah*, also known as “the Forbidden City,” can only be accessed by members of the Lawatiyah community. The neighbourhood is isolated from the *souq* (a local word for market) adjacent to it by two wooden gates and an enormous fortified wall, and no one knows why the walled quarter was closed for such a lengthy period (figure 4). Some scholars speculate that because the Lawatis were a small Shiite group, they chose to live in seclusion, much like their contemporaries in Najaf and Karbala. Although the walled quarter is no longer officially closed to the public, strangers are still not welcome, even if the gates are open today (David, 2018). Nevertheless, *Souq Mutrah*, located in the middle of the neighbourhood, is still isolated from the surrounding buildings; there is no access from inside the neighbourhood to the *souq*, which should be a space for people to gather and socialize.



Figure 4: View of Mutrah area showing Sur al Lawatiyah neighbourhood and the *souq* (Major & Tannous, 2020).

In recent years, most countries worldwide have focused on studying the social life of cities and building sustainable cities with strong social sustainability. However, due to globalization, and urban development, some countries have become socially unsustainable (Mehan & Soflaei, 2017). What does social sustainability mean in neighbourhoods and public spaces such as the *souq*? Can we consider *Souq Mutrah* socially sustainable, especially after the *souq*'s development?

4. Social Sustainability in neighbourhoods and Public spaces

The concept of sustainability was introduced by the United Nations in the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report, which defined sustainable development as the pursuit of current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability encompasses environmental, economic, and social dimensions and is often defined as the quality of the society (Yoo and Lee, 2016; Mehan and Soflaei, 2017).

Social sustainability specifically focuses on addressing the fundamental human needs of individuals, irrespective of factors such as ethnicity, age, religion, sexuality, social class, economic status, and abilities. It emphasizes the well-being of both individuals and society as a whole, as well as the sustainable development of the built environment (Mehan & Soflaei, 2017). In 2003, sustainable communities in the United Kingdom defined social sustainability as

“Places where People desire to live and work, now and in the future” (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). In the urban context, Yiftachel and Hedgcock defined social sustainability as the “continuing ability of a city to function as a long-term viable setting for human interaction, communication, and cultural development” (Yoo & Lee, 2016). Urban social sustainability has been scoped to three different urban units, starting with macro-level like city, to medium-level like urban districts, to micro-scale built environments like neighbourhood and urban public spaces (Mehan & Soflaei, 2017).

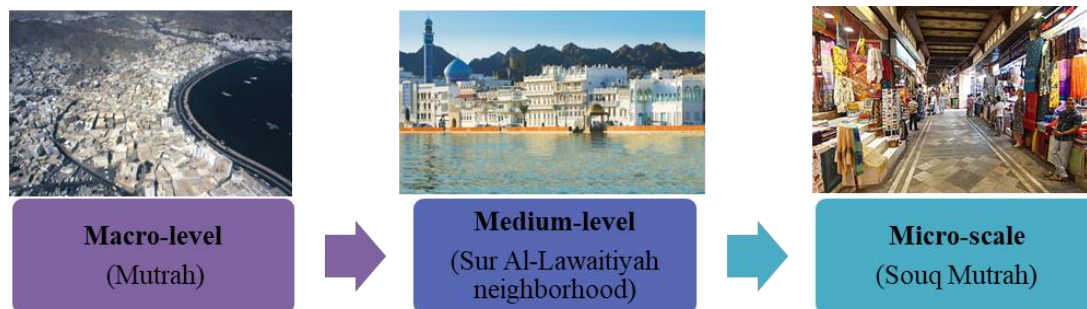


Figure 5: Urban social sustainability has been scoped to three different urban units (prepared by the Author).

Traditional Islamic neighbourhoods are an example of harmonious integration between private and public spaces, with street and road networks morphing into thrilling walkways, leading to visual and intellectual delights. Neighbourhood planning has several concepts, including privacy, hierarchy in open spaces, courtyards, *souqs*, neighbourhood councils, neighbourhood centres, streets, buildings, local materials, unity, harmonious community roles, protection, and security (Fatani et al., 2017). The built environment of neighbourhoods is critical in achieving social sustainability, with essential environmental design ideas such as a feeling of place, equal access to essential services, appropriate housing, and amenities. Meeting places, various building types, and a variety of land uses have all been linked to social sustainability (Yoo & Lee, 2016). Public spaces in neighbourhoods are critical for meeting people's needs, and it depends on the space's functionality and activities (Aram et al., 2018).

Traditional neighbourhoods contain public and private spaces, such as the mosque, parks, and *Souq*, the most important public space in the neighbourhood. However, how can we say this *Souq* is socially sustainable? So far, there have been few studies on how to improve the social role of these markets, which has resulted in increased social interactions among individuals (Aram et al., 2018).

5. Social Sustainability in Traditional Souqs

Traditional *souqs* are typically centred in the city's historic old quarter as iconic inherits (Elsayed et al., 2019). They are places for gathering people from different ethnicities and ages to meet their needs, including economic and socio-cultural activities (Aram et al., 2018). Traditional markets reflect the community's lifestyle, history, heritage, and the solid connection of the people there. The traditional *souq* in the Arabian Islamic countries is consistently near or around the Friday mosque, and it is essential in the urban context because of its functional diversity and social sustainability. These traditional public spaces provide a high level of social communication and interaction between people and play an important role as a hub for commercial and cultural exchange (Elsayed et al., 2019).

Hebatallah A. Elsayed and her colleagues argue in their article "Traditional Market Design towards Cohesion between Social Sustainability and Bioclimatic Approach" that some new traditional markets in the Arab world were developed without regard for local identity and lifestyle; they do not promote social stability. They looked at three aspects of the design of Al-Zall *Souq* in Riyadh: morphological language, socio-cultural, and bioclimatic (Figure 6) (Elsayed et al., 2019).

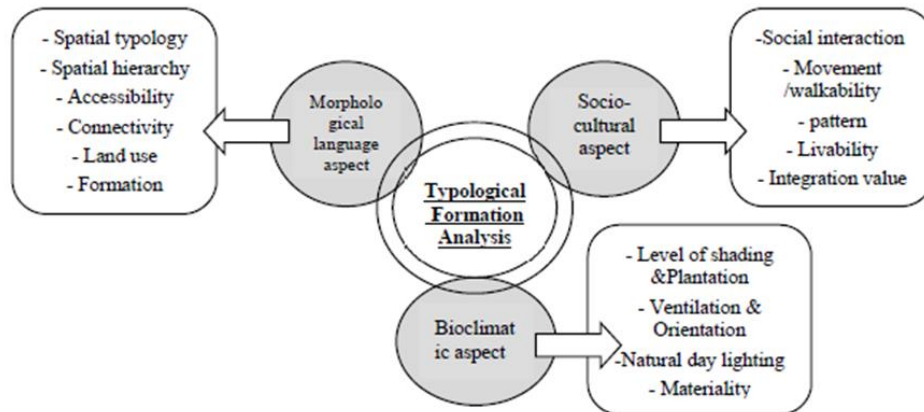


Figure 6: Typological Formation Analysis Model (Elsayed et al., 2019).

The most important aspect is the socio-cultural aspect, which studies the traditional *souq* as a complex cultural space and reflects the social and local dimensions. The socio culture criteria are: (a) social interaction, which is the relation or the social communication between two or more individuals at deferent levels; (b) Movement/walkability pattern, which enhances access to public spaces, primary nodes, and recreational facilities; (c) Livability, which is defined as a set of physical characteristics that combine the natural and built environments to provide comfort and safety, attractive facades, and easy access to services and public transportation; (D) Integration value, which examines the boundaries of the *souq* and how it integrates with the surrounding buildings in the neighbourhood; and (E) Safety and security, which is a right for all individuals and groups to be protected and secured (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017; Stanislava & Chin, 2019). However, these five criteria will be used to study the social sustainability of *Souq Mutrah*.

6. Case study: Souq Mutrah

Souq Mutrah is Oman's oldest permanent traditional market, dating back to the 19th century. It is known as "*Souq Al-Dhalam*," which means "darkness market," named for its dark and crowded alleyways (Major & Tannous, 2020). It stretches in a linear pattern from the main entrance on the Mutrah Corniche waterfront along the coastline in the north, facing Al Bahri Road (Corniche), splitting into two ways towards the southern gates facing Mutrah High Street (Major & Tannous, 2020). The *souq* cuts across the old residential walled neighbourhood of "Al-Lawatiyah," which came into being some 200 years ago (Gutberlet, 2016).

Souq Mutrah is a bustling marketplace that offers opportunities for commerce, entertainment, and social interaction, particularly for the local community (Al-Maimani et al., 2014). It is also a popular destination for tourists who visit to purchase antiques, jewellery, handicrafts, and traditional clothing (Major & Tannous, 2020). Covering approximately 51,200 m², the *souq* comprises around 800 shops, all of which are licensed by the Municipality of Muscat (Gutberlet, 2016). Most of the shops are owned by the Lawatiyah.

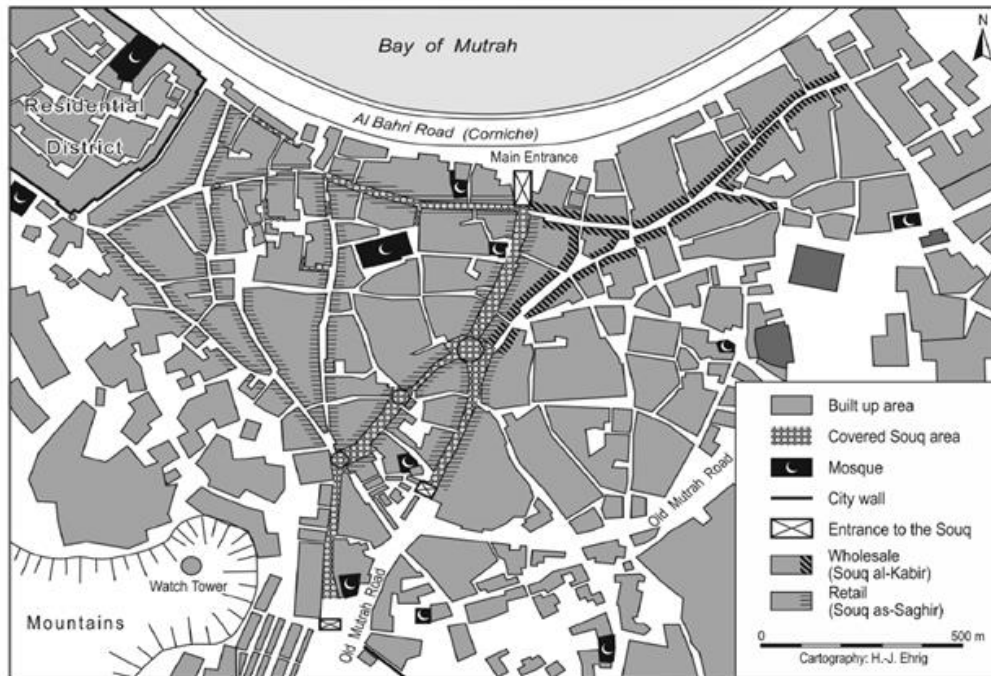


Figure 7: View of the Mutrah area (Gutberlet, 2016).

The Mutrah Municipality has taken various measures to ensure the long-term sustainability, survival, and viability of *Souq* Mutrah as a traditional marketplace. During the development process in 2004-2005, the municipality focused on improving the drainage system, electrical supply, security, safety, and accessibility by constructing northern and southern access points (Major & Tannous, 2020). They also provided water hydrants, reshaped sections of the *souq*, built public areas, and replaced the roof with more durable and safer materials (Al-Maimani et al., 2014). Despite the expansion and addition of spaces to accommodate the growing population and development, the question remains: Is *Souq* Mutrah socially sustainable?

7. Social sustainability criteria

To assess the social sustainability of *Souq* Mutrah, we can use several criteria. One important aspect is social interaction, which can be analyzed by examining social patterns, movement, liveability, and integration value within the community (Elsayed et al., 2019).

Social interaction

Souq Mutrah has three primary gathering node spaces. Some of these spaces were open spaces at the *souq's* main entrances, while others were enclosed as central gathering nodes within the *souq's* urban fabric. The first is a massive watchtower located at the main gate, with the words "*Souq* Mutrah" engraved on it (figure 8). This area serves as a common drop-off point and a parking area for taxis and buses. However, the movement of people in this space is so fast that it reduces the amount of contact. The upper floor of the watchtower links to a tourist restaurant and provides an excellent space for social interaction, with a beautiful view of the sea (Gutberlet, 2016). The boundaries and exits of this space provide a sense of safety and protection, and the shade at the entrance adds to the comfort. The lighting at night is appropriate and enhances the spirit of the place (Al-Maimani et al., 2014).



Figure 8: Main entrance to *Souq* Mutrah (Photos by the Author, 2022).

The second node is the middle gathering space, which is the most significant enclosure gathering space in the middle of the *souq*. It has a circular roof covered with glass-reinforced plastic, allowing natural light to enter the space and artificial light from surrounding shops to illuminate the area. However, this space is primarily used for shopping, and people move through it quickly, reducing the amount of contact. The space is only accessible by walking or cycling, and there is no seating area. Nonetheless, the space reflects Omani identity and culture through the traditional Omani jewellery shown in the glass roof (Figure 9) (Al-Maimani et al., 2014).



Figure 9: The middle gathering space (Al-Maimani et al., 2014, p.).

The third space is the open area at the back entrance from the southwest, which serves as a drop-off area and has a fixed sitting area made of brick blocks. It creates a physical border with the street and provides a sense of safety and support. This sitting area promotes significant social interaction among people of various ages, cultural backgrounds, and genders. It is a socially inclusive space among all three nodes, where users can visit the *souq* to shop, sit, relax, and socialize. The dimensions of the space, built-in seats, and visibility promote interaction. It can be reached through various modes of transportation (Figure 10) (Al-Maimani et al., 2014).



Figure 10: Back entrance from the south-west. (Photo Source: https://mybrothertraveler.com/trip.php?continent=asia&state=oman&trip=EI_11).

Movement / walkability patterns

The movement and circulation around the entrance and exits of *Souq* Mutrah are clearly defined, allowing visitors to navigate the space easily. The main corridor is wide, and all secondary narrower alleyways connect to it (Figure 11). Additionally, these corridors are designated solely for pedestrians (Major & Tannous, 2020). The three main public spaces are separated by varying distances and connected to each other by the main corridor. The use of these spaces enhances visitors' spatial awareness, as changes in level, proportion, height, and direction guide their movements and increase their sense of wayfinding, ultimately improving their overall user experience in the *souq*. However, the narrow alleyways of the *souq* have often experienced overcrowding, especially during weekends when a large number of visitors flock to the area. This overcrowding has raised concerns regarding safety (Figure 12) (Gutberlet, 2016). Fortunately, with the ongoing development of the *souq*, significant progress has been made in addressing the issue of overcrowding, leading to notable improvements in safety conditions. Additionally, while occasional crowding may still occur in the corridors, such instances are primarily attributed to the arrival of tourists from the ships docking at the port of Muttrah.

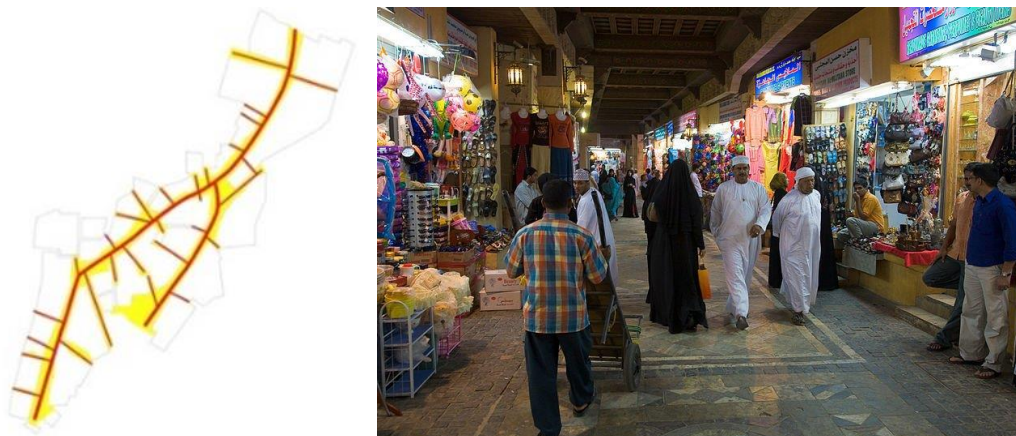


Figure 11: Circulation inside *Souq* Mutrah (Major & Tannous, 2020).



Figure 12: The main corridor in *Souq* Mutrah /26 February 2012, around noon (Gutberlet, 2016).

Livability

The strategic location of the *souq*, nestled between residential neighbourhoods, particularly Al-Lawatiyah, contributes significantly to its livability and enhances the overall quality of public spaces. As mentioned earlier, the majority of shops in the *souq* are owned by local residents, forging a strong connection between the community and the marketplace. The active involvement of local people in the maintenance and improvement of the *souq* plays a pivotal role in boosting the local economy.

Furthermore, the *souq's* livability is further supported by the presence of other tourist attractions in Mutrah, such as museums, the Fish Market, and the Sultan Qaboos port (refer to Figure 13). Many visitors arrive at the Mutrah market through cruise ships that dock at Port Sultan Qaboos, enriching the diversity and vibrancy of the *souq* (Gutberlet, 2016).

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the *souq* remains a popular destination for Omanis themselves. Its appeal lies in the affordability of goods, with negotiable prices and a wide array of offerings, particularly traditional items. This ensures that the *souq* caters to the needs and desires of a large number of people, reinforcing its significance as a valuable cultural and economic hub.

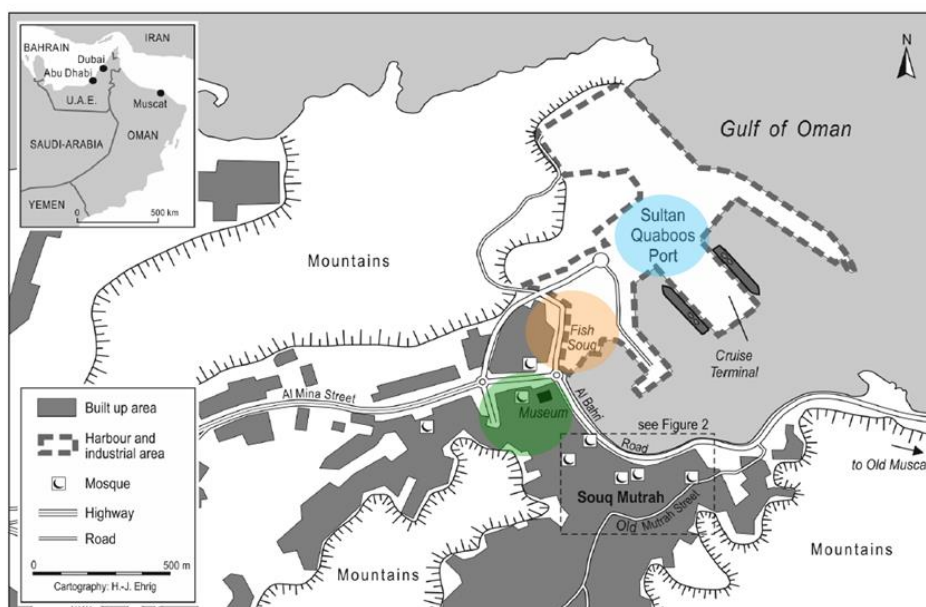


Figure 13: Map of the district of Mutrah, including *Souq* Mutrah and Port Sultan Qaboos (Gutberlet, 2016).

Integration value

The *souq* Mutrah's location at the heart of the neighbourhood, seamlessly blending with the surrounding urban fabric, exemplifies a remarkable level of cohesive integration. The boundaries between the *souq* and its neighbouring areas foster a sense of unity and interconnectedness, as evidenced by their interlocking patterns and shared urban elements (see Figure 14). This integration value is a testament to the *souq's* indispensable role within the community.

The significance of the *souq* extends beyond its function as a marketplace. It serves as a vital hub that caters to the diverse needs of the local population, fulfilling various aspects of their daily lives. Whether it's purchasing essential goods, engaging in commercial activities, or seeking social interactions, the *souq* seamlessly integrates into the neighbourhood's fabric, becoming an integral part of its structure.



Figure 14: View of the Mutrah area showing the integration value (Major & Tannous, 2020).

8. The identity:

The identity of *Souq* Mutrah has undergone some changes with the introduction of modern elements such as ATMs, but it has not lost its character as an Omani traditional market. While some residents have concerns about the negative impact of the *souq's* development on their neighbourhood, they still use the *souq* as a gathering space, a place to meet their needs, and a place to trade and work. Despite concerns about overcrowding, selling cheap mass goods, and the loss of Omani identity, the *souq's* development has brought economic and social benefits to the area, which must be balanced with the needs of residents.

According to Manuela Gutberlet, "Mutrah consists of the multi-ethnic population (Gutberlet, 2016)". It is a reflection of the vibrant cultural mosaic within the *souq*. This diversity is an integral part of Mutrah's identity, highlighted by the array of stores and imported products available in the *souq* (Figure 15). The rich diversity of cultures in Oman is often attributed to the historical trade routes and the settlement of various tribes in the region. This unique blend of cultures is believed to have been shaped by the influx of different tribes and communities due to trade activities.

In summary, while the identity of *Souq* Mutrah has undergone changes due to the introduction of modern elements, it has managed to preserve its traditional essence. The concerns expressed by residents regarding the *souq's* development should be addressed, considering the potential impact on overcrowding, commoditization, and cultural identity. However, it is important to recognize the positive economic and social contributions that the *souq* brings to the area. The diverse nature of Mutrah's population and the multicultural offerings within the *souq* further emphasize its unique identity. Finding a balance between development and preservation will ensure the continued success and sustainability of *Souq* Mutrah as a cherished cultural and economic landmark.



Figure 15: Imported souvenirs, displayed outside a shop at the entrance to *Souq* Mutrah (Gutberlet, 2016).

9. The effect of *Souq* development on the surrounding neighbourhood:

The development of *Souq* Mutrah has brought about significant changes in the surrounding neighbourhood of Al-Lawatiyah. Previously secluded with limited accessibility, the neighbourhood has now embraced a more open and welcoming atmosphere thanks to the expansion of the *souq*. While some residents have taken measures to protect their privacy and preserve their way of life, the *souq* remains a vital public space where locals can gather, trade, and work (Gutberlet, 2016).

The revitalized *Souq* has emerged as a popular destination for people from around the globe, attracting a diverse range of visitors and reflecting the multicultural identity of Mutrah. This increased interaction has fostered a greater sense of community among both residents and visitors (Gutberlet, 2016). Importantly, the development of the *souq* has not compromised the identity or character of the surrounding neighbourhood. The traditional architecture, cultural heritage, and historical buildings have been carefully preserved, and the *souq* coexists harmoniously with the neighbourhood.

Overall, the impact of the *souq's* development on the surrounding neighbourhood has been overwhelmingly positive. It has enhanced the neighbourhood's social sustainability by providing a space for community engagement and reinforcing a sense of place. The *souq* has breathed new life into the area while respecting and celebrating its existing cultural fabric. The ongoing integration between the *souq* and the neighbourhood contributes to the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of the community.



Figure 16: The exterior wall of *Sur* al Lawatiyah neighbourhood (Photos by the Author, 2022).

10. Conclusion

The *souq* Mutrah and surrounding neighbourhood of Sur al-Lawatiyah in Muscat exemplify the resilience of historical districts in preserving their cultural heritage amidst the influences of globalization and trade. These areas have successfully maintained their unique character, architectural treasures, and cultural identity, serving as essential components of Muscat's rich past.

The development of *Souq* Mutrah has not only contributed to the social sustainability of the neighbourhood by fostering community cohesion and interaction, but it has also reinforced the local identity. By acting as a vibrant gathering space and a thriving trading hub, the *souq* has injected vitality into the community while respecting its residential nature.

The seamless integration of the *souq* Mutrah within the surrounding neighbourhood, its provision of essential goods and services, and its role as a social and cultural hub all contribute to its enduring significance and impact. This symbiotic relationship enhances the livability of the area, fosters a strong sense of identity among residents and visitors, and exemplifies the potential for sustainable urban development.

Sur al-Lawatiyah, benefiting from its proximity to the *souq* Mutrah, has embraced the advantages of being a secure and private residential community while actively engaging with the dynamic atmosphere emanating from the *souq*. As Muscat continues to evolve, it is essential to strike a harmonious balance between modernization, economic growth, and the preservation of the city's distinctive character and cultural heritage. Safeguarding the historic urban fabric, cultural treasures, and sustainable development in Mutrah will ensure a thriving future for the city.

Moving forward, it is crucial to continue valuing and preserving the heritage and authenticity of the *souq* Mutrah and its surrounding neighbourhood. By doing so, Muscat can flourish as a multicultural city, attracting people from around the world, while serving as a model for sustainable urban development. This study makes a significant contribution by highlighting the social, cultural, and economic benefits of the *souq* Mutrah's development. By embracing tradition alongside progress, the *souq* Mutrah will continue to be a cherished symbol of Muscat's remarkable history and promising future, perpetuating the city's legacy of sustainable growth.

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