

# Guest Editorial: Saudi Vision 2030

**Dr. Yenny Rahmayati**

*Assistant Professor, Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia*

**Email:** yrahmayati@psu.edu.sa

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Situated in the heart of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has played a significant role in the Arab region since the pre-historic and pre-Islamic periods. The discovery of oil in 1938 brought a major transformation to the country, which has since become one of the world's largest oil producers and exporters. The oil industry boom occurred during the 1970s and 1980s and resulted in the rapid development of the economy. This in turn transformed the country into a modern state; a change that touched all sectors, including the built environment.

In 2018, eight decades after the first discovery of oil, Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman launched 'Saudi Vision 2030', a blueprint that provides general guidance for the future of the Kingdom's development. Built on three main themes: 'A Vibrant Society', 'A Thriving Economy', and 'An Ambitious Nation', Saudi Vision 2030 is calling for action in many areas, not least of which are urban development and environmental sustainability. This vision aims to free the Kingdom from its dependency on oil and build a prosperous and sustainable economy that can serve as a model of excellence worldwide. This can be achieved by capitalising on existing opportunities while developing the country's unique strengths and diverse capabilities.

This special issue, Saudi Vision 2030 - Habitats for Sustainable Development presents key issues from a range of perspectives in architecture, urban design and planning. By focusing on the challenges and opportunities arising within the frame of Saudi Vision 2030, it tries to capture the specific problems faced by cities and the new habitats in Saudi Arabia, and propose solutions and approaches for dealing with them. It thus presents a diverse range of discourses and case studies that reflect the Vision. Special attention is paid to the Vision's first pillar, 'A Vibrant Society' and its connection to economic development. We present views on policy, heritage, urban design, and the environment, while exploring new perspectives that are can lead to more sustainable, more resilient, and ultimately more liveable cities. Specifically, the six articles in this special issue explore new paradigms in urban planning, the potentials of cultural heritage, creating sustainable vernacular architecture, managing public spaces, the branding of Saudi Arabia's capital and the concept of a 'happy city'.

The first article in the special issue is by Amira Abdelrazik Elbortokaly and Noorhan Mustafa Hanafi who adopt an urban planning perspective. Entitled "Saudi Vision 2030: A New Mind-set of City Future: Moving from Strategic Planning to Sustainable Development Based Vision: The Case of Ar-Riyadh, KSA", the article discusses the transformation of the city vision by investigating the urban vision history of the Kingdom's capital and its development to accommodate the visioning process. Using Ar-Riyadh as a case study, this article examines two main documents: the strategic planning process of MEDSTAR 2003 (The Metropolitan Development Strategy for Ar-Riyadh Region) and Saudi Vision 2030. It also assesses how both documents can be integrated to achieve sustainable development.

The second article examines the influence of Saudi Vision 2030 from the standpoint of cultural heritage. In this article, "Adaptive Reuse Strategy for Abandoned Historic Villages in Asir (Saudi Arabia): A Participatory Approach", Dr. Anna Klingman argues that reviving and promoting abandoned historic villages can provide a boost to the tourism economy and positively develop national identity. In this way, heritage reuse can be understood to contribute to the Vision by helping to achieve the goal of strengthening national identity. Significantly, the author uses architectural approaches to answer two key questions. Firstly, to what extent does the adaptive reuse of abandoned villages make a positive contribution to the circular economy? And secondly, how does adaptive reuse solidify a dynamic understanding of heritage as an ongoing social and cultural process? The article concludes with thought provoking results - especially for the younger generation: Who would have imagined that the fundamental aspects for economic growth can be found in their social and cultural identity as embodied in heritage villages such as Asir?

Extending this discussion concerning the value of heritage, Dr. Silvia Mazetto argues that rapid urban development using innovative materials and new technology should be aligned with the preservation of national identity, heritage, local history and culture. The synergy created by such development can be achieved, the article suggests, by adopting the goal of environmental sustainability as unifying principle. The author employs a comparative approach to several examples of

successful adaptive-reuse projects in the wider Middle East to better evaluate the merits of the various urban regeneration projects. The analysis has a particular focus on socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects; identifying examples of 'best practice' that integrate the environmental principles of sustainability. The result is a collection of examples of innovative practices derived from real world projects.

The focus of the issue then shifts to the urban context with three contributors addressing this theme. In their article, "Improving the Quality of Life in Saudi Cities through Active Public Residential Spaces: The Case of Central Damman City", authors Sulaiman M. Almazroua and Dr. K.M. Maniruzzaman posit the idea that a strong relation exists between public spaces and quality of life, especially in residential areas. To validate this claim, selected residents in the Damman city centre took part in a case study of their neighbourhood. A key finding was that some the public spaces involved would require significant improvements to improve the residents' quality of life. The authors therefore conclude their article by providing specific recommendations for the relevant authority to enable such improvements.

Dr. Anna Klingmann's second contribution to this special issue, "Branding Saudi Arabia's capital: How Riyadh uses urban place marketing, mega-events, and urban destinations as tools to brand the city in line with Vision 2030" examines the mega-events and urban mega-destinations of Saudi Arabia, with a particular emphasis on the capital, Riyadh. The author focuses on how this city is promoting the image of the country within a framework of urban and architectural branding strategies. The article suggests that the long-term credibility and identification of the capital would be enhanced through a more participatory and inclusive approach to achieving this objective. This article thus proposes an approach for contributing to the sustainable vision of 2030.

The last article in the issue address the Vision 2030 theme of 'A Vibrant City' directly. Entitled "Saudi Vision for a Happy City: Analyzing architecture students' perspective for Riyadh, Saudi Arabia", the article explores how administrators have sought to design an urban landscape that is capable of creating a 'Vibrant Society', one comprising residents who lead happy and fulfilling lives. The authors, Arshi Parashar and Dr. Harshit SosanLakra, chose Riyadh as the study's location. In order to gain a fresh perspective on the city's development, the authors compared alternative designs as evidenced by the work of undergraduate students of Architecture and Urban Design. The resulting comparison, identifies similarities and differences between students' design projects which had been developed in response to the 'Quality of Life Program' under the 'Vibrant Society' theme, and those developed by city administrators as part of their realization of the goals of Vision 2030. The findings reveal that the students' ideas for a happy city is largely in alignment with the city's, and the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. Key differences were identified, however, and the authors present an interesting discussion concerning the role that academics can play in harmonizing the perspectives of young students and the city's administrators.

*Saudi Vision 2030 - Habitats for Sustainable Development* is a special issue of *Ekistics and the New Habitat*, a journal focused on the problems and solutions of human settlements. This issue presents six perspectives on Saudi Vision 2030 which provide insight into the ways that this vision is being realised. Dr Anna Klingmann's study of the branding strategy of Riyadh contains a key message that is echoed in the final article of this issue, and which recalls a principle of *Ekistics*. Centralised planning and intelligent urban design need to incorporate participatory frameworks and processes that will enable administrators, architects, designers and decision makers to harmonise their perspectives and agree upon workable solutions. As we pursue the goals set out by Saudi Vision 2030, it is essential that collaborative and participatory approaches are fostered within our projects, and that we recognize the strength and economic potential of embracing our Saudi heritage, values, and identity.