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

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Abstract

City urban visions are an increasing concern all over the world and exceptionally for Saudi cities. Saudi Arabia leaders have just launched the Saudi Vision 2030, which is a bold vision for an ambitious country in 2016. At the same time, planners in major cities tend to diversify their economies, improving quality of life, and repositioning their cities in the global context. Notably, Riyadh city, the capital of KSA expected to be not only a great city for its citizens but also a city that symbolizes Saudi urban aspirations. The research aims at investigating Riyadh's urban vision history since the urban city development accumulates different approaches according to the nature of the visioning process. It has changed from urban development decisions made on a case-by-case principle, with no vision, to decisions derived from a vision based on the strategic planning process of MEDSTAR 2003 (The Metropolitan Development Strategy for Ar-Riyadh Region) to more integrated vision based on the sustainable development process of Saudi Vision 2030.

The main research argument is that urban planning paradigms affect intense approaches that cities experience when formulating their urban visions. Using an analytical framework, the paper analyses Saudi Vision 2030 and MEDSTAR vision 2003. The aim is not to compare but to investigate Riyadh's vision history that diversifies from strategic planning-based vision to sustainable development tending to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The framework includes qualitative variables focusing on the process of city vision formulating as the nature of the process, time horizon, and scope of visioning, etc. The research concludes that the nature of the visioning process plays a great role in the vision-formulating process. Especially when it comes to Riyadh city's case since adopting the sustainable development process of Saudi Vision 2030 helps integrating multiple comprehensive development aspects such as (urban, economic, social, etc.) and forms a new mindset of the city's future.

Introduction

Constructing a vision for a city is a complicated endeavour, especially when it comes to the point of strongly maintaining a city's cultural heritage and traditions in light of globalization. Cities in the Middle Eastern Region struggle every day with the global trends that grow rapidly in parallel with their daily challenges. They try so hard to cope with the modernized world besides managing to preserve the richness and authenticity that they already have (Fuccaro, 2001). Moreover, the rise of the Arab Spring has increased the burden to achieve people's demand for new rights, freedom, and better quality of life. Besides, the commitment of the international governments, especially the Arab ones, for achieving sustainability through adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and commit to facing global challenges for a better future (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018; UN-Habitat, 2012).

In doing so, this research traces the evolution of the vision of cities, especially the ones located in the Middle Eastern Region. It aims to focus on showing the mechanism of how it can be a tool for selecting a suitable vision for a complicated urban context. For example, Riyadh the capital city of Saudi Arabia, can change the pull of a city from not only attracting people for worship and cultural acts of religion, but also open for creating a solid ground for business, investments, employment opportunities, as well as, achieving a good quality of life for its residents, all this to function like any other city located in a globalized world. Moreover, the city shows a wider range of approaches according to the nature of the visioning process. It represents an emerging global city that gives balance regarding regional diversity, economic importance, and size of the population, in addition to being a useful example to learn from regarding how city visions can merge.

Consequently, this paper aims to show the different approaches adopted in each vision by implementing an analytical framework approach developed for tracing the development and process of making a vision for a city. The framework will help us to outline not only differences and similarities in visions formulating approaches but also to discover the future of the vision formulating process. Besides, it helps to find reflections of urban planning paradigms on these approaches.

City Background

Ar-Riyadh is not only the capital of Saudi Arabia but also one of the major cities in the Gulf Region. With the envisioning of the future of the City, the small town has grown up from being less than half a million to more than 7 million inhabitants in the year 2020. Since then, it has
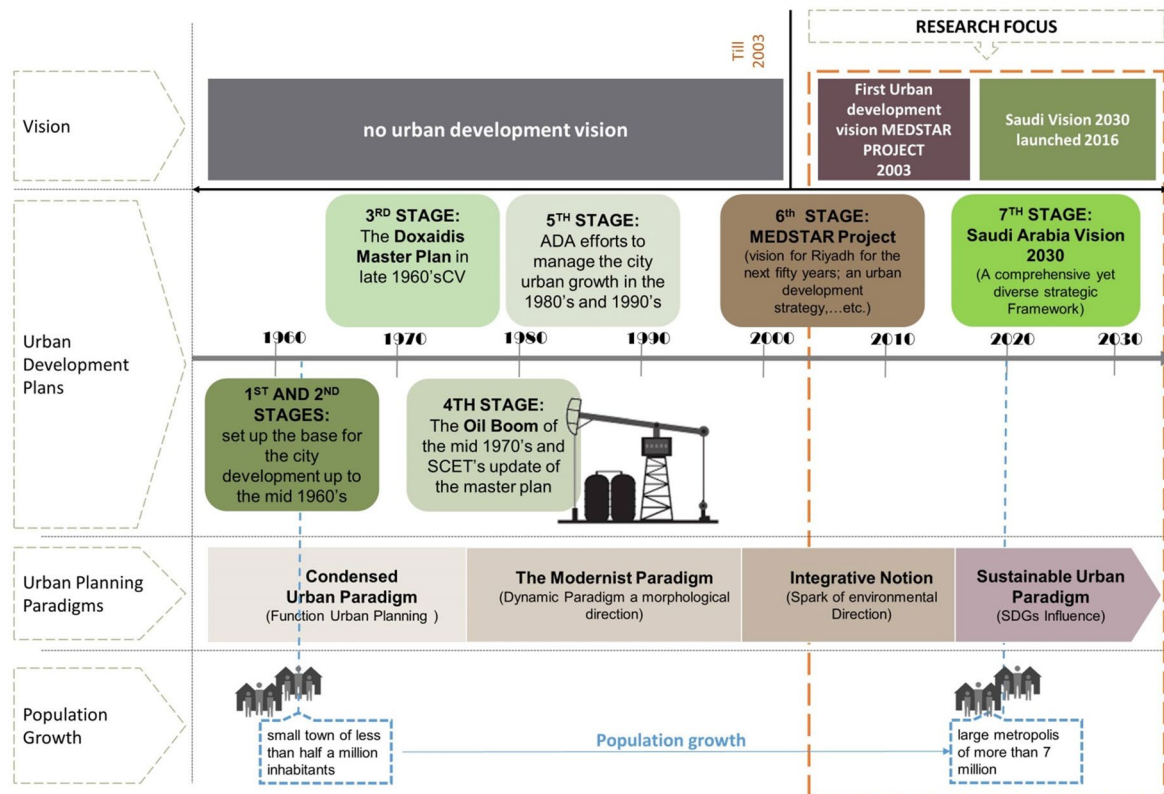
International Journal of Ekistics and the New Habitat: The Problems and Science of Human Settlements. 2021, Vol. 81. Issue No. 2. Special Issue: Saudi Vision 2030 - Habitats for Sustainable Development. Guest Editor: Dr. Yenny Rahmayati. Deputy Editor: Dr Ian Fookes. Editor-in-Chief: Assoc. Prof. Kurt Seemann.

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Fig. 1: Historical overview of Ar-Riyadh city development plans and visions for the Past 70 Years
Source: Author based on (Al-Hathloul, 2017)

taken several new tracks of urban development. Its political, economic, and administrative role led it to strive to become one of 'the most livable cities in the world,' says Muhammad Al-Tuwaijri, Minister of the Economy and Planning. Besides, the city fought desperately to cope with the surrounding global trends of urbanization; this can be observed by the following timeline, which shows the city urban development Figure (1). The timeline tracks the evolution of the city for the past 70 years, focusing on four main roles: first, the vision pole, second the urban development plans, third the urban planning paradigm, and fourth the extensive population growth in the city.

Since the 1960s, the City has managed to follow six different stages of urban development (S. Al-Hathloul, 2017), followed by a seventh stage inline. The first and second stages were mainly focused on managing to grow the city in a sort of day to day needs, urban development paradigm used to be executed in terms of decisions coming directly from decision-makers (S. A. Al-Hathloul & Anis-ur-Rahmaan, 1985). Consequently, the process did not last long. Planning authorities recognized the importance and the need to establish some sort of control on the urban development process. They started to prepare land subdivision plans for the city, the most outstanding of which was the Al Malaz plan, during the fifties of the 20th century (S. Al-Hathloul, 2017; S. A. Al-Hathloul & Anis-ur-Rahmaan, 1985; Middleton, 2009). It was the first attempt of the city to have a real strategic plan. The fourth stage came out in line with the discovery of the Oil industry in the region, or as Fuccaro, 2001 calls it 'Oil urbanization' that has changed the course of urban

development to achieving the modernist paradigm. This type of change has emphasized the shape of the city to be more dynamic and spreading instead of condensing all activities in one place, shifting the city from a condensed urban paradigm to a dynamic one (Middleton, 2009). The city has started to expand in different branches from economy to population rate; even spatially its urban fabric has taken new form and shape, competing with the high international standards of urban development back then.

With the rapid increase in the urban development sector comes the challenge of the rise in the population growth rate. Thus, the kingdom found it was essential to establish a governmental authority called the Ar-Riyadh Development Authority (ADA), whose primary role is to take actions differently. It started to adopt long term strategic urban plans that are much more comprehensive and development-oriented to manage the urban city development (S. Al-Hathloul, 2017; S. A. Al-Hathloul & Anis-ur-Rahmaan, 1985). This plan can be categorized as the fifth stage of Strategic Urban development.

Since then, the city started to move forward, taking steps to realize how essential to coping with their needs and urban growth rate of population is building for the future generation. Doing so, in the sixth stage of development of the city, the ADA had her first vision outlined to cover the prospected projects and plans for fifty years ahead. It was developed specifically for the development of the City Ar-Riyadh. The main objective of the plan was as follows:

•   Preparing a long-term plan to guide the city future development in all sectors,

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- Creating an urban identity for the different parts of the city,
- Helping the government and private sectors to plan for their future development
- Providing a sustainable urban environment for the current and future generations.

From that moment and accordingly, the country has not stopped adopting a framework vision that integrates the modernized notions of global trends in its strategic plans. The framework appeared in both the Metropolitan Development Strategy for Ar-Riyadh (MEDSTAR 2003) and the country vision that was launched in 2016. The Saudi Vision 2030 appeared as a seventh stage. This research focuses on both of these visions to highlight the development phase of the city under each state.

Methodology

As previously mentioned, for a city to develop wisely in its socio-economic, environmental, spatial, and governmental aspects, it is essential to have its vision. Therefore, the development of a framework was discussed as the focus on this research. The framework that was acted as a tool to trace the formulation of a vision. On another side, the deduced framework is not intended to be the assessing tool but as an analytical tool that helps to read city vision components, understand the formulating process, nature of the visioning approach adopted, and other variables that make every vision unique. But before going through it, it is mandatory to understand the nature of a vision, why it is essential for the development of a city, and how it can be formulated, highlighting its main elements and process of development.

Some references related to the city's vision have been published. Some of them focus on defining its main components and how to make a good vision (El-Namaki, 1992). Other references tried to link its process by adopting the Michelangelo paintings and numbering approach (Collins, J.C. & Porras, J.I., 1994). However, visioning is a dimension that allows classical planning to develop a natural foresight for the expected scenarios (Van Cutsem, 2010). This includes the engagement of several stakeholders such as inhabitants, organizations, administrations, and other local resources under the authority of the government, all working to formulate a normative vision that is based on four main elements:
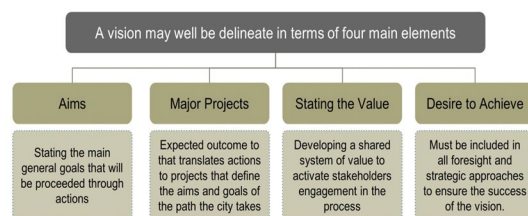

Fig. 2: Normative City Vision Elements
Source: Elbortokaly. Based on (Van Cutsem, 2010)

On the other hand, there are interesting norms that classify vision according to the nature of the process dividing them into four categories (Van Cutsem, 2010):

- First: Strategic Planning Approach; this category can be classified as a transitional practice twinned with the concept of strategic planning. It includes classical types of urban exercise, which mainly try to widen classical urban planning top-down reflection to a more transversal and integrated process.

- Second: Sustainable Development Approach; this category is an emerging one, growing together with Agendas 21 implementation. These exercises are more embedded in the long term. In practice, they are mainly concerned with environmental challenges, integrating different dimensions to achieve sustainable development.

- Third: Competitive Strategy Approach; this category comprises a set of cities and urban regions that positioned themselves as competitors in a globalized, economic, and technological environment. They implement strategy and management methods inspired by the private sector and tend to set relatively short-term timeframes: ten years most of the time. These frameworks are modest in size; their focus is narrow and rather elitist.

- Finally, the Territorial Project; was presented under the heading " territorial projects" and seen as more ambitious, systemic, and more involving projects, notably in terms of actors mobilized by the process. The territorial scale is variable and goes most of the time beyond the city level (Parrad, F., Goux-Baudiment, F, 2000).

Fig.3: Vision Classification according to Nature of Process.

Accordingly, the previous analysis helped us to deduce the following analytical framework (Figure 4); this framework recommends a system approach that understands the nature of a vision and how it can be developed. Thus, it consists of three main dimensions and a total of twelve sub-dimensions, which are all based on the views of Frédérique Parrad, Fabienne Goux-Baudiment, and Van Cutsem in their studies of vision formulation. Each one is selected to help decision-makers, researchers, and urban planners develop one at ease.

- First, Component Parts of a city Vision; we need to understand the situation or the place we are developing the vision for its environment and issues, the expected future results all this to develop a normative city vision.

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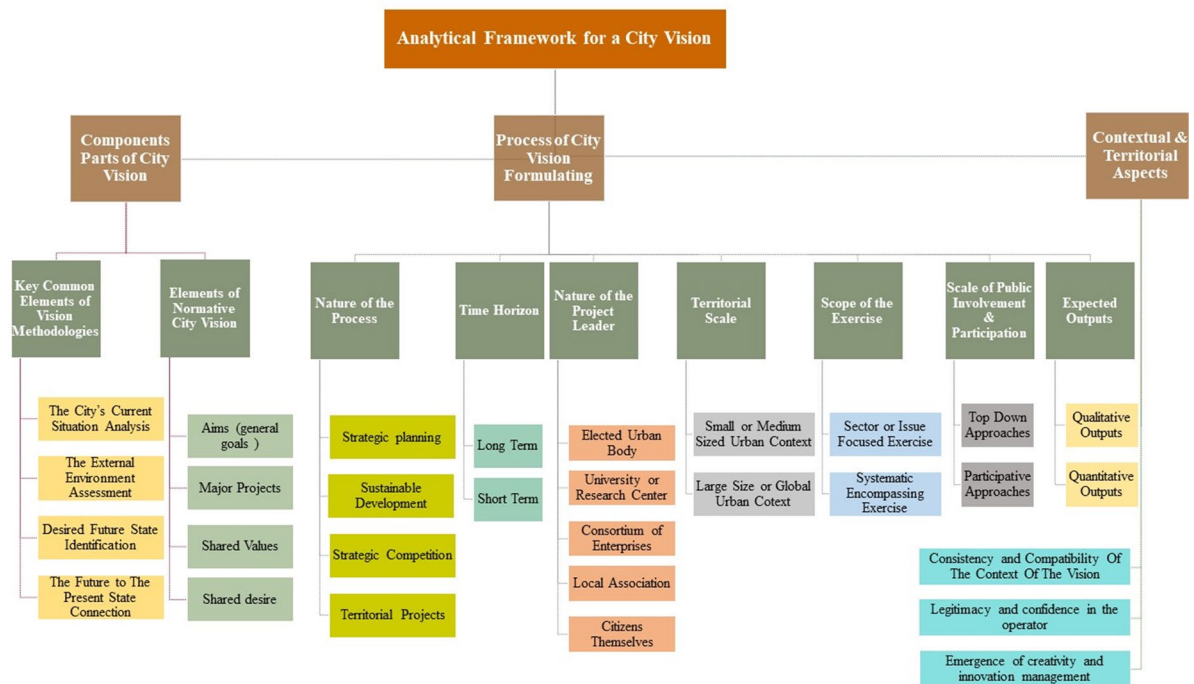- Second, Process of City Vision; the formulation

Fig. 4: Analytical Framework for a city's future vision.
Source: Elbortokaly.

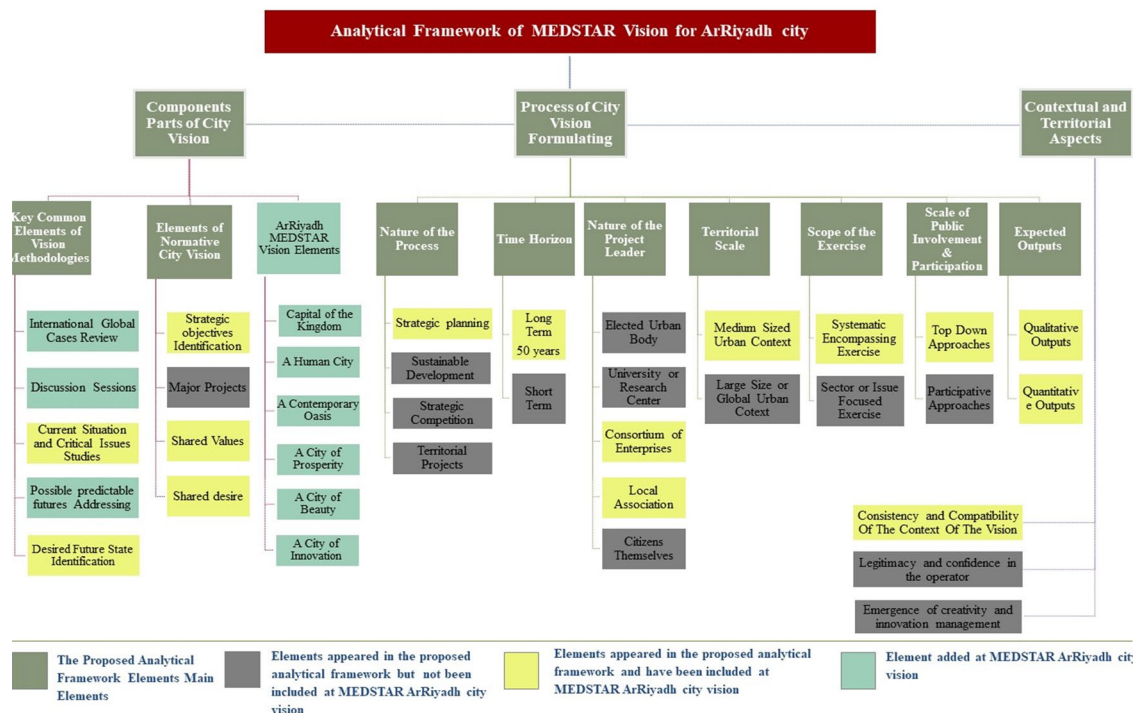**Fig. 5:** Analytical Framework of MEDSTAR Vision on City Ar-Riyadh, Source: Author based on ADA, Ar-Riyadh Development Authority (2010).

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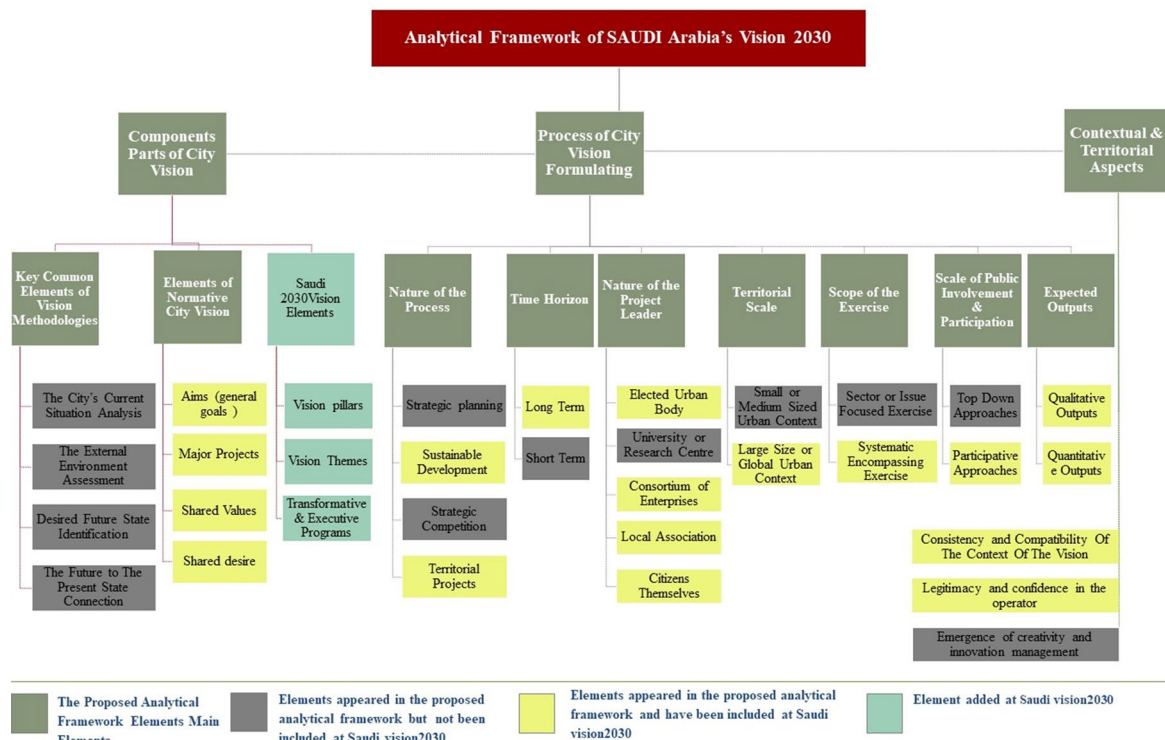
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Fig. 6: Analytical Framework of Saudi Vision 2030 on City Ar-Riyadh.
Source: Author based on (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018)

stage, it is the part that focuses on the nature of the vision, the time it targets, the type of suggested projects, the territory working on, the scale of stakeholder's participation, and expected outputs.

- The third and final stage, Contextual and Territorial Aspects, this part is about Consistency, Compatibility, Legitimacy, and Creativity.

Results

It is interesting to apply it as an analytical framework method on different city visions around the world after deducing an analytical framework that concludes and elaborates theoretical concepts and analytical findings of the literature on what's visioning and how it could be created. This will help to understand what they have processed through to create their visions addressing different priorities areas and following unique aspirations for the future. For the present research, we tend to apply it to the MEDSTAR vision 2003 and Saudi Vision 2030; despite both belong to the same country, they differ in territorial scale, nature of the visioning process, and their approach to the future.

Discussion

Regarding the newly proposed analytical framework, a new concept added to the research development to analyze, highlight, and investigate the significant approaches found in each vision. This part focuses on discussing city vision findings in aspects of the key vision method, time horizon, the normative city vision elements, as well as the nature of vision process classification.

Key Common Elements of Vision Methodologies

MEDSTAR Vision, the methodological process of formulating vision stated clearly includes International Global Cases Review, Discussion Sessions, Current Situation and Critical Issues Studies, Possible predictable futures addressing, and finally, Desired Future State Identification. As for the Saudi Vision 2030, the methodological process of formulating vision has not been mentioned clearly according to the government's official published document Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016).

Elements of Normative City Vision:

In the MEDSTAR Vision, for being the first attempt from the Saudi governorate in developing a vision, all elements were included in the vision document except for the major projects which have been conducted but not mentioned as a prior planned step included in the vision. These projects reflect the aims of the vision, helping for a plan for the future, creating an identity for different parts of the city, building a strong new economic base, encouraging pedestrian mobility in some areas, and provision of adequate services in some areas. Some of these projects

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have shown quite a progress; others were hindered (UNHabitat, 2017).

a.   Projects that show signs of progress are projects related to infrastructure, building networks, and environmental open parklands. For example, the development of a central business district, the objective is to build a local business area that is pedestrian-friendly and includes open spaces and manage access through public transport. Planning for comprehensive light rail and bus system to enhance the use of public transport and decrease carbon emissions.

b.   Projects that have been hindered were due to various issues caused by the unexpectedly low rate of population growth. First, projects are new cities or subdivisions built integrated with the main city to fulfill the population growth demands. The project was not finished according to the planned period; this led to leaving vacant housing projects. Second, the metropolitan sub-centers, which focused on expanding local businesses in residential communities that had a high urban growth rate. This project also did not meet its target due to lack of land for development.

On the other hand, the Saudi Vision 2030 played by the roles it included all four standard elements that can be found in a normative city vision. It had quite clear four main projects that reflected the purpose of the vision.

Classifications to Nature of Visioning Process:

The study findings in this aspect were clear as the MEDSTAR vision approach has shown actions and interventions that can be classified in terms of strategic development approach and serves as a transitional stage. At the same time, sustainable development and territorial projects intertwined at the Saudi Vision 2030, trying to achieve the global trend notion of the SDG goals. This can be observed in Ar-Riyadh city by adopting four major projects that plot the vision into reality aim to achieve the country's global and comprehensive visions on the ground. These projects have endorsed the SDG goals in many ways, all about enhancing 'Quality of Life' for local inhabitants and creating a sustainable developed community. These major projects are King Salman Park, Riyadh Green, Sports Boulevard, and Riyadh Art. As noted, all proposed projects attempt to move on with a much more robust economy, from depending on one economic source (oil) to other diversified resources that serves the program of Quality of Life (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018).

According to the time horizon:

MEDSTAR is a long-term vision, while Saudi Vision 2030 was planned as a short-term plan, despite the sustainable development approaches requiring long term vision. Saudi Vision 2030 is a mix of sustainable development and territorial project approaches in a way to process and formulate a future vision for a city of tomorrow.

Hence, from all the above, we found that MEDSTAR Vision 2003 can be considered as a transitional phase. Being the first-ever vision for a city like Ar-Riyadh has paved the way to a more integrated and comprehensive vision of Saudi Vision 2030 to reveal. That is why the MEDSTAR vision is more of what we can call as an incomplete vision that is based on a top-down approach compared to the Saudi Vision 2030. While Saudi Vision 2030 is more comprehensive in terms of its vision, starting from providing a big umbrella for the future of all Saudi cities to the nature of the sustainable development process applied. The process includes different sustainable dimensions in addition to supporting the public involvement and participation by adopting the participatory approach in the process of formulating a vision.

Conclusion

Our final views of the research can be concluded as follow. First, by looking at urban planning paradigms that moved from physical condensed, modernized structure, and environmental planning to sustainable integrated planning. It is interesting to discover that it intensely affects the approaches the city can experience when formulating their urban visions as for the case of Ar-Riyadh. The urban city development accumulates different approaches according to the nature of the visioning process. It was moving from urban development decisions made on a case-by-case principle where no vision to decisions derived from a vision based on the strategic planning process of MEDSTAR 2003, to a more integrated vision based on the sustainable development process of Saudi Vision 2030. Yet, Ar-Riyadh city is well on its way concerning creating some of the record notable urban development in the Middle East.

The developed analytical framework has proved a success by examining it on the basis of two different visions for the same city. It helped us analyze the city vision process and outlined its significance and missing points. Moreover, it has proven flexibility by accepting changes that can be adapted and mitigated easily within the nature of a visioning process. It may be considered as an initial trial to understand cities 'visions in more depth and empirical approach. It helps to analyze city visions' starting blocks and components, find similarities and differences between different approaches that are used to formulate visions.

On the other hand, the future of the city in its desired state is one of the noted definitions of the city vision. Likewise, missing the link between the present and the future is one of the pit bulls that cities face when formulating their visions. That is why Saudi Vision 2030 appeared to be bold; its track to the future is clear whence identifying how to implement the vision. The 2030 vision translates the future they desired into pillars, themes, and finally, the most important part, a portfolio of transformative and executive programs which, in turn, translated to projects that can be seen on the ground. Moreover, its link to the global SDGs has strengthened the vision structure, whether by influencing its main themes; vibrant society, thriving economy, and ambitious nation or by the constructive programs that roots and promotes sustainable development (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016;

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Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018). All this has thrived in the mindset of city development and futuristic vision for Ar-Riyadh.

Finally, it is mandatory to mention that a limitation in the study is noted in the number of pertained documents that are subjected to Ar-Riyadh City and its relation to the Saudi Vision 2030 since the city's strategic development plans have not yet concluded.

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Keywords

International Journal of Ekistics and the New Habitat: The Problems and Science of Human Settlements. 2021, Vol. 81. Issue No. 2. Special Issue: Saudi Vision 2030 - Habitats for Sustainable Development. Guest Editor: Dr. Yenny Rahmayati. Deputy Editor: Dr Ian Fookes. Editor-in-Chief: Assoc. Prof. Kurt Seemann.

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