

Architecture as a Facilitator

“Saudi Art District”

Final Year Thesis Report

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

BACHELOR OF ARCHITECTURE

Presented by

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Architecture as a Facilitator

Thesis Report

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A thesis submitted for evaluation to School of Art, Design and Architecture on 11 May 2018, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for degree of B.Arch.

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2018

School of Art Design and Architecture
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Acknowledgements

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#architorture4lyf

Abstract

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is going through a major social paradigm shift in the current year due to the new Vision 2030 which aims to reduce the Kingdoms dependency on oil and transform itself into a tourist hub. By pushing the boundaries of the local culture and traditions the Visions aim is moving towards a more progressive state which will cater to people all around the world. As the change happens, many are worried about what will happen to the years of culture and image the Saudi Kingdom has portrayed and how it will affect the future generations of a society whose morals are built on a strict following of the religion of islam.

As such this project aims to provide a space catering to the paradigm shift, where everyone can gather in a specially designed space to celebrate the changes and provide a platform for all those who have been underground to rise up and showcase their talents in a Kingdom where they are now going to be heard. And to further exemplify the culture of a nation whose identity slowly being scraped away due to westernization.

The idea, therefore, is to form a program as well as a design a space which will cater to the current and rising need of the Kingdom's public interaction areas while majorly focusing on the "arts" culture, which has been missing from the country's social scene for so long.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Introduction:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is going through a major social paradigm shift in the current year due to the new Vision 2030 which aims to reduce the Kingdom's dependency on oil and transform itself into a tourist hub. By pushing the boundaries of the local culture and traditions the Vision's aim is moving towards a more progressive state which will cater to people all around the world. As the change happens, many are worried about what will happen to the years of culture and image the Saudi Kingdom has portrayed and how it will affect the future generations of a society whose morals are built on a strict following of the religion of Islam.

As such the Vision 2030 is a plan to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, diversify its economy, and develop public service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism. Some of the most crucial aims of the Vision 2030 is to include reinforcing economic and investment activities, increasing non-oil industry trade between countries through goods and consumer products, and increasing government spending on the military, manufacturing equipment and ammunition. In addition to this, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is going through a major social paradigm shift in lieu of recent events. Therefore, the Vision aims is to make headway towards a more progressive state which will cater to people all around the world, by pushing the boundaries of the local culture and traditions. As the change takes place, although, many worry about what will happen to the years of culture and image the Saudi Kingdom has portrayed and how it will affect the future generations of a society whose morals are built on a strict following of the religion of Islam.

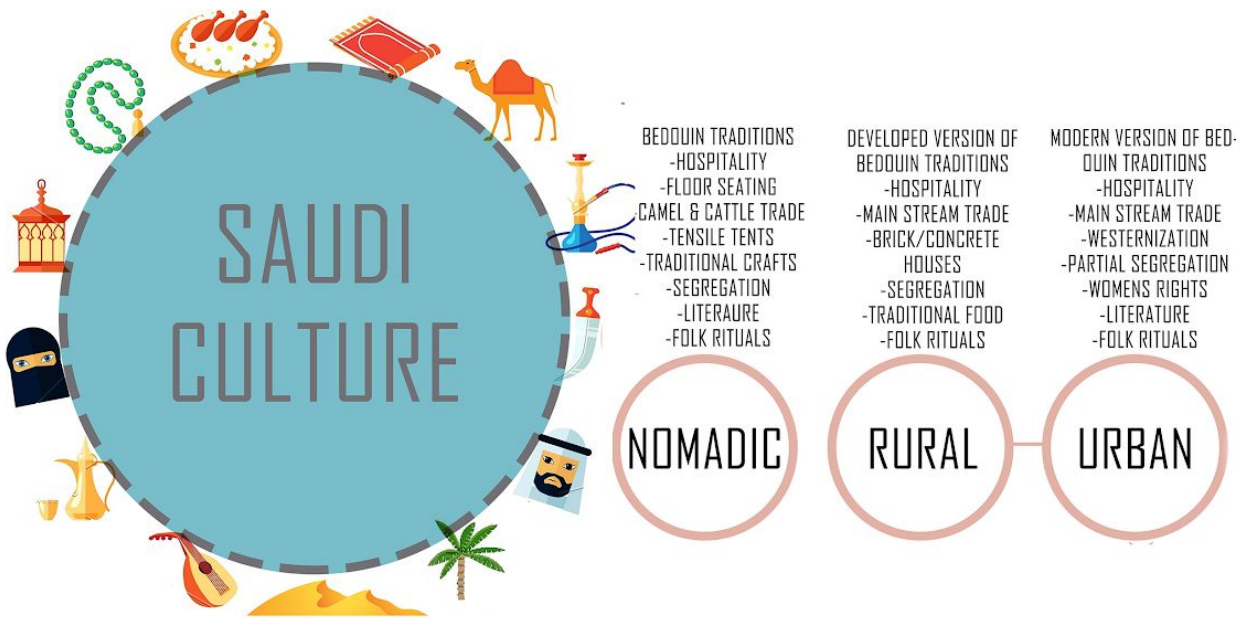
Due to this new transformation, there has been a major shift within the “art” society of Saudi Arabia as well, where they believe they now have a voice which can be heard. Prior to the announcement of the Vision 2030, the availability for artists to display their artwork was very scarce and moreover so usually kept underground. Ever since the implementation for the development of the Vision has commenced, however, there has been an increase in the number of artists who have never before found a platform in which to share their work. Specifically, gallery spaces which were previously underground have now started to surface and artists are now able to showcase their artwork. Significantly, these emerging artists have found a platform and a common ground – both with other artists, and also with those who appreciate art and the change the Vision is attempting to bring.



In addition to the aforementioned facts, it is imperative to realize that when one thinks of a public space in Saudi Arabia, one usually refers to a shopping Mall. Malls are in great abundance in the Kingdom, for they provide the most programs in one area – these are public spaces where one can shop, eat, and entertain themselves under a single roof. I find, however, that it is important to remember that in this developmental stage that the Kingdom is in, there

will soon come a time when a shopping mall will not be enough to cater to the diverse anticipated users, and the demand for more compact public spaces will increase.

Another important aspect that needs to be delved into is the Saudi Culture. Globally known for being a culture which revolves around vocabulary such as tribal, primitive, and conservative, the Kingdom is now also going through a huge cultural reform as well. As the developments coming with the Vision come flowing in, the identity of the “true” saudi culture is slowly being stripped away. A big catalyst of this demise is the lack of sensitivity being displayed in the architectonic/architecture of the region. International firms are coming in and designing buildings which use state of the art technologies and materials, but ignore the characteristics and requirements of the surroundings. It is imperative that the culture is kept intact for the future in order for it to become a grounding and recognizable entity.



Thesis Statement:

The thesis seeks to use the developments of the vision 2030 as a facilitator for an architectural program which caters to the rising needs of the arts and the mediation of the cultural paradigm shift.

Objectives:

- Use architecture as a facilitator for the current social paradigm shift
- Provide a space which will be a fusion of the authentic saudi with the future saudi.
- Provide a space which is user friendly and accessible to all.
- Provide spaces which will be a response to the climate of the region.
- Design architecture which will be state of the art and reflect the progression of the Kingdom in the future years and the past.

Scope:

Because of the current paradigm shift, the need for this thesis is very important to as to create platform for the rising need of a creative hub which will be the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia and become a precedence for future developments on site. It has also been announced by the saudi government that a proposal for a “Art and Cultural” city has been decided and will be completed by the year 2030 in accordance to the developments which will take place with the 20 year plan.

Conclusion:

The idea, therefore, is to form a program as well as a design a space which will cater to the current and rising need of the Kingdom’s public interaction areas while majorly focusing on

the “arts” culture, which has been missing from the country’s social scene for so long. This would ensure that the project will cater to a much larger base of users and stakeholders both, who would attempt to use this platform as an opportunity. But to further recognize the essence of the region through its culture and translate that into architectonics to derive a fusion between what was and what might be as the Vision 2030 developments prevail.

In a region that has previously been so direly deprived of such activities or services, the introduction of such an integrated program would give them a platform to more openly express themselves and explore the media they would want to all the keeping their identity intact for the years to come. As such, the “Saudi Art District” is a pedestrian based district which will provide platforms for the rising art culture and art enthusiasts in a district which caters to a variety of creative categories in one complex in the artistic hub of the Saudi Kingdom, Jeddah. It will be the first of its kind within the Kingdom, becoming a precedent for the future developments that may be planned for the upcoming transformations linked to the Vision 2030.

Chapter 2 - Precedent Study

Introduction

As aforementioned, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is going through a major social paradigm shift in the current year due to the new Vision 2030 which aims to reduce the Kingdoms dependency on oil and transform itself into a tourist hub. By pushing the boundaries of the local culture and traditions the Visions aim is moving towards a more progressive state which will cater to people all around the world. As the change happens, many are worried about what will happen to the years of culture and image the Saudi Kingdom has portrayed and how it will affect the future generations of a society whose morals are built on a strict following of the religion of islam.

As such this project aims to provide a space catering to the paradigm shift, where everyone can gather in a specially designed space to celebrate the changes and provide a platform for all those who have been underground to rise up and showcase their talents in a Kingdom where they are now going to be heard. And to further exemplify the culture of a nation whose identity slowly being scraped away due to westernization. Therefore, the idea is to design a program which will be a hybrid of a public space - providing a defined range of experiences to the user concentrating around displaying the true essence and rising talents of Saudi Arabia.

Rationale for Precedent Selection:

As the nature of the thesis revolves around an identified problem and aims to construct a solution for it - any existing precedents wholistically do not exist. As such, however, portions of

the thesis which looks into inspirations from the local architecture of the region of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, specifically targeting typologies and such as:

- Souk (local outdoor market)
 - Retail
 - Food
 - Public realm/Courtyard
- Artistic/Cultural District
 - Art Exhibition areas (temporary and permanent)

The two precedents that have been chosen to comply with the aforementioned targeted typologies are as followed:

1. Souq Waqif - Doha, Qatar

“The souq is noted for selling traditional garments, spices, handicrafts, and souvenirs. It is also home to dozens of restaurants and Shisha lounges. Although it dates back at least a hundred years, it was renovated in 2006 to conserve its traditional Qatari architectural style. It is often perceived to be the only lasting area in Doha that retains an authentic feel notably in reference to its commerce, architecture and culture. The area is very popular with local and expats alike (especially on weekends) as it offers multiple dining options in the same location.”¹

2. Dubai Design District (d3) - Dubai, UAE

“Dubai Design District has been developed through careful consultation with the design community to provide a creative ecosystem that surpasses the expectations of a typical creative neighbourhood. d3 is home to the region’s growing community of creative thinkers. It is being

built as part of the Dubai Plan 2021 using the Smart City principles which offer digital connectivity to create an innovation-led economy.”²

Souq Waqif - Doha, Qatar

Description:

Souq Waqif is the most significant and vital heritage site of Qatar. It dates back to more than one decade and it used to enclose private houses. It was afterwards transformed by their owners “merchants” plot by plot to shops, with the aim to creating a hub for the trading of different sorts of goods. Over the years this market became abandoned, due to the construction of large shopping malls, until his highness Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah al Thani and his wife her highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser recognized the importance to restore this heritage site by funding the renovation-project of Souq Waqif. The Private Engineering Office “Mohamed Ali Abdullah” was appointed to design, renovate and plan the heritage site in the period between 2004 and 2007. By 2008 this project was completed. All buildings constructed after 1950’s were demolished, while the older ones were preserved. The new designed buildings reflect the theme of fishing village heritage “local Qatari architectural style”. For instance, 75% of the structures were turned into the 1930’s era architectural style using the traditional methods of construction, based on the use of mangroves roofs, bamboo poles bonded by clay, which act as insulation from heat and natural stones with clay.³

Several streets that appear as mazes with no defined geometric pattern are characteristic of these Middle-Eastern markets (souq). The Souq offers several small shops lined along these paths with a dazzling array of Middle Eastern merchandise from spices and seasonal delicacies to

perfumes, jewellery, clothing and handicrafts. Traditional music, art and cultural shows add to the ambience of this historic place.

Low-rise buildings, generally only single-storied are a peculiar characteristic of Qatari Architecture. This is in keeping with regional planning principles and then available local materials such as bamboo, mud (soil) and palm frond (leaves of the date palm tree). All buildings in this market are rough plastered and small openings face the streets (generally faced a courtyard in former residential buildings). Wind towers were used in residential buildings and one such property exists at one end of the market.

Post renovations in the last decade, 2 underground parking lots for over 3000 cars have been added. In addition to the main square that faces the park and waterfront, a new square has been added around the center of the whole development. Water features to allow for climate control seem to be planned at the new square also.

Analysis:

Souq waqif is a prime example of a traditional arabesque open market also known as a souq. The narrow streets around which the food and retails shops are allocated makes the souk a central spine which allows the users to navigate from within to the outdoor/courtyard spaces.

Dubai Design District (d3) - Dubai, UAE

Description:

The project is a purpose-built master-plan development in Dubai dedicated to the design community including startups, entrepreneurs and established international design, luxury and fashion brands, it is further a business park consisting of three phases, the first of which is 11 building offices, completed in 2015. The facilities will include residential, hospitality, retail and

office space. The development will include a 1.8 km waterfront development which will be populated with food and beverage outlets, hotels, retail outlets and a multi-use outdoor space. It is located close to Mohammed bin Rashid City and adjacent to Dubai's Business Bay and is situated beside Dubai Creek, and behind Burj Khalifa and Dubai Mall. Further development of d3 has been separated into three phases:

Phase 1

Phase 1 was completed in 2015, with 1.2m sq. ft. of offices, studios, ateliers, showrooms, and over 200,000 sq. ft. of retail space. It contains 11 buildings with an estimated 100 retail units and 1,000 office units.

Phase 2

Phase 2 will see the construction of the creative community which will house a range of design industry workshops, studios and showrooms. This phase is due for completion in 2019. The creative community is being designed by Foster and Partners.

Phase 3

The third phase of the development will focus on d3's 2 km long Creekside promenade which will feature hotels, international and regional food and beverage offerings with a wide selection of hospitality and leisure facilities. This phase is due for completion in 2018.

Analysis:

The d3 is an excellent example of a program that is currently the requirement of the after effects of the Vision 2030 developments. The district is a space for creative minds to have a platform to be able to express themselves. As such, the undergraduate thesis revolves around a similar

approach of designing a master plan of a district which will cater to the rise of creative and artistic thinking within the region of saudi arabia.

Chapter 3 - Architectural Program

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, two relevant precedents were discussed in regards to the overall ideology or essence which will be explored within this thesis. This chapter will define and further develop along the lines of the Dubai Design District, to form an amalgamation of micro programs and fuse them, transforming the program into a creative/artistic district - majorly focusing on a public space which caters to multiple platforms of the creative spectrum.

The program for this thesis, currently, is very important for the development of Saudi Arabia as they are leaning towards a more tourist/entertainment based economy. Currently, there is no precedent for a program like so in the Kingdom, there are however future plans in the master planning to develop a “City” for Art and Culture. As such, this thesis will be the first of many interventions which will eventually take place when the project arrives to its construction phase.

Architectural Typology:

The nature of the architectural typology for this thesis will solely revolve around the integration of **Public Realm (piazza, courtyard, park), Art Gallery, Cultural Museum, Food Court and Retail** loosely defined as a Deconstructed Mall except with the addition of the Cultural, Exhibition and Park aspects. As the typologies integrate, they will form a “Cultural and Art District”.

The Cultural and Art District will take inspiration from Saudi Arabia’s vernacular/regional architecture (central courtyard/park, street souq, semi permeable wooden

screens, palm trees, tensile shading etc) and fuse it with modernist characteristics to create a space which will display the origin nature of the region but also display its transformation as a result of the Vision 2030.

Perceived Spatial Nature:

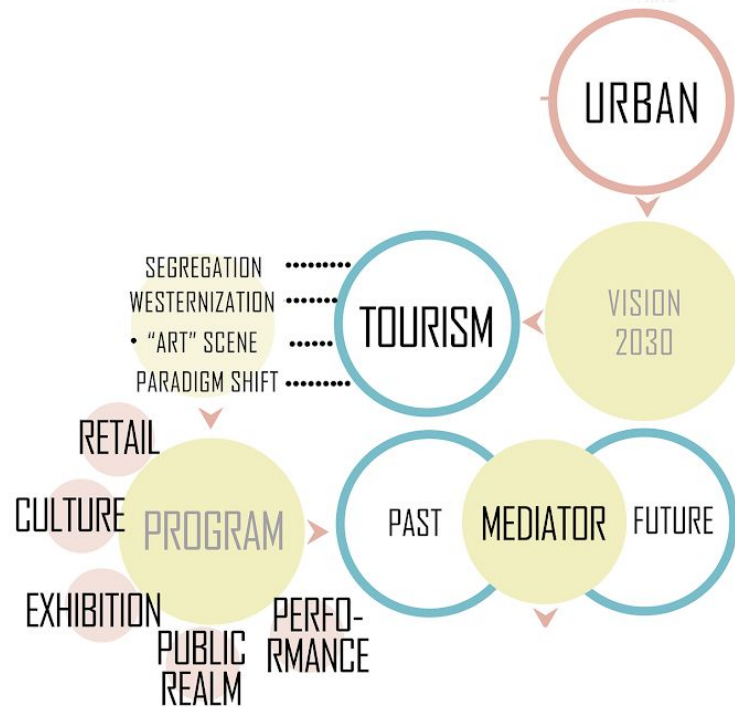
The perceived spatial nature of the thesis very closely resembles that of an arab “souk” where you have vendors parallel to each other in shops provided on ground floor of residential buildings, usually in a street, where makeshift tensile structures are used to provide shade for the users. Vendors screaming at the top of their lungs and displaying a variety of their products outside their shops to attract customers. All these characteristics will be used within the design district, hence the name district. Where the food and retail vendors will be placed and design as such to resemble the local market and give an essence of the “true arab” culture.

Another aspect which will become a part of the spatial nature will be the use of the traditional wooden screens used within a lot of traditional architecture in Saudi Arabia - and within this feature, the thesis will explore the idea of the “veil” - a semi permeable barrier to keep what is inside protected, shielded from the outside- and how the arabs have manage to further translate this idea into their architectonics.

All in all, the space will be a district, catering to both adults and children - providing them with an experience of the culture through the fusion of traditional architecture fused with modern day techniques to design a facilitator or mediator for the ongoing developments.

Program Brief:

The design concept of the thesis revolves around the idea of “mediation” which is not evident within the Vision 2030 ideology and the current state of the Saudi social fabric. The term mediation here is defined in terms of both cultural and psychological aspects, where both of these aspects are being constantly being torn between



“what was” and “what will be”. This change has sparked a few controversies within the Kingdom itself, some saying they not only want to completely reject the idea but the impact it will have on the Kingdom and its religion belief system, Islam, as it is still the custodian of the two holy mosques. On the other hand, some are with the vision and want to see the development rise up to the development of the western countries. The reason for choosing to define a hybrid program for the thesis is to cater to four of the most important concerns which have risen from the delayering of the Vision 2030 :

1. Segregation

Openly known to everyone, KSA has a strict segregation policy, especially within the Saudi Governmental Authority, where men and women can not openly interact- this extends to various programs including schools, restaurants and sometimes even offices.

2. Public space

When one tries to envision a public space within KSA, the first and only thing that comes to your mind is a MALL- because under one roof, the users have access to retail, food, entertainment, and recreational activities in an artificial environment which leads to our third concern

3. Climate

Located in the desert region, the climate of Saudi Arabia is very harsh- where the heat can reach as high as 45 degrees Celsius on an average day. In an effort to cater to this majority of the public spaces are all indoor and not much has been thought about vernacular techniques.

4. Culture

As the changes occur due to the vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is trying to transform itself into another Dubai, where they will have a glass and concrete jungle, have beaches which will attract tourists from abroad. Unfortunately, what they are forgetting is that Saudi Arabia will be a region which will always be known for its connection to Islam and not otherwise. However, in an effort to do the earlier, it is being speculated that they will erase their culture trying to transform into something they are not and try to rewrite a culture for themselves accordingly. However the aim here will be to use the culture as the main focal point of the thesis and use it as a rooting

factor to the whole thesis - designing a space which will be iconic is its nature and recognizable due to its authenticity to the true arab culture.

Conclusion:

As such, in an effort to cater to these concerns the hybrid program is made up of an open both indoor and outdoor space, followed by an exhibition area which will cater to the rising art scene within the Kingdom as a response to the Vision 2030. And finally, because this program will call out to not only the local user but also to the tourists who might decide to visit, programs related directly with a community center will also be incorporated. The cultural center aspect will majorly focus on the authentic culture of Saudi Arabia and will stand as a grounding or iconic factor within the integration of future developments. By doing so the architecture will reflect the future vision of the region by being an iconic and relatable symbol for those who believe that the vision is a negative aspect and try to display to them that even with the current developments, Saudi Arabia always will be what their true nature is, the bedouins, modernized perhaps but true to their nomadic culture.

Chapter 4 - Site Analysis

Introduction:

Site selection is of prime importance to this thesis as it will dictate every aspect of the tangible and intangible aspects of the built environment. As the aim of the thesis is to focus on the developments coming from the Vision 2030, it is evident that the site would also be located somewhere in region. Some characteristics of site selection include the site to be :

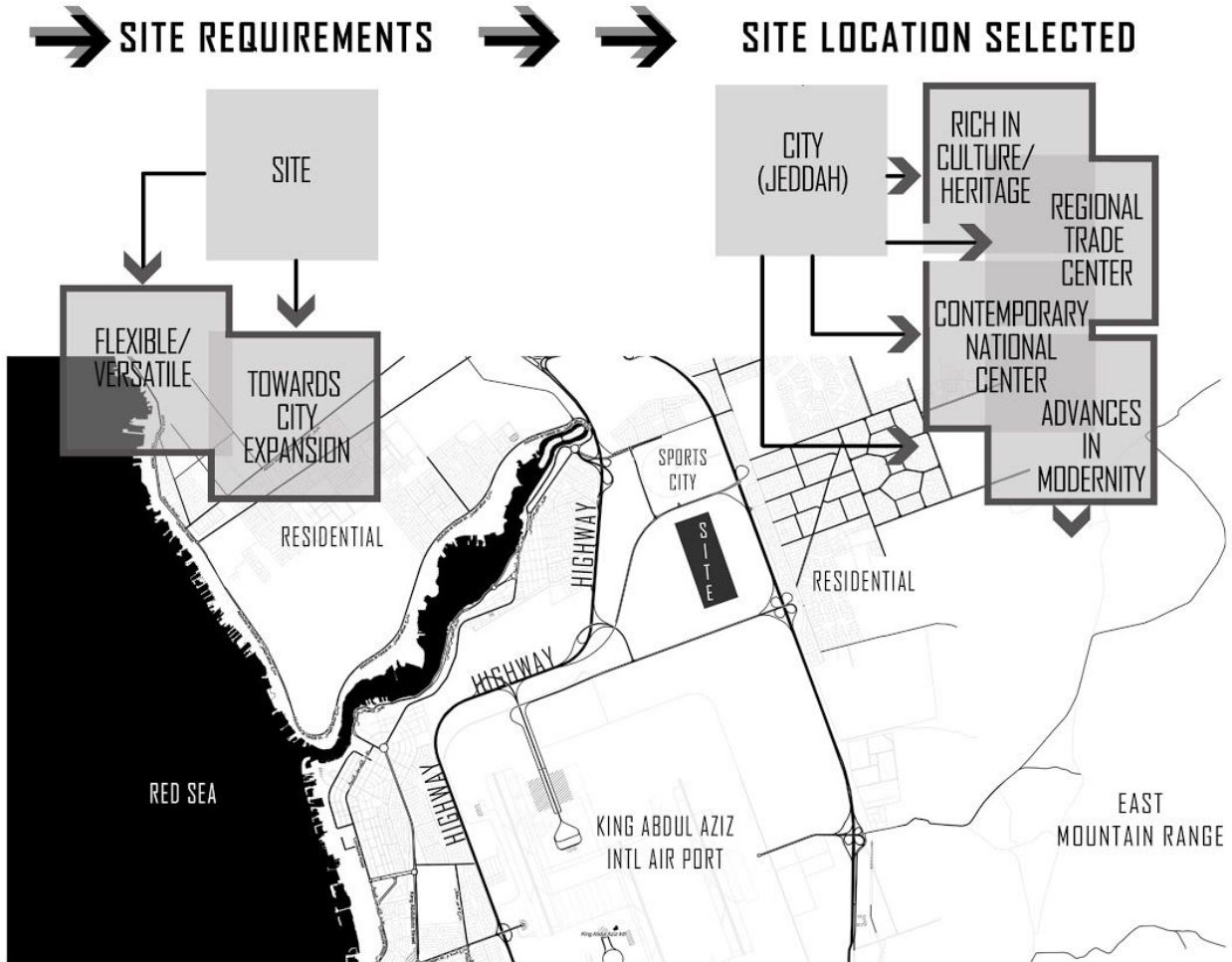
- flexible/versatile
- preferably situated in an area where the city would be expanding, because that area would become the hub in the future as progressive development would occur in that area.
- Situated in a city most affected by the vision 2030
- Existing plan of suggested program in master planning of city

The site is therefore located in Jeddah where the effects of the Vision 2030 are already majorly affecting the city. The city of Jeddah is considered as:

- Metropolitan city of KSA
- Regional trade center
- Contemporary national center
- Major advances in modernity

As such the site which has been selected is located in the city of Jeddah, towards the north expansion of the city, closely placed within the vicinity of the International Airport, Sports City, and Red Sea Coast, linked together by the major highway running through and minor roads

on the periphery. The site selected for the thesis is also present in the future plans of the city's development where there will be a "Cultural City" built.



Site and Thesis Statement:

As aforementioned, the thesis intent of the project is to “*use the developments of the vision 2030 as a facilitator for an architectural program which caters to the rising needs of the arts and the mediation of the cultural paradigm shift.*” therefore it is necessary for the site to be located in Saudi Arabia - as the vision 2030 is planned specifically for the region. Currently, there is a huge outburst of local artists who are looking to display their artwork and have it

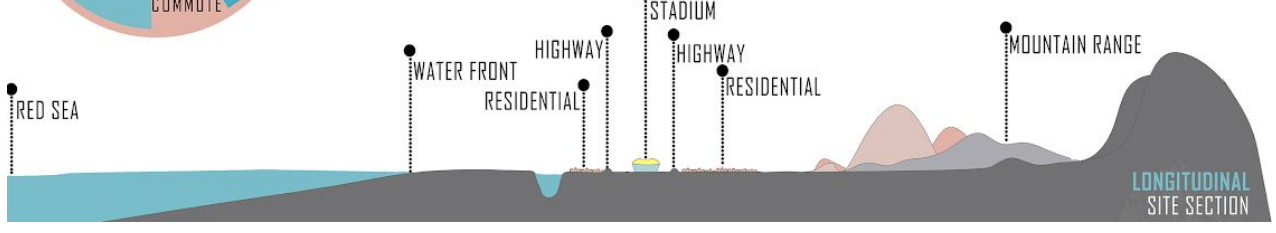
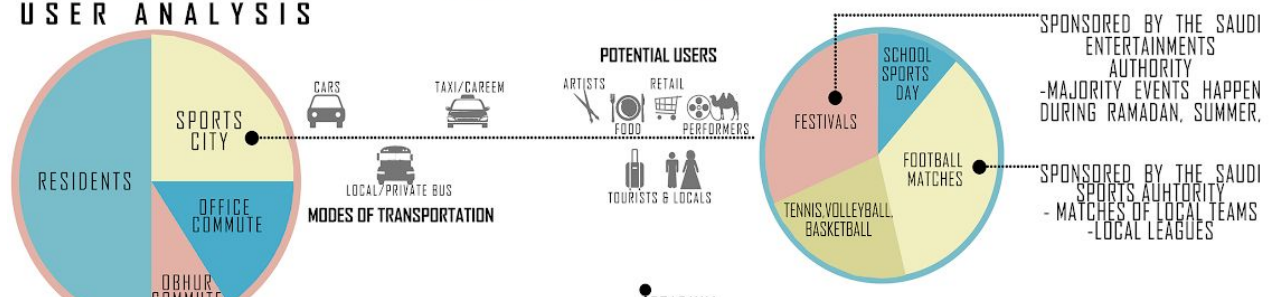
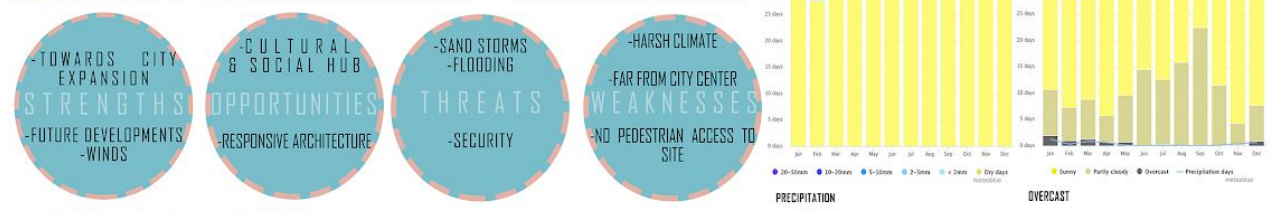
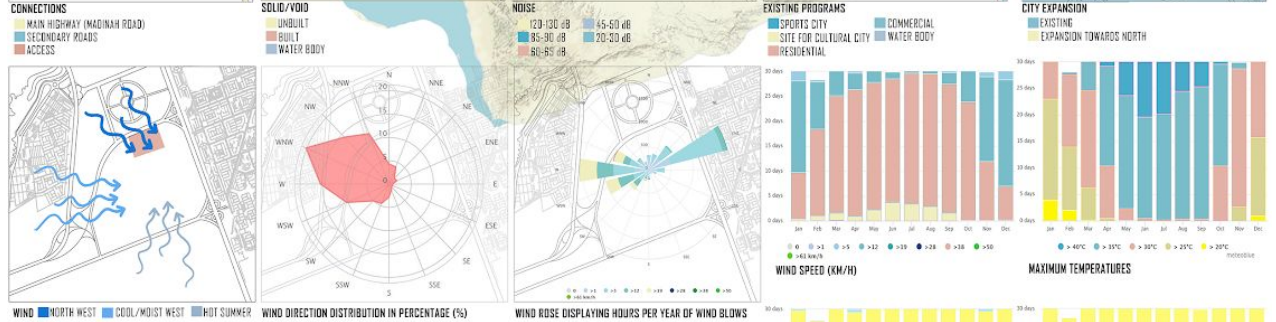
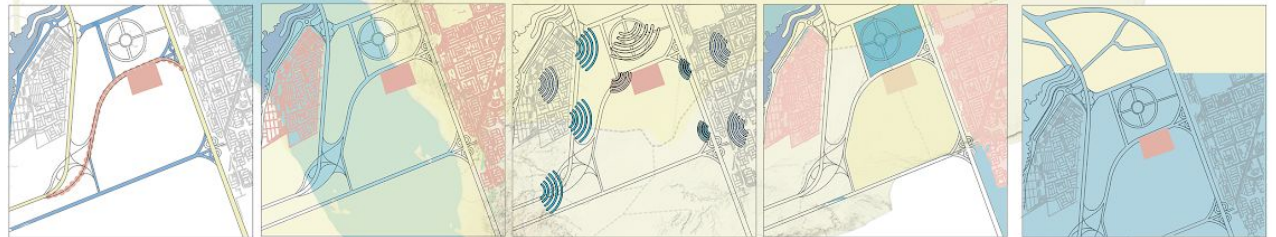
recognized not only by the public, but also by the government and international artists. Therefore the site that is chosen needs to be situated in places where the outbursts are taking place and become a platform for them. To further this discussion, it is also important for the site to be culturally rooted within the region, where the culture needs to outshine or be carefully put in the foreground as opposed to the background.

Site and Program:

As the programs within the thesis are a hybrid of four main concerns (segregation, public space, climate and culture), it is befitting to choose a site which has future plans to have a similar program already planned in the city's master plan. While the proposal has been designed and showcased to the government as a "Cultural City" where there will be a cultural center, exhibition halls, residential, hospitality, and medical facilities, it is uncertain as to when the building phase will begin. However as the Vision 2030 brings in uncharted changes, some of the programs need to be put on hold and others need to be exemplified to create opportunities rising from the developments. For this thesis, it is then important to consider the factors surrounding vision 2030 and develop programs from that and use them on the site which has other aspects which perfectly cater to the site.

Site Analysis:

The image below is the site location of the site in accordance to the site criteria mentioned earlier as well as the analysis conducted related through which design techniques will be derived and implemented into the architecture but also the concept of the form.



Conclusion:

After conducting a thorough site analysis, the concepts and design strategies that the thesis will further explore are mentioned below:

Concept -

THE FOLLOWING CONCEPTUAL COLLAGE IDENTIFIES SAUDI ARABIA'S GEOGRAPHICAL, CULTURAL, AND ARCHITECTURAL SIMILARITIES.
KEYWORDS: BARRIER, VEIL, PERMEABLE



PROGRAMATIC CONCEPT

INTEGRATION WITHIN THE VARIOUS PROGRAMMATIC ZONES - CREATING AN INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENT.

THE FOLLOWING CONCEPTUAL COLLAGE EXPLORES THE POSSIBILITY OF THE VOID, BEING CREATED BY THE PARADIGM SHIFT TO BE MEDIATED THROUGH AN ARCHITECTURAL ENTITY

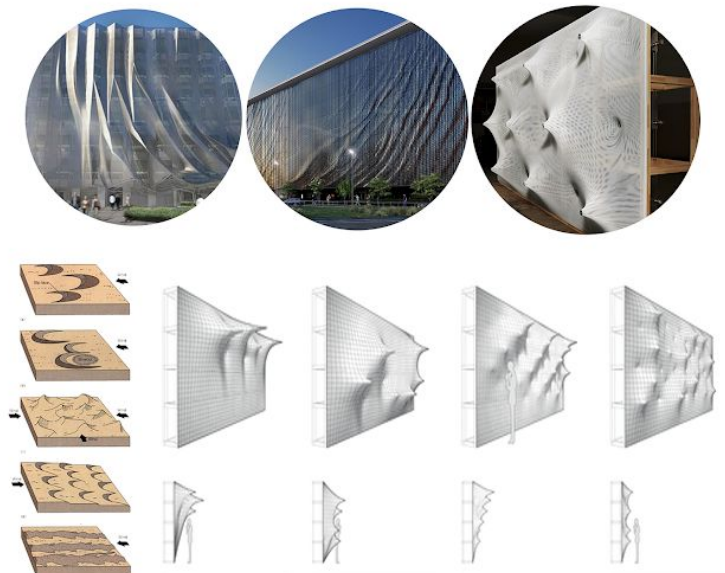


DESIGN CONCEPT

METAPHORICAL ANALOGY BETWEEN THE SAND DUNES AND THE VISION 2030 PARADIGM SHIFT.
- DYNAMIC
- TEMPORARY
- UNPREDICTABLE

Design Strategies-

1. Use the idea of the “veil” to create a permeable barrier/secondary skin which displays characteristics of dynamism, transience, and transformability- all inspired characteristics of the “sand dunes”.

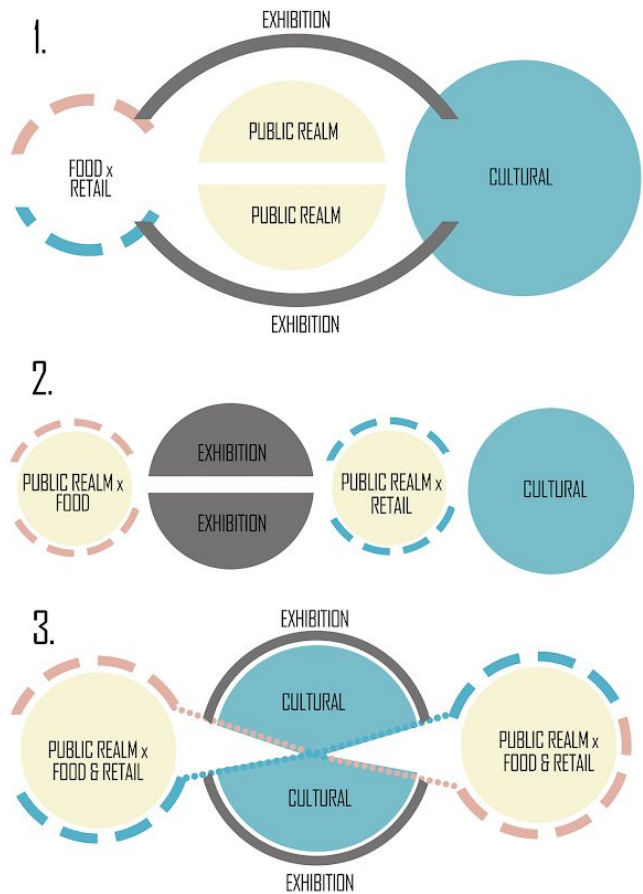


2. Programmatic Integration will be used to design configurations which will best work with the idea of a district and allow for the primary and secondary programs to be involved with one another to ensure more user outpour.

Configuration 1 is showcasing the cultural aspect to be of main focus and placing the exhibitions on the periphery and allowing for a larger public realm space while placing the food and retail at the beginning so as to create a programmatic hierarchy.

Configuration 2 is a very linear zoning where the public realms are divided between both the exhibition areas and the cultural, further giving the retail and food vendors to make space within the public realm for a more integrated atmosphere.

Configuration 3, which will be taken forward in the planning phase suggests an infinity loop circulation and integration of the programs. Giving focus to the cultural center and exhibition areas along with providing the public realm on the beginning and end to engage the users at all times.



Chapter 5 - Design Process

Introduction:

This chapter deals with the design process and strategies that have been concluded from prior research which will be used to design architectural solutions for the aforementioned thesis. Whilst taking the site into major consideration, most of the strategies which have been implemented are those which respond to the surrounding context and culture of the site. The current context of the site is towards the expansion phase, which means that majority of the developments will be taking place towards the northern expansion of the city. Where there are already multiple “cities” designed to cater to different uses, Medical, Sport, Education, Economic, Industrial- most importantly however, the announcement and future plans of the Art and Cultural City is what drives this thesis into becoming tangible. That being said, it was stated earlier too that currently there are no precedents of an “art and/or cultural” district in Saudi Arabia. Fortunately, the announcement, implementation, and effects of the Vision 2030 have significantly influenced the need for such a thesis but more importantly influenced the design process. To design a space in a context which prior to the recent year did not believe it was okay for females to drive and believed that art was a taboo subject to delve into, requires a list of parameters that have to be established based on the current and future predictions of the cultural mindset - both psychologically and physically. The parameters for this thesis as such have been directly inspired from the context and precedents from the surrounding GCC (Gulf Coast Countries) to stay closely connected with the culture so as to have a strong underlying essence with the Saudi roots fused with inspirations from advances and styles from the modern world.

Design Strategies:

1. Influence

Majority of the influence for the design language, as mentioned above, comes from the culture and context of the site. Firstly, the site is situated strategically at a location where the future art and cultural city will stand, as such the design needed to in some way either correlate with the design proposal or choose a different direction all together. In the case of this thesis, it was an amalgamation of both the choices. The overall geometry of the design district stands out amongst its context- rigid, straight/angular lines, grid formation- into a more circular and flowing geometry. One of the more basic reasons to go for a more circular geometry was to design in response to the King Abdullah Sports City which is located right across the thesis site. Because the main attraction of the sports city is a centralized stadium with a concentric car parking placed around it, the first influence on the thesis design established from the sports city. The second influence was established, as briefly mentioned earlier, to allow the district/complex to stand out amongst its existing context- perhaps even making it iconic in nature both as a physical entity and a programmatic entity. This allows for the user to be able to clearly identify the space because it is something that does not exist due to its unconventional (as compared to the contextual language) establishment - further enhancing the sense of recognizing a space as iconic.

In unity with the master planning of the site in a circular geometry, the individual programs have also been designed to follow the same language so as to create a holistic design outcome. While this does not mean that 90 degree angles or straight lines have been not used, it only means that so as to keep the circulation as flowing as possible externally within the district

but also within the individual programs that take place to insinuate a sense of continuity at all times inside-out.

Although a more “neo-saudi” language has been introduced within this thesis, it is important to remember that distinct qualities have been taken from the Saudi/Arab architectural language to establish the essence of their culture within the design. Key aspects such as the use of the “Arch” have been used to define an entrance or as a transition from one space to another. Tensile shading devices inspired from tents of the nomadic saudi’s, have been used to provide sanctuary from the extreme hot weather of the Saudi region. Tensile shading devices have been more recently used all over saudi arabia as a conventional way to provide shading and protection from the heat during the day so as to prevent any health issue, but also because of its economical and cultural inclinations. The importance of the street is extremely important in the arab culture, moreover so that they established a market on the parameters of a street. That market is very commonly known as a “Souk” where retailers sell clothing, footwear, household items, food, pottery, artwork, books, etc. Because of its iconic value within the culture, it was important to incorporate it into the design of the District and let the Souk in itself be a program which will define itself, because its initial purpose is for retailing, it will remain so.

While an oasis is very important to the nomadic saudi, influence has also been taken from there to incorporate a water body on site to allow for the winds to pass by and create a cooler microclimate on site. As intimated, the flora and fauna on site also pertain to the local market and the use of Palm Trees has been used to its full potential because of their rapid growth during the warm seasons and their ability to provide shade.

As the thesis is a program relatively new for the people of Saudi Arabia, its initial influence was derived from the Dubai Design District (D³). While the nature of both the districts is to create a hub to generate and nurture creativity, D³ is more focused on the commercial and retail aspect, whereas this thesis wants to establish more of a platform for the user to be able to showcase their creativity, in simple words create a “show and tell” aura. Although of course some aspects will include retail and commercialism, the main aim however is to create an overall exhibition activity.

2. Re-Definition

One of the aims of this thesis was to redefine the definition of a “public space” within Saudi Arabia. This meant that the design which had to be carried out needed to refrain from all the aspects which define public space as a “Mall”. Malls are a very common typology in Saudi Arabia which cater to a variety of different programs under one built envelope and what the Arabs most commonly refer to as a public space. It is understandable that due to extreme hot weather, most people do prefer to be indoors with active cooling, however it is important to remember that we as architects can look at the precedents, in this case Saudi vernacular architecture and take inspirations from them to use strategies or create strategies to help combat climate. As such, the Saudi Design District is a completely pedestrian based, as suggested in its name, district which caters to multiple programs in a specified carefully designed arrangement to allow for a very different public space experience which will not be all under one roof - rather the user will be able to interact with the outdoors in a controlled manner.

Design Development:

After taking all of the above into consideration, the design development was fairly straightforward. The design needed to follow a north-south orientation to avoid harsh sunlight for the comfort of the user, it also needed to incorporate a water body which would pertain and respond to the winds coming in from the west and create a relatively cooler microclimate for those on site. The zoning of the programs was done in a way to allow those programs which needed exclusive access to be placed on either ends of the site while maintaining a singular entrance and exit with a well defined parking loop and drop off. The remaining programs were then placed around a central axis/avenue/district for clarity of wayfinding and circulation, maintaining a starting and ending point for ease of accessibility. The introduction of a park also needed to be incorporated because that would be the main element which would:

1. Attract users especially with children

and

2. Allow the sense of connectivity with the outdoors as mentioned earlier. As the design phase continued, it was a carefully thought decision to place the water body and the park together to enhance the effect of the oasis but also to help retain a cooler micro climate.

Spatial Connections:

Because of the nature of the thesis, being the first of its kind, it is important to remember that spatial connections between the whole district and amongst the individual programs is very important. Within these spatial connections, there are three important aspects that need to be explained:

1. Characteristics

The atmospheric characteristic of the spaces at the district all encompass an essence of Saudi Arabia with a modernized twist. Some of the programs within the thesis specifically the amphitheater and large scale art gallery, have not been introduced prior to in Saudi Arabia. As such it has been carefully decided to include elements from the arab architectonics and language so as to preserve that essence.

2. Indoor/Outdoor

As mentioned earlier, Saudis are not used to the idea of outdoor public spaces due to the extreme climate of the region. However the way the district has been designed is by incorporating a water body and a park within on another to allow for a cooler climate for comfort of climate. At the same time, every program has a green space incorporated within their built space to allow for either visual/ or both visual and physical connectivity with the outdoors.

3. Detailing

It was of utmost importance to give attention to detailing to the facades of the different programs which resembled some aspect of the saudi vernacular architecture or of the local architectural language. The souk which has been designed has very specific detailing to the arches which have been incorporated for the entrance/exit thresholds but also for design elements within the shops of the souk. Other elements include wooden screens based on designs inspired from islamic geometry. Another important detailing which has been looked into for the design is for the tensile shading structure - the structure has been designed for the souk's central courtyard and then used on a similar smaller scale for seating and shading across the district.

Conclusion:

All in all, the design considerations which have been taken for this thesis have been carefully thought out to the specifications of the culture and context of Saudi Arabia and its people. It was very important to remember that the design implications which have been decided to be incorporated within the final design have to be site specific and sensitive enough to make sure that the impact made on the users is not too apparent but more of a subtle impact but one that will last for a long time.

Chapter 6 - Design Outcome

Introduction:

This chapter is mostly dedicated to the design outcomes of the thesis, where the overall quality and salient features of the design will be discussed - that being said, as previously discussed, the thesis revolves around the social and cultural paradigm shift taking place within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its “Vision 2030”.

The intervention which has been made on site is an important step towards progressive development for the creative wing providing platforms for a variety of artistic categories. The design is a district/complex which is designed is placed carefully across from the Sports City, placed on the future master planning of a “Cultural and Design City”. Majority of the user influx will include not only enthusiasts of the creative category but also locals as well as international users to be able to visit and view the rising “art scene”. The governing body of the district will be able to make it their office but also be able to carry out “Jeddah Art Week” or “21,39” in a space which will now be dedicated for such an event and allow users the ease to visit it all in on location as opposed to the various locations previously.

All in all, the “Saudi Art District” is a pedestrian based district which will provide platforms for the rising art culture and art enthusiasts in a district which caters to a variety of creative categories in one complex in the artistic hub of the Saudi Kingdom, Jeddah. It will be the first of its kind within the Kingdom, becoming a precedent for the future developments that may be planned for the upcoming transformations linked to the Vision 2030.

Design Description:

The design which has been established has strong inspiration from the atypical Saudi vernacular or traditional architecture. The overall language of the plan and form correspond to a circular geometry which has strong ties with Islamic Geometry where the circle symbolizes unity and diversity in nature, and many Islamic patterns are drawn starting with a circle and then transforming further.

Another significant inspiration and key feature has been taken from the local Arab “souks” or an open-air marketplace or commercial quarter. Souks have a very old history within the Arab culture, where the initial idea of an open market was defined by these souks. In nature the souk can either be temporal or permanent, those which are permanent cater more towards the commercial aspect but the temporal souks also cater to entertainment.

However, moreover so Saudi Arabia is a region with extreme heating temperatures throughout the year, making it very difficult to navigate or pedestrianize any region without providing shading devices, cooling devices or indoor spaces. As such, the Bedouins, or the authentic nomadic people of the region use tensile structures to use as not only shading but also as residential and commercial uses. That said, the traditional shading devices are used to combat the scorching heat at all times in order to ensure a comfortable walking microclimate.

Water bodies have also been incorporated to induce a cooling effect physically and psychologically for the user. Physically, the location of the water bodies has been made as such to allow the east cool winds to make their way and carry a wave of further cooled wind for the users. Psychologically, the desert houses many oases which usually become the salvaging and culmination or rest points for those travelling across - as such this feature allows for a further essence of the local Saudi landmark.

The thesis statement states that the aim of the design is to use architecture as a tool to create platform due to the rising paradigm shift of the arab culture- the final outcome thus has been able to achieve so by not only providing the required platforms but also visioning a district for the creativity that is now quite visibly shining through the more conservative saudi culture.

Conclusion:

All in all the thesis has attempted to try and achieve a design district similar to that of the Dubai Design District and make it a social hub for the city of Jeddah but also for the Kingdom as a whole. The design decisions and choices which have been taken for the project correlate closely with arabian architecture but morphe it with neo architecture, producing a product which can be identified as neo-arabian. The thesis statement which was said to be carried out, I believe, has been successfully translated into architectonics and the outcome is a step forward or rather the first intervention which has taken place within the kingdom, as aforementioned, will now set a precedence for the upcoming projects catering to the same social programs as this thesis has tried to explore and achieve.

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