Cities, Communities and Homes: Is the Urban Future Livable?

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The Significance of public open space to Physical Activity and prevention of obesity in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

• Format:
Written paper

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• Abstract (328 words):
According to the WHO, physical activity is essential for public health, helping control weight and obesity-related chronic diseases like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and some cancers. Today, obesity is an international concern, rapidly rising across developed and developing countries. It is a major public-health threat and a leading cause of preventable death. In England, it is estimated to be the fourth largest risk factor contributing to deaths after hypertension, smoking, and high cholesterol. In Saudi Arabia, the 2013 National Health Survey confirmed a strong association between obesity and inactivity: 28.7% of the total population aged 15 years or old were obese, which is about 33.5% for women and 24.1% for men. Overall, 46.0% of men and 75.1% of women are physically inactive.

Recent research confirms that urban public spaces are a promising means to satisfy current exercise requirements. There is ongoing research suggesting that access to safe
and attractive open spaces is vital to people’s health, impacting on physical activity. Some studies have investigated the importance of such spaces to health and analyzed the physical and social attributes conducive to outdoor exercise in the Saudi context. This study links open spaces to physical activities and obesity prevention in Saudi Arabian cities, using Jeddah city as a case study.

In Saudi Arabia, with growing oil revenue in the late 1970s, strategies were created to implement housing and transportation projects in major cities. Changes in the built environment created an obesogenic built environment, encouraging unhealthy eating, sedentary lifestyles and weight gain. Saudi Arabia now has the highest rate of obesity in the world, putting its population at great risk for expanding rates of Non-communicable Disease (NCD) mortality.

We advance the hypothesis that current public spaces do not support a healthy lifestyle and personal development. This has resulted in an obesity pandemic. Our investigation – based on extensive documentary analysis, a qualitative survey and systematic field observation – identifies urgent need for an understanding of how physical environments affect low level physical activity.

Keywords: urban public space, urban design, physical activity; obesity, neighborhood, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Education

2004 - 2011 Ph.D. in Urban Design Newcastle University, Newcastle, School of Architecture.

1990 – 1992 Master of Landscape Architecture, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.

1988 - 1992 Master of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.

1979 –1986 Bachelor of urban and regional planning, King Abdul Aziz University, Engineering College, School of environmental Design, Jeddah.

Professional work experience

April 2013-date Urban Design Consultant- The Expansion of the Prophet Mosque.

January-April 2013 Chainman of Urban and Regional Planning Department, King Abdul-Aziz University, College of Environmental Design.
2011 - 2013  Assistance professor, King Abdul-Aziz University, College of Environmental Design, Department of Urban and Regional Planning.

2002 – 2011  Lecturer, King Abdul-Aziz University, College of Environmental Design, Department of Urban and Regional Planning.

2001 – 2002  Director of office in Makkah Municipality.


**Training Programmes**

**June 2011**  Modern business administration, University of Warwick, UK

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**9\97 – 12\97**  Training program in urban design, Development Planning Unit, University College London, London, United Kingdom

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