A few steps away yet worlds apart! A closer look at changing streetscapes in Abu Dhabi.

In-person presentation / Written paper

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Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, continues to change at a rapid-pace in response to city branding efforts. Major investments in the city’s urban infrastructure and its built environment are common as Abu Dhabi attempts to compete at the world stage, and lure-in tourists, corporations, and investors alike. City planners have been busy updating the city’s urban spaces and streetscapes, and trying to transfer it into a sleek and modern contemporary Arab city with a ‘high-end’ feel -a task that has been rather successful. As a result, Abu Dhabi’s name has become synonymous with luxury, and the city’s overall quality, livability, and even resilience have improved dramatically.

Yet, and at the other end of the spectrum, the lower income segments of the society appear to be missing from the big planning picture. Similar to most rebranding cities, these city beatification exercises involving signature developments and public realm
improvements might be unintentionally taking away some of vibrant and diverse aspects of street life in some older areas, while replacing them with rather monotonous, if not sterile environments and streetscapes. This paper attempts to take a closer look at some of these older spaces and streetscapes in Abu Dhabi. The paper will shed some light on some of these vibrant areas (yet potentially soon to vanish). It hopes to highlight the vibrant nature of these streetscapes, and bring this to the attention of city planners. The paper argues that important lessons could be learned from these spaces that could contribute positively to future planning efforts in the city.

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

Abdellatif Qamhaieh is currently an Assistant Professor of Urban Planning at Alhosn University in Abu Dhabi. His current research interests include social aspects of planning, mobility, and urban design.