Constructing an Urban Future: The sustainability and resilience of cities – infrastructures, communities, buildings and housing.

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Urban Design Interventions for Informal Settlements: The Case of Ghulail, Jeddah

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• Abstract (300 words):
The city of Jeddah, the second largest city in Saudi Arabia, has been plagued for most of its recent history by the unremitting proliferation of informal settlements. These settlements house over a quarter of the city’s population, in conditions far below standard. Predominately concentrated in the south of the city, the settlements are close to the main port, providing cheap labor and supporting the surrounding industries. The area is also famous for its traditional markets providing affordable merchandise to both residents as well as visitors arriving for pilgrimage. Affordability is also extended to housing which is significantly lower in cost than the more prosperous north. On the down side however the area lacks the most basic of services, potable water supply and sanitation. The area is also plagued by inadequate storm water drainage causing severe damage to property at times of intense rainfall.
In 2008, the city initiated a program to regenerate the unplanned settlements within its boundaries. Due to the limited government funds the city developed a public-private partnership in the form of Jeddah Development and Urban Regeneration Company (JDURC). The approach adopted involved categorizing the settlements according to their strategic location within the city. Those closest to the center of the city were considered ‘viable to private developers’ and were marked for demolition and subsequent regeneration. To attract the investors the city offered unlimited FAR (floor-area ratio) encouraging high-rise structures that would represent its new image as well as bring back significant returns to the investors. The project’s implementation however was halted as the residents coalesced to push out the investors and fight for their right to remain within their settlements and close to their sources of livelihood.

These top-down approaches towards informal settlements have been a subject of much criticism in both literature and UN reports for the past six decades. In this paper we attempt to present a more sensitive approach towards dealing with informality, beginning with an acknowledgement of the qualities present within the settlements and using that as the basis for the design interventions. The discussion in this paper is the result of a studio-based investigation on a specific settlement, Ghulail. Under the rubric of slum upgrading we aim to highlight the major challenges that Ghulail faces and to propose design solutions that are both specific and relevant. Minimal cost-effective strategic interventions are proposed that would impact the entire settlement and improve the lives of the inhabitants. This paper aims to take Ghulail as a starting point for a broader discussion, about the agency of urban design and the role it could play in improving living conditions within Jeddah’s informal settlements.

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

Dr Hanaa Motasim has earned both her MSc and PhD from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. She currently works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, Dar Al-Hekma University. Her research interests include Urban Design, Islamic Architecture, and Architectural Regionalism. She has a number of publications to her name these include:


Petrella, Laura. , Hanaa Motasim and Karen Rye (eds), (2010), Planning Sustainable Cities – Experiences and Perspectives of UN Habitat, (UN HABITAT)

