

The Sustainable Development of Urban Planning and Architectural Identity in Barka City – Oman

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1114SDAICO9>

Received: 04 July 2024; Accepted: 19 July 2024; Published: 02 November 2024

ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of architectural identity and its importance in attaining sustainable urban growth, using the seaside city of Barka in Oman as a model. Architectural identity refers to the unique features and attributes that distinguish a particular site or structure, which are influenced by cultural, historical, social, economic, and environmental aspects. As Barka rapidly urbanizes, there is an urgent need to strike a balance between modern development needs and the preservation of the city's distinctive architectural legacy and urban fabric. The study examines Barka's current urban morphology, vernacular architecture, and community needs to create a framework for guiding future growth in a balanced manner. It focuses on combining contemporary designs with traditional Omani architectural components to create a unified feeling of place and social sustainability. Maintaining architectural identity is critical not only for aesthetic reasons, but also for promoting cultural continuity, community resilience, and inhabitants' sense of belonging. By evaluating varied architectural styles throughout neighborhoods, the study identifies contextually relevant planning and design interventions that preserve Barka's roots while improving livability. Finally, it seeks to educate politicians and urban practitioners on how to create an inclusive development path that respects Barka's unique identity while meeting modern needs.

Keywords: Sustainability, Urban Planning, Architectural Identity, Oman.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable urban development that preserves and promotes local cultural identity is a critical concern for rapidly urbanizing places around the world. Barka, a coastal city in northern Oman, demonstrates the struggle between modernity and the preservation of traditional architecture and urban structure. As Barka's population grows and the economy develops, there is an urgent need to properly manage the city's expansion in a way that improves inhabitants' quality of life while protecting the city's distinctive cultural legacy. This study investigates sustainable urban planning solutions for cultivating a cohesive sense of place and architectural identity founded in Barka's historical traditions. By examining the city's existing urban morphology, vernacular architecture, and community needs, the study hopes to create a framework for guiding future development that harmoniously balances modern needs with the preservation of Barka's unique cultural landscapes and streetscapes. Preserving the essential character of cities like Barka is about more than simply aesthetics; it is also about fostering social sustainability, cultural continuity, and a strong sense of place among local people. This introduction emphasizes the importance of balancing urban advancement with heritage preservation via contextually relevant planning and design interventions.

This paper aims to:

Find the reasons that led to the absence of a unified architectural identity in Barka city.

Attempt to extrapolate the main features of the architecture in Barka.

Find a suitable definition of Identity in a multidisciplinary approach.

Identify the meaning of the architectural identity and the controversy over this concept.

Finally, the research aims to educate policymakers and urban practitioners on how to chart an inclusive developmental path that is consistent with Barka's particular identity while improving livability for all people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through this part some previous studies that addressed this subject were reviewed to be a reference utilized during this research and built upon its new knowledge and information, to integrate a holistic view of the topic.

The article titled Building the Regional Identity of Sustainable Architecture clarified One of the keys to understanding feasible design is to develop the social personality of urban areas. The losing of urban characteristics is reflected both within the merging of geology and the section of social personality, it analyzed the celebrated territorial buildings in China to summarize the comparing engineering characteristics, moreover, take the reproduction of Hougou antiquated town in Shanxi Territory for pilot inquire about urban components are organized and proposed in a modular way (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Throughout another paper titled Understanding the role of architectural identity in forming contemporary architecture in Saudi Arabia, the propensity to distinguish and accomplish personality in design may be a critical drift in modern engineering, the Saudi organizing drove the transition from conventional to modern engineering to precise their preservationist and the significance of the nearby social personalities in design. This consider points to look at this explore driven by the Saudi government to get it how the planners might express their concept of territorial personality in their work was communicated.

The investigation looks at five components forming the architectural character in two perspectives, modern structural works can be caught on through five primary ranges: plan concept, shape and frame, development innovation, the materials utilized, and relationship with the encompassing, Different planners are effective in making structures whereas joining present day and local architecture (Alzahrani.A,2022). This paper titled the impact of sustainability trends on housing design identity of Arab cities examined past inquire about and examinations on the zone of green cities and maintainable architecture need the consider and investigation of the effect of maintainability standards applications on the city picture.

At this point, a basic address is raised; to what degree the structural personality of the city might be affected by the selection of the diverse supportability patterns? From this point of see, this paper centers on two key issues: firstly: consider and investigation of the said supportability patterns in lodging plan, besides: evaluating and analyzing the effect of these patterns on forming the character of the Middle easterner city (Abdelsalam.T & Rihan,2013). Another paper titled Is It Possible to Define Architectural Identity More Objectively? talked about the concept of personality is complex and at the same time equivocal. Engineering personality, be that as it may, is indeed more complex. This stems from the reality that engineering is the reflection that reflects the distinctive political, social, and financial components that are forming the city. Starting discoveries from meeting distinctive parties within the city counting modelers, academicians and organizers highlighted the critical struggle in communicating the Sudanese structural character in modern design. This comes about in an add up to ignore in considering it in both urban and engineering plan forms (Hamid, M& Hanks,2021).

The authors of this book titled Cities' Identity Through Architecture and Arts covers a wide extend of themes relating to engineering and urban plan, such as the preservation of cities' culture and personality through plan and arranging forms, different belief systems, and approaches to accomplishing more maintainable cities whereas holding their characters, and techniques to assist cities promote themselves on the worldwide showcase (Mohanty, M. 2020). The paper titled Urban Conservation and Sustainable Development analyzes the method that driven to the advancement of the concept of urban legacy and to its integration within the

systems given by the UN Worldwide Improvement Motivation. The appropriation of the Unused Urban Motivation in 2016 has opened modern viewpoints on urban legacy arrangements and on the part of culture in advancing urban recovery and versatility (Bandarin, F. 2020). In the article Linking Cultural Built Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development follows the collaborative improvement of territorial and neighborhood procedures for the security and valorization of built social legacy within the German- Polish border locale. The premise for these techniques were five theories that brought together information approximately advancement flow in little and medium-sized towns, their quality of life and perspectives of social legacy. These speculations were discussed and reflected upon within the ten German and Clean towns and condensed into location-specific approaches (Al-Alawi, S& Knippschild.2022). UN-HABITAT discussed in book titled Planning Sustainable Cities Un-Habitat Practices and Perspectives Long run of urban arranging has been the question of exuberant wrangle about in later a long time. For a long time, urban arranging was considered a wasteful instrument, incapable of addressing improvement viably. In any case, recharged consideration to urban arranging has as of late risen. Moving significantly from its initial aspiration to command and control the city, arranging has begun reassessing itself within the modern setting of urbanization (UN-HABITAT,2010).

Definition:

Identity:

There are many definitions for identity such as:

- It is special characteristics through which one person can be distinguished from another, one group from another, or another culture.
- The term “identity” refers to the unique features or characteristics that define an individual or a collective, and these attributes may encompass social, cultural, historical, personal, or other factors that contribute to an individual’s or group’s sense of identity or affiliation (Alavi & Tanaka, 2023).
- Identity is the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places by having a vivid, or unique, or at least a character of its own (Ozlem.K,2017).
- The basic principles of identify are quite straightforward and move from identification to personal identity (Robert Adam; 2012).

Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as the ability to meet current needs without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet their own. Sustainable methods in urban planning and architecture seek to strike a balance between economic growth, social well-being, and environmental conservation. This requires careful consideration of resource utilization, energy efficiency, waste management, and the preservation of cultural legacy and local identity. Sustainability, in the context of urban planning and architectural development, refers to a comprehensive approach that balances economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social well-being while preserving cultural legacy and local architectural identity for future generations (Koglin, T. 2009).

Strategies for sustainable urban planning and architectural design should seek to incorporate contemporary development needs while preserving vernacular architectural components and the built environment's inherent character. This promotes a unified urban fabric that resonates with the unique feeling of place, while also fostering social sustainability by enhancing community resilience and inhabitants' shared sense of belonging (Majid, N. 2012).

Identity:

There are five levels for identity in different sectors such as:

- Religious level: It is well known that the idea of debt associated with human beings since its existence is also an integral component of the mouthpiece of the community identity (Goussous & Qashmar,2019).
- Geographical Level: determine the natural territorial border of any nation, including the Provisions of ethnicities, nationalities, and peoples, so that brought together by circumstances, fate, and single goals (Goussous & Qashmar,2019).
- Cultural level: An integrated system of material, psychological, moral, and social data that includes a system of cognitive integration processes, and is characterized by its unity, which is embodied in the inner spirit that includes the characteristic of feeling of identity.” (Sabe.m, 2017).
- Language Level: is the title for any nation to determine her personality and identity, it is a tool for expression, to translate thoughts, ideas, and feelings, it is a way of understanding, learning, development, transfer of experiences, cultures, and civilizations (Goussous & Qashmar,2019).
- Architectural level: the context of architecture, “identity” refers to the distinct characteristics and attributes that characterize a specific location or structure, it includes cultural, historical, social, economic, and environmental variables that shape a city’s identity or architectural style (Alavi & Tanaka, 2023).

Also, Identity includes many sectors (Space, Building, Neighbor, City, State), and the identity can be found in (Elevations, Landmarks, Historical buildings, Optical vision, Construction, Elements, Street, Topography, Geography).

Architectural & Urban planning Identity:

There are two sides to identity (architectural identity for buildings, urban planning identity for cities):

- Identity of Urban planning: It is the final product of shaping the features of the built environment of urban communities, and it is the main criterion for measuring the success of this urbanization. The urban identity of a region is the result of employing specific elements, patterns, and clearly defined urban vocabulary. Therefore, it can be said that the built environment is an effective means through which any society can confirm its identity and explain it to distinguish it among societies (Almahd & albili, 2020).
- Architectural identity: is the expressive characteristic of a thing or a group of qualities that reflects the fundamental truth of the architectural product stemming from its subjectivity, its spirituality, and the roots of its formation, which makes it its eternal meaning (H. A &D. M. 2010).

Architectural identity considers as a part of cultural identity for communities, so there are different architectural styles according to different (community, geography, culture, ...), and architectural identity determined in two aspects:

Permanent: nature, climate, geography, local material.

Temporary: economic, social, artic circumstances.

Architectural identity principles:

There are three principles for the architectural identity as the following (H. A. & , D. M.2010):

- Identity is a series of sequential processes that stem from us and our environment and are influenced by traditions and customs prevailing in that environment and that identity is dynamic as it changes over time.
- Identity is formed from a series of processes, so it cannot be created. Identity develops through dealing with

what is perceived.

- Identity is not linked to self-awareness. We evaluate others and place them in a certain image even though they do not seek to be in that image, so we find our identity through our understanding of ourselves and our environment.

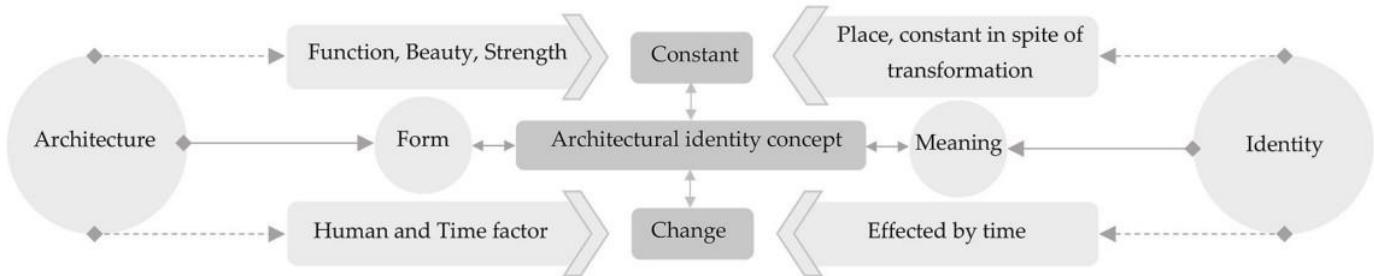


Figure (1): The relationship between architecture and identity (Alavi & Tanaka, 2023).

Architectural identity elements:

There are five elements for the architectural identity as the following:

- Building materials.
- Urban and architectural form
- Optical image
- Urban shape
- Repetition

Characteristics of architectural identity:

The architectural identity recognizes with many characteristics such as (Alavi & Tanaka, 2023):

- Contextualization: A context is a phrase used to describe the creation of items by combining all events. and conditions.
- Form and Function: Form describes the physical appearance of a building, including its size, shape, color, texture, and other visual features. The function of a building, on the other hand, refers to its purpose and practical utilization.
- Building materials: which play a major role in defining a region's identity, are among the most important factors in architectural identity.
- Memory: Architecture is strongly linked to memory and history. Architectural memory is a physical manifestation of society's cultural memory, and it includes both cultural and architectural monuments, as well as the social norms and customs involved in their preservation and usage.
- Political and Economic Factors: Political power and architecture have a close relationship. Architecture and politics are inextricably linked, and politics oversee building and enhancing the society in which we live, However, the economy also has significant.
- effects on a region's architectural identity. Architecture is everywhere around us and affects everyone, and

architectural design decisions can be costly.

- Sustainability, Technology, and Environmental Factors: Sustainability is essential for every living creature on Earth, and one of the most significant factors in today's advanced technology-based environments is architectural sustainability.
- Individual Creativity and Client Preferences: Creativity is frequently defined as the capacity to generate functional and original concepts. Through creativity, architects can incorporate their unique perspectives, ideas, and visions into the design process, resulting in distinctive and innovative projects. On the other hand, client preferences are another crucial factor that significantly influences the identity of architecture. When working on a project, architects collaborate closely with clients to determine their specific requirements, preferences, and building visions.

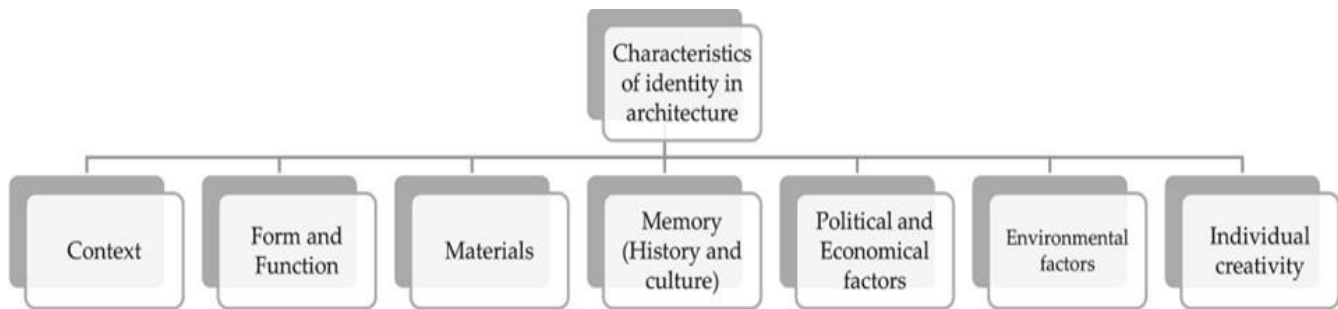


Figure (2): The fundamental components of identity in architecture (Alavi & Tanaka, 2023).

Architecture & Local Community:

All previous studies and cases ensure to strong relation between human and architecture identity in different areas, as result for that appear new term (local architectural identity), and in modern ages local identity faced a lot of challenges and changes:

Interaction influence between cultures and openness to each other.

Technical and technological development.

Modern trends and ideas.

Mobility and migration between communities.

The dissolution of communities and the emergence of others.

Many and varied variables.

Case study:

Oman:

In order to enhance the principle of cooperation and partnership between the municipal and academic sectors in the engineering and architectural fields and the exchange of experiences between the two sides, Muscat Municipality organized a workshop for students of engineering colleges specializing in the study of architecture on the future of architectural identity in Muscat Governorate, in which a number of academic students participated, with the aim of extrapolating the aspirations of the new generation in The future identity of architecture in Muscat and learning about the visuals of architectural identity from the perspective of future generations.



Figure (3): Muscat Municipality organized a workshop for students of engineering colleges

Historical Background, Barka City:

Each city has a character that distinguishes it from other cities, and the urban heritage is one of the most important aspects of the cultural heritage that every country is proud of, because of the original values stemming from its civilization, and because it is a true translation of all the progress it has reached in various fields of life. The city of Barka is rich in authentic urban heritage, reflecting cultural aspects of its history and the personality of its inhabitants, Barka is in the Governorate of South Batinah and is about 86 km from the city of Muscat, overlooking the coast of Al Batinah, and the residences in the city were built with reasonable density.

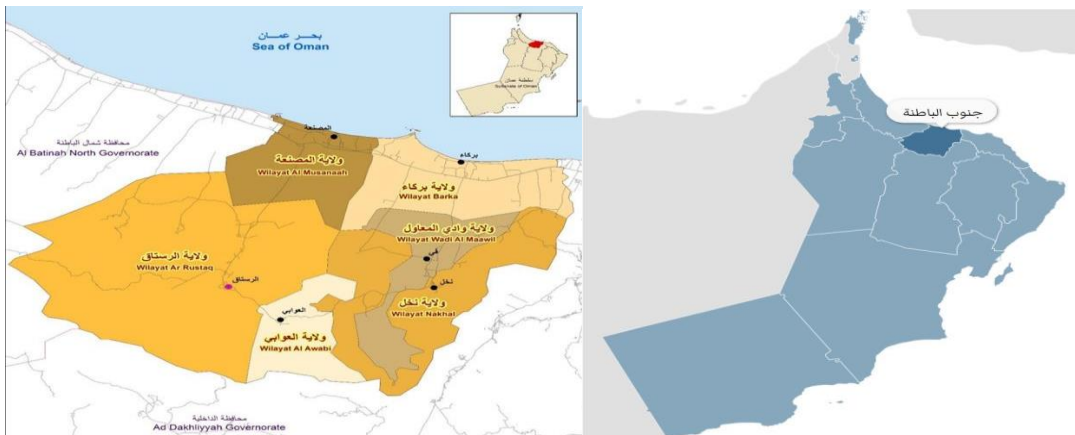


Figure (4): Barka City-Oman

Barka city located in Oman, AL Batinah south governate, it is the center of it, Marina Beach project is one of the new projects on the city's beach and a model for the architectural and tourism development of the city.



Figure (5): Marina Beach- Barka

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced the launch of 5 new sites for real estate developers,

as part of the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighborhoods "Sorouh", in the governorates of: Musandam, Dhofar, South Sharqiyah, North Batinah and South Batinah (Hai Al-Naseem).



Figure (6): Sultan Haitham City Figure (7): Hai Al-Naseem

Analysis study:

The research depends on the analytical study of a set of samples, examples and models of residential building facades, and the importance of the analytical study comes from the fact that it gives a clear evaluation and analysis of all cases from various aspects to be evaluated and known to reach the goal of research and study, and that the selection of samples for the study was according to several bases, namely:

- Diversity in styles.
- Difference in historical and chronological sequence.
- Difference in location within the city.
- Diversity in the techniques and materials used.
- Diversity in social and living standards.

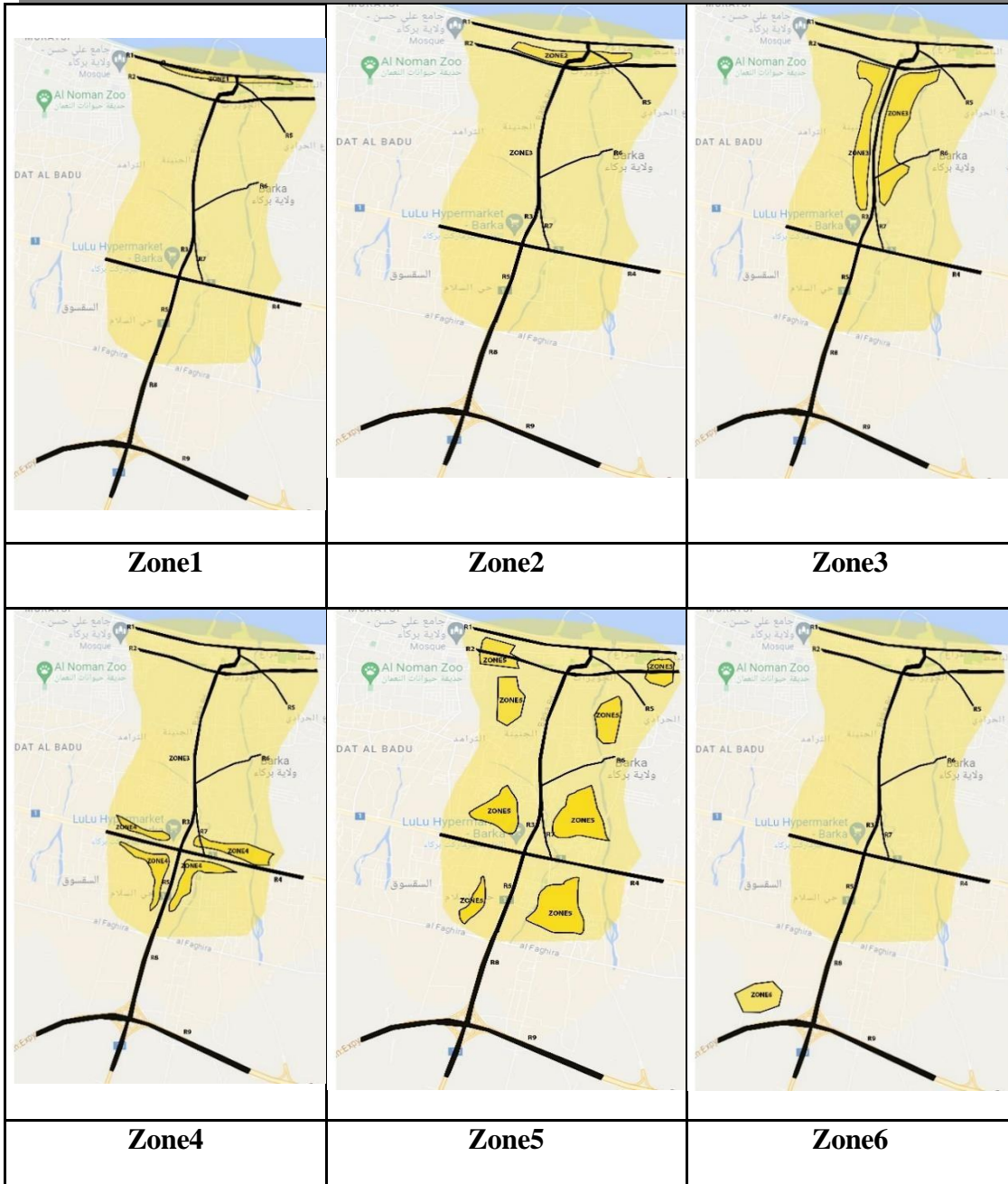
The studied models (11 traditional models, 54 modern models, 27 contemporary models) were selected for analysis to cover all components of the facades with their various elements, foundations, and techniques, according to two tracks (design analytical study, evaluation analytical study), noting that all selected models are currently based within the city and were selected by the researcher.

Descriptive Study

Urban Planning:

Table (1): descriptive study – urban planning for Barka city





All Zones						
	Zone1	Zone2	Zone3	Zone4	Zone5	Zone6
Region	South Batinah	South Batinah	South Batinah	South Batinah	South Batinah	South Batinah
City	Northern part of Barka city	Northern part of Barka city	Mid part of Barka city	Southern part of Barka city	Southern part of Barka city	South of Barka city
	One in Old	Multi in Barka	One in Barka & Souq	One in Modern Barka, on S.Q	Multi in Contempor	One in Hai AL Naseem,

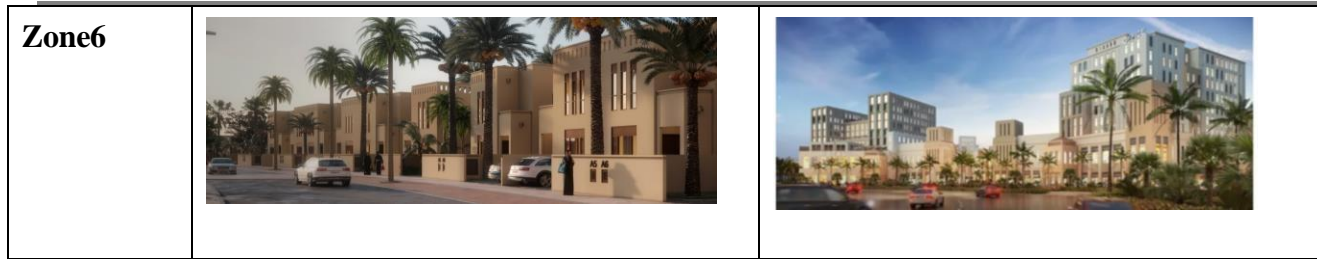
Neighborhood	Barka, On the Beach	Souq, near to the Beach	Traditional Barka	highway	ary Barka, near to both Highway	extension of Barka city
Block	4-5 blocks in one neighborhood	8-10 blocks in different neighborhoods	12-15 blocks in one neighborhood	10-12 blocks in one neighborhood	8-10 Blocks in different neighborhoods	Multi blocks in one neighborhood
Building	Old residential style in one level	Traditional style in two level & functions	Traditional & modern Style in multi levels	Modern style in multi levels & functions	Contemporary residential style with 2-3 levels	Modern style in multi levels & functions
Commercial	No commercial buildings	commercial function mixed with residential	commercial function mixed or separate with residential	commercial function mixed or separate with residential	No commercial buildings	Separate commercial function
Educational	No Educational buildings	No Educational buildings	Sperate Educational buildings	No Educational buildings	Sperate Educational buildings	Sperate Educational building
Cultural	No Cultural buildings	No Cultural buildings	Spearte Cultural buildings	Cultural function mixed in one building	No Cultural buildings	Spearte Cultural building
Religious	Spearte Religious buildings	Spearte Religious buildings	Spearte Religious buildings	No Religious buildings	No Religious buildings	Spearte Religious buildings
Sporting	No sporting buildings	No sporting buildings	No sporting buildings	No sporting buildings	Sperate sporting buildings	Sperate sporting buildings
Green area	No green areas	little green areas	some green areas	little green areas	more green areas	A lot of green areas
Parks	No parks	No parks	No parks	One or two parks	No parks	A lot of parks
Public	Public spaces on the beach	Public spaces near the	Public spaces in souq	Little Public spaces near to highway	No Public spaces	Public spaces in the site

space		beach				
Administrative	No administrative building	Little administrative buildings	little administrative buildings	More administrative buildings	Little administrative buildings	Little administrative buildings
Highway	Batinah highway passed through it	Near to Batinah highway	Little far to Batinah highway	S.Q Highway passed through it	Near to S.Q & Batinah highways	Near to Muscat Highway

Architecture:

Table (2): descriptive study – Architecture for Barka city

Zone	Examples1	Examples2
Zone1		
Zone2		
Zone3		
Zone4		
Zone5		



	Zone1	Zone2	Zone3	Zone4	Zone5	Zone6
Elevations	One level old residential style	Two level traditional style	Multi-level traditional & modern style	Multi-level modern style	2-3 level contemporary residential style	Multi-level modern style
Openings	Small and different shapes and styles	Bigger and similarity in styles and shapes	Bigger and similarity and modern, traditional style	Bigger and similarity, modern style	Modern and contemporary style, color, materials, and elements	contemporary style, color, materials, and elements
Style	Old residential	Traditional mixed	Traditional & modern mixed	Modern mixed	Contemporary mixed	Modern mixed
Materials	Local materials used in traditional styles	Traditional materials mixed with modern	Traditional materials	Modern materials	Contemporary materials	Modern materials
Shapes	Simple and functional	Functional with traditional aesthetics	Blend of traditional and modern	Modern functional shapes	Contemporary shapes	Modern functional shapes
Colors	Earthy tones	Earthy tones with traditional patterns	Mixed earthy and modern colors	Modern color schemes	Contemporary color schemes	Modern color schemes
Levels	Single level	Two levels	Multi-level	Multi-level	2-3 levels	Multi-level

DISCUSSION

The study explores deeply into the concept of architectural identity and its significance in sustainable urban development, utilizing Barka City in Oman as a case study. It describes architectural identity as the distinguishing qualities and attributes that distinguish a particular location or structure, as influenced by cultural, historical, social, economic, and environmental aspects. The analysis emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between modern development needs and the preservation of Barka's distinctive architectural history and urban fabric. It promotes a strategy that harmonizes contemporary designs with traditional Omani architectural components, resulting in a unified feeling of place and social sustainability.

The study emphasizes that preserving architectural identity is more than just an aesthetic concern; it also

promotes cultural continuity, community resilience, and a sense of belonging among people. It acknowledges the challenges faced by globalization, technological breakthroughs, and shifting societal norms, which can all destroy local identities. The study analyses the distinct architectural styles, materials, shapes, and functions found in different neighborhoods by conducting a thorough survey of several zones within Barka City. It emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between historic and modern aspects, ensuring that new developments match the city's existing identity while still serving current demands.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable urban development in Barka City should prioritize merging modern architectural designs with traditional Omani architectural components, preserving the city's specific cultural identity while addressing modern necessities. This strategy promotes social sustainability by instilling a sense of belonging and communal resilience in residents.

The study emphasizes the necessity of contextually relevant planning and design solutions that honor Barka's historical roots while encouraging required progress. By establishing a balance between heritage preservation and modern needs, the city may promote an inclusive growth path that improves livability for all while preserving its unique architectural legacy.

Finally, the study emphasizes the importance of architectural identity in sustainable urban development, acting as a catalyst for cultural continuity, social cohesion, and a strong feeling of place in a quickly changing urban landscape.

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