

The Negative Impacts of Subdivision Regulation on the Residential Built Environment 2015

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Abstract

Land subdivision plans (LSP's) are the basis of development and transform untouched lands into modern residential areas. Subdivision regulation (SR) plays a key role in the process of organisation, design, planning and development of residential areas.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) relies on a single unified SR guideline formulated by the central government that applies one conventional development LSP approach for all Saudi cities. This approach does not take account of the provision of the final product or any particular part of it (eg, housing units, public service plots, etc) as well as after-sale services such as maintenance and management.

Situated in the American and Saudi subdivision literature, this research first examines the quality of what this type of regulated development produces at a macro (city) scale relating to the structure of the urban form being built in Jeddah. It finds that at this scale, low-density car-reliant urban sprawl results – exactly the type of development that misses the sustainable liveability rhetoric the SR documents espouse, and which undermines Jeddah's planning department's attempts to meet the city's 21st Century challenges of rapid demographic and economic growth, and climate change.

The research then investigates the quality of the public services and facilities provision at a micro (district) level by appraising the quality of two conventionally developed subdivision districts in Jeddah. It finds the quality of the public services and facilities is poor, especially for those residents not using a car. Building plots stand vacant/semi-built for long periods of time, and soft infrastructure provision (schools, parks, community facilities) are often slow to arrive – if they arrive at all. A face-to-face survey of resident heads of households in these two districts revealed that these shortcomings made life very difficult.

The research also explored the regulations' content and implementation process and, as part of this element of the investigation, interviewed local planners and conventional developers to gain a better understanding of how they perceived their role, the quality of these localities, and the shortcomings in the system that produced this type of

development. The conventional developers were of the view they already provided too much, and if anything the regulations should be relaxed, not strengthened; the planners' perception was that the regulations were about right, requiring essential services but not so restrictive as to prevent development.

The resident's survey from the original case studies also revealed preferences for a number of other localities in Jeddah where provision was better. The research investigated the development practice of these localities ('non-conventional development'), by visiting the localities and interviewing the developers and found a smart-growth/new urbanism model of development, which could provide better quality public realm and up-front infrastructure provision, albeit at a cost and rather exclusively.

This thesis concludes that it is important to improve the current conventional practices of LSP development to enable Jeddah to provide a more sustainable and more liveable urban form than is currently created, and presents a set of recommendations to achieve this. These include recommendations to amend the SR guidelines based on comprehensive studies conducted with modern techniques incorporating residents' aspirations, developers' suggestions, officials' ideas, inputs from urban planners, and autonomy to local regulators (increased role and responsibility of Jeddah Municipality) cumulatively aimed at provision of better public facilities and services.

There are still some possible avenues to conduct future researches, such as encouraging planning and consulting offices to reveal their views of the current SR code and LSP development. Moreover, residents' perceptions should be studied and included in unconventional subdivision plans to fulfil their satisfaction. Finally, it is useful to study and analyse the views of public services and facilities providers, particularly pertaining to their role within the LSP approval process.