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**Young Planning
Professionals Workshop**

Designing for walkability and Livability: Multi-Scalar Public Strategies in Riyadh



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Designing for Walkability and Liveability:
Multi-Scalar Public Space Strategies in Riyadh

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The report documents collaborative research, fieldwork, discussions, and planning exercises undertaken as part of the workshop. The disclaimer of responsibility in this paragraph refers specifically to the participants' analysis, interpretations, proposals, and recommendations, rather than to the accuracy or completeness of official source material provided by the host. ISOCARP and the host institutions accept no responsibility for the application or implementation of the concepts, designs, recommendations, and other content contained in this report.



The Young Planning
Professionals Workshop Report



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The Young Planning Professionals Workshop

Introduction

The Young Planning Professionals Workshop 2025 was conceived as the pre-congress, in-person programme linked to the 61st ISOCARP World Planning Congress, a landmark event hosted in Riyadh from 1 to 4 December 2025. This workshop was not a peripheral add-on, but an integral component of the Congress, designed by ISOCARP and the Riyadh Region Municipality to enable emerging planners to engage in deep, grounded exploration of the city's challenges and opportunities before the formal opening of the wider international discourse. The work of the YPP would go on to enrich and inform discussions across the Congress.

Held from 24 to 28 November 2025, the workshop unfolded over five intensive days of fieldwork, discussion and design exploration. The timing and location were deliberately aligned with the Congress not only to maximise synergies, but also to position the YPP as a formative experience shaping subsequent sessions and debates.

Programme Theme and Focus

The programme bore the title Designing for Walkability and Liveability: Multi-Scalar Public Space Strategies in Riyadh and revolved around three core themes: Walkability, Climate and Social Cohesion. Its focus was placed squarely on the relationship between mobility, public space and the everyday lives of citizens in the context of one of the fastest transforming cities in the world.

Within this frame, Riyadh's ongoing investments in metro infrastructure and public realm enhancement were understood not merely as technical upgrades, but as pivotal opportunities to recalibrate the balance between vehicles and pedestrians. Central considerations included comfort, safety, shade and climate-responsive design, reflecting the specific demands of a hot arid environment.

Study Area: Al Dirah District

The selected study area for the workshop was the Al Dirah District in the Central City, a historic heart of Riyadh where layers of urban history, cultural heritage and contemporary transformation converge. This context offered a rich terrain in which to explore how walkability and liveability might be advanced through strategies that respect existing urban character while opening new possibilities for inclusive public life.



Photos by ISOCARP 61 congress host Riyadh Region Municipality.

Institutional Collaboration

A key pillar supporting this endeavour was the close collaboration between ISOCARP and the Riyadh Region Municipality. The municipality was the host of the 61st ISOCARP World Planning Congress under the patronage of His Highness Prince Dr Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of the Riyadh Region, underscoring its commitment to knowledge exchange and to positioning Riyadh as a global hub for urban planning dialogue.

This partnership was not merely symbolic. Representatives of the Riyadh Region Municipality contributed actively to the workshop, providing strategic insights into local planning frameworks, ongoing urban projects, and institutional priorities. Their engagement helped anchor the workshop's explorations in lived reality, ensuring that participant proposals were informed by the city's aspirations and constraints. In turn, the municipality gained access to fresh, international perspectives and emerging professional thinking, strengthening the dialogue between local practice and global expertise.



Methodological Framework and Objectives

The workshop was organised around a set of thematic priorities that reflected both global planning discourse and local urban conditions. Rather than advocating wholesale pedestrianisation, the programme emphasised the importance of strategic balance: slowing traffic where appropriate, reimagining street sections, and redistributing space to support walking without undermining necessary mobility.

A multi-scalar thinking approach was promoted throughout, connecting citywide networks with detailed local interventions such as shading solutions, microclimatic enhancements and placemaking measures. The focus on quality of life was holistic, encompassing thermal comfort, ecological performance and cultural vitality.

These thematic priorities informed the expected learning outcomes. Participants were encouraged to turn firsthand experience in the field into structured walkability analysis, to shape strategies that balance traffic and pedestrian needs, and to propose improvements to thermal comfort and liveability. The ultimate aim was to translate broad strategic thinking into coherent street-level proposals that resonated with both local conditions and wider planning principles.

Workshop Leadership and Organisation

The workshop was led by Dr Luisa Bravo, MSc Luca De Stefano and MSc Mohamed Morsi Hassan, whose collective expertise framed a learning environment rooted in dialogue, critical reflection and shared inquiry.



Dr Luisa
Bravo



MSc Luca De
Stefano



MSc Mohamed
Morsi Hassan

Markus Appenzeller, YPP Coordinator for ISOCARP, together with workshop co-organisers from the Riyadh Region Municipality, Reema Alrasheed and Hadeel Alaqili, contributed to shaping a constructive and interactive engagement throughout the programme.



Markus
Appenzeller



Reema
Alrasheed



Hadeel
Alaqili

Workshop Structure and Process

The five-day structure was devised to guide participants through a progressive learning and design journey.

Day 1 focused on site immersion and walkability mapping, including field visits and SWOT analysis to develop a shared understanding of the context.

Day 2 centred on visioning and conceptual frameworks, supported by lectures and early strategic sketches.

Day 3 marked the transition from macro strategies to micro design, facilitated through cross-team exchanges and structured feedback.

Day 4 concentrated on detailing and scenario building, including phased implementation ideas and considerations of governance.

Day 5 was dedicated to synthesising and presenting work for stakeholders within and beyond the workshop.

Workshop Structure and Process

The outputs of this process were captured in a set of deliverables that form the foundation of this report, including team presentations, spatial strategies and visual design proposals. These contributions reflect not only individual creativity, but also a collective commitment to addressing complex planning challenges with nuance and ambition.



Photos by ISOCARP 61 congress host Riyadh Region Municipality.



1, 10, 100, 1000 Riyadh – When plurality delivers plans for a city in constant change

**By Mohamed Morsi Hassan, Luisa Bravo, and
Luca De Stefano**

On the evening of the 23rd of November, in the ballroom of the Holiday Inn Al Malaz in Riyadh, the journey of the ISOCARP Young Planning Professionals Workshop 2025 began. For the first time, the forty selected participants gathered in the same space, alongside members of the ISOCARP Board, partners from the municipality, congress experts, and the workshop facilitators. The room itself set the tone for what was to follow. Wide, formal, and unmistakably institutional, it was organised around a series of tables that would soon become places of debate, exchange, and imagination. What started as a formal gathering quickly revealed itself as the starting point of a collective exploration: informal, hands-on, productive.

At the heart of this journey lay a single, guiding concept: diversity. From the outset, diversity was not treated as a background condition, but as a deliberate and central methodological choice. The scene in that ballroom reflected this clearly. Approximately half of the participants came from international contexts, representing a wide range of countries, while the rest were selected from the Riyadh Municipality. Alongside them were local participants whose diversity emerged through their personal professional backgrounds. While such heterogeneity may appear natural within an international programme like the YPP, in this case it was intentionally cultivated, framed, and activated as a core asset of the workshop.

As curators of the programme, Mohamed Morsi Hassan, Luisa Bravo, and Luca De Stefano approached diversity as a source of richness rather than complexity to be managed. The ambition was clear: to ensure that the YPP would meaningfully enrich the wider ISOCARP World Planning Congress and contribute to ongoing planning debates around Riyadh. This Congress placed strong emphasis on new models of participation, on translating unheard voices into planning practice, and on positioning Riyadh not only as a city in transformation, but as a powerful exploratory ground for future-oriented thinking. Exploration, in this sense, required imagination, and imagination thrives where perspectives differ.

For this reason, the workshop methodology was designed to empower participants to imagine futures and possibilities for the Al Dirah District through the widest possible range of lenses. Group composition was carefully curated to avoid homogeneity and intellectual reinforcement. Participants were intentionally mixed across professional backgrounds, gender, nationality, and cultural experience. Although some were young in age, all participants brought strong expertise and a high level of professional maturity. The guiding question was therefore not how to extract individual excellence, but how to enable mutual enrichment. The result was a genuine plurality of visions, exactly as intended. This plurality played out clearly in the interaction between local and international perspectives. Local participants grounded discussions in the lived realities of Riyadh, its spatial behaviours, social dynamics, and everyday challenges. International participants contributed comparative insights and best practices drawn from contexts often radically different from the Saudi capital. Rather than competing, these viewpoints complemented one another, producing a layered understanding of the site and its future potential.

The same philosophy informed the pedagogical approach adopted by the workshop mentors. Instead of imposing rigid methodologies or predefined conclusions, the programme privileged inspiration, critical reflection, and dialogue. Inputs were structured around case studies, precedents, and opportunities, leaving space for participants to interpret, challenge, and rework them collaboratively.

Luisa Bravo opened the thematic framework by addressing walkability, one of the three core topics of the workshop. Her contribution spanned scales and approaches, from tactical urbanism interventions to strategic planning frameworks, illustrating how walkability can act as a catalyst for public life, health, and spatial equity.



Photo by ISOCARP 61 congress host Riyadh Region Municipality.



Photo by ISOCARP 61 congress host Riyadh Region Municipality.

Luca De Stefano focused on climate, examining how both perceived and measurable climatic conditions influence movement, comfort, and experience in public space. Particular attention was given to how general climate principles can be adapted to the specific environmental and cultural context of Riyadh.

Mohamed Morsi Hassan led the exploration of social inclusion, moving beyond expert input to actively involve participants themselves. Through questions rather than answers, he brought everyday experiences to the foreground, allowing personal narratives to shape collective understanding.

Throughout the five-day process, these thematic strands were continuously interwoven through site visits, group work, discussions, and iterative design sessions. The structure of the workshop was carefully paced to balance immersion, reflection, and production, enabling ideas to evolve from initial observations to spatial strategies and concrete proposals.

The outcomes of this intensive collective effort were presented on the first day of the ISOCARP World Planning Congress. After five days of intense collaboration and shared experience, the work returned to the public stage in the form of posters and presentations, displayed in the garden of the National Museum where the Congress took place. What began in a ballroom concluded in an open setting, symbolically reflecting the transition from introduction to contribution.



Photos by ISOCARP 61 congress host Riyadh Region Municipality.

Riyadh's Majlis

Creating Spaces for gathering and fun

Group 1

Introduction:

We were a diverse group of local and international participants with different backgrounds and perspectives, brought together by a shared goal to give back to the city of Riyadh, particularly the historic Ad-Dirah area. Over one week, we conducted research and explored best practices, beginning with field visits on the first day to understand existing conditions. From the second to the fourth day, we focused on walkability, climate, and social cohesion through thematic lectures, group discussions, and daily checkpoint presentations. On the final day, we synthesized our findings into practical recommendations and developed a poster to be presented at the World Planning Congress.

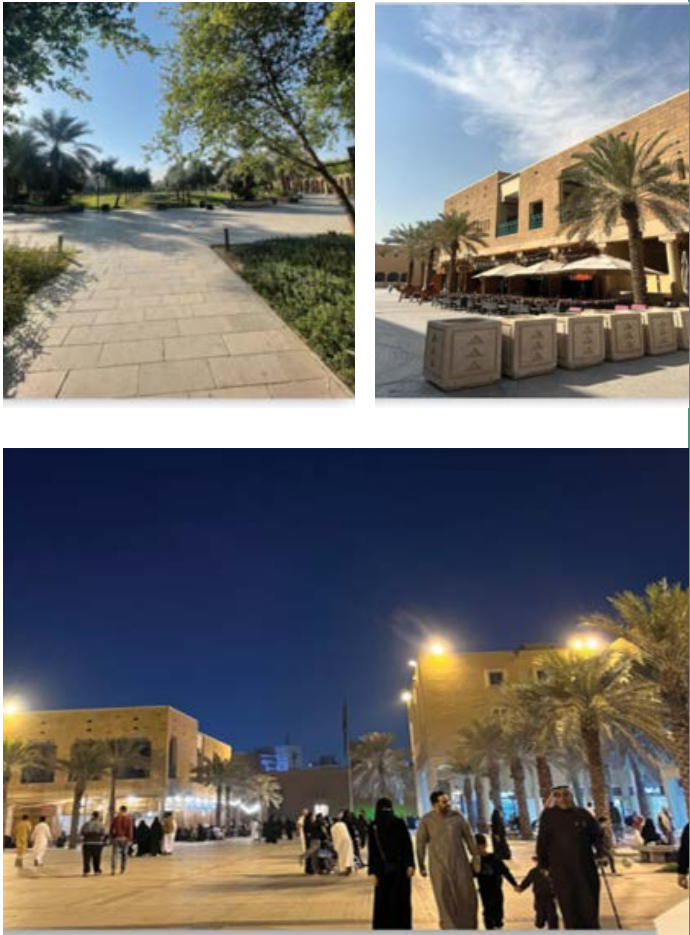
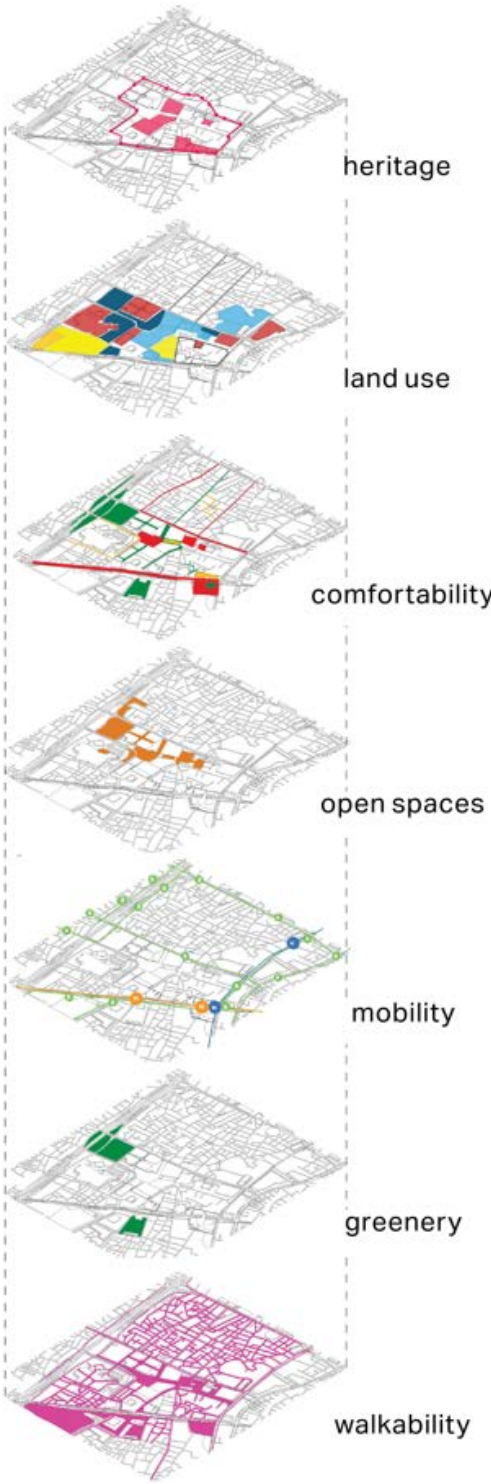


Reserach/Analysis:

Understanding Our Site

We initiated our analysis by addressing guiding questions: what is currently happening in the area and what elements are missing. Based on these reflections, we conducted both a SWOT analysis and a spatial analysis. We identified that Ad-Dirah possesses significant strengths, not only as a historical landmark but also as an active urban hub for Riyadh's residents, and as a strategic area aligned with Saudi Vision 2030 to enhance tourism. However, we also recognized several key challenges, including extreme climatic conditions, the presence of informal settlements, and limited vegetation. To support our assessment, we mapped seven thematic layers. This allowed us to develop a well-grounded concept for the proposed intervention.

STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES	
Historical Center	Good Accessibility	Attractions Lacking	Less Vegetation
Strategic Location	Open Space	Slums Detract	
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
Saudi 2030 Vision	Utilizing Technologies	Ongoing Construction	Growing Volume of Vehicles
Urban Renewal Projects		Extreme Climate	



Proposal/Concept:

Following a comprehensive understanding of the site, we identified two main findings related to social cohesion: the strong cultural preference of residents to gather and the significance of Ad-Dirah as a historic district. And then we adopted "Riyadh's Majlis" as the concept. The Majlis represents a space for sharing and social interaction, designed to provide an attractive and inclusive environment for community gathering. The proposal aims to build upon the past while bridging future possibilities, creating a lasting emotional connection with the place.



مجلس الرياض

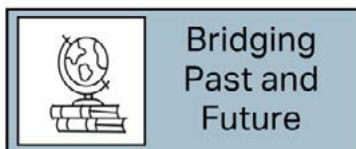
Riyadh's Majlis



Playful
Discovery



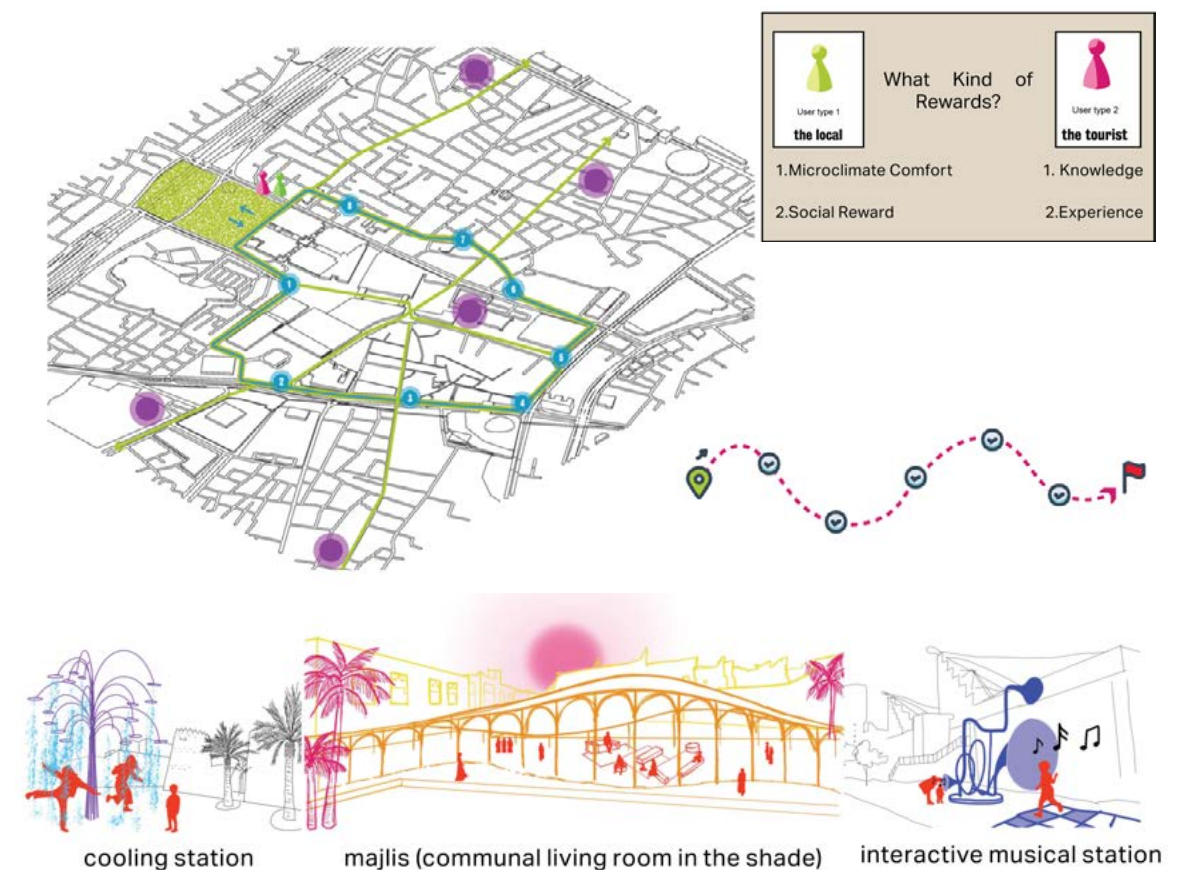
Comfortable
Collective
Experience



Bridging
Past and
Future

General Strategy

Gamification serves as our experiential approach, grounded in the belief that people are inherently motivated to explore, play, and achieve through a meaningful journey. We propose reactivating the historic fortress and establishing a circuit of diverse activities designed to create a playful and engaging experience for both local residents and tourists. Through this journey, they gain value and enjoyment at each stage of the experience.



Conclusion and Reflections:

Our participation as ISOCARP Young Planning Professionals (YPP) marked a transformative milestone in our professional development. Engaging directly with the urban challenges of Saudi Arabia provided us with a deeper understanding of planning in hot-climate contexts, particularly in relation to thermal comfort and climate resilience. This experience enabled us to move beyond theoretical knowledge and apply practical, climate-responsive solutions in collaboration with a diverse cohort of international peers and experienced Saudi planners.

Beyond technical learning, the programme significantly strengthened our cross-cultural communication and leadership skills. Working in a fast-paced, multicultural environment required adaptability, collaboration, and a high level of emotional intelligence. The opportunity to present our work to an international audience on World Planning Congress further enhanced our confidence and public speaking abilities. In addition, the program expanded our professional networks, fostered meaningful international friendships, and offered valuable exposure to Riyadh and its vibrant urban environment.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that the YPP programme is a highly valuable opportunity for early-career planners. It deserves to be sustained and expanded as a platform that empowers young professionals to explore urban planning practices across the world, providing a creative and experimental space to learn, reflect, and continuously improve.



Sensing the souks

A sense of place shaped through sensory experiences for an enhanced sense of walkability and likeability in Ad Dirah

Group 2

Introduction:

The Isocarp's Young Planning Professionals' Workshop 2026, Designing for Walkability and Liveability: Multi-Scalar Public Space Strategies in Riyadh was conducted between 24–28 November 2025 in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The focus was on the Ad Dirah District, one of Riyadh's oldest and most significant urban areas. The three thematic pillars framed the analysis and design work were:

Walkability, addressing pedestrian continuity, safety, comfort, and accessibility;

Climate, focusing on thermal comfort, shading, ventilation, and environmental adaptation;

Social Cohesion, emphasizing inclusivity, cultural continuity, and opportunities for interaction.

Al Al Dirah District is one of the oldest and most historically significant urban areas within the city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The district forms a key part of the city's historic core and continues to play an important role in administrative, cultural, and commercial activities. This section provides an overview of its location, characteristics, and current urban context.

It contains key landmarks such as Al Masmak Fortress, traditional souks, mosques, and governmental institutions. The north part of the site is densely inhabited. Historically, the district functioned as a compact, pedestrian-oriented environment structured around markets, courtyards, and shaded passages. Spatial proximity supported social interaction, economic exchange, and cultural continuity.

Over time, modernization and infrastructural expansion have disrupted this logic. Wide roads and zoning separation have introduced physical and perceptual barriers within the district. Despite these challenges, Ad Dirah continues to attract a diverse user base, including local residents, workers, and foreign visitors. This underscores the importance of designing inclusive and legible public spaces capable of accommodating varied temporal, cultural, and functional patterns.



Masmak Fortress



Residential street in the Northern part of the site



The clothes market



Alsafat Square

The project was defined as much by the process of collaboration as by the proposals that were produced. The workshop had a participation of thirty planning professionals working in different specialities in architecture and planning.

It was a good mix of fifteen international from all over the world and fifteen local Saudi professionals. We were organised into mixed teams of six participants, with a good balance of internationals and locals in each group.

This structure created an environment in which diverse professional backgrounds, and personal perspectives were continuously brought into dialogue. Group 2 was composed of Iva Stefani from Albania, Sean Meyer from South Africa, Graziella Boudy from Lebanon, Oussama Rouijel from Morocco, Olla Mahmoud and Wael Alshmarhi from Saudi Arabia. Part of the challenges of a workshop like this, besides the project task, is also finding a working language and collaborative language with strangers you have never met before.

The help of the Local Saudi professionals was crucial. They guided us during the site visit and shared their contextual insights into everyday life in Al Dirah, including social customs, urban rhythms, and informal spatial uses. These perspectives frequently changed our initial perceptions. The input of the locals became even more important because due to the constraint of the limited time of the workshop a deeper study o was not possible.

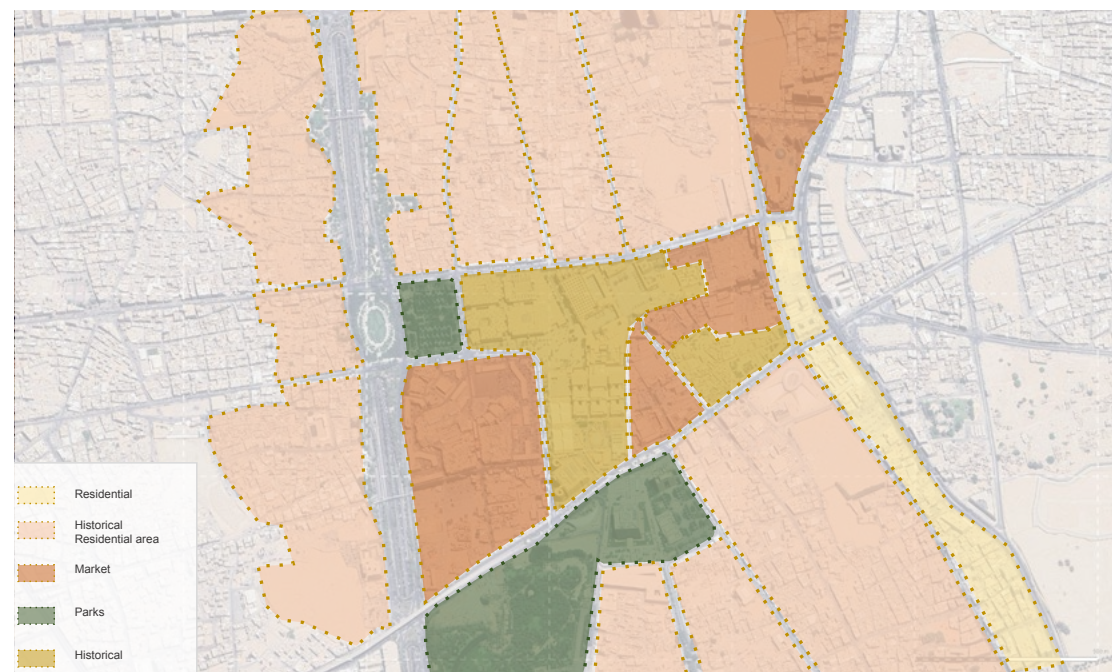
Reserach/Analysis:

The first visit on the side was conducted on the first day of the workshop. Using the observations and the information from the maps we were able to conduct the spatial analysis in order to understand Ad Dirah's urban structure, challenges, and opportunities.

We started with the Functionality blocks. The functional zoning maps indicate that the study area is characterized by a mixed-use urban fabric dominated by residential

We started with the Functionality Blocks.

The functional zoning maps indicate that the study area is characterized by a mixed-use urban fabric dominated by residential areas, markets, parks and historical zones. Residential uses occupy the majority of the site, particularly toward the outer edges, while commercial and market activities are concentrated in the central and southern portions. Several historical buildings and districts are embedded within the urban fabric, often adjacent to markets and religious structures. This close proximity reinforces the cultural and economic importance of the area but also contributes to spatial congestion and land-use conflicts.



Functionality blocks map

Afterwards we studied the Street Hierarchy and Accessibility

The street hierarchy analysis identifies a clear distinction between main arterial roads, secondary paved roads, and narrow alleys. Major roads frame the site and provide regional connectivity, while internal streets are predominantly narrow and irregular. Public transport infrastructure is present, including bus stations and metro stations, primarily located along main corridors. However, internal accessibility relies heavily on alleys that are not optimized for high pedestrian or vehicular volumes, resulting in circulation inefficiencies.

Climatic analysis highlights dominant wind directions, which affect environmental comfort, particularly in exposed open areas. The sun path analysis shows extensive sun-exposed zones, especially across large open spaces and main streets, with limited shading. These conditions negatively impact pedestrian comfort during the day and emphasize the need for climatic mitigation strategies such as shading devices, vegetation, and orientation-sensitive design.



Street Hierarchy and Accessibility map



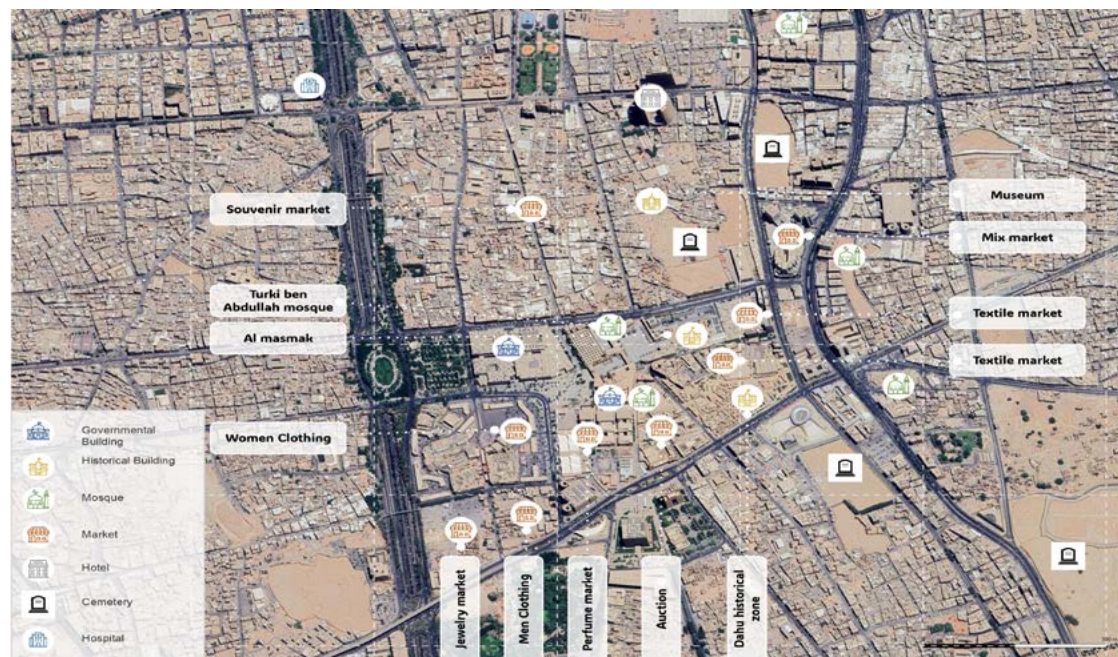
Climatic analysis map



Open space map

The open space map reveals a fragmented network of public parks, green spaces, and open areas. While some significant green spaces exist, particularly toward the southern edge of the site. Most are poorly connected and unevenly distributed. Car parking areas occupy a noticeable portion of open land, often at the expense of pedestrian-friendly public spaces. This fragmentation limits the usability and continuity of the open space system. The voids analysis shows numerous underutilized or inactive parcels scattered throughout the site. These voids interrupt the continuity of the urban fabric and contribute to visual and functional discontinuity. Despite this, they represent latent opportunities for infill development, public spaces, or community-oriented functions.

The landmarks map identifies a dense concentration of markets, mosques, historical buildings, museums, hotels, and governmental facilities. Key landmarks such as major mosques, historical zones, and specialized markets (textile, perfume, jewelry, clothing, souvenirs) function as strong activity generators. However, their clustering without adequate spatial hierarchy intensifies congestion and pedestrian-vehicular conflict. We called them the “Hidden Gems”, because of their potential as tourist landmarks and as reaching them can be complicated especially for visitors and tourists.



The landmarks map

After concluding the spatial analysis we understood the main challenges the site is facing. One of the most prominent issues is zoning fragmentation, where residential, commercial, historical, and institutional uses are interwoven without clear spatial transitions.

This condition is reinforced by a noticeable disconnection within the urban fabric, caused by major arterial roads, irregular street patterns, and vacant or underutilized parcels that interrupt continuity. Public and green spaces are similarly disconnected, limiting their accessibility and reducing their effectiveness as social and environmental assets. Climatic challenges further exacerbate these issues, as large portions of the site, particularly commercial zones, streets, and open areas, are heavily exposed to solar radiation with no shading, resulting in poor thermal comfort for pedestrians. In addition, the area exhibits a strong dependency on private vehicles, even within narrow internal streets and alleys that are not designed to accommodate car traffic.

This car-oriented behavior contributes to congestion, safety concerns, and inefficient use of public space. Parking is inadequately planned and dispersed, frequently encroaching on pedestrian areas and open spaces, thereby diminishing the overall quality of the urban environment.

Despite these challenges, the site contains significant opportunities that can be used to enhance its urban performance. The presence of numerous underutilized spaces and “hidden gems,” particularly near historical landmarks and within market districts, offers strong potential for urban regeneration and adaptive reuse. These areas can be transformed into active public spaces that respond to both local community needs and tourism demands.

The high concentration of landmarks and commercial activities provides a foundation for establishing stronger pedestrian networks and urban linkages, especially by reconnecting fragmented public and green spaces.

Furthermore, the existing voids and open areas create opportunities to introduce climate-responsive design strategies, such as shaded corridors and improved streetscapes, which would significantly enhance environmental comfort.

Proposal/Concept:

By addressing connectivity, walkability, and public space quality, the site has the potential to evolve into a more cohesive, vibrant, and human-scaled urban environment.

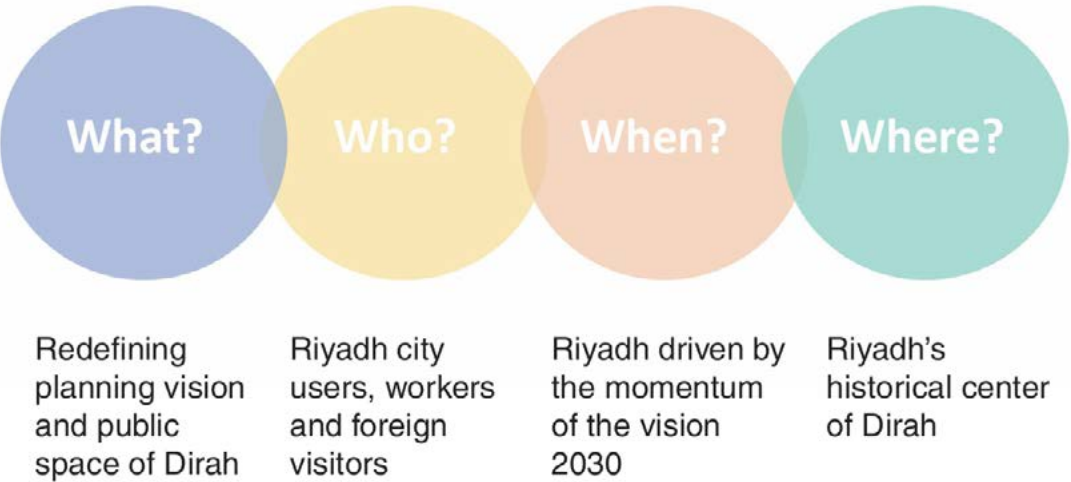
We used a structured WH-process asking:

What is happening,

Who the area serves,

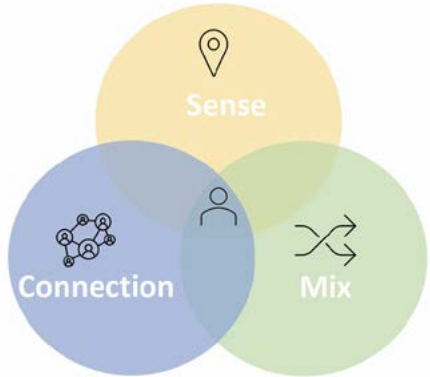
When activities occur,

Where connections and movements take place.



WHs process diagram

This method allowed us to move from understanding workshop pillars (Walkability, Climate, Social Cohesion) to identifying the deeper spatial logics of the place. From this analysis, our three guiding principles naturally emerged: Connection as the site's underlying network, Sense as its experiential and perceptual identity, and Mix as the dynamic interplay of uses and communities that give the area its character.



Guiding planning principles

Connection addresses how spaces link people, activities, and urban systems. Connectivity shapes how we move, navigate, and interact with the city. In the context of Ad Dirah, connection is not limited to infrastructural linkage but includes spatial continuity, urban integration and social accessibility. This includes prioritizing walkable routes that link key landmarks, markets, mosques, museums, and public institutions into a coherent spatial system. By strengthening physical, social, and digital networks, we create seamless, legible, and accessible urban experiences.

Spatial continuity: Clear paths, wayfinding, visual cues, and intuitive movement systems that help people orient themselves and navigate with ease.

Urban integration: Networks, multi-layered mobility and social networks that integrate transport, public space, and community flows into a cohesive whole

Sense refers to how space is perceived, remembered, and felt. In historic districts such as Ad Dirah, sense is deeply intertwined with cultural memory, sensory richness, and symbolic meaning. The planning principle of sense seeks to protect and enhance these qualities while accommodating contemporary use.

Sense emphasizes the emotional and sensory dimensions of place. It defines how people experience, interpret, and develop attachment to their surroundings. Two key dimensions come into play:

Sensorial Experience: The integration of sound, light, texture, and climate to create immersive and engaging spatial atmospheres. The planning framework integrates sensory mapping as a design tool, using experiential cues to guide movement, mark transitions, and create memorable sequences along pedestrian routes. This approach reframes walkability as an embodied experience rather than a purely functional metric.

Sense of Place: Sense also encompasses emotional attachment and belonging. Public spaces that feel safe, legible, and culturally resonant encourage repeated use and long-term stewardship. By strengthening the experiential quality of streets and squares, the planning vision supports a sense of ownership among local users while offering visitors an authentic and engaging encounter with the district's heritage.

Mixed environments bring together uses, people, and lifestyles. A balanced mix enhances vibrancy, inclusivity, and long-term resilience. From a spatial perspective, mix promotes multifunctional environments where different activities overlap rather than segregate.

Mixed-use buildings, adaptable ground floors, and flexible public spaces support continuous activity throughout the day and evening. This temporal layering enhances perceived safety, economic resilience, and social vibrancy.

This guiding principle brings together the social and spatial dimensions of planning:

Mixed Use (spatial): Combining living, working, leisure, and civic functions to create active, multifunctional districts.

Mixed Generations (social): Designing for all age groups through inclusive spaces that support interaction, care, and shared community life. Inclusive design strategies ensure that public spaces accommodate users of different ages, genders, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.

Connection, Sense, and Mix function as an integrated system. The effectiveness of the planning vision depends on their simultaneous application across scales. Together, these principles translate analytical insights into a coherent and human-centered approach to public space and urban regeneration.

While the guiding planning principles clarified what needed to be addressed, they did not yet explain how these interventions would be perceived by users. To close this gap, we shifted our focus from spatial to human experience.

We asked how connection, sense, and mix are actually lived in everyday movement through the district. We position the human body and perception at the centre of the design process. This shift revealed that the effectiveness of planning principles ultimately depends on how they are felt, interpreted, and remembered by users.

To articulate human experience in a structured and analytical way, we introduced the concept of a layered human experience, organised through five interrelated sensory layers:

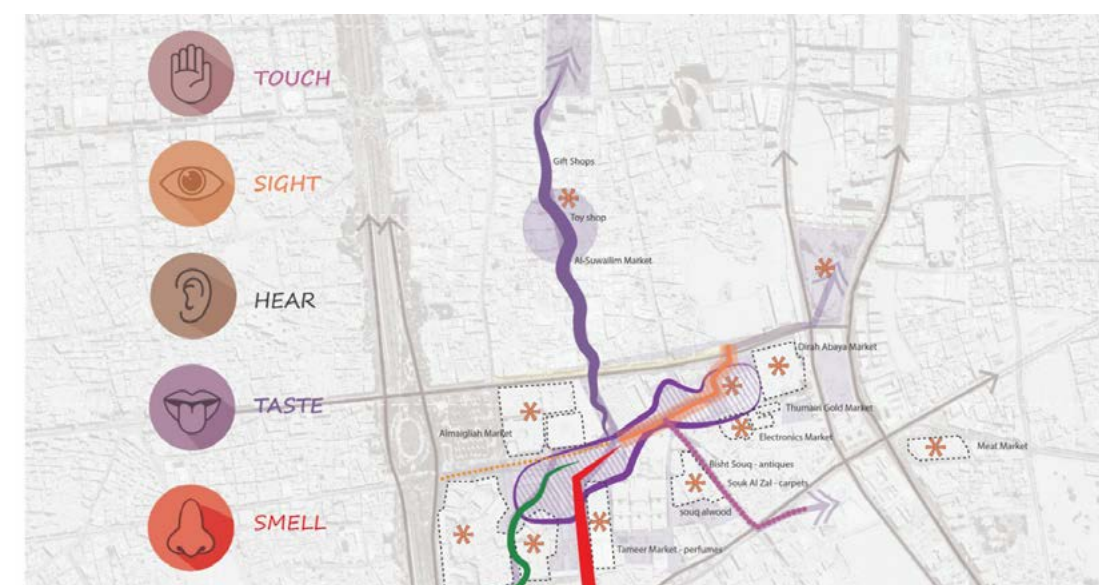
Sight: visual landmarks, spatial enclosure, light and shade, material continuity

Smell: spices, incense, food preparation, and traditional materials

Hearing: market voices, negotiation, calls to prayer, ambient urban sound

Taste: food culture and informal consumption practices embedded in the souk

Touch: surface textures, thermal comfort, shade, airflow, and material temperature



Connecting through sensory experiences

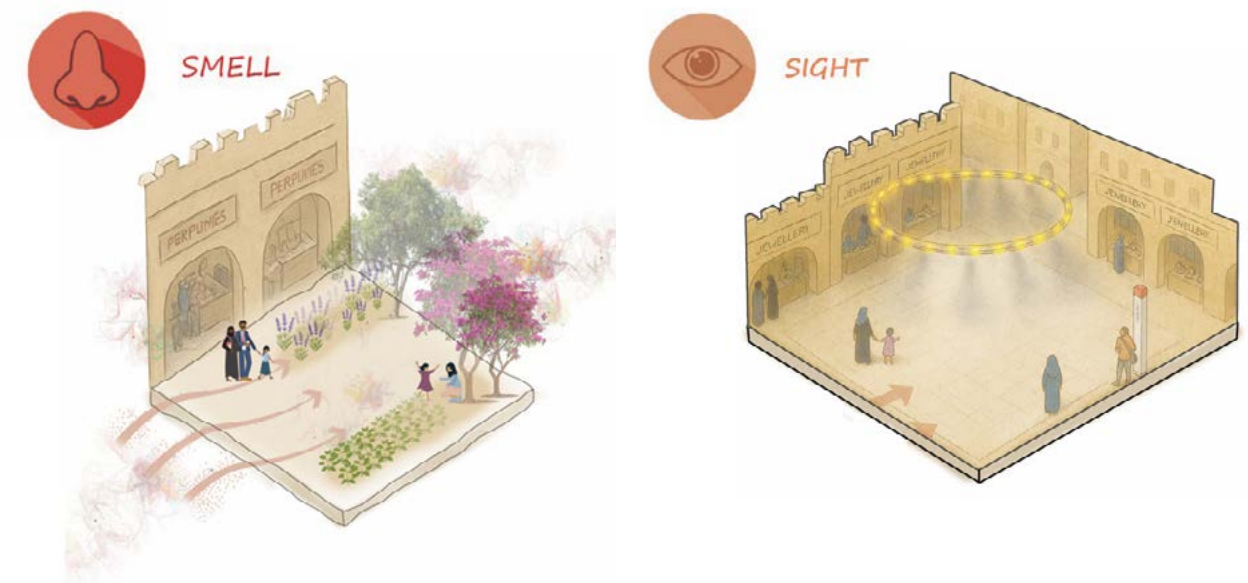
Rather than isolated interventions, we focus on sensory continuity. This means extending the market's sensory richness into adjacent streets through shading sequences, material transitions, sound gradients, and activity spill-over. Sensory continuity strengthens walkability by making movement intuitive and engaging.

From site observation and analysis, we identified the market as the heart of the site.

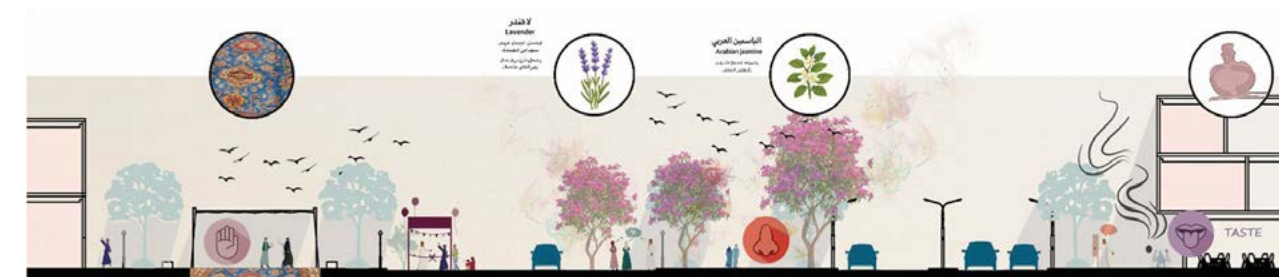
Nevertheless, the project remains conceptual. Implementation would require coordination among public authorities, stakeholders, and local communities, as well as phased investment and governance mechanisms. These considerations point toward future research and practice-oriented work.



The incorporation of the sensory experience in the site



The incorporation of the sensory experience in the site



The incorporation of the sensory experience in the site (section)

Conclusion and Reflections:

To end it, the Young Planning Professionals' Workshop in Riyadh was a great experience. Not only meeting Planning professionals from all over the world that hopefully might result in future collaborations, but also having the opportunity to work in an exciting environment like Riyadh. The city is experiencing a rapid urban transformation, defined by ambition and modernization. Working in this contest was one of the most interesting parts. Even though the experience was very intensive, being only five days, it was very enjoyable.



Workshop participants during the site visit

COOLING BATN AL-HAWIS

Pushing exploration to improve climate resilience and social cohesion in the heart of Riyadh

Group 3

Introduction:

Rising extreme hazards, including heat, rainfall, and drought, and fast-growing urban growth are increasing the vulnerabilities of communities that live in, visit, and drive the cultural landscape and economic development in the heart of the city. To mitigate heat-related risks, the revitalization of the traditional residential fabric in the Al Dirah District is essential.

This approach moves beyond monument preservation to promote alternative modes of transit, and foster exploration, and civic appropriation.

Al Dirah is more than a district; it is the city's heart. It is a complex ecosystem where the imposing history of the Al Masmak Fortress meets the kinetic energy of the souqs and the modern efficiency of the new metro system.

However, it faces a critical paradox: while major landmarks and transit hubs have seen significant investment, the inner arteries and alleys -the district's literal capillaries- have not yet received the same careful consideration. This infrastructure gap isolates the traditional residential fabric from the public realm, creating thermal discomfort and physical barriers that prevent residents and visitors from comfortably, safely, accessibly, and walkably experiencing the daily life of the district.

This infrastructure gap isolates the traditional residential fabric from the public realm, creating thermal discomfort and physical barriers that prevent residents and visitors from comfortably, safely, accessibly, and walkably experiencing the daily life of the district.

The difference in development focus and the difference in urban comfort is like the difference between night and day. Literally.

During the day only a hand full of people inhabit the streets in the old city centre. This is a pity, because it is such a beautifully designed place. It left part of our group (the internationals) feeling a bit lost in the between grand monumental buildings in the hot desert climate. After sunset the area changed completely. During the night the city centre becomes alive with families and groups of friends. The streets fill up, visitors enjoy themselves and suddenly there are a lot of activities. We set out to explore possibilities to make the day-time more lively.

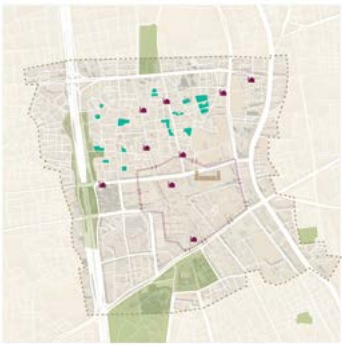


Reserach/Analysis:

Social, spatial, climate and historical indings that lead to our proposal are visible on this page.



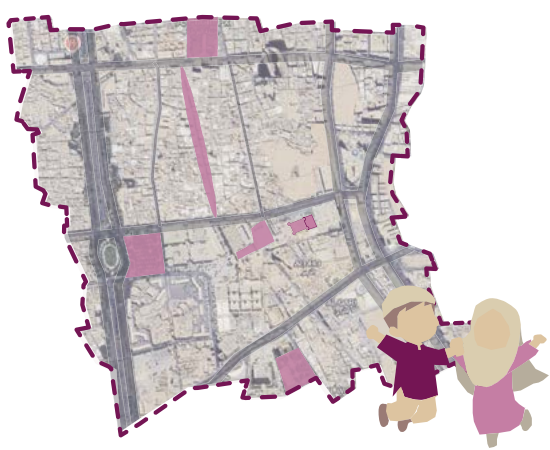
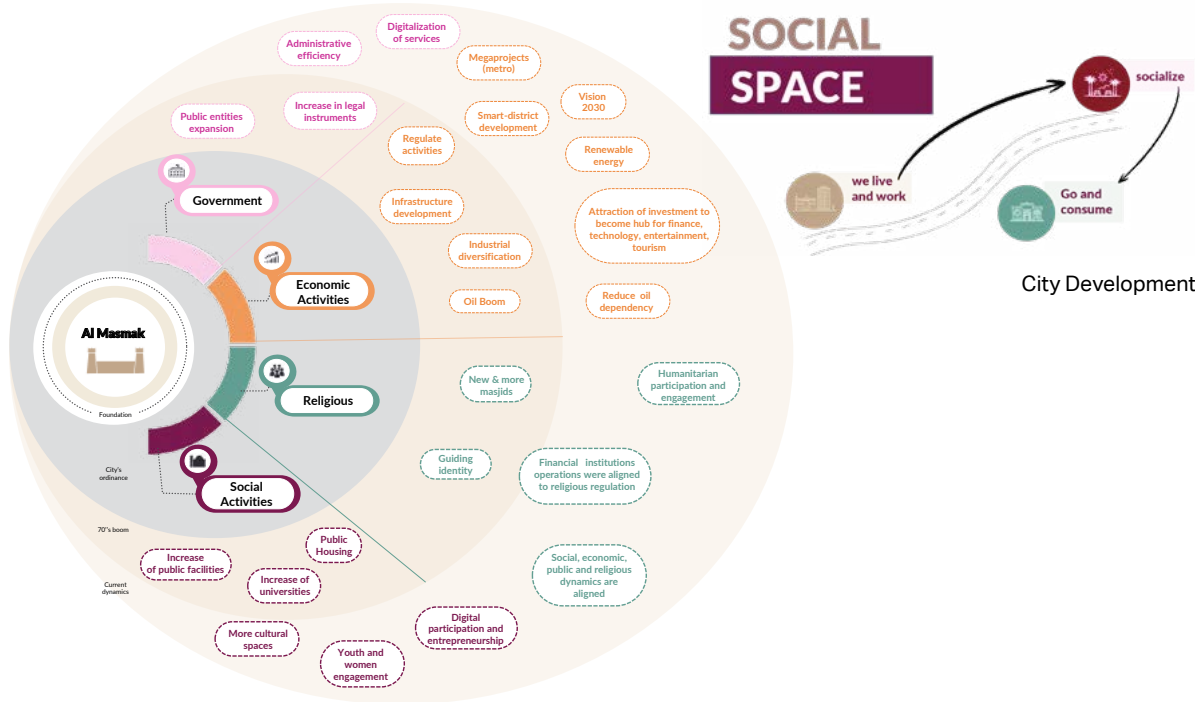
Mobility



Destinations



Heat-Map



Child-friendly places



Open spaces for women



Adult social-interaction places



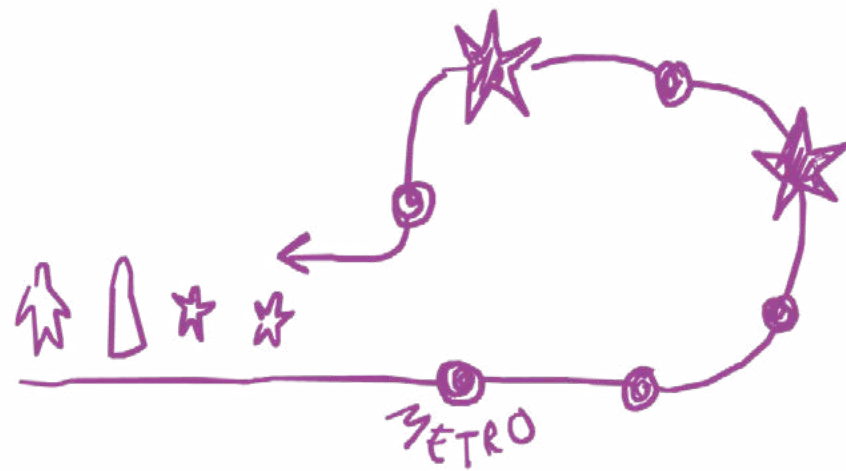
Destinations for the elderly

Proposal/Concept:

Masmak is hot! Cool down in Al-Bat'ha

Our design proposal focuses on the inner arteries of Al Bat'ha, as the next step in Al Dirah's urban development. It promotes climate resilience, social cohesion, and walkability; key objectives of the YPP workshop.

We learn that the centre is used as a place where people go to with an itinerary. Most families have a few activities planned on their visit. Their visit can be seen as a necklace with many different beads that together make a full day of activity.

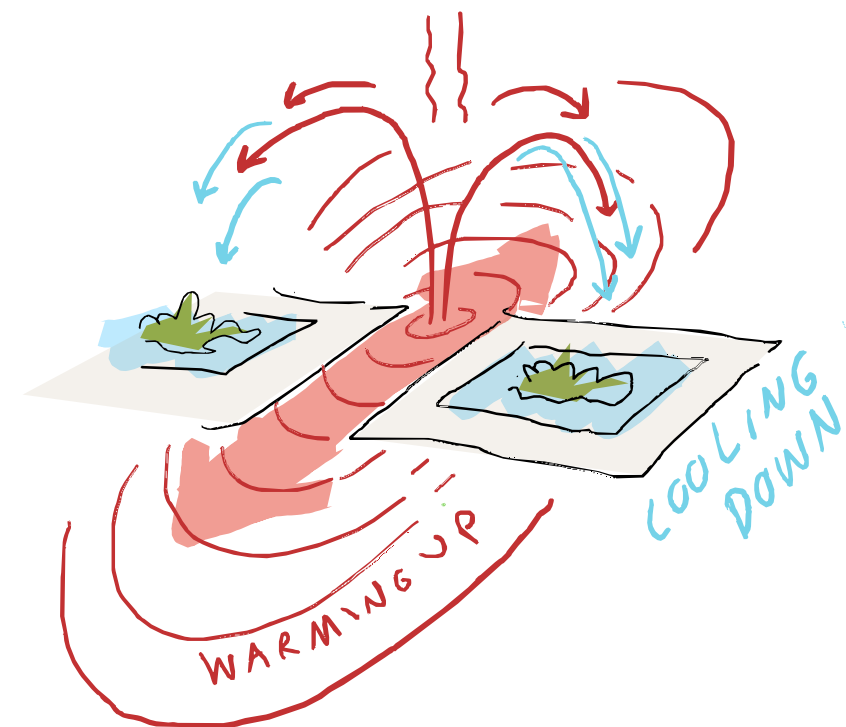


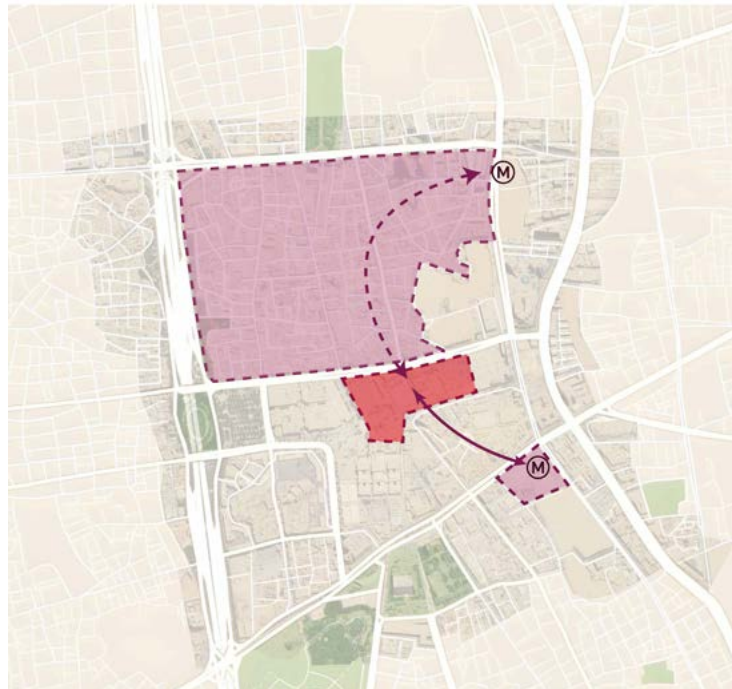
We asked ourselves the question: What if, Al Bat'ha had much more to offer to people visiting Masmak? Would they extend their stay? Would they explore a larger area by foot? Can shop owners benefit from this economically? Who inhabits this space, and who is allowed to call it their home?

Batn Al-Hawi, Heritage as a Cooling Engine

The project proposes a comprehensive reactivation strategy focused on the adaptive reuse of Al Dirah's traditional housing called 'Batn Al Hawi' to be a catalyst for urban resilience. By enhancing these structures, it is expected to:

- Activate breathable pathways that encourage alternative transit and human-scale exploration
- Leveraging the inherent passive cooling wisdom of traditional architecture to mitigate the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect
- Ensuring that Al Dirah is both adapted as a destination with urban comfort to visit, but a resilient neighbourhood to inhabit
- link important cultural places, like the first municipal building in Riyadh, Masjids, Al Suwailim street, and the old entrance to the historic city centre





Invite to explore



Traditional Batn Al-Hawi



Enhanced cooling capability

Scales of Batn Al-Hawi

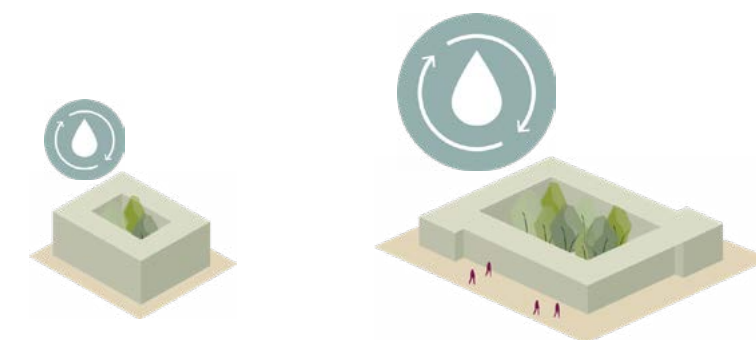
Our re-imagined Batn Al-Hawis have two sizes. The small typology represents a private single-family housing unit, while the medium hosts public courtyards and are inhabited by multiple families. The medium courtyards are connected and form a new fabric of routes to increase comfortable walkability. Together they serve as Cooling-fountains that create a circulation of both air and people.

All courtyard gardens are part of a 'Planting Lab' for Riyadh. The courtyard gardens are irrigated with grey water harvested from the housing units that encase the courtyards. This gives the opportunity to experiment with different types of planting communities based on the available water.

Cooling Batn Al Hawis interventions are well-defined spaces, they invite people in by the public program in the plinth and by interactive art at their entrances. They offer seating, vegetation, act as a climate refuge, and can offer public restrooms.

By implementing these planning interventions, the District will be able to increase its heat resilience capacities significantly, activate a wide range of social spaces and livelihood opportunities, effectively connecting modern social and economic dynamics to the historical heart and foundations of the city.

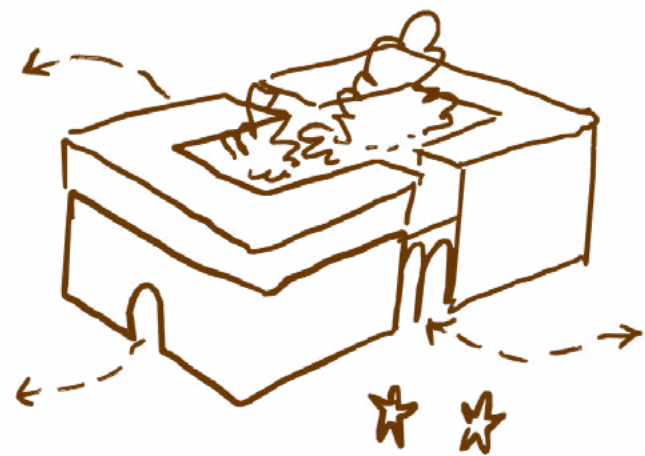
The Batn Al-Hawi principles of air flow for urban comfort are used to give space for visitors and locals to explore, through creating a network of cooling places that offers a different mobility to users who transit and visit on foot. They link important cultural places, like the first municipal building in Riyadh, Masjids, Al Suwailim street, and the old entrance to the historic city centre.



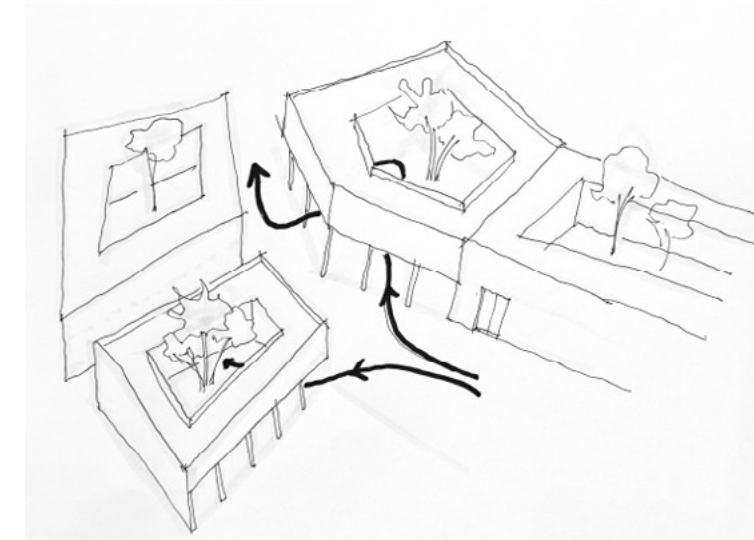
Greywater use as basis for the 'Planting Lab'.



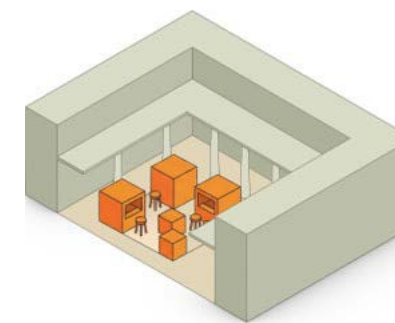
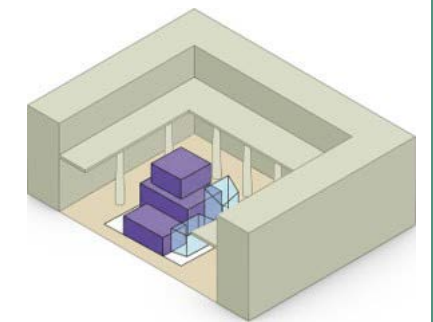
Small



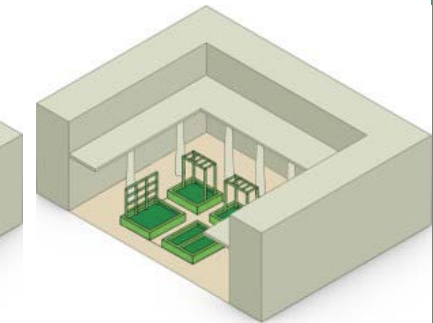
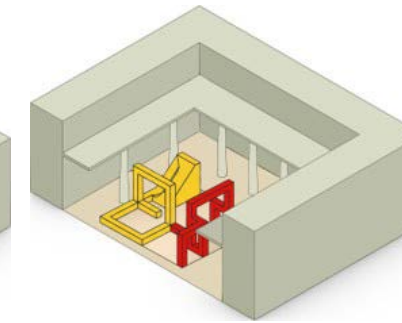
Medium



Circulation

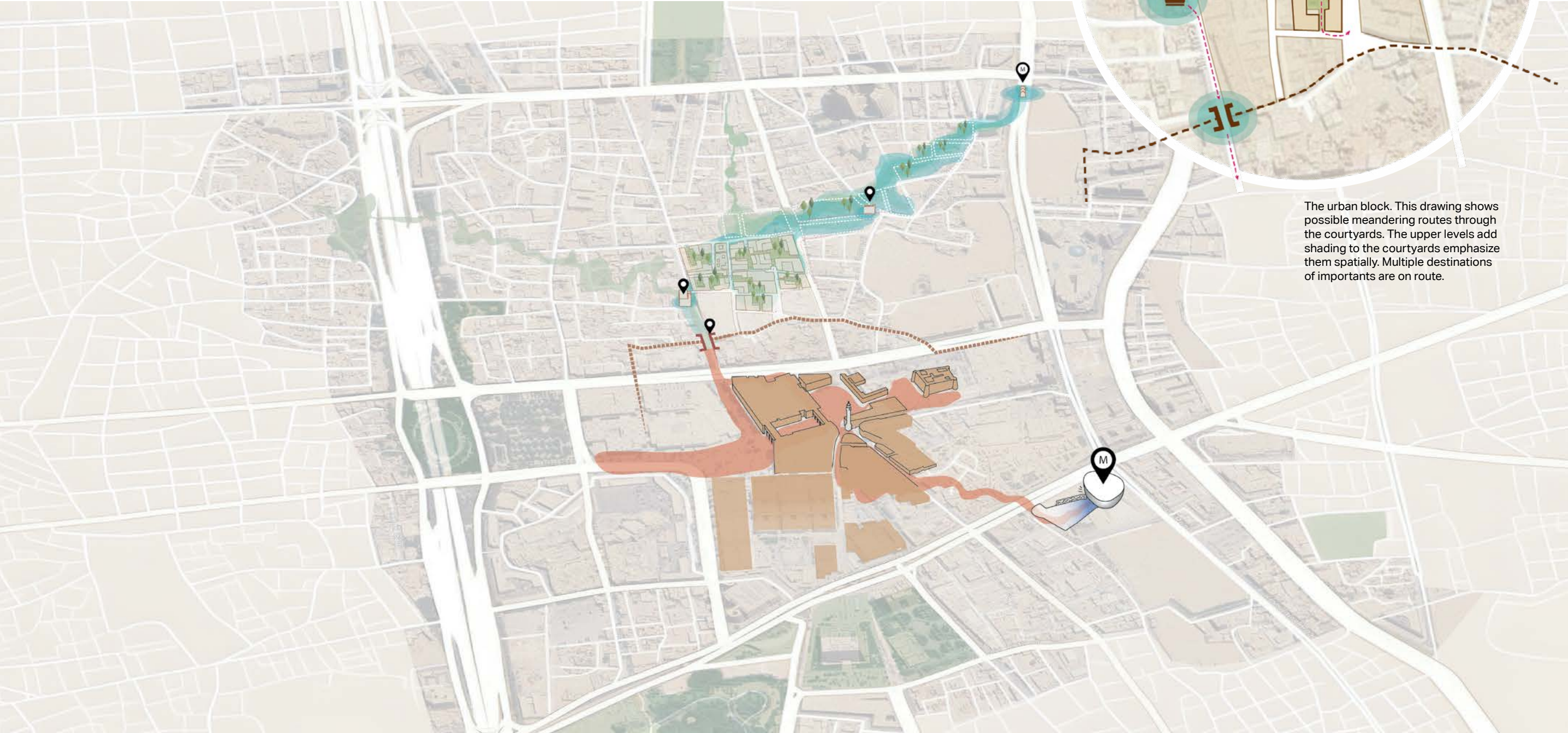


Diverse public program



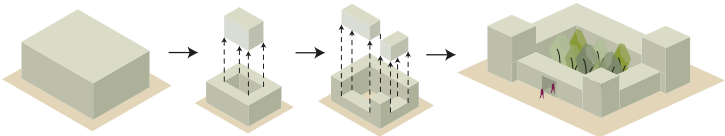
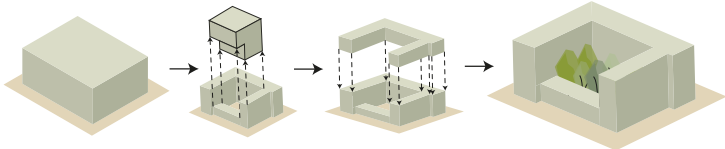
A Cooling Route to Explore

Adaptive reuse of Al Dirah's traditional housing called 'Batn Al Hawi'.



The urban block. This drawing shows possible meandering routes through the courtyards. The upper levels add shading to the courtyards emphasize them spatially. Multiple destinations of importants are on route.

Masterplan. Instead of a tour from metro to Masmak, the route is extended with courtyards fit for exploration both during the day and in the evening.



Cut and Add building mass to create courtyards of various sizes.

Strategic Action Route

The following roadmap outlines a scalable approach for the municipality and relevant government agencies to revitalize the Al Dirah district through a series of phased, high-impact actions.

- Participatory Mapping - Socio-spatial mapping of local usage patterns and perceived barriers
- Drawing the mobility Spine – design a shaded connectivity route through the sikka (alleyway) network linking Metro hubs to the historic core
- Resilience Assessment – elaborate a comprehensive diagnostic of social vulnerability (per population group) and infrastructure heat-stress capacity.
- Thermal Hotspots - deployment of tactical cooling hubs and climate refuge interventions along primary pedestrian paths.
- Asset Structuring -development of legal and financial instruments for private-sector participation, funding, and interaction in Batn Al Hawi (courtyard) revitalization.
- Adaptive Portfolio -A curated catalog of scalable, context-sensitive design solutions for traditional building typologies.
- Governance Mechanism - Establishment of a multisectoral platform for long-term monitoring, impact tracking, and improvement.

Dilemmas

The following aspects were also mentioned for the feasibility of the proposal:

- Lack of women transiting in the alleys of the district
- Scarce public lighting infrastructure
- Interaction between current inhabitants and visitors
- Intimacy of the households that have public spaces in the courtyards
- Investment typologies (public, subsidies, public-private, private funds)
- Gentrification vs. social livelihood
- Ownership of abandoned Batn Al Hawi's in the area

The operationalization of this framework ensures a bridge between high-level national policy and local-scale inclusivity, preventing the marginalization of traditional communities and the northern neighbourhood's current users amidst rapid urban growth. To ensure long-term viability, the project's success is predicated on four pillars: collaboration and dialogue among parties, cross-sectoral work, stage-driven, and a people-centred approach.

Conclusion and Reflections:

Lukas: "An intense, inspiring, and truly eye-opening journey."

"Working side by side with planners and experts from around the world reminded me how powerful collective thinking can be when designing more resilient, human-centred cities."

Abdulah: "A valuable participation... and an inspiring experience I am truly proud of."

"I had the chance to work with an outstanding group (a family) that provided me with an new perspective on integrating historic districts with modern planning methods."

Nada: "A very rewarding 5-day experience that left me with a renewed perspective on the future of planning, new ideas to contemplate, and most importantly, very dear friends."

"Grateful for the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration, the learning, and the inspiring group of planners I had the chance to meet and work with."

Mohammed: "The tour through Downtown Riyadh offered a vibrant cultural experience, blending local flavors like traditional batn al-hawi with visits to key landmarks."

"Sharing the journey with international guests made the experience even richer, adding a lively exchange of stories, tastes, and perspectives."

Hannah: "Our team was in sync. We were in an inspiring process of synchronisation and updating our plan and ourselves throughout the workshop."

"I'm actually quite amazed at the level of detail our group was able to imagine in a (very) compressed timeframe."

Stephanie: "This formula is perfect for stepping up for resilient futures and demonstrates that resilience is only possible with people and nature at the centre."

"A truly gratifying experience. The program enabled our team to push boundaries, go beyond theory and aesthetics, and deliver a human-centred and tailor-made proposal for such a vibrant and modern city."



An eye-opening experience

The Young Planning Professionals Program (YPP) at the 61st ISOCARP International Society of City and Regional Planners World Planning Congress in Riyadh, was an intense, inspiring, and truly eye-opening journey. 31 individuals from 15 countries collaborated in 5 teams with the goal of making the Al Dirah district in Riyadh more walkable, socially cohesive and climate resilient.

The workshop offered a site-visit and three thematic lectures, which created balance between structure and flexibility, fostering an experience that reshaped our understanding of urban challenges and their hidden potential.

The way the program was structured broke the ice from the very beginning, enabling participants to form friendships that extended well beyond the program hours. Early on, a strong sense of synergy emerged in how we worked together - one that inspired us to experience the city collectively, both as hosts and as guests. We wanted to engage with the city through a shared lens, building an itinerary that allowed us to exchange perspectives and create meaningful, shared experiences.

Driven by curiosity

From day one our team was driven by curiosity. We were eager to share ideas, doubts, our experiences and occasionally mixed in our cultural backgrounds- each bringing in a different lens from which we tackled social and urban challenges. This exchange highlighted how we could revive the heart of Riyadh, considering the area's dynamics and the city's accelerated growth.

Syncing: A safe space for open discussions

We were in an inspiring process of synchronisation and updating our plan and ourselves throughout the workshop. Like any good team, we did not agree on everything from the start, but felt curious about each other's beliefs and understanding of the way space and programming influences people.

We created a safe-space with humour, to promote open discussions and greeted any topic proposed with equal curiosity and respect. It enabled us to voice our thoughts and hesitations during this process. Our different fields and contexts challenged our understanding of what people need to feel free, safe and comfortable in urban areas.

Discussing frames of mind, we challenged our own thoughts and each other's while bluntly being confronted with our own prejudice, and (sometimes) somewhat naive thoughts. This open process nurtured conversations that made the experience as well as the work more meaningful.

Simple is not that simple

The workshop method and our safe space helped form a very layered, multi-faceted concept. It is spatially quite a simple design idea, but will

need a community focused bottom-up municipal strategy to fully reach its potential.

This is both the strength and weakness of the concept we propose. The idea is easy enough to implement top-down, but we can imagine the urban resilience and the actual success of the plan in the long run will depend on the process.

Our plan confronts us with this duality in urban planning. It considers the importance of allowing more inhabitants to engage in the design process to resist sparking gentrification and resist the process of hollowing out the soul of neighbourhoods in urban renewal.

The speedy process in a nutshell

We travelled through two site visits, social and spatial analysis conclusions, asked ourselves two founding 'what if?' and translated our thoughts through each scale level of urban and landscape design into something simple and concrete.

We tested our beliefs spatially and can conclude that with this spatial frame we could be on the way to an understanding of how adapting the urban compositions on the neighbourhood scale could work to cool Riyadh, increase social cohesion, while embracing local, nature based, traditional (passive) building and urban principles.

How to continue?

Our conversations moved from the design of spaces and economic revitalization, to how our practice could be valuable for children, women, adults, the elderly, integration of new communities in Riyadh and community empowerment to future-oriented strategies.

As time progressed, discussions unfolded within the team that broadened our perspective and helped us discover feasibility characteristics that reach beyond complying with construction regulations, using technical jargon, or masking a problem with an aesthetic design. At some point we even started defining the planting communities we could implement and what would be needed in this participatory design.

Even though our final concept will not be implemented, the process itself, the discussions, the ideas, the collaboration, was incredibly valuable and enriching.

Thank you..

Lastly we would like to express our gratitude to Riyadh Region Municipality and ISOCARP as well as the organizers and workshop leaders for their tremendous efforts and outstanding organization. We cannot emphasize enough how fortunate we feel to have been a part of the YPP program in Riyadh.

Walk. Connect. Thrive

Public space as driver for Old-Riyadh's legacy

Group 4

Introduction:

We want to revitalize Al-Dirah, the historic core of the city. Our vision is to transform this heritage heart into a vibrant, liveable district through multi-scalar public space strategies. By focusing on three core pillars Heritage Promotion, Climate Resilience, and Social Cohesion the proposal seeks to ensure Al-Dirah remains a place where Riyadh's legacy continues to live.



Location Map

The Challenge: A Disconnected Core

Al-Dirah currently functions as two distinct zones: a Southern historical district rich in landmarks like Masmak Palace, and a Northern retail and wholesale hub.

Despite its cultural depth, the area faces significant urban challenges:

- **Climate Stress:** Key public spaces are exposed to extreme heat with insufficient shade and resting areas.
- **Fragmentation:** Major road systems like Al Imam Turki Ibn street prioritize cars over people, creating a physical and social disconnect between neighbourhoods.
- **Poor Pedestrian Infrastructure:** Disconnected pedestrian paths, a lack of wayfinding, and poor accessibility for all users limit the area's potential as a walkable destination.

The Strategy: Five Journeys of Transformation

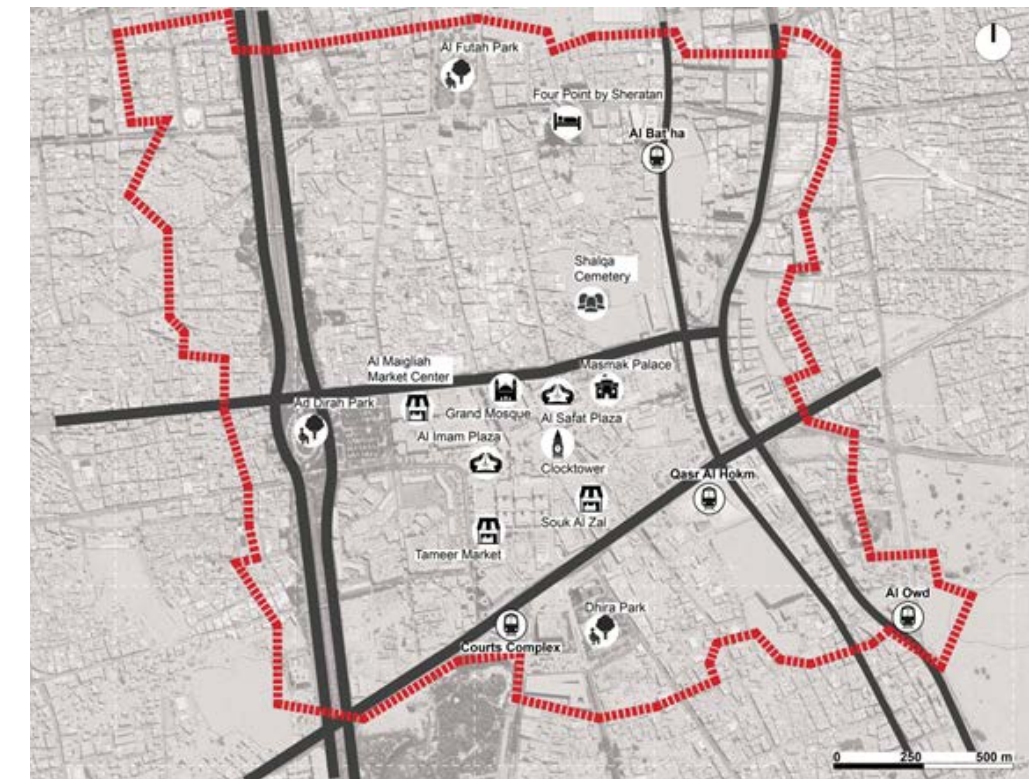
To address these issues, Group 4 proposes five integrated “Journeys” that operate across different scales:

1. **Bridging the Gap:** A proposed pedestrian underpass to provide a safe, climate-controlled, and integrated link between the North and South neighbourhoods.
2. **Climate-Responsive Plazas:** Enhancing the South neighbourhood by implementing shading, trees, and water features to boost thermal comfort and activate social gathering areas.
3. **Activating the Fabric:** Improving the historic alleyways through permeable pavement materials, limited car access, and the adaptive reuse of mud building ruins into traditional cafes.

Expected Outcomes

Through these interventions, Al-Dirah will transition from a car-dominated environment to a human-centric urban landmark. The expected impact includes improved pedestrian safety, increased local business opportunities, and a strengthened sense of community ownership, ensuring that the heart of Riyadh is not just a site for tourism, but a thriving space for daily life.

This section establishes the framework for the project, detailing the significance of the site and the specific goals of the Young Planning Professionals’ (YPP) Workshop



Site Map - Masmak District

Al-Dirah serves as the historic core of central Riyadh and the birthplace of the city's early beginnings. As the heart of Riyadh's story, it is a site of immense cultural value, housing iconic landmarks, traditional markets (souks), heritage gates, and narrow, historic streets. The district represents a unique intersection where Riyadh's legacy continues to live alongside modern urban development

Our group's intervention is guided by the theme "Designing for Walkability and Liveability". The primary objective is to develop multi-scalar public space strategies that transform Al-Dirah into a human-centric environment.

To achieve this, the project focuses on three key pillars:

- **Promote Walkability through Local Heritage:** Using the district's historic identity to create a unique and engaging pedestrian experience.
- **Enhance Climate Resilience:** Implementing design solutions that mitigate extreme heat and provide thermal comfort for users.
- **Strengthen Social Life:** Creating high-quality public spaces that encourage social interaction, daily cultural activities, and a sense of community ownership.

Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all solution, our methodology addresses the urban fabric at multiple levels:

1. **Macro-Scale (Connectivity):** Improving the relationship between the North and South neighbourhoods by overcoming major infrastructural barriers like the current road system.
2. **Meso-Scale (Public Spaces):** Activating plazas and key assembly points through shading, street furniture, sufficient shading, and water features.
3. **Micro-Scale (Alleyways & Buildings):** Enhancing the texture of the city through improved pavement materials, street furniture, and the adaptive reuse of existing mud structures

Reserach/Analysis:

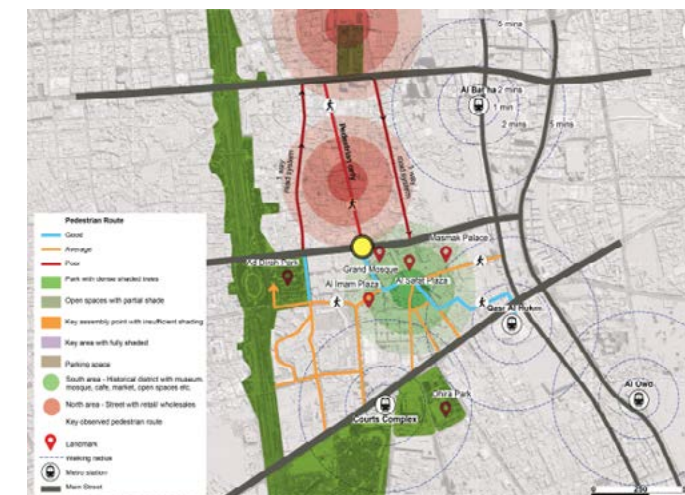
This section details the investigative process and the core findings derived from the workshop's "Site Analysis and Key Findings" phase.

The analysis was conducted through a collaborative, multi-step process during the daily workshop sessions:

- **Lectures & Expert Guidance:** Engaging with urban planning experts to understand Riyadh's strategic growth and walkability frameworks.
- **Site Visits:** Field observations in Al-Dirah to assess real-time pedestrian movement, thermal comfort, and social interactions.
- **Brainstorming Sessions:** Collaborative mapping and "Journey" planning to synthesize field data into actionable design interventions.

The study area is bifurcated by the Al Imam Turki Ibn street, creating two distinct urban characters:

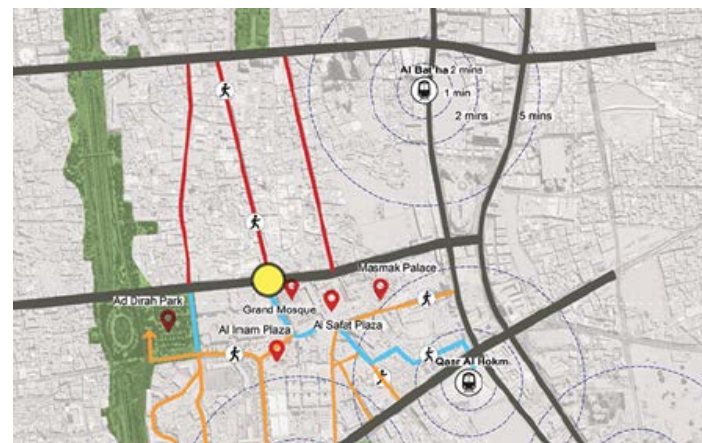
- **South Area:** A historical district characterized by high-density heritage sites, including Masmak Palace, Al Imam Plaza, the Grand Mosque, and various museums.
- **North Area:** A more commercial-focused zone dominated by retail and wholesale activities, currently separated from the cultural core.



Spatial Analysis Diagram

Our mapping revealed a high potential for movement that is currently hindered by infrastructure:

- Proximity: Most key landmarks are within a 1-to-5-minute walking radius of each other.
- Connectivity: The site is well-positioned relative to public transport, located 5–15 minutes away from major Metro stations.
- Pedestrian Experience: While some routes are observed as “Good,” many key pathways remain “Average” or “Poor” due to a lack of continuity.



Walkability Diagram

Through our analysis, we identified the following drivers and barriers for the project:

Potentials

- Strong Identity: The area possesses a unique historical district identity with high potential for cultural programming.
- Key Spine: The existing street network acts as a spine that can support continuous movement if optimized.
- Public Space Quality: Existing spaces like Al Safat Plaza are well-maintained and already encourage some social interaction.



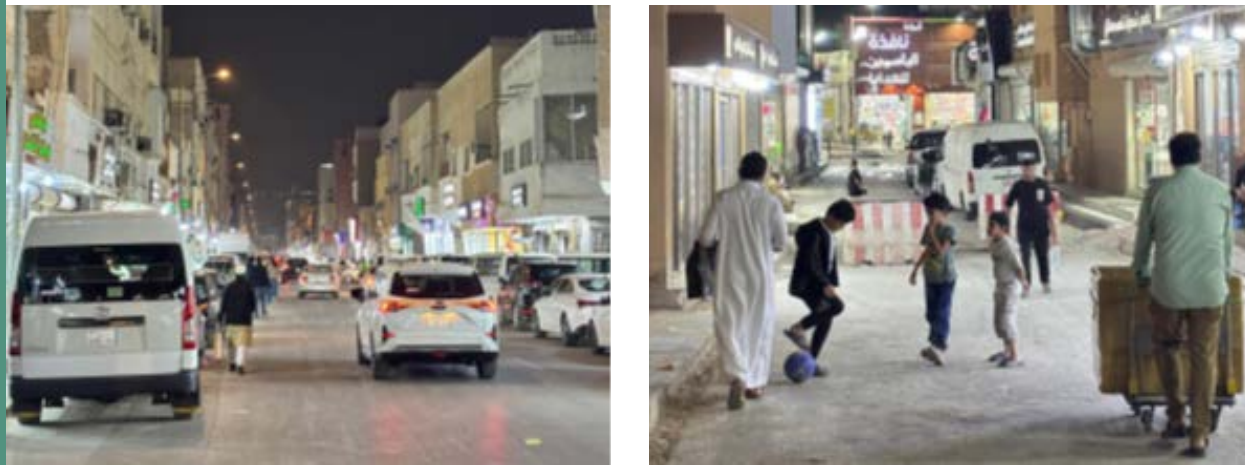
Site photos demonstrate the potential of the neighbourhood as a public space that accommodates diverse activities and users

Challenges

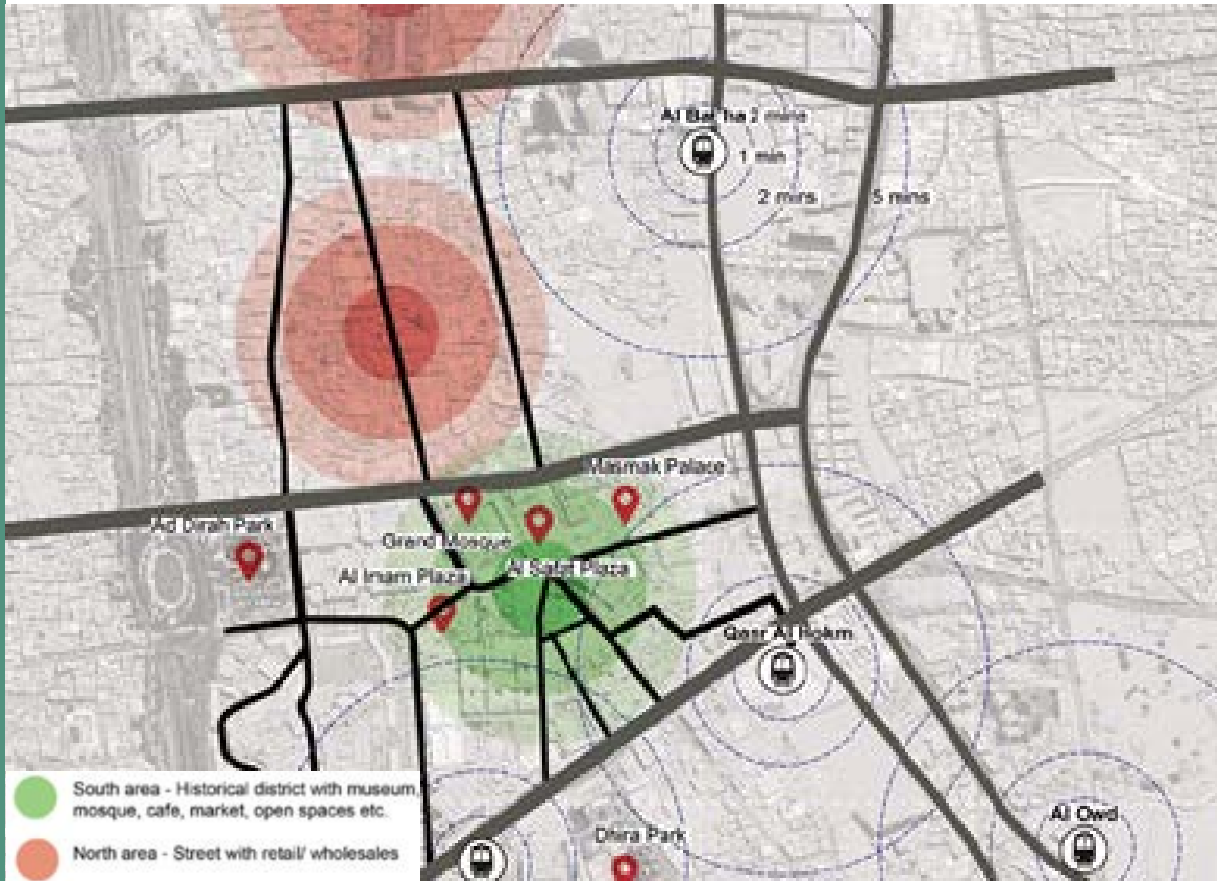
- Extreme Heat: Key public spaces are exposed to harsh climate conditions with insufficient shade or resting areas.
- Infrastructure Barriers: Streets prioritize car movement over people, leading to disconnected pedestrian paths.
- Social & Visual Disconnect: There is a lack of lighting and wayfinding, alongside a weak sense of ownership among users.



The site photo illustrated the key challenge where the road divides the district into two parcels which creates significant segregation.



Site photos illustrate the key challenge of poor quality of public space towards the north area, which is not safe for pedestrians.



Site is divided into different urban character by the road

Proposal/Concept:

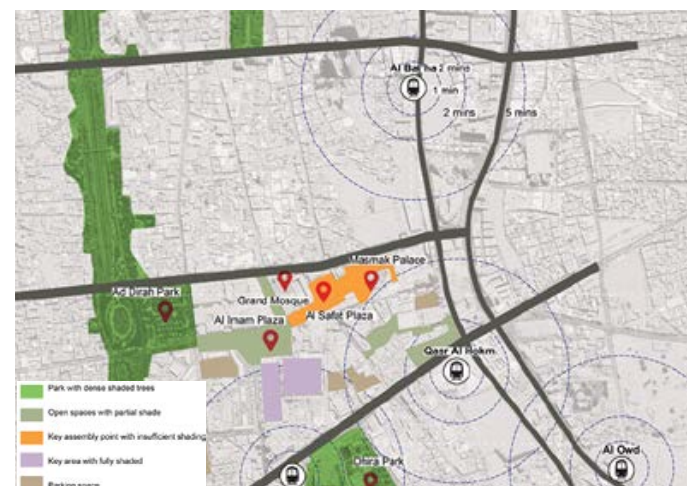
This section outlines the specific spatial interventions designed to address the challenges identified in Al-Dirah, organized by the “Journeys” developed during the workshop.



Journey Mapping

Journeys 1 & 2: Climate-Responsive Plazas (The South)

The South neighbourhood contains high-potential gathering areas that represent Riyadh's rich cultural values, but they are currently underutilized due to environmental stressors, see figure.



Climate map

- **Thermal Comfort:** To tackle the challenge of extreme heat, we propose the implementation of extensive shading and trees.
- **Blue-Green Infrastructure:** Incorporating water features to boost climate comfort and increase the overall quality of public spaces.
- **Enhanced Connectivity:** These improvements aim to transform existing "Poor" pedestrian routes into comfortable "Key assembly points"



Proposed shade along the plaza and pathway to activate the outdoor space

Journey 3: The Urban Bridge (Connectivity)

The primary intervention focuses on overcoming the physical barrier created by Al Imam Turki Ibn Street, which currently leaves the North and South neighbourhoods disconnected.

- **Proposed Underpass:** We propose a pedestrian underpass to create a safe, integrated, and comfortable link between the two zones.
- **Safety & Integration:** This removes the conflict between pedestrians and the heavy road system, prioritizing people over cars.



Improve the safe and well-connected pedestrians by introducing the underpass

Journeys 4 & 5: Activating the Historic Fabric

These interventions focus on the micro-scale—the narrow streets and historic alleyways that give Al-Dirah its identity.

- **Alleyway Activation:** We suggest improving pavement materials using light-colored, permeable surfaces to reduce heat absorption.
- **Micro-Interventions:** Adding street furniture, planting trees in narrow gaps, and limiting car access to reclaim these spaces for people.

- Adaptive Reuse: Renovating existing ruins (mud buildings) to serve as traditional cafes.
- Local Economy: These new uses will invite more visitors and generate opportunities for local businesses while preserving heritage.



Activation of sikka as a shopping street to invite more visitors into the retail zone will significantly boost the local economy

Conclusion and Reflections:

- From Car-Centric to Human-Centric: Shifting the priority from the 1-way road systems to a continuous pedestrian network.
- Visual Identity: Improving wayfinding and lighting to resolve the current lack of orientation in the district.
- Resilient Design: Transforming exposed public spaces into shaded "Climate Anchors".

The strategy for Al-Dirah, titled "Walk. Connect. Thrive.", provides a blueprint for reconciling Riyadh's historic heritage with the demands of a modern, liveable city. By focusing on multi-scalar interventions, Group 4 has demonstrated that walkability in an extreme climate is not only possible but can serve as a catalyst for social and economic revitalization.

Summary of Impact

- Heritage as a Driver: By promoting walkability through local heritage, the project ensures that Al-Dirah remains the "heart" of Riyadh's story.
- Resilience through Design: The proposed implementation of shading, trees, and water features directly addresses the challenge of extreme heat, transforming exposed areas into comfortable social hubs.
- Unity through Connectivity: The introduction of a pedestrian underpass and activated alleyways bridges the physical and social divide between the North and South neighbourhoods.
- Social Ownership: Through the adaptive reuse of mud buildings and improved public spaces, the proposal strengthens community participation and creates a sense of ownership that is currently lacking.

To ensure the success of these strategies, the following next steps are recommended:

- **Prioritize Shading Infrastructure:** Begin immediate installation of temporary or permanent shading in key assembly points like Al Safat Plaza to improve daytime usage.
- **Pilot the Alleyway Activation:** Launch a pilot project in a single “Journey” (e.g., Journey 4) to test permeable materials and traditional cafe integration before scaling to the wider district.
- **Cross-Sectoral Coordination:** Ensure collaboration between the Riyadh Region Municipality and heritage authorities to balance modernization with historic preservation

Temporality versus Permanence

Creating interactions between old and new, what stays and what can change

Group 5

Introduction:

Ad Dirah is a district of deep historical significance, shaped by a fine-grain fabric, strong cultural identity, and a constellation of underutilized spaces embedded within its structure. This project interprets the voids as latent opportunities for reconnecting the neighborhood, intensifying public life, and reinforcing the continuity between heritage and contemporary urban dynamics. The project proposes a flexible and strategic urban framework that aims to rethink the district through a bottom-up decision making approach. It operates through adaptable strategies, spatial typologies, and a co-creation methodology that allows interventions to respond to local needs, evolve over time, and be shaped by the people who inhabit the district.

By working across multiple scales—from streets and vacant plots to community spaces and new urban milestones—the proposal seeks to stitch together fragmented areas, reclaim underused spaces, and introduce new uses that support everyday life. Through this layered strategy and a co-design process, Ad Dirah's voids can become a connected network of public spaces, enabling exploration, encounter, and belonging, while laying the groundwork for a resilient, inclusive, and vibrant urban life. This project follows a clear and sequential methodology to guide the development of the design proposal. The approach focuses on understanding the overall context, organizing available information, and identifying key directions that inform the design process. These steps help translate initial observations into a coherent concept and final proposal.



Photo Credit: Riyadh Region Municipality

Understanding the context and formulating clear objectives.

Processing information available and mapping audits.

Identifying opportunities and challenges, and priorities in the area.

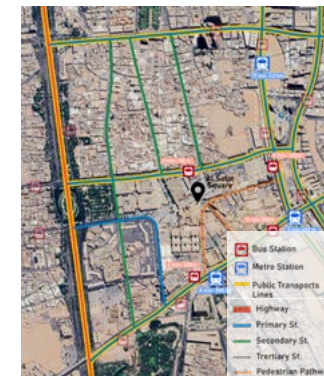
Designing the concept, defining approach strategies.

Shaping the proposal

Diagram: Project Analysis and Design Approach Methodology

Reserach/Analysis:

Aligned with the workshop's intentions of delivering ideas to improve walkability in Ad Dirah district, to better understand the context and our scope, we gathered relevant information about the area. Through onsite visits and group and individual walks, we observed and documented urban conditions using photographs and sketches, focusing on comparisons between day- and night-time activities in open spaces, mobility patterns, and overall urban dynamics. While discussing challenges and potential solutions.



Map: Existing Streets and Public Transportation



A. Mobility patterns and identified issues:

The main observed means of commuting were walking, private cars and public transport. Reaching the district with the public transport city network is possible and distances to cross the district go between 1 and 1,5 km, which are considered walkable distances for an average person. Despite these conditions, street design largely prioritizes car movement, which can limit opportunities for active mobility and reduce accessibility for users with varying needs. These challenges stem from street configurations, as well as from comfort and safety conditions, transit management, and driving practices.

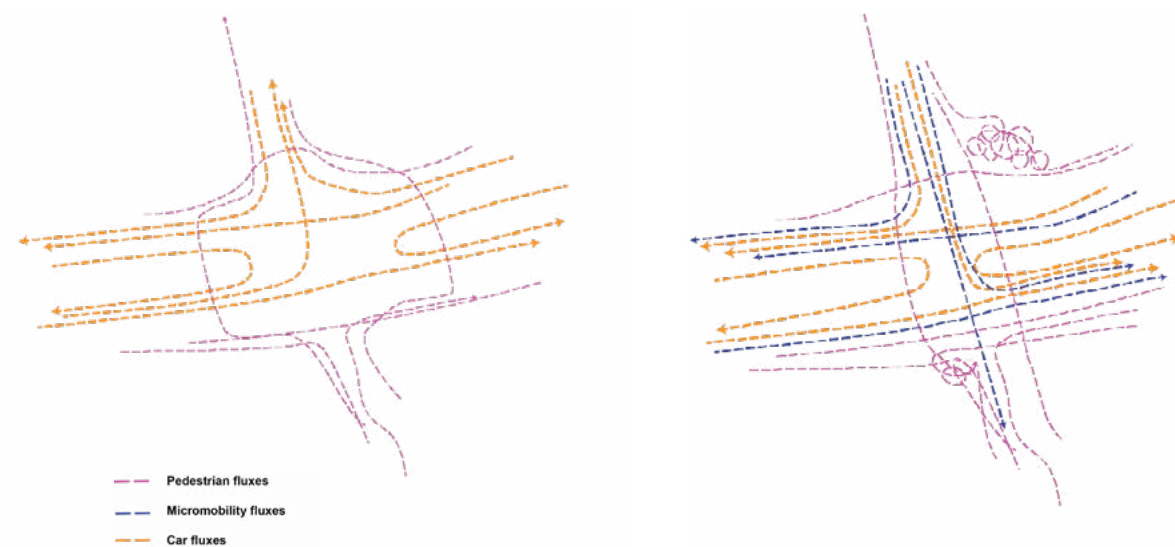


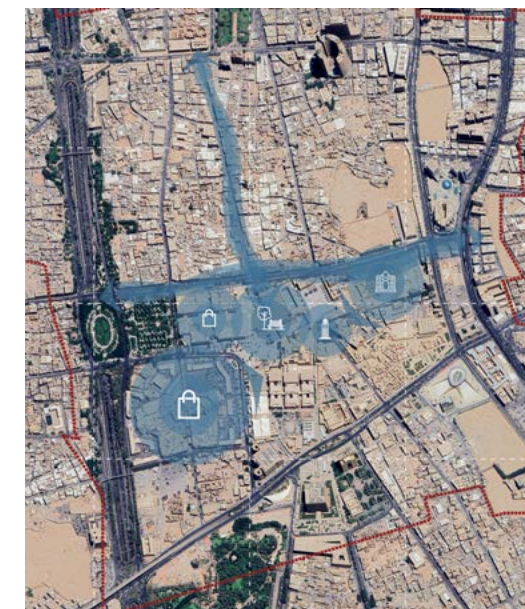
Diagram: Current (Left) Vs Ideal (Right) Fluxes on Intersections

B. Mental map: Showcasing the Intensity of Use and Gathering Spots

Despite limitations in time spent on site and the scale of the study area, we were able to identify clear patterns of activity intensity and gathering in specific open spaces within the district, which, in some cases, were reinforced by nearby commercial or touristic uses.

Through comparing intensity of uses during day and night, we realized climatic comfort related to sun exposure in large open spaces, rise of temperature, wind fluxes and heat island play a decisive role when inhabiting open spaces of Ad Dirah.

Expanding our heat-map analysis and on-site observations, to include the observation of transitioning from the southern to the northern parts of the district. Our observation concluded that the transition was perceived as fragmented, not only due to the lack of comfortable pedestrian connections, but also because of differences in building condition and typology. Notably, the northern area retains a traditional urban fabric originally designed.



Heat Map: Existing Activity Intensity and Gathering Spots Illustrative Observation Diagram: South to North Transition

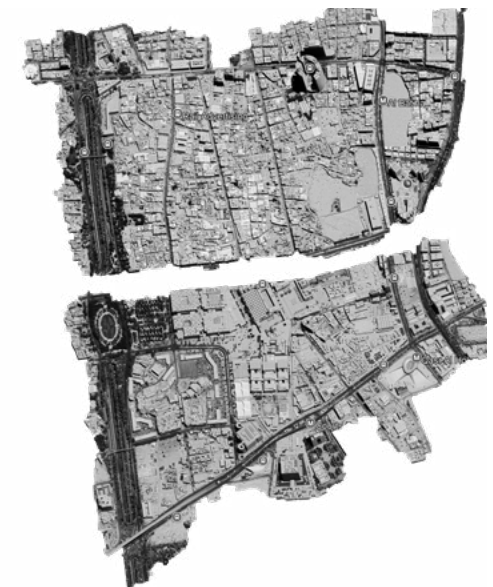


Photo: The Plaza - evening Time



Photo: Souq Alzal - Day Time

C. Character Zones: Homogeneity and typologies

Based on the spatial overlay of collected data and on-site observations, the Ad Dirah district was structured into five homogeneous zone typologies. These zones were identified according to similarities in land-use intensity, urban fabric condition, block morphology, and spatial continuity. The analysis highlights both consolidated urban patterns and a high presence of underutilized or vacant spaces with redevelopment potential.

Unbalanced urban fabric: Predominantly fine-grain areas characterized by dense plots, limited open space, and irregular street networks. These zones are largely residential, with aging building stock and varying physical conditions, resulting in an overall imbalance in spatial quality.

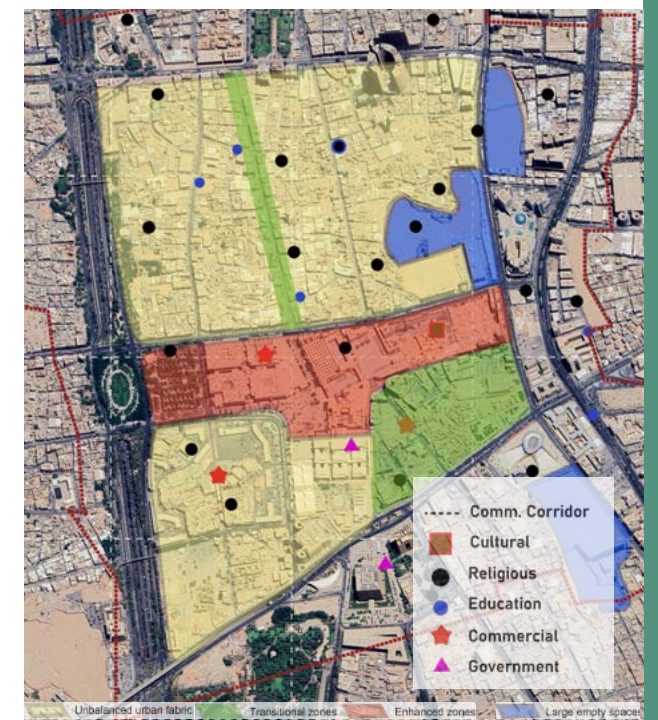
Enhanced zones: Areas with lower building density and a strong presence of institutional or civic functions. These zones benefit from larger plots, higher-quality infrastructure, and generous public spaces; however, they tend to lack continuous daily urban life and street-level activity.

Transitional zones: Mixed-use areas and active corridors where commercial and social activity is concentrated. Despite their high intensity of use, the surrounding urban fabric remains fragmented or outdated, indicating strong potential for targeted upgrading and urban regeneration.

Large empty spaces: Extensive vacant or underutilized plots whose scale contrasts sharply with the surrounding fine-grain fabric. Depending on their current function, these spaces interrupt urban continuity but also represent strategic opportunities for new public spaces, mixed-use development, or connective infrastructure.



Map: Solid Vs. Void



Map: Character Zone and Existing Facilities

Overall, the analysis revealed a fragmented urban structure, with numerous voids and transitional areas that could play a critical role in redefining Ad Dirah's spatial continuity, public life, and urban identity

Proposal/Concept:

Najdi Place-Kit: A Co-Creation Framework for Urban Transformation

Rather than prescribing fixed solutions or predefined interventions, the project proposes a strategic and flexible approach based on three core strategies, the identification of potential locations for larger impact, and a methodology for co-creation.

This approach is grounded in a dialogue between temporality and permanence, allowing interventions to range from temporary, adaptive actions to more permanent spatial transformations. Such flexibility enables responses to local needs and aspirations while allowing the project to evolve alongside changing urban dynamics. Their visit can be seen as a necklace with many different beads that together make a full day of activity.

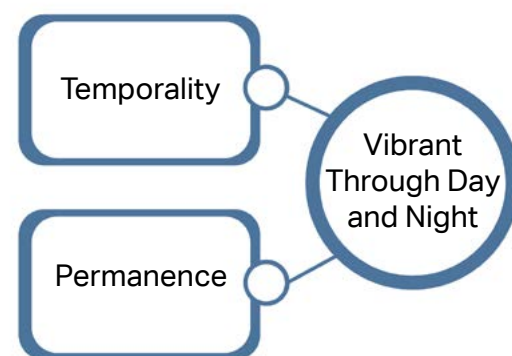


Diagram of Framework Base Dialogue

For each potential location, a combination of adaptable urban elements can be deployed to either reinforce existing dynamics or catalyze new ones, depending on local conditions. These interventions operate through the three core strategies and can shift along the spectrum between temporary and permanent, ensuring responsiveness, resilience, and long-term relevance.

A- Core strategies

Connecting areas: Infrastructure improvements aimed at facilitating mobility, strengthening connections across the district, and enhancing the legibility of public space. These interventions prioritize active mobility through traffic calming and improved orientation, creating a safer and more intuitive environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The interventions aim to guide movement, protect commuters, provide comfort, and ensure smooth transitions between different urban zones.

Reclaiming underutilized spaces: This strategy consists of temporary or permanent interventions that transform underused public spaces into active destinations, bridging heritage and new urban fabric. These interventions aim to attract and retain people, generating strong visual and emotional resonance while reinforcing cultural identity. They also support small-scale economies such as crafts, markets, and pop-up activities and incorporate climate-responsive features focused on cooling, shading, and heat mitigation. By doing so, they invite residents and visitors to explore the neighborhood and contribute to the activation of urban life.

Introducing new uses: Permanent interventions and new constructions on public or private vacant land that introduce additional uses aligned with local needs. These developments create new opportunities for living, working, and gathering, while also establishing potential urban milestones that strengthen the existing open-space network.

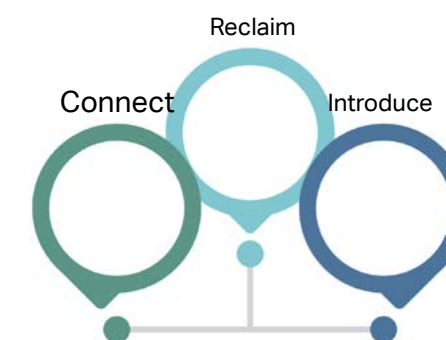


Diagram of Core Strategies

B. Urban Voids as Opportunities for Allocating Typologies

Although the voids identified in Ad Dirah are often perceived as residual or leftover spaces, this project redefines them as strategic urban opportunities. Rather than gaps, they are understood as tools to stitch the neighborhood together, encourage exploration and discovery, and reinforce the continuity of the urban fabric and its uses. When conceived as a network of interconnected open spaces, these voids can assume multiple roles acting as connectors, thresholds, destinations, and social catalysts thereby activating community life and enhancing the quality of public space.

Within this framework, vacant land and underutilized spaces become the primary drivers of urban transformation. Through targeted and adaptable interventions, these voids host different strategic spatial



Map: Potential Voids

typologies that structure the intended impact across the district:

B1. Sewing paths

Key streets and corridors that ensure strong north-south connectivity within Ad Dirah and improve links with surrounding areas. These paths also introduce transversal connections that shorten walking distances, enhance legibility, and facilitate inclusive mobility, particularly for people with diverse needs.

B2. Consolidation spaces

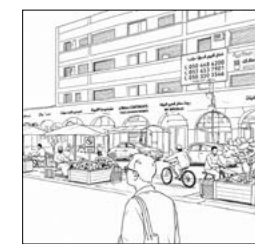
Vacant or underutilized plots whether publicly or privately owned that, due to their strategic location or large scale, play a critical role in defining urban blocks. These spaces offer opportunities for complementary development, such as collective housing or public services, supporting social integration for both residents and visitors.

B3. Opportunities to discover

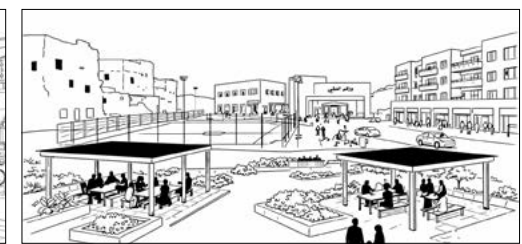
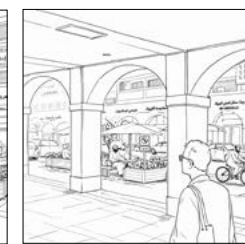
Smaller-scale vacant or unused spaces, often embedded within the existing fabric, that can evolve into intimate community-oriented places. These sites contribute to a network of "pocket" amenities offering spaces to rest, cool down, play, garden, eat, and gather, reinforcing everyday social life at the neighborhood level.

B4. Paths to discover

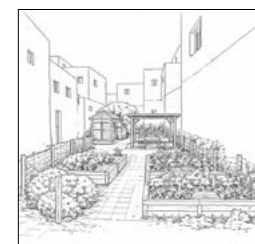
Pedestrian-oriented routes that connect the opportunities to discover with one another and with key landmarks and milestones, promoting walkability, curiosity, and gradual exploration of the district.



Illustrative images for B1. Sewing Paths



Illustrative images for B2. Consolidation Spaces



Illustrative images for B3. Opportunities to Discover

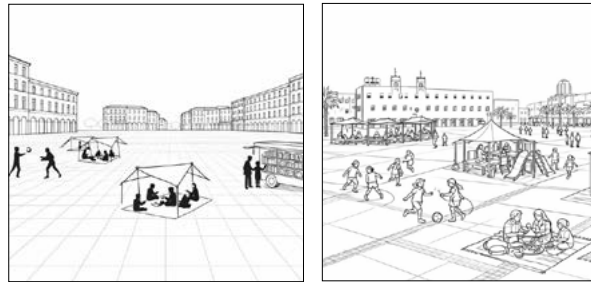


Illustrative images for B4. Paths to Discover

B5. Activation spaces

Open and flexible spaces with already high urban fabric quality that can host strategic and/or temporary interventions to cool down heat island effect and to boost urban life also during sun exposure hours.

Together, these interconnected voids form a cohesive spatial system capable of consolidating the urban fabric, diversifying uses, and fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and community-oriented public realm across Ad Dirah.



Illustrative images for B5. Activation Spaces

C. Najdi Place-Kit: A co-creation methodology

To support this proposal, a Najdi Place-Kit was developed as a placemaking toolkit for co-creation and participatory decision-making. The Place-Kit enables a bottom-up methodology, allowing residents, local stakeholders, and institutions to actively shape their environment. By involving users directly in the selection and combination of interventions, the toolkit strengthens local ownership and fosters a lasting sense of appropriation.

The Place-Kit is composed of modular placemaking elements—such as educational, cultural, sports, and residential functions, complemented by market spots, shaded parklets, and informal gathering spaces. Each element can function independently as a catalyst for activity, yet when combined, they form complex, mixed environments that intensify urban life, encourage social interaction, and transform isolated facilities into vibrant public realms.

C1. Connecting elements: Wayfinding systems, shaded walkways, mobility corridors, traffic-calming devices

C2. Reclaiming elements: Temporary structures, pop-up markets, cultural installations, climate-responsive public furniture

C3. Introducing elements: Permanent buildings, mixed-use developments, community facilities, housing typologies



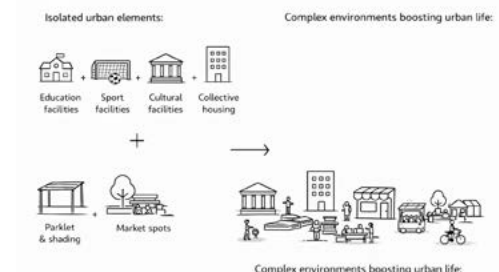
Illustrative images for C1. Connect



Illustrative images for C3. Introduce



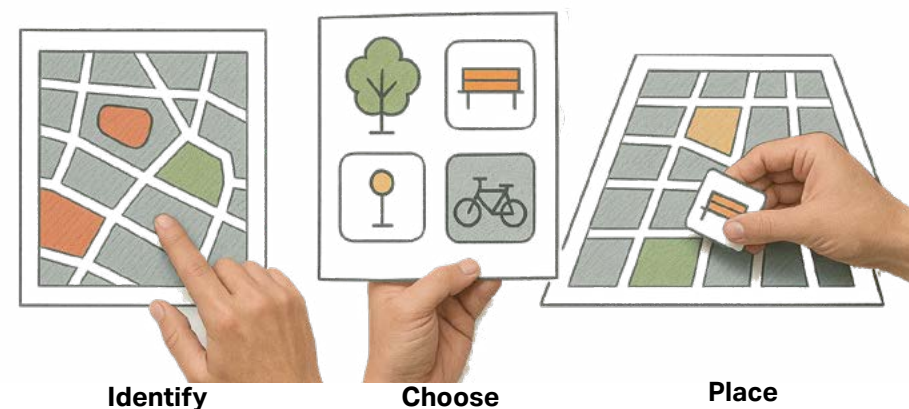
Illustrative images for C2. Reclaim



Illustrative Image of Elements in Isolation and Combination

This participatory map, the map of potential voids, was conceived not only as an analytical output, but also as a future engagement tool. The poster is intended to be reused in community meetings as a medium to facilitate dialogue and invite local residents to actively participate in the design process. By encouraging participants to identify, choose, and place elements directly on the map, the tool enables people to relate their lived experiences to the spatial analysis and proposed strategies.

The map was first tested during the ISOCARP Congress, where participants were guided through a set of simple directions that mirrored our analytical framework. This initial testing phase allowed us to observe how users interacted with the map, refine the instructions, and assess its effectiveness as a collaborative and inclusive platform for discussion. Insights gained from this exercise will inform its future use with local communities, ensuring the tool remains accessible, adaptable, and responsive.



Through the instructions to identify, choose, and place, participants at the congress engaged with the map at a moderate level.

While overall participation was not extensive, the interactions revealed valuable patterns.

Transportation experts showed particular interest in locating and discussing connecting elements, reflecting their professional focus. Colleagues from other workshop groups, already familiar with the site, contributed more confidently by adding context-specific insights directly onto the map. General participants were initially less certain about some of the terminology used; however, the visual nature of the map successfully captured their attention and encouraged engagement.

This experience highlighted the importance of adapting participatory tools to accommodate diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and age groups, leading to the conclusion that future iterations should include clearer guidance and more inclusive language to broaden participation.

To evaluate, expand, and refine the allocation of each core strategy across the identified spatial typologies, a matrix was developed (see Figure X). This matrix acts as an analytical and decision-making tool, mapping what type of intervention is appropriate, and where, rather than prescribing a single solution.

By cross-referencing locations for strategies with the three core approaches—connecting, reclaiming, and introducing elements—the matrix helps identify overlaps, gaps, and potential synergies.

The matrix also reflects a dialogue between temporality and permanence. Some locations lend themselves to temporary or incremental actions, such as tactical urbanism or activation spaces, while others can support more permanent infrastructural or real-estate interventions. The marked relationships indicate where strategies can reinforce existing dynamics or initiate new ones, allowing interventions to remain adaptable and responsive to local needs and evolving urban conditions.

Overall, the matrix provides a flexible framework to guide implementation, support co-creation, and ensure that interventions are context-specific rather than uniformly applied.

		Core strategies (What do we aim to do)		
		Connect	Reclaim	Introduce
Opportunities for Allocating Strategies Typologies	Sewing Paths	x	x	
	Spaces for Consolidation	x		x
	Opportunities to discover	x	x	
	Paths to discover	x	x	
	Activation spaces	x	x	

Analysis Matrix - Allocating the Core Strategies

Conclusion and Reflections:



In Ad Dirah, sharing extends beyond space to include memory, identity, and history. The workshop leveraged Sharing Riyadh as a method to collectively reimagine urban voids drawing from local narratives and heritage while engaging with global urban thinking. This exchange allowed historic spaces to evolve as inclusive public realms, ensuring that Ad Dirah’s past remains present and meaningful within Riyadh’s contemporary urban fabric.



Some of us arrived in Riyadh from different countries with curiosity and open minds, eager to discover new people, places, and perspectives. The intensity of the workshop quickly brought us together, creating an unexpected sense of belonging. Through its focus on the city center, we explored Riyadh’s diversity of backgrounds, resources, and experiences, guided by our coordinators and professionals from the Amana. We encountered warmth in many forms—from the hospitality of the people to the heat of the city itself—and explored Riyadh day and night, engaging with both its old and new faces in an effort to understand it more deeply.

Collective Reflections

The projects presented in this report speak for themselves. Yet their true strength lies not only in individual proposals, but in their collective coherence. While each group pursued distinct directions, together they form a rich and complementary body of work. Some focused on placemaking and walkable journeys that enhance heritage value and spatial experience. Others addressed urban regeneration through microclimatic strategies. Several explored symbolic and experiential dimensions, reinterpreting lost or transformed urban elements, while others developed guidelines for future development and growth.

Taken together, these contributions offer a multifaceted form of advice, reflection, and visioning for the historic core of Riyadh. They raise shared questions about direction, ambition, and values, while demonstrating how diversity of thought can converge into a single, meaningful conversation. This is the enduring value of the YPP Workshop, and more broadly, of the ISOCARP Congress in Riyadh: bringing best practices and diverse perspectives from across the world into dialogue with a city that is learning, evolving, and transforming every day.



Photo by ISOCARP 61 congress host Riyadh Region Municipality.

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