

REVITALIZING KUWAIT'S EMPTY CITY CENTER

by

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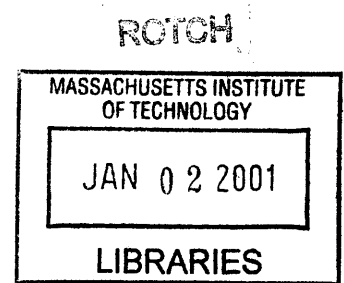
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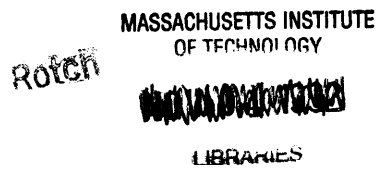
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To My father and mother

Contents

Abstract	7
Preface	9
Acknowledgment	11
Introduction	13
Part I: The Present	17
Chapter 1: The Problem of Land Vacancy	21
Chapter 2: The Context	51
Part II: The Past	67
Chapter 3: Early Development of Kuwait Town	69
Chapter 4: Plans, Reviews, and Studies	89
Chapter 5: The Factors that Caused Land Vacancy	127
Part III: The Future	141
Chapter 6: The Vision of the City Center	145
Chapter 7: Implementing the Vision	169
Conclusions	187
Appendix A	189
Sources	206
List of Illustrations	212

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in Architectural Studies

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of land vacancy in Kuwait's city center and its adverse effect on both the image of the city and land economics was investigated, and issues of symbolism, character, and identity were addressed. In addition to the description of the physical and natural environments, social context, and postwar policies and their impacts were discussed.

The history of the city center's physical evolution since the eighteenth century, before and after the discovery of oil, was analyzed. Causes of the problem were identified through the examination of previous plans, reviews, and studies that had been carried out since the early fifties to respond to the quality of the city center's environment.

Questions and concerns for future plans were addressed and alternative visions for the city center were suggested. Changes in public policies and implementation mechanisms were explored, as well as tools that need to be used to make implementation of future plans more successful.

Thesis Supervisor: Gary Hack
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Preface

The research for a thesis topic was initiated by my direct interaction with Kuwait City as a resident of almost thirteen years, and by my professional experience with both local and international consultants on a variety of projects in the Middle East. Kuwait City's continuous process of demolishing and physically emptying its center, the increase of land vacancy in the center, and the rapid expansion of the city towards the desert had all intrigued me as an unusual phenomenon. I had also realized that the vast unbuilt areas in the center have a negative impact on the image of the city.

Questions such as why the center has taken this form, why only the center has not been developed, and why the center does not have an attractive environment and special character remained in my mind. Observations, questions, and concerns such as western intervention, dealing with the past, character and identity developed over time; they became clear and were articulated only after coming to MIT and being nurtured in an academic environment that helped me to formulate my area of inquiry.

The thesis research and field work, which included interviews with planning officials, data collection, review of previous plans and studies, photographic survey, and collection of aerial photographs began in January, 1990. The Iraqi invasion in August, 1990 and the Gulf War in early 1991 rendered this effort impossible. Since the filing system of Kuwait Municipality and the library of its Urban Design Section were both looted and damaged during the invasion, I had to limit my research to the material I had obtained earlier and to some personal documents sent to me from Kuwait after the liberation.

Despite the delays and difficulties for carrying out this thesis research, the need for this kind of study by professionals familiar with the culture, coupled with the Kuwaiti decision makers' encouragement and my advisors' persistence and support, motivated me to continue my research and finish the thesis. My hope for the future is that other experienced professionals from this region will continue to inquire into and research these issues and to initiate special mid-career programs and other educational exchanges specifically oriented to this part of the Middle East, making use of the advanced techniques and resources available in the United States and Europe.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the following individuals and government officials who gave me their valuable time when I began my research in Kuwait: Ali Abdullah, Adnan Al-Adeeb, Abdul Rahman Al-Hoti, Abdul Aziz Al-Mansoor, Gazi Al-Rayes, Hisham Al-Rayes, Sabah Al-Rayes, Mohamed Al-Rumaihi, Musa Al-Saraf, Ibrahim Al-Shaheen, Ibrahim Al-Shatti, Abdul Aziz Hussain, Fou'ad Mulla Hussain. Special thanks and gratitude to Hamid Shuaib for his immense help in obtaining research material, arranging interviews, and for his personal involvement and essential comments on the text.

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Finally, my deepest gratitude to my advisors: Professor Julian Beinart, Professor Gary Hack, and Professor Laurence Vale for their persistent encouragement, active participation, dedication, time and patience, and without whom this thesis would not have been possible. To Sahar, Mohamed, and my mother for their affection, care and moral support, to Raad for his love, understanding, sharing, and the many discussions and exchange of ideas, to Alia for her love and continuous effort to maintain my high spirits.

Introduction

This thesis explores the problem of empty land in the center of Kuwait City, which started to appear in the late 1950's as a result of the sudden oil prosperity and the subsequent urban modernization. The land vacancy has adverse economic and aesthetic implications. The old residential neighborhoods in the traditional city were demolished and replaced by expansive empty lots that have been neglected and remain unused, in spite of the persistent planning efforts over the last four decades.

Through the historical survey and analysis of the center's physical evolution, it became possible to define some of the causes of problems of land vacancy and delays in plan implementation. The main objectives of the thesis are not only to define the problem and its causes, but also to envision future solutions and delineate areas of possible public intervention.

The thesis is divided into three parts: present, past, and future. The first part (The Present) describes the problem and its context. The first chapter states the problem, and discusses issues of aesthetics and symbolism. It also deals with land economics and governmental acknowledgement of the problem. The second chapter portrays the physical and natural environments, social context, and postwar realities and policies.

The second part of the thesis (The Past), which comprises three chapters, is a historical analysis of the center's physical transformation and the planning efforts for developing the traditional city (Kuwait Town) into a modern and significant capital city center. The third chapter traces the history of the physical form of

the traditional city, from its establishment in the eighteenth century up to the period of oil discovery and exploitation in the late forties. The next chapter (Chapter 4) is an overview of the different planning efforts that have taken place since the early fifties. Since analyzing and evaluating the different plans, reviews, and studies is difficult without understanding the contextual events, it became necessary to include the international and regional events that directly and indirectly influenced the development process. The last chapter of this part (Chapter 5) pinpoints the causes and major participants that contributed to the creation of the emptiness in the center of Kuwait City. The acknowledgement of past obstacles is the first step in improving the urban environment of the center.

The last part (The Future) mainly concerns questions of how to resolve the center's development dispute. The first chapter of this part (Chapter 6) addresses issues that need to be considered for proposed solutions; it also suggests five different options for the center's future vision. For each of these visions, there is an analysis of its advantages and disadvantages, in light of the prevailing circumstances. The last chapter of this part (Chapter 7), which is also the last chapter of the thesis, pertains to the implementation process. It discusses different government policies and actions that are necessary for implementing one or a combination of visions; this chapter delineates the areas of public intervention that would be required to bring the theoretical concepts into reality.

The thesis is organized in this manner to separate issues related to period and to guide the reader through different stages of the center's physical transformations. It was necessary to begin the thesis with an elaborate explanation and definition of the

problem, with all its contextual circumstances, in order to learn

lessons from past experience, investigate and propose solutions for the present situation, and achieve better results in the future.

Part I: The Present

The Problem of Land Vacancy and its Context

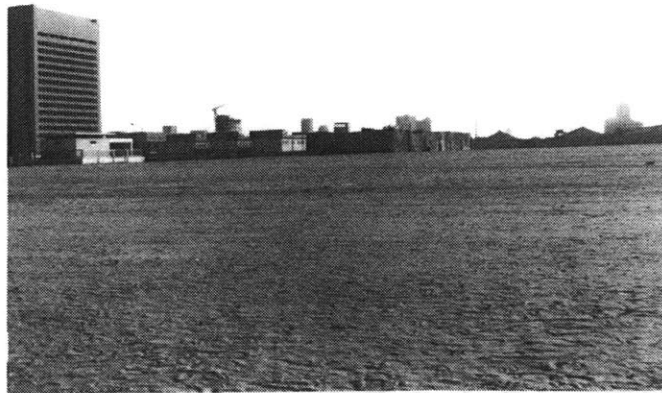
Since the discovery of oil in the Arabian Gulf^{*}, cities in this region have undergone rapid, visible physical transformations as a result of the sudden economic, social and political changes. The Gulf cities not only share postcolonial cities' problems resulting from modernization and western intervention, they also share some unique characteristics that make them different from cities in other developing countries. Some of these characteristics are an abundance of financial resources, a small population, a dependency on expatriate labor, and a limited technical capacity. In addition to their location in an extremely hot, arid region, cities in the Gulf have some peculiarities: for example, natives are often a minority in their country and gasoline is less expensive than bottled water.

The manifestations of the sudden economic changes in the region took different forms in different cities. For example, some of the traditional cities survived destruction and coexist with new development, some were completely rebuilt, and the rest of the traditional cities were haphazardly demolished and new construction took place. In what is now Kuwait City, the abrupt changes resulted in the destruction of the traditional city (Kuwait Town, which currently comprises the new city center) and its replacement

^{*}Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

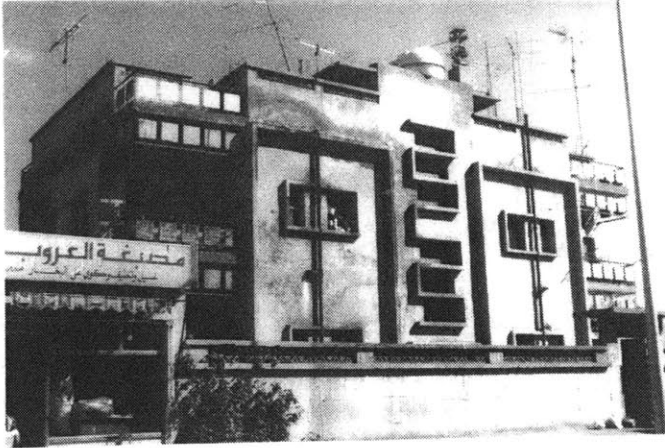
with scattered modern developments and a considerable area of land vacancy.

The objectives of this part of the study are to define the problem of land vacancy in the center of Kuwait City and the subsequent aesthetic and economic implications. In Chapter 1 there will be a description of the built form and vacant land in the city center, as well as a discussion of why and to whom land vacancy is a problem and why it is important to have significant center.

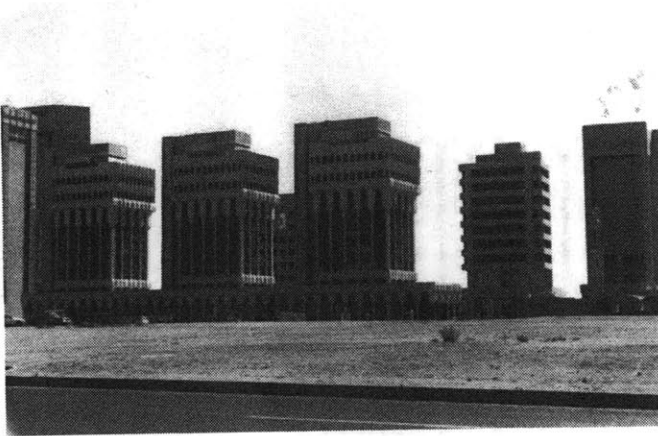


Cemetery in the Center

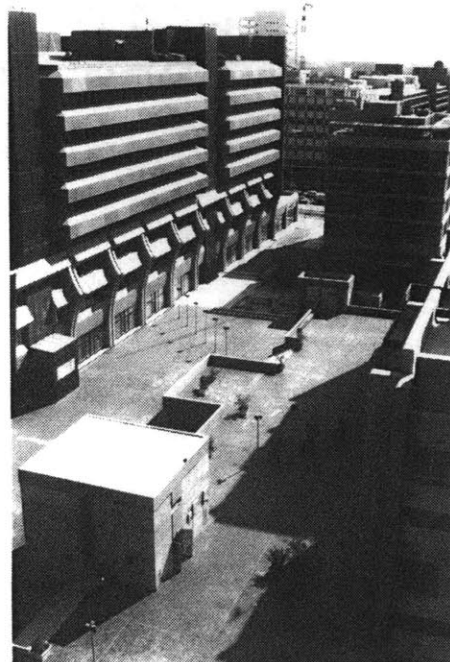
[Fig. 1] Views of empty land in different parts of the center



[Fig. 2] 1960's residential architecture



[Fig. 3] Architecture of the 1980's



Chapter 1: The Problem of Land Vacancy

The City Center's Physical Environment

Kuwait City center's inland boundaries are defined by *Soor* Street [*Soor* means wall], which was built on the alignment of the old city wall. Adding the unoccupied areas of the undeveloped Green Belt* and the unornamented cemeteries (The *Wahabi* sect of Islam to which most Kuwaitis adhere does not recognize large, formal gravestones) to the other vacant land in the center, the first striking view of the center is vast abandoned spaces surrounded by modern high-rise buildings. The hollowness of the center emphasizes both the harsh barren environment and the discontinuity in the urban form [Fig. 1].

The architecture of the buildings in the center represent a hodge-podge of architectural styles developed over the last forty years. These styles range from the early fifties' simple three to four storey buildings up to the eighties' high-rise buildings [Fig. 2,3]. The different architectural styles represent the public taste of the times, the available technical and professional resources, and the existing financial resources. While the styles of the fifties and sixties mainly exemplify the work of Egyptian architects and Lebanese contractors employed at that time, the seventies and eighties witnessed the introduction of international architects and contractors into Kuwait City.

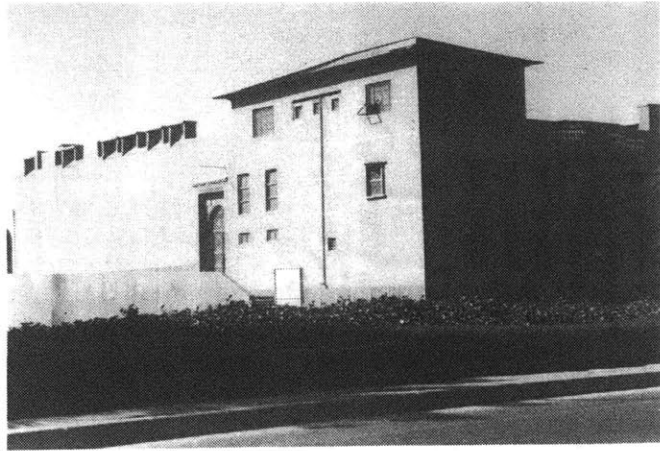
*The Green Belt was an open space initially proposed in the 1952 Master Plan which was partially developed but remained mostly conceptual in subsequent plans and reviews.

High-rise buildings went up between old mud brick houses, highways replaced the desert routes and the narrow alleyways, and modern ports supplanted the old harbor and the simple jetties. Building construction occurred only on the edges of city blocks, leaving behind empty lots, which are used for parking. City blocks differ in size, shape, and area; the largest of the vacant lots are not useful for parking because of the intense heat and lack of protection for both cars and people.

The few buildings that survived the destruction of the old city are public buildings, mosques, some prominent merchant families' houses [Fig. 4] and *diwanis* [the part of the house used for men's formal gatherings] and some of the *souqs* [traditional covered bazaars] which were recently demolished during the Iraqi occupation of 1990-91. Except for very small areas, residential neighborhoods suffered most from the demolition. The vacant land is a painful reminder of the old city and its disrupted history, or as Yi-Fu Tuan describes it "*the locus of memories.*"¹ The skyline has been altered; the new telecommunication tower which rises 372 meters above ground, Kuwait Towers, and the minaret of the State Mosque dwarf the older significant landmarks of the city such as the Sief Palace* tower and the minarets of the adjacent mosques [Fig. 5].

Another notable feature in the city center is the wide road network and wide setbacks. The combination of the width of the streets and width of the setbacks intensify the dislocated sensation created by the vacant land. Buildings in the city center lack tying elements and anchorage; surrounded and separated by the empty

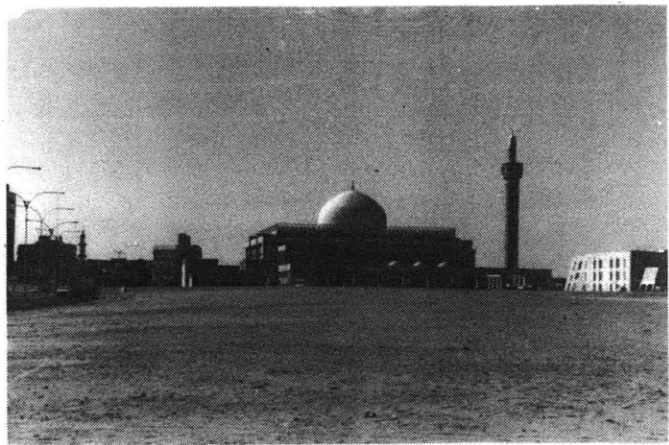
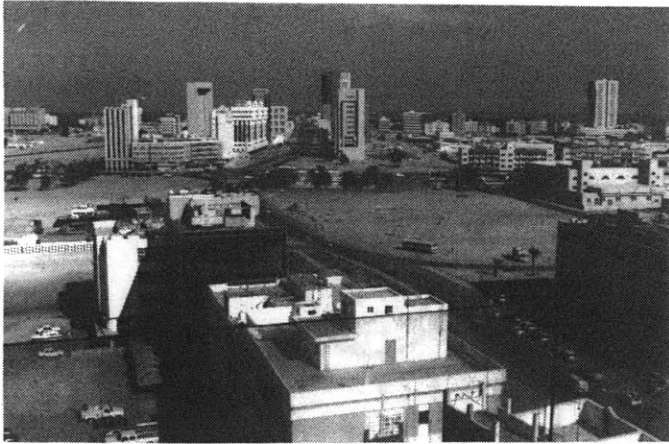
* The Sief Palace is the original and oldest headquarters for the ruler.



[Fig. 4] Preserved old merchant family house on the seaside



[Fig. 5] New telecommunication tower dwarfs minarets



[Fig. 6] Buildings in the center need settings and tying elements



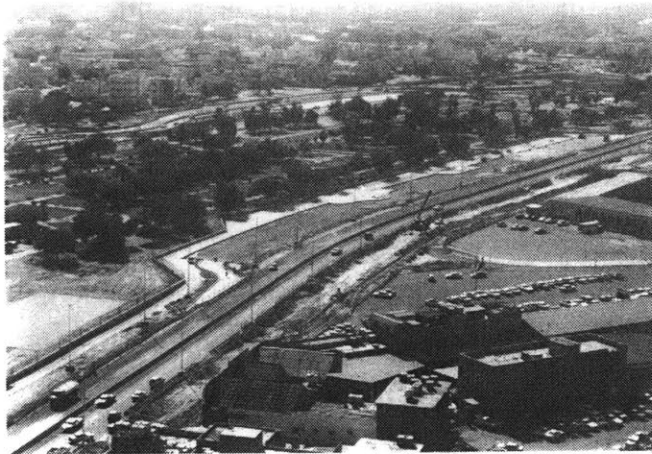
lots, the buildings look unrelated to each other and need to be coordinated [Fig. 6].

The present city center lacks civic sense; it does not have grand and elegant places such as public parks, landmarks and plazas, nor does it have prominent and distinguished architecture. It does not communicate the importance and ambience of the place or invoke the feelings of respect and reverence associated with stately and special places in the city such as large mosque enclosures or boulevards. There is no remarkable contrast in the built environment of the city such as open and enclosed, or dark and light spaces. Traditional cities in the region used to have such contrasts. They used to have public spaces in the *souq* area or in front of the Friday mosque which were contrasted by the privacy of the inner courtyards of the houses; the dark shaded *souqs* countered the unbearable heat and glare of the sun.



[Fig. 7] Soor Street

Not only does the center have undeveloped land, physical boundaries are also not fully developed. Part of the waterfront in the center has not yet been developed; the center's seaside boundary is the heavily travelled Arabian Gulf Road,* which is used to both cross and approach the city center. *Soor* Street, which is the inland boundary, is also adjacent to the partially developed Green Belt [Fig. 7,8].

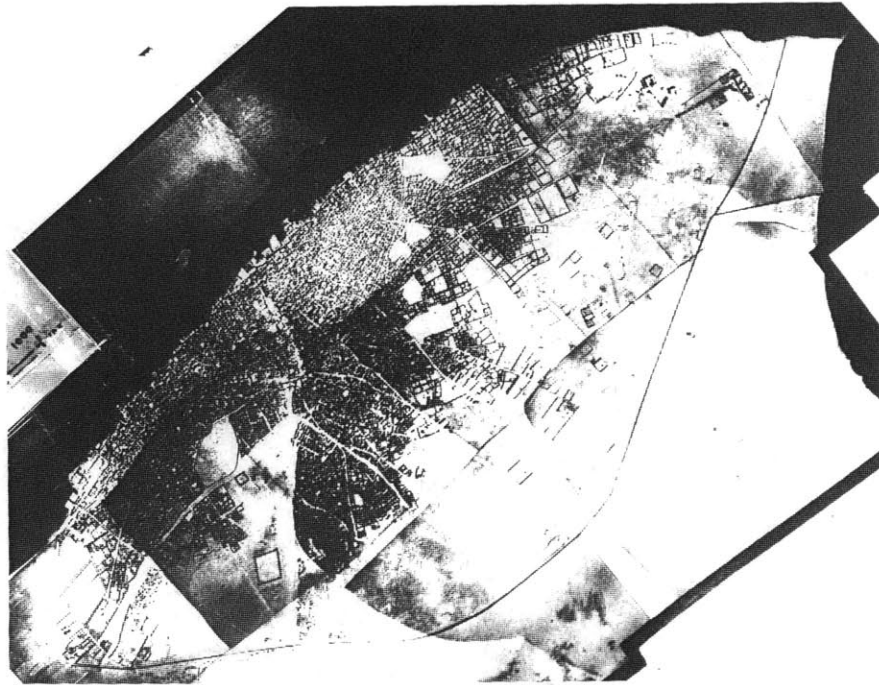


The Developed Segment of the Green Belt



[Fig. 8] The Green Belt

* The Arabian Gulf Road is a six lane urban expressway with a wide middle island and sidewalks.



1932



1952

[Fig. 9] Sequence of aerial photographs of the city center
Source: Kuwait Municipality



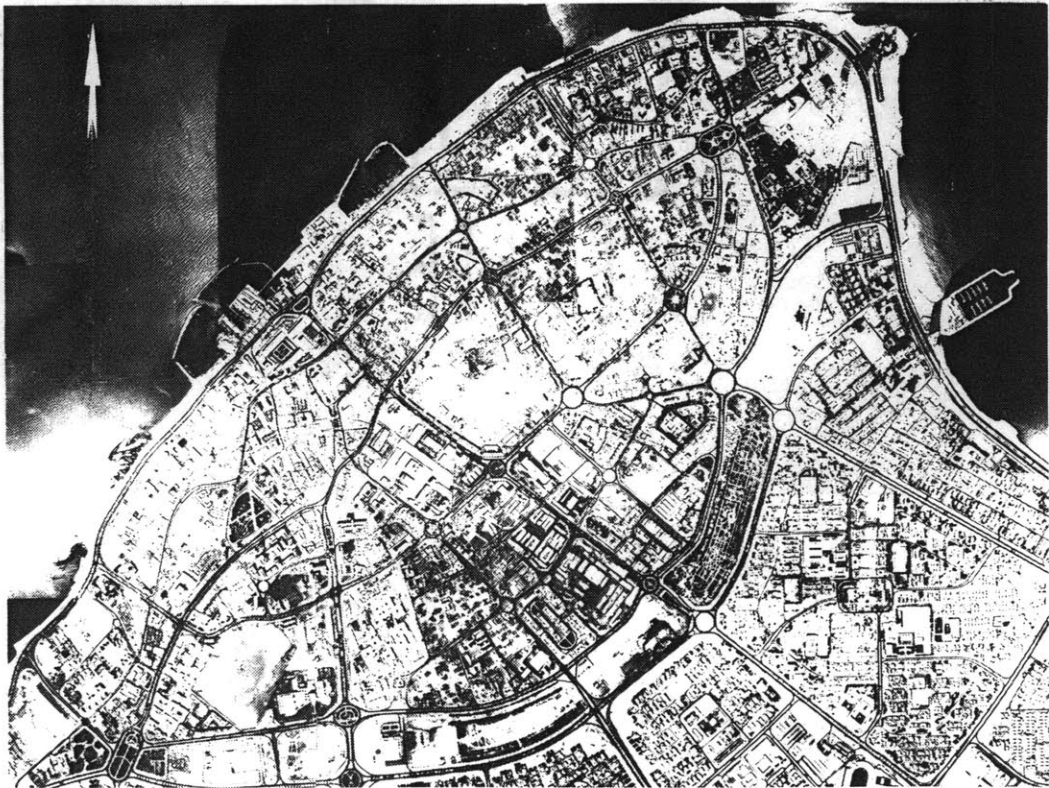
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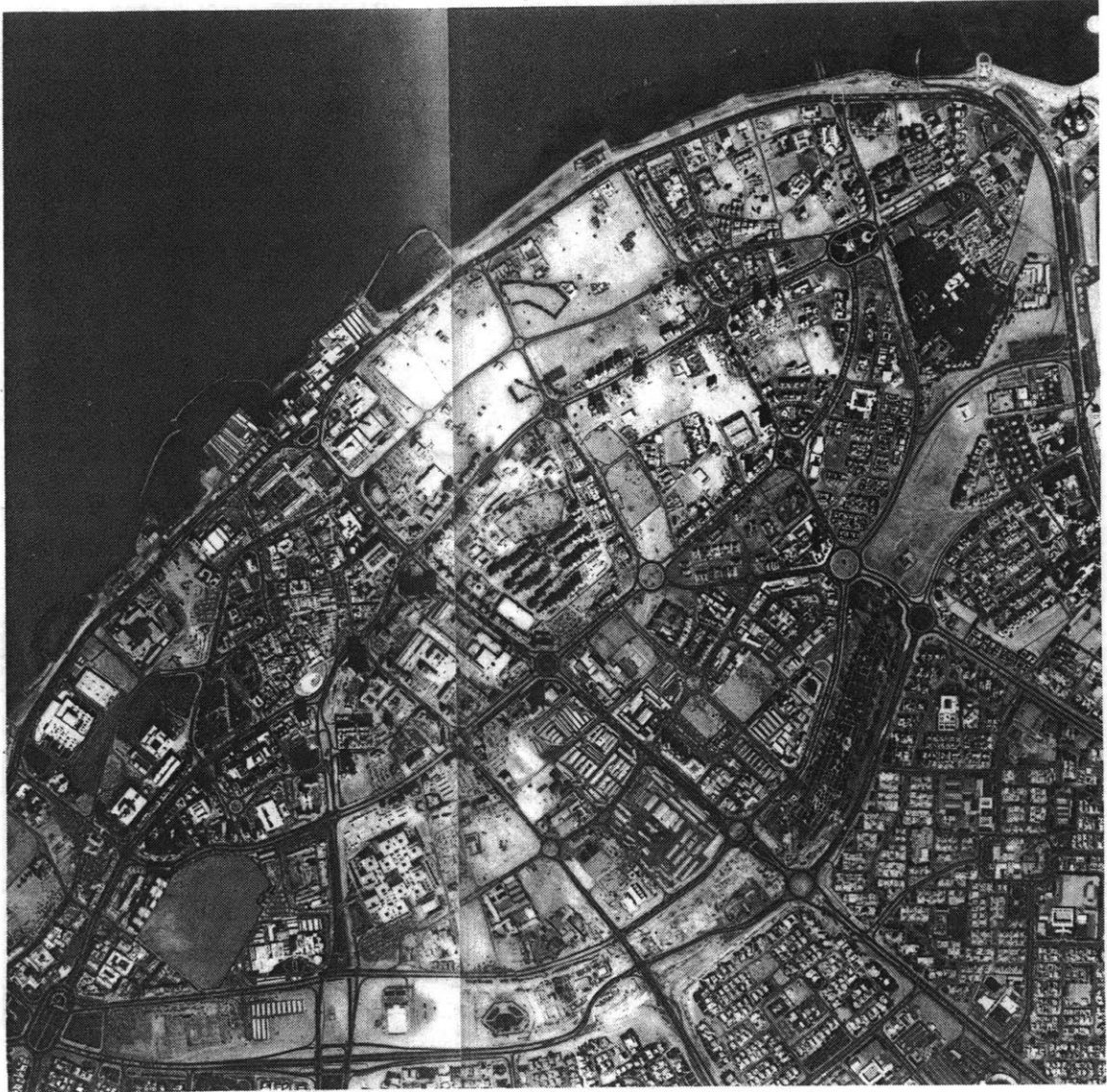
1964



1967



1980



1987

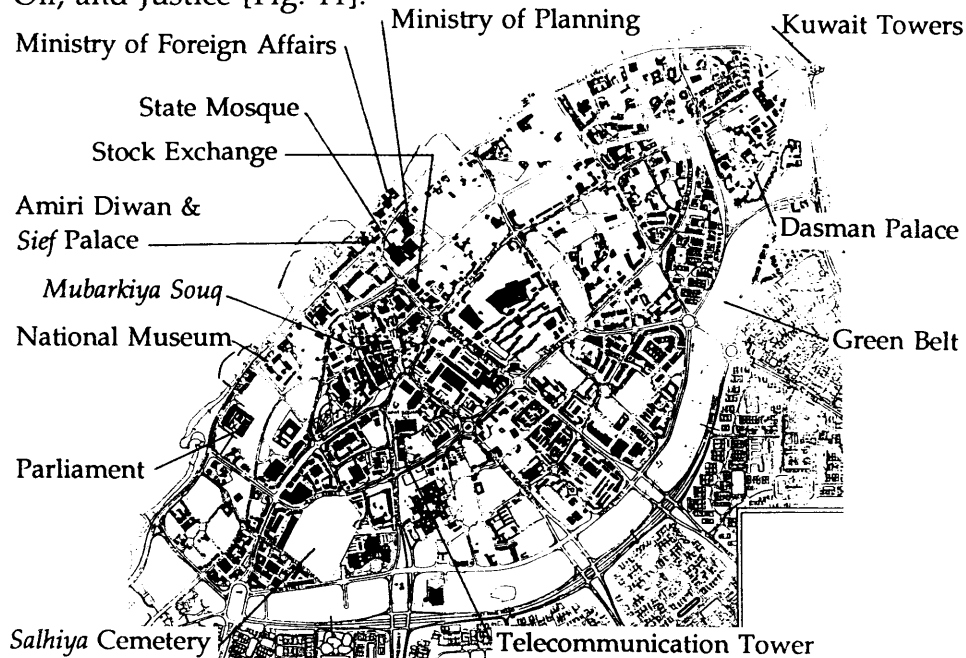
Statement of the Problem

In Kuwait City, since the establishment of the settlement in the early eighteenth century and despite the continuous process of demolition and destruction of the traditional city within the wall and its replacement by the present city center (which is still referred to as Kuwait Town), this part of Kuwait continues to be the locus of the center of power, religion, and major economic activities. The city of Kuwait is not only the capital city and major port city, but it is the primate city where the majority of Kuwait's population resides. To date, in spite of persistent planning efforts over the last forty years, the city center still suffers from disordered development and large holes of neglected land and their subsequent impacts on the image and economic vitality of the city. The empty lots are concentrated in large areas of the center and are in a prime location in terms of real estate value and the sea view [Fig. 10]. Because of this concentration, the vacant land is conspicuous and has an adverse effect on the quality of the physical environment, character, and image of the city.



[Fig. 10] Map showing the extent of land vacancy

The physical area of the city center is relatively small. Excluding the area of the Green Belt, the center's area is about 8.5 square kilometers from the Arabian Gulf Road to *Soor* Street. The vacant land constitutes about seventy percent of land available for development, which includes cemeteries and secondary roads within blocks² and does not include major roads and setbacks. The government owns about 75% of this vacant land.³ In a wealthy city like Kuwait, such a high percentage of vacant land is an eyesore and constitutes an underutilization of city resources. While some of the center's activities such as service ministries, retail centers, government institutions and professional offices moved out of the center, the core of the center contains the complex for the *Amiri Diwan* and the *Sief* Palace (the current headquarters for the ruler), the office of the Crown Prince, Council of Ministers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Planning Board, Parliament, and Court houses, in addition to important and symbolic decision-making ministries such as Religious Endowments, Planning, Finance & Commerce, Industry, Oil, and Justice [Fig. 11].



[Fig. 11] Map showing major activities

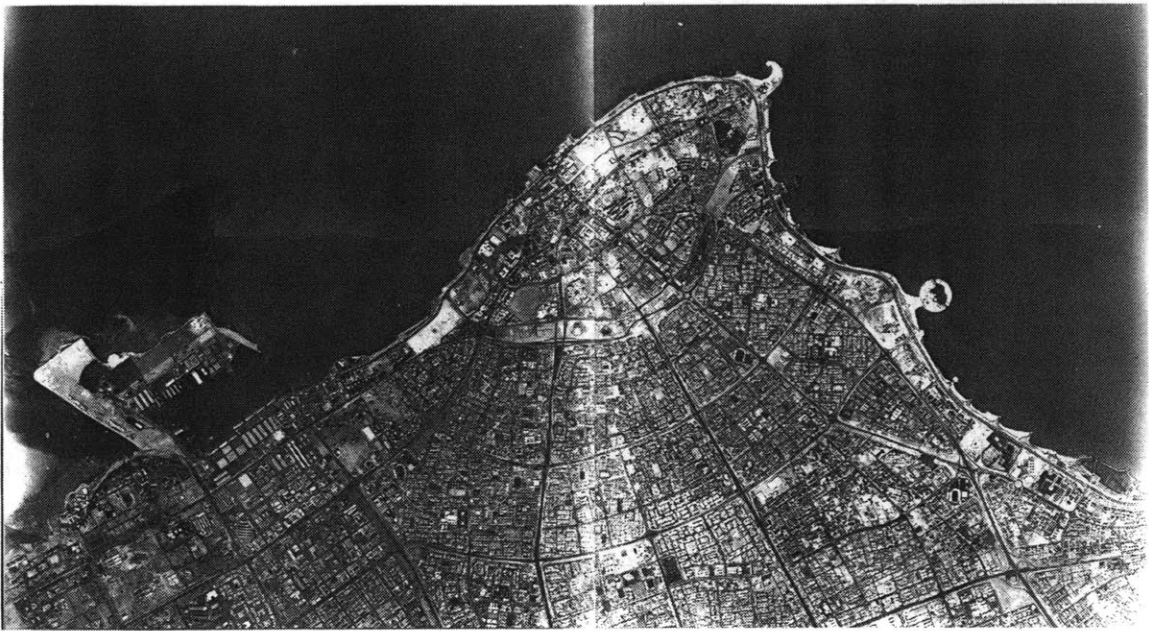
The center also contains the State Mosque, Stock Exchange, Central Bank, National Museum, Kuwait Municipality, Government and other headquarters and public institutions. Future public institutions such as the Audit Bureau and National Library will also be located in the center. Commercial and special retail activities still function in the center, either in the *Souq* or in newly developed shopping malls and shopping centers. Private commercial offices, services, hotels, and some entertainment activities are still located in the center of the city.

In the city center, the most noticeable decline--both in number and quality--has been in the residential use. Most of the center's original inhabitants have moved to villas outside the wall. Recently some Kuwaitis agreed to move in to the empty ten year old high-rise public apartment buildings [Fig. 12]. Existing housing in the center is mainly occupied by either single non-Kuwaiti or expatriate families (that is, before August, 1990); lower income people live in the run-down apartment buildings of the early 1960's and wealthier families inhabit some of the modern apartment buildings. Non-Kuwaitis mostly live in rented apartment buildings since they are not allowed to own property in Kuwait. Unlike the city center, the surrounding and newly created residential neighborhoods are fully developed and plans for these areas were implemented as they were designed according to the Master Plans, reviews and studies that followed [Fig. 13]. The same is also true for the highways and road networks: the plans were implemented everywhere except for inside the city center.

The physical planning efforts have been ongoing since the first Master Plan for the city of Kuwait in 1952. Kuwaitis were keen and persistent about the implementation of plans. What went



[Fig. 12] *Al-Sawaber* housing complex (for Kuwaitis)



[Fig. 13] 1987 aerial photograph showing the fully developed residential neighborhoods outside the center
Source: Kuwait Municipality

wrong, and why were plans not implemented in the city center? The Kuwaitis lost their old city and have not yet seen an alternative suitable for their needs, culture, and climate. The land vacancy phenomenon has two effects: aesthetic and economic. Aesthetically, the city center has lost its identity, character, and sense of place. Unlike cities in the Gulf region such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Bahrain, which underwent similar socio-economic changes yet have a special character that distinguish each of them, Kuwait city does not have a significant and special image. Economically, the city is not using its assets productively. The prime real estate properties are sitting idle and missing growth opportunities. Physically, the center has not been fully developed, resulting in the discontinuity in the built form and the image of dispersion in the city center.

In order to fully understand the problem of land vacancy and to have better insight into its aesthetic, economic, and physical implications, a thorough and comprehensive description is required for the city center. A description of its aesthetic qualities which includes meanings and symbols, character and identity, as well as the sensory qualities of the place, will shed light on the importance of developing the city center and recreating a sense of place for it. In the words of E Relph (1976), who discussed the sense of place and its importance for people:

A deep human need exists for associations with significant places. If we choose to ignore that need, and to allow the forces of placelessness to continue unchallenged, then the future can only hold an environment in which places simply do not matter. If, on the other hand, we choose to respond to that need and to transcend placelessness, then the potential exists for the development of an environment in which places are for men, reflecting and enhancing the variety of human experience.⁴

In the process of developing the traditional city and transforming it to the capital city center, the traditional city of Kuwait has been replaced by a multitude of architectural attempts to establish and recreate a new image for the city. These attempts range from the rebuilding of the local architecture to the introduction of state-of-the-art architectural designs.

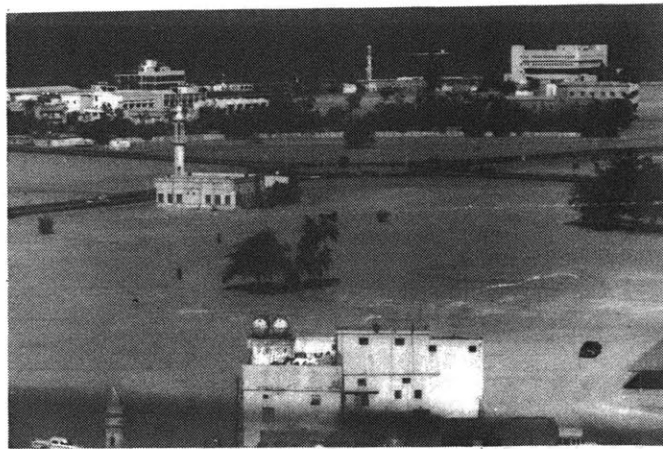
The extensive land vacancy in the center disrupted the historical continuity and detached people from their place of heritage and belonging. Emotionally, the people of Kuwait Town are still very attached and sentimental about their old city and its memory; unfortunately, the place they used to live in and interact with has been destroyed and transformed into vacant land. From what remains of the old traditional city, it has become hard to read and understand the history of the city [Fig. 14].

Meanings and symbols

On the production of meaning, Relph further defines:

Places are not abstractions or concepts, but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world and hence are full with meanings, with real objects, and with ongoing activities.⁵

The city center was deprived of its animation and its sense of continuity when lively residential neighborhoods and their related services moved out of the city center. People are experiencing the city center less because there is less direct interaction within its environment. The few scattered mosques left in the vacant land, which used to serve the surrounding residential neighborhoods for



[Fig. 14] The replacement of the traditional city

daily prayers, lost their relevance when the residences were demolished. Similarly, the handful of remaining *diwanis* and houses which used to be part of the organic fabric of the city now sit in the middle of the sand and dust, exposed to the desert harshness and wilderness [Fig. 15]. Buildings from the old city were not designed as free-standing structures but as blocks of connecting



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Because the present city center still functions as the symbol of government, religious, and economic powers, its symbolic meaning needs better presentation in its architecture and built form. The center needs more meaningful landmarks and urban elements that express its legitimacy⁶ and transcendence⁷ such as boulevards, monuments, and public places.⁸ The capital city center's power could be better expressed by ceremonial buildings, monumental landmarks, and ambient public infrastructure that emphasize its significance and replace the land vacancy.

Character and Identity

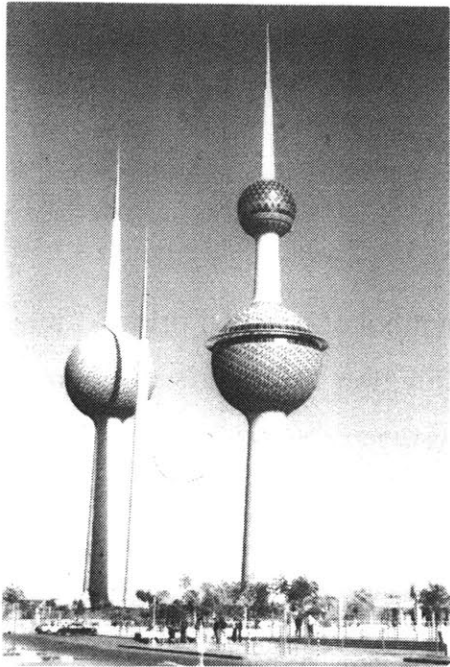
The capital city should be a symbol of national pride: capital cities around the world, such as Washington, D.C., Paris, or London, express a sense of power and prestige. The elements of urban design and the architectural styles used give these capital cities their unique character and unmistakable identity. By comparison, the present city center of Kuwait has a remarkable absence of these qualities. The center lacks memorable and enjoyable urban and human places for the residents of the city.

They are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centers of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties.⁹

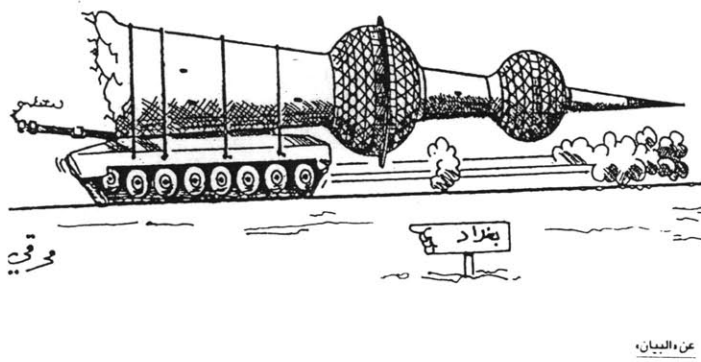
Yi-Fu Tuan (1974)

The handful of landmarks in the city such as the *Sief* Palace and Kuwait Towers give the city its present limited imageability.¹⁰

Kuwait Towers, built in the early 1970's, became a powerful landmark and national symbol due to its form, color, height, location, and most important, its vertical contrast with the flat desert [Fig. 16]. Unless there is an immediate action to improve and control the quality of the physical environment in the city center, these landmarks will soon also lose their scale and meaning in the changing context. A major effort is desperately needed to solve the



[Fig. 16] Kuwait Towers

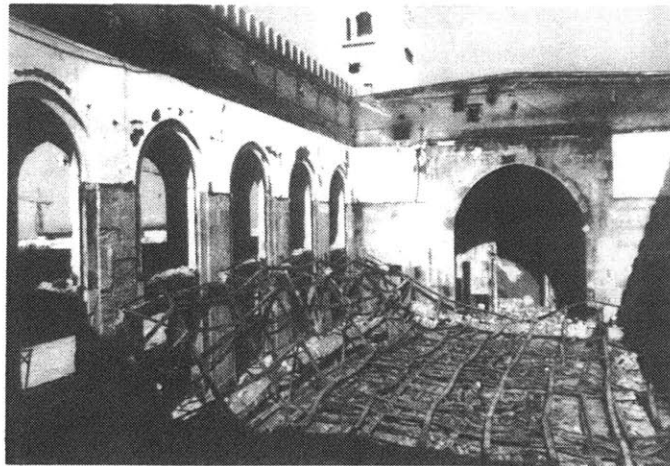


[Fig. 17] Destruction of Kuwaiti identity
Source: Al-Bayan Newspaper, U.A.E, 1990

problem of the vacant land, to develop and integrate this land with the rest of the city center in order to establish a unified framework that gives the center a sense of order and harmony and subsequently a special spirit, character, and identity [Fig. 17]. The issue of national identity has acquired more importance since the Iraqi invasion, which aimed to destroy the Kuwaiti identity and eradicate its symbols (the *Sief* Palace, national museum, and the wall gates) [Fig. 18]. Even the *dhow* [trading ship] that was exhibited in the museum garden to represent Kuwait's seafaring heritage was burned by the Iraqis. More than ever before, Kuwait city needs to reestablish its national identity and recreate a city center with a unique and distinguished character.

Sensory Qualities

Tuan talks about *topophilia*, or the love, sentiment and emotion people feel for a place.¹¹ The vacant land in the center does not evoke any of these positive feelings: people do not experience or feel the vacant land as a place¹² because they do not use it. It physically isolates individual activities¹³ and it separates the people



[Fig. 18] *Sief* Palace after the invasion
Source: U.S Army Corps of Engineers, 1991

from these activities--the last thing one wants to encounter on a summer day in Kuwait City is an open space. Unprotected space means sun, glare, dust and sand during the day, darkness and desolation at night.

It is a void; it does not have natural features such as greenery or water that touch feelings or leave positive impressions that reside in the memory. The artificially controlled environment in the buildings surrounding these dead parts of the city further severs the people from their sensory experience; they no longer have the direct experience of their natural and physical environment that they had in the old city. For example, the surviving *souqs* in the city center, such as *Souq Al-Hareem* (women's market), *Souq Al-Silah* (weapons market), *Souq Al-Zel* (carpets and men's formal costumes), and *Souq Al-Chai* (tea and spice market), used to have these sensory qualities. They have retained the richness of traditions and cultural values: the traditional costumes, the aroma of the cardamom and coffee, and the smell of burnt incense and essences, the sound of the call to prayer, and the colors and textures of the desert [Fig. 19]. As Tuan says, "smell and odor evoke vivid and emotionally charged memories."¹⁴ One can feel and sense the local culture and climate,



[Fig. 19] The *Souq* in *Mubarakiya*
Source: Laurence Vale, 1990

the shaded *souqs* provide a feeling of coolness and protection from the heat and glare of the sun, and from sand storms. Moreover, *souqs* also provide a location for social interactions and leisure that makes the experience of marketing exciting and enjoyable.

In its current state of neglect, the city center of Kuwait will entirely lose its connections with its original traditions, authenticity, and values that differentiate cities in the Gulf region from other cities in the world.

Land Economics

As a result of development plans, government land acquisition policy, and speculation that followed (the process will be more thoroughly described in Part II), the land values in the city center kept increasing until it became unfeasible to develop for both the private and public sectors. The land market in Kuwait City is not a market in the traditional sense: land prices are inflated and unrealistic. Commercial offices are moving out of the center because of the sky-rocketing rents and it is unfeasible for the government to utilize the vacant land for public housing projects unless it builds high-rise residential buildings which are strongly resented by the Kuwaitis. Instead of being a resource for development and economic growth, vacant land in the center became a burden on both the government and private land owners.

Services ministries and other public services and institutions moved out or are planning to move away from the city center in order to decrease traffic congestion and relieve the radial roads that lead into the center. As a result, the expected land vacancy and the

number of abandoned structures are increasing. The vacant land has become a tool for speculation in the hands of the private sector.

Development of land in the center has become impossible without a significant increase in development density. So far, the FAR (floor area ratio) for private commercial development has been increased twice. Additionally, private land owners in the center have exerted pressure to change usage from residential to commercial because residential development is not as profitable as commercial and retail enterprises. The technical officials at Kuwait's Municipality, which is the responsible authority, feel that any increase in density would lead to an increased pressure on the existing infrastructure, and are concerned that its capacity will not be sufficient for the demand generated by the additional development according to increased density zoning. As a result, the Municipality had to put a freeze on commercial development in the center and on all traffic and transportation projects in the city center.

At the present time, especially after the invasion and war, there is no economic pressure to build in the city center. There are no incentives for the private sector to build and the government has other priorities (dealing with the aftermath of the war). Unless a major change in the policy of improving the quality of the environment in the city center takes place, there will be no driving force for developing the center to its full capacity and potential. For the time being, the land market is inactive and the demand for commercial and residential development is not clear because of postwar economic, social, and political changes. Demand for rental residential development will be much less than it was before the invasion, not to mention demand for public services and hence commercial and retail developments.

Since the government of Kuwait is the principal land owner in the center, the problem of land vacancy is a main concern for technical officials in the government. In light of urgent demand for land for public housing, the National Housing Authority and Kuwait's Municipality are facing the problem of finding land sufficient for public housing. Since the Municipality has exhausted its capacity for providing land for NHA (villa-type) housing projects, a recent study has been carried out by KISR (Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research) using the Landsat satellite to delineate areas having the lowest development density in the city.

Government officials are focusing their attention on vacant land in the center for public housing projects. But this approach also has its drawbacks: first, Kuwaitis would need to accept living in apartments instead of villas; second, the NHA has a limited implementation capacity; and finally, there is the question of whether to allow non-natives to live in the center. Vacant land in the center is not only an NHA problem, responsible officials at the municipality are also confronting the problem of development, increase of FAR, providing sufficient infrastructure, and implementing master plans and revisions.

Private property and land owners in the city center also suffer from the land vacancy dilemma. Those who have not already developed their land are not able to develop it now because of economic unfeasibility and the recent freeze on development. Property owners with developed land are not increasing their equity due to underdevelopment of the center in general.

The public also pays a price for land vacancy; regardless of their level of income or nationality, inhabitants of the city all share the discomfort and disadvantages resulting from vacant land. They all suffer from the traffic, parking, and the car-oriented built

environment; the social cost of the land vacancy is that people need to travel longer distances and to use their cars in order to move from one block to another. Additionally, the vacant land does not provide an urban feel, weather protection or security that would enhance the social qualities of the city center.

Realization of the problem

Up until the late eighties, government officials in Kuwait believed that Kuwait had developed an effective and successful physical planning system and that Kuwaitis were the pioneers in city planning in the Gulf region. Since 1988, however, the people and government officials of Kuwait began to realize that other cities in the Gulf have more beautiful and successful urban environments. Despite the fact that some of these cities had the same British planners, their centers are livelier and more densely developed and inhabited than the city center of Kuwait. For example, Abu Dhabi is green and its waterfront is more integrated with the city than that of Kuwait City.

During my interviews with the highest level of government officials concerned, all acknowledged that the city and especially the center has not been developed to its potential as an attractive and liveable city center. They felt that the center suffers from traffic congestion, an inadequate number of parking spaces, and very few quality pedestrian environments and protected shaded areas. All professional officials complained about the lack of aesthetic expression and the absence of a special and coherent character for the city center.

Although the policy makers and high government officials differ in their views and future visions, they all shared the vision that the city center should be maintained as the seat of the state and should house the decision-making agencies in addition to the financial, commercial, cultural, and entertainment activities. They agreed that for reasons of national security the center should be repopulated solely by Kuwaitis. Officials interviewed acknowledged the need for better and more prestigious architectural representation and powerful expressions in the city center's built form. Following is a summary of some of the remarks made by these officials:

- *Need to restore the old city*
- *City does not have a special character*
- *Unsuccessful architectural expressions*
- *City needs identity*
- *Does not have the spirit of a city*
- *City has a strange character*
- *Distorted facades*
- *City does not have harmony*
- *Uncoordinated buildings*
- *No unified framework*
- *City planned by transportation planners without any consideration for pedestrians*

Some of the high government officials believe that the vacant land is not a serious problem for the government and the decision to develop it need not be made immediately and at one time, and that it is better to have the land reserve in the center for future, as yet unplanned projects.

The officials in Kuwait have begun to acknowledge the failure of the previous Master Plans in developing Kuwait Town as a significant city center; the plans were implemented everywhere but in the city center. The problem is not only in the implementation of the plans; but also in that the plans themselves have problems. The plans assumed an implementation capacity that did not



[Fig. 20] Kuwait's City center lacks cohesiveness, character, and identity
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Historical Preservation Study; old Kuwait
Town, Kuwait, 1988

exist. In an interview, the director of NHA mentioned that the current city center's empty blocks are fragmented by the new secondary roads and are only developed at the road edges, leaving the inner parts of the blocks underdeveloped.

Kuwait Municipality is the town planning authority responsible for physical policy, urban developments, municipal services, land control and land transactions for the entire state of Kuwait. Kuwait Municipality is headed by a Minister of Municipal affairs, who is supported by a Municipal Council. Planning proposals are prepared in-house by officers of the Municipality and approved by the Council and relevant committees. The Council of Ministers has to approve or reject planning proposals. However, the implementation of planning decisions involves a number of institutions.¹⁵

In the late 1980's, Kuwait Municipality realized the magnitude of the land vacancy crisis and its impacts and enhanced the role of an in-house committee responsible for guiding developments in Kuwait Town and advising on future plans.¹⁶

Some recent projects and studies* demonstrate the realization of the city center's need for identification and character. In fact, these projects do not deal with the principal issues and the broad framework of the problem; they do not address the real problem in a comprehensive manner. Borrowing styles, using superficially what is called Islamic architecture, recreating history, and reviving the past are ineffective attempts to add distinctive traits and special marks to the image of the city.

* "The Greening of Kuwait," the competition for developing *Abdullah Al-Ahmed* Street, the restoration of *Souq Al-Amir*, the Kuwait Historical Preservation Study, and the re-creation of the miniature Kuwait village on the seaside.

Notes

1. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New York; Columbia University Press, 1974. p. 93. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Tuan.
2. Hamid Shuaib, fax from Kuwait on 4 October, 1991.
3. Shankland Cox Partnership in association with Salem Al- Marzouk & Sabah Abi Hanna, "Master Plan for Kuwait: 1st Review 1977 (Final Report) Volume 1; Planning and Policy." p. 78.
4. E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*. London; Pion Limited, 1976. p. 14. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Relph.
5. Relph, p. 141.
6. Tuan, p. 151.
7. Tuan, p. 50.
8. Tuan, p. 173.
9. Tuan, p. 141.
10. Tuan, p. 27.
11. Tuan, p. 113.
12. Kevin Lynch, *Managing the Sense of a Region*. Cambridge; The MIT Press, 1976. p. 21. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Lynch.
13. Lynch, p. 35.
14. Tuan, p. 10.
15. Hamid Shuaib, "Planning for Implementation." Kuwait pp. 7,8,10.
16. Hamid Shuaib, fax from Kuwait on 4 October, 1991.

Chapter 2: The Context

Description of Kuwait City

The extent of the land vacancy situation and its adverse effect on the life of the city cannot be understood without the acknowledgment and appreciation of the contextual factors involved. The bare, sandy, empty lots are even more unbearable with the heat and sandstorms, and the glare on an expansive open space is formidable. The problem of land vacancy in the city center of Kuwait should not be seen as separate from its physical, natural, social and political context.

The present center of Kuwait City, is surrounded by low-density, self-contained residential neighborhoods created by the intersection of the radial and ring roads system [Fig. 21]. These villa-type single-family residential blocks are located in islands and are isolated by major roads and expressways edged by wide unpaved setbacks [Fig. 22]. Each of these neighborhoods has a center that contains a co-op supermarket, shops for daily shopping, a clinic, a post office, and other municipal and public services depending on the size and location of each neighborhood. The city has been expanding towards the south and it has reached the sixth ring road so far. Some of these neighborhoods are strictly for Kuwaitis; others where non-Kuwaitis live are mainly higher density multi-family apartment buildings. Whereas about 90% of Kuwaitis live in villas, 95% of non-Kuwaitis live in apartments [Fig. 23,24]. Some of the non-Kuwaiti neighborhoods are located in the secondary commercial and retail centers that cater to various needs



[Fig. 21] Kuwait; Urban Pattern. Aerial photograph 1990
Source: Spot Image Corp.



[Fig. 23] Villa in a Kuwaiti neighborhood



[Fig. 22] Expressway isolating residential neighborhoods
Source: Ministry of Information, Kuwait: Facts and Figures, 1988



Higher Income



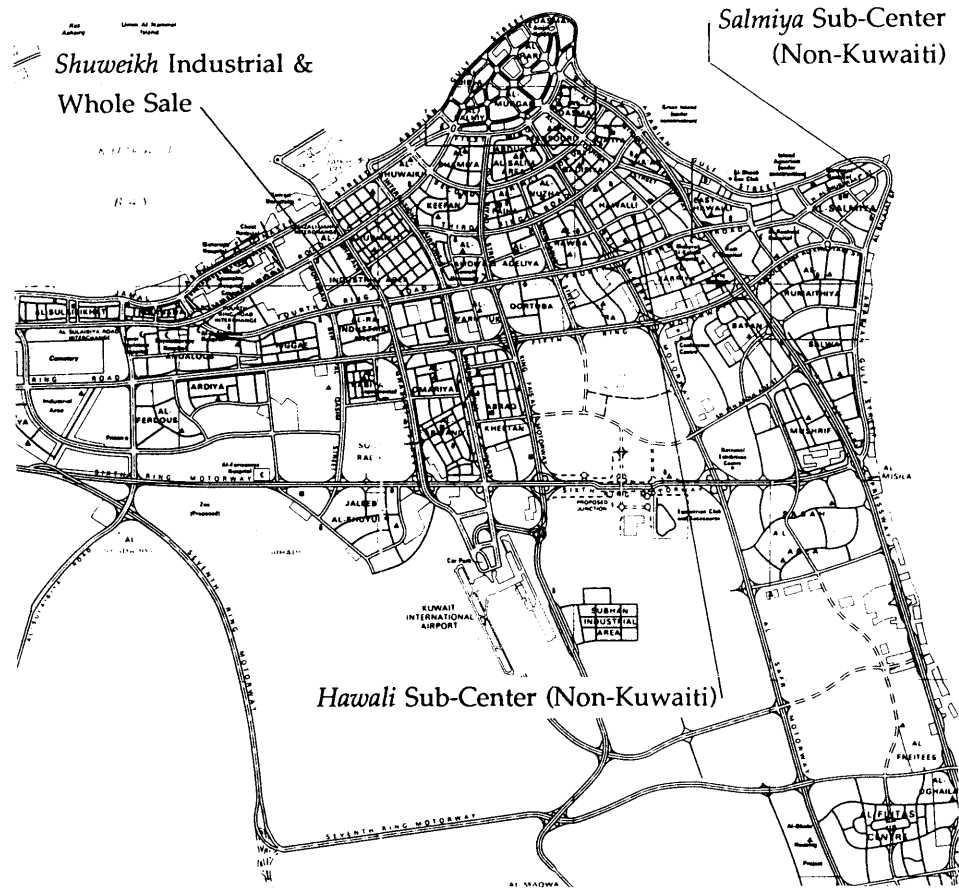
Lower Income

[Fig. 24] Apartment Buildings for non-Kuwaiti

and shopping requirements depending on the levels of income, tastes and preferences of the different ethnic groups [Fig. 25]. Although the city has a bus system which is mainly used by expatriate labor, the majority of the city inhabitants use their cars for commuting within the city. Kuwaitis, specifically, are adamant about using their cars rather than public transportation; cars are a direct symbol of their oil-related affluence, power and social status. As a result of the decentralization and the extension of roads, a significant amount of time is spent travelling from one place to another, causing traffic congestion especially on the radial and ring roads.

In the late 1980's, the waterfront of the city was developed into a major recreational development that has restaurants, marine clubs, marinas, and promenades. The waterfront, commercial activities in *Salmiyeh* (a fashionable, up-scale sub-center), other retail centers, shopping malls, hotels and restaurants constitute the major entertainment activities in the city. Some of the government institutions, ministries, hospitals, the university, and other public services are mainly located either west or south of the city center. However, the city has some attractive physical features and assets--the coastline and the bay, Kuwait Towers, the contrast of sea and desert, and the central location of Kuwait Town--which constitute the present image of the city. If utilized productively, these features will improve the urban quality of the city and enhance its image and character.

In spite of the dispersed commercial, retail, and entertainment activities as well as other public services within the city, up until the Iraqi invasion the city center in Kuwait had maintained its vitality and crowdedness. The private service sector is the second largest



[Fig. 25] Map showing new residential neighborhoods, road network, and secondary commercial centers
 Source: Jonathan Crusoe and David Kemp, MEED Profile No.6, Kuwait: rebuilding a country, London 1991

employer (after the government) in Kuwait. The center still had special retail shopping in the *Souq*, with wares such as gold and jewelry, fabrics, carpets, spices, essences, incense, and traditional Kuwaiti garments. The new shopping malls differ in the quality of their shops and merchandise. As a matter of fact, Kuwait City used to be a major shopping center for the Gulf region, not only for Kuwait's residents but also for surrounding countries. Shopping in Kuwait, especially in climate-controlled shopping malls, is an entertainment and social pastime; people (especially women) spend

considerable time in shopping areas, mostly in the afternoons and early evenings. On weekends and holidays some parts of the center become livelier and more congested. Hotels and restaurants cater mainly to businessmen and foreigners. There is no doubt that the Iraqi invasion and subsequent war left their marks on all these activities and imposed different realities on all aspects of life in Kuwait City.

Natural Environment

Kuwait has the typical arid climate and geography of the desert that forms the Arabian Peninsula. The topography of the city is mainly flat and the surrounding desert rises gently from the east to the west. The desert in Kuwait does have some dunes and oases but does not have the appeal, the soil texture or color of the romanticized desert landscape; it becomes green only during the short spring season when the Kuwaitis have the traditional spring exodus to the desert.*

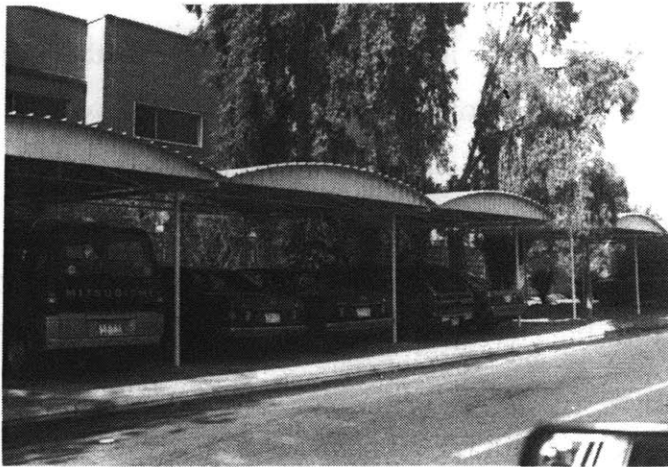
The city in general has a hard landscape and very little greenery because of the poor soil quality and water scarcity. The maintenance and upkeep cost of greenery in Kuwait is high; so far no serious effort has been made to encourage landscaping and planting of the city as the government did in Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain in the United Arab Emirates, where the personal vision of the ruler

* Usually in February, most Kuwaiti families spend two to three weeks camping in the desert. It is the only time they can interact intensely with their natural environment; they are willing to commute to their jobs from tents in the desert in order to preserve this tradition.

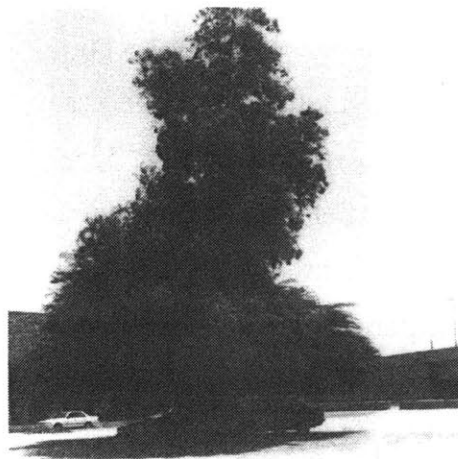
has had a tremendous impact on the quality of city urban environment. The city, and specifically the center, lacks the lushness, freshness, color and smell of greenery.

In summer, which lasts for about seven months, the heat of the sun, the humidity and the sandstorms affect every aspect of the city's daily life. For example, some construction work, especially the pouring of concrete, has to be done at night. Life starts very early in the morning (between 6 and 7 a.m.), with a break at noon for siesta, which brings the city to a complete standstill before activity resumes at four in the afternoon. Except for government offices, people normally go back to work in the afternoon for about three hours, and generally do their shopping afterwards as shops stay open late in the evenings. The split working day increases the traffic congestion because of the doubled rush hours.

The climate not only affects the daily life of the city, but also the architectural form of the city. People need to be protected from heavy sandstorms, direct sun light and glare; shaded areas are essential, not only for people, but for cars and other exposed objects as the harsh climatic conditions affect everything in the city's physical environment [Fig. 26]. The use of shading and air circulating devices are necessary; unprotected open spaces are rarely used during the day. Heat, glare, and the continuous brutal duststorms and strong wind limit outdoor life, especially during daytime in the hot months of the summer. In winter, the temperature may drop drastically at night, whereas daytime weather is pleasant and comfortable, allowing for substantial outdoor recreation.



[Fig. 26] Photographs showing the need for shade in Kuwait



Social Context

Up until August of 1990, Kuwait's population was about 2.17 million,¹ out of which only 27.5% were native Kuwaitis; the government's goal was to increase this percentage to 33% by the year 2000.² The rest of the population was mainly comprised of expatriates from over one hundred nationalities who came to Kuwait and intended to stay only temporarily, and on whom the society depended. In Kuwait, foreigners are not allowed to be naturalized or own property, regardless of the number of years they have lived in Kuwait. Therefore, the social system has a duality of structure due to the fact that expatriates never integrate with Kuwaiti society. Non-Kuwaitis usually maintain ties with their original societies and socialize mostly with their own people. Since they have no continuity or future in Kuwait, their aspirations and views are different from Kuwaitis, as are their concerns for and attitudes towards the city. After the invasion, Kuwait's population decreased to less than 1 million; as of late 1991 about 50% are Kuwaitis. According to latest reports, 44.5% of Kuwaiti population are less than 15 years old and 44.1% of population are between 15 and 44 years old.³ For non-Kuwaitis, percentages before the invasion were 29.9% and 57.6% respectively.⁴ Also, Kuwait has the second highest per capita income in the world. The government of Kuwait is responsible for providing an extremely generous welfare system. For example, Kuwaitis do not pay any form of taxes or fees for services, and the government guarantees employment, housing, free education and health services in addition to other privileges and benefits. Therefore, Kuwaitis can afford to completely depend on servants for their daily life requirements and have more leisure time than people in other countries. Another manifestation of their

affluence is the high rate of car ownership; teenagers in particular spend their leisure time driving.

The indigenous population of Kuwait is a tribal, traditional, and exclusive Islamic society with great ambitions for modernity, prosperity, and progress. The number of people in a typical Kuwaiti household is fairly large; having and bringing up a large number of children is not an economic problem for Kuwaitis. One of government's main goals is to increase the Kuwaiti population and people have no difficulty getting help raising their children. Kuwaiti families maintain strong relationships and ties with their extended families and relatives; they have also maintained their social traditions and Islamic values.

Kuwaitis strongly adhere to their religion and any form of activity that contradicts Islamic values such as gambling, alcohol drinking, or women swimming at public beaches is prohibited. Public entertainment is limited; for Kuwaitis, social gatherings are the dominant pastime during weekdays. Women often go shopping for leisure, and men go to *diwanias* to socialize, do business, talk politics, exchange information, eat dinner and drink tea and coffee. Kuwaitis have recently started to enjoy family entertainment like taking children to the waterfront, entertainment parks, or local restaurants. Before the invasion, Kuwaitis who had weekend houses on the beach would spend Thursdays and Fridays at the seashore. Lower and middle income Kuwaitis generally spend their free time and holidays either sitting or having picnics at the seaside and waterfront. The sea and its related diversions are the main attraction for both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis; to their dismay, the newly constructed waterfront project physically obstructs people's



[Fig. 27] Photographs showing the need for physical interaction with water

interaction with the water [Fig. 27]. In general, cultural, entertainment, and leisure activities are few; the younger generation and cultured, sophisticated people are the ones who suffered most from this limitation [Fig. 28].



[Fig. 28] Photographs showing the need for greenery

Postwar Realities

Up until August, 1990, the socio-economic context described was still valid (since the invasion, further field research has been restricted). The Iraqi invasion and the Gulf War imposed important new economic, political, and social realities and changed the contextual factors. National and internal security has become an increased concern in Kuwait; the government has had to reexamine its policies. The general postwar policy of the government is to decrease the non-Kuwaiti population and to reach a balance between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis (the target total population is 1.2 million).⁵ Additional policies include more dependence on natives and less reliance on foreign labor (76% of labor force before invasion),⁶ a higher dependence on technology, and training and education of Kuwaitis.⁷ The government has been discouraging expatriates from bringing their families to live in Kuwait. Postwar policies regarding the decrease of population will certainly have adverse economic impacts; the policies will reduce the need for the service sector, and decrease the demand for development. The government as the principal spender will have several years of deficit to come, and so far the private sector's confidence in the economy has been undermined.⁸ The government is considering some kind of nominal charges for public services and some form of taxes on foreign businesses. Regardless of changes in the social, economic, and political contexts, the fact remains that the center has an issue of land vacancy and that an effort needs to be made to deal with it.

Land vacancy in the center of Kuwait City should not be separated from its contextual factors. It is not only the question of how to deal with the problem and what to do with the empty land

in the center. The broader question is how to deal with land vacancy in a city center where land prices have reached unprecedented astronomical levels and in a country that enjoys one of the highest per capita income, highest population growth, and highest rate of car ownership. Moreover, a solution is required for developing vacant land in one of the hottest regions in the world, where water is scarce and soil quality is poor. Finally, there are the questions of whether there will be sufficient demand for development in the center in light of recent depopulation policies and whether it is justifiable and feasible to develop a physically empty city center that has retained its vital activity considering the large number of vacant rented housing units resulting from the recent departure of expatriates.

Notes

1. Hamid Shuaib, fax from Kuwait on 7 January 1992.
2. Al-Siyassah (newspaper), 15 January 1990.
3. Jonathan Crusoe and Peter Kemp, "Kuwait: Rebuilding a Country (MEED Profile No.6)." EMAP Business Information Ltd, London, 1991. p. 5. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Crusoe.
4. Al-Qabas International (newspaper) 25 April 1990.
5. Crusoe, p. 1.
6. Crusoe, p. 5.
7. Crusoe, p. 12.
8. Crusoe, p. 1.

Part Two: The Past

What Went Wrong?

In order to understand and be able to analyze the factors that led to the present state of the center, it is essential to retrace and carefully examine the historical events and factors that lead to the phenomenon of vacancy in the inner part of the city. The vacant land in Kuwait's city center is a result of more than one factor; the origins of some of these factors go back to the pre-oil era, such as changes in the public attitudes and collective memory as well as the influences of the private sector and the British.

It is extremely difficult to understand why the city center took its present form without the knowledge of the historical context. The international events and regional political changes greatly influenced the evolutionary process of its physical development. In Kuwait, the government's policies and planning decisions have been driven primarily by outside forces and abrupt economic and political changes.

Chapter 3 will discuss some pre-oil historical issues that led to land vacancy in the center; there will be an attempt to describe the traditional city and its dense fabric, urban form, and the special character that responded to the surrounding desert environment. In Chapter 4 there will be an analysis of post-oil planning efforts and a summary of the Master Plans, reviews, and studies that have been carried out so far. The milestones of the last forty years which had a direct impact by either prompting or delaying decisions, will be included to achieve a fuller comprehension and a better analysis.

Chapter 5 will define, analyze, and elaborate on the causes of and participants in the problem. Identifying and taking these factors into account will enable decision makers and planners to approach future plans and programs with more insight in order to ensure a realistic and satisfactory implementation.



Kuwait Town, The Traditional City
Source: Hamid Shuaib

Chapter 3: Early Development of Kuwait Town

Historical Background

Until the late eighteenth century, Kuwait was an obscure fishing village and trading town on the Arabian Gulf under the control of the *Beni Khalid* tribes. It did not contribute to the major patterns of trade in the region, namely the one from Basrah in southern Iraq to India. At that time, the *Utub*, a branch of the *E'neza* tribal confederations, migrated from *Nejid* in the north eastern parts of the Arabian Peninsula because of droughts and scarcity of natural resources as well as hostilities from other tribes. The *Utub* managed to take over and declare independence from *Beni Khalid* in 1756.

In 1760, the *Utub* were split and the *Al-Khalifa* branch migrated to Bahrain while the *Al-Sabah* branch remained in Kuwait and established their power and the legacy of their uninterrupted and prevailing rule in the Emirate of Kuwait.

In 1776, The East India Company established a base in the Gulf, signaling the development of British interest in the region for commercial and political control purposes.¹ After the Persian occupation of Basrah, the East India Company started to send its mail from India to Aleppo through Kuwait using camel cargo, calling it the "Desert Express."² Kuwait began to acquire its commercial importance as a terminus for trade from Syria and the Levant and as a port on the Gulf. For the next century, the British and Ottoman relations in Kuwait were strained.

The political developments of the late century--the British occupation of Egypt, the Russian interest in reaching the warm

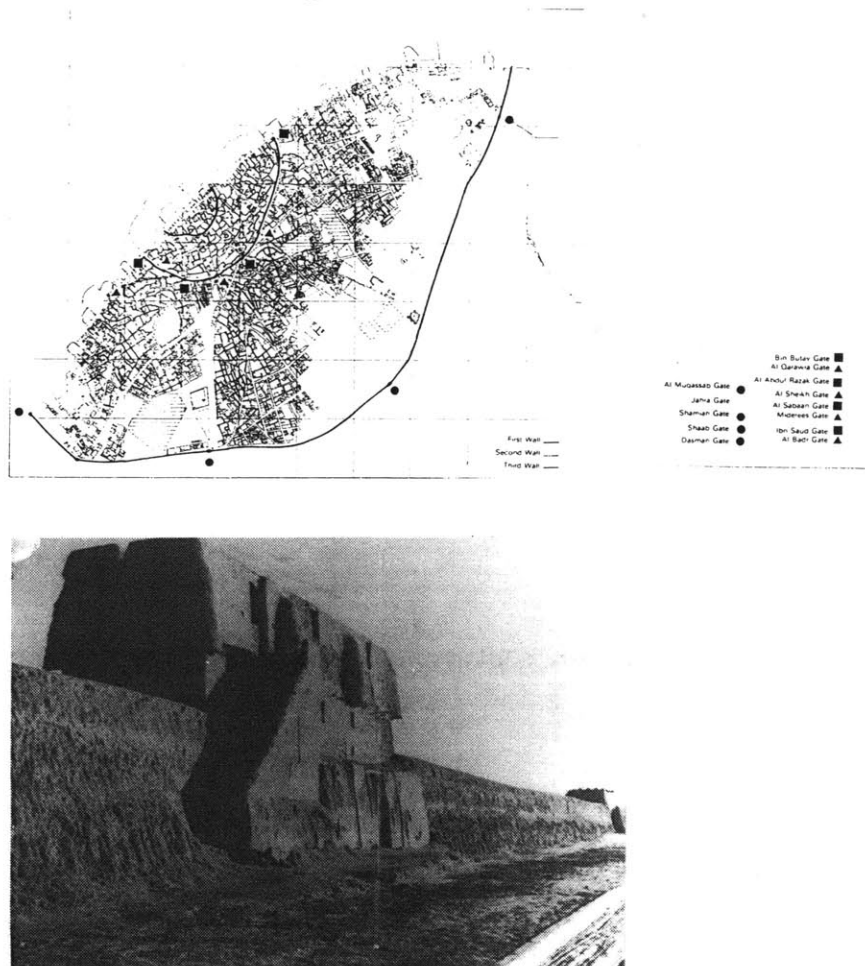
waters of the Gulf, and the Ottoman encouragement and assistance to the Germans in building the Berlin-Baghdad railway with plans to extend it into Kuwait--urged the British to sign a mutual benefits agreement with *Sheikh Mubarak* in 1899, whereby Kuwait received protection from Ottoman invasion and protection of its shipping and pearl-diving fleet. In return, Britain acquired access to the north of the Gulf at the borders of the Ottoman Empire in Iraq.

In 1902, the first British political agent was appointed. In 1914, Britain agreed to sign an agreement which stated that Kuwait was to be an independent government under British protection.³ Through their Political Agent and advisors in Kuwait, the British exerted direct and indirect influence on political and administrative decisions. Their influence was not limited to the advisory role, it extended to the institutions and administrative system as well. When the time came and Kuwait needed planners, the British were available and the obvious choice for continued modernization. At that time, Kuwait's port gained importance in competition with Basrah in Iraq. European distribution agencies began to relocate from Basrah to Kuwait.

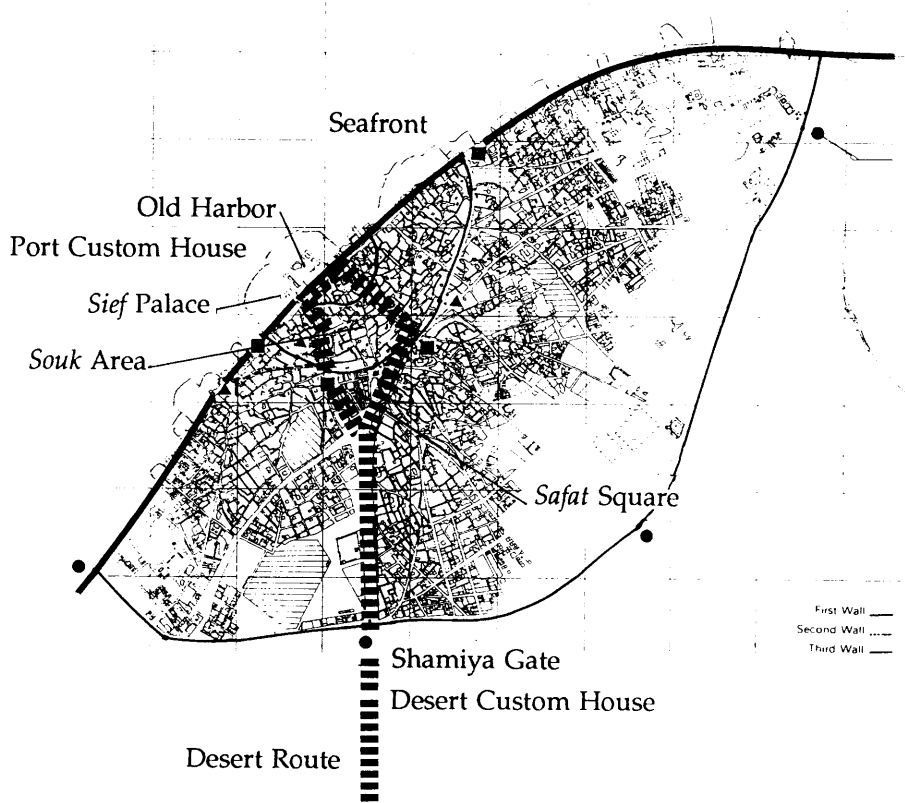
By 1934, an agreement was signed between Kuwait and the Anglo American Oil Company in which *Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah* stipulated that no exploration or drilling would take place inside the city wall. In 1938, oil was discovered in the Burgan oil field (at the time the largest oil field in the world), but its exploitation was delayed by the Second World War.⁴ Oil production began in 1946.⁵ This was the turning point in Kuwait's history: it transformed Kuwait from a small state with an insignificant city and port into one of the wealthiest oil-producing countries.

Physical Development of Traditional City

The earliest settlement was located on an elevated site for two reasons: easy defense and surrounding water wells outside the wall in Hawali and Shamiya. The first wall was built in 1760 to protect the town from Bedouin raids. The wall formed a crescent following the edge of the existing settlement and topography, it was 750 meters long and had five gates. According to historians, the town's population at that time was 10,000 and its area was about 11.275 Hectares.⁶ [Fig. 29]



[Fig. 29] The walls and gates of the old town
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait, Kuwait, 1980



[Fig. 30] Major activities in Kuwait Town

During the nineteenth century, as a result of the growing trading activities, the obscure village grew organically and transformed into an integrated city in which residential neighborhoods, retail and commercial activities were the major elements. The two major economic activities (sea-related economic activities and desert trading) were developed along two axes. In 1811, as the town expanded, the second wall was built parallel to the first wall: it was 2300 meters long and had seven gates. The town area was about 72.4 Hectares.⁷ Prominent sea merchant families built their houses

along the sea axis and the harbor (the sea port) in the *Seif* area and the commercial activities were concentrated along the desert route axis, with a custom's house at *Shamiya* gate (the land port).* [Fig. 30] *Safat* Square was the center of trading activity; it was the desert caravans' terminal, a meeting place, and a focal point for social and economic interaction. During this early period, the *Sief* Palace was built on the seafront; it was and is the heart of the city center [Fig. 31].



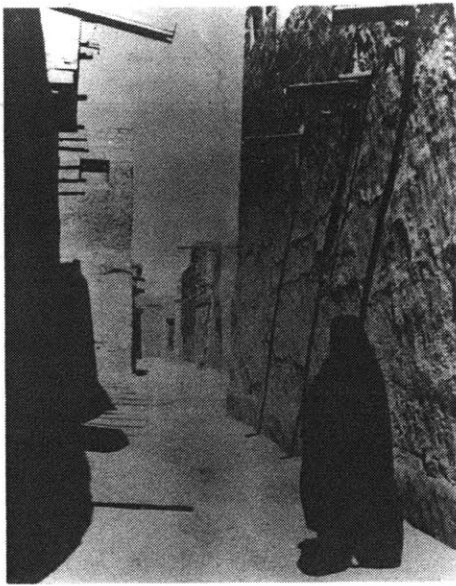
[Fig. 31] The *Sief* Palace

Source: Saba Shiber, *Arab City Growth, Kuwait*, 1967

In the early twentieth century, when sea trading, pearl-diving, and shipbuilding activities were thriving, the town of Kuwait expanded. In 1921, the Saudis advanced on and attempted to besiege Kuwait, and a third wall was built to protect the

* Some gates are named for a destination and/or purpose. *Sham* is Arabic for Damascus. Therefore *Shamiya* refers to the direction of Damascus and also implies the desert route between Damascus and Kuwait Town.

expanded Kuwait Town and its inhabitants. The third wall followed the form of the second wall; it was 6400 meters long and had five gates. The town's area was about 750 Hectares.⁸ The city inside this last wall represents the present city center. The form of the early settlement and the first wall dictated the form of the expanded city and following city walls, and therefore defined the form of the current city center and the city's road network. The concentric ring roads paralleled the form of the last wall and radial roads extended from gates' axes.

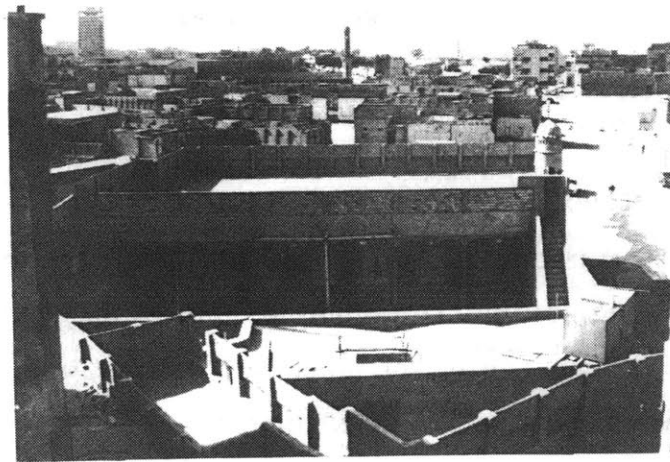


[Fig. 32] Narrow street in the traditional city
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987

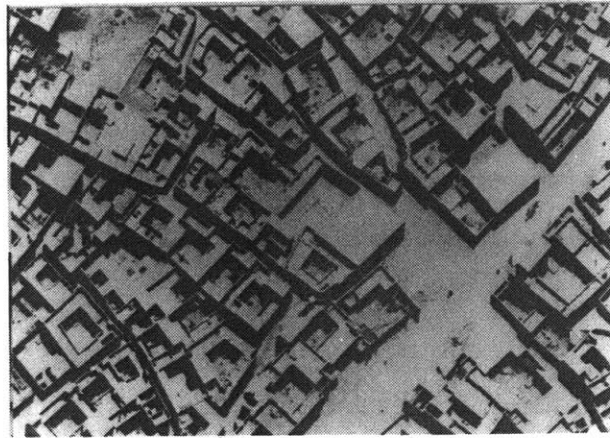


[Fig. 33] Protected and Shaded Alleyway
Source: Ronald Lewcock & Zahra Freeth, Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Northern Gulf, London, 1978

The old settlement developed along narrow pedestrian streets. The outside walls of old one storey courtyard houses had plain facades with minimal openings and ornamentation. The old fabric of Kuwait Town was densely knit to suit natural, social, and economic conditions. For example, high walls along both sides of narrow streets protected pedestrians from heat and severe dust storms; side walls of houses were not directly exposed to the heat of the sun, as houses were built adjacent to one another [Fig 32,33]. High, plain walls also provided privacy and separation of family life from street life. The architecture of the traditional city was sympathetic to the climate, culture, and desert environment, and also gave the city its unique character and identity. The silhouette formed by minarets and wind catchers, and the surrounding wall, contributed to the city's Arabic and Islamic image and character [Fig 34,35].



[Fig. 34] The traditional city
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait 1987



[Fig. 35] The dense fabric of the traditional city
Source: Kuwait Municipality: Historical Preservation Study; Old Kuwait
Town, Kuwait, 1988

Economic Development

The economic endeavors in Kuwait Town revolved around sea and desert trading. Economic activities related to the sea such as pearl-diving, trading, shipbuilding, and fishing were the main sources of income. During the nineteenth century, trade flourished as local pearl merchants realized that it was more profitable for them to market their pearls directly in India (rather than sell to middlemen in Kuwait). The Kuwaitis sailed to India to sell pearls; on the return journey they brought rice and spices, timber from East Africa, and wheat and dates from Basrah.



[Fig. 36] *Sief* harbor
Source: Hamid Shuaib



[Fig. 37] Intense seafront activities
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987

The timber trade and availability established the industry of *dhow* [large sail boats] building in Kuwait. The *dhow* industry flourished in all sizes of ships, from the large oceangoing *dhows* to pearl-diving *dhows*, small fishing boats, and all related handicrafts. The prominent merchant families living along the seafront, together with all other sea-related activities and the harbor, constituted the lively part of the city. The busy *dhow* harbor (in the *Sief* area) was adjacent to warehouses and the *Souq* [Fig. 36,37].

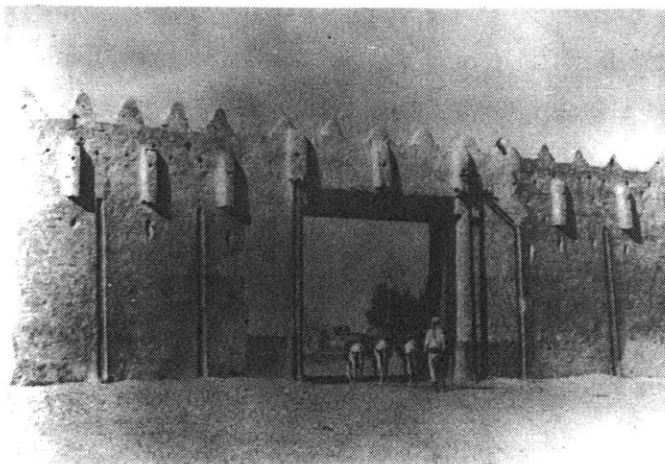


[Fig. 38] *Safat Square*

Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, *Kuwait Al-Madhi*, Kuwait, 1987

The other economic activity was desert trading; Bedouins used to bring their goods and sell them inside the wall. The Bedouins occupied the inland parts because of their connections with the desert. Both sea and desert commercial activities were linked at *Safat Square* [Fig. 38]. During his visit in 1912, Raunkiaer observed:

On the inland side there was a moveable town, that is to say of caravaneers and bedouin, scattered over parts of the desert which penetrates like an arm of the sea into the real Kuwait ... In the innermost corner of the inlet of wastes begins the bazaar, with numerous lanes and partly covered streets.⁹



[Fig. 39] *The desert route*

Source: Hamid Shuaib

By 1930, pearl-diving and the pearl trade had started to decline due to the competition from Japanese cultured pearls, coupled with the worldwide economic recession which effected the whole region.¹⁰ Kuwait's local economy suffered from a recession which did not last long; oil was discovered in 1938 and a new era began in Kuwait's economic history.

From the beginning, the old merchant families shared the fortunes and hardships with the ruling family. They depended on each other; subsequently, a social contract was instituted between the ruling family and the old Kuwaiti merchant families. Their mutual relationship was one of respect, support and interdependence.

The old merchant families established their names and prominence through their trading and by acting as local representatives for European agencies. Through the use of their *diwaniyas* as guest houses for agencies' representatives, old families initiated their relationships with these agencies. Also, educated Kuwaitis who could translate and provide business support were able to become local agents for the European companies. The government and the ruling family depended on the merchant families for their political support, advisory role, and revenue. Merchant families used to pay taxes (2%) and customs to the government at both the seaport and the desert port.

After the oil discovery, when the government no longer needed this financial support, the ruling family and government chose to reciprocate and acknowledge the role of these families (and later other newly established prominent families). The government's gestures of respect and support continued and increased over time until there reached a point where the government became quite

vulnerable to pressure and abuse, especially in land registration, land acquisition, and plan implementation.

Kuwait Municipality is the only institution responsible for the planning and development of the city; it represents the state of Kuwait as a land owner (the Municipality is directly attached to the Council of Ministers). Since its establishment in 1934, Kuwait Municipality has been responsible for all land transactions, land development, and physical planning of Kuwait at a national, metropolitan, and city center level. Through the jurisdiction and power of the Municipal Council, the Municipality played a major role in land registration, ownership, valuation, acquisition, distribution, and ownership conflicts.¹¹ The Municipality's jurisdictions are spread from the National Physical Planning Policy down to the street furniture, and include planning, programming, execution, and maintenance.

The Municipal Council consists of appointed and elected members and the president (appointed by the ruler). In the past, it was important that the president also be a member of the ruling family. The president and members of the Municipal Council have to be reputable and highly respected people in the city. The Council is supposed to represent the public, but in reality it has represented the influential private sector. Membership on the Municipal Council is not only a prestigious position, but also a very powerful and effective one. Through its decisions and actions, the Municipal Council can manipulate, pressure, and direct decisions regarding the development of the city.

The phenomenon of land vacancy has some attributes that go back to the origin of land ownership. In Kuwait City, prior to oil discovery and exploitation, the land that later became so valuable and expensive to develop did not have much value. It was not

useful as agricultural land; therefore, there were minimal disputes about ownership, water, or grazing. Financial resources were limited; nobody had the foresight for future development or land speculation. Except for those owned by wealthy and prominent families, parcels inside the wall varied in size and were of small area and irregular shape. Outside the city wall, and up to the late 1940's, the desert land did not have any value. According to *Shari'a* [Islamic laws], the prevailing law at that time, public land was owned by the ruler; only the *Calif* [ruler in early Islam] or the *Sultan* [Ottoman ruler] had the power to donate land, and to whom he chose.¹²

In the early days, land came into possession in three ways: by purchasing or seizing the land, or by ruler's donation to favored individuals. Before the Municipality's establishment in 1934, there was no official land or property registration. After that, the Municipality became the responsible entity for buying and selling land and properties in its capacity as land owner representing the state. By 1940, the Registration Department was established and people started to petition for land registration after proving their claims.

The flow of oil income in 1946 triggered some unplanned development, characterized by "cutting" new roads in the organic fabric of the old city and widening existing lanes to serve the growing number of automobiles. There was a fierce opposition to the new roads, which demolished homes and disrupted the existing social and neighborhood relationships. It is significant to note that the Kuwaitis used an Arabic term meaning "to cut a road" for the process of road widening. They even refer to this period as "the year of the cut" with all its implications of physical and emotional

separation. This process signaled the start of the destruction of the traditional organic fabric of the town of Kuwait.

The Municipality had to expropriate land for this purpose; a parcel or part of a parcel was expropriated for street encroachment with minimal or no compensation. At that time, land expropriation and land acquisition were unwelcome practices to the town's inhabitants. As the oil wealth increased, the government represented by the Municipality became more generous in land acquisition for public projects [Fig. 40].



[Fig. 40] New roads in the old town

Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
Hamid Shuaib

The early 1950's witnessed a milestone in the history of Kuwait: *Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem*, who was the Amir of Kuwait between 1950 and 1965, declared that the oil wealth in Kuwait belonged to the Kuwaiti citizens and not to the ruling clan (as it is in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates). His visions of modernity and democracy were translated into a distribution of oil wealth among all Kuwaitis, the establishment of a constitution, ambitious development programs, and a generous welfare system. As a result, the government adopted some major public policies to implement these decisions such as a high valuation for property acquisition for those who owned houses, a provision of government employment for those who did not own property, and an upgraded standard of living for all Kuwaitis. As a tool for distributing the oil money and encouraging private development, the government began to acquire land for public projects from property owners in the traditional city, paying extremely inflated prices. The Municipality representing the government began to purchase land in excess of what was required for public projects and re-sell the surplus back to the public (mostly to the original owners) for a fraction of its cost to the government (about 4%)¹³ after taking what it needed for building new roads and replanning the lots. The government's goal at that time was to benefit the largest number of people, to encourage them to build new houses, generate income from developing what remained from their properties, or establish businesses.

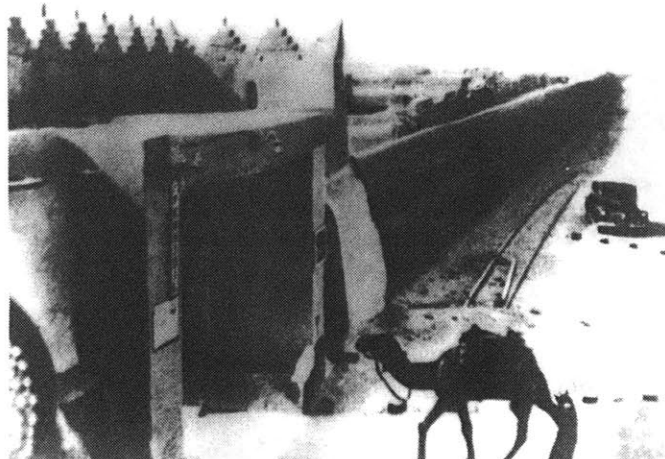
In this process, the government not only created a demand for land, but also created a high value for land in the city within the wall. Land became a source for accumulating wealth, therefore, people rushed to benefit from the opportunity, claiming land especially outside the city wall. When oil was discovered, the

government had to delineate and reserve public land for oil exploration and production. To prevent land grabbing, people were forced to register land (to which they had proof of prior claim). Large tracts of worthless desert land outside the wall and unregistered parcels inside the wall were seized by those who had either the foresight or foreknowledge to anticipate future public projects.¹⁴ At this point, the government had to limit the distance within which people could claim lots by demarcating an area along the coast and outside the city wall. During this transitional period, there was a manipulation in land claims and registration with the help of some Municipality employees. When land prices went up later they put pressure on the Municipality either to acquire it or subdivide it and extend infrastructure so they could sell it at high prices as residential lots.

The Collective Memory

The history of Kuwait Town before the oil prosperity is one of hardship, depression, backwardness, and underdevelopment because of limited resources, water scarcity, and an extremely harsh natural environment. Life was full of uncertainties; favorable conditions would include good rainfall, a fair sailing wind, and high trading profits. The inhabitants of the traditional city lived a much simpler life; extended family lived together in one house and social life was limited to immediate family, relatives, and neighborhood relationships. At that time, Kuwaitis could neither spend lavishly on their houses and lifestyle, nor on public infrastructure. Houses were built with mud brick and soft materials. Their life revolved around the sea and its related activities.

Kuwaitis shared this memory of hardship--long trade journeys to India and Africa, difficult conditions of pearl-diving, and women staying alone with their children. The Kuwaitis also shared the memory of traditions such as celebrating the returns of *dhow*s to Kuwait Town,¹⁵ finding the *dana* [rare large pearl], or the close neighborhood relationships that accompanied their mutual difficulties. It is this same collective memory of suffering which



[Fig. 41] Elements of the collective memory of the traditional city
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987



Source: Ronald Lewcock and Zahra Freeth, *Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Northern Gulf*, London, 1978

Kuwaitis wanted to leave behind when they had the opportunity to do so. Although they did not develop the city center, they managed to destroy the traditional city. Kuwaitis became selective in their memory; they wanted to eradicate the physical form that reminded them of the part of their past associated with difficulties and maintain the memories associated with the old traditions and social relationships which are still vivid and active. Kuwaitis of the traditional city still have an attachment to their old city. *Mubarakiya* (the old *Souq*) still has a special meaning and value. The vacant land in the city center infers the destruction of these memories, values, and heritage.



Kuwait Town Waterfront
Source: Hamid Shuaib

Notes

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2. David Sapsted, *Modern Kuwait*. Macmillan London Ltd, London, 1980. p. 13. Further citation in this Chapter will be cited as Sapsted.
3. Cambridge Encyclopedia, "Kuwait", p. 365.
4. Cambridge Encyclopedia, "Kuwait", p. 366.
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12. Elizabeth Mayer, ed. *Property, Social Structure and Law in the Modern Middle East*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1985. p. 10.
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Chapter 4: Plans, Reviews, and Studies

General Overview

Between 1950 and the present, the Gulf region has been undergoing explosive political, economic, and social changes. In a small, newly independent state like Kuwait, the national economy and government policies are very sensitive to international and regional events. Oil prices in a single commodity economy like Kuwait directly and indirectly affect development programs, the land market, and hence government actions. Chaotic situations resulting from external changes prompted the government to embark on many studies and plans and to call in foreign expertise. Increases in oil prices were generally followed by prosperity, an increase of government expenditure on development, and projects which have required more expatriate labor. Thus, oil booms have been followed by rapid population growth, greater demand on development, inflated land prices, and higher rates of car ownership.

International political and economic milestones, paralleled by local responses such as government policies and actions, planning efforts and plan implementation, and private sector pressure and influence have had impacts on the city center's development. These forces resulted in decentralization, destruction of the traditional city, unfeasibility of land development as well as high public land ownership, numerous projects and studies, and failure of plan implementation.

It would be extremely difficult to describe and analyze the planning process without an understanding of its context and background. Since this period of time was full of dramatic events and dynamic changes, the analysis in this chapter will be limited only to the major events that influenced the physical evolution of the center and how the government, private sector, and land market responded. Following is a brief analysis of the Master Plans, their reviews, and a partial listing of studies and projects that took place.

The First Master Plan

The temporary interruption of the Iranian oil supply during the Mussadiq crisis in Iran 1951 further increased the importance of Kuwait's oil for the west.¹ In the early 1950's, Kuwait's new prosperity created a demand for services, which attracted expatriate labor and professionals. The creation of Israel in 1948 accelerated the Palestinian exodus to Arab countries, and a high percentage went to Kuwait. When Kuwait took its first census in 1957, the population was 206,000.

In order to implement the government's ambitions of modernization and improving the standard of living, the Development Board was established in 1951. Headed by the Amir, the board was the highest authority for planning and construction. The Board decided to employ a British firm to develop a physical plan for Kuwait Town. Minoporio, Spencely and Macfarlane of Britain were assigned the preparation of the first Master Plan of Kuwait Town. At the time the British were considered the most advanced city planners.

During this period, there was a debate about the future city center and a major decision had to be made to choose between three options presented by the Master Plan consultants: the first was to keep the old city and build a new center outside the wall; the second was to rebuild the existing city center and develop new residential neighborhoods outside the city wall, maintaining Kuwait Town as the state capital and preserving its functions as the city center; the third and most radical option was to build a new city along the coast, south of Kuwait Town. The decision was to adopt the second option. At the time the consultant did not have any prior knowledge of the place except that Kuwaitis wanted a modern city. Minoporio thought there were no artifacts worth saving in Kuwait Town (as compared to landmarks in Isfahan and Baghdad).² Meanwhile, the ever increasing number of cars and limousines could not get through the city wall's gates [Fig. 42]. In 1954, a decision was made to demolish the city wall, leaving only the gates, and to create an open space following the wall's shape in its memory³ [Fig. 43]. The space between the *Sief* area (the palace and the harbor) and the open space would then be used for government and commercial structures. The wall's demolition encouraged the further demolition of a large number of houses in Kuwait Town.

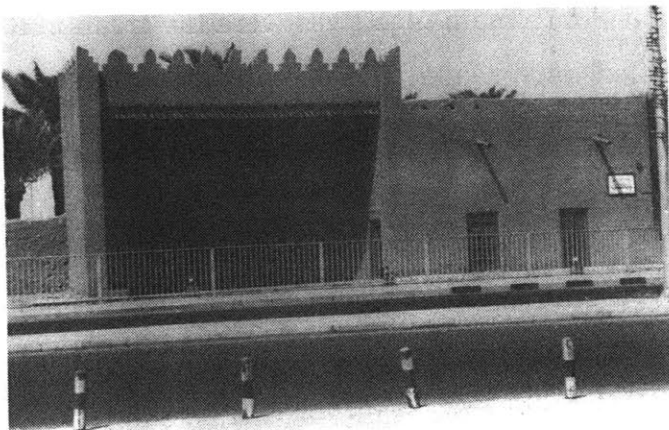
The 1952 Master Plan's main objectives were the creation of a beautiful and dignified town center, provision of a modern road system, commercial and industrial zoning, residential zoning inside and outside the wall, selection of sites for public parks and open spaces, and planting of trees along principal boulevards and at important points.⁴ The plan established a network of ring roads paralleling the wall and radial roads extending through the gates



[Fig. 42] The traffic congestion at wall gates
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987



Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987



[Fig. 43] Demolition of city wall, remaining gates today

and beyond the wall. The intersections created by these networks outlined the self-supporting residential areas outside the wall * ⁵ [Fig. 44, 45].

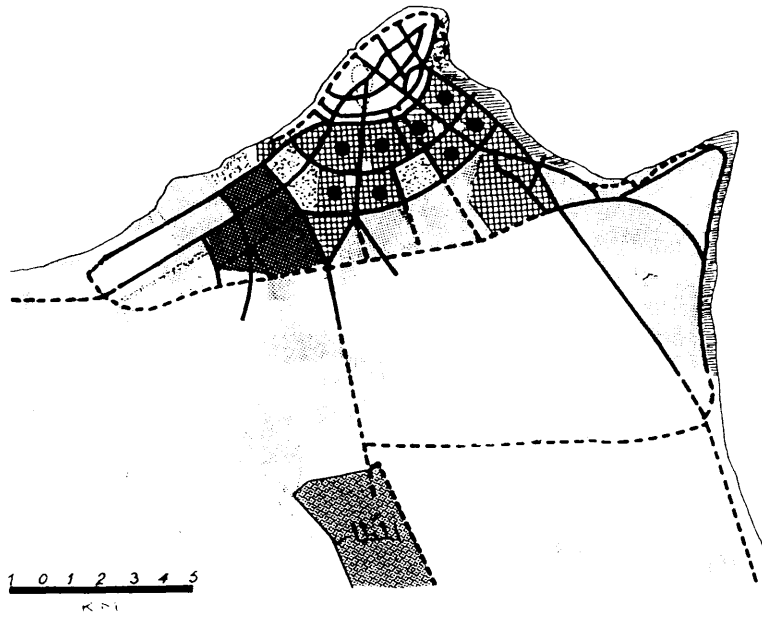
The *Shiekh* not only accepted this plan, he also approved the demolition of houses in the traditional city. The increase in land value resulting from both the large acquisition compensations and development plans made land acquisition desirable and accelerated the exodus of residents from the center. People exerted enormous pressure on the government to acquire their properties inside the wall so they could move to the newly created residential neighborhoods. Encouraged by the government, the public's attitude at the time was to embrace modernity and reject the poverty and backwardness of the past.

The 1952 Master Plan initiated and encouraged decentralization; large traditional city households (20-25 extended family members) were separated into three to four smaller households as each new household was recognized as a single family unit.







Political and Social Changes

During the 1950's, the region witnessed some major changes in its political structure. The Egyptian revolution in 1952, the Suez War in 1956, the Iraqi revolution in 1958, and the rising tide of Arab Nationalism culminated in the sixties.⁶ These factors led *Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah* to demand independence negotiations with Britain. Eventually, in 1961, Kuwait became an independent state. The strong Arab Nationalism movement and the other

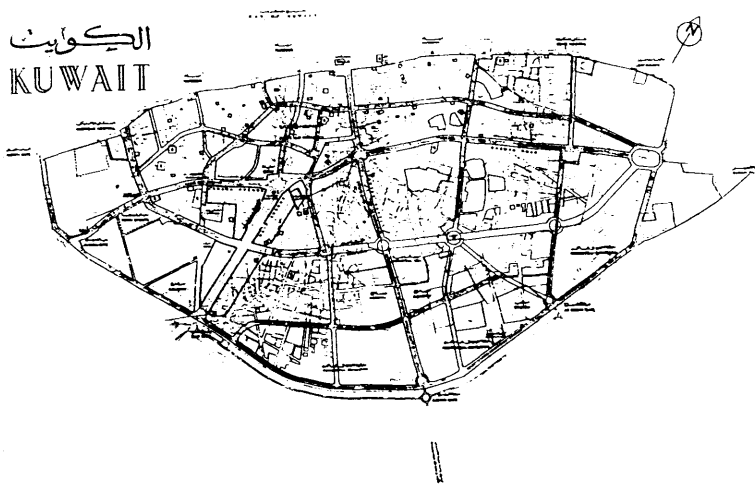
* There is a summary of the 1952 Master Plan in Appendix A.



KUWAIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN
1952

- New housing 
- Low density housing 
- Public buildings 
- Industry 
- Open space & planting 
- Commercial centres 

[Fig. 44] 1952 Kuwait City Master Plan
Source: Minoprio & Spencely & P.W. Macfarlane, Plan for the Town of Kuwait, Kuwait, 1951

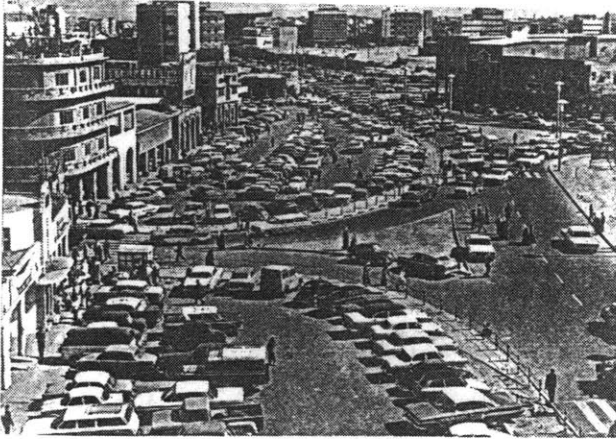


[Fig. 45] 1952 City center Master Plan
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait, Kuwait, 1980

political changes left their imprint on the Kuwaiti social and political life.

The social changes of the fifties incorporated rejection of the past and westernization. Living outside the city wall in a single-family detached unit became socially desirable, and living in a small traditional courtyard house in the center became unfashionable. Furthermore, some people replaced their traditional dress with a western style to demonstrate their modernization. During this period, the pace of destruction of the traditional city was faster than it had ever been. For lack of strong local institutions of higher learning, many Kuwaitis were educated in Egypt and Iraq during this period. Arab professionals, Palestinians and Egyptians, together with newly graduated Kuwaitis, played a major role in shaping the legal and educational systems in Kuwait. Additionally, Arab planners and architects were employed in different planning and architectural projects both in the public and private sectors; they had a tremendous influence on the early planning and architectural decisions for the city.

Following Kuwait's independence, General Qassim of Iraq declared Kuwait to be part of Iraq. The British intervened and the crisis was resolved, and to increase the population, the Kuwaiti government adopted a new policy for Naturalization and Immigration, whereby labor migration to Kuwait was encouraged and the Bedouins were naturalized. The increased migration of expatriates and professionals to Kuwait and the naturalization policy caused an abnormal population growth during this period and drastically changed the demographic composition of the country; by 1965 the population had jumped to 467,339.⁷ The population growth exceeded the capacity of the planned areas.



[Fig. 46] Parking problem in *Safat Square*, 1960
Source: Hamid Shuaib



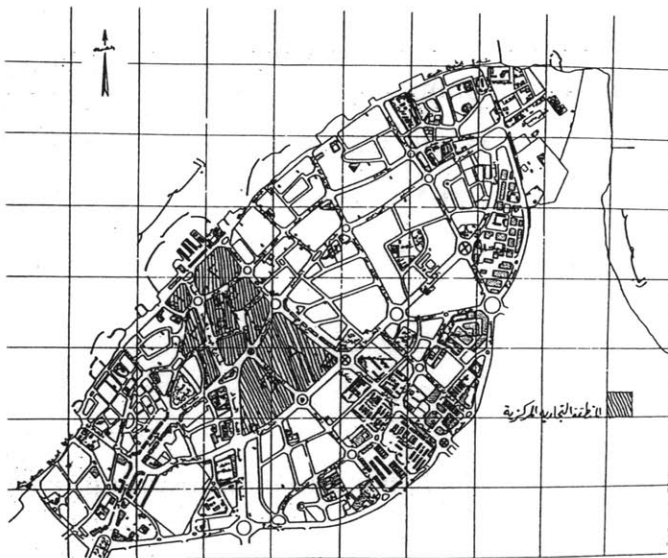
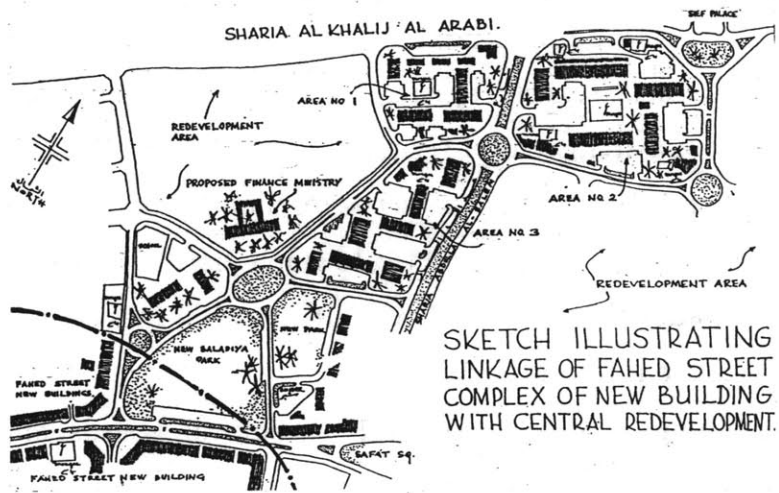
[Fig. 47] New road; placing existing mosque in roundabout
Source: Saba Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanization*, Kuwait, 1964

During the 1960's, the government was under continued pressure to acquire more properties within the center. The increasing problems of the city center, such as traffic congestion, car parking, and chaotic architectural styles, added to the pressure on the government and planning officials. The reactionary government policies were simply a quick response to immediate and urgent situations. International experts and consultants were called upon each time government faced a crises.

After gaining independence in 1961, several boards and committees were established. The Valuation Committee was established in 1961 to deal with the increased pressure for land acquisition in the center. The Planning Board was established in 1963 and the Planning Department was transferred from the Ministry of Public Works to Kuwait Municipality.

Shortcomings of the Master Plan

The early 1960's witnessed a chaotic situation resulting from the land acquisition, inflated land market, frantic land transactions, public projects, addition of new residential neighborhoods, and most important, technical and administrative problems. The manifestation of this disorder in the center was evident in the wasted land, wide setbacks, under-utilized spaces between buildings, number of roundabouts, traffic congestion, lack of parking areas, and the diverse uncoordinated architectural expressions ⁸ [Fig. 46,47]. Additionally, all parcels in the center were zoned for five storey structures according to the first Master Plan. Dr. Saba George Shiber, the architectural and city planning advisor to the government of Kuwait, recommended the adoption of a contemporary



[Fig. 48] The CBD Plan

Source: Saba Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanization*, Kuwait, 1964



[Fig. 49] Demolition for implementing CBD Plan

Source: Saba Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanization*, Kuwait, 1964

comprehensive and rational plan for the CBD (Central Business District) of Kuwait City ⁹ [Fig. 48], which initially comprised of the replanning of eight (later increased to eleven) blocks or parts constituting the center.¹⁰ The process of planning the CBD blocks included the following steps by the government: land expropriation, large-scale land assembly, demolition of old structures, planning infrastructure, production of design guidelines, reallocation or sale to the public by auction.

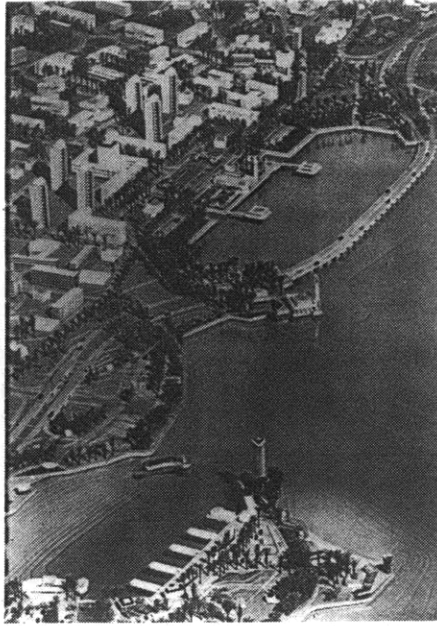
In 1962, a freeze on both the 1952 Master Plan and development was enforced.¹¹ The CBD plan was implemented only in four areas because of time, cost, and difficulty in implementation. Further, the CBD plan was an outdated system that took into account neither demands for parking and other services nor pedestrian movement and architectural cohesiveness within the blocks ¹² [Fig. 49].

The progression of land acquisition resulted in a skyrocketing land and property market because the government first decreased land supply available in the market, and inflated the market. Both the high land valuation and land market prices influenced each other; land market values raised valuations and vice versa. By the mid 1960's the government had to intervene to break this vicious circle; the city was divided into three zones, each of which had a maximum and a minimum land price to which the valuation committee were asked to adhere.¹³ As investment in property became more profitable and rewarding, the influential private sector, exploiting their connections in the Municipality and Municipal Council, exerted pressure on the government to acquire more land in excess of the government's need, and to pay a housing allowance for government expatriate employees (rather than to build housing for them). Moreover, real estate investors pressured

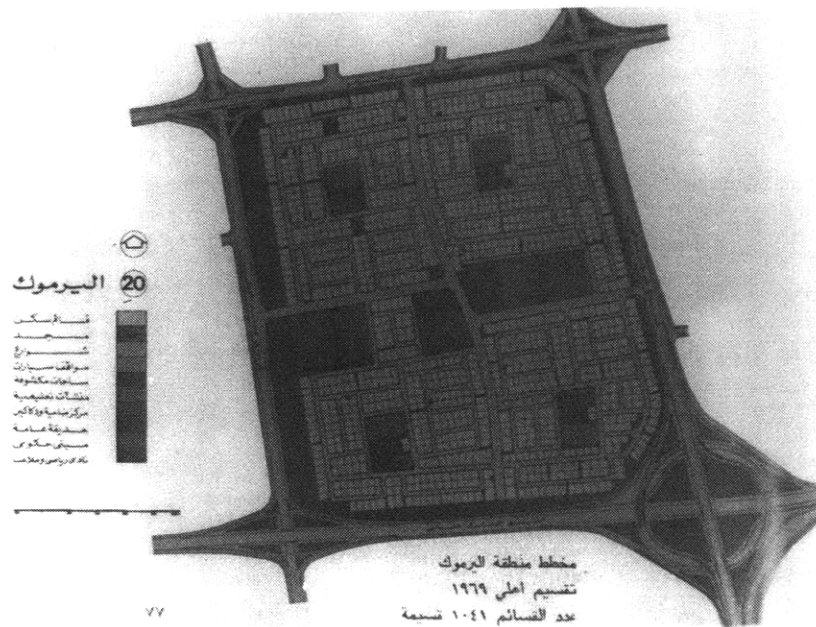
the government to rent commercial office buildings for government offices rather than to build new ones.

The trend of employing international experts and consultants to work on projects and studies began in the early 1960's. A Canadian firm was chosen to design the Kuwait Town waterfront. The plan envisioned Kuwait as a sea-oriented city, having as its heart the *Sief* Palace, extending south, with a skyline declining towards the sea. The consultant proposed that the waterfront be cleared (relocating the harbor and vegetable market) and that only the *Sief* Palace be maintained. Extensive planting and greenery landscaping were proposed [Fig. 50]. The Kuwait Waterfront Study was probably the first attempt to create a vision for the future city center.¹⁴ Also, it was one of the earliest projects destined to be shelved. Since then, several projects and studies were commissioned for improving the urban environment in the center; very few were implemented. The one project that is worth mentioning is the conversion of the old cemetery to the present Municipal Park; it was the first and only cemetery that the religious authorities permitted to be converted into a park.

The city outside the wall grew rapidly toward the west and south with little control over development, appearance, and urban sprawl. Owners of large land holdings outside the wall exerted pressure on Municipality to subdivide their lands without a municipal plan. The Municipality resisted the pressure at the beginning, but complied shortly after. Ironically, some of the houses in the new residential areas were empty and for sale. By the late 1960's, a good part of the old town was demolished as a result of new construction, the CBD Plan, and large-scale movement outside the traditional city, and migrants started to occupy the old houses that were left in the center [Fig. 51].

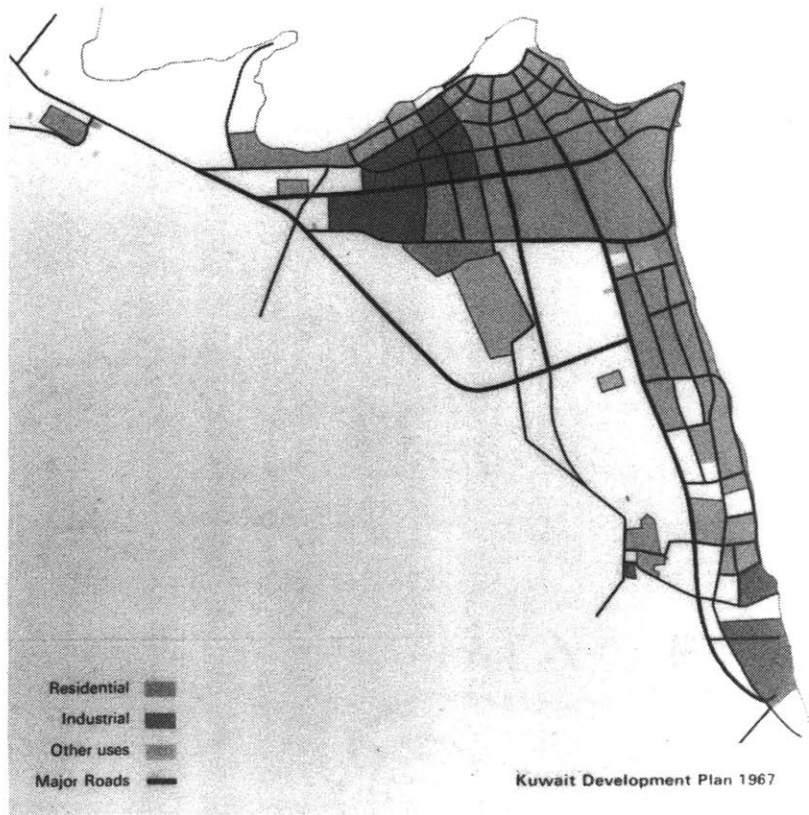


[Fig. 50] Early vision for the Waterfront
 Source: Project Planning Associates Ltd., Proposed Waterfront
 development, City of Kuwait, 1961



[Fig. 51] Al-Yarmouk residential neighborhood plan, 1969
 Source: Kuwait Atlas, Kuwait

The government's dilemma in the 1960's was that it had to pay for the inflated land acquisition in the city center in excess of its need, while simultaneously providing resources for extending roads and infrastructure in the newly subdivided residential neighborhoods.¹⁵ Moreover, Kuwait, as a recently independent state, had to prove itself and gain support nationally and internationally. All these financial commitments and public expenditure drained the available resources and left the government alarmed and panicked.



[Fig. 52] 1967 Municipality Development Plan
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait, Kuwait, 1980

Attempts at Solution

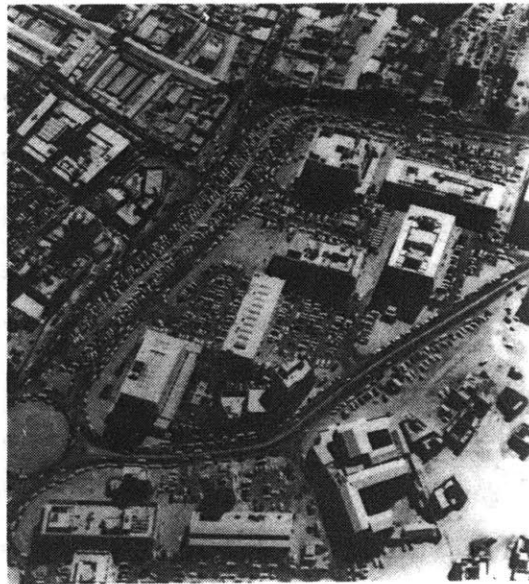
As a result of the inflated land acquisition policy and the ambitious development policy, the government's financial commitment became a major issue. Kuwait sought advice from the U.N. and the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, and subsequently a team of eleven experts visited Kuwait and prepared reports and recommendations regarding the control and management of growth and development in different aspects.

In 1965, the Municipality acknowledged the problems of urban sprawl, low density, extended infrastructure, and the unrealistic land and property market and prepared the 1967 Municipality Development Plan [Fig 52]. It was an assembly plan that added residential, commercial and industrial zones to the 1952 Master Plan. The Municipality Development Plan neither dealt with demographic and detailed traffic studies nor city center development problems.¹⁶ It was limited to the planning of forty residential neighborhoods, provision of the 5th and 6th ring roads, extension of radial roads, and the planning of Shuaiba, a port and industrial town.¹⁷ This plan did not have a direct impact within the city center; it intensified the problems of low density, urban sprawl, and extension of roads and services outside the center, despite its original objectives and goals. The more people moved out of the center, the more empty houses and vacant land that were left inside the center.

At the time, the government realized that a comprehensive planning effort was required for both urban plans. As a result the government requested further advice from the U.N., and a committee of three advisors was formed to make recommendations on the management and control of the rapid development. The committee

submitted a report suggesting the appointment of an international consultant to establish a base for comprehensive planning and development in the state of Kuwait to the end of the century. In 1968, Colin Buchanan and Partners, a British planning firm, was commissioned to work on the second Master Plan; they had to produce a comprehensive program for both-short and long-term urban planning.

In 1970, Colin Buchanan and Partners began to produce plans at the national, metropolitan, and urban level; more detailed plans were produced in 1971, including a plan for Kuwait Town. For the analytical purpose of this study, only the Master Plan for Kuwait Town will be discussed * [Fig. 53].



[Fig. 53] The increased parking problems in the center, late 1960's
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, *The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation*, 1971

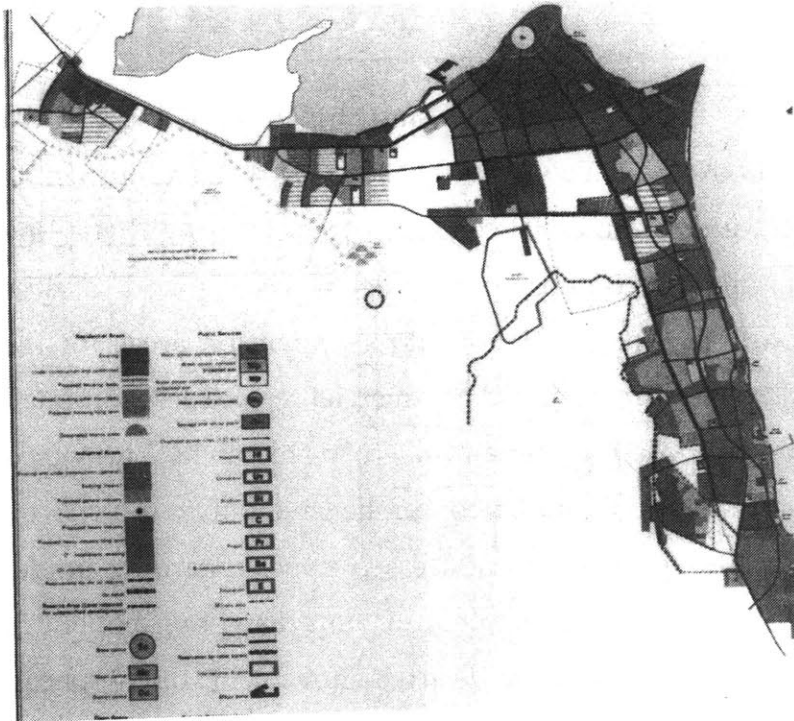
* The 1971 Master Plan is summarized in Appendix A.

The 1971 Master Plan

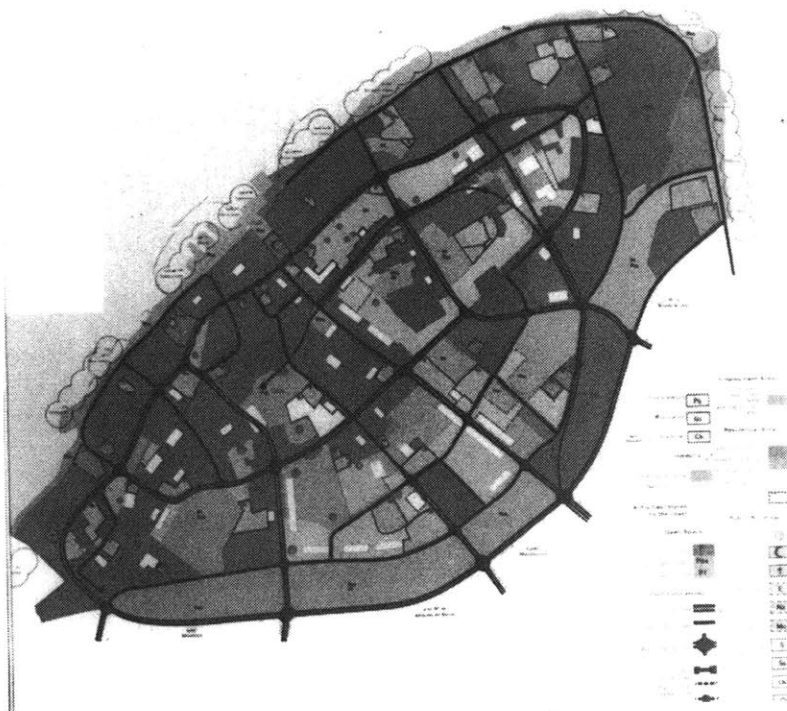
The main objectives of 1971 Master Plan for Kuwait Town were to retain Kuwait Town as the state capital and principal administrative and commercial center, to project balanced employment and population compositions, to decide on required services and their locations, and to identify three expansion areas for the core (specialized government and commercial services). Additionally, the plan proposed a system of road hierarchy, restricted pedestrian areas, parking, and a comprehensive public transportation system. Although the plan addressed issues regarding implementation policies and improvement of the urban environment in the center such as character, pedestrian movement, open spaces, landscape, and greenery, the plan's main concerns were demographic figures, development density, and traffic capacity. Since then, policy-makers have been committed to plan implementation. Outside the city center, major elements of the National Physical Plan were implemented such as the main highway network, new residential areas, public utility and social services [Fig. 54,55].

Parallel to the Buchanan studies, four international architectural firms were selected to design some important civic projects in the center: Riema Pietella; Belgiojoso, Perusetti and Rogers; Peter Smithson; and George Candilis. Of the four projects, only the *Sief* Palace expansion and Ministries Complex were implemented.

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the oil embargo resulted in soaring oil prices. By 1973, oil prices quadrupled and the Middle East oil boom began. Real estate and land markets were the first to be affected by the sudden increase in oil prices and government revenues. In Kuwait City, a capital market had been strongly developed;¹⁸ land owners and shareholders were making enormous



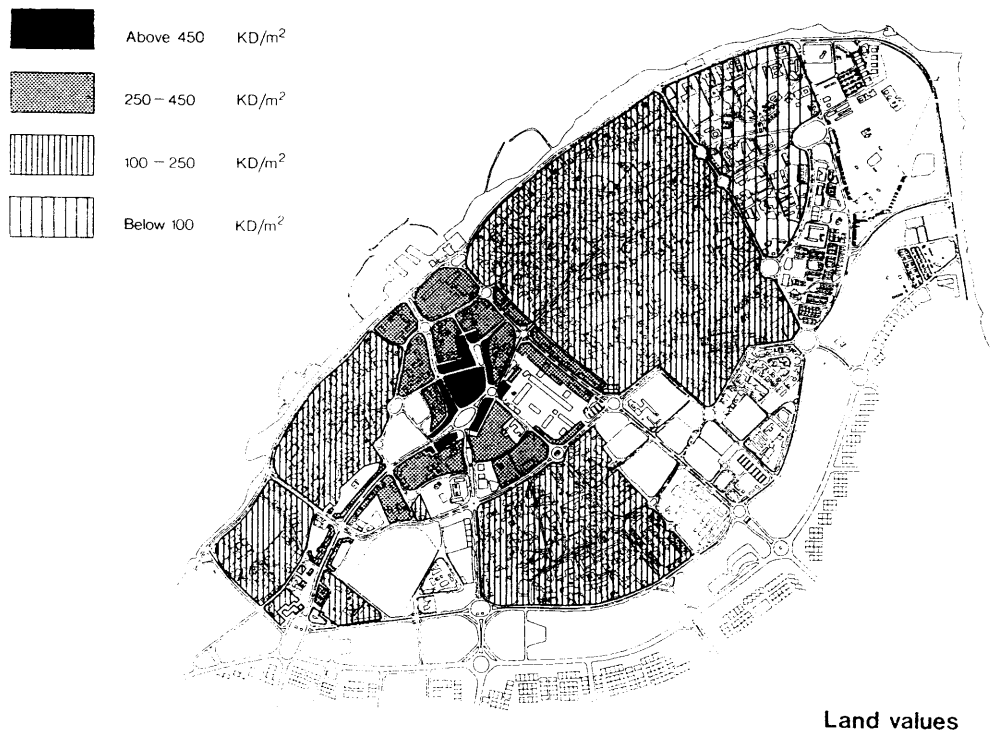
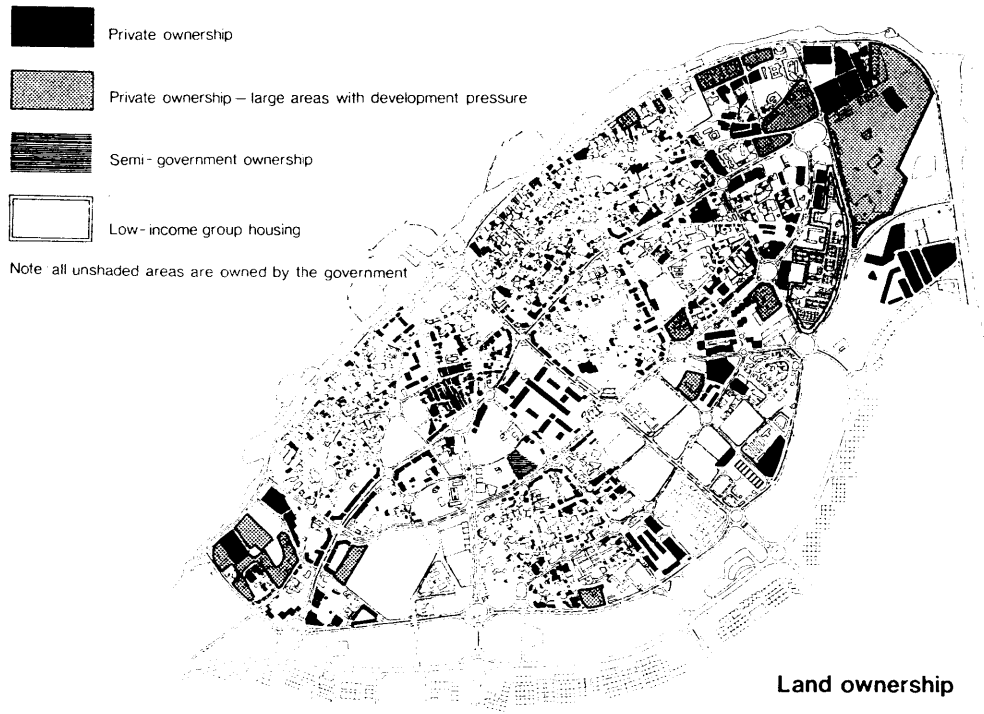
[Fig. 54] 1970 Kuwait City Master Plan
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and
 Plan Implementation, 1971



[Fig. 55] 1970 City Center Master Plan
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and
 Plan Implementation, 1971

profit from speculation. Land prices increased 200% in two years. The highest values were for land and properties in *Mubarakiya*; the value of land decreased as distance from the *Souq* increased. During this period, wealth accumulation became easier, and a new trading class was created. The Kuwaiti's public taste evolved and higher degrees of sophistication were reached due to affluency, education, and exposure to other cultures and countries. Private sector investors started to employ international architects to design their new buildings, and the international consultants replaced the preceding Arab consultants.

The early 1970's economic boom created an enormous pressure for development, especially in the center. The 1971 Master Plan was approved and put into action, but the high land prices made the development of land in the center unfeasible. In 1976, the private sector and land owners in the center put pressure on the Municipality to increase FAR, to change land usage, and to exclude the basement and mezzanine floors from the allowed FAR in the Building Code. The changes in zoning disregarded the impacts on traffic, car parking, and other services [Fig. 56].



[Fig. 56] The city center (early 1970's): land ownership, land values
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation, 1971

With the increased demand for parking garages in the early 1970's, the Municipality leased some of its land in the center (25 years at token annual rents) to the real estate share-holding companies in order to build parking garages, and allowed them to use 12.5% of the parking areas for commercial use. Once more, the private sector succeeded in pushing this percentage to 25%. A zoning variance was issued and the regulations were changed. The incentives given by the government to provide more parking spaces were used by the private sector to attract more cars to the center.

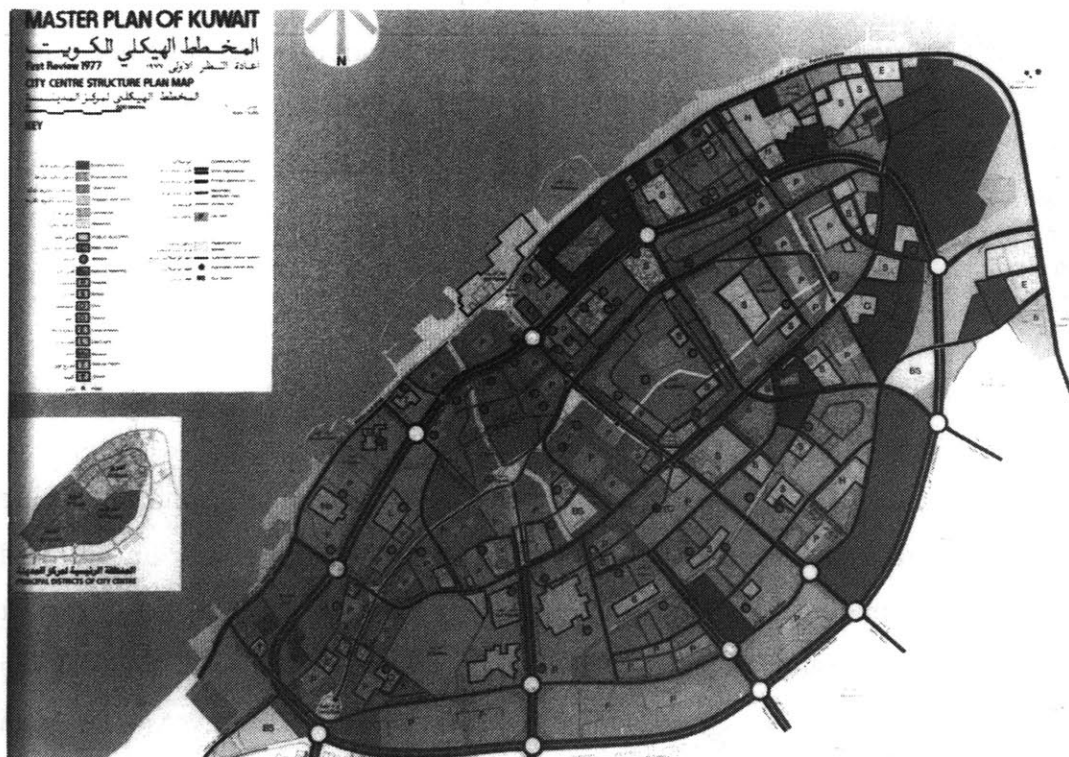
Despite the growing demand for development in the center, a significant percentage of the center's area remained vacant. The National Housing Authority (established in 1974) did not build any of its housing projects in the center until later in the 1970's, and few public buildings were built during this period. Both the inflated land value and restricted zoning regulations in the center discouraged private development within the city center, while development in other surrounding areas of the center flourished. The feasibility of land development increased as the distance from the center increased; for example, development in *Salmiya* was more profitable than in the center, and in *Fintas* more profitable than in *Salmiya*.

KMPR1-- the First Review

The abrupt changes in the national economy and social life that took place between 1970 and 1977 resulted in unexpected circumstances such as abnormal population growth, pressure for development, an unrealistic land market, and amendment of the Building Code. These factors made a review of the Master Plan necessary. Kuwait Municipality appointed the British firm of



[Fig. 57] 1977 KMPR1, Kuwait City Plan
Source: Shankland Cox Partnership in association with SSH, 1977



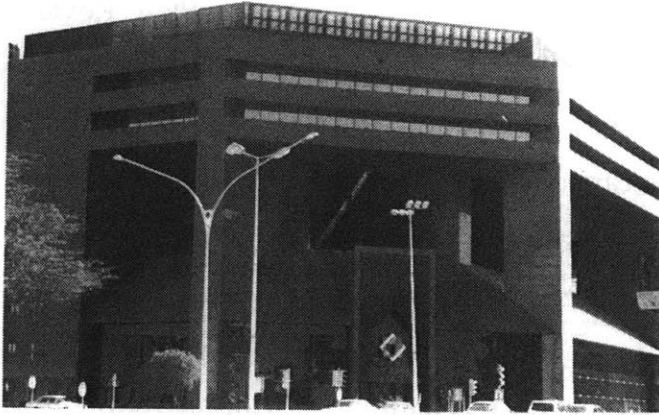
[Fig. 58] 1977 KMPR1, City Center Plan
Source: Shankland Cox Partnership in association with SSH, 1977

Shankand Cox Partnership, in association with a local firm, to undertake this review. The 1977 Kuwait Master Plan Review (KMPR1)* had to reexamine the 1971 Master Plan's projected employment and resident population figures according to the modified development capacity and zoning in the city center. It also questioned the economic vitality of these developments (if achieved) and their environmental impacts, as well as the severe traffic that would be generated by them.¹⁹ The KMPR1 recommendations included setting new targets for population growth, restricting and possibly reducing FAR, and defining locations for governmental, commercial, and residential uses. Based on new population targets, it proposed alternative road patterns and public transportation, and estimated the number of parking spaces required. Similar to the 1971 Master Plan, the review addressed environmental issues regarding conservation and special character areas, as well as major open spaces and landscaping of the city center [Fig. 57,58].

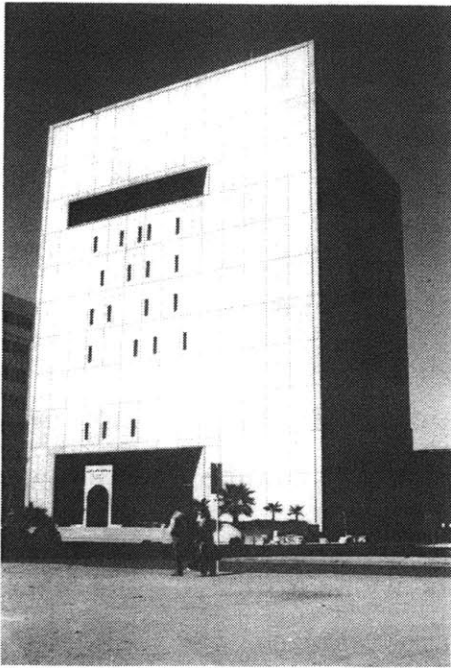
KMPR1 further emphasized the decentralization and extension of urban areas and encouraged low-density urban sprawl by extending and increasing the capacity of the road network. Although it promoted the provision of housing in the center, like the first plan, the review did not respond to cultural and climatic issues.

Except for construction of Arabian Gulf Road and some other roads in the center, no major urban physical changes took place after the Master Plan and its first review. It proposed neither a mechanism for stimulating development in the center nor attractive solutions for residential development. The 1971 Master Plan and its review served to further increase values for parcels zoned for

* KMPR1 is summarized in Appendix A.



[Fig. 59] The Stock Exchange, Architect: John Bonnington



[Fig. 60] Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science, Architect: TAC

commercial use. While the city was expanding south along the coastline and west towards the desert, the center was undergoing a continuous process of emptying, culminated by the relocation of the old *Sief* harbor north of the city.

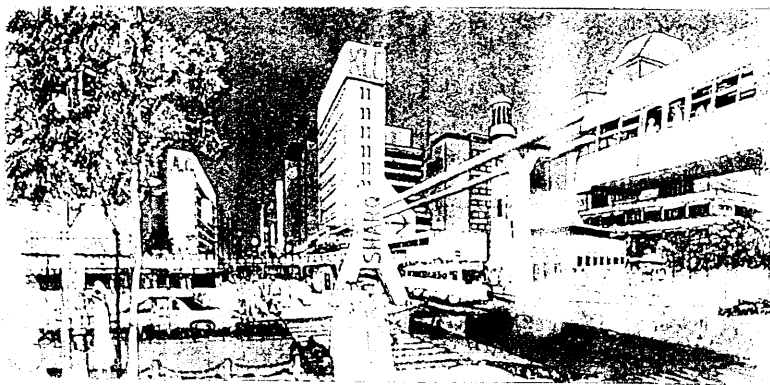
Both the 1971 Master Plan and KMPR1 generated the need for further detailed studies and proposals. They defined action areas for improving urban life and creating a quality environment within the city center. International consultants were commissioned to work on a variety of urban projects and proposals, as well as studies for improving traffic and car parking problems. Nevertheless, none of these projects reached the implementation stage.

The design of many individual public buildings were commissioned during this period, such as the Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stock Exchange, the National Museum, and State Mosque. The design of privately owned buildings and four National Housing Authority high-rise housing complexes in the center were commissioned to international consultants [Fig. 59,60].

The 1970's economic and development boom was followed by the 1980's recession, which was caused by the collapse of oil prices, the Iraq-Iran War, and the crash of *Souk Al-Manakh* [the informal stock market] in 1982. Since financial activities and the construction industry are entirely dependent on government expenditure and oil prices, the government decided after considerable pressure to compensate the small investors (less than 2 million KD, 1 KD=\$3.5) for their losses by buying their stocks at pre-crash prices, which resulted in the government and local banks acquiring large amounts of stock in local privately owned companies that had large holdings in the center. The government felt no urgency to develop the center and the private sector was reluctant to invest because of the recession.

In the early 1980's, the government's main concern was how to deal with the drain of its financial resources resulting from its heavy commitments and decrease in revenues. Unofficially Kuwait supported Iraq financially during the war with Iran, while at the same time, the government had agreed to compensate small stockholders for their losses. The accumulated debts, resulting from land acquisition in excess of need, were about 600 Million KD; a policy of land exchange and substitution was subsequently adopted. The policy in the 1980's was not to acquire land except for the purpose of providing infrastructure and public works.

In response to its difficulties, the government had to take certain actions to keep up with the problematic situation of the 1980's. Some of the publicly-owned land was put up for sale in public auction at the beginning of the 1980's (before the stock market crash) and when the prices reached their peak. This action was strongly opposed in Parliament (similar to the 1970's, their stance was that the government should not compete with the private sector). Since the crash of 1982, land prices were in continuous decline, especially with the dragging on of the Iraq-Iran War.



[Fig. 61] Proposed mono-rail in the center
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait

Further Reviews and Studies

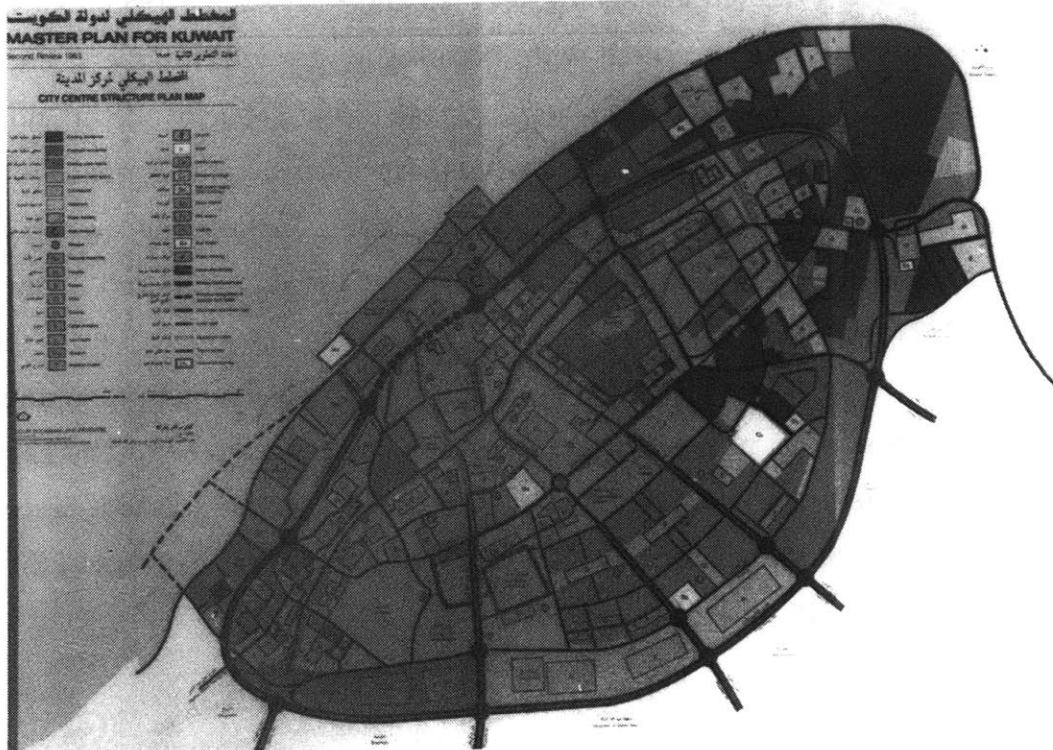
In 1983, Colin Buchanan and Partners produced the second review of the 1971 Master Plan (KMPR2).^{*} The intent of this review was to update the 1971 Master Plan and ensure that it continue to fulfill its original purpose in the light of changing circumstances. The two most important factors that the second review dealt with were the prospect of continued employment growth and Building Code alteration. It adopted new population targets, estimated floor area requirements, established a growth strategy, and updated road and traffic systems. Also, four special environmental areas, each with a similar use and character, were selected for further comprehensive environmental design studies. KMPR2 suggested some rigorous development control for implementing the Master Plan. Unfortunately, no serious effort was made to carry out these suggestion. Like the 1971 Master Plan and KMPR1, the 1983 review was mainly concerned with population growth numbers and projections, development density, and traffic capacity. It did not suggest major conceptual design changes or a different approach for dealing with the city center; its main concern was for the two new towns north and south of Kuwait City that were proposed in the 1971 Master Plan [Fig. 62.63].

In the mid 1980's, after the assassination attempt on the Amir's life, a number of old houses in the center which had been occupied by expatriate labor were vacated and demolished. Since then, security has become a concern in the center, where most of the government buildings are located.

^{*} KMPR2 is summarized in Appendix A.



[Fig. 62] 1983 KMPR2, Kuwait City Master Plan
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners & OAP/KEB, Master Plan for Kuwait: Second Review 1983, Vol. 1: Planning and Policy

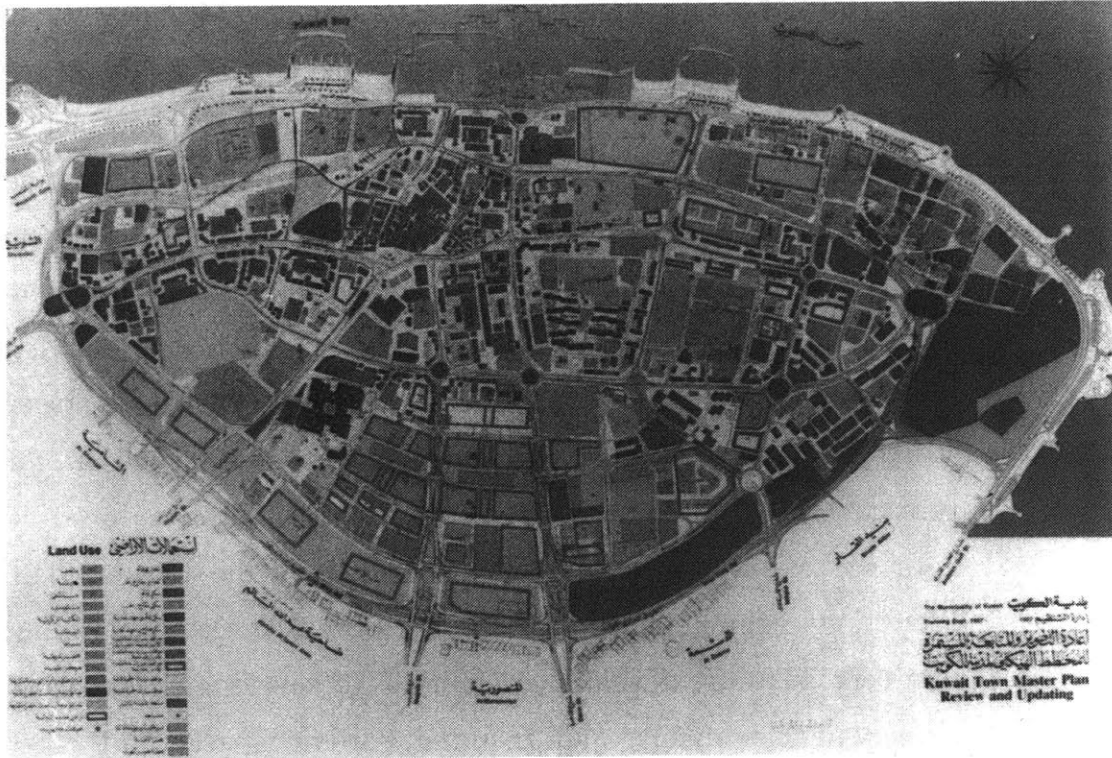


[Fig. 63] 1983 KMPR2, City Center Master Plan
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners & OAP/KEB, Master Plan for Kuwait: Second Review 1983, Vol. 1: Planning and Policy

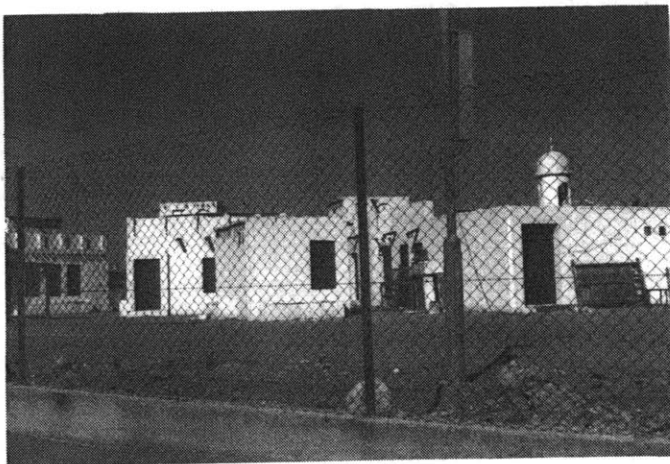
In 1985, a local team was formed in the Municipality to evaluate the development situation in the center. By 1987, the "Kuwait Town Master Plan Review and Updating"* was completed, the main goals of which were focused on determining and setting controls for development density, introducing restricting rules to implement study recommendations, and developing a system to implement, monitor, and follow-up decisions.²⁰ The study included a comprehensive survey and documentation of each parcel and structure in the center. A comparative analysis was carried out for projected development areas and the number of jobs produced by both the existing FAR and that proposed by the Master Plan. Projections estimated from the existing FAR revealed alarming numbers for future development in terms of development capacity, employment numbers, and required parking spaces and other services. The study recommended some options for solving the problem which included land exchange for private development, cancellation of government commercial development, restrictions on Building Code implementation, and encouragement and hastening of public residential projects [Fig. 64].

The 1987 study represents the first attempt carried out by local professionals and produced by the Municipality. Although the study dealt only with specific areas of the Master Plan (development capacity and the implications resulting from changing Building Code and zoning) the study team managed at least to survey and document the prevailing situation. A realistic inventory of land parcellation, structure use and conditions was recorded for the first time.

* This study is summarized in Appendix A.



[Fig. 64] 1987 Municipality Review Study
 Source: Kuwait Municipality, Kuwait Town Master Plan Review and
 Updating. Kuwait 1987

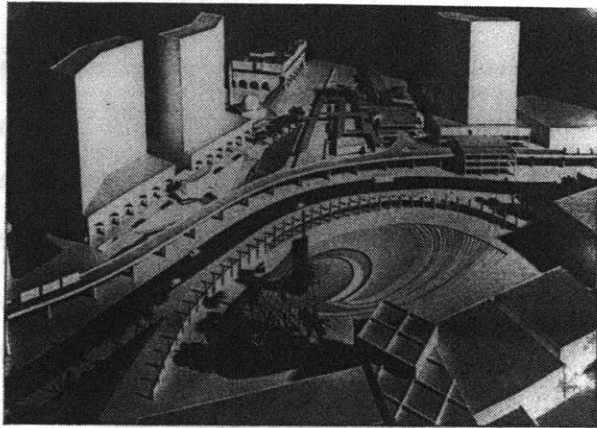


[Fig. 65] The Kuwaiti village

As a result of the 1987 study, decision makers became more aware of the land development issue in the center; they realized that the government should confront this issue and take further action to deal with it. By the late 1980's, a freeze was put in effect on commercial developments, traffic and road projects including the urban expressway (extension of the First Ring Road) in the center, and any increase in FAR was banned. Top government officials also developed a greater awareness and concern about the aesthetic appearance of the city, revival of old traditions and the past.

Kuwaitis managed to dismantle the traditional city and eradicate the memory with which it was associated. In the late 1980's, about two-thirds of the city center was empty. At that time, the people and the government realized that their city was missing something they could not identify, something to do with its traditional spirit. After establishing and reconstituting themselves as a modern society, Kuwaitis regretted the demolition of the traditional city. They became sentimental about their lost traditions. Both the memory and nostalgia of the past became important. A three-quarters scale Kuwaiti village was built in the city center on the sea shore [Fig. 65]; it was built to remind the young generation of their history. The Municipality of Kuwait, supported by the Amir and the government, initiated a strong preservation movement. The merchant families renovated their *diwaniyas* in the old city and now proudly use them as an emblem of their prominent past. Men again felt inspired to wear their traditional dress as an expression of their national identity.

Kuwaitis were trying to revive the collective memory, but they organized it in a distorted way. Only the elements that suited



[Fig. 66] *Safat Square* competition proposal, 1982
Source: DEVECON OY & INCO, *Safat Square* Summary Report, 1982



[Fig. 67] 1980's vision for the center
Source: Architetti BBPR, *The Study of Kuwait City Environmental Improvements*, 1986



[Fig. 68] *Abdullah Al-Ahmed Street* Competition Entry
Source: Pan Arab Consulting Engineers, Kuwait, 1990

their purpose and ideology were preserved to express their past and history. Kuwaitis were selective in both the deconstruction and the reconstruction of their memory.

The 1980's were distinguished by the multitude of commissioned buildings and urban projects, and by the studies for improving traffic congestion and public transportation system. A number of public buildings, banks, small-scale urban areas, and restoration projects were also implemented; none of the large-scale urban design projects proposed in the Master Plan reviews were executed due to government indecision and cost.

Some selected projects of the 1980's demonstrate both revival of memory and history, as well as the government's realization and awareness about bolstering the city center's image. "Kuwait City Environmental Improvements" by Architetti BBPR of Italy is an attempt to upgrade the quality of the environment in the center and giving the city a particular and consistent character. The study for the *Sharq Al-Sief* area included the architecture and urban design for the National Council of Fine Arts and Culture headquarters, crafts village, housing, and their surrounding area. The recent competition for developing a design concept for *Abdulla Al-Ahmed* Street to be the identity street for the center, which was also called "*Kuwait's Champs Elysées*," expressed Kuwaitis' desire and eagerness to have a distinctive and beautiful city center. However, these studies did not respond to the center's urban and aesthetic problems [Fig. 66,67,68].

In late 1989, the British firm Shankland and Cox, and W.S. Atkins, in association with a local firm, were appointed to undertake the third review of Kuwait Master Plan. The key objectives were how to accommodate expected future growth, taking into account that committed land in Kuwait City was almost exhausted, and that

the new towns and major district centers that were proposed in earlier reviews were not built.²¹

In early 1990, Kuwait was embarking on another development boom. The local economy was recovering from the 1980's recession; it had become solidified and financially stable, balanced by large cash reserves and foreign investments. The general idea was to redevelop the center and prioritize institutional, cultural and recreational projects, create a coherent urban character for the city, increase development density in the center, encourage young Kuwaitis to return to and reside in the center, and rely more on the private sector for all aspects of development.

The 1990's ambitious plans and policies for the redevelopment, repopulation, and beautification of the city center did not last too long. The Iraqi invasion made all these future plans irrelevant and created a panic situation for Kuwait's government and people. Policy makers had to reconsider the government's priorities. Public projects have been either delayed, postponed, or canceled. More concern has been given to national security, national defense, and postwar reconstruction. For the second time in the history of the city, the collective memory had undergone an attempt to eradicate it, this time by a foreign force.

In the current situation, the land market is not active and the private sector is waiting until further actions are taken by the government. The postwar policies will eventually effect both property and land markets, not only in the center but in Kuwait City in general.

Recently, the KMPR3 consultants resumed their work and studies. In a paper presented by the technical director of W.S. Atkins in a conference held in London in May, 1991 for rebuilding Kuwait, several strategies were proposed for future development

addressing issues of decreasing the population, redundancy in services, population distribution and density, as well as issues regarding the replanning of Kuwaiti residential areas and redevelopment of the city center instead of building the new towns.

Notes

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2. Stephen Gardiner, *Kuwait: the Making of a City*. Essex, England: Longman Group Ltd., 1983. p. 39. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Gardiner.
3. Gardiner, p. 35.
4. Kuwait Municipality, "Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait". Kuwait, 1980. p. 24. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Kuwait Municipality.
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6. Cambridge Encyclopedia, p. 366.
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21. Derrick Hartley, "Planning for Reconstruction and Development in Postwar Kuwait." Paper presented at MEED conference in association with the United Bank of Kuwait, London, 20 May, 1991.

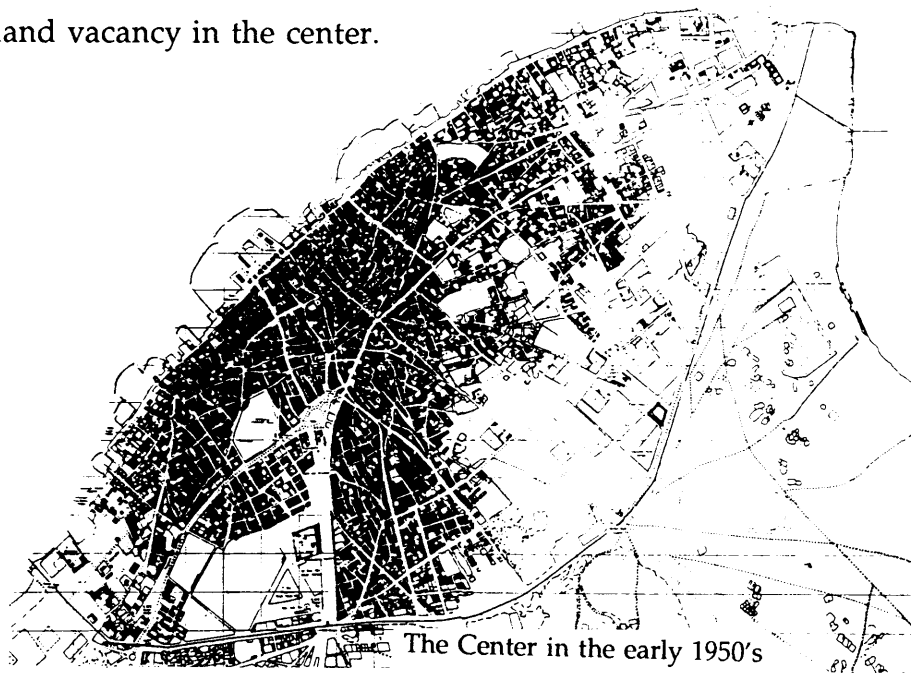
Chapter 5: The Factors that Caused Land Vacancy

Introduction

In the Middle East, the political and economic changes that followed the Second World War created previously unknown city problems like rapid growth, uncontrolled large-scale developments, introduction of wide roads, destruction of the old traditional city, and loss of the city's character and identity. Cities in oil-producing countries suffered more than other cities in the region. With the increase in oil revenues and lack of local expertise, European intervention and ideas were welcomed. In Kuwait, the abundance of both resources and desert land coupled with the desire for modernity and newness facilitated the application of new planning theories and ideas.

Kuwait City exemplifies the weakness of the traditional British planning system, a two-dimensional physical plan based on demographic and employment projections, development densities to accommodate these projected numbers, traffic and transportation planning, and infrastructure demand. The planning process did not incorporate social, cultural, political, and environmental issues in a meaningful manner; it did not recognize public participation as a major factor for reaching planning decisions. Comparing structure plans for the city center with recent maps and aerial photographs reveals that the majority of vacant land is zoned for residential use. According to 1971 Master Plan studies, the government owns the majority of the total land available for development, and 50% of all residential land in the center, of which only 10% is developed. The

privately owned land, which is mainly concentrated in *Mubarakiya, Desman and Qibla* areas, is 82% developed.¹ The government could not develop this residential land because Kuwaitis refuse to live in apartments. Commercial and government buildings were not developed on government land because of other government priorities, pressure from landlords, and fear of increased traffic. Except for a few cases, privately owned residential zoned parcels were not developed because they did not yield profit compared to commercial developments.² My analysis revealed that, in addition to the international events that have taken place during the past five decades, there seems to be no one reason or single factor that led to the phenomenon of land vacancy in the center of Kuwait City. In order to diagnose the causes of the problem we need to define the main actors and their roles in this process: the government, the private sector, the planners, and the institution (Kuwait Municipality). The accumulation of events and the combination of active roles in the planning efforts explains the occurrence of a considerable land vacancy in the center.



[Fig. 69] A sequence of city center's plans showing the progress of demolition and expansion of vacant land since the early 1950's





The Role of the Government

The state, represented by its government, has the ability to command the economy through the control of oil revenues and to maintain the national economic viability through the involvement of the private sector. With all its good will and good intentions, the government itself initiated the problem. The highly inflated land acquisition policy (valuation policy) was not meant to gain control over land, but as a means to benefit the largest number of Kuwaitis possible. However, this policy did not only create value for the land, it also triggered wild speculation and generated a false land and property market. Through its actions, the government established a powerful economic class that had the ability to exert influence on land development and plan implementation in the center. With the availability and abundance of capital and limited investment opportunities, real estate and land speculation dominated all other national economic activities in Kuwait. Land acquisition does not yield profit for the government, yet it consumes a significant segment of government revenues.

By the late 1970's, as a result of the inflated valuation policy, the debts accumulated by the government reached a level where the government had to take action to curtail land acquisition. Although the principal cause of the 1982 stock exchange crash (*Souq al-Manakh*) was the extremely inflated values for shares in the market because of false speculation,³ the government's restraining action was another factor that led to the crash.⁴ Both the land acquisition and valuation policies resulted in extreme fluctuations in the land market, especially in light of the absence of taxes and other tools to control land development. In Kuwait's city center, land can sit idle

indefinitely; there is no carrying cost or any other pressure for development.

The policy of not competing with the private sector in real estate development left the government unprotected against the influence and pressure exerted by the private sector. Other policies adopted by the government, such as the aspiring development program and the extremely generous welfare system, over-burdened government responsibilities and financial commitments. The government in Kuwait had to provide everything for its people without yielding any kind of profits or revenues; it became incapable of delivering its commitments, and the government was forced to decide on its priorities in developing the city center.

The Private Sector

The private sector's influential role has a long history; its economic power became undeniable. Land owners constitute an active pressure group in the government, municipality, and on the Municipal Council. Initially, they managed to claim both unregistered parcels within the city wall and large tracts outside the wall. The private sector pushed the Municipal Council to acquire much more land than needed for public projects in the city center, and at very high prices. The intervention of the private sector influenced the form of both the city and the city center; it encouraged horizontal, low-density city expansion and discouraged city center development except for commercial use.

By the mid 1960's, the government had begun to allow the sale of unbuilt parcels in the newly subdivided residential neighborhoods while the Municipality was simultaneously acquiring and

subdividing land in areas even further from the center and in excess of the actual demand. The private sector's influence extended to the implementation process of the Master Plans through intervening and changing zoning regulation and the Building Code, which were manipulated to satisfy their greed. The increase of commercial development density in the center, and the inevitability of an increase car volume delayed the development of more government buildings. Even in estimating the feasibility for land development, land owners considered the large residual value gained through speculation and inflated land valuations to be a fixed cost, and thus maintained continuous pressure for upgrading FAR.⁵

In the 1970's and 1980's through the Parliament, the private sector strongly opposed and eventually prevented the government from selling its excess land in public auction; they did not want the government to compete with the private sector and increase the land supply in the center. In the process of the city center's development, the influential private sector played a major role in using and abusing government policies and twisting building laws to suit their personal interests, disregarding the interests of others and the public good.

The Planning Process

In Kuwait as a general pattern, crises are often followed by calling in experts and commissioning studies. The accountability of these studies is questionable; very few were considered for actual use in the past. For example, studies and reports in the early 1960's and 1970's warned the government against the inflated land acquisition policy, but politicians and decision makers underesti-

mated the repercussions of their policies. A high Kuwaiti official's comments on the implementation of plans: "plans are theoretical, need and urgency dictates planning"; he also quoted an Arab maxim "you plan and fate will mock you."

The imported ideas of modern planning theories of the 1950's and 1960's were applied regardless of their suitability and relevance to the locale. The plans and reviews for the city of Kuwait were rigid and fixed; they did not view the city as a dynamic and continuous process. The plans could not accommodate the political, economic, and social changes that are part of this region's nature. The plans encouraged decentralization and low density by proposing an extensive road and highway network, new secondary commercial centers, and villa-type residential neighborhoods--the city kept expanding and dependency on cars became inevitable. The concept of concentric and radial roads catered only to car movement and created isolated, self-contained residential neighborhoods.

The 1971 Master Plan suggested the fragmentation of the old commercial area; there was no necessity for banks and old *souks* to remain in the center (core area). The European idea of replacing the city wall with a green belt was proposed in the first plan and emphasized in the following plans and reviews; however, except for one segment, the Green Belt has never been green. More important, by delineating the Green Belt area, the 1952 plan created a limited city center that does not have the capacity for expansion, while at the same time all the radial roads pour into this limited area. At the time, Kuwaitis knew little about the different concepts of planning--all they wanted was the newest and the best.

The 1971 Master Plan neither demonstrated an understanding of the culture nor provided incentives for the social changes necessary to facilitate implementation. The Plan suggested that

well-off small Kuwaiti families should move into the center and low-income Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis should move out; the opposite became the actuality. In the 1970's, abandoned old Kuwaiti houses were occupied by low-income non-Kuwaiti residents at a low rents.⁶

KMPR1 suggested that 60% of the center's employees would live and work in the center, and that laborers would live and work outside. What happened was that employees of the center (government employees are mainly Kuwaitis) ended up living in villas in the suburbs and commuting to the center for work, while laborers lived in old houses in the center and commuted to work outside. KMPR2 predicted that at least 95,000 people would live in the city center; in 1985, no more than 45,000 did.⁷

In the Master Plans, issues of a quality urban environment such as greenery, cityscaping, preservation, character, and identity became secondary. The questions of how people use the city, how they interact with its elements, and how the city looks and feel were not adequately addressed. People need protection from fast cars in the streets, the hot sun, glare, and dust. Protected environments such as shopping malls and covered *souks* are inviting and attractive places for pedestrians and shoppers. The major weaknesses and shortcomings of the plans, reviews, and studies were that there was neither an agreement on a vision for the center nor urban environmental controls. Some local planning officials think that previous plans and reviews have adequately addressed and dealt with the center's urban and environmental issues. However, the evidence contradicts their assumptions; for example, rather than walking outside, people use the climate-controlled shopping malls for crossing from one block to another.

Except for some cities in the Gulf such as Abu Dhabi, Al-Ain and Muscat, where decision making power is highly centralized, implementation of large-scale urban projects is extremely difficult in this part of the world. In spite of recommendations for controlling the process of implementation, little was achieved. The Master Plans recommended actions such as building parking garages and widening roads, rather than adopting incentive and disincentive policies such as taxing cars and increasing parking fees. As a result, the government ended up being responsible for providing everything without having any means to control and enforce its policies and plans.

The long, cumbersome and detailed studies did not take into consideration the inevitable transformation factors: the commitments of the government, the influence of the private sector, and the capacity for implementation. The plans and studies assumed that the government is the sole financier for all large-scale and long-term commitment projects. They forgot that the government in Kuwait is not a beneficiary and does not generate revenue from its people. The public was not involved in the planning process or allowed to participate meaningfully in making planning decisions.

The Role of the Municipality

Rational planning is easier to implement through a single strong central authority and one jurisdiction system. Because of the limited local capacity, the Kuwaitis had to make use of the British when establishing their institutional system, which depended on a high level of public control. The Municipality of Kuwait is the central and only institution responsible for the physical planning

and land control, all the way down to food inspection and garbage collection, from the national level to the local level. It has full power, authority, and control over all of these activities. The Municipality is overburdened with these responsibilities to the extent that coordination between Municipality departments and with other institutions became a real problem. For example, the Building Code was changed by the Municipal Council without consulting the Planning Department. Moreover, there is an overlap and duplication with other ministries' tasks such as highways, highway beautification, and parks and greenery.

With the strong leverage group in the Municipal Board, the Municipality of Kuwait became a principal and active player in creating the problem of land vacancy and under-utilization of the city center. Except for a handful of implemented projects, Municipality projects have been either delayed or cancelled. The Municipality's performance is handicapped by its own internal manipulation and disorganization. There is no single management system to address issues related to the aesthetics and imageability of the city or changes in the physical environment, memory and identifying symbols of the place. The Municipality of Kuwait could not address and articulate the city center's problems and define requirements for improving the urban quality of the city center when the plans and studies were commissioned.

Even while the Municipality was trying to solve some of the city center problems, it created some new ones. It gave incentives without regard to their repercussions. The incentives given for building parking garages provided additional parking spaces; at the same time this action adversely affected the street facade and attracted more cars to the center. It is true that the private sector is more efficient in both utilizing resources and implementing projects;

nevertheless, some form of guidance and control for private sector performance is still needed.

In addition to the factors previously mentioned, climatic, cultural and social issues had their impacts on the center's development. In the past, different lifestyles generated special development patterns in the city,⁸ and the traditional lifestyle resulted in the dense organic form of the old town of Kuwait. For Kuwaitis, owning a parcel of land and a villa became the symbol of being privileged. Sharing services and establishing social relationships with neighbors were concerns which prevented the Kuwaitis from living in high-rise residential buildings in the center. In Kuwait the built environment is mainly dictated by the lifestyle, tradition, and culture of the people, as well as by the natural environment; these aspects must be taken into consideration in studies, because failing to do so will hamper the implementation, causing delays and cancellation of projects.

I would like to stress that the goal of my analysis is not to criticize for the sake of criticism, but to define the obstacles that delayed the development of the city center to its full potential. The analysis clarifies what should be avoided in the future and what should be focused on. Otherwise, this study will be redundant and useless; it will only add one more study to the numerous earlier ones.

Notes

1. Baladeyat Al-Kuwait, Al-Shou'oun Al-Handasiya, "Yadat Al-Tatweer wa Al-Mutaba'a Al-Mustamire; Al-Mukhatat Al-Haikali lemedinat Al-Kuwait." Kuwait 1987. p. 52. Further citation in this chapter will be cited as Baladeyat.
2. Derrick Hartley, "Planning for Reconstruction and Development in Postwar Kuwait", paper presented at MEED conference in association with the United Bank of Kuwait, London, 20 May 1991. p. 38.
3. Hamid Shuaib, fax from Kuwait 12 November, 1991.
4. David Spasted, *Modern Kuwait*. London; Macmillan London Ltd., 1980. p 157.
5. Shankland Cox Partnership in Association with Salem Al-Marzouk and Sabah Abi Hanna, "Master Plan for Kuwait: 1st Review 1977; Final Report, V. 1." p. 79.
6. Hamid Shuaib, fax from Kuwait on 12 November, 1991.
7. Baladeyat, p. 46.
8. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New York; Columbia University Press, 1974. p. 173.

Part III: The Future

How to Deal with the Problem of Land Vacancy

The analysis in Part II revealed that the previous plans for the center of Kuwait City had failed to achieve their goals for developing the center. In spite of the numerous plans, reviews, and studies, the center is still suffering from discontinuity and disintegration in its physical form. So far, the plans for the city center have not succeeded in creating a liveable and attractive urban environment.

In order to achieve better solutions, lessons from previous experiences need to be considered and applied in the future. There is no doubt that Kuwaitis are the pioneers in establishing such large-scale planning; they are committed to maintaining the continuity of planning efforts. However, the planning approaches that were adopted in the past did not demonstrate their success in developing the center as a significant locale. The plans and their subsequent reviews and studies neither defined a vision to act as a framework for proposed solutions nor produced design guidelines for controlling the center's urban environment. They did not respond adequately to local conditions such as a social, cultural, and outdoor environment. Previous solutions for the center underestimated the capacity for carrying out the plans; they did not take into consideration the institutional barriers and private sector's influence.

The other lesson to learn is that the Municipality (the only authority responsible for developing the center) has its own

institutional weaknesses and shortcomings. In addition to its multiple tasks, it suffers from the overlap of different roles and responsibilities. For example, the Municipal Council, which is the highest decision-making (a non-technical) body in the Municipality, has the power to override the technical committees' decisions. There is no single authority for managing the center's development problems nor a mechanism for addressing issues and reexamining planning concepts. In the past, the Municipality's main concerns were focused on commitments to and compliance with the plans, without respect to their appropriateness and relevance.

The crucial lesson to be learned from history is that public policies and planning endeavors should not be inflexible. Without a continuous reviewing process, government policies may lose their usefulness and begin creating other problems. The government also needs to be more critical and assertive in choosing different planning approaches, rather than leaving these important decisions to uninvolved parties. From the historical analysis in Part II, it seems that having a visionary framework, effective mechanisms for carrying out plans, and a self-reevaluation process are much more important than merely producing plans and studies. To insure the success of the planning efforts in Kuwait, it is essential to focus initially on selecting a vision, then on assessing implementation capacity, and finally on developing a detailed physical plan. The mistake made in the past was in taking these priorities in reverse order.

In this part of the thesis, I will try to explore alternative approaches for dealing with the problem of vacant land and its implication on the imageability of the center. The main subjects for discussion are: first, the creation of a high quality urban environment for a city center with a unique character and special identity;

second, a better use for the vacant land. In order to accomplish these objectives, a general framework plan and program are suggested before any further recommendations are made. Designing and planning city centers is a major and complex task that requires multi-discipline skills and comprehensive data; therefore, I will limit my proposal and recommendations to the general policy level.

The first chapter in this part (Chapter 6) will list the existing constraints and available resources, discuss questions and issues that need to be addressed, and propose possible visions for the city center. Having a vision is a prerequisite step that should precede any decision with regard to the center; it is extremely hard to decide on what to do without envisioning the end product. A clear and definite vision will delineate the framework for the end product and make the process for rebuilding the city center possible. The second chapter of Part III (Chapter 7) will deal with implementation issues such as how to develop a program for implementing and carrying out the vision and how to organize and carry out this whole effort. There will be a set of recommendations regarding who should be responsible for implementing the vision, who should pay, what changes are needed, what kind of public intervention is required, and what policies and strategies are to be adopted in order to ensure the success and continuity of this process.

Chapter 6: The Vision for the City Center

Resources, Concerns and Constraints

Kuwait City Center enjoys many natural assets and unrestricted resources that can be utilized for upgrading its urban quality. The most valuable assets are the sea and the shape of Kuwait Bay. For the time being, the seafront is underutilized and is separated from the city center by the Arabian Gulf Road. The underdeveloped waterfront offers an opportunity to integrate the city with the sea and to use the sea view, activities, and port to revive the sea life and restore its influence on the city center's vitality. The proposed Green Belt offers another opportunity to improve the city center's micro-climate and to fill the Kuwaitis' intense desire and need for greenery and lushness. The vacant land itself is an asset for creating an identifiable city center if it is developed according to a set of rules and controlling measures. Another asset is the continuity of some of the center's original functions: the seat of government, the major financial and commercial activities, and the functioning *souqs* and special retail shopping areas.

The present city center is not dead, it has maintained some of its original functions despite the demolition and destruction; no major effort is required to attract business and employment-generating activities. The recent momentum resulting from both the postwar reforms and reconstruction offers another opportunity to accelerate the rebuilding of the center, making a one-time large-scale effort possible. Now is a good time to rethink the city planning

policies and to rebuild the society by creating new values that are compatible with the newly created context. Recent government policies such as rejuvenating the city center character, repopulating the center by encouraging Kuwaitis to live in it, and more reliance on the private sector for boosting the national economy and redevelopment projects, could all facilitate the rebuilding effort if used in a productive manner and not abused.

Since Kuwait has significant financial resources, cost would not be expected to be an issue, but previous government policies, the Iraqi invasion, and the Gulf War left the Kuwaiti government burdened with debts, huge reconstruction bills, and considerably less revenue. Consequently, cost is an issue that needs to be considered at least in the short term, and the government is already considering some form of taxation and the charging of fees for public services.¹ For long-term policies with regard to redevelopment of the center, cost should not be a big problem since the government has already bought the majority of the land and gained control over its development. The government also enjoys the power of the highly centralized authority which makes the implementation of urban projects and city planning much easier than in other countries.

The cost issue is an example of how some opportunities can turn into constraints if misused and poorly managed. Constraints may also turn into opportunities. For example, the preserved structures from the traditional city may stimulate new projects and add richness to their design; at the same time, old structures may cause some kind of design restriction either by their location, size, or use. Another example of this kind of dual effect is the new telecommunication tower, which may enhance the silhouette of the city center and act as a landmark and new focal point for concen-

trated high-rise buildings, yet it dwarfs all surrounding structures if it is not integrated with the height restrictions at the center.

Some of the physical constraints on the development of the center are: the existing form of the city and the unrelated different architectural styles; developments only at the edges of the blocks; the city road network;^{*} and the isolation of the city from the sea by the Arabian Gulf Road.

Future plans for the center should not overlook natural constraints such as the extremely hot summer, the sun's glare, duststorms, water scarcity, and soil quality. Overlooking these natural factors will jeopardize the success of any plans for improving the quality of urban life in the center and restrain landscaping and greenery projects.

New plans for the city center should take into account social, political, and cultural concerns. Kuwaitis were reluctant to live in apartments until recently, when the National Housing Authority gave some incentives and made an exception to the waiting period (4-6 years) for villa-type housing applicants willing to live in high-rise buildings. Land scarcity and underutilized infrastructure became a major problem for public housing in Kuwait City. The new government policy is to encourage Kuwaitis to live in the center regardless of the cost to the government. Social values such as status, a high rate of car ownership, and a servant dependent society, constitute another constraint on city center development. Political instability and decisions have also imposed new constraints.

^{*} Seven major roads lead to the center; currently three of these are expressways, more are planned to be upgraded to expressway standards.

The increased security measures require even more distance around public buildings.

The planning process adds to the constraints and concerns regarding future solutions for the land vacancy problem. The government's insistence on implementing the 1971 Master Plan discounted all other approaches and possibilities for developing the center. Reviews following the plan did not challenge the concept, they only reviewed numbers and details. In the process of rebuilding the center, all development plans should seriously take into account facts that eventually influence and delay these plans. Factors such as the influence of the private sector and the limited local technical capacity have played a major role in the mismanagement and delaying of projects in the past.

Any effort to deal with the problem of land vacancy in Kuwait City center should acknowledge the contextual difference of this place, and that solutions which may have worked in other places may not necessarily succeed in this place. Understanding local conditions including available resources, constraints, and concerns makes future plans more realistic and easier to implement.

Development Questions and Issues

In order to develop the center of Kuwait City, decision makers need to consider some important questions and issues that may influence future plans and visions for creating liveable and attractive place, a usable center where life continues day and night and throughout weekends and holidays. Such broad questions as: what changes need to take place, and whether it is easier to change one variable or more; whether it is easier to change the physical

environment or social behavior, (and which is practical or possible); and what was the cost and outcome of past experiences, financially and socially, should precede any decision related to the development of the city center. The vacant land needs to be redefined as a place that has the sensory qualities of security, belonging, attachment, and historical continuity, that evokes emotions and memory, that has human scale and a sense of order, hierarchy and orientation.

If Kuwait's people and government want to rebuild the city center, they will have to accept and deal with the car problems and traffic congestion generated by that development. The criteria for high-density or low-density development should be based on demand, utilization of infrastructure, and improvement of urban qualities. Low-density development may attract fewer cars to the center, but that would mean people would travel longer distances within the city, which is an unproductive way of utilizing the city's resources of land and infrastructure. Higher density development raises questions of housing in the center, such as who is to live in the center and which levels of income to accommodate. Housing development should not exclude groups of people from housing in the center since this might create social and political problems. Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, lower and higher income people should all be able to use the center equally.

Questions related to the natural environment may, in the end, be the main decisive elements for envisioning the future center. The features that contrast with the desert environment--water, green, and shade--should be the central theme for potential visions. The sea represents the element of water; integration of the city center with the sea is fundamental. Future visions have to consider solutions for the treatment of the sea edge (soft or hard, distance

from water, height along sea front, and control of tide and ebb tide). Activities attracting people, such as restaurants, special retail and entertainment, as well as residential projects have to be located directly on the waterfront, either by depressing the Arabian Gulf Road or by using its air rights in some areas.

The other natural element that makes a dynamic contrast with the desert is the greenery and landscaping. Greenery projects need not consider vast green open spaces and lawns because of both water scarcity and the need for protected areas. Dense groves are more suitable for Kuwait's climate; they provide usable shaded areas and prevent heat from touching and reflecting from the ground. Plans for the city center should not ignore the undeveloped Green Belt, its use, function, and integration with the center. Questions of greenery are strongly related to those dealing with climate and weather protection, the third natural element.

Providing shade and weather protection is a necessity for any development plan to make the city center usable during the hot hours of summer days. Urban design for the center must take into consideration glare, duststorms, and humidity, and must also minimize the use of large open spaces and paved reflective materials. Providing protection from the severe climate makes city center activities more accessible for pedestrians; protected areas create an urban life separated from the car-oriented environment.

Issues of controlling the public domain shape the framework of plans aspiring to upgrade the quality of the built environment in the center. An effort should be made to design the cityscape without designing the buildings and to control the relationship between public and private activities. Decisions should be made about what kind of public infrastructure is needed. Street facades must be controlled and unifying elements introduced. The city center should

have an attractive public appearance for both pedestrians and cars.

Dealing with the public domain includes questions regarding aesthetics and symbolism, such as how to create a city center that has an individual, unique, and cohesive character. Designing buildings individually does not create a city character and does not express special values. Designs for urban landscape and settings give cities their distinguished character; a few tying elements such as trees, street furniture, arcades and setbacks, help to produce the desired effect. There is always the danger of misusing these tying elements--they should not be used as cosmetic and face-lifting means.

The center of the capital city needs to express the national identity and the national pride of Kuwait State. The issue of re-asserting the Kuwaiti identity has acquired even more importance since the Iraqi invasion. National identity might be expressed by means of built form such as vertical elements, landmarks, bridges, and boulevards. Other social and cultural traditions such as *souqs* and mosques may also express national identity. For example, Kuwaitis and other people of the Gulf dress in traditional garments to identify themselves from other nationalities. Cultural expressions such as music, dance, local dishes, even special smells and aromas are all means for identifying a group of people. The history of a place and the collective memory of its people distinguish the regional identity (which all the Gulf States share) from Kuwait's national identity.

New developments in the city center have to be sensitive to issues related to the past. People should be able to read the history of the city from its monuments and the remaining structures of the traditional city. Symbolic elements that are meaningful to the collective memory should be preserved as reminders for future

generations. However, future plans and visions should avoid the recreation of the past and the simulation of representational features of Islamic architecture. Preservation of the collective memory can be enhanced by building memorials and museums. Preservation and revival of traditions and rituals is one way to maintain the continuity of history—for example, the celebration of weddings and other social occasions, religious ceremonies, the annual seafaring festival, and the spring desert camping. Qualities of other cities in the region might be examined and used as models for inspiring new plans for the city center.

The city center should not only express its past, but also its present and its promises for the future; it has to cater to all sections of society. Since 40% of the Kuwaiti population is less than 15 years of age, plans need to provide facilities for children and teenagers as well as for men, women, and elderly people. Planners need to keep in mind the specificity and uniqueness of Kuwaiti social life and problems; for example, it is a conservative society that still maintains some kind of segregation between men and women. The introduction of mixed-use and more entertainment activities may solve some of the social problems of teenagers and young generations resulting from boredom and lack of leisure and free time activities. At the same time, preservation of social activities such as *diwanias* is one way of maintaining the continuity of history and traditions as well as providing the older generation of men with social gathering places.

Potential Visions

In order to restore a sense of place to the city center and to create an environment that is not alien to the residents, the people of Kuwait need to have a vision acting as a framework plan for the future. They need to share a common story about their city in order to re-establish a sense of strong attachment and love for the city. In the process of creating a vision, some questions need to be addressed, such as: what kind of place inspires Kuwaitis; which cities they like to visit; and what values they adhere to (the built form of any vision should express these values, needs, and the desires of people). Decision makers should have an idea about the kind of center they want, its functions, its use, and its physical and visual character. They should have a clear idea whether to develop the center as a significant and liveable place or to justify its current state. The following alternatives may shed some light on future possibilities and clarify the pros and cons of each. There are limitations for each scenario; the final decision depends on the balance between the cost and benefits for each.

Vision 1: The Capital City Center, Symbolic and Monumental **Examples: Washington, D.C., New Delhi**

The two examples used are cities built to be capital cities, but they differ from Kuwait City in terms of scale and the messages they relay. Both Washington, D.C. and New Delhi signify power and legitimacy; they have symbolic meanings that are expressed in the architecture of their buildings, the wide thoroughfares, the

geometry, symmetry, and axuality. In this vision, the center of Kuwait City would be the administrative, financial, and ceremonial center. It would contain central elements of power such as politics, finance, and religion.

Located at the core of the center where all radial roads intersect with the Arabian Gulf Road would be the focal point, the new *Amiri Diwan* Project (the *Sief* Palace, *Amiri Diwan*, office of the Crown Prince, and Council of Ministers), all decision-making government offices, the Parliament and Planning Board, as well as the financial districts which include the Stock Exchange, Central Bank, commercial banks, and other financial activities. The *Souq* would retain its vitality as a main retail shopping center where people do specialty shopping. Other commercial activities, headquarters, and business-related services would also be situated in the center, in addition to cultural and entertainment activities. Preserved structures from the traditional city such as houses of the old merchant families, mosques, and *diwaniyas* would remain in the center beside new low-density housing.



The center would function as a symbol for the old city and its collective memory: it would contain the major elements of the collective memory such as the gates of the wall, the seafront, the *Sief* Palace, and the *Souq*. These elements would form major focal points and landmarks beside other monumental public and private buildings. In this scenario, the center would consist of a large-scale, coarse-grain, low-density development--mostly public buildings owned by the government. Monumental government buildings would have formal settings and landscaping which would give the center its grand and prominent appearance. Buildings would be developed along wide roads with trees on both sides since pedestrian movement would be limited to the *souqs* and some commercial areas.

The public domain would be observed mainly by car, and the public open spaces would mainly serve as places to view such things as formal public gardens and water fountains. The cityscape and street furniture would be highly unified and design controlled. The waterfront would be part of the formal landscaping; it would be planted and used for enhancing the ceremonial appearance of the Arabian Gulf Road. Some limited entertainment activities would need to be introduced, such as walkways protected by trees along the sea's edge, children's theme parks, and theme gardens.

This vision places more emphasis on the visual quality of the place than the use of the place; it emphasizes city imageability and the expression of power and history. It has the advantages of providing security for public buildings, attracting fewer cars to the center, and maintaining the land reserve in the center for future public projects. The monumental center establishes the missing character and creates a dignified image for the city. Since the government has the leading role in this option, it will have more

control on the urban design and fewer entanglements with the private sector. Development of the private sector must conform to the monumentality and grandeur of public buildings; it is also subject to highly restricted design controls to ensure the desired vision.

However, this option has its drawbacks and disadvantages. It underutilizes valuable land in the center and encourages low-density and urban sprawl, which act to extend the city's infrastructure and increase travel distances. Paved open spaces increase reflected heat and glare; additionally, they require continuous labor-intensive maintenance and upkeep. Other disadvantages of this option are the absence of life in the center, especially at night, adding cultural activities such as a national theater or a music hall could fill this need. This option may satisfy the government policy and desire to rejuvenate the character of the center and introduce prestigious public buildings; at the same time, it reverses other government policies and priorities to encourage the development of the private sector and decrease reliance on expatriate labor.

Vision 2: The Oasis City Center, Green and Symbolic

Examples: Bahrain and Al-Ain in the United Arab Emirates, and Basrah in Iraq

The second option for a low-density development vision is a city center dominated by dense green. Although two of the examples, Al-Ain and Basrah, are not capital cities, the example cities can be used as models for this type of green city. The outskirts of the cities are planted with palm groves, with smaller trees and

plants underneath (citrus trees, vegetables, and herbs are usually grown under the groves). Inside the city, palm trees provide protection for domestic gardens, small parks, and private courtyards. Vines such as bougainvillea and climbing shrubs such as jasmine thrive in hot climates. These kinds of greenery provide the place with the missing sensory qualities—the colors of the bougainvillea that contrast the desert colors, the scent of jasmine at night, or the orange blossom scents in the spring. Tree-shaded areas not only improve the aesthetic image of the city center, but also provide practical aspects such as usable open spaces, a protected pedestrian environment, and shaded car parks.

In this vision, the center would maintain its present function as the location of the seat of government, decision-making government offices, the financial center, *souqs*, special retail, commercial and service activities. High-density low-rise residential complexes that respond to social, cultural and climatic issues would be developed on vacant land. The center would express its symbolic meaning not only in the built form, but also in greenery and



landscaping. Settings for public buildings and open spaces would be densely planted with trees. The type of trees and planting hierarchy and order would provide unifying and tying elements. Through the control of building, the center would acquire the desired distinguished character and unique identity. Formal landscaping could enhance the monumental architecture of the buildings, especially for existing structures. This vision has the capacity to integrate the underdeveloped Green Belt and cemeteries in the city. Developing the Green Belt as a dense grove would define approaches to the center and give them a significant presence. Planting the seafront and developing it as a soft edge for the center will enhance the city center's character and create an inviting place for both entertainment and residential purposes.

Advantages of this option are many; in addition to the micro-climate improvements and the provision of usable open spaces, it creates a special character for the city center. It satisfies the local need for lush greenery and enables people to use the center throughout the heat of the days and seasons. Implementing this solution might appear difficult and costly because of water scarcity, soil quality, and laborious maintenance; it might, however, be easy to implement since changes will include only one element. This option also has its disadvantages. For example, security is a main concern as groves provide easy hiding places and public buildings surrounded by trees are more difficult to protect. The other major concern is the practicality of implementation; the government would have to import large numbers of palm trees. Nevertheless, other cities in the region such as Abu-Dhabi managed to solve these problems. Like the first vision, this solution does not address government policies of repopulating the center, encouraging the private sector, and decreasing expatriate labor.

**Vision 3: The Metropolitan City Center, Services and Mixed-Use
Examples: Cairo, Beirut**

Old capital cities in the region used to have centers that contained all kinds of activities; governmental, administrative, financial, commercial, residential, entertainment, and cultural activities. Old cities like Cairo and Beirut used to have all their public services concentrated in the center; hospitals, schools, the university, wholesale markets, daily and specialty shopping markets, and special crafts shops. In this vision, the future center of Kuwait City is envisioned to be a high-density urban center that has diverse activities.

Like Visions 1 and 2, the center would be the hub of the major government, financial, commercial, and retail activities. Additionally, the center would have a high-density, probably low-rise, residential area and all related services such as hospitals, clinics, schools, shopping centers. These residential developments would be situated on vacant land overlooking the sea and the Green Belt; they would be fully integrated with the seafront's lively entertainment and cultural activities. Residential developments overlooking the Green Belt would take advantage of both the view and the use of greenery; similar to the second vision, the Green Belt would also be developed into a continuous dense grove.

In order to attract people to live in the center, the view and advantages of the sea front and the Green Belt should be fully utilized. Therefore, high-rise residential developments with imaginative architectural design need to be employed to avoid monotonous large-scale housing. However, building heights do not necessarily need to be restricted and uniform in all of the center. Variety is the main character of this vision. Different areas in the

center may have different characters, different levels of design control, and different urban environments. In this option, the center would cater to all sections of society regardless of their level of income, social status, or nationality.

Unlike the previous visions, the center here would not have a unified character or one dominant use. In general, the center would have shaded areas created by densely developed buildings, protected sidewalks and arcades, trees alongside sidewalks, and inward-looking building complexes. Public open spaces would have either artificially controlled climates like atriums, or small-scale planted courtyards that would lead to climate controlled commercial and residential complexes or to pedestrian malls. The distinctive character and special identity would not necessarily be expressed by individual buildings. Climate protection elements could be used to give a sense of uniformity--for example, the use of sun shading devices, a minimal use of openings and glass, with projections and canopies to protect those openings. These are simple unifying and tying elements that would reflect the spirit of the place and heighten its aesthetic appearance. The public domain would be represented by the varied city texture and fine-grain activities, and pedestrians would have more interaction with public urban spaces. The center should cater to both cars and pedestrians, to public and private activities.

This option for Kuwait's city center vision has many advantages. The service center would conform to government policies of bringing back the life and character of the center and encouraging development through the private sector, as well as provide weather protection, and integrate existing structures with new development. This solution may have some major drawbacks, nevertheless it should not be discounted as a viable option. High-density develop-

ments would attract cars and generate traffic congestion, noise, and environmental problems. These problems are unavoidable; any solution for developing the city center to its full potential would have to address them to a greater or lesser degree. Cities around the world have managed to develop their centers and accommodate a higher volume of cars.



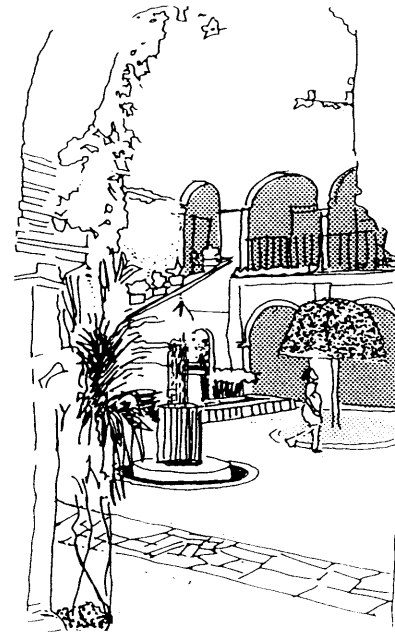
Implementing this vision would necessitate financial and technical resources; it would involve both a capable technical staff and a strong authority to monitor and control the development process. Moreover, this vision would require some fundamental changes and reforms of social behavior and public attitudes. The government would have to use incentives to encourage Kuwaitis to live in apartments, use public transportation, and be less dependent on servants. To date, plans for repopulating the city center and forcing people to use public transportation have had no significant success in achieving these goals.

Vision 4: The Shaded City Center, Core and Periphery

Example: Istanbul, Isfahan

Cities like Istanbul and Isfahan are much older than Kuwait City; the physical structure of these cities represent the time in which they were built. The purpose of using these two examples is to exemplify the type of environment that this vision is trying to achieve and not to recreate the past. The objective of this vision is to create an environment that is sympathetic to pedestrians and their movement in the city; places and activities in the center should be accessible during both day and night, despite heat and weather changes. The center would be divided into the core and the periphery. The core area would contain the top level government center, the financial district and the State Mosque. This core center would represent the three historical symbols of power: religion, politics, and finance. It would be monumental and ceremonial in character. This part of the center would be mainly accessed by car by the top government officials and employees of both government and financial centers.

Unlike the core, the periphery would contain retail, commercial, entertainment, and related services; it would integrate existing activities and preserved structures such as mosques and *diwanis*. At the street level, there would be a network of protected public spaces such as atriums, courtyards, arcades, and narrow streets. These public spaces would be interconnected and would lead to the waterfront entertainment and cultural activities from both sides of the core. Entrances and lobbies of public and private buildings would be linked to the pedestrian systems by means of planted public courtyards and defined open spaces. Residential town houses would be located on the waterfront, taking full advantage of the



sea's pleasant features and periphery activities. Residential units and semi-public gardens, playgrounds, and shaded car parking would be located above the street level.

The periphery's character would be defined by the continuity of uses, the visible crowdedness, and the ambient qualities of the place, qualities such as the excitement of experiencing the sequence of transitional spaces and feeling the contrast of light and shade. The dominant elements of the character would be the sensations of enclosure, discovery, protection, safety, continuity and diversity. People in the center would prefer to use this pedestrian route if they wanted to cross from one place to another and avoid the torridity. In this vision, the center would have two different characters: the formal and symbolic character of the core, which would be

experienced mainly by car; and the informal and lively character of the periphery, which would only be experienced by pedestrians. The public domain in the center would also be divided between cars and pedestrians; each of these sections would require different controls and guidelines. Pedestrians would observe their immediate surroundings (the interconnected corridors and lobbies of the ground floor that would constitute the periphery of public domain), while people using cars or public transport would observe larger expanses of the city center. This option creates a tying base for scattered existing buildings and old structures.

This vision has the advantages of creating an environment that reflects both the culture and climate, as well as defining a special character that expresses the spirit of the region. It provides protection, safety, and social interaction for pedestrians, and productively utilizes the city center's valuable resources of vacant land and the seafront. The drawbacks of this vision include difficulties in controlling the implementation process and providing urban design guidelines. Implementation would require substantial technical and financial resources.

This option may encourage private sector development and private sector participation in building the public infrastructure, but the question is whether there is enough demand for this scale of development, considering the recent government policy of reducing the population. Unless an efficient practical public transportation system is introduced and disincentives and discouragement strategies are employed, this option will attract large numbers of cars to the center. The government's priority, however, is to rebuild and repopulate the city center; dealing with cars is an issue that will be encountered in any development plan.

Vision 5: The Futuristic City Center, Environmental Control and High Technology

This vision may look extravagant and unrealistic, but in a rich country like Kuwait that has limited population resources and an extremely harsh environment, a solution like this is justified. In addition to its existing activities, the city center would have more government and public buildings, commercial, entertainment, and cultural activities. Housing might be introduced, depending on development density at each block. The center would be divided into islands; each block being a self-sustaining separate entity. There would be an artificial climate-controlled superstructure in each of the center's blocks, and a large open space or atrium would function as a terminal for the "superblock."

This open space would link underground parking garages with the street level's enclosed pedestrian activities, public transportation, and other "superblocks" by means of above-street bridges. The entrances of public and commercial buildings would open into this space. The main open space might be linked to secondary public spaces such as gallerias and covered arcades. The main elements that would characterize the space are combinations of state of the art technology and natural elements such as heavy greenery, light and shade control, and the possible extension of the sea into the city. Roads and street facades would mainly serve cars and public transportation; the controlled environment would be used strictly by pedestrians.

Like Vision 4, this solution would isolate the world of the pedestrian from that of the car. It would provide safety, protection, and a pleasing character that reflects the sense of newness and modernity among the younger generation and which reflects their

state of mind and outlook. It might be difficult to adopt and implement this kind of vision due to its heavy cost, the huge technical resources it would require, and the risk of using hi-technology. Nevertheless, it is worth considering this option, because it would be a one-time effort that would dramatically change the physical environment of the city center. This vision would conform to government policy of decreasing dependency on expatriate labor and increasing reliance on technology.

In reality, this vision would continue the history of modernization in Kuwait and add another step in the process of recreating a better image for the traditional city. Kuwaitis need the courage to admit that the past has been destroyed and that the reality of the present is imposing itself. There is no point in regretting the demolition of the traditional city--let Kuwaitis continue what they started forty years ago, be less sentimental about their past and look forward to a future of affluence, progress, and achievement.



In order to decide on a future vision, Kuwaiti decision makers have to keep in mind that there is no one solution that can solve all of the city center's development problems. Each one of the proposed options has its own advantages and disadvantages. Decision makers have to ensure that the solution is not worse than the original problem and must also continuously question the side effects on other objectives. Financial and social costs should not outweigh benefits. It is not the intention of this study to decide on the future vision for the city center of Kuwait. The final decision should be made by the Kuwaitis, taking into account the usefulness, appropriateness, and acceptability of the vision. They should also be mindful of the local technical capacity as well as the capacity and practicality of implementation. They may decide on one exclusive vision or they may choose to select certain elements from each vision, or to combine two or more visions. In any case, the future vision for the center of Kuwait City should be clear, simple, and easy to implement.

Notes

1. Jonathan Crusoe and Peter Kemp, "Kuwait: Rebuilding a Country (MEED Profile No. 6)." London: EMAP Barnes Information Ltd, 1991. p. 5.

Chapter 7: Implementing the vision

Introduction

The possible visions proposed in Chapter 6 are only general ideas to act as a broad framework for directing future plans for the center. These different alternatives need to be further developed into development plans. This chapter will discuss the broad guidelines for the implementation process. In order to decide on how to deal with land vacancy in the center and what kind of public intervention is required, there must be a general process to guide the implementation of the development plan, a process that defines the common elements of each vision. Government policies and actions may differ, depending on the vision. The process of redeveloping the city center and restoring its environmental qualities is a continuous piecemeal process; it has to take into account changes and incorporate feedback from implementation. It is a process that has the capacity for self-regeneration and updating and which has the flexibility to accommodate changes.

The first part of this chapter will define the bodies responsible for making decisions, financing, and the execution of city center plans. The second part will discuss changes which need to take place, and the alternative policies and tools that need to be employed for implementing each of the visions. There will be no attempt to examine and employ models used in other cities and countries due to the difference in the nature of the problems, cultural and contextual differences, and the limited technical capacity in Kuwait.

Responsible Bodies

The government of Kuwait is the main financier of urban improvements and the provision of public infrastructure. Incentives and transfer of benefits policies can be employed to encourage the private sector to build public infrastructure in the city center. A high level of maintenance and upkeep costs should be expected and provided for both the government and the private sector.

In most cases, the control of a city's urban environment is easier through highly centralized authority. The government should make use of its centralized power and establish an authority which is only responsible for development in the city center and the public domain. The City Center Redevelopment Authority should have a separate independent entity and strong political support; it should also have the power to override the Municipality and Municipal Council.

The authority is responsible for keeping an inventory for projects in the center; it should also be responsible for the coordination of these projects, the institutions involved, and coordination with the private sector. Moreover, the authority should also be responsible for establishing and updating a central data base for parcels in the center. In general, the City Center Redevelopment Authority must take the initiative for controlling changes in the urban environment of the center, planning, developing, and following up. It should also be able to address issues and questions regarding memory, symbols, character, identity, aesthetic values, and sensory qualities; changes in the issues such as the transformation of memory, symbolic meanings, and public attitudes should also be monitored and addressed. Cities like Boston in the United States and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia have established redevelopment

authorities to control the public domain and large-scale projects in the city. The authority may take different forms depending on the future vision, degree of control and details required. Establishment of more than one authority is also possible, but would entail more coordination problems, competition among different authorities, and the provision of a highly qualified staff.

This central authority needs to be independent from all decision-making bodies and be directly responsible to the highest authority of the state to ensure its legitimacy, power, and independence; it needs to have special jurisdiction, power of enforcement, and its own budget. The authority needs a strong and charismatic leader with a solid political backing. This leader, whether an elected individual like a mayor, or an appointed director, must have a clear vision for the center's image and its aesthetic appearance, is much more effective than a committee. To ensure the inclusion of all parties concerned, an authority council or board needs to be established; it should be constituted of professional and non-professional members and should include members from the Planning Board, Municipal Council and Chamber of Commerce. It should also include individuals who have an intellectual background, as well as an interest and concern about the city aesthetic appearance.

Since the leader of this authority does not necessarily need to be a technical person, he must have technical advisors to help in addressing and articulating questions and issues. The authority should also have a highly qualified and experienced staff in different disciplines to propose initiatives and make decisions. Additionally, there should be one or more multi-disciplinary committees, as well as panels and commissions to control public

domain by means of introducing design guidelines, design reviews, and design competitions.

The City Center Redevelopment Authority cannot function without private consultants, both local and international. Although the local experience is limited, the input of the locals is essential in the redevelopment process. International consultants also have an important role in guiding the planning and development efforts; they should have their own resources for conducting research and studies to understand the locale and the cultural differences. Additionally, the international consultants employed should have a continuous presence to monitor the process, get feedback, and train the local technical staff. Kuwaitis should take advantage of other cities' experiences and the methods used to deal with their problems; Kuwaitis may use some of their techniques and instruments, or they may share exchange programs with other cities authorities or research institutions.

The city belongs to the people who live and work in it, and public facilities in the center are meant to be used by the residents equally. Therefore, the public should also share in the process of the redevelopment of the center by participating in making decisions for the future city center. There are two levels of participation: the private sector and the inhabitants of the city. The input of vacant land owners, contractors, real estate companies, and building material trading companies is important especially at the beginning. Future plans for the center should take into account both the interest and the influence of the private sector.

Although the public participation process should not exclude some groups of society, the issue of who is to participate, and in which way, is important. Since only a limited percentage of the society is educated, there is a risk in involving people who have

difficulty in conceptualizing their views and attitudes.¹ Although some people may be extremist and very subjective, efforts should be made to take their opinions into consideration. Education and dissemination of information by means of the media, especially television and radio, are the most effective ways to overcome this problem. Initial decisions and policies need to be reconsidered as political, social and economic changes and the degree of involvement and responsibility of each of the concerned parties may change over time and take other forms.

Policies, Techniques, and Tools

Before any government intervention, some fundamental changes in government policies and government attitudes need to take place in order to be able to implement development plans for the city center in Kuwait. Policy alternatives and policy choice are highly dependant on which vision is applied; the adoption of implementation techniques and tools also depends on the vision and what it is trying to achieve. In the past, public policies such as inflated land acquisition, a generous welfare system, and a non-taxation system did not only create the problem of land development within the center, but also intensified it over time. Moreover, the absence of disincentives policies and regulation enforcement tools--especially among influential Kuwaitis--allowed the private sector to influence and delay the implementation of the previous plans.

To stimulate the development of the vacant land in the center of Kuwait City, some public policies need to be reconsidered. To encourage development on empty private land, the land acquisition

value should not exceed the market value in order to control speculation and make development feasible. Additionally, a larger reform might be considered; a form of taxation, either on vacant land or on incremental value, might be required, not as a source of revenue for the government, but as a tool for incentive and disincentive policies. Since land taxation is not easy to introduce and implement, and since the government is the prime land owner in the center, land taxation may not be very effective. Other measures must be examined to encourage development on government land.

The government has already invested in the land in the city center; to avoid complications resulting from selling the land and to maintain its control on both land and development, the government should only lease the vacant land. The government should use the lease contract as leverage to enforce building regulations and urban design guidelines for new developments. To ensure a high quality of development, leases should not be less than twenty-five years with a guaranteed option for renewal. If the government wants to encourage high-density development in the center, some additional actions, such as restricting urban boundaries and imposing fees on infrastructure, should be taken.

Higher density in the center attracts a larger number of cars. In the past, incentives to build parking garages in the center did not succeed; more cars were attracted to the center because of the increase in FAR, which was not coupled with any kind of counter-ing disincentives. In order to discourage cars and decrease traffic congestion, some different disincentive policies and different measures are possible. For example, the government could impose high taxes on car imports and gasoline, and/or higher fees on parking in crowded areas of the center. The government should also introduce impact fees and linkages on higher density complexes.

Furthermore, traffic management techniques such as the introduction of high-speed lanes for public transportation and high occupancy vehicles might discourage people from driving their cars individually. The provision of an efficient public transportation system that takes into account social and climatic constraints could also minimize the number of cars approaching the center.

Other public policies which indirectly delayed the development of land in the center and hampered government priorities, such as the building of government offices and public infrastructure, also need to be reexamined. For example, policies involving ideas that the government should not make a profit from the people, or that the government should be responsible for providing all public services without charging fees, left the government burdened with responsibilities and increasing financial commitments.

The public housing policy is an added pressure on the government; it does not have the land or the construction capacity to meet the growing demand. In the center, government land zoned for residential use is empty. Residential uses in the center need not necessarily presume only low- and middle-income housing. The government should also give incentives to the private sector to build housing, such as mixed-use developments and rental housing. Since rental housing is primarily built for non-Kuwaitis, encouraging the private sector to build rental housing might oppose government policies of repopulating the center with only Kuwaitis. Recent postwar policies of decreasing Kuwait's population by one half of what it was before the invasion, and preventing male expatriates from bringing in their families, will certainly decrease the demand for new development, be they public and private services in the center or rented housing outside the center.

Planning and urban design policies also need to be reviewed. A major decision has to be made whether to maintain and continue the British planning system (the use of the 1971 Master Plan and its reviews as city center development plan) or to divert to more up-to-date and innovative city planning and urban design theories and approaches that have the capacity to sustain changes and uncertainties. It is the government's responsibility to decide who should design the new plan and how to carry it out. To ensure the implementation of plans, building regulations and guidelines, the government must have some enforcement and deterrent powers. If private real estate companies and private landlords want to increase FAR they have to pay for it, either by paying linkages and impact fees, or by transferring benefits such as building public infrastructure. Government incentives for stimulating development in the center should be accompanied by disincentives for discouraging cars from coming into the center.

Through the authority responsible for the city center, the government should introduce strict building regulations and clear detailed guidelines in order to control the urban environment and the aesthetics of development in the city center. Depending on the future vision of the center, different design guidelines need to be introduced, such as urban design methods and a powerful set of rules that deals with contextual issues and issues of appropriateness such as how to address context, what type of measures and tying elements are needed to connect buildings to each other and to their surroundings, and what types of setting and landscape characters are required. Additionally, design guidelines introduce a set of rules to control scale relationship, height, shade, bulk, material, color, general architectural features, expression lines, and setbacks for

buildings. Different degrees of regulations might be used for different zones in the center.

Writing the design guidelines may take place over time, depending on goals and objectives. To ensure adherence to design guidelines and to control the process of improving the quality of the built environment, design reviews are essential. Design review committees may take different forms and adopt different procedures; it is important to decide who should be on these committees (planners, architects, landscape architects, private landowners, and contractors), whether to have single or multiple design review, whether it is binding or not, and how to ensure compliance of recommendations.

To improve the image and aesthetic appearance of Kuwait's city center, urban design policies should take into account the control of the public domain, which includes everything experienced by the public such as building lobbies, public entrances, arcades, public spaces, and public buildings.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the plans, public policies are also needed to change some social values and to encourage people to change their lifestyles, adapt to postwar realities and be able to participate in the planning process. Education and information are very effective tools, as are incentives and disincentives. The government should make the effort to build up a significant Kuwaiti professional class, encourage public awareness, and establish an active, educated and cultured class that is able to take the initiative and make decisions.

Different potential options for Kuwait City center's future vision will require different strategies and different public intervention. What follows is an attempt to examine each vision in terms of policies and changes required for implementing a specific vision,

policies for developing the vacant land, creating a distinguishable, unique character, and restoring a sense of place to the city center.

Vision 1

In this vision, the government is the prime land developer in the center. Unless the private sector is encouraged to build public infrastructure on public land through incentives and transfer of benefits such as density bonuses (if demand for development resumes) or alleviating taxes if they exist, the government will mainly own and maintain the public infrastructure. So far, past experience has proven that the government alone did not have the capacity for developing its land in the center. Therefore, the inclusion of the private sector is a necessity. The government may conditionally lease some of its land to the private sector for quality commercial and residential usage. Parts of the vacant land located on the waterfront might be used for prestigious, high quality residential high-rises to take full advantage of sea view; design guidelines for buildings' relationship to the sea would have to be established.

Design guidelines are the major tools for implementing this vision; they will have to be clear, detailed and highly restrictive. Public buildings as well as private buildings should adhere to these guidelines; a special planning commission should be created to control the public appearance of the center. Design guidelines should deal with issues of style, bulk, height relationship, expression elements, vertical elements, monumental features such as domes and sculptural roofs, materials, ornamentation, and most important, controlling the use of Islamic architectural features.

Commercial and residential developments should also comply with these guidelines.

Another set of design guidelines which are equally important would include the landscape, type of trees, setbacks, fountains, street furniture, street lighting, and visible services. Design guidelines are also required for the waterfront with regard to the height of development, distance from the water, soft and hard landscapes, and access to the water. Preserved structures must also have guidelines for integrating these structures into new developments in the center; these guidelines should address questions of use and context (depending on the number of preserved structures), whether to rebuild the fabric and what type of infill to introduce, and whether to preserve the structure and its use, preserve the structure and change the use, or preserve only the use and special activities.

Vision 2

This vision needs to have concentrated areas of green in the center, in addition to the formal green landscaping of public buildings and the flora used in private developments. In order to have some concentrated green areas, the government may need to have some land exchange in center. Since the greening is a major priority for the government, it may either increase development density as an incentive for planting part of the green area, or it may allow the private sector to become the direct implementing party. The scale of greening the center--soil improvements, provision of irrigation water, provision of trees, maintenance and upkeep--will generate large-scale business for the private sector and boost the national economy.

Design guidelines for the buildings and greening the center have to be specific about types of trees, distance between trees, relationship of different trees and plants, shade, fountains, and open spaces. They should visually explain that the concept of the green center does not imply vast lawns similar to public parks and common gardens in Europe and the United States. The implementation of this vision should be coupled with a major information campaign at the national level to build an awareness of the greening policy.

Vision 3

The approach for implementing this vision is entirely different from those in visions 1 and 2. The goals and objectives of this vision are the diversity of activities, its varied characters, and small-scale development. In the center, the government has to lease its land a large percentage of the private sector. In this case it is difficult to maintain control of the urban environment unless the government uses the long lease contract to stimulate development and to enforce urban design guidelines and requirements in both public and private projects. Different zoning and design guidelines need to be introduced for different areas in the center, as well as different levels of details and different degrees of control.

Design guidelines for integrating, linking, and unifying different parts of the center are the only means of keeping control on the general character and public domain. For example, design guidelines should include street facades, arcades, sidewalks, public areas, tying elements, and the street- and landscaping of city center; these guidelines should be directly applied to individual project's

architectural design. The different buildings should collectively produce the desired unified image. This option requires rigorous measures to curb high-density development impacts such as traffic congestion, car parking, noise and pollution. The implementation of a vision that suggests high-density development requires a substantial technical staff and implementation capacity. However, it maintains government control over land, encourages development, and augments the role of private sector.

Vision 4

Implementing the vision of the shaded city, similar to the third vision, also requires the government to lease its land to the private sector in order to retain power. The government has to give incentives such as changes of zoning and increases of FAR to encourage the private sector to build public infrastructure that constitutes the major elements of this vision, shaded areas, water, and green. The government has the option of maintaining the ground floor of the private developments for purposes of urban environmental control and continuity of public access. The government may also use these incentives for encouraging the private sector to build housing or even partial public housing. Intensive commercial entertainment activities (such as coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas, amusement arcades, and children's playgrounds) can also be used as incentive for the private sector. In return, the government will demand full control of the public domain.

In this vision, there should be two different sets of design guidelines and requirements. One set would deal with the external parts of the city center (parts seen from the car) such as building

heights, architectural features, bulk, expression lines, arcades, and street facades, in addition to elements of streetscape such as sidewalks, setbacks, trees, street furniture and street lights. The other set of design guidelines would deal with the internal pedestrian parts of the center (parts necessary for the pedestrians' comfort) which would include atriums, courtyards, projections, shading devices, shop frontages, signage, lighting fixtures, fountains, seats, and indoor greenery.

The city of Phoenix, Arizona in the United States has been identified as "the desert city"; its design review guidelines are centered on the provision of shade that enhances the character of the city. The design guidelines for Kuwait should take into account existing structures in the center and questions such as how to integrate existing atriums and lobbies to the pedestrian network, or how to connect and blend preserved structures and activities such as *souqs*, mosque forecourts, and *diwaniyas*. The relationship between the city center and the sea is another development activity that needs control by means of design guidelines and zoning for different residential, entertainment, cultural, and retail activities.

Vision 5

In this vision, each of the city center's blocks act as an independent entity. A joint sector has to be established to develop and guide the large-scale mixed-use development. The government and the private sector form a joint venture, whereby the government's share is the provision of land, technical advice, and low-interest finance. The private sector provides the design and development of these blocks and part of the financing. Each block needs to

be separately planned, zoned, and design controlled, depending on the density of development and types of activities. In other countries such as the United States, some cities have adopted this approach with successful results. This process will take time, since the two parties have to negotiate their terms and persuade each other. In Kuwait, where technical capacity is limited and the culture is different, the process of negotiation and persuasion might be difficult to manage. However, these problems should not disqualify this approach, especially if the proposed mechanisms take these problems into account.

As in vision 4, the street environment has to be controlled with design guidelines that deal with the external appearance of the development such as street facades, access and exits to "super-blocks" by cars or public transportation, height relationships, and cohesiveness between different levels. In order not to create an environment that is alien to people, streets and streetscaping also require some environmental design control. Although each of the blocks would have a special zoning and special design requirements, they all have to share some common elements such as the use of water (probably blocks linked together by water canals from the sea), use of dense indoor greenery, and the use of shading and light controls. Design guidelines need to be introduced to control the internal public domain such as the main public spaces, arcades, secondary open spaces, atriums, lobbies, and main entrances of buildings; additionally, design guidelines have to deal with quality of internal elements such as material, color, seating areas, fountains and the use of high-technology.

The different policies proposed for each vision demonstrate that no decision can be made and no action can be taken without having a clear vision that defines the general framework and the

broad policies for the center of Kuwait City. The choice of policies depends on the goals and objectives of the government; it also depends on the changes and social reforms which the government hopes to achieve.

First Steps

In order to bring visions into reality and effectively deal with the problem of land vacancy in the center of Kuwait City, some initial steps need to be taken. A steering committee (consisting mostly of non-government professionals, intellectuals, and representatives of different interests in the city) should be formed to address and deal with issues regarding development and aesthetics of the center. The steering committee might begin with a citywide enlightenment and information campaign targeting the highest level of decision-making, responsible institutions, and the public. It should first report to the top decision makers the current status of the center, including land vacancy, imageability, and delays of development, taking into account recent demographic changes and their implications on services and development demands. Simultaneously, the committee should propose the establishment of a redevelopment authority and advise on putting a freeze on the city center's Master Plan and its reviews, investigate other planning approaches, and suggest a list of new consultants and planning institutes.

Second, the steering committee should contact all government and non-government institutions that are involved in projects and studies for the center and briefly get their evaluation for the status quo. Members of the committee must have a comprehensive

understanding of the nature and magnitude of the center's development problems; they need to know how planning officials perceive and deal with this issue.

The last and most important step is the large-scale education and awareness campaign among all groups who use or have an interest in the city center. The committee should directly get in touch with the private sector either through some of its members or through representatives to communicate their difficulties and interests. Since most of the people in Kuwait watch television daily and there are only two channels; using this medium for a wide informational campaign would be very effective. Newspapers are another useful medium for exerting a strong influence on the public. Using advanced visual techniques for comparing the present center with other city centers and with what could be achieved could have a considerable effect on both the government and public. Once the public's awareness and knowledge has been increased, the Kuwaitis will be more able to envision and define their own urban environment.

Notes

1. Mohamed Al-Rumaihi, interview with author in Kuwait 15 January, 1990.

Conclusion

The study of the land vacancy in Kuwait's city center revealed that the planning process in Kuwait has undergone delays and difficulties which led to the existing state of the center. Some of these delays and difficulties (such as institutional barriers and inefficient implementation capacity) are more generic and occur in other developing countries, whereas others are more regional and are especially troublesome for the Middle East, including wealthy countries in the Arabian Gulf. For example, turmoil and political instability are part of the Middle East's nature, and have a tremendous impact on a small and vulnerable state like Kuwait. The Arabian Gulf countries not only share oil prosperity, but also have some common dilemmas that are less apparent in many other places. For example, because there is an abundance of capital, rapid socio-economic transformations have a direct effect on urban development.

Other components of the problem are less general and more applicable to Kuwait in particular. The Kuwaitis could not articulate their problems themselves; they mainly depended on foreigners to do so for them. The Kuwaiti leaders neither agreed on a clear vision for the future physical form of the center, nor clarified their system for reviewing progress of policy, goals, and outcomes. In order to address these problems, their attempts at solution were mostly limited to initiating studies and projects, of which very few were effective in achieving their objectives.

Additionally, planning officials did not want to confront the reality that the plans and reviews were insufficient and inadequate

in spite of the fact that a large part of the city center remains empty and unbuilt after forty years of planning. They put forth no effort to stop these plans and reevaluate their approach and methodology. They did not question the failure of earlier plans to produce an integrated and fully developed city center. In Kuwait, the urban planning process has not only suffered from delays in implementation, but also from indecisiveness, confusion, and absence of strong leadership.

In a turbulent regions like the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf, future planners should always keep in mind that abrupt political and socio-economic changes may upset plans at any moment. Previous plans and reviews were based on assumptions about population growth which, in Kuwait, is a very unpredictable factor. In addition to their unrealistic premises, the plans ultimately failed to incorporate changes in social patterns and to respond to both the local culture and the natural environment. Issues and questions related to future planning and development efforts should be formulated by the Kuwaitis themselves. Before taking any further actions, they need to clearly define a vision for their city center which incorporates the prevailing needs of its people.

Appendix A: Summary of Master Plans and Reviews

The 1952 Master Plan

Plan for the Town of Kuwait

Client: Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

Consultant: Minoprio, Spencely and P.W Macfarlane

Main objectives of the plan:

- The provision of a modern road system appropriate to the traffic conditions in Kuwait.
- The location of suitable zones for public buildings, industry, commerce, schools and other purposes.
- The choice of zones for new houses and other buildings needed in residential areas, both inside and outside the town wall.
- The selection of sites for parks, sports grounds, school playing fields and other open spaces.
- The creation of a beautiful and dignified town center, particular attention being given to the treatment of the *Safat* and the siting of public buildings.
- The planting of trees and shrubs along the principal roads and at other important points in the town.
- The provision of improved main roads linking Kuwait with the adjoining towns and villages.

Planning Concept:

The Master Plan introduced the concept for a radial and ring road system. It also introduced the residential neighborhood's pattern. It separated the town from the neighborhoods by a green belt as a buffer zone. It located new attraction areas other than the town such as the *Shuaiba* industrial area, hospitals, and the new airport. The plan paid considerable attention to roads and infrastructure which were previously deficient in the town. The plan allocated a commercial area around *Safat Square*, government offices on both sides of *Abdullah Al-Salem Street*, and an area for light industries.

Recommendations and Implementation Program:

- Build up a technical staff
- Set up a town planning committee
- Prepare a timetable for development
- Introduce building bylaws
- Place orders for building materials and equipment
- Survey lines of new roads and estimate number of houses to be demolished
- Prepare layouts of housing areas to replace houses demolished
- Survey warehouse area and prepare plans for its redevelopment
- Select sites for the most important buildings, including hotels, and prepare working drawings

The 1971 Master Plan

The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation

Client: Municipality of Kuwait

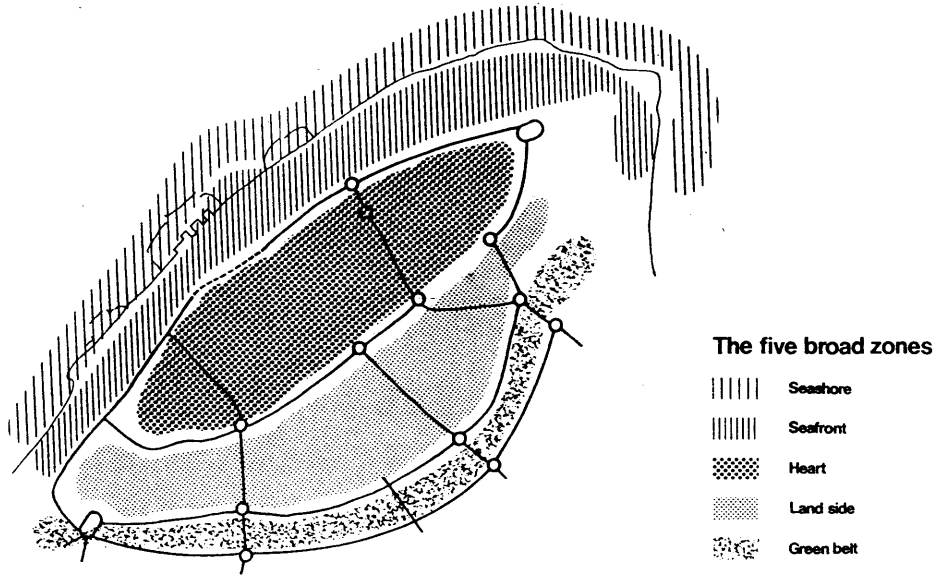
Consultant: Colin Buchanan and Partners of Britain

Main objectives of the plan:

- Kuwait Town is to maintain its importance as the state capital and the principal administrative and commercial center
- Traffic problems need to be solved by minimizing car journeys to the center
- Demographic composition in the center to be changed
- Kuwaitis are to be pressured to use public transportation
- Concentrated activities such as banks and old *souks* need to be relocated and removed from of the center
- Activities are to be spread in a linear plan along the coast
- Commercial satellites are to be created in the center
- The city is to act as a buffer between the sea and the desert
- The desert is to be maintained for oil

Method:

- Decide the best size for the city center in the future (number of people living and working in the center)
- Define upper limits for population and employment (target number and not projected number) rather than defining physical capacity
- Suggest 100,000 resident and 104,000 employment in the long-term study (modified in the first report)



[Fig. 70] 1971 Master Plan, proposed zones for the center
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town, and Plan Implementation 1971

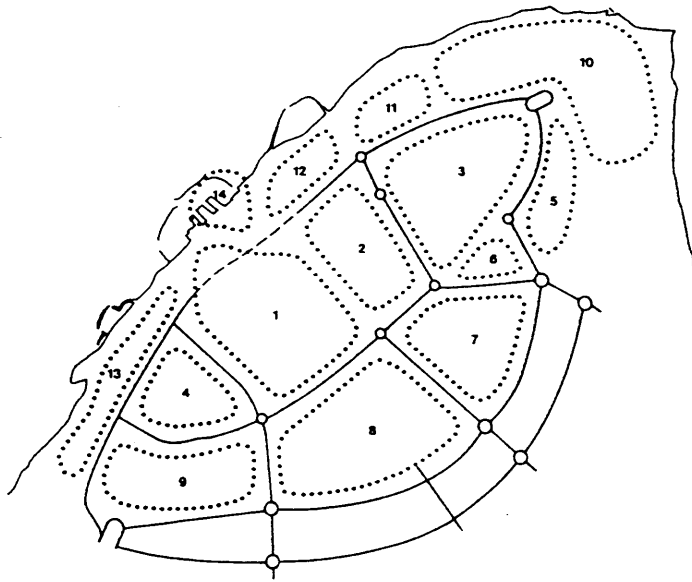


[Fig. 71] 1971 Master Plan, proposed road network for the center
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town, and Plan Implementation 1971

- Compare demand for building floor space and land to accommodate the assumed numbers of residents and workers, with the capacity of existing buildings that would remain throughout the short-term and with the area of land available for development. If the demand exceeds capacity, population and employment levels used are to be adjusted
- Prepare the plan for the town in five stages

Evolution of the Plan:

- Survey and analysis of existing pattern of activities, land use, and road network
- Delineation of areas available for development (the total area, less committed sites, preserved structures and infill sites)
- Delineation of environmental areas (parts of town having unified use or character) and fixed factors (structures to remain)
- Analysis and projection of total population, employment, and residents in the center; 110,000 employment and 100,000 residents
- Estimation of demand for building floor space and land required to accommodate projected population
- Comparison of required land and land available for development (land available was not sufficient)
- Projected numbers for population were modified to 95,000 employment and 80,000 residents
- Concepts for future expansion were analyzed, dispersed verses concentrated core (government and commercial) activities. Three main areas were designated for the future growth of the core (areas for employment)
- Radical demographic changes were proposed; well-off small Kuwaiti families were expected to move to the town. Low income Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaiti labor are to be decreased



[Fig. 72] 1971 Master Plan, proposed environmental areas
 Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town, and
 Plan Implementation 1971

- Three areas were defined as cohesive areas, (*Sharq, Qibla, and Mubarakiya*) that have character and unity that the plan should respect
- Landmarks such as the *Sief Palace, Safat Square, the old harbor, and wall gates* were designated
- The City was divided into five broad zones of similar use or character, each of which were divided into environmental areas, (urban areas where environmental considerations take priority over traffic considerations), with a total of fourteen environmental areas
- The land vacancy and the visually broken image of the town were acknowledged
- Issues related to landscaping and greenery were dealt with and encouraged, especially the Green Belt

- Issues of character, bulk, and height were taken into consideration
- Problems of traffic, road network, public transportation, and provision of short-and long-term parking, were dealt with elaborately
- Policies for implementation were recommended: priorities for development areas, conservation areas, densities, traffic, car parking, public transportation, open spaces, and a Green Belt
- The Plan suggested the legislation of new laws to enforce the implementation of the plan in addition to the establishment of a Land Policy Authority
- Reviews of and modifications to the Plan were recommended on a continuous and regular basis by establishing a strong department to carry out this job

The 1977 First Review of Master Plan (KMPR1)

Client: Municipality of Kuwait

Consultant: Shankland Cox Partnership (Britain) in association with Salem Al-Marzouk & Sabah Abi Hanna W.L.L. (Kuwait)

Changes since the 1971 Master Plan:

Major changes took place during the implementation of the 1971 Master Plan

- Unexpected population growth
- Change in national income
- Changes in social life
- Amendment of the Building Code (to increase FAR)

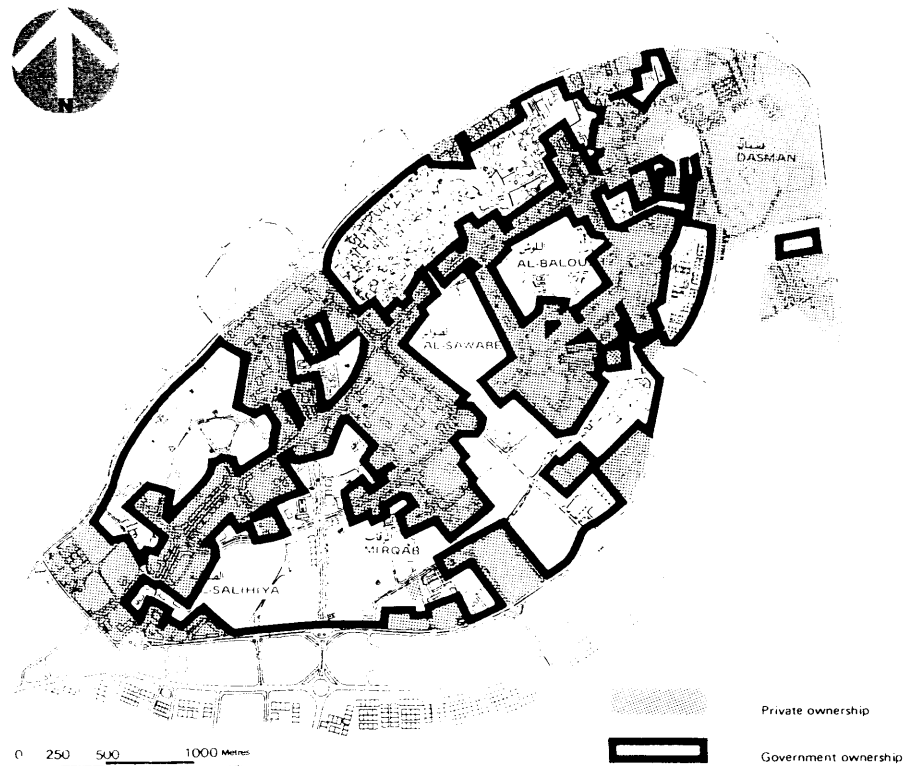
Objectives:

The main objectives of the first review were:

- To deal with the problem of the demographic projection discrepancy (the number for employment and residents resulting from the implementation of all committed projects and proposals will be 182,000 and 117,000, compared with 95,000 and 80,000 according to the 1971 Master Plan)
- Question the economic viability of the new level of development
- Question the severe traffic and environmental impacts of the new level of development

Recommended Policies:

- Set a new maximum target for employment and residents in the city center to be 140,000 and 117,000, respectively



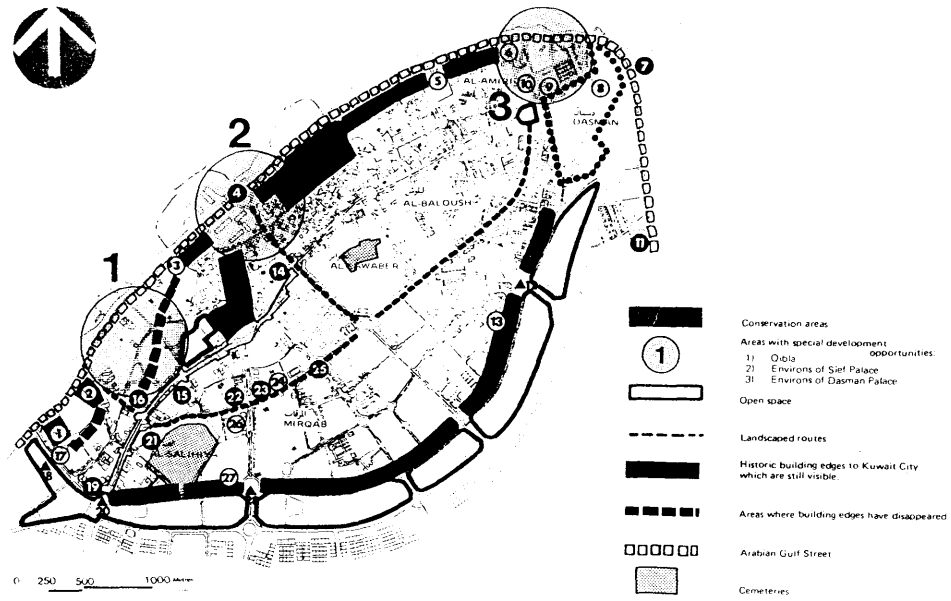
[Fig. 73] Land ownership pattern, 1977
 Source: Shankland Cox Partnership & SSH, Master Plan for Kuwait: First Review 1977

- Commercial areas are to be consolidated around the Central Business District, the *Souk*, *Fahad Al-Salem Street*, and subsidiary center at *Beloosh*
- Restrict and possibly reduce FAR
- Civic and government uses will mainly be constructed in three areas: *Qibla*, the *Sief Palace*, and *Abdullah Al-Salem Street*
- Remainder of the center is to be mainly residential
- The government needs to take initiatives to provide housing for low-income groups, principally for non-Kuwaitis and bachelors

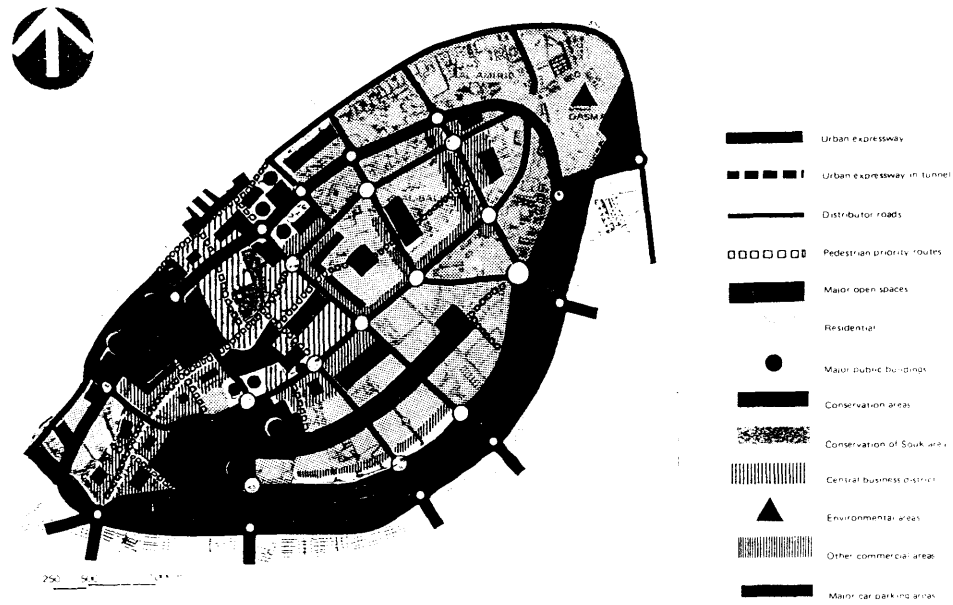
- The Green Belt is to encircle the city center and contain recreational facilities. In the center, major open spaces are to be located in *Safat Park*, the *Salhiya Cemetery*, *Sief Square*, *Al-Beloosh*, and extensive landscaping around the main public building complexes
- Some areas are to be designated as conservation areas such as *Behbehani Compound*, the *American Mission*, the traditional *souks* and part of the *Sharq* sea frontage, in addition to individual palaces and mosques, which are to be preserved
- The existing road pattern is to provide the main access to the city and is to be supplemented by an urban expressway formed by extending the *First Ring Road*, which is to be depressed in some parts
- Car parking spaces are to be provided for residential and non-residential use, 35,000 and 63,000, respectively, and some form of restraint on traffic movement is required in the near future
- A comprehensive public bus transportation system is to be developed, based on express services originating from other parts of Kuwait as well as local city center service, and will operate from two main bus stations

Method:

- Description of existing conditions and forecasts for: land use, employment types and distribution, population growth and distribution, land ownership, land values, the role of the private sector, townscape analysis, transport and utilities
- A survey of all future plans and proposals for the development of the center showed that each site in the center is committed. Estimations were made for the future impacts of this development



Townscape analysis



Urban design strategy

[Fig. 74] 1977 KMPR1, city center proposals
 Source: Shankland Cox partnership & SSH, Master Plan for Kuwait: First Review 1977

- The Structural Plan for the center defined three major environmental areas (each having high-quality coherence, and character) conservation areas, and special landscapes and open spaces
- The Structure Plan also defined land uses in the center and proposed transportation structure

Recommendations for Implementing the Plan

- Recommendations were made for establishing a Central Planning Authority responsible for data collection, following up schemes, and implementing of plans
- Suggestions were made for continuous monitoring and updating of the plan
- Action priorities and different development strategies were prepared and analyzed

The 1983 Second Review of the Master Plan (KMPR2)

Client: Municipality of Kuwait

Consultant: Colin Buchanan and Partners (Britain)

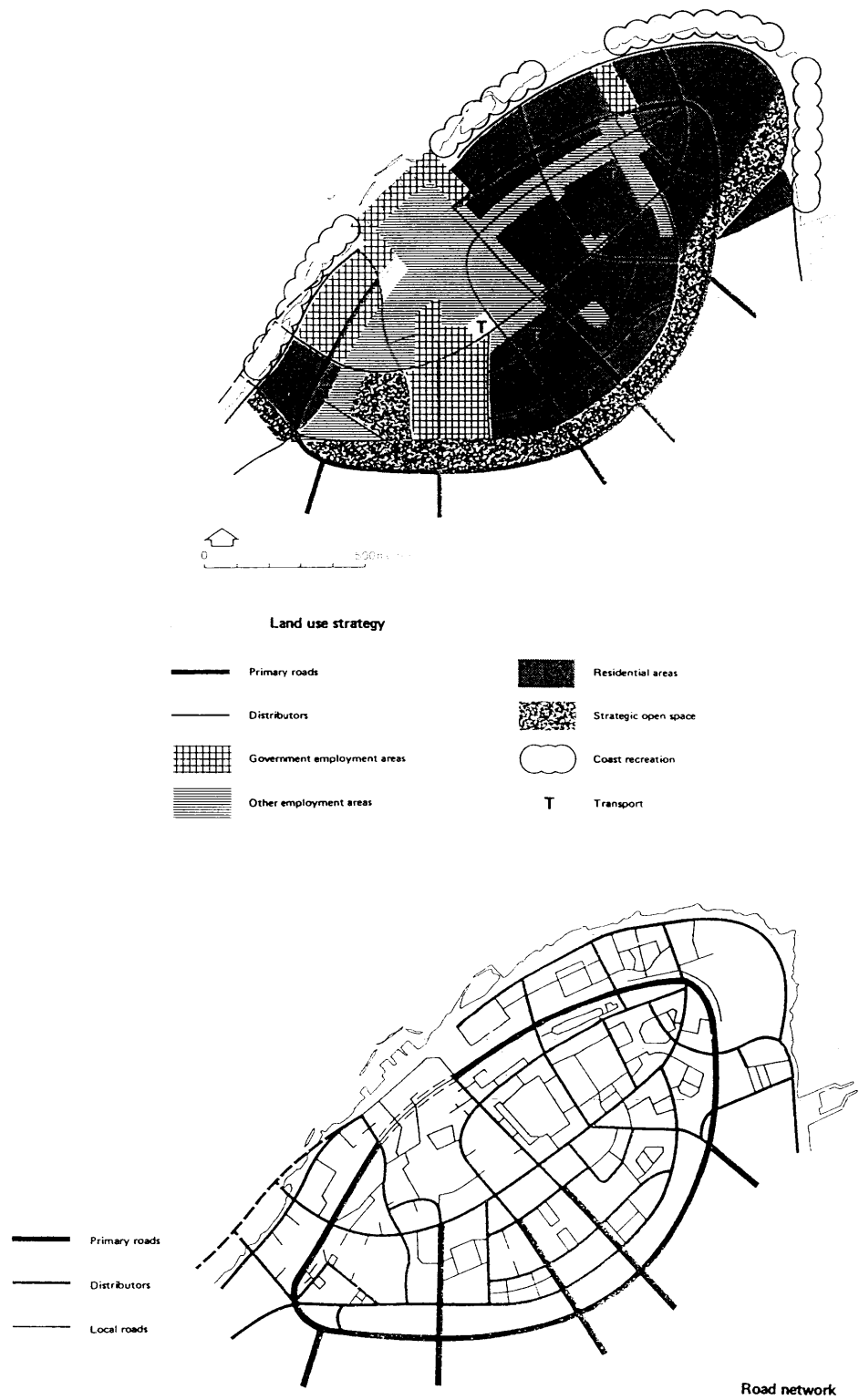
Objectives:

As described in the introduction of the final report, to update the Master Plan to ensure that it continue to fulfill its purpose in the light of changing circumstances. Some of these objectives are attributed to the plan itself.

The most important factors that the Second Review dealt with were the prospect of continued growth of employment and the change of the Building Code.

Method:

- Review changes during the last five years and forecast future needs accordingly
- Survey commitments and opportunities, both commercial and residential, in terms of floorspace area and residential capacity
- Asses existing conditions of transport and traffic conditions
- Adopt population targets for the city structure plan to be 140,000 employment and 100,000 residents
- Estimate floor space requirements for employment, residential and other services and activities
- Establish a growth strategy and preferred levels of floor space
- Define city center activities and land usage location
- Propose four special environmental areas (same use or character):
the *Sief Palace*, the *Souk*, *Fahad Al-Salem Street*, and the *Qibla*.



[Fig. 75] 1983 KMPR2, city center proposals
 Sources: Colin Buchanan and Partners & OAP/KEB, Master Plan for Kuwait: Second Review 1983

Comprehensive environmental design studies to be conducted to develop detailed building design guidelines, traffic and pedestrian circulation proposals, planting and landscaping.

- Produce development controls for implementing the Master Plan, such as control of floor space development, Building Code changes, a traffic restraint policy and parking changes, landscape implementation, and public transport services.

1987 Study for the Redevelopment and Follow-up the Master Plan for Kuwait Town

Objectives:

- To project future development capacity according to the existing Building Code.
- To achieve the most appropriate development capacity
- To establish a new Building Code and enforcement regulations by continuous monitoring

Method:

- Field survey and data collection to establish the first data bank for each parcel and structure in the center in terms of use, area, occupancy, ownership, age, and conditions
- Estimations of developed areas, number of jobs according to both existing FAR and Master Plan proposed FAR
- Projections of the trend of increase in development and number of employed according to both existing FAR and the Master Plan
- Projections according to existing FAR showed alarming results for future development in terms of development capacity, employment numbers, and required parking and other services

Recommendations

- Recommendations regarding commercial and administrative development capacity suggested: land exchange at the same price (from private commercial to government residential); land exchange for private commercial (from inside the center to outside); cancellation of government commercial on public land; and restriction of both land use and FAR.

- Recommendations regarding residential development capacity (government owns 81% from all residential land in the center) suggested speeding up government residential development, retaining government residential land for residential use only, encouraging residential development, and enforcing zoning regulations.
- Recommendations regarding roads, transportation and car parking suggested some measures to control future growth, especially the car parking fee policy in the center.

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List & Source of Illustrations

Chapter 1

- [Fig. 1] Views of empty land in different parts of the center
- [Fig. 2] 1960's residential architecture
- [Fig. 3] Architecture of the 1980's
- [Fig. 4] Preserved old merchant family house on the seaside
- [Fig. 5] New telecommunication tower dwarfs minarets
- [Fig. 6] Buildings in the center need settings and tying elements
- [Fig. 7] *Soor* Street
- [Fig. 8] The Green Belt
- [Fig. 9] Sequence of aerial photographs of the city center
Source: Kuwait Municipality
- [Fig. 10] Map showing the extent of land vacancy
- [Fig. 11] Map showing major activities
- [Fig. 12] *Al-Sawaber* housing complex (for Kuwaitis)
- [Fig. 13] 1987 aerial photograph showing the fully developed residential neighborhoods outside the center
Source: Kuwait Municipality
- [Fig. 14] The replacement of the traditional city
- [Fig. 15] Structures from the traditional city stripped from their context
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Historical Preservation Study; old Kuwait Town, Kuwait, 1988
- [Fig. 16] Kuwait Towers
- [Fig. 17] Destruction of Kuwaiti identity
Source: Al-Bayan Newspaper, U.A.E, 1990
- [Fig. 18] *Sief* Palace after the invasion
Source: U.S Army Corps of Engineers, 1991
- [Fig. 19] The *Souq* in *Mubarakiya*
Source: Laurence Vale, 1990
- [Fig. 20] Kuwait's City center lacks cohesiveness, character, and identity
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Historical Preservation Study; old Kuwait Town, Kuwait, 1988

Chapter 2

- [Fig. 21] Kuwait; Urban Pattern. Aerial photograph 1990
Source: Spot Image Corp.
- [Fig. 22] Expressway isolating residential neighborhoods
Source: Ministry of Information, Kuwait: Facts and Figures, 1988
- [Fig. 23] Villa in a Kuwaiti neighborhood
- [Fig. 24] Apartment Buildings for non-Kuwaiti

- [Fig. 25] Map showing new residential neighborhoods, road network, and secondary commercial centers
 Source: Jonathan Crusoe and David Kemp, MEED Profile No.6, Kuwait: rebuilding a country, London 1991
- [Fig. 26] Photographs showing the need for shade in Kuwait
- [Fig. 27] Photographs showing the need for physical interaction with water
- [Fig. 28] Photographs showing the need for greenery

Chapter 3

- [Fig. 29] The walls and gates of the old town
 Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait, Kuwait, 1980
- [Fig. 30] Major activities in Kuwait Town
- [Fig. 31] The *Sief* Palace
 Source: Saba Shiber, Arab City Growth, Kuwait, 1967
- [Fig. 32] Narrow street in the traditional city
 Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
- [Fig. 33] Protected and Shaded Alleyway
 Source: Ronald Lewcock and Zahra Freeth, Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Norther Gulf, London, 1978
- [Fig. 34] The traditional city
 Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait 1987
- [Fig. 35] The dense fabric of the traditional city
 Source: Kuwait Municipality: Historical Preservation Study; Old Kuwait Town, Kuwait, 1988
- [Fig. 36] *Sief* harbor
 Source: Hamid Shuaib
- [Fig. 37] Intense seafront activities
 Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
- [Fig. 38] *Safat* Square
 Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
- [Fig. 39] The desert route
 Source: Hamid Shuaib
- [Fig. 40] New roads in the old town
 Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
 Hamid Shuaib
- [Fig. 41] Elements of the collective memory of the traditional city
 Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
 Ronald Lewcock and Zahra Freeth, Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Northern Gulf, London, 1978

Chapter 4

- [Fig. 42] The traffic congestion at wall gates
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
- [Fig. 43] Demolition of city wall, remaining gates today
Source: Sulaiman Al-Awadi, Kuwait Al-Madhi, Kuwait, 1987
- [Fig. 44] 1952 Kuwait City Master Plan
Source: Minoprio & Spencely & P.W. Macfarlane, Plan for the Town of Kuwait, Kuwait, 1951
- [Fig. 45] 1952 City center Master Plan
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait, Kuwait, 1980
- [Fig. 46] Parking problem in *Safat* Square, 1960
Source: Hamid Shuaib
- [Fig. 47] New road; placing existing mosque in roundabout
Source: Saba Shiber, The Kuwait Urbanization, Kuwait, 1964
- [Fig. 48] The CBD Plan
Source: Saba Shiber, The Kuwait Urbanization, Kuwait, 1964
- [Fig. 49] Demolition for implementing CBD Plan
Source: Saba Shiber, The Kuwait Urbanization, Kuwait, 1964
- [Fig. 50] Early vision for the Waterfront
Source: Project Planning Associates Ltd., Proposed Waterfront development, City of Kuwait, 1961
- [Fig. 51] Al-Yarmouk residential neighborhood plan, 1969
Source: Kuwait Atlas, Kuwait
- [Fig. 52] 1967 Municipality Development Plan
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait, Kuwait, 1980
- [Fig. 53] The increased parking problems in the center, late 1960's
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation, 1971
- [Fig. 54] 1970 Kuwait City Master Plan
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation, 1971
- [Fig. 55] 1970 City Center Master Plan
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation, 1971
- [Fig. 56] The city center (early 1970's): land ownership, land values
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town and Plan Implementation, 1971
- [Fig. 57] 1977 KMPR1, Kuwait City Plan
Source: Shankland Cox Partnership in association with SSH, 1977
- [Fig. 58] 1977 KMPR1, City Center Plan
Source: Shankland Cox Partnership in association with SSH, 1977
- [Fig. 59] The Stock Exchange, Architect: John Bonnington
- [Fig. 60] Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science, Architect: TAC
- [Fig. 61] Proposed mono-rail in the center
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Planning and Urban Development in Kuwait

- [Fig. 62] 1983 KMPR2, Kuwait City Master Plan
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners & OAP/KEB, Master Plan for Kuwait: Second Review 1983, Vol. 1: Planning and Policy
- [Fig. 63] 1983 KMPR2, City Center Master Plan
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners & OAP/KEB, Master Plan for Kuwait: Second Review 1983, Vol. 1: Planning and Policy
- [Fig. 64] 1987 Municipality Review Study
Source: Kuwait Municipality, Kuwait Town Master Plan Review and Updating. Kuwait 1987
- [Fig. 65] The Kuwaiti village
- [Fig. 66] *Safat* Square competition proposal, 1982
Source: DEVECON OY & INCO, *Safat* Square Summary Report, 1982
- [Fig. 67] 1980's vision for the center
Source: Architetti BBPR, The Study of Kuwait City Environmental Improvements, 1986
- [Fig. 68] *Abdullah Al-Ahmed* Street Competition Entry
Source: Pan Arab Consulting Engineers, Kuwait, 1990

Chapter 5

- [Fig. 69] A sequence of city center's plans showing the progress of demolition and expansion of vacant land since the early 1950's

Appendix A

- [Fig. 70] 1971 Master Plan, proposed zones for the center
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town, and Plan Implementation 1971
- [Fig. 71] 1971 Master Plan, proposed road network for the center
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town, and Plan Implementation 1971
- [Fig. 72] 1971 Master Plan, proposed environmental areas
Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners, The Plan for Kuwait Town, and Plan Implementation 1971
- [Fig. 73] Land ownership pattern, 1977
Source: Shankland Cox Partnership & SSH, Master Plan for Kuwait: First Review 1977
- [Fig. 74] 1977 KMPR1, city center proposals
Source: Shankland Cox partnership & SSH, Master Plan for Kuwait: First Review 1977
- [Fig. 75] 1983 KMPR2, city center proposals
Sources: Colin Buchanan and Partners & OAP/KEB, Master Plan for Kuwait: Second Review 1983