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The right to housing in Kuwait: An urban injustice in a socially just system

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The Right to Housing in Kuwait:

An Urban Injustice in a Socially Just System

SHARIFAH ALSHALFAN

Abstract

This work examines the extent to which land-use policies and social housing laws have contributed to the demise of the urbanization process of a city. It is set in the context of Kuwait – a city-state that has undergone a short but rapid urbanization history that only started in the 1950s after the discovery of oil. The paper traces the methods of housing welfare distribution and questions their role in promoting justice in an environment of increasing housing application backlog, endless sprawl and continually rising housing property values. It challenges the current cultural explanations for the lack of fundamental redress of the present state legislation, and supports this view through a tracing of historical precedents and exploration within ongoing changes in urban ways of life in Kuwait. Instead, through a set of semi-structured interviews conducted with both state officials and local citizens, it identifies the effect of urban policy on society, which has induced an entitlement notion framed from a ‘rights’ perspective. In an environment of unsustainable wealth-distribution methods that not only treat the city as a flat landscape but also are open to abuse, this paper calls for an absolute need for a re-evaluation of the current practice that not only raises the quality of life for citizens today, but grants justice for generations to come.

1. INTRODUCTION

‘With a proposition as such, you would start a parliamentary questioning!’ This was the response of a government official working for the Kuwaiti municipality at a UN Habitat workshop to discuss particular housing issues in Kuwait.¹ The suggestion so frowned upon, made by me during a larger debate on housing ideology in the country, was a reconsideration of the type of welfare housing that is currently in place: the single-family detached home. The workshop’s focus on foreign labour accommodation reinforced the distinct difference between the 1.1 million Kuwaiti urban-elite minority and the 2.4 million non-nationals in their country (State of Kuwait 2011a). Mr. Mishaal’s² tone rang with disapproval. For a Kuwaiti national who benefits, together with his fellow citizens, from the numerous offerings that this welfare city-state has continued to pour out on those who were born not necessarily in Kuwait but to a Kuwaiti father,³ this suggestion was alarming.

¹ ‘The Right to Adequate Housing: Workshop on Low-Income Workers’ Housing in Kuwait’, 4 April 2012, Kuwait Regency Hotel.

² The name has been changed to protect his identity.

³ Kuwait has very tight naturalization laws, and with the exception of females marrying Kuwaiti nationals, it is very difficult to acquire Kuwaiti nationality. For further details on the implications of this ethnocracy, refer to Longva (2005).

The informal setting of the workshop prompted an impulsive response, that of a Kuwaiti citizen, rather than a state bureaucrat. With Kuwaiti nationality come many advantages: free healthcare and education, public employment, and the provision of housing welfare to all Kuwaiti families whose head does not own or co-own real estate at the time of application⁴ (Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2011a). These are only a few of the benefits that have been granted to Kuwaiti citizens in the post-oil era, and the number has generally only increased with political pressures on the state demanding more. Debate of this system, which created complete dependency on the state and little room for innovation, is commonly unheard of amongst most sections of society. Questioning the single-family detached housing model then prompts parliamentary action, even with a backlog exceeding 100,000 applications (Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2012), continuous urban sprawl and a housing market unattainable to most.

This perplexing setting is commonly linked to culture. The validity of this claim, however, is questionable.

A transformation that happened almost overnight, moving people from mud houses lacking in electricity and running water to fully air-conditioned villas benefiting from vast infrastructure links and technology, was not opposed to cultural change. Sixty years later, these progressive and democratic wealth-distributing means are the very cause of the lack of progressive planning, social disintegration and oil-wealth dependency. Revolutionary change that was possible then is still possible now. This paper argues for alternative thinking about housing welfare that not only distributes wealth equally today but protects the rights of future generations. The paper questions the sustainability of current practice and interrogates the ways in which it is open to abuse. This questioning will be achieved by examining previous, current and future plans of the state through its land-use policies and changes in housing welfare laws, as well as through evaluating the aspirations of its citizens and the role of these distributive policies in creating these false needs. The intention of this paper is not to dwell on historical practices and criticize the past. Rather, it aims to illustrate the way that the precedent set has contributed immensely to urban and social dismantlement in Kuwait. Therefore, radical redress and fundamental re-evaluation of the current practice, strongly based on historical decisions, are absolutely necessary today.

2. METHODOLOGY

Tracing the rapid evolution of the housing welfare system in relation to key land-use policies is vital to evaluating the issues pertaining to housing in Kuwait today. The oversimplification of the housing welfare provision system results in treating all Kuwaiti families' needs equally, as well as conceptualizing the city as a flat landscape. Therefore, understanding the master

⁴ Article 14 of Law no. 47 of 1993 concerning Housing Welfare, according to the latest amendments of 1995.

planning process of Kuwait since its modernization in relation to the changing welfare housing laws will aid in evaluating the system and the way it has led to the problem of housing today.

Semi-structured interviews with both Kuwaiti citizens and state bureaucrats were used to identify whether the problem is driven by supply or demand, or is perhaps a vicious cycle that incorporates both. The citizens interviewed were couples from various generations who benefited differently from Kuwaiti housing welfare provision. The focus was placed on understanding their aspirations and opinions with regard to the system of housing welfare in Kuwait. This was supported with numerous newspaper articles that reflected common issues pertaining to housing and suggested solutions from and the desires of both citizens and experts in the field. In addition, two interviews were conducted with state officials: one with a manager who works at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) and the other with a Kuwait municipality planning engineer. Both were focused on assessing the role of the state in housing welfare and the way various housing solutions and land-use policies have reacted with regard to this issue.

Literature that focuses on the welfare economy in Kuwait, together with social discourse and modernization of the state, aids in understanding the rapid development of the country and the initial intentions of its leaders. The development of the master plans and the housing laws were key primary sources for the evaluation. Trends in the property market in Kuwait, particularly in relation to private Kuwaiti housing, were juxtaposed with fieldwork explorations which entailed visiting and understanding different housing neighbourhoods that were planned and built at different times, and analysing the various physical manifestations and typologies that emerged with time.

What follows aims to understand the spatial and social expressions of these policy changes and conceptualizes ways for alternative planning and living in Kuwait. It is divided into two main sections: section 3 examines the land-use policies in the context of housing, together with the development of housing welfare policies in Kuwait, while section 4 is framed from a 'rights' point of view to highlight the effects of those policies on society, which in turn reflect on the urban fabric of the country.



Figure 1a. *The endlessly sprawling landscape of Kuwait viewed from the city centre*

3. KUWAIT: HOUSING A NEW URBAN POPULACE

3.1. *A city-making experiment*

The physical layout and build-up of Kuwait has been conducive to social disaffection instead of fostering that type of social interaction and intercourse which the contemporary planning dogmas and practices are purportedly designed to foster. To use an expression of Emile Durkheim, an ‘anomic’ atmosphere and environment has been engineered. (Shiber 1964: 120).

In 2013, Kuwait – a city-state with an area of about 17,800 km² – is little different from what it was fifty or so years ago, only with more sprawl, and more road infrastructure. Due to lack of local expertise at the time, and for political and other reasons, the British firm Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane was commissioned to draw the first lines from which modern Kuwait extends today. In 1952, the first master plan was completed for Kuwait with a vision to transform a state with its 150,000 inhabitants to ‘the best planned and most socially progressive city in the Middle East’ (Minoprio 1964). It was not based on a thorough understanding of climate, culture and people; rather it was an experimentation process in a *tabula rasa* desert: Kuwait City outside the old city walls. Both New Town planning principles and Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City movement were employed in the planning of Kuwait, on the principle of self-sufficient, low-density neighbourhoods or ‘neighbourhood units’⁵ separated by a radial ring road network expanding beyond the old city, and resulting in the car being the principal mode of transportation.

Thirty years later, one of the planners himself confessed to the challenge: ‘It was a difficult commission. We didn’t know anything much about the Muslim world and the Kuwaitis wanted a city – they wanted a new city ... All we could give them ... was what we knew’ (Gardiner 1983: 33). What they knew created dependency on the car. What they knew

⁵ Based on Clarence Perry’s principle of planning, the neighbourhood unit consists of a limited population, amenities to serve its population, traffic separation and recreation facilities. A group of neighbourhood units make up a community (Shiber 1963: 219).

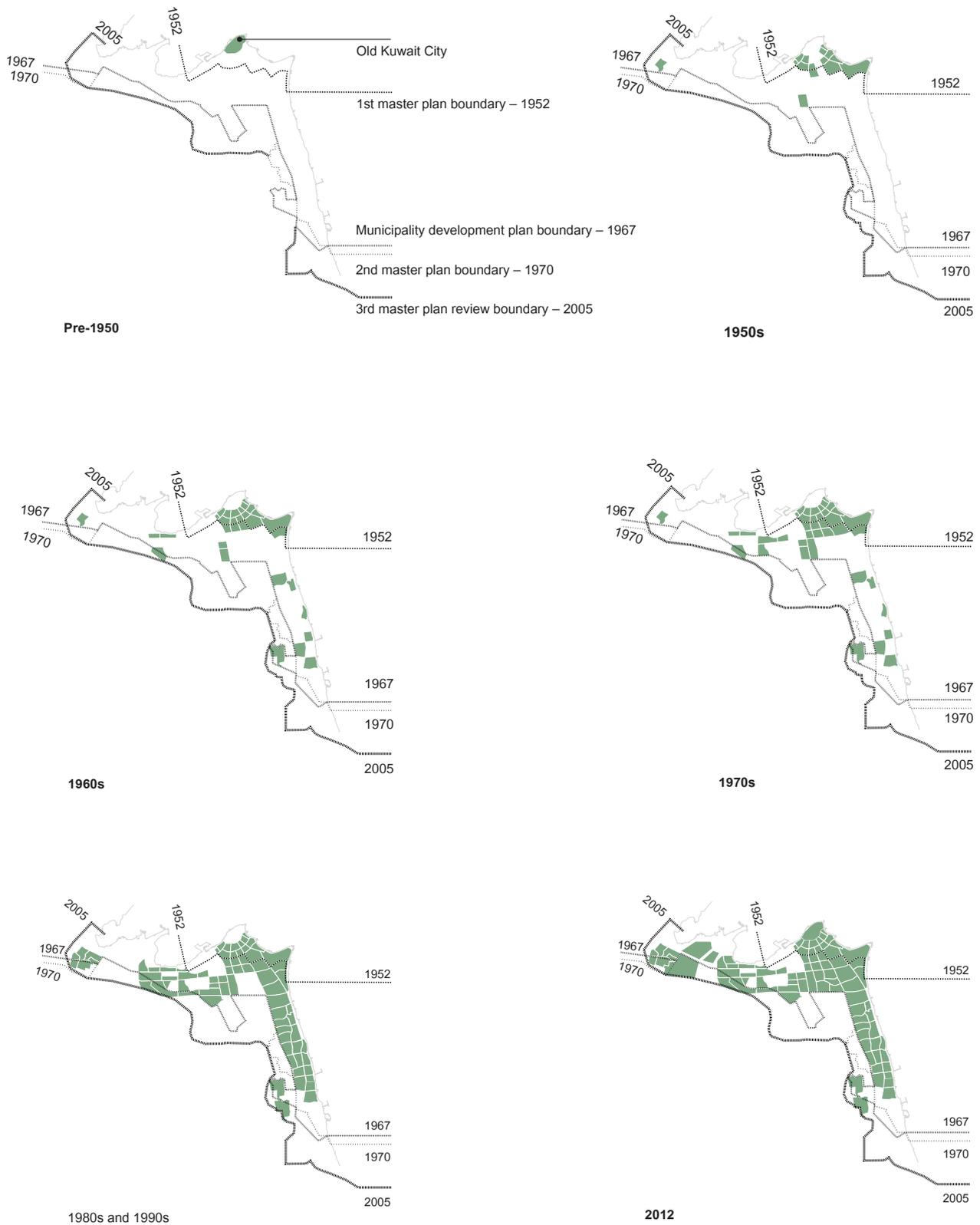


Figure 1b. *The effect of the growth of the ‘neighbourhood unit’ on the urban footprint of Kuwait, pre-1950–2012*

Sources: Kuwait municipality master plans; PAHW records.

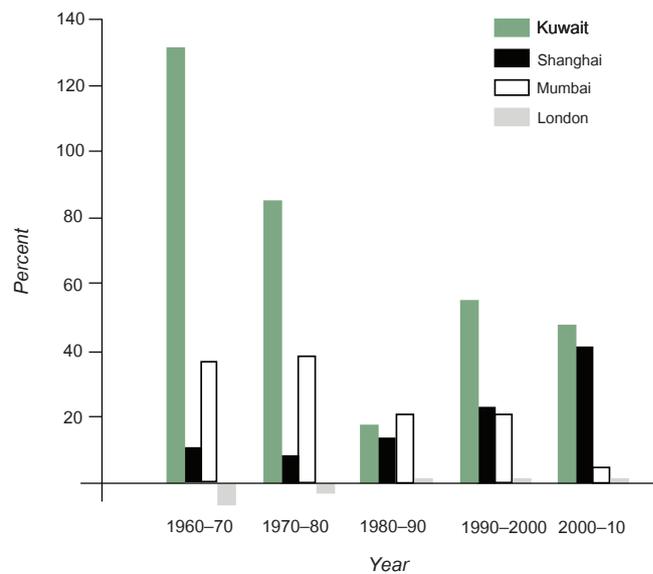


Figure 2. *Population growth rates of different cities every ten years, 1960–2010*

Sources: United Nations (2010); Kuwait municipality master plans.

created sprawl. What they knew is what generation after generation have to live with today. ‘The total effect of this amazing new city is disappointing ... [It] is nondescript, due to hasty construction and inadequate research into the possibilities of shaping buildings against sun, heat and sandstorms’ (Hewins 1963: 250). This irresponsibly ambitious shift in the planning of Kuwait not only neglected the context in its architecture but also created new ways of living for its people. What may have seemed to be simple decisions about density, transportation and zoning lacked long-term vision and understanding of the city that was being created. In the past fifty years, the urban footprint of the city has expanded into the desert to accommodate the growth of the population from 320,000 to 3,600,000 inhabitants, a pace faster than that of today’s known fastest-growing cities such as Shanghai and Mumbai (Figures 1 and 2). With an average density of 4,444 people per km², a fifth of Mumbai’s average (Burdett and Sudjic 2011), this rapid sprawl becomes a matter of concern.

In the early 2000s, British planners in Kuwait are immersing themselves yet again in speculation, this time in the area of housing. In a working paper on housing in the latest review of the master plan, a peculiar statement appears: ‘The Kuwaiti family does not accept living in other types of housing but villas or palaces or traditional houses’ (Colin Buchanan and Partners and Kuwaiti Engineering Group 2004). This simplified claim lacks serious consideration of the state’s welfare policies and future growth of the country. In this haphazard process of master planning, there are major implications defining the urban fabric of Kuwait and the ways in which people live in its city. Although it lacks justification or backing, this statement plays a defining role in the urban expansion of the city, and its consequences are amplified by the importance of the housing welfare system in the country, as will be discussed next.

3.2. Kuwait's land-use policies since the 1950s: the housing of a population

Between 1954 and 2012, the government of Kuwait had secured 93,040 housing units for Kuwaiti families (Public Authority for Housing Welfare n.d.). Its efforts to provide adequate and hygienic housing, together with other aspects of social welfare, started after the discovery of oil in order to redistribute its sudden wealth to its citizens, who were otherwise living in a primitive Arab town lacking modern infrastructure and technology. Eventually, taxes were lifted, health and education were freely provided, and employment was guaranteed (Ministry of Guidance and Information of Kuwait 1963). This rapid shift in economic prosperity called for the emergence of official planning in the country, which was up until the early 1950s a small walled town whose citizens relied on fishing, pearl diving and trade as a means of livelihood. And with this wealth came the first master plan of 1952 (Figure 3), which called for four main objectives:

1. The development of an efficient road system.
2. The redevelopment of the central area of the old town inside the wall to provide good sites for important public buildings and the replanning of the bazaar and commercial area to enable these to expand and develop along more spacious lines to cope with the town's increasing trade.
3. The expansion of the town outside the wall by the development of eight neighbourhood-units accommodating 48,000 people, and the expansion of Hawalli and Dimna, two existing villages near the coast which benefit from cooling sea breezes.
4. The development of specialized industrial, educational and health zones outside the wall along the coastal road towards Jahra. (Minoprio 1953: 527)

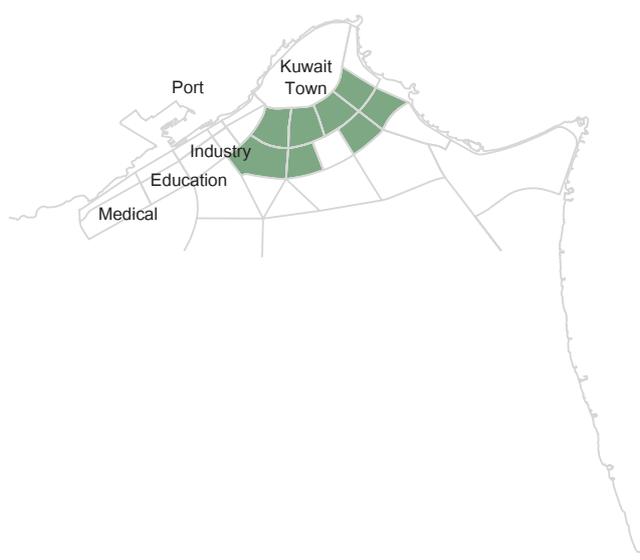


Figure 3. *The first master plan, showing eight neighbourhood units, 1952*

Source: Kuwait municipality master plans.

Housing was a clear priority, as would be expected with any urban plan. Since the expansion outside the wall was stipulated, people needed to relocate from their existing dwellings to the newly planned Kuwait. This was achieved through land-purchase programmes, where the land was valued greatly above its worth, as a means of oil-wealth redistribution. Although aimed at social mobility, this generous decision marked the first step towards injustice in the current housing system in Kuwait.

Within two years of the plan, 2,000 new homes had already been built and distributed to the citizens (Public Authority for Housing Welfare n.d.). In the period that followed, other citizens were given plots of land in the new neighbourhoods that had cost them much less than the compensation they had received for their homes in the old city. The state also aided in providing further loans and government housing to those who needed it. Not until 1967, however, was there specific regulation for housing provided by the state. Income stratification was the basis for eligibility to receive various types of housing aid. Those with a monthly income between 27.5 and 87.5 Kuwaiti dinars (KWD)⁶ were considered for low-income housing, while recipients of KWD 250 to KWD –500 a month were assumed to be middle-income earners and had the option of getting a bigger house or a loan plus a plot of land (Al-Dekhayel 2000).

In 1974, the National Housing Authority (NHA, now the PAHW) was established as the body responsible for housing welfare. Specific regulations with regard to house size, location and programme were set to distinguish between low-income and middle-income housing. This stratification on an income basis was, however, cancelled in 1984, and instead equal housing welfare was provided for all. This was an attempt to grant more social justice and equality amongst citizens. From its early years, the NHA could not meet demand, and it was faced in 1980 with a backlog of around 19,000 applications (Figure 4). The state was no longer capable of providing houses and plots at the rate required and people were therefore forced to find alternative means for accommodation.

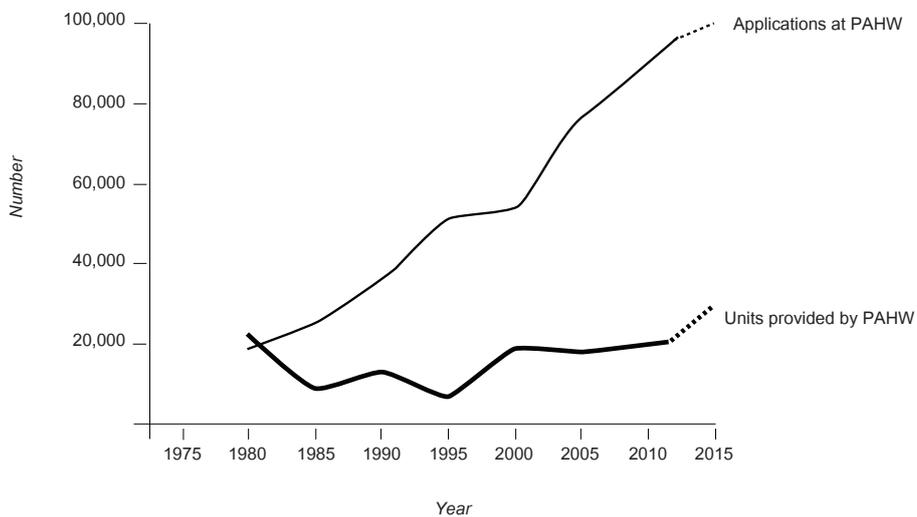


Figure 4. *Housing demand and supply at the PAHW, 1975–2015*

Sources: Public Authority for Housing Welfare (2012); PAHW records.

⁶ At the time of writing, 1 KWD is equivalent to approximately GBP 2.2 or USD 3.5.

In response, the government introduced apartment living as an alternative to the scheme of low-density housing. Al-Sawaber Complex, one of only two built projects of this new type to date, was a multi-storey residential building with the promise of no waiting time. It was an experimental housing model introducing communal living as part of the housing welfare provision schemes. It almost trebled the density at the time of 8 units/hectare to 21.3 units/hectare, providing 524 apartments right in the centre of Kuwait City – the only residential property located there since the inception of the NHA in 1974. Regrettably, poor maintenance due to the absence of a responsible body – such as a home-owners’ association – has contributed to its deterioration. In addition, lack of regulation with regard to leasing has caused various apartments to be converted to commercial use, bringing unwanted traffic into the private building’s premises. To this day, Al-Sawaber Complex exemplifies the failure in Kuwaiti apartment living both to Kuwaiti citizens and to state decision makers (Figure 5).

The backlog of housing applications at the PAHW in 2012 exceeded 100,000⁷ – more than the number of housing units the government has been able to provide in close to sixty years (Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2012). Unrest is clear, with rising waiting times



Figure 5a. *Al-Sawaber Complex: an example of vertical housing failure in Kuwait provided by the PAHW*



Figure 5b. *A typical government house provided by the PAHW today*

⁷ This includes applications for a house, apartment or plot of land.

to receive housing welfare reaching up to eighteen years, and a minimum wait of eleven years (I. Al-Nashi, interview, 16 April 2012). The increasing backlog, together with rising prices in the property market, are being met with government solutions of new housing neighbourhoods almost at the borders of the country. Discontent is seen in articles in the local press and in protests such as that in 2012 by a group of citizens at the PAHW demanding their housing right as Kuwaiti nationals (Al-Dudlajjan 2012a).

3.3. A crisis of housing

In a country with one of the highest GDPs per capita in the world, and such lucrative housing welfare schemes, it seems a housing crisis is unthinkable. The reality is, however, quite the opposite. Demand still exceeds supply, sprawl has taken over urban growth, and the property market is unattainable to most. In an article that captures the views on housing of both local citizens and real estate company owners, the general tone seemed one of dissatisfaction: ‘It has become impossible for the young generation to buy a family home compliant with their basic needs’ (Al-Ghannam et al. 2012). Real estate values are rising, in both the sales and the rental markets, and thus both the housing loan and the rent allowance provided by the government are much less than what is required in the market. It is clear that general opinion saw those government allowances as a substitute for their own providing, rather than simply an aid or a social subsidy.

A Kuwaiti family seeking housing welfare for the first time today has the following options:

1. A government house built on a minimum 400 m² plot or a minimum 400 m² apartment provided by the PAHW at nominal value, plus a monthly rent allowance of KWD 150 during the waiting period.
2. A minimum 400m² plot of land provided by the PAHW at nominal value and a KWD 70,000 long-term, interest-free loan from the Savings and Credit Bank for construction, plus a monthly rent allowance of KWD 150 during the waiting period.
3. A KWD 70,000 long-term, interest-free loan from the Savings and Credit Bank, to buy or build a house with a minimum area of 360 m², or to buy an apartment with a minimum area of 360 m². (Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2011a)

The nominal value of a government house or plot in some areas in the early 1980s is still the same in the newly built neighbourhoods. Yet the price of that very plot has now multiplied more than seventy times (Figure 6). The constant transfer of public land to private owners at prices remarkably below the market rate has created an imbalance in the market itself. People easily become owners and then have the ability to turn this newfound commodity into a secondary market. A policy that aims to house Kuwaiti citizens has now become another means of wealth creation. Although the mechanism is different, this policy is an extension of the land purchase programme that started in the 1950s, when land was valued by the state at a

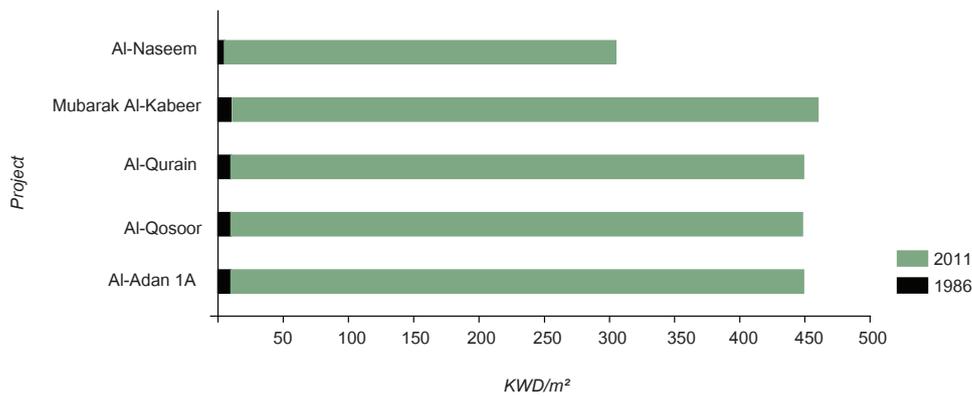


Figure 6a. Increase in value of land distributed by the PAHW, 1986–2011

Source: PAHW; Kuwait Fund House (2011).

Project name	Price (KWD/m ²)
Al-Nahtha	12.500
Al-Naseem	12.500
Jaber Al-Ahmad	7.500
Saad Al-Abdullah	5.000

Figure 6b. Nominal value of land distributed by the PAHW, 2012

Source: PAHW.

much higher rate than it was worth, and resulted in more wealth created for the citizens. The true principle behind this method, however, should have been to reclaim private land to benefit the general public.

Eventually, houses and plots that were distributed earlier are worth much more not only because they were sold at nominal rates, but also because they are much closer to the city than newer ones being built today. For instance, a house in Kaifan was sold in 1959 for KWD 2,900 (A. Rahim, interview, 26 July 2012); in 2012 it was worth KWD 373,500 (Kuwait Fund House 2012), a growth of more than 128 times. In addition, as housing welfare became unified for all income groups, more pressure was placed on the state. Acknowledging this problem, the state responded at various stages to readjust to the rising demand. At the same time, sprawl continued, as there was no fundamental re-evaluation of the current practice; instead, there were minor iterations in reducing plot sizes and increasing the loan amount, yet continuing with the same method of distributing single-family detached homes and plots of land with interest-free loans. As housing provision became too far from the city, dissatisfaction amongst citizens rose. Consequently, citizens started looking for alternatives in the housing property market, creating more demand and thus raising prices further (Figure 7).

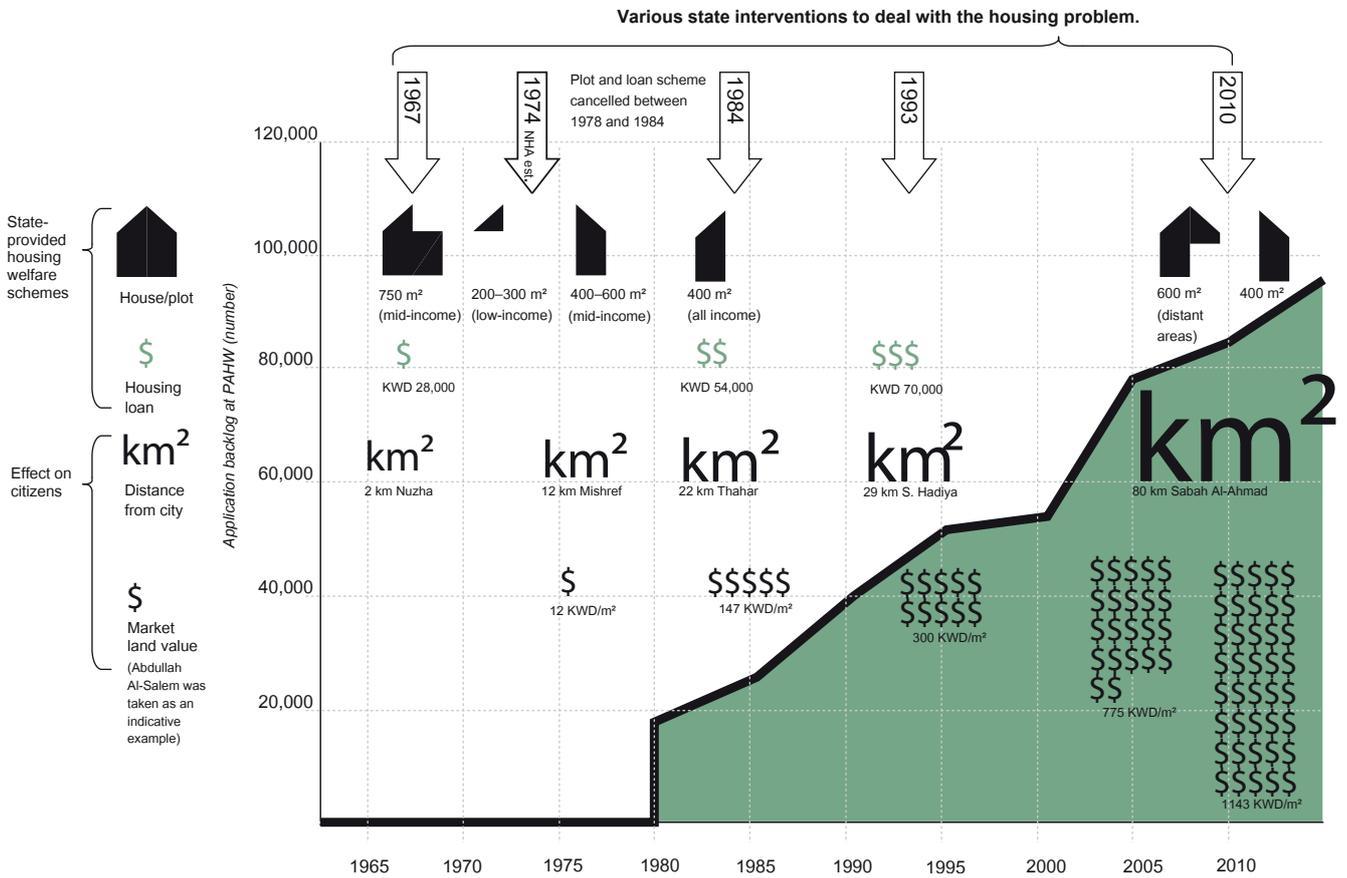


Figure 7. The relationship between housing policy changes and application backlog, property prices and sprawl, 1965–2012

Sources: Al-Dekhaye (1999); Al-Dudlajjan (2010, 2011); PAHW.

As referred to earlier, the PAHW and the Savings and Credit Bank are the two entities that now provide state housing aid for Kuwaiti citizens. The control of land and resources falls under various state institutions including the parliament, the council of ministers, the municipal council and the municipality. Together with the current system of distributing land, changes in laws and legislations have contributed to the housing crisis that faces Kuwait. One example is the Credit Bank, established in 1960.⁸ It provided a variety of loans to support housing, light industry and agricultural needs on the premise of low interest rates and long terms of repayment. In relation to housing, the bank provided loans to those who owned land or had a considerable amount of money to buy a house on the sole premise that in either case, they had to live in that house. Those who did not own land or did not have enough money to add to the loan to buy a house were given a government house by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Ministry of Guidance and Information of Kuwait 1963). With time, the bank evolved into the Savings and Credits Bank and its activities moved slowly towards interest-free loans for housing and getting married, as well as free marriage grants. People are now allowed to use the loan to buy a house, but are not obliged to live in it, allowing them to rent or sell

⁸ Law 40 of 1960 for the establishment of the Credit Bank. Amended with Laws 8, 12, 18 and 33 of 1961.

it. This shift in focus from fulfilling a basic housing need to distributing wealth directly to individuals, without need, shows a change in objective and contributed to more liquidity for citizens and thus rising property values.

Although the municipality is continually being criticized for controlling most of the land (Figure 8) and not liberating it for urban growth because of physical and geographical constraints (Al-Dekhayel 2000; Al-Sabah 1984; Al-Ghannam et al. 2012), the land available for development only contributes further to the housing problem. Land-use policies together with the system of housing welfare explained earlier are principal contributors to the housing problem in Kuwait. The third master plan recommends a maximum density of 12 units per hectare for Kuwaiti neighbourhood units, a frivolous increase from the previously recommended 8 units per hectare (Colin Buchanan and Partners and Kuwaiti Engineering Group 2004). The PAHW on the other hand stipulates a minimum of 400 m² plot size for houses. Both these factors result in a sprawling city, with housing neighbourhoods built further and further away from its centre, creating increasing demand in the secondary market. In effect, when benchmarked with international examples, Kuwaiti housing property prices have shown a dramatic increase (Figure 9; note that Kuwait has shown the biggest increase since 1995, and is still rising in a time of world crisis); and with the current housing loan covering only a fraction of the land available for sale, the PAHW becomes the only hope of securing housing ownership for a Kuwaiti family today.

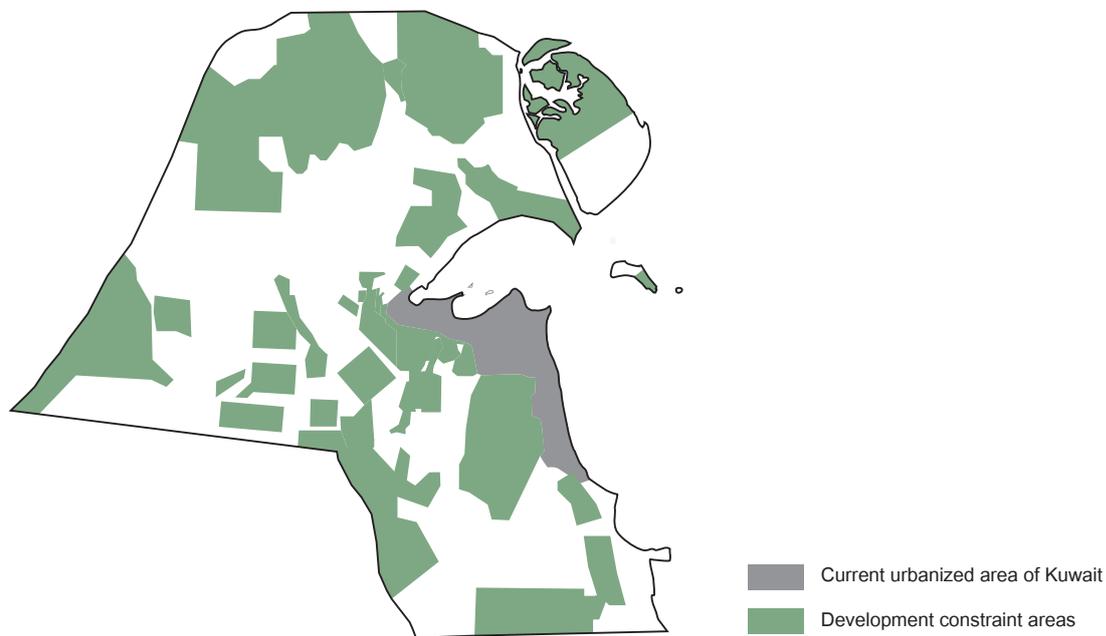


Figure 8. Land development constraints, including oil fields, water fields and military sites as defined by the third master plan

Source: Colin Buchanan and Partners and Kuwaiti Engineering Group, *Third Kuwait Master Plan Review*.

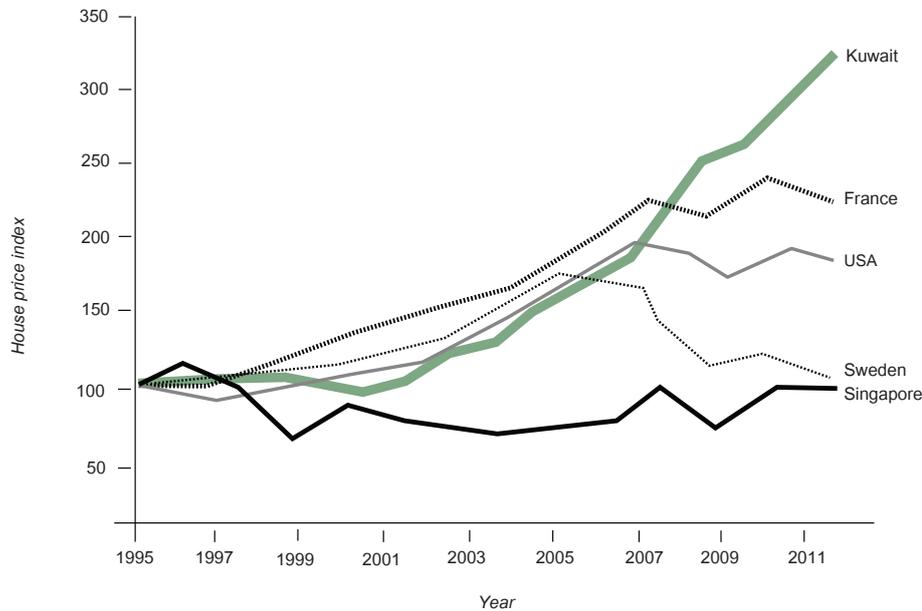


Figure 9. House price comparison by country (base 100), 1995–2012

Note: Due to lack of consistent data, the average prices of land of the following neighbourhoods were used: Yarmouk, Salwa, Mishref, Surra and Sabah Al-Salem.

Sources: Kuwait Fund House; Global Investment House; *The Economist*.

With the current situation, more pressure is thus placed on the PAHW to provide more housing in the light of the increasing backlog of applications. It is continuing to build neighbourhood units and housing cities up to more than 80 km away from the city centre, promising to provide an ambitious 72,000 new homes by 2016, and for the first time since 1989 it is reintroducing apartment living, despite the lessons of previous experiences⁹ (Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2011b). The focus is turned from radical rethinking about methods to control this sprawling city and onto minor adjustments of density, completely neglecting the issue of land scarcity. Continuous iterations in the housing welfare system from the reduction of the minimum plot size to the increase in the loan amount show that the government is aware of the shortcomings of the system, yet its response is very poor.

Various experts and academics have put forth several suggestions to deal with the housing problem of Kuwait. Al-Sabah (1984), for example, proposes three ways to deal with the issue:

1. A change of legislation to allow organizations to provide mortgages for the different income groups in society.
2. Establishment of government agencies to prevent monopolies in the private sector, such as a financial institution, a civil engineering consultancy and a construction organization.
3. Simplification and flexibility in housing regulation and land distribution.

⁹ Problems such as lack of maintenance of common areas, and lack of controlled leasing policies.

In her argument, Al-Sabah is calling for an alternative approach to housing welfare. It encourages a more active role for the government in controlling the market, whilst reducing the current practice of depleting its resources by directly handing them over to the citizens. In addition, it strives to understand demand, and is flexible enough to respond to the differing needs of people. Although these solutions are sufficient to solve the housing shortage in the short term, they do not address the problem at its roots. The system currently focuses on solving the problem of the backlog by finding solutions to increase house/plot delivery rate, and releasing more public land for development, only to create greater pressure on the PAHW. In an effort to increase supply, the private sector has been invited to participate in the provision of public housing in Kuwait: an initiative that has not, at the time of writing, been put into practice¹⁰ (Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2011a). Otherwise, the PAHW has no hope of keeping its promise of meeting current demand.

Even though there have been various amendments of the laws and suggestions by academics and experts alike for solutions to the housing problem, there has been very little exploration of the reasons behind the crisis in the housing welfare system. This has been proven with the recurrent changes in housing laws, which constantly need to be revised. Similarly, land-use policies and housing typologies are seldom reconsidered, creating a further deficiency in the system. The questions remain. Why has demand exceeded supply so drastically that there seems no hope of reversing the situation? How much more land can we continue to use up? What are society's real needs today and in the future? Why has there not been a fundamental re-evaluation of the current system and a long-term view for the future?

4. HOUSING: A KUWAITI CITIZEN'S RIGHT

Housing welfare shall be provided to Kuwaiti families, according to the priority registration of applications at PAHW, depending on the type of housing welfare, including plots, houses and apartments. To obtain the housing welfare stated in this law, the head of family must not own or co-own a real estate, which provides appropriate housing welfare to his family. In application of this provision, the real estate shall be considered as owned by the head of family, if it passes through him in any way either directly or indirectly to his wife or to either one of his dependent children. (Article 14 of Law no. 47 of 1993 concerning Housing Welfare, according to the amendments of 1995; Public Authority for Housing Welfare 2011a)

We do not live in a fair and equal world. The time and place of our birth determine where we will be living, working and possibly retiring in the future. To whom we are born governs our opportunities in receiving education, health and shelter. The housing law in Kuwait stipulates providing housing for all Kuwaiti families, without differentiation, except on the basis of prior real estate ownership. It does not, however, recognize the unfairness of inequalities that emerge from circumstance (Rawls 1971). Rather, it assumes predetermined social equity based on the principle of rent distribution. 'Unlike welfare states, which are "redistributive", rentier

¹⁰ Law no. 50 of 2010 concerning Housing Cities.

states do not exist by extracting surplus from the local population. Institutional development in distributive states is thus likely to diverge from classical patterns of state-building as their bureaucracies emerge in response to the need to allocate rather than to appropriate revenue' (Chaudhry 1997: 26). This may explain the establishment of the PAHW as an entity wholly responsible for the provision of housing to citizens. It further explains the lack of willingness on the part of the state to rethink this regressive system of planning. When asked about lessons learned from the past, the housing official responded with a shrug: 'This is just the way it has always been done' (I. Al-Nashi, interview, 16 April 2012).

The state does not only subsidize numerous goods and services to its citizens, but also takes complete responsibility for basic human needs of education, health, employment and shelter, without consideration of the nature of society and the pervasive inequality created at birth (Rawls 1971). Assuming all people to be equal is not only naive but also reinforces further inequality. For example, those born to parents from merchant families are still society's affluent members. 'Well before oil, clearly by the first decades of the twentieth century, Kuwait had a narrow and well-established elite: wealthy trading families who were linked by marriage and shared economic interest' (Crystal 1990: 37). Those families established their wealth prior to the discovery of oil through trade and pearl diving, and the post-oil era only contributed further to the growth of their wealth. However, as Kuwaiti citizens, they still benefit from the state's generous offerings equally with other fellow citizens. In an interview, an older couple who had experienced the shift in wealth from the pre- to the post-oil era expressed concern: 'Everyone takes advantage of the system. All millionaires profit from it. Since the housing provision was allocated, they all profited from it' (A. Al-Shali, interview, 26 July 2012). There is clear affirmation that this behaviour was not based on need, but rather on opportunity.

The state treats all Kuwaiti citizens as equals. However, this way of seeing citizens is fundamentally flawed, even though its aims are in fact to create social equality. By eliminating income stratification, inequality amongst society is further reinforced as those with less need are competing with those more deprived. This is prevalent in the unsustainable housing demand that is encountered, with a yearly average of around 80 per cent of married couples applying for housing welfare (Figure 10). It has become second nature to any newly married Kuwaiti couple to start the application process immediately after they wed. 'This is what you do when you get married' (S. Al-Ali, interview, 16 June 2012). The automatic nature of this behaviour, facilitated by state legislation, has immense consequences due to its neglect of implications for the future. 'Each generation must not only preserve the gains of culture and civilisation ... but it must also put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation' (Rawls 1971: 285). Even though certain individuals do need the state's help, this can only be given if there is a method for managing wealth for the future. Unfortunately, this is not evident in the system of housing distribution current in Kuwait, as it does not cater to the scarcity of resources.

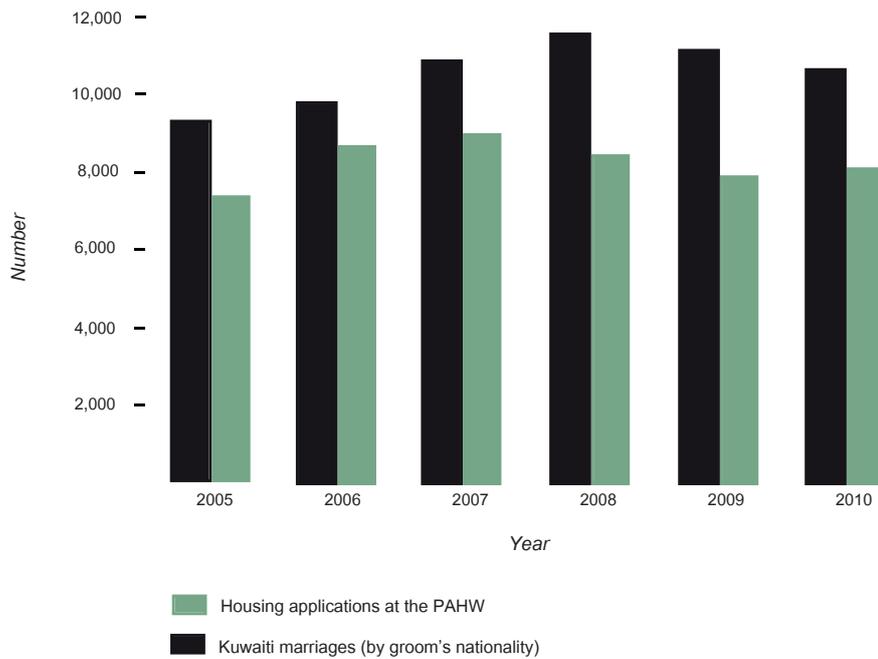


Figure 10. Annual numbers of marriages and of housing applications at the PAHW, 2005–10

Sources: State of Kuwait (2011a, 2011b, 2012); PAHW records.

With waiting times continuing to rise, now reaching up to eighteen years, the state tries to find quick-fix solutions to resolve the problem: the latest being compensating its citizens with rent aid. From the citizens' point of view, however, this is still unsatisfactory. 'The government provides KWD 150 monthly rent allowance – not a realistic value to cover rent. As well as KWD 70,000 housing loan – insignificant in a market where the cheapest available is worth at least its double' (Al-Ghannam et al. 2012). Housing provision is considered as completely a state responsibility and is seldom contested. Although not granted by the constitution, housing welfare has become an established right for all Kuwaiti citizens that many today claim is constitutional. In fact, in all interviews with different generations of Kuwaiti couples, seven out of ten thought it was a clause in the constitution, while the rest were not sure. Surprisingly, the housing official interviewed at the PAHW himself claimed it was a constitutional right (I. Al-Nashi, interview, 16 April 2012): a misguided opinion that does not open avenues for reconsideration.

Through its distributive policies, the state has created, in essence, an entitlement outlook amongst citizens, and in the urban context a right to housing exclusive to Kuwaiti families. The interviews that were conducted with different couples, from different generations, who all benefited from various provisions of the housing welfare system, unanimously alluded to this notion. The recurrent newspaper articles on different facets of society further confirmed these interview findings. It was clear that the system of housing welfare in Kuwait was not seen as a privilege, but rather as an entitled right, and although it is unique to Kuwait, discussion beyond the local context was rarely referred to.

Three main themes emerged from the interviews framed in the perspective of rights: (1) the right to ownership, (2) the right to architectural type and (3) the right to investment. These will be discussed in the following sections. Certain expected themes were absent, however,¹¹ while contradictions emerged throughout the different interviews with regard to the desired type of housing welfare, living needs and solutions offered. These contradictions reflect preconceived philosophies regarding housing provision that are not necessarily based on need or logic, but rather on the status quo. Through time, the housing welfare system has provided certain benefits and set a standard for aspirations which eventually developed in people's minds into needs. From its inception, housing welfare in Kuwait was aimed at distributing the newfound wealth to its citizens; however, this intention became a state-induced policy that creates not only complete state dependency but an attitude of pure entitlement.

4.1. The right to ownership

The government loan is insignificant. How is one expected to build or even buy with it? The smallest and least desirable land available is at least triple that amount. (W. Al-Sani, interview, 24 July 2012)

The tone of voice in the interview was one of dissatisfaction. In the couple's opinion, the government needs to secure housing ownership to its citizens: a duty that is currently not being met, and thus frustration is rising amongst them. The responsibility is not only for securing housing but also for the specific type of tenure. In another couple's interview, when asked about the possibility of changing the housing welfare system from ownership to rental, the response was blunt: 'Your question is not valid' (A. Al-Bader, interview, 25 July 2012). This rhetoric refuses to acknowledge an alternative method to the current system, much less take it into consideration. A culture of home ownership has been ingrained as the sole form of tenure for households in Kuwait. Rental – also a state responsibility – is almost always a temporary fix in the process of waiting to secure home ownership, of course with the aid of the government.

One may question the unwavering opinion of ownership, illustrated by the constant demand at the PAHW. Since the inception of the housing welfare system in Kuwait, the state has worked on the basis of facilitating home ownership to Kuwaiti citizens, either through subsidized government land and built homes or through interest-free loan facilities. 'The first five-year development plan (1967/8-1071/2) expressed the long-term objective of ensuring that "every citizen has his own home". The plan saw this objective as important in achieving a greater level of social justice in Kuwaiti society' (Al-Dekhayel 2000: 139).

¹¹ For example, the rights of Kuwaiti women to housing. Even though the law claims housing provision for Kuwaiti families, the right essentially is for men. Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis do not get equal rights, nor do those who are divorced or widowed. Other neglected rights are those of non-Kuwaitis, who make up over 65 per cent of the population, and have almost no rights to housing provision by the state.

Although the objective was long-term, the means by which to allow for such an ambitious project were short-sighted. The efforts made by the state to keep its promise to its citizens have gradually deteriorated because of a constant increase in demand, and a realization that resources are decreasing. Yet the issue of ownership is never reconsidered; rather, short-term solutions of loan increases and a gradual reduction of the size of land being distributed have been haphazardly introduced. This extended distributive behaviour only further reinforces the current entitlement right rooted within the Kuwaiti culture and recultivates it with its continued methods of further provision and compensation.

Serious reconsideration of legislation is seldom tackled by the state. For example, although the housing loan system is essentially a mortgage from the state's Credit and Savings Bank, the commercial banks of the private sector are not allowed to engage in mortgage facilities. 'It's better this way for society as it ensures that no one will ever be kicked out of their home' (L. Al-Bader, interview, 25 July 2012). Although introducing such a system would open further means for Kuwaitis to meet their ownership aspirations, it creates more freedom in the market and thus places more responsibility on the individual in the context of private finance. With this freedom comes risk, a matter that citizens have not been accountable for. The state, therefore, chooses not to engage in such an environment and instead would rather focus on other state-controlled solutions.

This approach may be called conservative socialism, where extreme welfare policies reinforce complete state reliance, yet housing legislation promotes home ownership as the only form of welfare. Ownership generally entails management of personal finances, which requires complete responsibility and reliance on self. In his controversial defence of the 'right to buy' policy put forth by the Thatcher administration in the UK, Peter King explains the cultural value in home ownership: 'Rights over property allow us to exercise a degree of control and so match our income with our expectations and aspirations' (2010: 44). A clear link is made between ownership aspirations and financial capabilities. The system in Kuwait, however, is problematic because it exactly contradicts this. Its generous, non-differential welfare treatment, when it comes not only to housing but to all other prosperity measures, encourages complete reliance on the state, although, when it comes to housing, it ingrains an ownership entitlement right which in its core ideologies aspires to self-reliance. These two opposing doctrines create an imbalance both in policy and in society. The citizens see the state as fully responsible for their housing ownership needs, yet the state is incapable of meeting this continuous demand that over-relies on the continuous supply of its scarce resources, both in land availability and in oil revenues.

Another inherent contradiction in the system is the continuous transfer of public property to individual private households. Not only is this a permanent transfer that is very unlikely to be reversed, but it also opposes the conception of the right to the city (Amin 2008; Berner 2002; Brenner and Thedodore 2002; Harvey 2003; Lefebvre 1996) in the sense of access to public space, rather than a right to private property. Land-use policies in Kuwait are

driven by private housing needs. This is demonstrated through a focus mainly on building new housing neighbourhoods, rather than on prospects for job creation, industry or economic prosperity. Moreover, opportunities for producing adequate and accessible public space are usually neglected and the focus is rather on providing more land and houses for private living, to the extent that new neighbourhoods are created and houses are occupied prior to completing nearby public facilities or infrastructure (Figure 11). Thanks to this irrational method of managing the country's wealth, and the creation of a fictional right to private ownership, the state today is immersing itself in haphazard planning in which new neighbourhoods are continually sprawling out, and some are even designated in hazardous areas, placing the health of their occupants at great risk (Figure 12). In essence, quality of life is continually being jeopardized to compensate for this false notion of rights.

Yet, because of these previous state practices, home ownership rights that have been embedded within the mind-sets of Kuwaiti citizens are difficult to give up. In fact, they are related to other senses of entitlement within the culture, as shown in the following quotation from a local Kuwaiti newspaper, which will lead us to the following ingrained right – that of architectural type:

The governmental loan together with a bank loan would still not cover the cost of buying a house. As for buying an apartment, it is not viable because it would eliminate any chances of owning a house. An apartment may work for a newlywed couple, but when they have children, they surely would require more space, thus leaving them with no option but to wait for a government house. (Al-Ghannam et al. 2012)



Figure 11. *Homes are built, yet infrastructure and facilities are not complete*



Figure 12. *New housing neighbourhoods are being built adjacent to a desalination plant*

4.2. The right to architectural type

People before received houses, and if people now get apartments, then it is not fair ...
Equality is a right granted by our constitution. (A. Al-Bader, interview, 25 July 2012)

Out of the 93,040 housing units provided by the government between 1954 and 2012 (Public Authority for Housing Welfare n.d.), only 1,088 were apartments. The fact that state policies focused on building single-family detached homes has created an inherent dismissal of an alternative architectural type by the citizens and a skewed sense of equality amongst them. The populist argument, and that of some academics (Al-Baqshi 2010; Mahgoub 2002), is a cultural one: the society does not accept communal living. According to this argument, a single experiment to date has proven unsuccessful¹² – albeit for other reasons – and thus apartment living is deemed unacceptable. This was anchored in the premise of a culture of privacy, derived from the pre-oil era courtyard housing scheme. A closer look at the urban fabric and social constituents of that period shed light on a different reality: one where community was closer, the street was the public gathering space and the walls of the houses were shared between neighbours.

¹² Al-Sawaber Complex, described earlier. Although there has been another project in Sabah Al-Salem, it is rarely referred to because it is allocated to specific minority citizens on a rental basis.

Welfare and education have upset the pattern of kinship relationships. Most Kuwaitis today no longer live with their extended families, grouped in quarters divided along sectarian and tribal lines. The fact that government houses have, over the past decades, been distributed indifferently to married couples on a first-come-first-served basis has resulted in the coexistence within the same residential neighbourhoods of people whom traditional 'asabiyah' ('group feeling') would have kept spatially and socially apart. (Longva 2005: 128)

Although criticized by Longva, this shift demonstrates a certain flexibility in society, where culture has adapted to the new ways of life. Further exploration of behavioural patterns before the oil area highlights the fallacy in the notion of a culture of privacy:

Practical needs at the level of everyday experience made people use space in ways that often contradicted the alleged quest for family privacy and female seclusion. For example, most people in Kuwait slept outside on their roofs in the hottest summer months, as it was cooler than sleeping indoors...practicing such a private act as sleeping in the open-air with nothing but a low parapet wall between neighbours rendered the strict privacy of the individual home somewhat tenuous. (Al-Nakib 2011: 130)

The issue here is not a cultural one, rather one of luxury.

Many Kuwaitis live in apartments while abroad, a practice that is seldom questioned. Many also display public behaviour such as gathering in public parks, riding double-decker buses and squeezing into busy tubes. However, an interview with a young married couple seemed to voice a contradiction in opinion about communal living (A. Al-Ali, interview, 16 June 2012). Although the couple currently live in an apartment and at the beginning of the interview mentioned being comfortable living there, going so far as to say that they would live there forever if they did not have any more children, towards the latter end of the interview ideas of privacy and the 'Kuwaiti way of life' emerged against communal living. This shows that while current discourse in society does not accept the idea of communal living, the practice in reality proves otherwise. Many families in Kuwait are living in apartments without difficulties, as demonstrated by this couple. In fact, the phenomenon of low-density apartment buildings (Figure 13) is rising within the traditional single-family residential neighbourhoods, either through purpose-built apartments or through villa conversions. There is a clear shift in architectural type in the private sector that is yet to be acknowledged by the state.

In fact, the response of the state to the changing needs of society lacks consideration. The concerns posed by different couples in the interviews when questioned about their opinion of the state's provision of apartments expressed similar views: lack of privacy, insufficient space and problems arising with neighbours. Some of these issues emerged from couples who themselves were currently living in the low-density apartment buildings mentioned earlier, and who hardly encountered any of those problems. Although they alluded to a desire for more space, most agreed that living in an apartment is saving them from paying for higher utility bills as well as making them have to rely less on domestic help. The state, nevertheless, responds poorly to these concerns. In its first attempt to reintroduce vertical living into the



Figure 13. *Current trends within the housing neighbourhood units: the two buildings to the right are multi-storey apartment buildings with three apartments each, while the building to the left is a private, single-family detached home*

housing welfare system,¹³ its solution has been to build five-storey buildings with a single 400 m² apartment on each level. This was premised on the principle that each building would be occupied by a group of related family members. In the state's opinion, this would eliminate not only concerns of privacy, but problems emerging between neighbours (I. Al-Nashi, interview, 16 April 2012). Not only is this an illogical solution that barely addresses these issues, but it also fundamentally contradicts the housing law's basis on priority of application due to the differences in time of marriage, and the current system of determining the location of housing itself within a neighbourhood based on a draw.

When the same interviewee was asked about ways that the previous problems encountered in Al-Sawaber were being avoided, such as the lack of building management or a home owners' association, the response was negative. The PAHW continues to do things the way it always has. These trivial attempts at finding alternatives to the current practice, and the passive attitude towards the system of housing welfare, reinforce the role of the state as essentially an entity solely distributive of oil income. 'Unlike in countries that do not have large resource incomes, in Kuwait social benefits and other transfers distribute income, but they do not re-distribute income: they are financed from oil rather than by taxing individuals or businesses' (El-Katiri et al. 2012: 182). Not only has this policy neglected the nature of

¹³ These are newly planned neighbourhoods that are still under construction in the south and west of Kuwait City, including North-West Sulaibikhat, Jaber Al-Ahmad and Sabah Al-Ahmad City.

limited resources, but in doing so, it has instilled the current entitlement attitude within its citizens. Terry Karl explains this phenomenon as follows: ‘Windfall gains that arise from petroleum encourage rent-seeking behaviour; the state becomes a type of “honey pot” in which competing interests try to capture a significant portion of resource rents by capturing portions of the state’ (2004: 666). In this case, the resource is a plot of land or a house, and people are not willing to give up this opportunity as long as it is available to them.

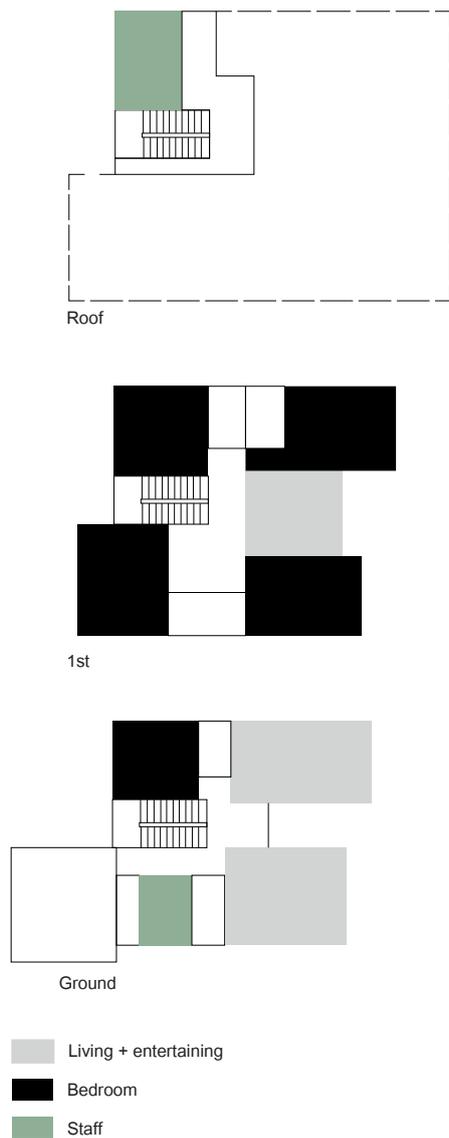


Figure 14. *PAHW house prototype*

Source: Public Authority for Housing Welfare (2011b).

A government house today is a two-storey, fully detached home that occupies a plot of land measuring at least 400 m². Apart from the excessive number of sleeping, living and entertainment spaces, it has two separate areas for domestic staff accommodation: quite a peculiar component of social housing (Figure 14). Today, the majority of low-income foreign labour in Kuwait comes from India, a country that is now one of the world’s fastest-growing economies. This abundant supply of cheap human capital will no longer be available in the future. Indians will soon find better opportunities in their own country, and will no longer need to leave their families and homes in search of jobs abroad. Yet the Kuwaiti government is still implementing this type of housing and creating an over-reliance on this segment of imported society. Although this is not explicit, by providing social housing on this scale, and eliminating a local working class through its other welfare policies, the state is essentially creating a dependency on this foreign labour.

As it continues in similar practices, the state is failing to sustain the extension of its resources. This leads to discontent within a society hesitant to compromise. A right to a single-family detached home has been created by previous provisions granted by the state which set a precedent for current expectations. Consequences, however, for the future of urban growth in the country are rarely addressed. Land has been used up closer to the city and the right to architectural type has expedited this process. There is still

a demand for more land, yet discontent with the increasing distance from the city centre prevails. These contradicting aspirations induce panic within society and lead to a belief in a third entitlement: the right to future investment, discussed next.

4.3. The right to investment

We see it as an investment opportunity ... We don't view it as granting a housing need, rather as a future security, especially for our kids. (S. Al-Ali, interview, 16 June 2012)

In an interview with a young couple with two children, currently living in a rented apartment, the conception of housing welfare seemed to be quite different. The system to them is more one of a future investment opportunity rather than fulfilling a current housing need. Straight after they got married, they had applied to be on the waiting list for a plot of land at the PAHW, without the intention of receiving the type of welfare applied for, but meanwhile they were receiving rent allowance for their waiting period.¹⁴ Not only is this opportunistic behaviour welcomed by the current legislation, but it also creates a false indicator of actual demand for housing at the PAHW which has great implications for future planning and organization. In 2009, the couple decided to buy a house, applied for the housing loan at the Credit and Savings Bank and finished their transaction within four weeks. 'It was quick and very fair' (S. Al-Ali, interview, 16 June 2012). Their explanation of fairness is questionable. This couple had been receiving rent compensation for five years while on the waiting list, knowing that they had no interest in the type of housing provided by the PAHW. When they found a prospect for investment in the private sector, they seized it and sought other means of financial benefits from the state: a long-term, interest-free loan. In their view, as Kuwaiti citizens, they are rightfully entitled to these opportunities that are lawfully provided for them by the state. Doing otherwise was deemed illogical: 'We have to secure our own future; we cannot depend on the state for that' (S. Al-Ali, interview, 16 June 2012).

Yet the couple's association of future security with land emphasizes the importance of the state in regulating housing supply. Instead of focusing their investment on their children's education, for example, to give them the means to secure a prosperous future, the couple instead chose to invest in land. The difference is that the latter form of investment requires less effort on their behalf. It is argued that 'because this wealth is the result of a windfall and ... it may largely be independent of merit-based efforts made by citizens, this pattern of wealth creation encourages rent seeking as well as a tendency to live beyond one's means' (Karl 2004: 665). Again, the role of the state is crucial in manifesting this, and although in the couple's opinion the state is unreliable, this very investment that they chose places more reliance on the state itself. In entering into speculative behaviour, they are completely depending on the state to maintain its distortion of the property market through its housing

¹⁴ A family continues receiving rent allowance until they secure housing welfare from the PAHW or the Credit and Savings Bank, when it stops after a certain period of time, depending on the type of welfare they receive.

provision. However, if re-evaluation of the system takes place, or if a monetary crisis happens, this investment would not be as lucrative. Thus, without full awareness, the very institution that this couple are claiming cannot be depended on for their future security is itself the one that they are relying on to maintain the value of their investment.

The couple still live in a rental apartment. The house they bought is being leased out to another family, which is paying off its loan back to the government. They are, in essence, getting the loan, and paying back for it for free. Because the law permits them to do so, many other families are taking advantage of this practice, as supported by various newspaper articles (Al-Dudlajjan 2011, 2012b; Al-Ghannam et al. 2012; Al-Jarrah 2012). The state has created capital surplus for the exploitation of the citizens, encouraging its exchange for more financial returns versus its use for shelter.¹⁵ Instead of providing the mechanisms to deliver adequate housing for citizens, the state has allowed them to immerse themselves in opportunistic behaviour through its very housing provision laws. What is seen as social welfare is developing on the ground into a means of wealth creation (Figure 15). This is explicitly a phenomenon of neoliberalism, characterized by ‘strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (Harvey 2007: 2). In essence, the interference of the state in this case is producing speculative practices which not only benefit private individuals specifically, but also jeopardize the chances of the less affluent to secure housing. By increasing liquidity amongst certain individuals in the form of interest-free loans, and not restricting their use, this interference makes property values rise due to speculative behaviour. Thus the state has created urban inequality and neglect of the public good that otherwise would be associated with minimal governmental intervention.

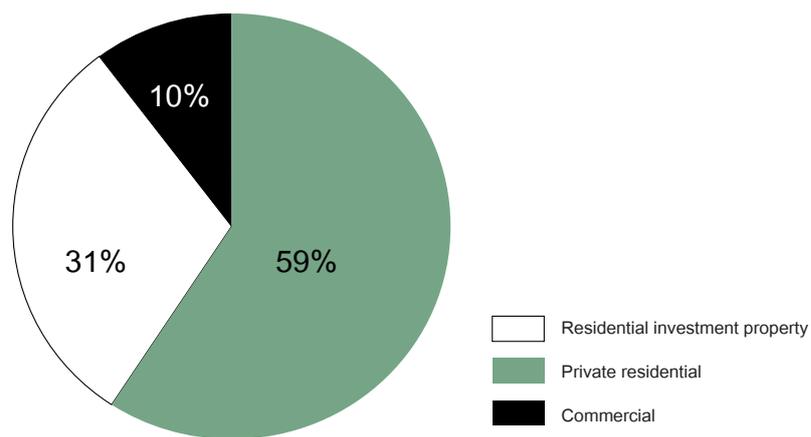


Figure 15. *Percentage of real estate trade per sector, last quarter of 2011*

Source: Kuwait Fund House (2012).

¹⁵ This borrows from Henri Lefebvre’s criticism of the commodification of space which asserts its exchange value over its use value (1996).

A further examination of the system of housing provision and legislation could shed light on the way the distributive property mechanisms of the state have contributed further to this inequality. By providing land and houses at nominal rates, the PAHW is ultimately transferring public land to private individuals without need. This creates large imbalances in the market, as once land is transferred to individuals it can be resold at market price, and gains can be made almost immediately. For example, six months before it was due to be handed over by the government, a house in the new neighbourhood of Saad Al-Abdullah was placed on the market for KWD 110,000, a price that is almost double its nominal value (Kuwait Property Guide n.d.). Although this practice is not legal, as those receiving a government house cannot sell it immediately, these instant gains encourage such behaviour, and thus citizens find various ways to avoid the legal barriers. Nonetheless, the current practice of land distribution through the secondary market is not responding to the obvious issue of land scarcity. The continued transfer of public land to newly married couples will not only deplete this resource but also be an inequitable practice for future generations. As can be seen from the history of housing provision in Kuwait, the plot size has more than halved since the inception of the housing welfare system in 1954 because of problems with land availability and the pace of delivery. At the same time, distance from the city centre continues to grow, creating less lucrative options for living and consequently raising the value of land that was distributed earlier which was closer to the city centre. Therefore the system has not only used up scarce land but created injustice in terms of who received it first – an inter-generational injustice that is further manifested in the current practice.

When questioned about their opinion of the housing problem, those interviewed commonly claimed that the state is controlling much of the land, which is hindering urban development, especially with regard to housing: an opinion that very clearly neglects the issue of land scarcity. ‘In most oil-rentier states, there seems to be a wide acceptance of the simple value judgement that the preferences of our contemporaries are to be given great weight, and those of unborn generations to be given negligible weight in the formation of people’s attitudes towards intertemporal choices’ (Beblawi and Luciani 1987: 102). This short-sighted view ignores any plans for the future and addresses the current policy that only caters for the interests of this generation. But even if the issue of releasing land for urban development is resolved, the state’s policies since the beginning of the housing welfare initiative have contributed to raising land values, which has inflated market prices. This inflation was created by the distribution of public land at extremely low rates, which allowed for opportunistic behaviour amongst certain individuals. The state’s lack of differentiation between citizens in eligibility for housing welfare on the basis of needs has allowed those with less need to indulge in speculative practices, which in turn has created further demand at the PAHW. Most people today cannot possibly afford to buy a home on their own, especially with a lack of mortgage facilities from commercial banks, as described earlier. A policy that aims at its core to achieve social equality is the very policy which has created injustice on the ground.

5. CONCLUSION

Kuwait today is in need of a moment of fundamental redress. The issue at stake is not solely one of unmanageable housing backlog, but rather a much larger social and economic one. A contrived sense of entitlement has resulted in unsustainable growth of the city that is difficult to reverse. The citizens' dependence on the state to distribute its resources has become an established means of wealth creation. Its generous welfare policies have ingrained a sense of complete state reliance, yet its housing ownership facilitations have promoted opportunism. The result is further dependence on the state without acknowledgement of the limits of its resources.

Though it aims at social equality, the current practice of housing welfare provision in Kuwait is creating dependency on foreign labour, places large burdens on the state for infrastructure provision, and provides an unsustainable model for living. Land is being used up closer to the city, expedited by a falsely based 'right' to architectural type. The sense of a right to ownership has placed control of this land in the hands of private individuals, and in turn created large inequalities in the urban fabric. As concern rises, a third entitlement notion arises: the right to future investment. Not only is this speculative behaviour largely abusive of the system in general, but its claim to dependency on the state is largely misled, as its sole security is in maintaining the current system of housing welfare provision.

Passive housing regulations have created false aspirations for citizens that have led to policies today focusing solely on housing provision. As times change, society's needs are also changing. Housing-led strategies cannot be sustained without attention to other income-generating means, health and education security, and entertainment and leisure needs. Policies today should cater for the citizen's needs and instil progressive desires. Radical re-evaluation should not focus on immediate solutions, but rather on ones that would last for generations. The aspirations of citizens are a product of years of state-induced rights that cannot be reversed instantaneously. It is the role of policy to empower individuals rather than to create false desires which rely on limited resources that are not sustainable for future generations. I therefore choose to end with this quotation, which provides a vision for tomorrow:

The future of urban development in the Gulf lies in human development. Over-dependence on oil and the belief that modernity equals infrastructure development have distracted attention from human development which requires social, political, cultural, and academic restructuring ... Modernity cannot flourish in the absence of freedom of expression and the right to differ with power and authority over the direction and policy. (Ghabra 2010: 109)

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