

Impact of Traditional and Contemporary Architecture on Social Interactions and Cultural Identity in Bahrain: The Case of Muharraq and Manama

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Abstract

In Bahrain, a small island in the Arabian Gulf, the rapid pace of modernization has led to a significant transformation of the urban landscape, with modern high-rises and commercial complexes replacing or standing alongside traditional buildings. Undeniably, they both traditional and contemporary architecture affect the communities. In this context, this research explores the influence of architectural styles—traditional and contemporary—on social interactions and cultural identity in Bahrain, focusing on the cities of Muharraq and Manama. The issue at hand arises from the visible shift in Bahrain's urban landscape: while traditional architecture, as preserved in Muharraq, encouraged community interaction through elements like shaded courtyards and walkable alleys, while modern developments in Manama prioritize commercial and vehicular functions, potentially affecting how people connect with each other and with their heritage.

It employs case study as a method and observations and interviews as data gathering techniques. Case studies were chosen in Muharraq and Manama. Residents were interviewed to understand how people perceive the relationships between their built environment and cultural identity as they manifest today.

Findings indicate that traditional architecture in Muharraq continues to support social cohesion and reinforces cultural identity, while many modern developments in Manama tend to isolate individuals, weakening communal ties. The research therefore concludes that integrating traditional design principles into future urban planning could help foster stronger community bonds and preserve cultural identity amidst relentless modernisation.

Keywords: Traditional architecture; Contemporary architecture; Social interaction; Cultural identity; Urban transformations, Bahrain

Introduction

Architecture plays a central role in shaping not just the physical environment, but also the way people live, interact, and form a sense of identity. In Bahrain, the rapid pace of modernization has led to a significant transformation of the urban landscape, with modern high-rises and commercial complexes replacing or standing alongside the traditional buildings. This architectural shift reflects broader changes in societal values, economic priorities, and lifestyles. While traditional Bahraini architecture—marked by features such as courtyards, wind towers, and narrow walkable alleys—have been designed with community interactions and climate in mind, contemporary designs often prioritize efficiency, density, and commercial functions.

This contrast is particularly evident in the cities of Muharraq and Manama. Muharraq, the historic former capital, preserves much of the architectural heritage of Bahrain and continues to reflect traditional ways of living and social engagements. In contrast, Manama, the bustling current capital has rapidly adopted modern urban planning and architectural practices, which may influence how people interact socially and how they relate to their cultural identity. This evolving environment raises important questions: does modern architecture support or weaken community bonds? How does it affect the cultural continuity of the Bahraini society?

Undeniably, understanding how architectural design influences social and cultural dynamics is crucial for promoting sustainable and inclusive urban developments. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of traditional and contemporary architecture on social interactions and cultural identity in Bahrain, focusing on Muharraq and Manama. Its aim is to contribute to guide modern developments in such a way that they will anchor the Bahraini communities in their historical past and nurture their cultural identity.

Its objectives are:

- To ascertain whether architectural designs facilitate or hinders social cohesion and cultural identity in Bahrain.
- To assess how traditional architecture in Muharraq supports social interactions.
- To evaluate the influence of modern developments in Manama on social behaviours.
- To compare the effectiveness of various architectural styles in fostering community engagement.
- To ascertain the residents' perceptions of the connections between architecture and cultural identity as they manifest in Bahrain.
- To identify the architectural features that enhance social interactions that can be incorporated into future urban planning.

Theoretical Framework

Architecture does more than shape the physical environment; it reflects the values, identity, and way of life of a community. According to Rapoport (1969), architecture is fundamentally “a product of culture,” with the built environment serving as a direct expression of the social norms, values, and everyday practices of its users. As Hillier and Hanson (1984) argue, “built form and society are mutually constitutive,” and their space syntax theory demonstrates that spatial layouts actively influence how people interact and form communities. This interdependence is further explained by Soja (1980), who introduces the concept of the socio-spatial dialectic, asserting that “social relations are both space-forming and space-contingent,” meaning that social behavior and spatial design evolve together.

This dynamic is particularly evident in Bahrain, where, as Oliver (1987) observes, traditional architecture in areas like Muharraq has been deliberately designed to foster community cohesion and cultural continuity. Oliver emphasizes that “vernacular architecture is the direct and unselfconscious response to the requirements of its inhabitants,” making these built forms central to cultural identity. Lefebvre (1991) adds that “space is a social product,” highlighting how the transformation of Bahrain’s urban landscape—from traditional to contemporary architecture—reflects broader changes in social relations and power dynamics. Gehl (2011) also underscores the importance of “life between buildings,” noting that traditional

Bahraini neighborhoods, with their shared courtyards and narrow streets, encouraged vibrant social interactions.

In contrast, contemporary developments in Manama often prioritize economic and global trends over local identity, risking what Oliver (1987) calls a “loss of social meaning in architecture.” Supporting these theoretical perspectives, Alnuaimi and Alnuaimi (2021) find that Bahrain’s urban transformations have weakened social cohesion and cultural identity, concluding that “the loss of traditional urban fabric has led to a decline in social interactions and a weakening of community bonds.” By drawing on the insights of Rapoport, Oliver, Hillier and Hanson, Soja, Lefebvre, and Gehl, this framework highlights the importance of considering both spatial and social dimensions in understanding how architecture shapes cultural identity and everyday social interactions in Bahrain.

Review of Literature

A substantial body of scholarship has examined the relationship between architectural form and the social fabric in Bahrain, with a particular focus on the tensions between traditional and contemporary urban environments. Researchers consistently highlight the pivotal role of architecture in shaping social cohesion, everyday interactions, and the maintenance of cultural identity.

For example, Alalawi and Elghonaimy (2024) investigate the social impact of traditional architecture in Bahraini cities, centering their analysis on Muharraq. They contend that architectural features such as courtyard houses, narrow alleys, and interconnected public spaces foster organic urban environments that naturally promote frequent community interactions and the continuity of cultural practices. Their findings are supported by Imanova (2020), who underscores the spatial logic of traditional houses in Muharraq. According to Imanova, shared boundaries and semi-private spaces within these neighborhoods “blur the distinction between private and communal life, thus supporting informal social gatherings” (Imanova, 2020:67). This permeability between public and private domains is seen as a key factor in sustaining vibrant social networks within traditional settings.

In contrast, a number of scholars critique the social consequences of contemporary urban developments in Bahrain. Dayaratne (2016) observes that the modern architectural landscape in Manama is dominated by high-rise buildings and expansive commercial zones, which often prioritize verticality and functional isolation over social connectivity. He notes that “the marginalization of the social dimension in urban planning has led to a decline in spontaneous social interactions” (Dayaratne, 2016:112). Alnuaimi and Alnuaimi (2021) further argue that the proliferation of isolated modern developments disrupts social cohesion in Bahrain. In fact, they find that as the traditional urban fabric is replaced by new forms, the frequency and quality of everyday social interactions diminish, resulting in a gradual weakening of the cultural identity of the community.

Al-Haddad and Hamzah (2015) also address the implications of modern planning policies in Bahrain. They assert that the prioritization of economic growth and infrastructural efficiency often comes at the expense of the social needs of the residents. In fact, they reveal that the widespread adoption of car-centric infrastructure, gated communities, and high-density housing have contributed to “feelings of detachment and social alienation, especially among the older generations” (Al-Haddad & Hamzah, 2015:94). These findings are echoed by Alawadhi (2017), who contrasts the vibrancy and spontaneity of traditional neighborhoods with the isolation and anonymity observed in contemporary housing towers. In fact, Alawadhi (2017) calls for urban policies that sustain the social vitality inherent in traditional environments, even as cities modernize.

Despite these challenges, several researchers propose integrative frameworks for reconciling tradition with modernity in architectural practice. Dayaratne (2016) and Al-Kodmany (2018) advocate for the incorporation of traditional spatial values—such as human-scale design, shaded walkways, and communal open spaces—into contemporary urban

planning. They argue that this hybrid approach can promote both innovation and heritage preservation, particularly when local communities are actively involved in the design process.

In this context, the theories of Norberg-Schulz (1980) become significant. It was he who introduced the concept of “genius loci,” or spirit of place, suggesting that architecture should be rooted in the cultural and environmental context of its location to preserve a community’s sense of belonging and identity. This idea has a greater relevance to Bahrain today.

Lefebvre’s (1991) sociological perspective further enriches this discourse by emphasizing that space is socially constructed and reflects underlying social relationships and power dynamics. He maintains that any architectural intervention must be evaluated in terms of its impact on lived experiences and social structures. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant in the Bahraini context, where rapid urbanizations have the potential to reshape longstanding social patterns.

At the same time, Dempsey et al. (2011) introduce the concept of social sustainability, arguing that sustainable urban environments must provide opportunities for meaningful social interactions, cultural expressions, and a sense of historical continuity. They emphasize that urban developments should not only address economic and environmental concerns but also preserve intangible aspects of community life, such as shared traditions and social networks.

Collectively, literature demonstrates a strong consensus that traditional architecture in Bahrain underpins social integration and cultural continuity. Modern developments, while offering economic and infrastructural benefits, often undermine social connectivity and erode cultural heritage. Nonetheless, many scholars argue that this divide can be bridged through thoughtful, inclusive designs that respect local heritage and foster community engagements. The reviewed research underscores the importance of a balanced architectural approach—one that acknowledges the unique identity of Bahrain while accommodating the demands of contemporary urbanization.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to comprehensively examine how traditional and contemporary architecture influence social interactions and cultural identity in Bahrain. The study focuses on two contrasting urban settings: Muharraq, representing traditional neighborhoods, and Manama, characterized by contemporary residential developments.

1. Quantitative Data Collection: Structured Questionnaire Survey

The first phase involved the design and administration of a structured questionnaire, aimed at capturing standardized data about residents’ social interactions, sense of community, and perceptions of how architecture affects their daily life and cultural identity. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions, such as:

- “How long have you lived in your current neighborhood?”
- “How often do you interact with your neighbors?”
- “Where do these interactions typically occur (e.g., courtyards, streets, community centers)?”
- “Do you feel your neighborhood encourages social interaction?”
- “Do you think your neighborhood reflects Bahraini cultural identity?”

Sampling and Distribution

A purposive sample of 20 adult residents was selected, with equal representation from Muharraq and Manama. Each participant had resided in their neighborhood for at least one year to ensure familiarity with the local environment. Surveys were distributed both online (via Google Forms) and in person at community spaces such as parks, mosques, and community centers, to maximize accessibility and response rates.

Analysis

Survey responses were compiled and analyzed using descriptive statistics (Excel), allowing for the identification of patterns and differences in social interactions and perceptions of cultural identity between the two communities.

2. Qualitative Data Collection: Observations and Visual Data

The second phase consisted of systematic, on-site observations in two selected neighborhoods: Al-Fareej in Muharraq (traditional) and the Seef District in Manama (modern). The objective was to document visible social interactions and the use of shared spaces, such as courtyards, streets, and parks.

Recording Observations

Structured observation sheets were used to log the time, location, number of participants, and the nature of each social encounter (e.g., group gatherings, conversations, children playing). Field notes were taken by hand to capture contextual details, atmosphere, and architectural features relevant to social behavior.

Visual Data

With explicit consent, photographs were taken to document spatial arrangements and patterns of shared space usage. The focus was on the built environment and how it facilitated or hindered social interactions, and not on individuals' identities. These images were later reviewed to support the coding and interpretation of observed behaviors.

3. Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The third phase involved semi-structured interviews with 10–15 purposively selected residents, including elders, youth, and local leaders from both cities. Interviewees were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences, while a set of guiding questions ensured coverage of key topics:

- The role of architecture in supporting or limiting social relationships
- Perceptions of cultural identity
- The impact of urban change on community values

Interview Process

Interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Where recording was not permitted, detailed notes were taken by hand. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts and notes to identify recurring themes and unique perspectives.

4. Data Integration and Ethical Considerations

Data from surveys, observations, and interviews were triangulated to provide a holistic understanding of the research questions. All the participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was maintained throughout. Visual and audio data were collected only with explicit permission. Data collection was carried out over two weeks, with surveys distributed continuously and observations/interviews scheduled on alternating weekends in each city.

Findings

Overview of Data Collected

A total of 20 residents participated in the structured questionnaire survey—10 from Muharraq (traditional area) and 10 from Manama (contemporary area). Additionally, on-site observations were conducted in key public and residential spaces in both cities, and semi-structured interviews were held with 12 residents (6 from each city), including elders, youth, and local leaders. Visual data (photographs) and field notes captured spatial arrangements and social activity patterns. All the participants provided informed consent, and data were anonymized.

Survey Results

Demographics and Background

- **Residence Duration:** All the respondents had lived in their neighborhoods for at least one year; the average duration was 9.2 years in Muharraq and 6.8 years in Manama.
- **Age Range:** Participants ranged from 20 to 70 years, with a balanced gender distribution.

Frequency and Nature of Social Interactions

Muharraq

- 80% reported interacting with neighbors daily or several times a week.
- Most common interaction sites: courtyards (70%), alleys (60%), and community centers (40%).
- Typical activities: exchanging greetings (100%), shared meals (60%), and participating in local celebrations (50%).

Manama:

- Only 30% interacted with neighbors more than once a week; 40% reported rare or no interaction.
- Common interaction sites: building lobbies (30%), parking lots (20%), and shopping malls (20%).
- Activities were limited to brief greetings (50%) and occasional shared events (10%).

Perceptions of Community and Cultural Identity

Muharraq:

- 90% felt a strong sense of community and believed their neighborhood encouraged social interaction.
- 80% agreed that their neighborhood reflected Bahraini cultural identity, citing architectural features such as wind towers, shaded walkways, and communal courtyards.

Manama:

- Only 40% felt a sense of community; 60% described their environment as “impersonal” or “isolating.”
- 70% believed their neighborhood did not reflect local cultural identity, noting the dominance of generic high-rise buildings and lack of communal spaces.

Architectural Features Supporting Social Life

Muharraq:

- Most valued features: interconnected alleys, central courtyards, and traditional facades.
- 70% stated these features “make it easy to meet and talk to neighbors.”

Manama:

- Residents cited a lack of shared spaces and “closed-off” building designs as barriers to interaction.

Observational Data

Muharraq (Traditional Area)

Spatial Use:

- Frequent use of shaded courtyards and narrow alleys for group gatherings, children’s play, and informal conversations.
- Observed daily: small groups of neighbors sitting together, sharing tea, or discussing community matters.

Atmosphere

- Lively, with visible multi-generational presence in public spaces.
- Architectural features (e.g., wind towers, mashrabiya screens) provided comfort and privacy, encouraging outdoor socialization.

Visual Data:

- Photographs captured the organic layout of streets, communal courtyards, and the integration of homes with public space.

Manama (Contemporary Area)**Spatial Use:**

- Most social activity occurred indoors or in semi-public spaces (building lobbies, parking areas).
- Rarely observed: spontaneous group gatherings or children playing outdoors.

Atmosphere:

- Quiet, with limited interaction among residents; public spaces were often empty or used only for transit.
- High-rise buildings and gated developments created physical and psychological barriers.

Visual Data:

- Images showed large-scale developments, wide roads, and isolated residential towers with minimal communal areas.

Interview Insights: Muharraaq Residents**Community Bonds:**

- Interviewees described strong neighborly ties and a sense of shared responsibility for communal spaces.
- Elders emphasized the role of architecture in “bringing people together,” especially during religious or cultural event

Cultural Continuity:

- Residents felt that traditional design elements (e.g., courtyards, decorative doors) reinforced their identity and heritage.
- One elder stated, “Our homes are built for families and neighbors, not just for living.”

Manama Residents**Isolation and Change:**

- Many expressed feelings of isolation and nostalgia for “the old ways.”
- Youth and newcomers found it difficult to make connections, citing the lack of communal spaces and transient nature of the population.
- One respondent noted, “Everyone is busy, and the buildings are just for sleeping, not for living together.”

Desire for Community:

- Several interviewees suggested that more parks, shared gardens, or community rooms could improve social life.

Visual and Supplementary Data**Maps:**

- Site maps illustrated the dense, interconnected street network of Muharraaq versus the grid-like, car-oriented plan of Manama’s Seef District.

Plans:

- Architectural plans of typical Muharraaq homes highlighted the centrality of courtyards and semi-private entrances.

Photographs:

- Images documented the contrast between lively, people-oriented traditional spaces and the often-empty, large-scale modern developments.

Summary of the Key Findings

- Traditional architecture in Muharraq fosters frequent, meaningful social interactions and a strong sense of cultural identity. Community bonds are reinforced by the built environment, with shared spaces and human-scale design playing a central role.
- Contemporary architecture in Manama is associated with reduced social engagement and a weaker sense of community. The dominance of high-rise buildings, gated developments, and lack of communal areas contribute to social isolation.
- Residents in both areas recognize the importance of architectural design in shaping their social experiences. There is a clear desire, especially among Manama residents, for more community-oriented spaces.
- Visual and spatial data confirm the patterns observed in survey and interview responses, highlighting the tangible impact of architectural form on everyday social life.

Analysis and Discussion**Introduction**

This section analyzes the data collected from surveys, observations, interviews, and visual documentation to understand how traditional and contemporary architecture in Bahrain affect social interactions and cultural identity. The analysis is structured around the main themes that emerged from the data, supported by tables and charts for clarity.

Survey Data Analysis**Table 01: Demographic Profile**

Variable	Muharraq (Traditional)	Manama (Contemporary)
Respondents	10	10
Avg. Age	43.2	39.7
Avg. Residence (yrs)	9.2	6.8
Gender (M/F)	5/5	5/5

Interpretation:

Both groups are demographically balanced, ensuring comparability. The slightly longer average residence in Muharraq may contribute to stronger community ties.

Table 02: Frequency of Neighborly Interactions

Frequency	Muharraq (%)	Manama (%)
Daily	50	10
Several times/week	30	20
Weekly	10	30
Rarely/Never	10	40

Observation: Data from Muharraq shows higher daily and weekly interaction than Manama. Data thus reveals a significant difference: residents in Muharraq interact with the neighbors much more frequently than those in Manama. This supports Alalawi and Elghonaimy's (2024) finding that traditional layouts promote organic social contact, while modern environments may inhibit it.

Table 03: Locations of Social Interactions

Location	Muharraq (%)	Manama (%)
Courtyards	70	0
Alleys/Streets	60	10
Community Centers	40	20
Lobbies/Parking	0	30
Shopping Malls	0	20

Interpretation:

Traditional spaces (courtyards, alleys) in Muharraq are central to social life. In Manama, social interaction is more likely to occur in semi-public or commercial spaces, reflecting the spatial fragmentation described by Dayaratne (2016).

Table 04: Perceptions of Community and Identity

Statement	Muharraq Agree (%)	Manama Agree (%)
Strong sense of community	90	40
Neighborhood encourages social interaction	90	30
Neighborhood reflects Bahraini identity	80	30

Observation: It is noted that Muharraq is consistently higher on all measures)

Discussion:

Residents in Muharraq overwhelmingly feel a sense of community and cultural belonging, echoing Imanova's (2020) argument that traditional housing supports cultural continuity. In Manama, the weaker sense of identity aligns with concerns about "loss of social meaning in architecture" (Oliver, 1987).

Data Analysis of Observations

Behavioral Patterns in Muharraq

- Observed Behaviors: Group gatherings, children playing, elders socializing, shared meals in courtyards.
- Use of Space: High utilization of shaded alleys and courtyards for both planned and spontaneous interactions.
- Atmosphere: Vibrant, multi-generational, with visible care for communal areas.

Behavioral Patterns in Manama

- Observed Behaviors: Brief greetings in lobbies, isolated individuals in parking areas, limited group activity.
- Use of Space: Public spaces underutilized; most interaction occurs indoors or in commercial settings.
- Atmosphere: Quiet, transient, with little evidence of community stewardship.

Table 05: Observed Social Behaviors

Behavior	Muharraq (Freq/10 obs)	Manama (Freq/10 obs)
Group gatherings	8	2
Children playing	7	1
Shared meals/tea	6	0
Spontaneous greetings	9	4

Discussion:

The observational data reinforce the survey findings: It is clear that Muharraq's architecture facilitates social life, while Manama's built environment discourages it. This supports Gehl's (2011) emphasis on the importance of human-scale design.

Analysis of Interviews

Thematic Coding

- Interviews were coded for recurring themes:
- Community Bonds: "We look after each other" (Muharraq elder).
- Role of Architecture: "Courtyards are for everyone, not just one family."
- Isolation in Modern Areas: "In the tower, I don't even know my neighbor's name."
- Desire for Change: "If we had more parks or shared spaces, maybe things would be different."

Patterns and Contrasts

- Muharraq: Residents value shared spaces, see architecture as reinforcing social and cultural ties, and describe a sense of belonging.
- Manama: Residents express feelings of isolation, nostalgia for traditional environments, and a wish for more communal facilities.

Table 6: No of Times Key Interview Themes Mentioned

Theme	Muharraq	Manama
Community Support	9	2
Cultural Identity	7	3
Social Isolation	1	8
Need for Shared Spaces	2	7

Discussion:

The interviews deepen the quantitative findings, providing personal accounts that illustrate how architecture shapes daily life. The longing for more community-oriented design in Manama aligns with the recommendations of Alawadhi (2017) and Al-Kodmany (2018) for integrating traditional principles into modern urbanism.

Visual Data and Mapping

Maps and Plans

- Muharraq: Maps show a dense, organic street network with interconnected courtyards and pedestrian-friendly alleys.
- Manama: Plans reveal a grid-based, car-oriented layout with isolated towers and limited public space.

Photographic Evidence

- Muharraq: Photos depict active courtyards, communal gatherings, and traditional architectural details (wind towers, mashrabiya).
- Manama: Images show empty plazas, wide roads, and gated developments with little pedestrian activity.
- Interpretation:
- Visual data corroborate the survey and observational findings, making the spatial contrast between the two areas immediately apparent.

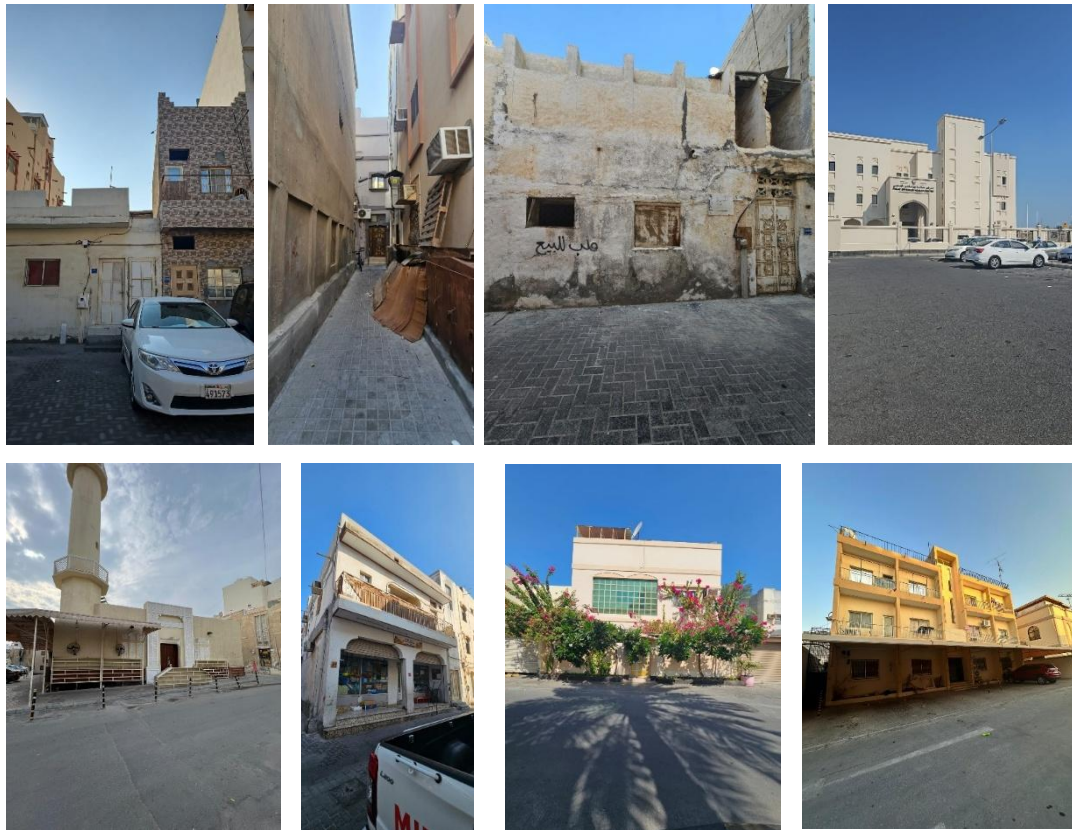


Fig. 01: Images of Traditional Buildings in Muharraq

Source: Author

Synthesis and Patterns: Emergent Patterns

Traditional architecture (Muharraq):

- High frequency of social interaction -Strong community bonds and cultural identity
- Spaces designed for communal use

Contemporary architecture (Manama):

- Low frequency of interaction-Feelings of isolation and weak identity - Spaces designed for privacy and efficiency, not community

Link to Literature

These patterns align with the theoretical framework as follows:

- Rapoport (1969) and Hillier & Hanson (1984) emphasize the cultural and social logic of space.
- Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1980) highlight the reciprocal relationship between space and society.
- Gehl (2011) and Oliver (1987) stress the importance of design in sustaining social life.

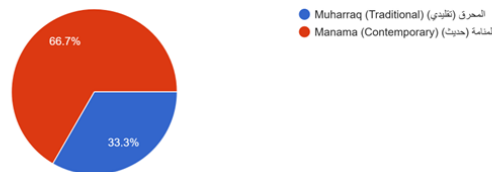
Conclusions from the Analysis of Observations, Interviews, and Visual Documentation

The analysis confirms that architectural design in Bahrain has a profound impact on social interaction and cultural identity. Traditional environments like Muharraq foster vibrant, cohesive communities, while modern developments in Manama often lead to social fragmentation. Residents in both areas recognize the importance of architecture in shaping their lives, and there is a clear desire for urban planning that balances modernization with the preservation of social and cultural values.

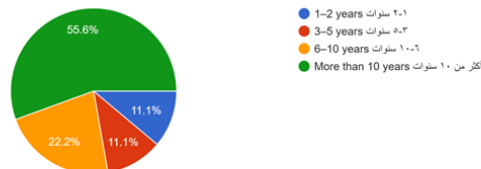
Analysis of Survey Questions & People's Responses

Section 1: Background Information

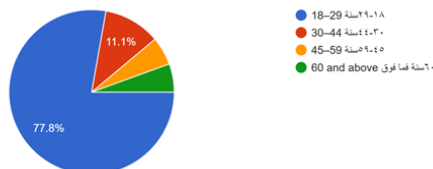
1. Which neighborhood do you live in? في أي حي تسكن؟
18 responses



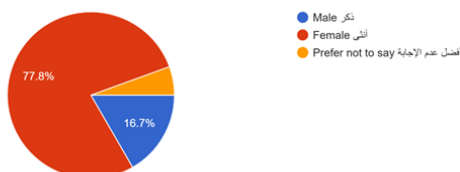
2. How long have you lived in your current neighborhood? منذ متى وأنت تعيش في هذا الحي؟
18 responses



3. What is your age group? ما هي فئةك العمرية؟
18 responses



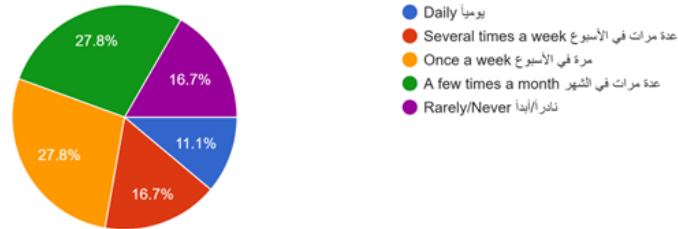
4. Gender: الجنس:
18 responses



Section 2: Social Interactions

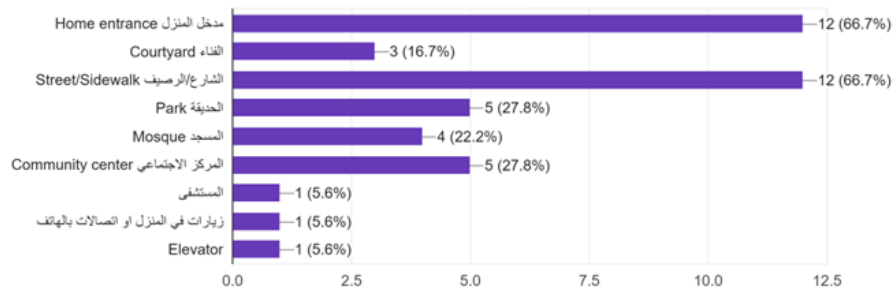
5. How often do you interact with your neighbors? كم مرة تتفاعل مع جيرانك؟

18 responses



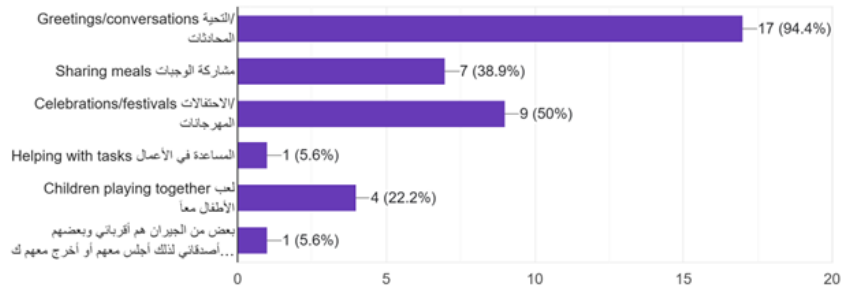
6. Where do your interactions with neighbors usually take place? (Select all that apply) أين تحدث تفاعلاتك مع الجيران عادة؟ (اختر كل ما ينطبق)

18 responses



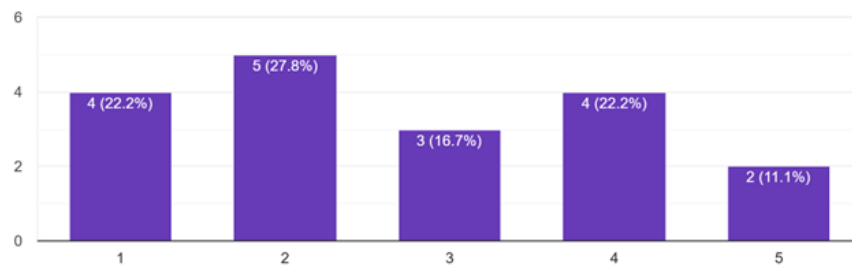
7. What types of activities do you usually share with your neighbors? (Select all that apply) ما هي الأنشطة التي تشاركها عادة مع جيرانك؟ (اختر كل ما ينطبق)

18 responses



8. How would you rate the quality of your interactions with neighbors? NOTE 5 is very high and 1 very low علما ان 5 تعني عالية و 1 منخفضة جدا كيف تقيم جودة تفاعلاتك مع الجيران؟

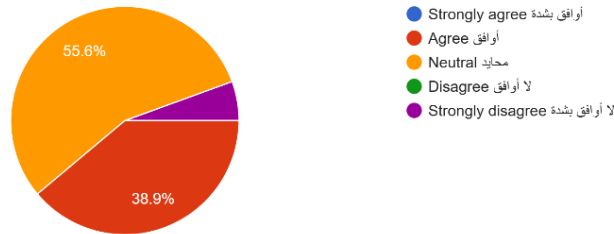
18 responses



Section 3: Neighbourhood Design and Community

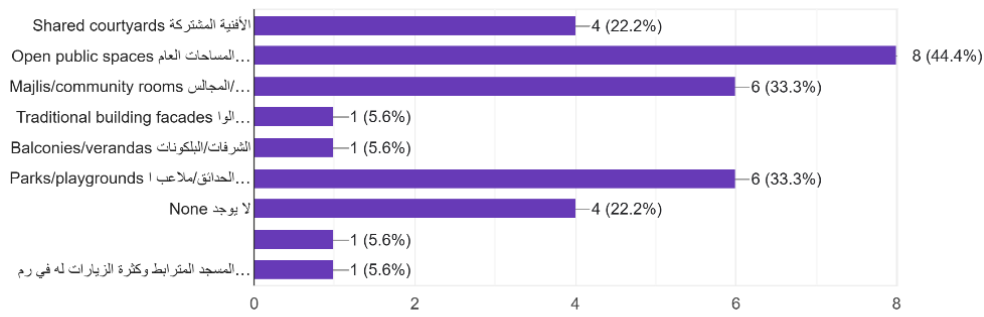
9. Do you feel your neighborhood encourages social interaction? هل تشعر أن حيّك يشجع على التفاعل الاجتماعي؟

18 responses



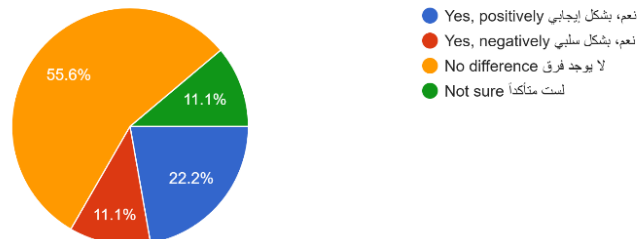
10. Which architectural features in your neighborhood help you connect with others? (Select all that apply) ما هي العناصر المعمارية في حيّك التي تساعدك على التواصل مع الآخرين؟ (اختر كل ما ينطبق)

18 responses



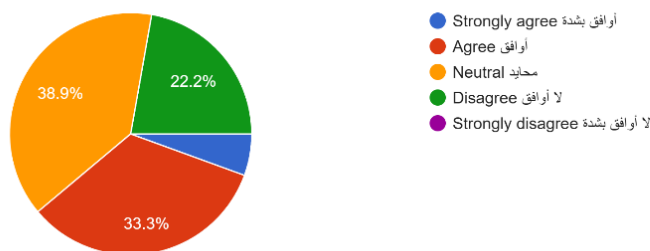
11. Does the design of your home/building affect how you interact with others? هل يؤثر تصميم منزلك/مبنايك على تفاعلك مع الآخرين؟

18 responses



12. Do you feel a sense of community in your neighborhood? هل تشعر بروح المجتمع في حيّك؟

18 responses

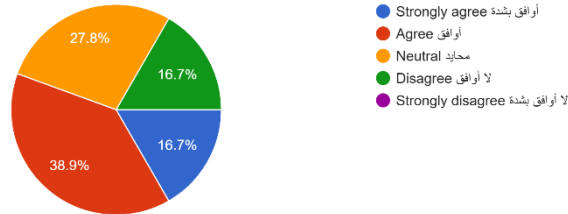


Section 4: Cultural Identity

13. Do you think your neighborhood reflects Bahraini cultural identity? هل تعتقد أن حيّك يعكس الهوية الثقافية البحرينية؟

البحرينية؟

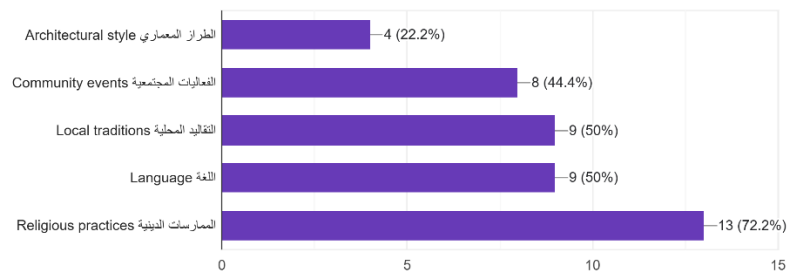
18 responses



14. Which elements in your neighborhood best represent Bahraini culture? (Select all that apply) ما هي العناصر التي تمثل الثقافة البحرينية في حيّك؟ (اختر كل ما ينطبق)

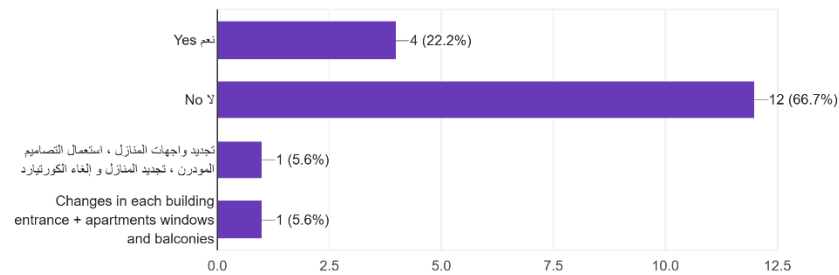
هي العناصر التي تمثل الثقافة البحرينية في حيّك؟ (اختر كل ما ينطبق)

18 responses



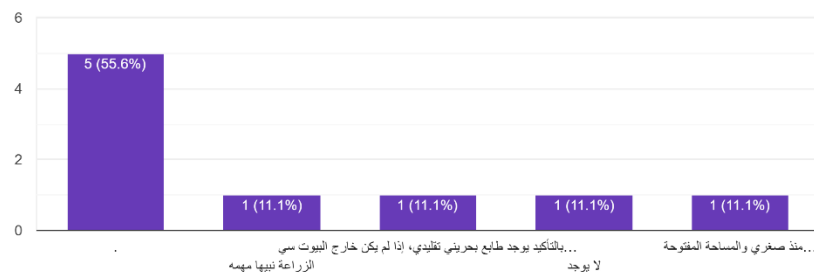
15. Have you noticed any changes in your neighborhood's architecture or community life over time? هل لاحظت أي تغييرات في عمارة حيّك أو الحياة المجتمعية مع مرور الوقت؟

18 responses



16. Please share any additional thoughts on how your neighborhood's architecture affects your social life or cultural identity: يرجى مشاركة أي أفكار إضافية حول كيف يؤثر تصميم حيّك على حياتك الاجتماعية أو هويتك الثقافية:

9 responses



Conclusions

This research set out to examine how traditional and contemporary architectural environments in Bahrain influence social interactions and cultural identity, focusing on the contrasting neighborhoods of Muharraq and Manama. The conclusions presented here are drawn directly from the data collected through structured surveys, systematic observations, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation.

The evidence demonstrates a clear and consistent pattern: traditional architecture in Muharraq strongly supports frequent and meaningful social interactions, while contemporary developments in Manama are associated with reduced social engagement and a weaker sense of community. In Muharraq, the vast majority of survey respondents reported daily or weekly interactions with neighbors, most often occurring in communal courtyards, shaded alleys, or at local community centers. Observations confirmed high levels of public space usage, with regular group gatherings, children playing outdoors, and multi-generational socializing. Interviewees described a strong sense of belonging and shared responsibility for communal spaces, attributing these bonds to the design of their built environment. Visual data further illustrated the role of interconnected alleys, central courtyards, and human-scale architecture in facilitating spontaneous and planned social encounters.

In contrast, the findings from Manama reveal a more fragmented social landscape. Survey data indicate that only a minority of residents interact with neighbors on a regular basis, with many reporting rare or no interaction at all. The primary sites of interaction were building lobbies, parking lots, or commercial venues, rather than dedicated communal spaces. Observational data showed limited use of public areas, with most residents moving quickly through shared spaces or spending time indoors. Interviews highlighted feelings of isolation and anonymity, especially among younger and newer residents, who expressed difficulty in forming connections within high-rise, gated developments. Many participants in Manama expressed a desire for more community-oriented spaces, such as parks or shared gardens, to foster social life.

A key conclusion is that architectural features play a decisive role in shaping the social fabric of neighborhoods. In Muharraq, design elements such as courtyards, wind towers, and walkable alleys not only encourage interaction but also reinforce cultural identity. Residents overwhelmingly perceive their environment as reflective of Bahraini heritage, with architecture serving as a daily reminder of shared values and traditions. In Manama, however, the dominance of high-rise towers and car-oriented layouts was frequently cited as a barrier to both social engagement and cultural expression. The lack of inviting communal spaces and the prioritization of privacy and efficiency over community have contributed to a diminished sense of belonging.

The data also reveal a widespread recognition among residents of both areas of the importance of architecture in shaping their social experiences. While Muharraq residents value and maintain their traditional environment, many in Manama express nostalgia for older ways of life and advocate for the integration of communal design features into modern developments.

In summary, the research concludes that traditional architectural environments in Bahrain are highly effective in fostering social cohesion and cultural continuity, while contemporary urban forms, as currently implemented in Manama, tend to hinder these outcomes. These findings suggest that future urban planning in Bahrain should prioritize the integration of traditional architectural principles—such as shared spaces and human-scale design—into new developments to sustain vibrant community life and cultural identity.

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Ethical Practice: This research followed accepted ethical practices. It did not involve any personal data, nor did it coerce any participants to take part in this research under pressure. No person has been identified.

Availability of Data: Data presented in this research is available for scrutiny by any legitimate organization.

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