

The Phenomenon of Apartments in the Kuwaiti House

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ABSTRACT

A house in Kuwait usually refers to a building within a plot of land that may accommodate one or two families. However, at the turn of the 21st century this composition gradually shifted to see many people lease one or more apartments in their houses. As a result, many residential neighbourhoods that were originally designed as low-density areas have become overcrowded apartment buildings. This study examines this phenomenon of recent societal trends towards adding ‘apartments’ in the Kuwaiti house by employing in depth interviews. These discussions become a platform to understand this intriguing socio-economic construct.

The findings reveal that high real-estate prices and Kuwait’s current housing crisis have significantly contributed to the reshaping of the Kuwaiti house form and altered some of its functions. People’s insecurity for the future has forced them to add apartments in their houses to pay off their loans in the short term and provide accommodation for their children in the long term. In addition, houses have become an investment opportunity for businessmen to turn them into commercial enterprises. This has resulted in many houses in model residential areas being transformed to medium density apartment complexes, which causes enormous strain on public utilities and infrastructure, such as streets, parking, electricity, and water. Consequently, this situation highlights the extent of poor governmental regulations and shows how the nation’s larger political climate has directly affected people in relation to their domestic built environments.

Keywords: Kuwait; Houses; Apartments; Globalization; Interviews.

INTRODUCTION

The 1950s oil boom has greatly transformed Kuwait’s built environment from a small organic sheikdom to a planned regional metropolis. The Kuwaiti house, once sustainable made of mud brick with central courtyards, has been converted into modern concrete villas overlooking the street. Consequent, modernization and development initiatives continue to shape, reshape, and brand Kuwait’s architecture. Yet despite this complete rupture with the past prior studies have discussed the resilience of the Kuwaiti house by adapting and conforming to various, socio-cultural, economic, political, and technological changes over time. This has been highlighted by AlJassar’s (2009) study that showed how the diwaniya (men’s social gathering space) survived, yet the courtyard disappeared (AlJassar, 2009). Moreover, AlHaroun’s (2015) cognitive maps study provided a different perspective on the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. The study identified various elements that managed to continue in Kuwait City and house built environment. Knowledge gained was understanding how people dealt with and adapted to the collision between traditional concepts and modernity, for example, how the courtyard has been replaced by the family living room (AlHaroun, 2014). The present study intends to follow on this line of inquiry by exploring how ‘apartments’ became an important contemporary requirement in Kuwait’s domestic built environment.

When one thinks of an ‘apartment’ they usually visualize a compacted residential unit within a usually larger high-rise apartment building. Its amenities are two to three bedrooms, a kitchen, a few bathrooms, and a living room. In Kuwait an ‘apartment’ takes a different form and has additional functions. Instead of being in residential towers they have encroached into suburban residential neighbourhoods. The law allows for one apartment to be placed in the second floor of houses to accommodate for the homeowners’ families. This concept may be traced back to Kuwait’s past when people’s children would live with them after getting married. Today instead of sharing a room in a traditional courtyard house they occupy an apartment in a modern villa. However, recently this trend has morphed, and people are

renting their apartments to strangers. These houses are open to the public and are no longer private. Many houses are designed completely as apartment complexes.

This research aims at investigating this phenomenon and to understand why homeowners add apartments in their houses. To what extent has various socio-cultural, economic, and political realities in Kuwait contributed to the birth of the ‘apartment unit’ in the Kuwaiti household? And how has this influenced house form and function? By identifying these factors, the study intends to illuminate understandings of larger issues at play within the context of Kuwait and its modernity. In-depth interviews have been used as the study method to question homeowners about the ‘apartment’ in Kuwait’s houses. This group is very much involved in the design and building of houses and their knowledge is useful in understanding this fascinating socio-economic construct.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical underpinnings of this research emerge from the larger discussion of the tradition vs. modernity paradigm and more specifically the effects of globalization on people and their domestic built environment. Therefore, the literature covered will discuss the impact of globalization and interdisciplinary social, cultural, and economic understandings as it pertains to housing. Kuwait’s oil wealth enabled an unprecedented transformation of its built environment and within a decade went from a small mud brick town to a regional modern metropolis. An increasingly globalized economic framework accelerated Kuwait’s leap to modernity to become one of the wealthiest nations in the world. As a result, real estate prices rapidly increased, which made Kuwait City one of the most expensive places to buy a plot of land. In turn this dynamic along with government mismanagement of its housing welfare system created Kuwait’s housing crisis. People’s insecurity to provide housing for their children after marriage made them look for alternative ways of living. As a result, the apartment house is a direct by-product of this socio-economic and political climate. Therefore, the literature presents a link between how globalization shaped Kuwait’s contemporary built environment in all its facets including the phenomenon of the apartment in the Kuwaiti house.

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is not a new concept, in fact people have been buying from and selling to each other in lands of great distances throughout history. The ‘silk road’ bridged Europe to the Arab world and from there to Central Asia and China. However, with the advent of the industrial revolution and new technologies the speed of travel made it possible to accelerate movement of people and goods. Better communication allowed for increased trade, commerce, and travel between nations. As a result many local communities have been overwhelmed with the social, economic, and political changes that transformed their way of life.

Globalization is a term used in many ways; however they all revolve around the idea of “progressive integration of economies and societies” (Gunter and Hoeven, 2004:1) around the world. Globalization has hyper developed local communities by imposing “conformity and homogeneity and that their familiar, personal neighbourhood coffeehouses and indigenous religious communities will be replaced by impersonal global identities” (ECSSR, 2008:19). The gap between the rich and poor has grown, “allowing two-thirds of the world’s wealth to go to only one-third of the world’s population while one-third of the world’s wealth is going to two-thirds of the world’s population” (Mahgoub, 2004:507). For some, “the impact of globalization on the culture of the ‘developing’ ‘post-colonial’ countries is pervasive and endemic” (Dandekar, 1998:6). In the Arab world some view globalization as “another term for capitalism and imperialism” and that “all Arabs and Muslims need to consider it an imminent danger that is endangering the political, social, cultural and economic stability” (Za’za’, 2002:1).

Furthermore, while it may be regarded as a force for economic prosperity, it has and continues to impact the natural environment. A recent U.N fifth assessment report about the science of climate change concluded that climate change is real and human activities are the main cause (U.N, 2018). They continue to assert that unless action is taken by the global community an increase in global warming will have severe consequence such as shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic flooding (Ibid, 2018). Therefore, transition towards sustainable development has now more than ever become of great importance in an increasingly globalizing world.

Many highlighted the notion of working with globalization amid its many challenges. As Salter asserts, “a coexistence of diverse philosophies is not only possible but necessary” (Satler, 2000:22). Similarly, ElSheshtawy contends that cities that witnessed rapid growth within the last decades are moving towards a model that attempts to balance forces of modernization and change while trying to preserve traditional elements within society (ElSheshtawy, 2000). Furthermore, Liangyong states “that globalization and regionalization are like two sides of a coin and that they are inseparable” (Liangyong, 2000:12). There seems to be a consensus that globalization is an inevitable reality and one needs to recognize its far-reaching effects all over the world, “sometimes even painful, changes in their accustomed ways of doing things. But if the challenges are great, so also are the opportunities” (Madison, 1998:20).

INTERDISCIPLINARY UNDERSTANDINGS IN HOUSING

Contemporary understandings in housing goes beyond the need for shelter; in fact it is a form of self-expression. Rapoport understood the house form and culture as primarily “a socio-cultural determinism of architectural form” (Rapoport, 1969: 10). In a socio-cultural perspective the house is an expression or symbol of the self (Copper, 1974) and is an important spatial factor in defining people’s perceptions (Marcus, 1997). Fathy saw the house and the courtyard identity as intrinsic for an Arab (Fathy, 1986). People’s experiences, culture, and personality all come together to influence house form and spatial arrangements. People’s experiences and social class create a ‘habitus, which has a direct impact on each individual’s perceptions (Bourdieu, 1987). Moreover, Freeman asserts where and how people were raised always affect future choices and their acceptance of certain residences (Freeman, 1998).

As societies develop and interact globally, understandings of the ‘house’ started to shift. A house today may not be like a house fifty years ago. Social relationships have also been affected by globalization as Beck claims, “these changes have also generated new forms of individualisation. They affect patterns of interaction dependent upon housing and living arrangements.... Thus traditional forms of community beyond the family are beginning to disappear.” (Beck, 1992:97). Beck argues that the solution to the “negative consequences of modernity is not the rejection of modernity itself, but its radicalization” (Ibid, 1992). As a result, necessary are critical reflections on “modern impacts and their ecological, urban, and social conditions of existence, and hence potentially to seek approaches to change them” (Ibid, 1992).

The effects of globalization do not stop at the natural environment but provide many challenges for sustainable development more broadly. According to Abel (2000) local sustainable design solutions become important in promoting sustainable development around the world. There is a “loss of local control over the economic and cultural forces that presently affect all aspects of the environment” (Abel, 2000,198). Therefore, to improve the quality of architecture in relation to the environment, what is needed is more local ability to influence decisions that impact their environment (Ibid,198). Perhaps modernization’s new forms of communal housing and apartment living may provide potential solutions. Initially apartments may have provided accommodation amid housing constraints but is now widely seen as a move towards sustainable development and a better quality of life (McDonald et al., 2009; Mitkus and Sostak, 2009). Some encourage retrofitting strategies in apartment houses to improve living standards and cut energy costs (Raslanas, 2011). Other studies looked at consumer satisfaction of apartment living to improve companies. Lee Yim et al. examined residential satisfaction and the effect in corporation performance based on the influence on consumers’ behavior (Lee Yim et al., 2011). Either way research on apartment living is increasing as more and more people live in apartments around the world.

Furthermore, in an economic viewpoint fluctuations in real-estate markets due to 2008’s financial crisis have had a significant impact on housing trends. It is believed that the crisis originated from the subprime mortgage market in the United States and rapidly spread to the banking and other sectors of the international economy (Roubini, Rogoff and Behravesh, 2009). This has led many to reexamine housing policy. Some contend that the housing crisis in the U.S may have altered attitudes toward home buying in favour for rental housing, which in turn has social impacts associated with homeownership (Rohe and Lindblad, 2013). Moreover, the financial crisis also impacted Kuwait’s banking sector. This situation directly impeded the growth of the housing market, which “is constrained by a supply-demand imbalance. The demand for housing is high – both from Kuwaiti population and from expatriates for rented accommodation. However, supply has not kept up...” (Freeman and Sudarsanan, 2012: 47). The study indicates that the demand on housing loans will continue to increase to provide more apartment units. It also sheds light on the extent

of how the banking sector and the state's financial policy is involved in shaping existing socio-economic dynamics as it relates to housing (Ibid, 2012).

Finally, in a social equity perspective, the right for affordable housing has been discussed by many researchers recently especially with the increase of issues in urban development. The sense of insecurity for future housing needs has been a reoccurring theme in many studies conducted in the Gulf's built environment. AlShalfan's (2013) study examines how land-use policies and social housing laws have led to the failure of the urbanization process Kuwait City and calls for a reevaluation of the current practice for a more just system (AlShalfan, 2013). AlHaroun's (2015) study identified many obstacles towards sustainable development in Kuwait's houses highlighted from people's desire to use more space to accommodate for their children after marriage (AlHaroun, 2015). In addition, a recent study on housing type preferences among Kuwaitis showed the lack of acceptance of alternative living spaces away from the town house and stressed the need to come up with innovative solutions to Kuwait's housing crisis (AlZamil and AlShaheen, 2016). Moreover, Salama et al. researched new housing typologies in emerging Gulf cities of Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Manama as they relate to various lifestyles and dynamics including infrastructural investments, urban growth rates, and new development policies. They conclude that supply and speculation-driven factors are more dominant than lifestyles of a settled and consolidated multicultural society. Furthermore, local populations face challenges to maintain the high housing standard rooted from first urbanization period and welfare state mechanisms. Rising construction costs force young families to live with their parents (Salama et al., 2017).

The literature discussed socio-cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions related to housing within an increasingly globalized world. And each topic provided multiple viewpoints of the larger structural issues associated with development. It is the intention of this paper to further understandings into the extent of how globalization has impacted people's relationship to their domestic built environment.

THE KUWAITI HOUSE

After the oil boom and consequent modernization people's lives changed forever. Shiber described this period like a "dramatic urban revolution that swept over Kuwait as a hurricane, leaving one dizzied and dazzled in its wake. ... Kuwait literally exploded from a small village to a fast-urbanizing regional metropolis in just over 12 years" (Shiber, 1964:6). Shiber continued to write as he witnesses the turn of events, "perhaps nowhere in the world do so many contrasting urban types and relationships stand in such close proximity to each other" (Ibid, 434).

In a 1952 article in *The National Geographic Magazine* called *Boom Time in Kuwait*, Paul Case recalled a fascinating experience visiting Kuwait on the eve of its modernity. He said, "I have been watching a revolution in progress. It is a peaceful revolution... In all my years as a resident of the Near East I have never witnessed a greater transformation" (Case, 1952:783). Moreover, Michael Bonine described the oil boom as "One of the most spectacular transformations in the history of urban development" (Bonine, 1981:245). Abu Hakima remarked, "The nation witnesses a spectacular state of development and change, both human and material" (Abu Hakima, 1983:159). Old Kuwait City was gone, leaving new generations only traces of their architectural heritage. The phenomenon had a great impact beyond Kuwait and its people. Quickly, people started to know of Kuwait and come for work all providing the needed manpower to build the new City. Eventually, the population of foreigners surpassed that of Kuwaitis. Their different backgrounds and cultures also played a role in shaping the new built environment. Figure (1) below shows the rapid development of urban growth and residential neighbourhoods from pre-oil 1951 until 2012.

The Kuwaiti house has been transformed from the traditional mud brick courtyard house, which was private and inward to the modern villa that had an extroverted form. This changed the way people lived in Kuwait and has created many issues for Kuwaitis who moved from the old town to the new suburbs. The first was that of privacy; Kuwaitis were used to a more private domain where the courtyard shielded them from the street. Suddenly, they found themselves in houses with a different spatial structure and privacy/public hierarchy. In reaction to this, some houses were designed with screens that covered larger glass windows to not only protect against the sun but also provide more privacy. Another issue was the emergence of the balcony, which due to Kuwait's hot and dry weather had no functional role whatsoever. After years of collecting dust many have been closed and were extended as additions to the house.

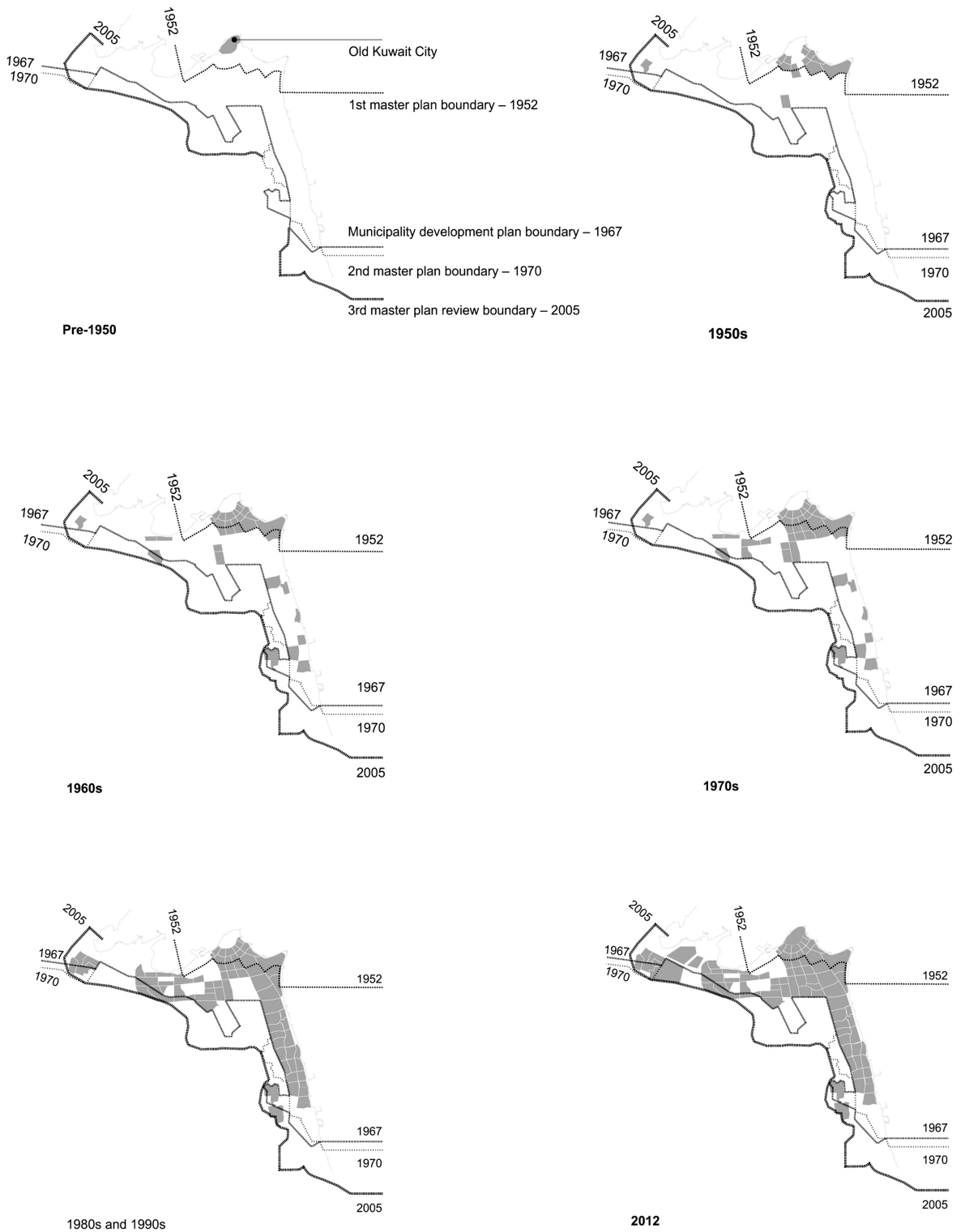


Fig. 1. Residential urban growth in Kuwait over time from 1950-2012. Source: Kuwait Municipality and PAHW.

In contrast with the traditional courtyard house, today, houses in Kuwait are usually two or three storeys and have come to accommodate an array of requirements deemed necessary by the Kuwaitis. These include large guest reception halls, *Diwaniya* (men's reception), which usually are spaces that face the street, family living rooms, master bedrooms, garden spaces, swimming pools, and an extensive services zone to provide staff quarters, kitchens, garages, and storage space. The houses are environmentally unsustainable, using exported building materials, and rely heavily on electricity and water from the state's grid. Culturally, they do not represent Kuwait's traditional vernacular in any way. With this new reality people's perceptions of their houses changed. They looked for other cultures for inspiration to build their houses, and as a result, today Kuwait's domestic built environment reflects styles from around the world. This resulted in what AlBahar describes as a "plethora of eclectic" a "carnival show, an architectural history showroom of copied styles and motifs" (AlBahar, 1990:133).

The demolition of Kuwait's vernacular has created a vacuum, which made it possible today for Kuwaitis to import different architectural styles from around the world. As one drives through the suburbs of new Kuwait City, the houses showcase Islamic, Modern, Neo- Classical, Mediterranean, and even Japanese styles. Rapoport may explain one reason for the generation of this form of built environment (Rapoport, 1982). After the oil boom people wanted to express their socio-economic status in the modern villa; images of different facades around the world were a way to visually (non-verbally) communicate this newfound wealth. As a result, people's houses did not necessarily reflect how they wanted to live; instead they conveyed messages in how they would like to be perceived in the world.

THE PHENOMENON OF APARTMENTS IN THE KUWAITI HOUSE

Until recently apartments in Kuwait usually meant residential units in apartment complexes in high-density areas and a few apartments within houses. The concept of legalizing apartments inside houses have been introduced by the baladia (municipality) in the 1990s. The baladia regulations allow homeowners to build 210% of the plot of land. Within that space it is permitted to have (1) or (2) apartments in the second floor of the house to accommodate for the owner's children (Baladia Building Regulations, 2016). However, people are building an extra floor of apartments to increase family income, but also being mindful of the future when they may serve to accommodate their children after marriage. This desire to secure a place for their children is in part parents' reaction to the government's inability to provide housing welfare (Figure 2) required by law for every Kuwaiti citizen.

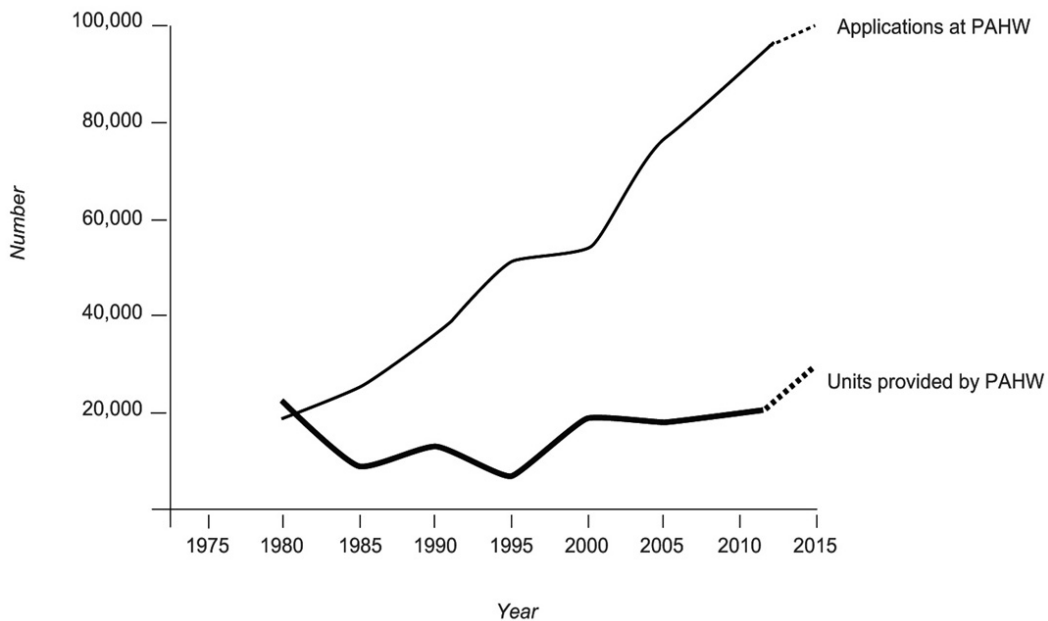


Fig. 2. Demand and Supply for Kuwait's housing welfare. Source: Public Authority for Housing Welfare, 2014 via AlShalfan, 2013.

There are around one hundred thousand citizens waiting for the government to provide them housing welfare (AlWatan, 2018). This means there are at least one hundred thousand people that either live with their parents or rent an apartment. As a result, the demand for apartments has increased and in turn more units are being built in houses. In 2013, in a study conducted by Kuwait's National Assembly aiming to rank issues that concern the public, the housing crisis was identified as the most important issue that people wanted resolved (KNA, 2013).

Although initially commended for its progressive modernization campaign from the 1960s to 1980s, people have gradually recognized the side effects generated from the government's early policies creating an environment, which encourages unsustainable wealth-distribution methods. AlShalfan's study highlighted one such example - housing welfare distribution and questioned their role in promoting justice in an "environment of increasing housing application backlog, endless sprawl and continually rising housing property values" (AlShalfan, 2013:1). She explains that the aspirations of citizens are a product of years of "state-induced rights" creating false desires, which rely on limited resources not sustainable for future generations. Instead she argues that government policy should focus on immediate solutions to empower individuals to meet their needs and instill progressive desires (Ibid, 2013).

Many private organizations have advocated for solutions to the housing crisis. One notable group of young Kuwaitis who developed *Thukhur* or National Project for Sustainable Development aims to encourage projects with a proactive approach to identifying and initiating ideas that stimulate the country's growth and development. They have recently conducted a nationwide survey to find priorities for the housing crisis in Kuwait. Their findings have revealed that, from the state's various housing welfare options, 69% of people waiting for housing welfare desired a plot of land to build their house, 17% desired Government housing, 9% an increase for government housing loans, and 5% only wanted apartments (NPSD, 2014:2). From people who want a plot of land to build their future house, 38% indicated the importance of the location of the residential area while 25% identified the land spatial dimensions as vital (Ibid, 23). Finally, the study found that 84% of the people surveyed indicated that limiting high real estate prices as a possible solution to the current housing crisis (Ibid, 27).

Another group started a public campaign calling itself *Nuter Bait* or Waiting for a House has encouraged public rallies and called on the government to resolve the crisis. Today, public pressure on the National Assembly and the government has seen increased efforts to build new neighbourhood units and housing cities. One such proposal is to move towards vertical housing where people could live in apartments instead of waiting for a house. In fact the Public Authority for Housing Welfare is currently building apartment buildings in several locations around the far-reaching suburbs of Kuwait City. Some estimates show that if not solved the current housing crisis will see 174,000 applications within 6 years and waiting times exceeding 15 years (AlQabas, 2014). However, past government experiments such as *AlSawaber* Complex (modern apartment building) proved unsuccessful, and therefore, similar proposals if not studied and carefully planned may also end in failure.

Kuwaitis do not usually live in high-density apartment complexes; instead they prefer to live in suburban residential neighbourhoods. So why are Kuwaitis not willing to live in high-rise apartments? The reasoning behind this is not clear. However, it may suggest a desire to live closer to their families in suburban neighbourhoods. Alternatively, Kuwait's new City is very segregated where Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis do not usually live in the same area. This was one of the consequences of the early master plan. This study intends to further understand this implication in housing trends and how it relates to apartments in Kuwait's houses.

Some academics argue that society does not accept communal living and justify this claim by culture of privacy that originated from Kuwait's traditional courtyard house (Mahgoub, 2002). AlShalfan on the other hand points out that in fact Kuwait's past urban fabric is "one where community was closer, the street was the public gathering space and the walls of the houses were shared between neighbours" (AlShalfan, 2013:24). In fact many social practices in old Kuwait respected privacy yet demonstrated many forms of community living. Therefore, despite current discussions that give preference for privacy, the practice in reality proves otherwise (Ibid, 2013).

Kuwait's current domestic built environments have clearly been shaped by the various economic, socio-cultural, and political forces, resulting in a unique social dynamic that suggests people's demand for more space goes beyond

their desires for luxury living and conforming to societal expectations, but, paradoxically, is an attempt to meet a basic human need, which is to secure present and future housing for their family (AlHaroun, 2015). However, recent trends go beyond what is allowed by law in having apartments in the first floor or in some cases the entire house converted into a commercial apartment building. Figure (3) shows the relationship between spatial requirements, house form, and Kuwait's changing socio-cultural, economic, and political realities. The representation illustrates people's desire for more spatial requirements over time regardless of their size of land.

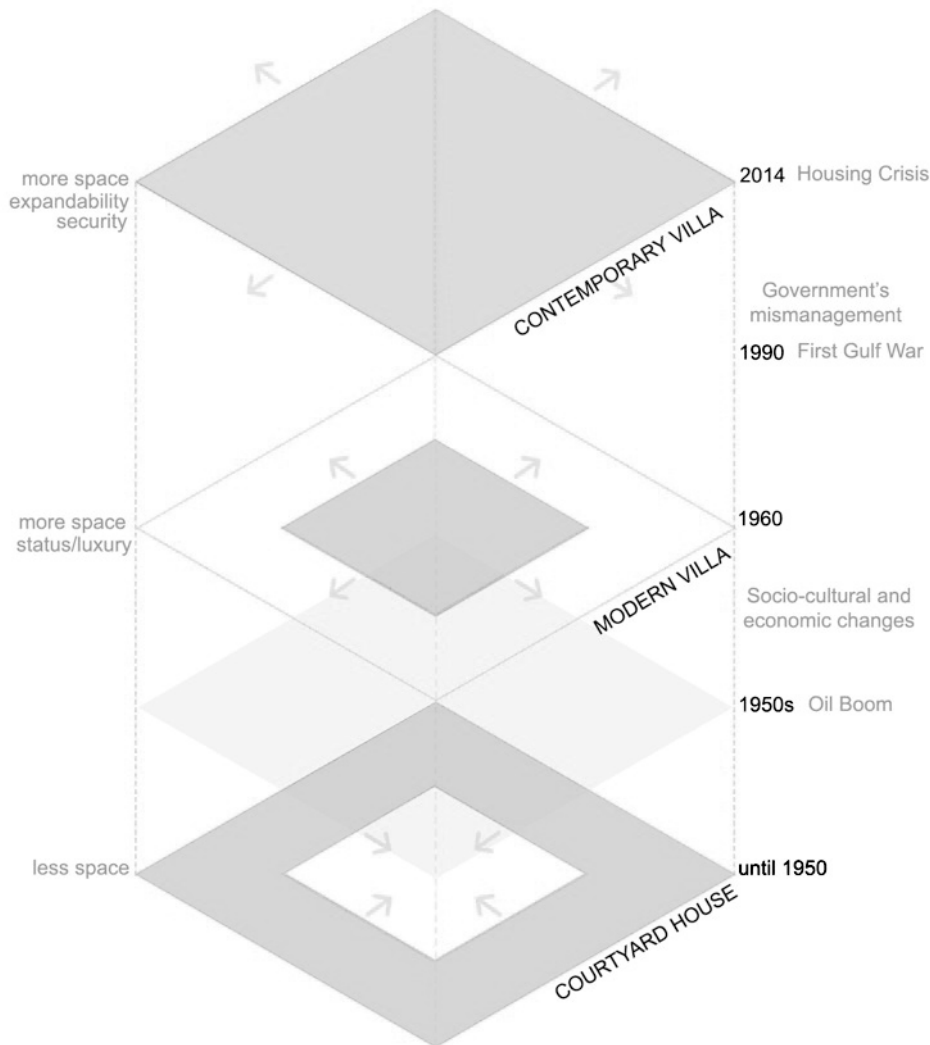


Fig. 3. The evolution of the Kuwaiti house with regards to spatial form. Source: The Author, 2015.

The houses that do have apartments are usually block shaped in order to use all the allowable space by law. Figure (4) below depicts typical floor plans of this type of housing. The ground floor has two main entrances one for the homeowner and the other to the elevator that is used for the tenants. Although some houses also have apartments in the basement this design has limited ground parking, and therefore, basement parking becomes required for the success of the 'apartment house complex'. The first and second floors are identical where there are two apartments per floor. Each apartment has three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living room, kitchen, maid room, and laundry area. The maid room is a unique requirement for an apartment in Kuwait. After the oil boom and consequent higher standard of living most families in Kuwait can afford to have a maid and driver as staff members for the family. Due to spatial constraints

these rooms are usually small. Larger apartments may have more amenities such as a duplex with more bedrooms, small garden, balcony and swimming pool.

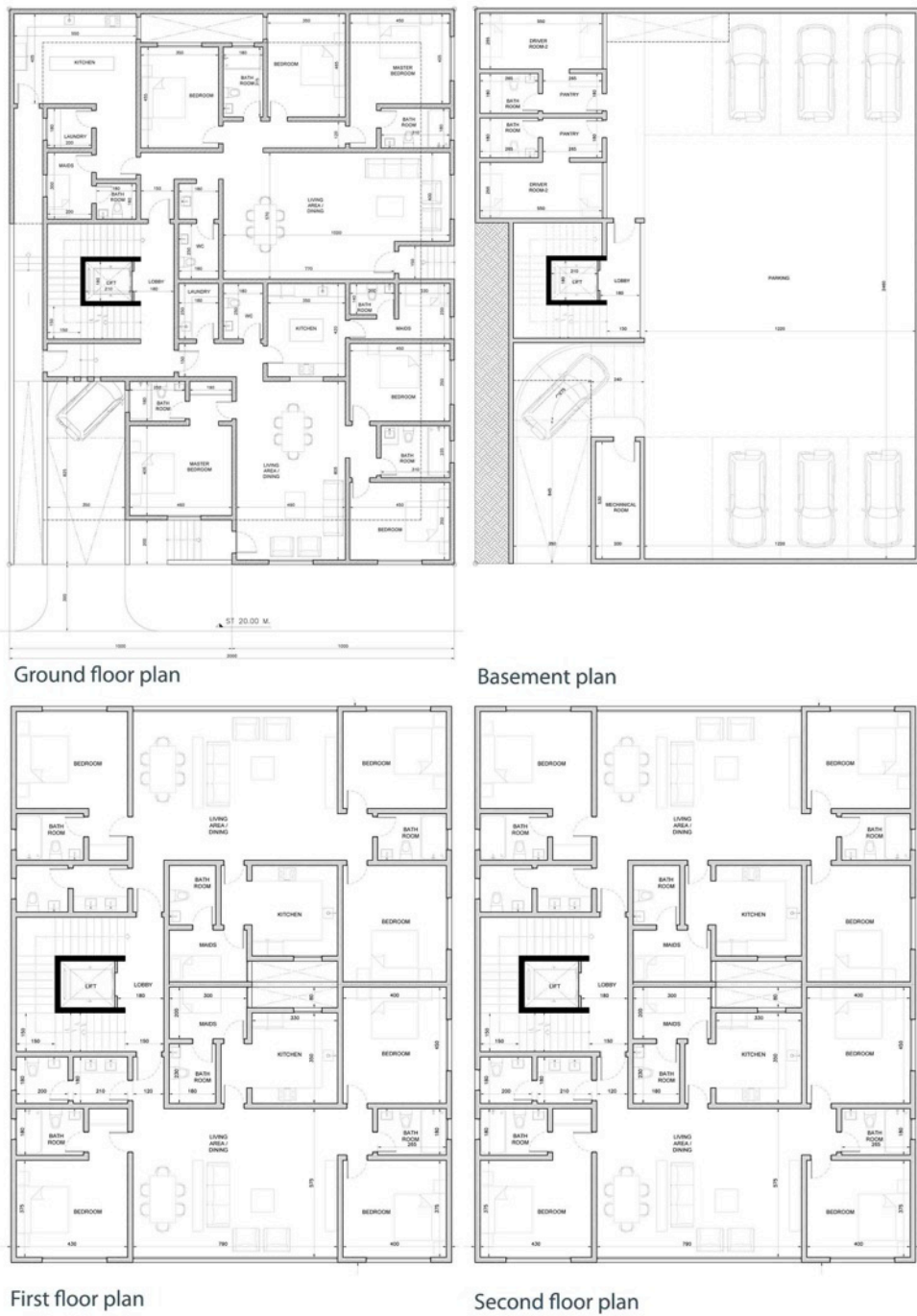


Fig. 4. Typical apartment house floor plans. Source: Design office in Kuwait, 2018.

The next few photographs present various houses that have apartments in Kuwait. Figure (5) shows a house that has a homeowner renting out an apartment. Usually, the tenants use the side door (the bottom left of the photograph), which takes them down an alley and to an elevator and then to the apartments, which are in the first or second floor.

Figures (6), (7), and (8) display how a neighbourhood has been completely transformed by newly built commercial apartment buildings. Some landowners have taken the idea of adding a few apartments further by using the space for a commercial enterprise. Although, this is meeting demand, these buildings are a burden for the community and over use existing utilities and infrastructure. In this case it is rare that the owner will live in one of the apartments. Finally, figure (9) clearly illustrates how new residential districts zoned for low-density housing are overwhelmed with commercial apartment buildings. AlSidiq has been envisioned for a model one family housing residential area; instead it has become overcrowded with new apartment buildings.



Fig. 5. This image is an example of a house in Kuwait that has apartments in AlKhalidyah residential area.
Source: The Author, 2018.



Fig. 6. This image shows commercial apartment buildings dominating in a low-density residential neighbourhood of AlQadsiya residential area. Notice the ‘for rent’ sign at the centre. Source: The Author, 2017.



Fig. 7. This image shows newly built commercial apartment buildings dominating in a low-density residential neighbourhood of AlKhaldiya area. Source: The Author, 2015.



Fig. 8. This image shows commercial apartment buildings in Bu Futaira residential area. Source: The Author, 2018.



Fig. 9. This image shows commercial apartment buildings being built in new residential areas of AlSidiq.
Source: The Author, 2015.

METHODOLOGY

To understand different facets of this socio-economic construct in-depth qualitative interviews have been chosen as the method for this research. The primary aim of the interviews is to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue (Liamputtong, 2009), in this case why have apartments emerged in the Kuwaiti house. In addition, the interviews were used to understand, and explain, the meanings, beliefs and cultures that influence the feelings, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals (Rabiee, 2004:655; Hennink, 2007:6).

INTERVIEW DESIGN

This study uses a semi-structured approach to facilitate the discussions with specific direction, yet also be flexible to allow for follow-up questions. The order of the questions followed an understanding of the research, a logic derived from the research questions and theoretical framework. The participants were allowed space to discuss issues of interest. When participants talk about something not covered in the guide, it is obviously important to them (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, the motive behind using a semi-structured qualitative approach directs the overall flow of the interview, yet allows room for flexibility. The questions were open-ended and focused on the Kuwaiti house and the phenomenon of the ‘apartment’ in the house. This was done in order not to lead the participants and reduce researcher bias. Why apartments specifically emerged, their advantages and disadvantages, typical apartment requirements, and to what extent have they influenced house design.

After asking for age, gender, and employment, the following questions were used for the study. Question 1: What kind of house unit do you live in? House, apt. in a house, apt. in apt. complex, other? Question 2: Historically did Kuwait houses have apartments or another type of community living within them? Question 3: Today what may be the reasons homeowners add apartments in their houses? Question 4: Who lives in these apartments? Question 5: Why do Kuwaitis prefer to live in apartment houses within low-density suburban areas rather than high-density tower buildings? Question 6: What are the advantages of the apartments in the house? Question 7: What are the disadvantages of the apartments in the house? Question 8: What are the typical user requirements of each apartment? Is it a one/two/three bedroom? Question 9: How many apartments are usually in a house? Is it one/two/three/ or the entire building has been converted into an apt. complex? Question 10: To what extent does the “apartment” influence the overall house design? From this initial guide many follow-up questions continued with divergent paths of inquiry.

PARTICIPANTS: HOMEOWNERS

For the Kuwaiti house, it is specifically the homeowners who play a key role in shaping current domestic architecture. In Kuwait, this group is usually involved in the house design and build process, and therefore, are appropriate participants to explore the research direction. This will provide insights into their preferences and indifferences and is crucial in understanding why they add apartments in their houses.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In the literature there is no rule for the number of interviews required for a qualitative study. It depends on the research topic and interviewees. However, there is a consensus among researchers that number of interviews conducted stops when the findings achieve a saturation point. The interviews continue until there are no new answers coming from the respondents. It depends on the number and nature of questions. Guest et al (2006) paper suggests saturation being achieved after 12 interviews in their study, but some meta-themes emerged after 6 interviews in a study that interviewed more than 60 participants (Guest et al, 2006). Consequently, this study conducted 12 interviews in order to gain enough data to drive the emerging themes.

The interviews were conducted in both Arabic and English to allow people to express their ideas in the language most comfortable with them. As a result, the transcriptions underwent translation by the researcher when required. The interview was transcribed almost word for word trying as much as possible to accurately represent what was said.

For this study the analysis of the group interviews did start during data collection by collecting rich descriptions from the interviews, observational notes, and transcriptions. From that point the researcher listened to the recordings and read the transcripts several times. Aware of the many analysis techniques, the overall interview analysis followed an open coding strategy. The coding served as a bridge providing categories to then qualitatively discuss the issues with direct participant quotes.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study started even before the data has been collected and continued during the interviews and even the analysis stages. Every piece of information gathered throughout every stage of the study provided rich insights and understandings. This section describes the interviewees, who they are, how the researcher approached them, and some observations. The researcher approached family members or friends of varying ages and genders. This was intended to see responses from the older and younger generations and also understand if women and men have different opinions about apartments in the house. It seems that most responses were in favour of adding apartments in the house as means to increase their income.

Table 1. Interviewee Information Table

#	Group/Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Employment	Housing Type
1	Homeowner 1 (H.1)	78	Male	Kuwaiti	Retired	House
2	Homeowner 2 (H.2)	30	Female	Kuwaiti	Financial Analyst	House
3	Homeowner 3 (H.3)	38	Male	Kuwaiti	Businessman	Apt. in House
4	Homeowner 4 (H.4)	60	Female	Kuwaiti	Retired	House
5	Homeowner 5 (H.5)	46	Male	Kuwaiti	Architect	House
6	Homeowner 6 (H.6)	50	Male	Kuwaiti	Assistant Professor	House
7	Homeowner 7 (H.7)	39	Male	Kuwaiti	Assistant Professor	Apt. in House
8	Homeowner 8 (H.8)	36	Male	Kuwaiti	Government Employee	House
9	Homeowner 9 (H.9)	43	Male	Kuwaiti	Government Employee	Apt. in House
10	Homeowner 10 (H.10)	65	Female	Kuwaiti	Retired	House
11	Homeowner 11 (H.11)	35	Male	Kuwaiti	Kuwait University	House
12	Homeowner 12 (H.12)	27	Male	Kuwaiti	Diplomat	House

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the interviews revealed participants' rich insights and understandings of the phenomenon of the apartment in the house within Kuwait's 'post oil' socio-cultural, economic, and political dynamic. Many themes have emerged and are discussed below.

BAYT ALHAMOULA OR FAMILY HOUSE

The Big House, known as *Bayt AlKabir*, was a significant place for the family. *AlHamoula* in Kuwait refers to the main family in which many sons and daughters although branch off and have their own families usually return to the source. It is a place where the entire family would gather in Eid, events, and other celebrations. Many families would have a monthly or even weekly gathering. In old Kuwait, the family would usually live in one single storey courtyard house and add a room for their newly wed son. It is customary for children to live with their parents after marriage.

Almost all the interviewees highlighted this understanding and its importance in Kuwaiti society. One explains it as perhaps the birth of the apartment concept, *"started when Kuwaitis used to build another floor with a room in the roof when suddenly his son or daughter got married... or an additional room will be added in the ground floor if the house had space. Sometimes if the courtyard was large enough a room would be added from that space"* (H.5). Moreover, one homeowner who lived in both old and new Kuwait City also highlighted this notion, *"before the family head would bring all his children to live under one roof. However, after changing and more complex lifestyles they started to build apartments in their houses for their children"* (H.1).

This idea has also been discussed by another homeowner where he identified the *Bayt AlHamoula* or Family House; he asserts that, *"Kuwaitis had houses with apartments only for their children, the Hamoula house"* (H.9). While another describes the importance of the family house, which derived, *"from our traditions, culture, and norms as Arabic families. The father or grandfather always prefers his children to live with them (when they grow up); they do the impossible to let no one leave the house to live as one family. The family lives together with no outsiders such as tenants or strangers. They are all one family brothers, sisters, and their children. If the entire family is living together of course it will have stability and a great coherence/togetherness/bond"* (H.8).

The idea of parents wanting their children with them may be explained from Islamic teachings, which encouraged respect and priority given to parents. Moreover, life in old Kuwait was tough and not everyone could afford a house and thus lived together; they needed each other to make a living and survive. However, despite the oil boom and consequent modernization this concept is still very important for the Kuwaiti family and has been morphed from providing a room in the traditional courtyard house to an apartment in a modern villa.

This finding is also consistent with prior research, which showed that cultural concepts and spatial arrangements in the Kuwaiti house have survived and adapted despite overwhelming transformations. (AlJassar, 2009; AlHaroun, 2015). This notion is further reinforced by AlHaroun and AlAjmi's recent paper about the Hadhar and Badu houses in Kuwait, which highlighted how the modern villa's spatial characteristics have been derived from their traditional dwellings. They may be modern from the outside but from the inside they are very much associated with their cultural lifestyles (AlHaroun and AlAjmi, 2018). Likewise, this study's finding suggests that the emergence of the apartment in the Kuwaiti house may be traced to strong family traditions and is in fact another socio-cultural space resilient in the face of enormous transformations towards modernity.

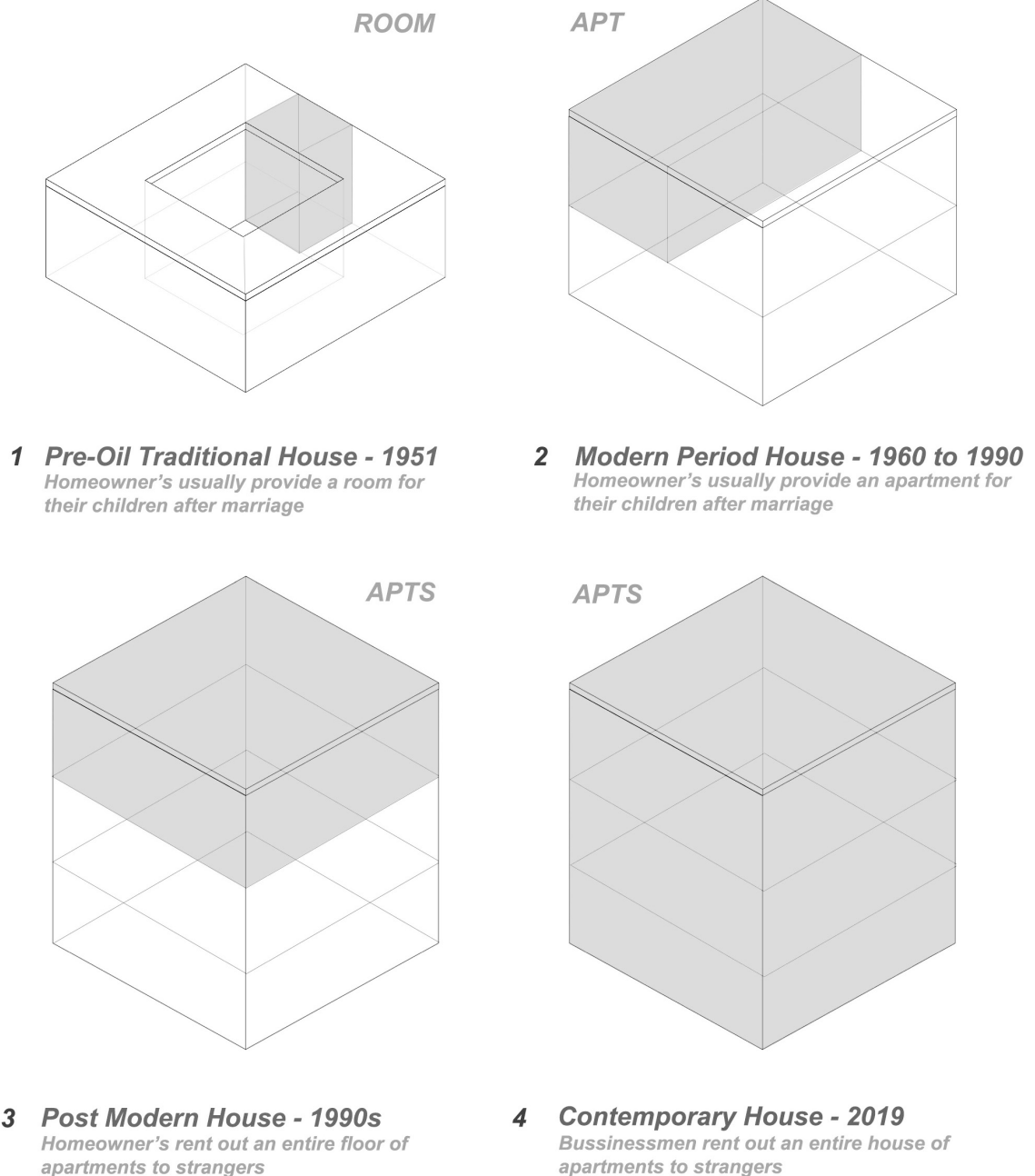


Fig. 10. Development of the apartment space inside the Kuwaiti house from pre-oil (1951) until the present. The space progressed from a small private domain for the family into a semi-public unit as an investment. Source: The Author, 2019.

KUWAIT'S HOUSING CRISIS

Kuwait is among nations with the highest real-estate prices in the world, which translates to more value for spaces and results in many people wanting to use all the allowable space defined by the law. Figure (11) clearly depicts how high real estate prices played a role in Kuwait's housing crisis. If one cannot afford to buy a house, they have

to wait years for government housing welfare, and therefore, the situation has made the apartment an addition to many houses in Kuwait, however, not always for the better as one interviewee points out that, “investors started to see houses as an opportunity for profit because the slow government response to provide housing welfare. The more the government delays the situation the more people violate the law (H.9). On the other hand a homeowner who has multiple apartments in their house acknowledges the violation but argues that he is providing a, “solution to a social phenomenon. People want to live, they have to live, today 300,000 Kuwaitis are living in apartments if you will apply the baladia law will these 300,000 be thrown in the street? This is a problem the government created from Kuwait’s housing crisis” (H.3).

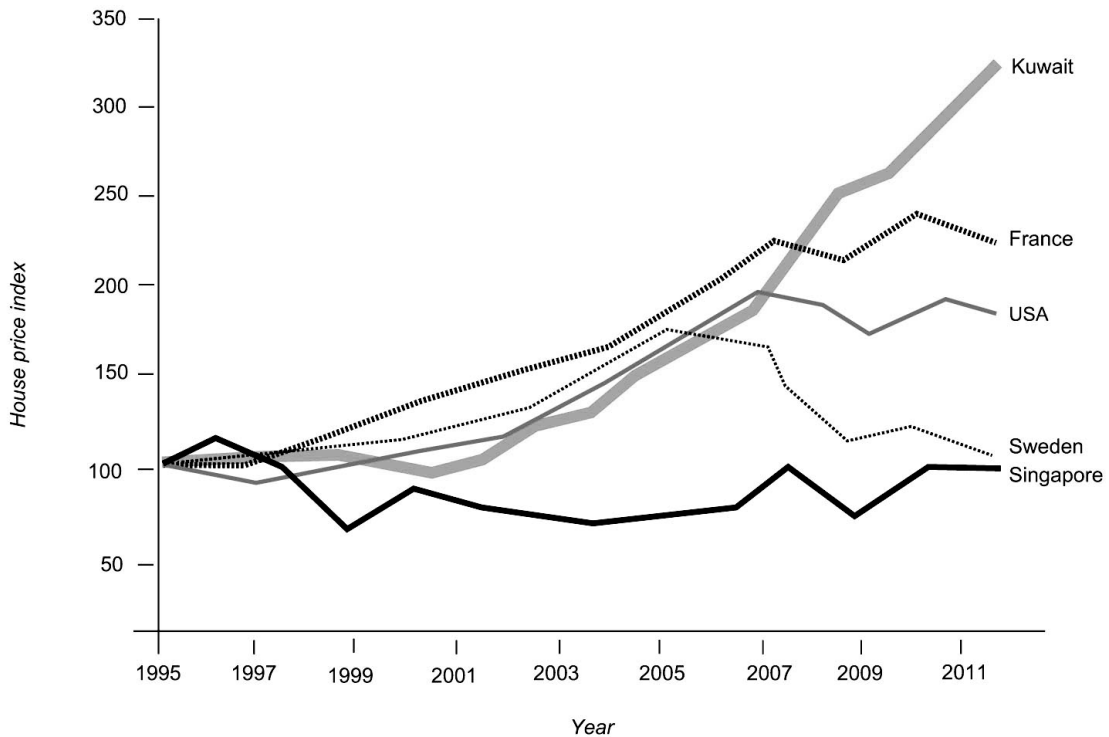


Fig. 11. House price comparison by country (base 100) from 1995-2012. The data has been collected from various sources including: Kuwait Fund Home, Global Investment, and The Economist. Note: Due to lack of consistent data, the average prices of land of the following neighbourhoods in Kuwait were used: Yarmouk, Salwa, Mishref, Surra and Sabah AlSalem. Source: AlShalfan, 2013.

SEGREGATION OF HOUSING

One question this research intended to answer is why Kuwaitis are not living in apartment towers/complexes instead of apartments in houses in suburban residential districts. Many interviewee responses indicated that this segregation between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis is according to income and a higher standard of living than it is to do with nationality. One homeowner describes why he prefers to live in single housing areas because it is, “near my wife’s family house it is good for us. It is also about the income. For example Khaitan area has a lot of foreign bachelors living there, so for me with my family it is not comfortable to live in that area, its not the same cultural background, its not the same standard of living” (H.7). Another designer continues in the same line of thought asserting that it is, “class segregation. They don’t want to be in lower standards interacting with people with less income” (H.6).

Other responses provided more insights in this issue. The density of people generates a clash of cultures and more traffic, which is not an attractive place to live. Also single housing residential neighbourhoods have better services. This has been identified by several interviewees. *“The issue relates to the density of people. South Sura, AlAdilya, and other inner areas (close to Kuwait City) have less people, more services such as Mosques, supermarkets and schools. In Hawally and Jabriya (high-density areas) and other areas that have apartment complexes, its atmosphere is different, the people are different, and the traffic is more”* (H.7). While another participant admits for his family, *“its more safe”* he continues to contend that, *“it’s a difference between cultures, which may let their children grow up with different values that are not Kuwaiti. That is a concern”* (H.9).

Although race and cultural backgrounds have been discussed many people see it more about traffic and lower quality of services. It seems that the density of people and generated traffic in other areas make them an unattractive place to live. Therefore due to segregation of class, it is closer to their families and better services; Kuwaitis are more willing to live in apartments within single house low-density areas than they are in areas designated for apartment buildings. This in turn completely changed the dynamic of these areas and in many cases overburdened their infrastructure and public services.

HOUSE DESIGN

HOUSE AS AN INVESTMENT

The apartment unit in the Kuwaiti house has become a means to improve the homeowner’s income first and foremost. The majority of interviewees regardless of group stressed the main reason today people add apartments is for the investment and to increase their cost of building. One homeowner explains that, *“the main reason is to repay the loans/mortgage. If someone for example takes three loans to build their house and his wife takes a loan he needs to have income from apartments to help. In the future these apartments may be used for their children”* (H.3). The idea of repaying loans and using the apartment for their children is a reoccurring theme within homeowners, *“the first to provide a home for their children, the second is with the increase in living expenses, a homeowner’s salary is not enough. There are a lot of expenses and therefore, they have to put an apartment in their house. For example, he may live in the ground floor and build two floors of apartments to benefit from the income”* (H.1).

This has also been recognized by another interviewee, *“The apartment is to accommodate people’s children, and also now as an investment. Life now is becoming a bit difficult, a person looks to have an income through his real estate”* (H.5). Another sees the house all about economics as he proclaims that it is all about the, *“Money, money, money. It all boils down to money even if we argue that it’s preserving a space for the future generation.”* (H.6). This understanding has also been discussed by another homeowner; he explains, *“private housing has transformed into a business because the profit is more than a commercial apartment building. The private housing as an investment will bring 15-18% return, whereas the commercial apartment building brings in 7-8% return. It’s almost double plus it’s cheaper to build”* (H.9).

Houses have become an investment, either as homeowners to improve their income and repay their loans or by businessmen who use houses as a commercial enterprise. Either way, *“the house became a means for wealth creation and it’s not a shelter anymore to house people. They want to maximize liveable slash rentable space even the geometry and design is different”* (H.6). It is understandable that homeowners need to repay their loans after construction and therefore rent apartments; however, why have some transformed the house into a business? One homeowner argues that, *“unfortunately there has been greed from some. They purchase land and build apartment houses with four apartments per floor and the basement in order to get more return than a commercial apartment tower complex. This has been a phenomenon spreading in Kuwait and in my opinion its wrong”* (H.1).

HOUSE DESIGNED AS A ‘BOX’

Apartments have made many homeowners and investors want to use all the allowable area by law to maximize return on their money. This has led to the so-called ‘box’ house, which is found everywhere in Kuwait. One homeowner asserts that if, *“you build all 210% of the plot land by default it will become blockish”* (H.3). In addition, the ‘box’ design usually has, *“two separate entrances (for the homeowner and tenant), two stairs, more bathrooms and kitchens”* (H.2). In fact, some stressed that there are prototype standard designs that are circulated in design firms for apartment houses and proclaims that houses became, *“boxes”*. Some homeowners want specific requirements and neglect the overall house aesthetics and façade. This means the apartment as an investment has influenced house form to a “box” like building.

NO PRIVACY IN APARTMENTS

The lack of privacy in today’s apartment homes has been identified by many interviewees as a disadvantage. This has been highlighted by many homeowners as one emphasized that, *“there is no privacy, the house has two stairs, and two entrances, and sometimes parking is an issue”* (H.2). Another stated that today people, *“want more privacy and independence”* (H.3), while another further explained, *“the disadvantage is privacy 100%. Human beings by nature want to have privacy for themselves and their families. There might be people that the husband does not want his wife interacting with. Also a person wants to mark his territory, in apartments one’s territory is not clear”* (H.5). It is interesting that in Kuwait’s past the entire family used to live together in one house and privacy was not really an issue. However, after the introduction of apartments in the house and renting them out to strangers, people recognized the need for privacy especially if they shared an apartment house with 4 or sometimes 8 other families.

GOVERNMENT ISSUES

BURDEN ON PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Many interviewees recognized that apartments in areas zoned for housing have caused enormous strain on public infrastructure. *“It has many disadvantages, higher density in the street and neighbourhood. If a house is for 12 people now it may need to serve 24 or 30 people. The services will be effected such as electricity, water, and parking”* (H.9). A homeowner emphasized that apartments allow, *“the streets to become tight and public services limited for single houses, which adds extra burden on the infrastructure”* (H.1). Another homeowner who lives in and owns an apartment house described the issues he faced with over water consumption, *“I was forced to get a water pump because the water from the government was not enough. There is a lot of people and they consume a lot of water”* (H.3).

BALADIA’S INABILITY TO ENFORCE THE LAW

There is an apparent disconnect between current regulations and people’s aspirations towards their house to meet their changing needs. Moreover, high real-estate prices make it more difficult to buy land; therefore people have to wait for public housing welfare and, in the meantime, live in apartments. This dynamic led to the phenomenon of apartments in the Kuwaiti house. The interview responses suggest that there is a gap in the existing baladia laws as one argues that after getting the design permit and getting electricity, *“most homeowners may do what they want. The baladia only may do something if there is a complaint. But even then they cannot remove anybody from illegal apartments except through the courts”* (H.9). It seems that the baladia only has jurisdiction over the design, permit, and construction process and loses control after electricity is given to the house even with violations. Many stressed that the government has no right to enter and search for violations inside people’s houses. Figure (12) shows the new AlSidiq residential area designated for low-density single housing. The area has seen a rapid rise of apartment houses, which highlights the inability of the Baladia to enforce the law.



Fig. 12. Map of AlSidiq residential area in Kuwait, which shows the spread of apartment houses as an investment.
Source: The Author, 2019.

Another issue is that the baladia is assuming everyone will do illegal apartments and, as a result, scrutinizes the design permit process. Ironically, while the baladia carefully examines designs for apartments they recently passed a law that allows 100 more square meters of space to be added in the roof of the house. The only possible explanation for this extra space is to allow another apartment or studio space in the house. Who is to gain from this addition? And why would the baladia allow this law when they know the negative consequences of apartments in Kuwait's houses. One explanation may be public pressure from homeowners and investors to have more rentable spaces in their houses as means to provide for high demand and in the same time increase their profits.

SOLUTIONS

THE MOVE TOWARDS SMALLER MORE SUSTAINABLE HOUSES

Despite the socio-economic and political dimensions discussed above, which allowed the apartment to emerge in Kuwait's houses, interviewees suggested solutions for its negative consequences. There is a consensus among a few homeowners that the Kuwaiti house is unsustainable and wastes space. *“Do we really need all this space if I'm a person who just got married? Do I need a space as large as 1000sq. meters or 400sq. meters? Can I do the needed*

maintenance? So eventually it's more feasible to live in an apartment" (H.5). One interviewee sees that homeowners need to design for the present and not the future. He argued that people, *"do not realize that the family is getting destroyed from this. If the building grows in time it is better than a building that is designed for the future. People take loans just for the idea of maybe my kids will need an apartment"* (H.5). Ironically, apartments may in fact be a solution to Kuwait's housing crisis but in the form of government welfare. People would accept, *"apartments with specific features such as a balcony that gives the feeling of a courtyard or a duplex like a town house"* (H.5). And instead of traffic congestion being a disadvantage, *"if we improve our public services such as mass transit and have more walkable cities I think it will reverse into an advantage"* (H.6).

LIMITATIONS

Interviews when compared to questionnaires are more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allow researchers to investigate people's views in greater depth (Kvale, 1996: 2003). However, as with any method it may have a few limitations. The first is the potential for subconscious bias from both the interviewer and interviewee. This may be in the form of results that might be subjective and therefore change over time according to circumstance. Despite these concerns, all efforts have been made by the researcher to ensure objective interviews with non-leading questions. Furthermore, observational notes and recordings about the interviewees' behavior and movement have also been analyzed to avoid any inconsistencies. Any segment that may have influenced participant responses has been discarded. The second limitation is the language. Most of the interviews were conducted in Arabic and then translated and transcribed into English. All efforts have been made to ensure that the translation is accurate and reflects the essence of the idea and meaning in any given discussion throughout the interviews. Despite this, when translating any complex topic there may be some expressions or words that may be untranslatable, and therefore, are lost in translation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed fascinating insights on the larger socio-economic and political situation in Kuwait. They specifically highlight disconnects between government regulation and reality. People are designing their houses differently and after they get electricity from the state they illegally change and rebuild parts of the design to accommodate for more apartments. This condition is causing an unsustainable built environment in Kuwait by overburdening public electricity and water supplies in low-density residential areas. Therefore, the study recommends the following:

1. To the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW): It is now more than ever become important to resolve Kuwait's housing crisis. New ingenious housing strategies need to be employed and implemented. Housing welfare does not necessarily need to be a plot of land or a government house. PAHW must design and build new low-density apartment complexes suitable for the Kuwaiti lifestyle. These new apartment complexes need to be in attractive locations such as next to the sea and with more features that would lure people seeking housing welfare from the state.

2. To the Baladia (Municipality): The baladia must have a legal framework to counter the apartment complexes being built in model residential areas. This must happen not only through scrutinizing the design during the permit phase but more importantly after the electricity reaches the building. The role of the baladia becomes of no consequence and void if it does not enforce the law. People see this as a weakness and are more inclined to build more apartments and other violations. Thus, a new law is required to give the necessary backing for the authorities and regain credibility as a first step to stop the growth of apartment complexes in areas designated for single family housing units. Instead allocate other low to medium density areas for apartment living or even provide specific blocks only for apartments within residential areas.

3. To the Homeowner: Homeowners must realize that your house is more than an investment. The law allows for one and even two apartments in the second floor of the house. This recognizes the desire for parents to accommodate

for their children and is a continuation of the concept of families living together for generations. So why are children being used as a pretext to build apartments and then rent them to strangers? The house lost its privacy and reduced its form into, as the interviewee's said, a generic 'box'. Therefore, this study urges homeowners to design and build their homes for their families and children. It also recommends a different house design by minimizing built area and building smaller houses. This is not only less expensive to construct but also significantly reduces water and electricity consumption. This allows the house to breathe providing outdoor spaces and gardens, which in turn elevate people's quality of space and life.

CONCLUSION

This study explains the emergence of the apartment in the Kuwaiti house. The apartment in the house is a socio-cultural and economic construct rooted in Kuwait's traditional family relationships. This is a significant finding, which further demonstrates the resilience of cultural practices in Kuwait's post-oil modernization. Once a place to accommodate the family, the apartment has now morphed into an investment project, which provides more income to homeowners amid high inflation and cost of living. Furthermore, businessmen have taken advantage of high demand for apartments to build 'apartment houses' in areas zoned for houses. As a result, completely transforming house form and function and rupturing residential landscapes with more traffic and over using water and electricity. Another major finding, which has been apparent but reinforced by this study is that this phenomenon is directly attributed to the slow government response to satisfy public needs for housing welfare. Thus, as one designer puts it, the longer the government delays, the more people will violate the law. People's reactions suggest that it is their way to adapt within the problems generated from years of governmental neglect towards the housing issue. Many in Kuwait blame government mismanagement and rising corruption as the root cause for the nation's stagnation in development despite record surpluses from oil revenues. And unless measures from the government are taken this trend will lead to more apartment complexes in residential areas, more burden in public utilities, and more unsustainable development.

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ظاهرة الشقق في البيت الكويتي

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قسم العمارة، كلية العمارة، جامعة الكويت، الخالدية

الخلاصة

عادةً ما يشير البيت الكويتي الحديث إلى مبنى في قطعة أرض مهيئة لاستقبال أسرة أو أسرتين، وفي مطلع القرن الواحد والعشرين تحولت هذه التركيبة تدريجياً لتشهد الكثير من الناس يؤجرون شقة واحدة أو أكثر في منازلهم. ونتيجة لذلك أصبحت العديد من المناطق في كثافة عالية مع زيادة الضغط على البنية التحتية. تبحث هذه الدراسة عن هذه الظاهرة من المنظور الاجتماعي والاقتصادي والسياسي، وقد تم استخدام المقابلات الشخصية مع ملاك البيوت لمعرفة مدى تأثير الشقة على البيت الكويتي. وتكشف النتائج أن ارتفاع أسعار العقارات وأزمه الإسكان الحالية ساهمت بشكل كبير في إعادة تشكيل شكل البيت الكويتي وتغيير بعض وظائفه، ومن الأسباب التي أدت لهذه الظاهرة هي تسديد القروض على المدى القصير وتوفير سكن لأبنائهم على المدى الطويل. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أصبحت المنازل فرصة استثمارية، وقد أدى ذلك إلى تحويل شكل البيت إلى صندوق، وتحويل مناطق سكنية نموذجية إلى مناطق ذات كثافة عالية، وهذا الوضع يسלט الضوء على مدى ضعف اللوائح والقوانين الحكومية والأوضاع السياسية لها تأثير مباشر على الناس وبيئة البناء.