

# The Collective Space of Commerce between Identity and Globalization in Kuwait

Giovanna Potesta'

Kuwait University

Email: giovannapotesta@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

The souk is one of the most important spaces of the traditional Arabian-Islamic City. The souk area is generally characterized by smaller souks grouped according to the products sold. Also in Kuwait the souk area is contemporary to the foundation of the citadel and maintained its position at the heart of the city for a long time. Starting from 1940s Kuwait was exposed to big tensions toward a process of modernization that affected also the ways of commerce. Western shops occupied the ground floor of new buildings. The commercial mall is a quite recent phenomenon in Kuwait, but in around twenty years its popularity overwhelmed the former forms of commerce, primarily the souk. The souk still survives but its importance and popularity is in rapid down fall. The present research, based on a survey study conducted among a pool of Kuwaiti citizens casts a light on the reasons and phenomenology of the matter. From the analysis emerges that the souk still embodies a flavour of identity but it is not able to deal with the attraction power of the mall.

**Keywords** - Architecture of Commercial Spaces in the ME, Architecture and Globalization, Kuwaiti Identity, Urban transformation in Kuwait.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The souk is one of the most important spaces of the traditional Arabian-Islamic City. The souk area is generally characterized by smaller souks grouped according to the products sold. In Kuwait the souk area, contemporary to the foundation of the citadel, maintained its position at the heart of the city for a long time. Traditionally the space of the souk is well differentiated from the space of residence, but in terms of physical distance they are very close. The souk represented one of the few occasion for public gathering, especially for women, usually protected inside the walls of the domestic environment. Starting from 1940s Kuwait was exposed to big tensions toward a process of modernization that affected also the ways of commerce. Western shops occupied the ground floor of new buildings. The commercial mall is a quite recent phenomenon in Kuwait, but in around twenty years its popularity overwhelms the other forms of commerce. The souk still survives. The souk area is one of the few components of Kuwait City that did not change either location either streets pattern. The increasing number of souks and the development of new commercial models raised some questions from the researcher. The researcher wanted to submit the questions to a sample of citizens (300 in the original statement

reduced to 250 later on), in order to have an interpretation key of the present reality. The first question was to understand if the souk, so important for the local culture for centuries, still represented a valid alternative to the mall. The question was dismantled in many sub-questions. The second aspect of the investigation was related to the social use of space. The mall may remember a street of a souk, also if the use of the space is different. The mall is also a scheme that is repeated with slight variations in the globalized world. The researcher wanted to know if this reality is acknowledged and if it may bring any consequence. The third important point was understanding how people are aware of the different dynamics occurring between commercial space and city in the case of the souk and the mall. And in case what is their perception. The last questions hinged on the problem of identity and creation of a fake reality. The questions, as mentioned, were in many cases tackled from different angles. The people interviewed were all Kuwaiti, approached by the interviewer in multiple collective places. The questions were formulated in English and Arabic and explained further.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE TYPOLOGY OF THE SOUK IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IN KUWAIT

### 2.1 The Souk in the Middle East

The souk is one of the most important components of the traditional Arab world. The concept of a dedicated area for commerce, either a *souk* or *bazaar*, depending on the geographic context, is common to the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> The importance of a commercial centre as a part of a city is documented before the birth of Islam (e.g. [21]). Many scholars in Oriental Studies regard the souk and the congregational mosque as basic conditions for the existence of any Islamic city (e.g. [25], [14], [22], [13]). Reference [25] notes that the presence of a souk and a mosque is usually connected to the presence of a *hammam*, or a public bath.

This condition, however, does not apply to cities of the Arab peninsula, where the presence of a public bath in old times is not documented. In addition to the mentioned interpretations, Reference [13] argued that has the main souk is usually connected or very close to the Great Mosque, without sharing the circulation of internal spaces.

<sup>1</sup> *Souk* is used in the Arabian countries, whereas *bazaar* is used in the Persian and Ottoman domains.

Some other facilities, such as *khans* or *funduqs*<sup>2</sup> (accommodations for foreigner traders or the army) are usually part of the ensemble (e.g. [21]) (Figure 1).



Figure 1- Example of Khan. Istanbul, 1764.

The main souk and the Great Mosque not only represent the civic centre of the Islamic city but also constitute the geographical centre of the urban settlement e.g. [19]). Although residential buildings are clustered around the religious-administrative-commercial nucleus, they always maintain a clear separation in terms of accessibility. The alleys leading to the houses are kept clear of any interference from the commercial space. A sense of privacy in domestic life is a value that must be preserved, not only inside the gates of the home but also in front of it (e.g. [21], [19]). Frequently, in Islamic cities, the central souk expands on the expanse of the surrounding urban fabric (e.g. [21]). A major city usually had more than one central souk and a large number of smaller souks (*suwayqa*), which were not necessarily divided into sectors of specialisation that served the daily needs of the neighbourhoods (e.g.[22]). Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, Damascus covered a surface of approximately 10 hectares and contained 50 souks, while Cairo, which covered 60 hectares, contained 145 souks (e.g. [21]).

The souk is organised into sectors of homogeneous products or zones according to the value of the items offered by the shopkeepers. According to this principle, shops selling gold, jewels and perfumes, the most noble of the products, are located close to the congregational mosque, while the vendors of less noble merchandise and the artisans whose activities produce pollution or annoy the community are located as far as possible from the centre and the residential districts (e.g. [18]). Animal markets and abattoirs are usually located next to the city walls.

Sometimes the shopkeeper is the salesperson as well as the artisan of the items displayed in the shop (e.g. [21]). The shops, in most cases, are very small. According to Reference [13] the standard size of a shop in the Arab-Islamic City is 3 metres deep and 1.5 metres wide; Reference [18] regards 1.5 square metres as the minimum required selling space. The products are displayed inside

and outside of the shop, hung upon the walls or on the shutters at the entrance and in part displayed on the floor leading up to the shop (e.g. [11]). The shops are usually raised two or three steps above street level, but this arrangement does not represent a rule. Two cases in the Gulf provide an example. In the old souk of Muscat, the shops are raised up, while in the old souk of Kuwait, the shops are street level. When the shops are higher than street level, they are accessed by climbing two or more steps. There is often a bench (*mastaba*) beside the steps, where the shopkeeper can rest or entertain the customers. Because the shopkeeper is frequently the manufacturer as well as the seller of the products, the bench may also serve as a workstation (e.g. [21]).

Although the form of the souk may vary according to the geographical context and the characteristics of the city, the shops in a souk are always arranged in a row (e.g. [13], [21]). The shops may be located under a gallery, on a pre-planned roofed path or at the edges of a street. Covered souks are considered special enclosures within the city and are accessible only through gates that can be closed at night. The shops within a souk can be lined up in many different arrangements. Regarding the urban fabric of settlements in Maghreb, Reference [20] notes a strict hierarchy of streets' net in the Islamic cities of the Region. According to his theory, each town from the time of its formation extended on at least a matrix route, often coinciding with the linear path on which the shops of the souk were lined up. The path is not always a simple line and is very rarely a straight line. In fact, Islamic culture, as opposed to Greco-Roman culture, is not concerned with the orthogonal definition of reality. The planning of cities on a grid-like pattern is not a characteristic of the Arabian-Islamic world. The rigid design of streets and squares that is evident in cities such as Damascus is an inheritance from Roman colonisation. The Greco-Roman market of Jibla in Yemen provides another example. The market was converted into a souk and was therefore shaped into a linear path that has survived over time (e.g. [18]). Moreover, Morris describes two types of linear souks. The first type is formed by a commercial path on which shops face each other. The path, as already mentioned, is rarely straight. The second type originates from a Greco-Roman market and usually maintains the market's design with some alterations depending on the different types of goods sold in each shop. The Greco-Roman market is usually composed of shops of equal size and accessible through a covered gallery. In contrast, the shops of the souk, as in the example of Jibla, deviate from the central circulation path edged by columns and are rearranged in a more casual way that accommodates the different needs of the shopkeepers. From the illustrative discussion provided by Morris, it is clear that the basic linear souk can be organised along a network of different paths or arranged around a major mosque, as is the case of the souk flanking the area around the Zaytuna Mosque in Tunis (e.g. [18], [13]). Although Morris presents a valuable explanation of the originating paths of a souk, it might be misleading if considered exhaustive. In fact, whenever the city presents an emergence, such as the case of the Zaytuna Mosque,

<sup>2</sup> *Khan* is the name used in many Middle Eastern countries, whereas *funduq* is used in the Northern African region. They both refer to the same typology.

the souk extends beyond the building that it engulfs. The shops encircle the major building, but they also extend beyond the building into outlying areas (Figure 2).

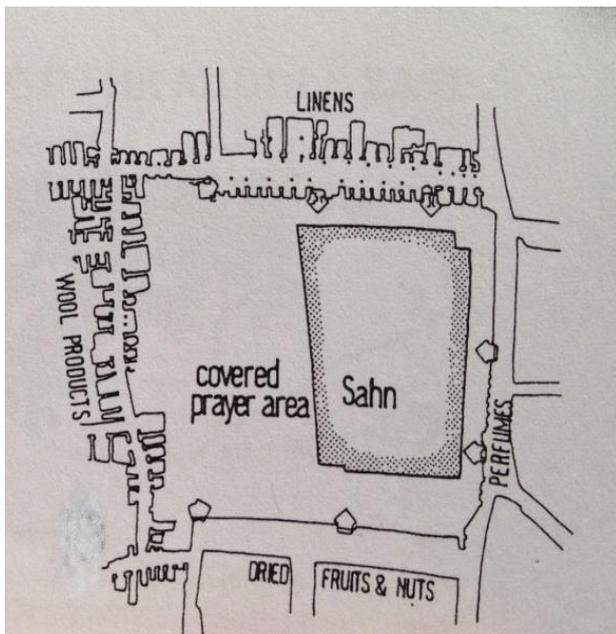
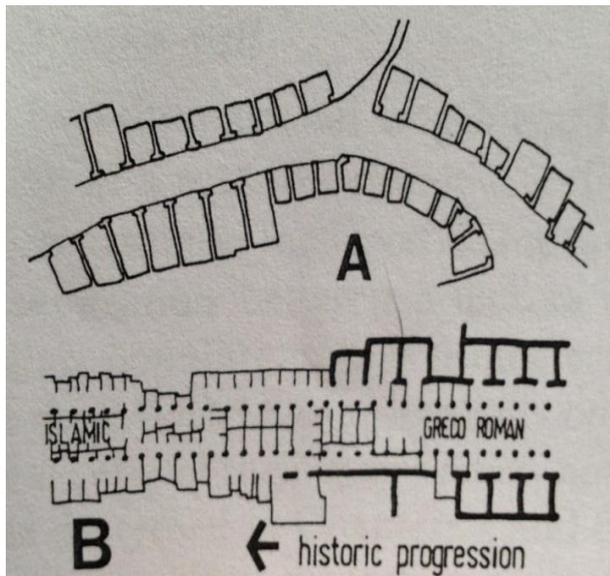


Figure 2- Above: Transformation of a Greco Roman market into a souk. Below: Shops around a core: Zeytuna Mosque, Tunis (Courtesy Reference [18])

## 2.2 The Souks in Kuwait

The most important route marking the early development of Kuwait City is the road connecting the harbour with the wells of Shamiya. When the first circle of walls was built to enclose the city in 1760, some shops opened along the edges of this construction. A few decades later, due to an increasing population, the city had to build a second circle of walls in 1811 (Figure 3).

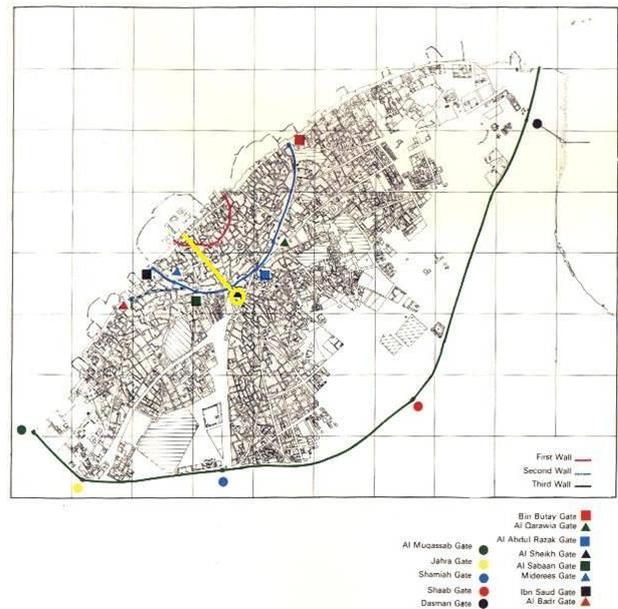


Figure 3 – Kuwait City: the three circles of walls and in yellow the path connecting the harbor to Safat (Courtesy Reference [24]).

At that time, the original street was transformed into a covered souk, Souk al-Dakheli (e.g. [24]). The most important buildings in the city were built near to the souk and the Friday Mosque: the Sheikh office, the Sheikh house, the Audience Hall (*majlis*), the Reception Hall (*diwan*), and the school (e.g. [24]). Outside the second circle of walls, near the gate leading to the Shamiya wells, a vast area called Safat served as a resting place for the tribes coming from the desert. They camped here before entering the city, and their animals rested. The dairy and wool products that the Bedouins brought from the desert could be sold in the large area of Safat without reaching the core of the city. The location also seemed appropriate for a livestock market. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the city enlarged dramatically, prompting the construction of a third wall. The third defensive structure was built in 1920 and enclosed an area more than ten times larger than the area surrounded by the second wall. At beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of Kuwait was approximately 150,000, and there were approximately 50 souks located between the harbour and Safat (e.g. [11], [24]). Whereas a portion of the products arrived from inland areas, the majority of the goods came by ship from Iran and Iraq. Here, the merchants whose offices were in front of the port (*furdha*), bought the stocks that they later sold to the shopkeepers. A portion of the merchandise was also imported from India and East Africa (e.g. [11]).

Souk al Dakheli, previously arranged along a single linear path, started to develop at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with several smaller souks departing from the main path (Figure 4). The shops in the area sold meat, fish, rice, spices, wheat, vegetables, housewares, utensils and fabrics.

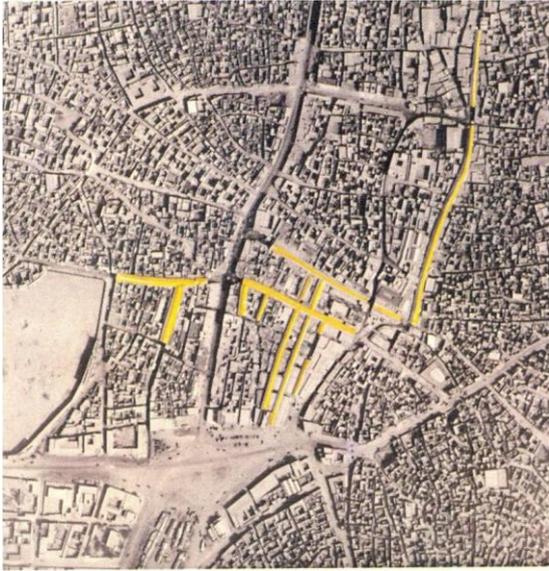


Figure 4: Souk al-Dahkeli and its branches leading to Safat (author elaboration on map Courtesy Reference [30]).

Souk al-Gharabally connected Sarrafin Square to al-Share'a al-Jadeed (the New Street) (Figure 5). In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, souk al-Gharabally was one of the most important souks in the city. The products available there were varied and plentiful. Carpets, doors, copper utensils, metal cases, weapons, wool and used clothes were all available in this souk.

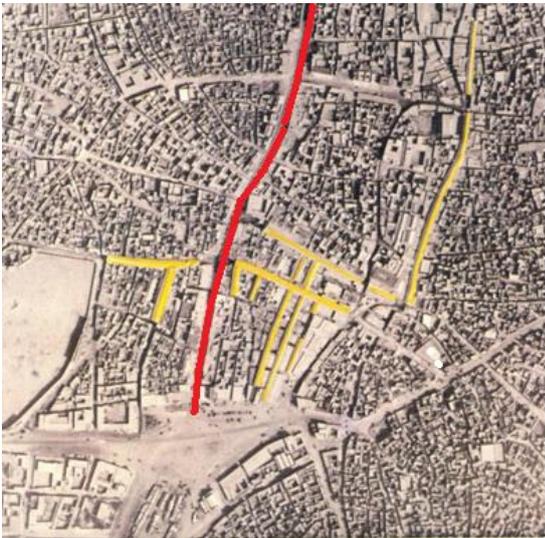


Figure 5 - Share'a al-Jadid (author elaboration on map courtesy Reference [30]).

Because of the significant affluence of people coming from afar, the souk al-Gharabally included many eateries with ready-made food.

The food was usually consumed outside the shops on small benches nearby. In addition to the eateries, some coffee shops served as resting and gathering places for the male visitors of the souk (figure 6). Although the presence of female visitors was not socially acceptable in the resting areas, women in the Islamic souk were often free to make deals and circulate in the presence of men without violating any code of propriety.



Figure 6- Photos of old souks of Kuwait in the early 1900s (courtesy Reference [30]).

### 3. THE EVOLUTION OF COMMERCIAL SPACES IN KUWAIT: FROM THE SOUK TO THE MALL

#### 3.1 The Impact of Modernisation

##### 3.1.1 Historical Antecedents

The shops at the ground floor of the concrete buildings in Safat and Share'a al-Jadid represent a first intermediate phase in the process of modernisation of the country. In the period between the 1940s and 1980s, shops were built along the edges of the streets, usually on the ground floor of multi-story buildings. In the 1980s, the Salmiya district had already replaced the City as the commercial hub of Kuwait. Between the 1970s and 1980s, Salem al Mubarak Street, with its high street shops, was considered one of the most elegant zones of Kuwait. The second intermediate phase took place after the Gulf War in 1991, when Kuwait began to move toward an even more westernised model of the city with the creation of commercial centres designed in the style of European arcades. The city arcade is representative of a style of architecture that began in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The arcade is typically composed of a section of a street covered by a glass ceiling. Shops and cafes are open at the ground floor, encouraging pedestrians to pass through this protected urban environment (e.g. [7]). The first example of a city arcade is the Galleria Vittorio in Milan, built in 1867 (e.g. [7]). The Galleria in Milan quickly became a place of

glamour, and this model of arcade spread across Central Europe. In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin welcomed the arcades as places of modernity (e.g. [4]). Benjamin defined modernity as an advancement in industrial processes that leads to a new configuration of space, spurring a new sense of collectivity. The modern space, according to Benjamin, is not shared in terms of common interaction among people, but it is shared as the uniform dream of the people. In other words, the masses share the dream of a collective space, but they also dream of sharing a collective space because at a social level, humans are isolated from one another (e.g. [5], [7]). In Europe, the arcade became a new place to shop and more importantly a place to spend free time. Free time was in fact the new currency of the bourgeoisie. At that time, leisure architecture and commercial architecture began their process of mutual integration. Shopping in the arcade does not have to serve a purpose; it can simply be a way to spend time. Reference [7] says that the arcade is “a zone of urban voyeurism and a dream world of mass consumption”, emphasising the strange correlation between the altered reality of desire (never achievable) and the reality (always achieved) of generalised consumption.

The commercial typology of the mall was created in the USA in the 1950s, based on a model produced by Victor Gruen. The idea was to re-create a dense urban environment in the low-density suburb of the American city (e.g. [7]). The word ‘mall’ comes from Pall Mall, a game in which a mallet is used to hit a ball on a strip of land. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, the strip of land used for Pall Mall became a place where the bourgeoisie could promenade in a safe environment (e.g. [7]). The commercial mall, an area where people can walk around protected by external intrusions, is based on the same idea. Gruen’s design principle was that smaller shops could benefit from the presence of magnet stores located at the end of the circulation path (e.g. [7]). Gruen’s intuition proved to be correct and still informs the design of contemporary malls when circulation is intertwined or organised into hierarchical systems. Gruen’s formula combined the pedestrian flow with a setting that mimics the streets and squares of the traditional city, thus recreating a sense of urbanity that is missing from many American cities. This insight, that there was a need for an urban setting that could be recreated artificially, achieved great success and made the commercial mall an inseparable part of the contemporary city.

### 3.1.2. Contemporary Kuwait

Kuwait has grown in a way that would not have been predictable one century ago. The extension of the city outside the third circle of walls was modelled on the principles of English urbanism with a special reference to the Garden City of Howard (e.g. [10]). Each district was organised around a core that included the cooperative market, the mosque, the clinic, the sports centre, and some other shops of daily use. We may observe that this model, or at least the idea of linking residential organisation to services, is not dissimilar to the analogue in the traditional

Arab city. Each district in Howard was organised around a cluster of services, and like in the traditional Arab city, the commercial area and the residences did not share the same open spaces or the same routes of circulation. In the modern and contemporary city, the use of cars led to the loss of space to make room for wider streets and extended neighbourhoods. The greater use of territory by inhabitants, which is connected to the changing demographics in Kuwait, has made a major difference in the form of the city. In the past twenty years, Kuwait City has grown enormously, reaching Fahaeel, an oil town approximately 30 km southward. Today, 98% of the total population is urban. In 1990, the total population of Kuwait amounted to 2,143,000 inhabitants, whereas in 2010, the total population was 3,051,000 inhabitants (GCC Statistical Annex, [26]). The demand for a greater number of commercial centres found its practical realisation in the development of the commercial mall. The commercial mall replaces the urban feeling that is lost by the rapid proliferation of buildings and also provides an environment that is safe, clean, thermally regulated and vibrant. The existence of sprawling malls in the contemporary, globalised city is a general characteristic shared by the majority of countries in the world. The mall is an undeniable reality that transcends cultures and geographic contests. In the region of the Middle East and particularly in Kuwait, the mall and the souk still coexist, although the survival of the latter is threatened. The commercial mall is not a Middle Eastern invention, but ironically it fits very well with the characteristics of the Arabian-Islamic tradition, at least on a superficial level. The following paragraph will analyse the architecture of both the souk and the mall. A different analysis with different outcomes will be carried out in subsequent paragraphs, where the analyses of both the souk and the mall will be referred to in context.

## 2.2 The Souk and the Mall: a Comparative Analysis

### 2.2.1 Typological differences

From the point of view of typology, the souk and the commercial mall present many similarities. They are both lined up on a path that can be simply linear, twisting or linked to other paths, and shops are placed on one or, more commonly, two sides. Both the souk and the mall are usually climate-controlled, which creates a microclimate within the structures that differs from the outside. The difference between the two environments is very drastic in the mall, where it is possible to decrease or increase the temperature by several degrees because of the mechanical conditioning system. The temperature difference is less pronounced in the souk, where the only way to protect the internal environment from the insulation and other external agents is the roofing system. The separation between internal and external space is also achieved in both typologies through the use of gates. In some cases, the souk itself is surrounded by gates, but gates are always present in the *kaysariyya*, which is a part of the souk with slightly different characteristics. The relationship between

the souk and the *kaysariyya* is similar to the relationship between restaurants and movie theatres inside the commercial mall, each having a different opening routine. Their working hours do not coincide with the ones of the shops. For example, a movie theatre is provided with a specific system of gating, making it possible to watch a movie when the shops are already closed. If these facts can be placed in the category of similarities, it is important at this point to look at the differences. First, it is important to note the differences between the commercial system of the souk and the mall. The shops of the souk are grouped in predetermined homogeneous zones, and each zone is composed of shops selling the same range of products. It is therefore possible to find what is needed while avoiding the other sectors. In fact, the circulation paths in the souk tend to be as short as possible, saving the customers from spending an excessive amount of time shopping. In contrast, the shops of the commercial mall are displayed in seemingly unplanned arrangement with a variety of shops selling different items in each area. In this situation, the customer who is looking for a specific item is coerced to travel past many shops, viewing several types of items before he/she can reach his/her destination. By passing various shop windows offering a wide range of items, he/she is more likely to feel moved to buy something that was not planned in advance. In addition, the circulation paths in the mall tend to be long, encouraging the customer to spend time (and possibly money).

The identities of both the mall and the souk present another important discrepancy that needs to be considered. The souk has a specific identity that is peculiar to its typology. The souk is what it must be. The mall has no identity; it is required to borrow its identity in parts from many different existing situations. The mall is never what it aspires to be.

The most interesting example in Kuwait is The Avenues, which is not only the biggest mall in the region but also the most successful. The Avenues is composed of several pieces. The entire structure models the organisation of a city. Phases 1 and 2 of the mall, the oldest chronologically, are characterised by one primary continuous path intersected by short branches; this organisation reproduces the idea of a main street from which secondary streets depart. The appearance of the interior suggests the ideas of modernity and lightness. The use of materials and finishing reminds one of an internal space. In other words, the mall's design communicates the idea of a city furnished as an interior space. The image of the building is split between a large-scale urban setting and a detailed, small-scale interior design.

The third phase of The Avenues is organised into different areas, each of them defined by a theme. On the mall website (2013), the area named 'Gran Avenue' is described as 'inspired by both Champs-Elysees in Paris and Oxford Street in London', while the zone called 'Soku' is described as 'an acronym for the South of Kuwait and is influenced by New York's bohemian Soho district' (Figure 7). Kuwait and is influenced by New York's bohemian Soho district'.



Figure 7 – The Avenues. Top: Interior of phase 2

Bottom: Plan of phases 1,2,3

The area called 'The souk' is named for its resemblance to 'the old traditional souk (market)'. The website's description of the area explains that 'it is constructed to replicate the character of the Souk environment, including a maze of narrow alleyways inside The Souk and many small shops based on the layout of old Kuwait City'. As a matter of fact, the design of the three phases of The Avenues reveals an increasing diversification of the areas encapsulated in the huge structure. The discrepancy between interior and exterior is more significant in the third phase. The interior of the third phase, in fact, could not be anticipated from the exterior. This discrepancy stems from the fact that The Avenues, like many of today's most successful commercial malls, is extremely large. Architect Rem Koolhaas groups buildings into categories according to their dimensions. The contemporary mall fits into the category of 'Bigness'. 'In Bigness ... the façade can no longer reveal what happens inside. The humanist expectation of "honesty" is doomed: 'interior and exterior architectures become separate projects' (e.g. [17]).

### 3.2.2 Behavioural Differences

Another area of difference between the souk and mall relates to human behaviours and relationships. The buyer and the seller of products in the souk develop a deal based on human comprehension. They negotiate according to their personalities, but in whatever agreement they reach, they demonstrate their human capabilities and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In the mall, no personality is

needed. The buyer and the seller perform a transaction of money through a credit card. The buyer is identified as the credit card owner, the seller as the cashier.

It can also be said that from an anthropological perspective, the souk represents the spirit of a culture. In contrast, the specificity of the mall is representative of what Manuel Gausa calls 'glocal', in the sense that 'glocal ... responds to the particular and interconnects with the general' (e.g. [1]). The case of Kuwait provides evidence for Gausa's theory of the 'glocal'. On the one hand, Kuwaiti malls are associated with the particular: the local area, the local people, and the local culture.

On the other hand, they transcend the physical place and offer an image that has no territory. The identity of a mall in Kuwait is similar to a mall in any other part of the world. In the early 90s, Auge had outlined how contemporary architecture is extensively dedicated to the creation of 'empirical non-places'. 'Empirical non-places' are 'spaces of circulation, consumption and communication' (e.g. [3]). He contrasts 'empirical non-places' with 'anthropological places', defined as those places where it is possible to find a social bond, a sense of history, or a sense of collectivity: 'if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place' (e.g. [3]). According to Auge (2008), the mall (hypermarket), along with airports, railways, and stations, is designed to create an illusion of beauty and a time removed from the context of history. In Kuwait, as in any other country, the mall produces expectations. The customer, continually subjected to the psychological pressure to shop to feel liberated, is rewarded by the supposed sense of beauty that the mall offers. The malls of Kuwait are particularly welcoming; they are sophisticated, clean, and always efficient. As reference [12] has pointed out the mall targets a specific group of customers offering them a lifestyle. Whereas a true urban situation can be full of unpleasant situations, the mall selects the urban experiences in a controlled environment (e.g. [12]).

Whereas the user of the souk experiences a process of shopping that is selective, the user of the mall is tempted by a process of shopping that is addictive. "Addictive" is intended in the duplicity of its meanings: in the sense that one shops for the pleasure of shopping instead of purposefully selecting items and in the sense that the detachment from reality creates dependence.

The main old souk of Kuwait, Mubarakiya, has been recently restored to have a nice, well managed appearance. Until a few months ago, it was dirty, dusty, extremely messy, and hardly a welcoming environment. Even when the souk is restored to a new condition, as in this case, visiting a souk requires a customer to wear clothing different from what one would wear when shopping in a mall. The users of the souk do not want to show their economic status, and women do not want to attract any looks. In contrast to what happens in a mall, the users of a souk want to show their wealth and women do not want to

subject themselves to the glances of others. In old Kuwait, spaces for social gathering were either urban or domestic. In contemporary Kuwait, malls are often chosen as spaces of socialisation. The mall does not provide the intimacy of the home, but it does shield customers from interaction with the outside. Everything happens inside. In this way, the mall subverts the relationship between private and public. It is a private space but used as a public space. "Where formerly we spoke of public space, we now speak of relational space (e.g. [1])".

#### 4. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY

The souk and the commercial mall have different relationships with their hosting city. The souk substantially maintains its identity, and even when it is in a city core that is experiencing continuous development, it cannot be subtracted from the urban environment because it is strongly embedded in it. The souk itself is a piece of the city. In fact, the souk is more than a piece of the city; it is tied to the old nucleus of the city. The souk and the city are so related that they exist in a symbiotic dependency. In old Kuwait City, the streets of the souks were detached from the residential alleys, but the souk was still within walking distance from the inhabitants' houses. The city was contained and densely organised with a distinct boundary between the city and the desert. The city was a set of places, and each place had a social meaning. The same cannot be said today of the cities in the Gulf countries where the impact of modernisation has subverted this state of things. Contemporary Kuwait City is not an exception; it gave up its identity in favour of a globalised appeal. The canons of Modernism seeded in a fertile land that produced a standard product, which was always generic when attempting to be anti-conventional. The danger of creating a generic city was balanced by a few enlightened local architects who tried to reconcile Regional architecture and International style. However, their attempt did not produce lasting consequences.

In general, the contemporary city in its global manifestation is defined by Castells's 'Informational City' (1989). In the 'Informational City,' the space of flows sweeps out the space of places (e.g. [6]). 'The fundamental fact is that the social meaning evaporates from places, and therefore from society, and becomes diluted and diffused in the reconstructed logic of a space of flows' (e.g. [6]). The informational flows act as a contemporary colonial power, crossing particular regional identities. Kuwait City belongs to those cities that, as Reference [15] observes, conformed its future developments to the principles of Modernism. Whereas the fabric of the city was dense in Kuwait pre-modernisation, it now contains groups of constructed plots, scattered across land that is neither desert nor city. A single building, isolated on its plot, is the type of housing that has succeeded clusters of buildings. Commercial malls, the new space of commerce, reinforce their typological self-referring structure with a location distant from residential areas of the city. Even in the past, the souk was independent from residential areas; at the same time, the souk was easily accessible and a part

of the same urban system. In the evolved city, the distance between the commercial mall and the core of the residential district is not just symbolic but also physical. The malls are reachable only by automobile. In the past, the souk, the mosque and the institutional buildings composed a whole; now the distances between them have grown. The detachment of commercial malls from the core of the city is also reflected in the separation between commerce and civic operations. The commercial mall is divorced from the city. In fact, the mall represents a city in and of itself. 'The mall constitutes a safe and predictable realm within a world rendered dangerous by both crime and cars (e.g. [7])'. The mall represents a city, but it cannot be a city. A city is complex, and its existence is influenced by an infinite number of variables, people, and possibilities. The mall is easy to understand and easy to use; it offers a sterilised version of urban life inside a glass jar.

The globalisation of architecture is like a disease (in its negative connotations) and a vaccine (in its positive connotations) that the body of the contemporary city cannot avoid. However, acceptance can be passive or critical. It is undeniable that the Arab city, more than the Western city, is facing an identity crisis (e.g. [9]). According to Koolhaas, 'Globalization destabilizes and redefines both the way architecture is produced and that which architecture produces' (e.g. [17]). Moreover, 'Globalization modifies architectural discourse, now an uneasy relationship between regional unknowing and international knowing' (e.g. [17]). In the case of the Arab city and the Eastern city in general, the gap between 'regional knowing' and 'international knowing' is wide. 'International knowing', in any case, is the result of 'Western knowing'. A sense of American knowing was not possible without its European antecedents, just as the International Style was not a possibility without its derivation from Modernism. The same process explains the evolution of the commercial mall from the Arcade. The eradication of architectural values in the Arab world is produced by an already existing eradication of typology that has developed in the American context. The chain of passages and transformation present in the Arab Region provides a further missing ring: the adoption without criticism of a model adapted to the American culture but not necessarily to the Arab-Islamic culture. The fact that the mall, as stated previously, resembles aspects of the typology of the traditional souk for many people is a contingency that may have critical consequences. The Arab city needs to find its identity in its roots and not through the emulation of alien realities.

## 5. THE SOUK AND THE MALL IN THE EYES OF THE KUWAITI: AN ANALYSIS OF DATA

The perception of the two commercial typologies may differ according to the points of view of the users.

We have conducted a survey with 18 questions delivered to 300 Kuwaitis. The survey was adjusted and corrected

after a test on a pilot group composed of faculty at the College of Architecture. The present questionnaire is the product of further reviews and adjustments.

We have chosen to limit the enquiry to Kuwaiti citizens without including expatriates. The interviewer was a young Kuwaiti architect. As a Kuwaiti, he could speak Arabic or English, depending on the case. As an architect, he could relate to the focus of the research and the answers to the questions. The interviews were based on a written questionnaire that was distributed at the entrance of several shopping areas, filled-in on the spot and delivered back immediately after its completion.

The respondents were initially divided according to their gender and their level of education. Some of the answers could not be evaluated correctly, and some of the people interviewed did not answer all of the questions. For this reason, the base of research has been slightly reduced according to the number of reliable answers.

In this paper, we note the answers that impact the percentage. We neglected the categories of answers with an insignificant number of respondents.

### 1. Question: *How often do you visit a shopping mall?*

Of those interviewed, 26.7% visit the mall more than once a week, while 27.1% visit the mall more than once a month.

### 2. Question: *Why do you visit a shopping mall?*

Approximately 30% of those interviewed visit a shopping mall because they need to buy something. Socialisation alone (8%) is not considered a sufficient reason for visiting a mall. More than 50% of those interviewed consider the shopping mall as a combined opportunity for shopping and socialisation.

### 3. Question: *Which of the following shopping malls do you like the most?*

The Avenues is by far the most popular (approximately 53%). Marina Mall and 360 are popular with men, while women are mostly oriented to the Avenues. Other malls earn a very low index of popularity.

### 4. Question: *How often do you visit a traditional souk?*

The majority of interviewed people (62%) visit a traditional souk less than once a month. Just 15% of the total sample visits a traditional souk more than once a month.

### 5. Question: *Why do you visit a traditional souk?*

Of those interviewed, 52% visit a souk because they need to buy something. Only 15% visit a traditional souk because it is a place for socialisation, and 33% visit a souk for both reasons.

### 6. Question: *Which of the following traditional souks do you like the most?*

Mubarakiya is absolutely the most popular, with 91% of those interviewed preferring to shop there. Other souks

mentioned in the questionnaire were only selected by a small number of respondents.

7. Question: *Do you prefer going to the traditional souk or to the shopping mall?*

The traditional souk is preferred by 8% of those interviewed, whereas 47% prefer the mall, and 45% like both (Table 7).

8. Question: *If you prefer the shopping mall, explain the reason:*

The main reason for preferring the shopping mall is that everything is available (38%). The comfort and quality of the space are also valued (16%). The respondents are in part motivated (25%) by the fact that the shopping mall represents modernity.

9. Question: *If you prefer the traditional souk, explain the reason:*

The majority of the respondents reported that they preferred the souk because it is a traditional place.

10. Question: *If you could change something in the shopping mall, what would you change?*

Of those who responded, 39% think that there is nothing to change, and 31% are not satisfied with shopping mall parking. The behaviour of other people at the shopping mall is a problem for 14%, while 10% are not satisfied with the products available. The accessibility and location of the shopping mall are considered satisfactory.

11. Question: *If you could change something in the traditional souk, what would you change?*

Of the respondents, 41% reported that they would change nothing, whereas 14% said they would change organisation. Cleanliness is an important issue for 23%, and parking is a problem for 11%.

12. Question: *The traditional souks are in the central areas of Kuwait:*

The fact that the traditional souks are in the central areas of Kuwait, many of them in the City, is usually considered a positive thing. A considerable number of people (48%) appreciate the fact that the location is in an original part of the city that has not changed over time. Moreover, 26% consider the location of the souks easy to reach. Of those who do not like the central location, most report that they do not like the location because of the traffic congestion in the area (24%).

13. Question: *The shopping malls are often far away from the central areas of Kuwait: I like it/ I don't like it.*

This fact is usually considered to be positive by 75% of respondents. The main reason is because the traffic congestion is decreased outside of the central areas.

14. Question: *The traditional souk is part of the local cultural identity that is fading:*

This is considered a problem by the majority of respondents (82%) (Table 14).

15. Question: *The shopping mall is an international phenomenon that is almost the same everywhere:*

Of the respondents who reported that they did not care that the shopping mall is almost the same everywhere, 21.6% are men and all of them are below the age of 28. All the other respondents consider the phenomenon a problem.

16. Question: *Do you find what you are looking for when you go to the traditional souk?*

'Yes' is the answer for 72% of respondents, whereas 28% responded 'No'.

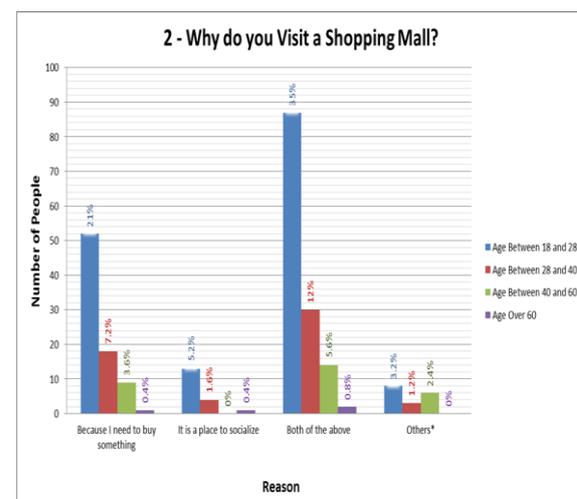
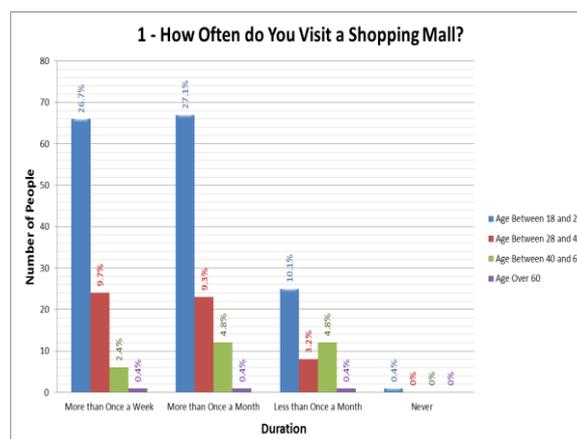
17. Question: *Do you find what are you looking for when you go to the shopping mall?*

The majority of the people interviewed responded positively (80%).

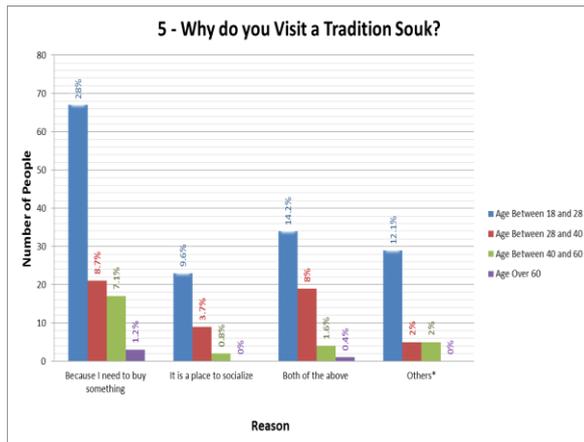
18. Question: *In phase 3 of the Avenues, a copy of a traditional souk will be built<sup>3</sup>:*

For 82% of the respondents, building a copy of a traditional souk inside the mall is a good solution. For 18% of the respondents, it is not a good solution.

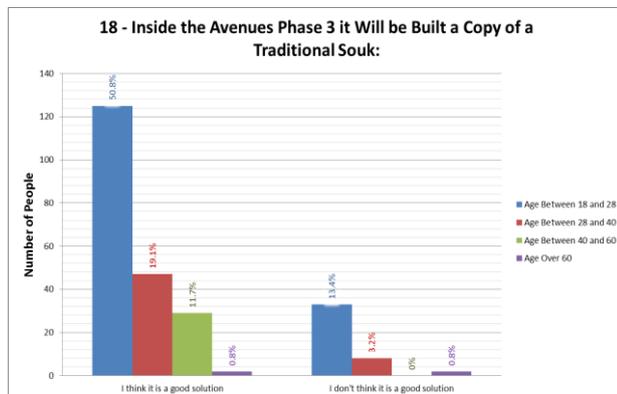
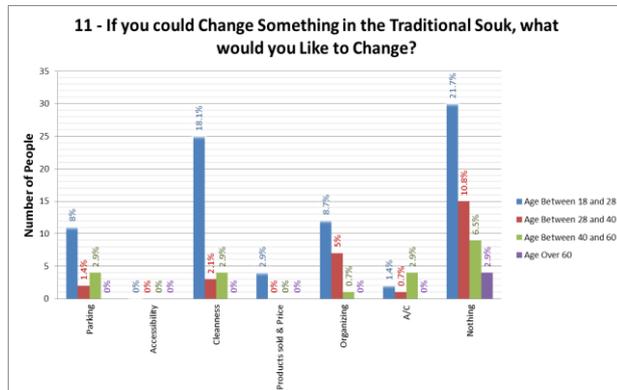
Charts visualization of answers to questions 1, 2, 5.



<sup>3</sup> Phase 3 of the Avenues was under construction at the time the questionnaire was delivered, but the construction is now finished.



### Charts visualization of answers to questions 11, 18.



## 6. CONCLUSION

The souk, the traditional commercial space and core of the Arabian-Islamic city, is severely threatened in Kuwait. Because of its strategic trading position, Kuwait could benefit from the import of several products. In the period of the Kuwaiti modernisation (from the 1940s onward), shops started to build displays on the ground floor of concrete buildings, which were constructed in the mood of the International Style. The s and the model of the souk coexisted with the one of the European street bordered by shops. In the late 70s and early 80s, small commercial centres that were constructed on several floors gained relative popularity. The commercial malls built in the late 1980s are by far the most successful commercial type at the present time. The commercial mall has some things in common with the souk, and this may explain why it is

more popular in Kuwait than in other countries. Despite these superficial similarities, the mall is, in reality, a western product. The souk coexists with the mall, but it does so as a secondary choice for shoppers.

The survey has shown that people prefer to visit a mall where they feel more comfortable, not just in terms of climatic conditions but also in the social use of space. Although the souk is appreciated, it is mostly seen as a symbol of stability in a rapidly evolving city. Some of the respondents reported feeling a sense of reminiscence when visiting a souk. The majority of respondents are concerned about the fact that the souk is part of a tradition that is fading. In the past, the souk was the typical place of commerce. Now, it is place where one can find groceries or cheap imported products. Nevertheless, a significant portion of respondents like the souk as it is. The mall does not interact with the city, but it constitutes a *hypercity*, existing by itself. This issue does not present a problem for the visitors who appreciate the fact that the peripheral location of the malls makes them easier to reach. The majority of people, especially women, are aware of the fact that shopping malls represent a part of a globalised reality that is the same everywhere. The attempt to introduce elements of regional connotation, such as the imitation of a Kuwaiti souk inside one of the commercial malls, is seen as a solution for a large majority of the people interviewed. In fact, a large majority (82%) are aware that the souk is a part of a tradition that is vanishing; at the same time, they consider its artificial reconstitution inside the shopping mall to be a positive thing. The identity of a place appears to be a minor factor in the construction of environments. The acknowledgment of this fact opens up new fields of investigation as does the problem of the de-contextualisation of architecture typologies in an era when the theme park is on the top of the agenda. These places are deprived of the anthropological meaning that related them to human experiences and memory. In the survey, memory emerges as nostalgia, not as a grounded field on which to sew a thread of continuity between the past and the future. Reality and artificiality share a buffer zone where they overlap. The results of this research contribute to an understanding of this society's wishes and their model of reality. The acknowledgement of the data can be considered as a leading motivation for the design of future developments in the city and its surrounding parts. The data also provides a stimulus for critical thinking on such topics as the reality of facts, dreamed reality and the heritage of the past. City planners are able to and, in a way, are required to follow the wishes of the society. At the same time, they have an ethical responsibility to anticipate new models and better interpretations of the future environment. This point is, in our opinion, particularly important. This research, therefore, provides the basis for a problem that needs to be further investigated and managed.

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