



Original scientific paper

Analysing the Social Impacts of Urbanization on Traditional and Contemporary Trading Environments: The Case of Bahrain

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ABSTRACT

The trade sector is among the top four growing sectors contributing to Bahrain's GDP. Despite the successful impact of trade on the local economy, there is an apparent disconnect between individuals engaged in trading activities and their physical urban spaces, posing a significant threat to preserving Bahrain's vibrant social trading culture. The research hypothesis is that effective urban design can significantly improve trading activities in the old city of Manama. Consequently, the research aims to define the role of physical urban design in influencing trade, outline the social impacts of urbanization on traditional and contemporary trading environments, and identify urban principles that affect the physical act of trade. The methodology follows a theoretical study that considers the history of urbanization and its contemporary theories, the impacts of urbanization, and the trading development impacts of urbanization on trading environments in Bahrain. An analytical study is then adopted to analyse the problem, using the "fishbone diagram", questionnaires and photographic analysis of the area. The findings highlight the importance of utilizing outdoor space, diverse building typologies, organic circulation routes, spatial layout, interior design, landscaping, adaptable design, interaction spaces and intimate spaces within the design of traditional and contemporary trading environments. The research concludes with recommendations to sustainably revive the trading streets in Bahrain. The results provide valuable insights for stakeholders, such as Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, and those working in architecture, urban and interior design, to reignite informal social trading experiences from the past. The results stress the importance of people's participation in design.



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Highlights:

- Effective urban design principles can enhance socio-economic vitality by fostering vibrant trading environments in Bahrain.
- Urbanization poses socioeconomic challenges by disrupting traditional trading practices and social interactions.
- An adaptable spatial layout, incorporating diverse building typologies, enhances commercial street functionality.

Contribution to the field statement:

This study contributes to the academic field by providing in-depth insights to stakeholders and experts into the impact of urban design and architecture in enhancing commercial activities in trading environments. The findings highlight the significance of the spatial layout, interior design, landscaping, adaptable design, interaction spaces, diversity of building typologies, and circulation, which should be prioritized in the design of commercial streets.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Bahrain is an archipelago, located in the Arabian Gulf, at 50.85 east and 26.24 north. The majority of the population resides in cities, and mainly in Manama. The rest of the population lives in older parts of the island, rich with traditional Bahraini architecture and identity (Eldardiry & Konbr, 2022). Manama (Figure 1) became the capital of Bahrain in 1921 and was known as a prominent trading centre in the region (Aljazi, 2020). It is home to a diverse population and individuals of different faiths. Bahrain has a strong, respectable history of urbanization, witnessing significant transformations in its built environments. Bab Al Bahrain Avenue is among the busiest streets in the capital, filled with residents and tourists. It has the significance of being both a destination and a transitional space. Most government buildings are located there and designed in a modern style. The characteristics of Bahrain's cities have been crucial to its urban development throughout history. Due to globalization, the city's primary economic drivers have been the tourist industries and trade, which have contributed significantly to its status as a central hub for commerce (El-Ghonaimy, 2020).



Figure 1. Manama's location in Bahrain (Adapted from (UPDA, 2024)).

1.2 Statement of Problem and Research Gap

Urbanization impacts commercial activities in traditional and contemporary trading environments in Bahrain. It is home to some of the world's most forward-thinking heritage preservation specialists, because of the professional guidance that it received from the government of Bahrain in the late 1960s (Hamouche, 2004). Globalization has radically altered the urban morphology of Bahraini cities, distorting the city's trading centre, even though early modern planning practices took into account the city's trading, social cohesiveness and historical significance. Hamouche (2004) claims that two concrete measures must mitigate the adverse effects of global planning practices on cities with heritage significance:

- a. The first strategy is to force non-native players to adapt to local conditions (climate, moral standards, cultural norms, etc.) in an authentic metropolis such as Muharraq.

b. The second strategy involves nurturing local human resources via knowledge-based networks. Moreover, in the older areas of Bahraini cities, the type of trading that facilitates tourists buying souvenirs, crafts and handmade trade has driven the city's economy, making it a central commercial hub. Unfortunately, globalization has dramatically changed the older section of the city's urban morphology, distorting its historical core despite the meticulous consideration of social coherence and historical significance in early modern planning. Most projects in such areas lack appropriate designs to attract visitors, which was a different case in the past, respecting both traditions and heritage issues and the vital commercial operations and needs of the users in the historical zones. Due to the significance of the heritage component in the city development plans, the designs of open spaces need to be re-examined, and streetscape conditions reflecting local identities need to be improved to enhance the trading ambience. Moreover, the designs should align with the strategic masterplan of Bahrain 2023, Bahrain's Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA) vision and the local municipality goals. To ensure that this paper achieves its aim, it is important to understand numerous key factors. The trade sector, which includes wholesale, retail sale and any service related to the sale of any type of goods in Bahrain, is among the top four growing contributors to the country's GDP (MOFNE, 2023). In the same context, it should be noted that the contribution of trade to Bahrain's real GDP increased from 11.8% in 2019 to 13.1% in the second quarter of 2023 (MOFNE, 2023). This demonstrates the successful impact of trade within the local economy. However, despite this rise in numbers, there is an apparent disconnect among individuals engaged in trading activities in Bahrain. There is an observed decline in social activities across the country, as individuals are attracted to global brands and shopping at malls and online, for a variety of reasons, including ease, fast transactions and convenience. This brings us to the main research problem, which addresses the disconnect in trade, posing a significant threat to preserving Bahrain's vibrant social trading culture, which its people have long celebrated.

1.3 Objectives and Hypotheses

The overarching aim of the research is to explore the dynamics of different trading environments in Bahrain to revive commercial activities. The objectives of the study include: 1) outlining the social impacts of urbanization on trade; 2) assessing the perceptions of commercial activities in traditional trading environments (Old Manama); and 3) identifying the architectural principles that influence the physical act of trade (Old Manama and Souq Al Baraha). The findings will help in the proposal of recommendations to reignite social trading experiences from the past. This can be achieved through a mixed-method approach.

- a. A "fishbone diagram" will be used to pinpoint the fundamental causes of disconnect in trade in Bahrain.
- b. A questionnaire (quantitative) will be adopted to explore the dynamics of trade from the personal perspectives of both shoppers and residents, and to outline the social impacts of urbanization on trade.
- c. A photographic analysis (qualitative) will be used to identify architectural principles that affect trade.

1.4 Significance and Structure of the Paper

The paper is structured in five sections. The first consists of an extensive literature review on urbanization and its impacts on trading environments, along with background information about Bahrain. Subsequently, the materials and methods section discusses the mixed methodology employed. The third section presents the results, while the fourth presents the discussion and the final section highlights the conclusions and recommendations for reviving the commercial streets of old areas in Bahrain (Figure 2). The research seeks to investigate the physical urban design and architectural elements that can significantly improve trading activities in the old city of Manama.

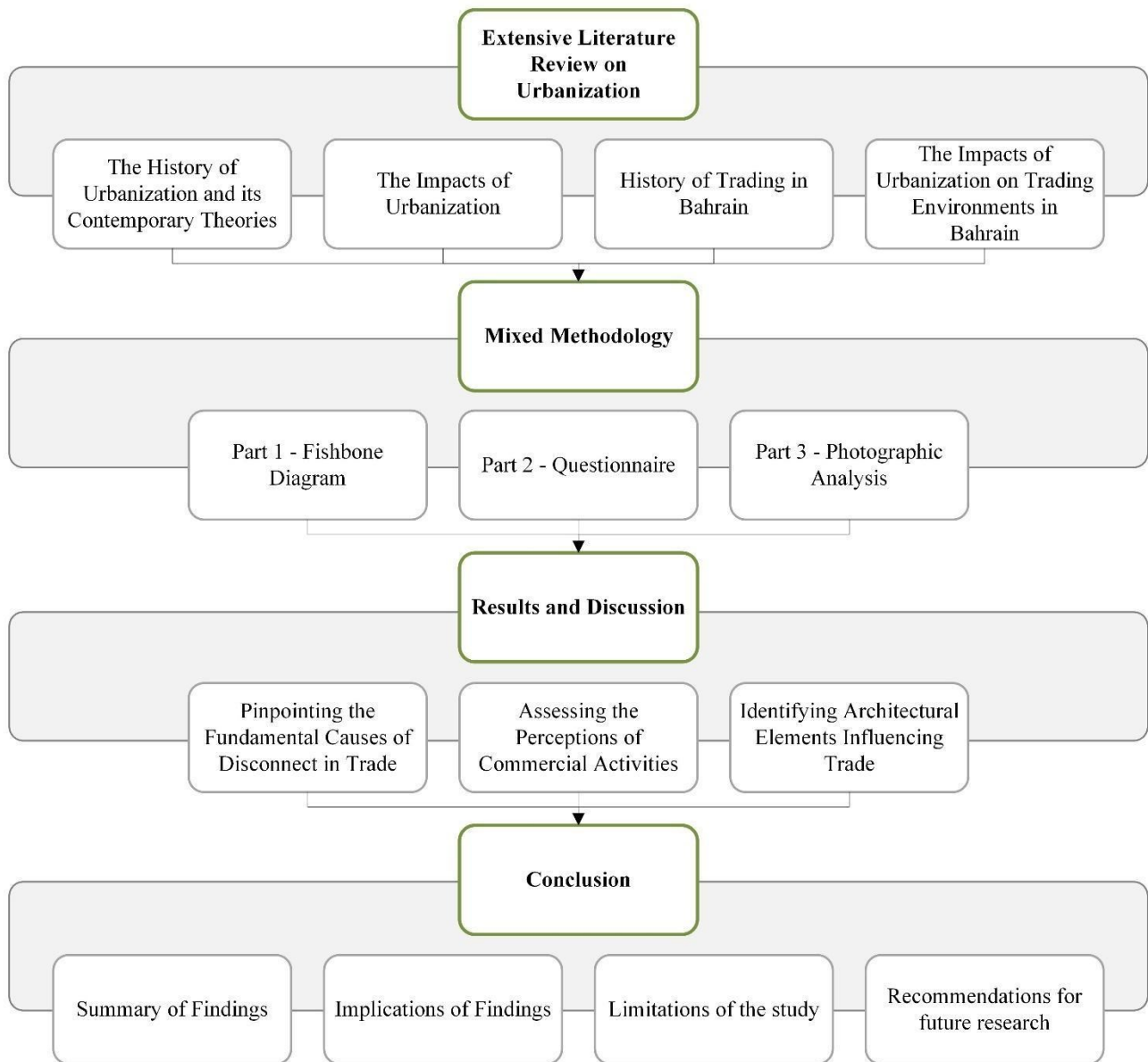


Figure 2. The research structure (Developed by the Authors).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The History of Urbanization and its Contemporary Theories

Urbanization is a global phenomenon; however, the absence of a fixed definition stems from the fact that urban aspects vary among different researchers and professionals in the field (Dijkstra et al., 2020). Many academics agree that urbanization is generally defined as the migration and relocation of populations from rural regions to urban areas, resulting in the subsequent alteration of the physical environment within urban settings (Kuddus et al., 2020). Throughout history, the attraction of cities as focal points for trade, culture, education and economic opportunities has consistently motivated the migration of people. This trend became even more pronounced following the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Friedlander & Okun, 2022). Over time, numerous urban theories surfaced to enhance our comprehension of cities and urban life. These theories adopt an interdisciplinary approach that garners interest from various disciplines, including



architecture. Due to substantial transformations in the scale, scope and characteristics of settlements, the clear distinction between urban and rural areas has become increasingly blurred (Hugo, 2016).

During the twentieth century, many influential contemporary schools of urban theory emerged, such as the Chicago School, the Frankfurt School, New Urbanism and Placemaking, among others. Each theory made distinctive contributions to the field of urban planning. The Chicago School focused on micro-sociology, urban sociology, social dynamics and urban ecologies within cities. The Frankfurt School aimed to enhance the understanding of social change (Jayne & Ward, 2016). Influenced by both schools, philosopher Henri Lefebvre focused on the “social production of space” and the “right to the city” (Kuttler, 2023). New Urbanism aimed to foster a sense of community among residents and counteract a sense of placelessness; however, further research is necessary to examine its advantages within the context of contemporary development, particularly post-COVID-19 (Garde, 2020). Placemaking emerged to enhance community engagement and people’s quality of life (Ellery et al., 2020). Ellery et al. highlight its importance in economically, socially and environmentally responsible design (2021). Placemaking also has the ability to give a sense of place, which can improve social communication and coherence in a community (Dash & Thilagam, 2022). Numerous researchers and theorists examining urban theories in the twenty-first century highlight the diversity and intricacy of urban life, focusing on social aspects and promoting cultural expression and cultural identity. They concur that cities are no longer confined within discrete boundaries, and the essence of urban life is now defined by the interplay of flows, juxtapositions, permeability and relational connectivity (Jayne & Ward, 2016). They are also widely recognized for their incorporation of diverse approaches, methods and theoretical perspectives, resulting in a range of both positive and negative impacts on societies.

2.2 The Impacts of Urbanization

The process of urbanization brings about numerous benefits to society by improving the social and economic aspects of people’s livelihoods (Murayama & Estoque, 2017). Table 1 illustrates the positive and negative impacts of urbanization, categorizing them based on their effect on the pillars of sustainability.

Table 1: Positive and negative impacts of urbanization on economic, social and environmental aspects (adapted from Murayama & Estoque, 2017; Lynam et al., 2023; Thaweeprawadej & Evans, 2023):

	Impact	Affected Sustainability Pillar(s)	Forms of Impact
(+) Positive Impacts of Urbanization	Economic opportunities & trade	Economic, Social	Increase in trade; increased GDP
	Infrastructure services and	Economic, Environmental	Improved infrastructure; enhanced utilities; increased investments; tech advancements
	Social and cultural diversity	Social	Cultural exchange; community building; interaction
	Knowledge innovation and	Economic, Social	Knowledge exchange; collaboration; entrepreneurship
(-) Negative Impacts of Urbanization	Overcrowding	Economic, Environmental	Population density; housing shortage; strain on infrastructure/resources; decrease in prosocial behaviours



Environmental degradation	Environmental		Effect on air, water and land; depletion of biodiversity; climate change
Social inequality	Social		Housing and employment disparities; segregation; access to services
Traffic congestion	Economic, Environmental	Social,	Increased vehicles; limited road infrastructure; parking challenges
Loss of agricultural land	Economic, Environmental	Social,	Decreased food production; displacement of rural communities
Urban poverty and crime	Economic, Social		Rising cost of living; concentration of disadvantaged populations
Social fragmentation	Social		Spatial segregation; loss of social networks; communication technology
Health challenges	Environmental		Air and noise pollution; inadequate sanitation

Urban centres epitomize the fusion of creativity and imagination, showcasing humanity’s immense potential for innovation and the generation of knowledge. They serve as vibrant hubs for socio-cultural transformations and act as engines of economic growth. However, urbanization brings with it negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts on individuals, communities and the natural environment. These include the urban heat island effect, air pollution flooding, traffic congestion, urban poverty and crime (Bodo, 2019). Additionally, it leads to overcrowding, social inequality, social fragmentation and loss of agricultural land, which itself leads to decreased food production (Thaweeproradej & Evans, 2023; Lynam et al., 2023). Overload theory claims that overcrowded environments, characterized by a wealth of stimuli, can affect individual cognitive abilities and exhaust cognitive resources. Consequently, individuals can show indifference to others and a decrease in their tendency to engage in prosocial behaviour (Liu et al., 2023). This is especially relevant in trade, where social interaction plays a key role.

It is evident that urbanization impacts all pillars of sustainability except environmental degradation, which is mostly concerned with the Environmental pillar. Urbanization exerts a noteworthy influence on social dynamics, shaping how people interact with each other and with their urban environment. Urbanization plays a vital role in fostering economic growth and development socially, particularly through trade. While it encompasses many economic and environmental impacts, the social impacts hold particular importance for trade, which is the primary focus of this study (El-Kholei et al., 2019). The next section delves into the background of Bahrain, setting the scene for the research.

2.3 History of Trading in Bahrain

Bahrain has been renowned as the epicentre of maritime trade in the Arabian Gulf for over four millennia (Figure 3), due to its strategic position (Laursen & Al-Otaibi, 2022). Situated along the historic Mesopotamia–Indus trade route, the island swiftly evolved into a vital port of call for vessels transporting valuable commodities between the two coastlines. Throughout history, trade has thrived in Bahrain, demanding extensive interaction with diverse individuals to facilitate business transactions.

island effect, increasing temperatures within cities and decreasing social relationships between individuals. Although the impact of overcrowding extends to various sectors, the focus of this study is on the commercial sector and trade, which is discussed in the following section.

2.4 The Impacts of Urbanization on Trading Environments in Bahrain

Throughout history, the trade landscape in Bahrain has experienced significant transformations (see Figure 4), influenced by a range of factors, with urbanization standing out as a prominent catalyst (Shubbar & Furlan, 2019). Manama in particular has gone through multiple stages of development, including autonomous, bureaucratic and global urbanism (El-Kholei et al., 2019). Due to the influence of urbanization, globalization, technological advancements and rapid architectural progress, local residents gradually shifted away from trade centres. This resulted in the emergence of larger air-conditioned shopping centres and a notable transformation in the urban design of commercial areas (Sarkar et al., 2020). Locals moved out of the capital and have been replaced by Asian workers, leading to overcrowding and posing a threat to Bahrain's social trading culture. Relations between buyers and sellers have become very systematic, if they exist at all, as people are leaning more towards convenient shopping options and environments, such as going to the mall or using e-commerce.

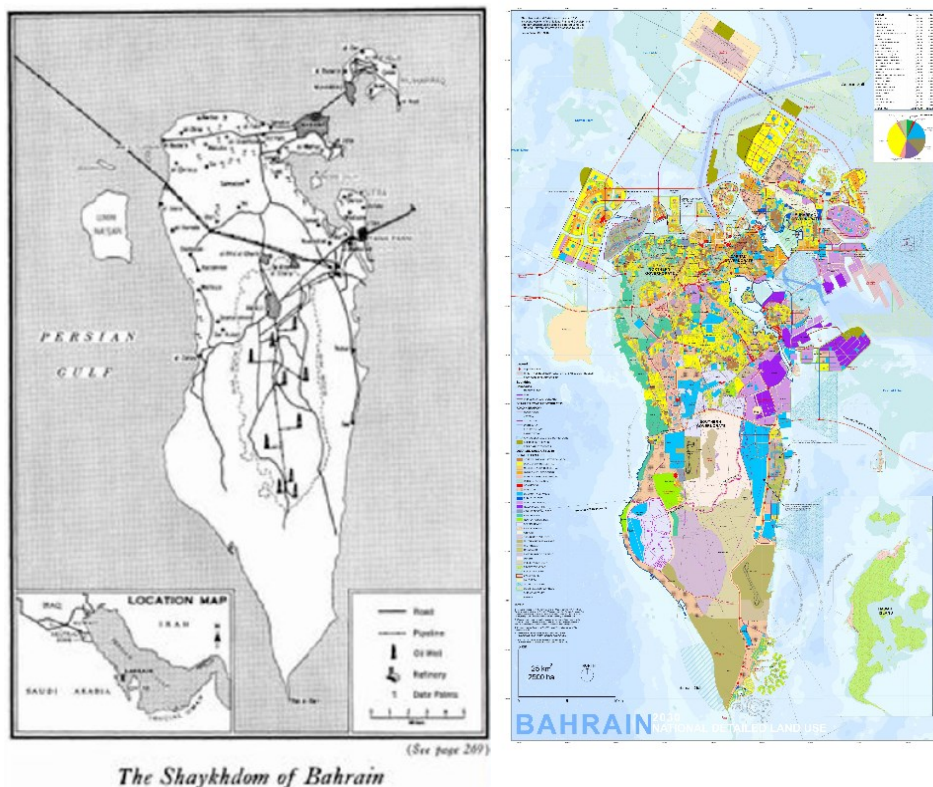


Figure 4. The transformation of Bahrain from 1955 to its vision for 2030 (Shubbar & Furlan, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the dynamics of commercial spaces. In response to social distancing regulations, outdoor shopping districts began to emerge, catering to the desire of people to spend more time outdoors because of being confined to their homes during the pandemic (Gordon-Rawlings & Russo, 2023). Additionally, e-commerce witnessed a surge in popularity, driven by the seamless connection between buyers and sellers and its heightened level of ease and convenience. The transition from traditional commercial streets to contemporary open-air shopping districts brings benefits, but it also carries a cost. Despite the improved comfort provided by technological advancements in controlling indoor climate and the increased space, a social gap has emerged between shoppers and shop owners. Architectural environments have shifted from cosy,



intimate and natural indoor and outdoor spaces, fostering trade built on loyalty and trust, to colder, more formal shopping experiences, characterized by limited interaction with sellers and a controlled movement of people (Iqbal et al., 2022).

Shopping malls have hence become essential components of many cities across the world (Olla et al., 2023). The physical, psychological and social attributes of the mall highlight place attachment as the bond between people and places (Lee & Jeong, 2021). This bond is described as cognitive or affective (Widya et al., 2019), or even as a cognitive-emotional construct (Reese et al., 2019).

In addition to the changing landscape of the trading environments, the insufficient infrastructure in Bahrain, lack of public parks, limited alternatives to transportation and lack of pavements have resulted in a strong dependence on cars. This leads to congestion, pollution, lack of space and overcrowding, factors that have an important impact on the trading environment (AlKhalifa, 2018). Furthermore, the large number of low-wage workers unable to work remotely further exacerbates urban overpopulation. These workers are heavily dependent on public facilities and services in densely populated urban areas, which increases overcrowding (Champlin et al., 2023). Overpopulation also generates health and safety concerns, including increased noise levels, excessive waste beyond cleaning capabilities, the impaired ability of security personnel to maintain order, increased conflicts due to limited mobility and, most importantly, barriers to the access of emergency vehicles (Silva, 2020). It also poses difficulties in accessing stores in outdoor commercial areas, as entrances to stores may become congested, making it challenging for shoppers to navigate freely.

The transportation infrastructure plays an important role in managing the population and reducing crowding. The numbers of registered vehicles continue to increase, causing traffic congestion, which leads to overcrowding (Gazder et al., 2018). It also increases air pollution, affecting people's health and vulnerability to disease, and is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. In today's consumer landscape, customers prioritize transactions that demand minimal time and effort, as they perceive such purchases to be more advantageous. Consequently, traffic congestion is a hindrance, affecting route selection, shopping location selection and shopping trip rate frequency, causing customers to alter their shopping destinations or to choose to stay at home and opt for online ordering instead (Hawkins-Mofokeng et al., 2022). Kanyepe's study confirms a positive relationship between travel behaviour and traffic congestion (Kanyepe, 2023), while another study also emphasizes the significant connection between traffic congestion and land use, specifically in urban areas (Kanyepe et al., 2021). Existing research demonstrates that locals play an important role in reviving the essence of old areas, and BACA is constantly working on reviving these old areas of Bahrain to preserve the traditions of the people and the essence of Old Manama.

3. Materials and Methods

Manama, the capital of Bahrain, was selected as the study area. The reason behind this selection was that most of Bahrain's population is concentrated in Manama. Urbanization greatly impacts trade in both traditional and contemporary trading environments in Bahrain, and in Manama in particular, since most of the commercial and trade hubs are located there. Old Manama was selected as the traditional trading environment, while Souq Al Baraha was selected as the contemporary trading environment. A mixed-method approach was utilized to enhance the credibility and generalizability of the findings. The methodology was divided into three parts (Figure 5). The first part presents a "fishbone diagram" to pinpoint the fundamental causes of disconnect in trade in Bahrain. The second part is a questionnaire to assess the perception of commercial activities in traditional trading environments. The third part consists of a photographic examination of buildings and outdoor spaces to analyse how urban design influences trade, by investigating the elements that have an impact on the physical interactions between merchants and customers.

This mixed method provides a comprehensive understanding of the social impacts of trade and the interactions between different parties in traditional and contemporary settings. It also provides valuable insights into how to approach the design of future trading environments in order to enhance the dynamics of contemporary trade. Further, it redefines the relationship between shoppers and shop owners, to give stakeholders and industry experts the opportunity to reignite the informal trading experiences from the past.

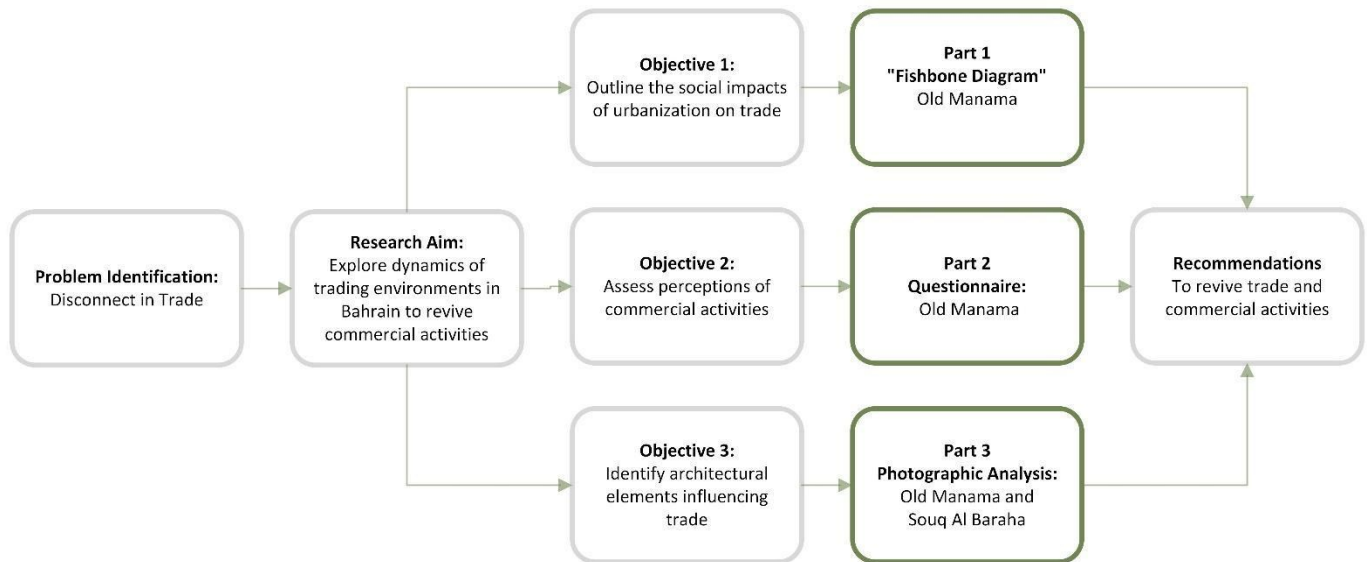


Figure 5. The mixed-methodological approach of the study.

3.1 “Fishbone Diagram”

Based on the aforementioned examination of the literature, a fishbone diagram was utilized as a valuable instrument with which to pinpoint the fundamental causes of disconnect in trade. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential factors, the diagram presents a detailed breakdown of the categories and their associated underlying causes. It is used to help to identify the root causes of a problem or effect and to assess the interplay between the cause-and-effect dynamics that contribute to areas in need of improvement (Plenert & Plenert, 2018; Coccia, 2017). Overall, it enhances understanding, promotes collaboration, simplifies complex issues and provides a structured framework for organizing and analysing qualitative data and determining the essence through phenomena (Jawwad, 2020).

3.2 Questionnaire

To facilitate the active participation of people in reviving commercial activities in Old Manama, a questionnaire was distributed using SurveyLegend to gather insights from residents of and visitors to the area. Table 2 outlines the demographic characteristics in more detail. The objective was to collect opinions and ideas that could play a significant role in revitalizing trade in Old Manama. Data was gathered in both English and Arabic, and the Arabic responses were subsequently translated and merged with the English data to create a comprehensive dataset. The questionnaire was distributed in both languages, as the majority of residents in Old Manama find it more comfortable and convenient to express their concerns in their native language. The initial set of questions consisted of demographic-related inquiries. The research team included detailed information about the study’s purpose and a digital consent form at the beginning of the questionnaire, to ensure that all participants were aware of the research and their voluntary participation. The questionnaire was designed to ensure anonymity, and the collected data was stored securely, with access only to the research team. By addressing these ethical considerations, the research team aimed to protect the rights and privacy of all the participants.



A convenience sampling method was employed to distribute the questionnaire via different social media platforms. This allowed the researchers to reach a broad audience quickly and efficiently. To mitigate potential bias, the link was shared across multiple platforms, to reach a diverse audience, enhance the representativeness of the sample and ensure the robustness of the findings. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data-collection instruments, the questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive review of the literature, and a pilot test was conducted to identify any issues with the questions. With a population of approximately 1.5 million, at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the sample size for the study was calculated as 385. A total of 762 individuals participated in the study.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	134	18
	Female	475	62
	Not answered	153	20
Age group	0–18	63	8
	18+	547	72
	Blank	152	20
Relation to Old Manama	Ex-resident of Old Manama	213	28
	Current resident of Old Manama	14	2
	Visitor to Old Manama	183	24
	Descendant of ex-residents of Old Manama	187	25
	None of the above	80	10
Residency in Old Manama	Unknown	85	11
	Less than a year	12	2
	1–5 years	30	4
	5–10 years	32	4
	10+ years	223	29
	None of the above	288	38
Frequency of visits to Old Manama	Unknown	177	23
	Never	99	13
	1–2 times a month	257	34
	3–4 times a month	84	11
	5+ times a month	128	17
Nature of visits to Old Manama	Unknown	194	25
	Clothes shopping	264	21
	Gold and jewellery shopping	328	26
	Cultural events	144	12
	Visiting family or friends	217	18
	Eating out	210	17
	Other	69	6

The questionnaire findings were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 29.0 for Windows). The frequency distribution was used to summarize the responses for the categorical variables. Cronbach’s Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire items to ensure reliability.

3.3 Photographic Analysis

A photographic analysis of buildings and outdoor spaces was conducted to understand how urban design influences trade. Old Manama was selected as a traditional trading environment, due to its history as a central trading hub in Bahrain. Souq Al Baraha was selected as the contemporary example, due to its recent date of construction. The data-collection process took place during March 2024. To

ensure the validity and reliability of photographic analysis, a standardized protocol for capturing and analysing the photographs was developed. The analysis aimed to understand the impacts of architectural elements on commercial activities in Old Manama and Souq Al Baraha. The findings were subjected to qualitative analysis to emphasize trends and draw conclusions regarding commercial activities. Lazar and Chithra's indicators of culture were utilized in the analysis to identify urban design elements that influence trading activities. They emphasize the importance of integrating cultural components in architecture and urban design, as they promote interactions and create a sense of belonging. These components include the use of local materiality, traditional elements, interior spatial layout, landscaping, flexibility and interactive spaces (Lazar & Chithra, 2022).

4. Results

4.1 “Fishbone Diagram”: Pinpointing the Fundamental Causes of Disconnect in Trade

Eight factors were categorized to encompass all the possible causes of the disconnect in trade: urbanization, economy, environment, petroleum, migration, cultural change, the Great Recession and COVID-19 (Figure 6). This diagram offers a comprehensive overview of the various causes that contribute to the observed disconnect in social trading activities.

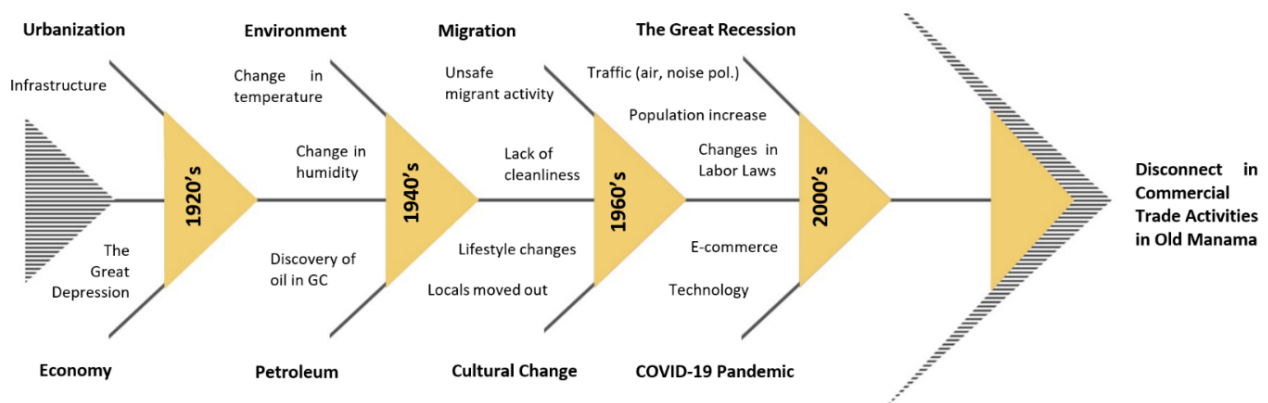


Figure 6. Fishbone diagram outlining categories and causes that contribute to the observed disconnect in social trading activities in Old Manama.

4.2 Questionnaire: Assessing the Perception of Commercial Activities in Old Manama

Among the participants, 63% identified as female, 18% as male and 19% as unknown (Figure 7). A total of 28% of the participants were ex-residents of Old Manama, 2% were current residents, 24% were visitors, 25% were descendants of ex-residents of Old Manama and 21% were none of these or did not select anything. Out of the entire sample, 29% had resided in Old Manama for more than ten years. The majority of the sample (34%) reported that they visit Old Manama once to twice a month. The types of visits differed among the sample, but the most popular choice was shopping for gold and jewellery. Attending cultural events was the least preferred choice.

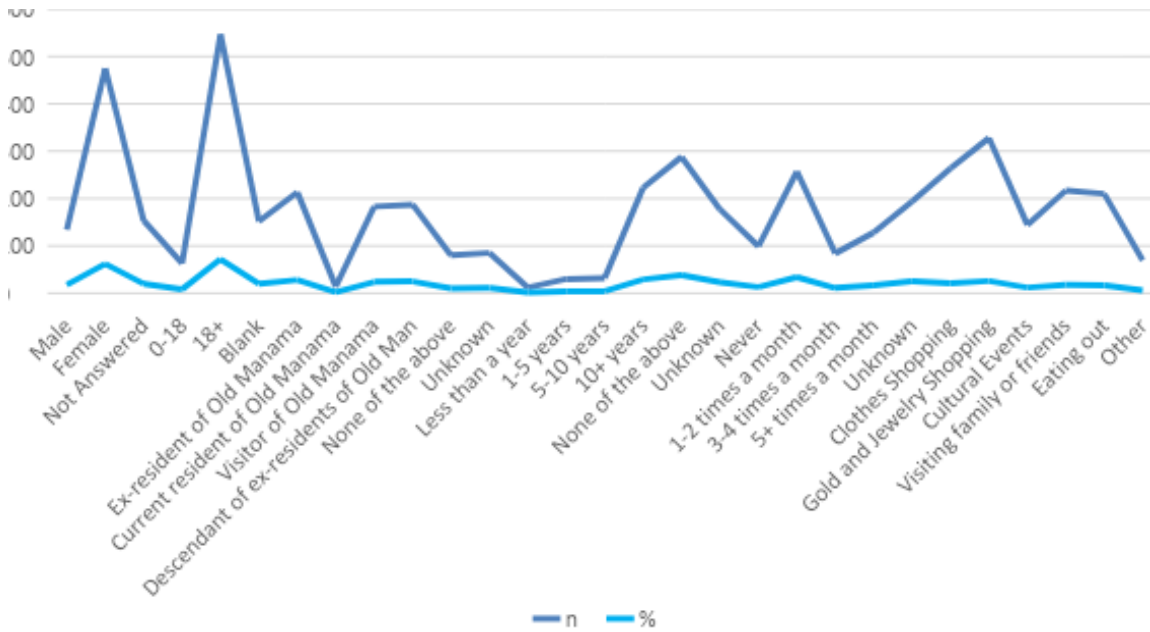


Figure 7. Visual representation of demographics.

Participants who selected the “other” option shared a wide array of reasons for visiting Manama. These included activities such as leisurely strolls, commuting to work in the town centre, people-watching, attending religious events (particularly during the month of Muharram), savouring local cuisine like Bahraini chickpeas and *mattay*, purchasing sewing supplies and having suits tailored. Interestingly, former residents of Old Manama mentioned more personal motivations, such as strolling through the alleyways to reminisce about their past experiences in Old Manama, visiting their childhood homes, attending funerals and paying respects at the graves of their family members. This exemplifies the strong bond that they have with Manama, evident in their consistent return to the area, while their extensive knowledge of the locality makes them valuable sources of insight, and thus it is worthwhile learning from them (Bobbio, 2018).

The perception of Old Manama was assessed through various questions in the questionnaire. A significant majority of participants (73%) concurred that Old Manama offers a diverse range of cafes and restaurants, while an even larger majority (79%) believed that the area provides everything that they seek in terms of shopping. Participants who indicated that they could not find all the items that they needed specifically mentioned certain products, such as branded clothing, fashionable modern clothing items, furniture, perfumes and make-up. The majority (75%) agreed that the area is family-friendly, and 83% felt safe during their visit to Old Manama. Participants who chose “not feeling safe” as their reason mentioned that this was primarily due to the increasing presence of unmarried Asian migrant workers who have recently relocated to the area. Additionally, there is a general concern about the lack of cleanliness, poorly lit streets at night and the potential for alcohol-related incidents where the workers do not adhere to the area’s policies. These factors have an impact on local commerce, as the public, feeling unsafe, may choose alternative shopping destinations such as malls instead. Furthermore, this finding emphasizes the necessity of implementing security measures to enhance the sense of safety among the public.

An overwhelming majority (98%) of the study participants expressed the view that infrastructure enhancements are crucial for the revitalization of Old Manama. The participants also expressed their opinions regarding the challenges of commercial activities in Old Manama: 38% believed that challenges in trading activities are due to the lack of infrastructure development, 25% believed that they are due to the decline in historical and cultural assets, 21% said that they were due to limited



business opportunities, and 11% selected the lack of community involvement. A small portion (5%) of respondents who selected “other” provided a range of reasons for their choice. These included concerns about the lack of maintenance of existing facilities, the migration of the local community being replaced by external subcommunities, traffic congestion, limited investment, insufficient parking, the exclusion of local residents from event planning, inadequate circulation and unfavourable climatic conditions. They also mentioned the increased competition with the availability of more convenient shopping destinations, the government’s negligence in promoting it as a tourist attraction compared to other old areas in Bahrain, and inadequate restroom facilities. Following the examination of the public’s perception of commercial activities in Old Manama, the final section of the questionnaire focused on soliciting suggestions from the public regarding potential measures to revive trade in the area. To encourage more family visits, 28% of the participants suggested increasing the availability of restroom amenities, 46% suggested providing outdoor and children’s play areas and 16% suggested offering baby changing facilities. Among the “other” (10%) responses, the majority suggested the need for additional parking facilities suitable for families. Some also emphasized the importance of wider pedestrian roads that are stroller-friendly, the provision of shaded areas to combat the summer heat and the inclusion of more public furniture to provide resting spots for visitors.

When asked what suggestions could attract more visitors to Old Manama, 29% proposed additional parking spaces, and the remainder of the answers were equally divided between the restoration of old buildings, the development of recreational spaces and providing landscaped rest areas with seating. Additional recommendations encompassed the implementation of various measures to enhance the restorative ambiance of the area, such as augmenting greenery through increased tree planting, ensuring regular street cleaning, providing additional waste bins and establishing air-conditioned spaces. Notably, a significant proportion (32%) of surveyed individuals underscored the pivotal role of tourism and hospitality in revitalizing trade within Old Manama. This was closely followed by the recognition of the potential of food and beverage establishments, art and cultural venues, and retail and souvenir shops. Some participants proposed the conversion of old houses into boutique hotels as an attractive proposition for tourists. Furthermore, promoting traditional handicraft workshops and activities that embody ancestral heritage emerged as a means with which to infuse authenticity into the area. Suggestions also included organizing traditional music events, comedy nights, photography tours, religious and national tours, and local culinary tours. Moreover, a considerable number of participants expressed the opinion that local businesses could benefit from marketing assistance and tax exemptions. Finally, the questionnaire emphasizes that the local community plays a vital role in the revival of trade in Old Manama by supporting local businesses, participating in cultural events and promoting Old Manama through social media and word of mouth.

4.3 Photographic Analysis: Identifying Architectural Elements Influencing Trade

The traditional marketplace in old Manama is a cultural hub, dating back to the 1920s. The traditional buildings previously incorporated sustainable practices with minimal impact on the environment (Figure 8).

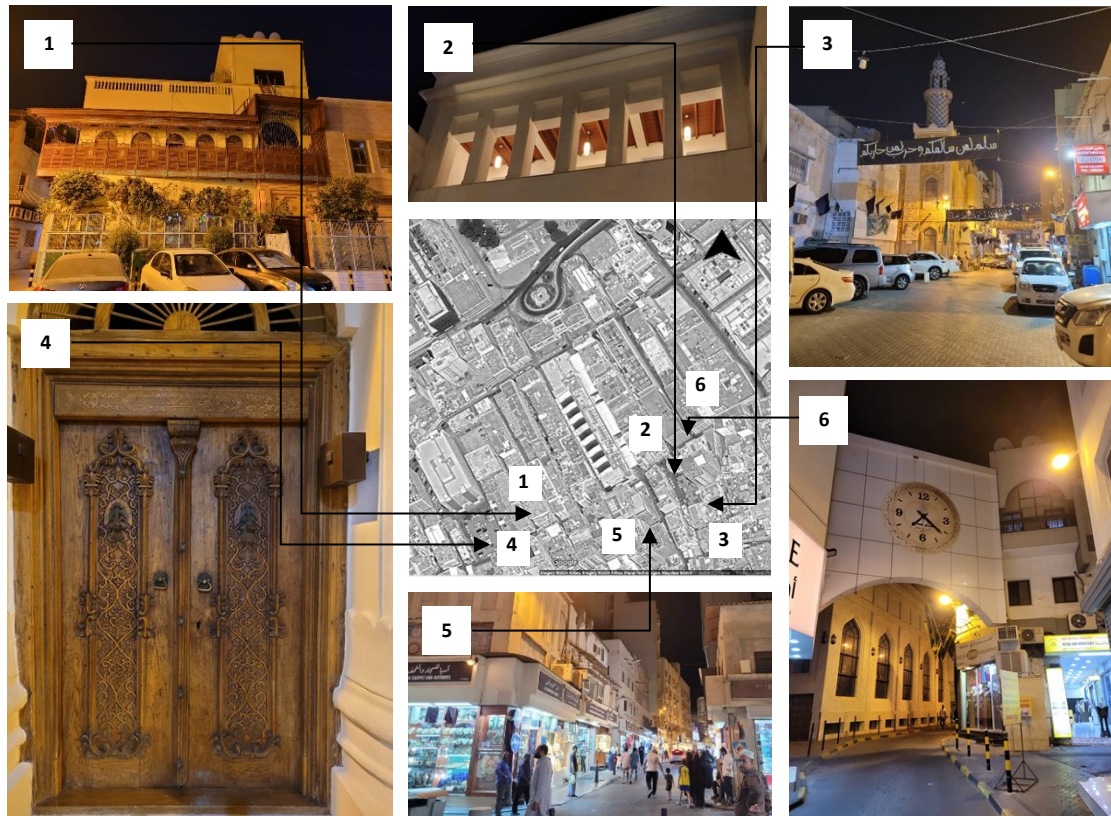


Figure 8. Photographs highlighting the narrow streets of old Manama.

They were built to reduce heat gain and maximize thermal comfort. Clay, palm leaves, limestone and timber were locally sourced for the construction of the geometrically dense buildings. Various elements, such as arches, projected mashrabiya and wooden craftsmanship, were integrated into the buildings. The narrow alleyways connected neighbourhoods where people used to trade (Figure 8). The public halls were designed to be flexible to house religious and social events.

In contrast, meticulous photographic documentation was conducted to capture the architectural elements at Souq Al Baraha, encompassing diverse spatial areas (Figure 9). The project recreates the traditional layout of a souq by arranging its building structures around courtyards. Designed in a contemporary manner, the souq blends traditional and modern elements. The project aims to enhance connectivity by linking districts through a central gathering space. Organic streets are designed to resemble old Bahraini neighbourhoods.

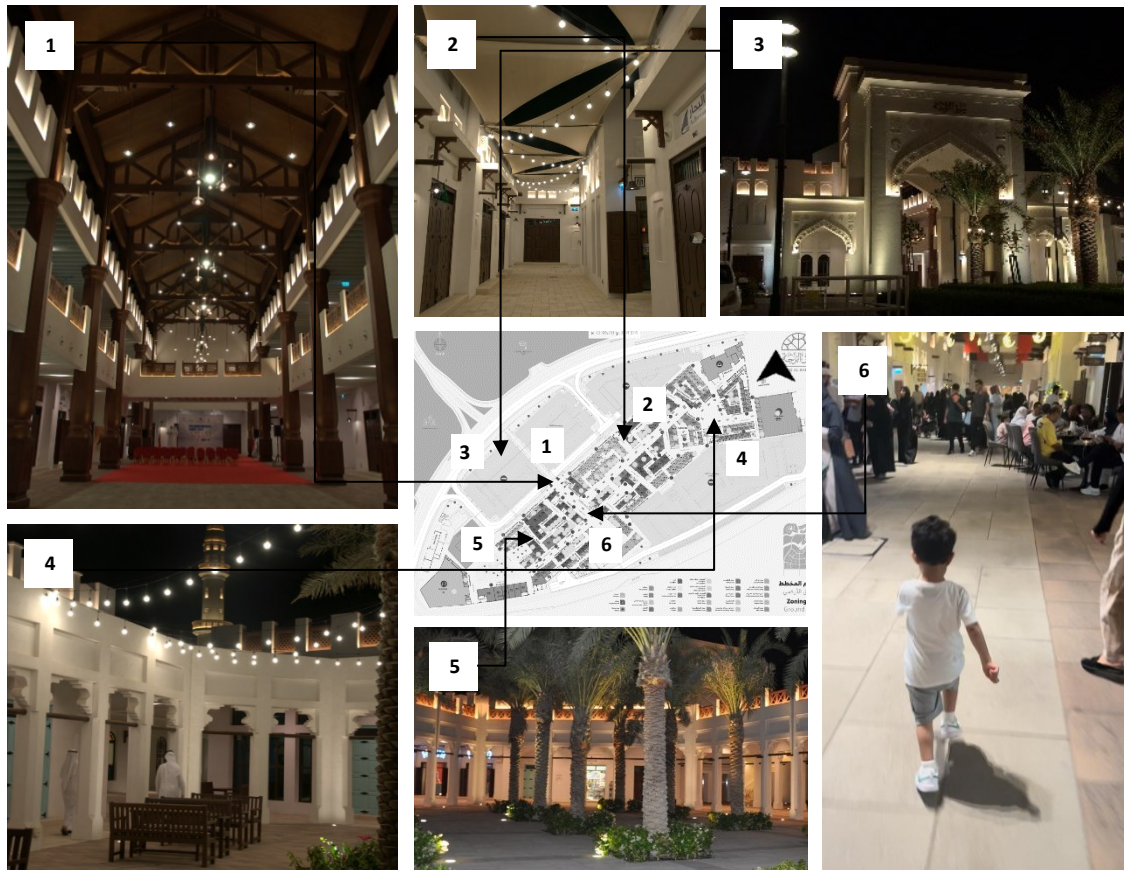


Figure 9. Photographs of traditional architectural elements at Souq Al Baraha.

The photographic analysis adeptly portrayed the visual architectural elements present within each space, revealing the unique characteristics and distinct conditions of five key areas. These areas encompass the entrance foyer, circulation area, retail shops, courtyards, and food and beverage (F&B) establishments. Figure 9 showcases a collection of these photographs, offering a visual depiction of the distinct spatial environments and their architectural nuances.

The entrance foyer is a grand double-height space, while the circulation areas and retail shops are more intimate and controlled. Additionally, the courtyards are large open spaces with vegetation and promenades of columns. The F&B shops are located adjacently, with traditional artistic openings and elements. Several outdoor courtyards are strategically placed to invite children to play in a safe environment. The integration of street furniture fosters a platform for social activities. Arches such as those found in old Bahraini houses are integrated within the façade and different wall openings. Shaded corridors and arcades also direct the visitors between different zones.

Palm trees and street furniture provide shaded rest areas. The use of natural colours and raw textures creates a unique tactile experience as users pass by, representing natural elements such as the sand and limestone. The overall design retains a distinct Bahraini essence and identity, fostering a strong sense of belonging, despite the use of contemporary materials. The sizes of the shop units range from 4 m² to 1,445 m² to accommodate a diversity of spaces to represent the old souq. The integration of cultural elements at Souq Al Baraha promotes interactions, creates a sense of belonging and improves sustainable behavioural change.

5. Discussion

The photographic analyses of both Old Manama and Souq Al Baraha emphasize the importance of outdoor spaces, diverse typologies of space, organic circulation and intimate spaces in enhancing commercial activities. These findings are in line with Lazar and Chithra’s (2022) findings of elements that emphasize culture. The results highlight how the commercial streets integrating elements of culture have a strong positive impact on commercial activities. Table 3 highlights the impacts of architectural elements on commercial activities in Souq Al Manama and Souq Al Baraha. Materiality and façade treatment displayed no impact on the commercial activities.

Table 3: The impact of architectural elements on commercial activities.

Architectural Elements	Traditional (Souq Al Manama)	Contemporary (Souq Al Baraha)	Impact on Trade Activities
Materiality	Mud; wood; palm fronds	Partial – aesthetic but not fully local	No impact
Traditional architectural elements	Arches; mashrabiya; balconies	Arches; repetition; placemaking	Minimal impact
Spatial layout	Narrow; organic circulation; geometrical volumes; furniture layout	Organic diverse spaces; circulation; architectural	Significant impact
Façade treatment	Light colours; minimal glazing	Light colours; repetition; openings	No impact
Interior design	Traditional elements; intimate, small spaces	Intimate, small spaces; minimal seating	Significant impact
Landscape	Communal; courtyards; local vegetation; indoor–outdoor spaces	Courtyards; local vegetation	Significant impact
Adaptable design	Flexible, from private and intimate to public; diverse typologies	Flexible outdoor furniture; multi-purpose courtyards	Significant impact
Interaction spaces	Courtyards; furniture layout	Courtyards; indoor/outdoor shops	Significant impact

The questionnaire gathered insights from residents of and visitors to Old Manama to assess their perception of commercial activities. People’s participation in design is very important, as seen in the existing literature, and it remains a challenge for architects to facilitate it. The engagement of individuals is driven by their interests, sense of empowerment and desire for transformative change (Zhang & Zurlo, 2020). Another study highlighted people’s participation as one of five criteria with which to transform commercial streets. The study emphasized the importance of understanding the opinions of users and shop owners in the revival process (Mehanna & Mehanna, 2019). These characteristics resonate strongly with the people of Manama, who are eager to bring about meaningful transformations in their community. The study’s findings illuminate the concerns voiced by both residents and visitors in Manama, predominantly stemming from the rapid urbanization and the diminishing social activities associated with trade. The original people of Manama, descendants of ex-residents of Manama and residents of Bahrain in general feel closely connected to Manama, as it represents the old origin of the country. Due to their strong emotional connection, they possess a deep passion for revitalizing the area. Hence, actively involving both visitors and residents of Old Manama, to acknowledge their issues and consider their suggested strategies, is essential for reviving the locality. Additionally, the study participants experienced a sense of empowerment with the opportunity to voice their perspectives on the ongoing developments within their community. This active engagement instilled a sense of hope among the participants, as they acknowledged that their input was being thoroughly examined and that their valuable contributions had the potential to bring about positive transformations.

Based on the findings from the “fishbone diagram”, questionnaire and photographic analysis of Old Manama and Souq Al Baraha, Figure 10 illustrates a wide range of recommendations to breathe new life into the area, categorizing them into three primary groups: minor adjustments, structural modifications and public support.

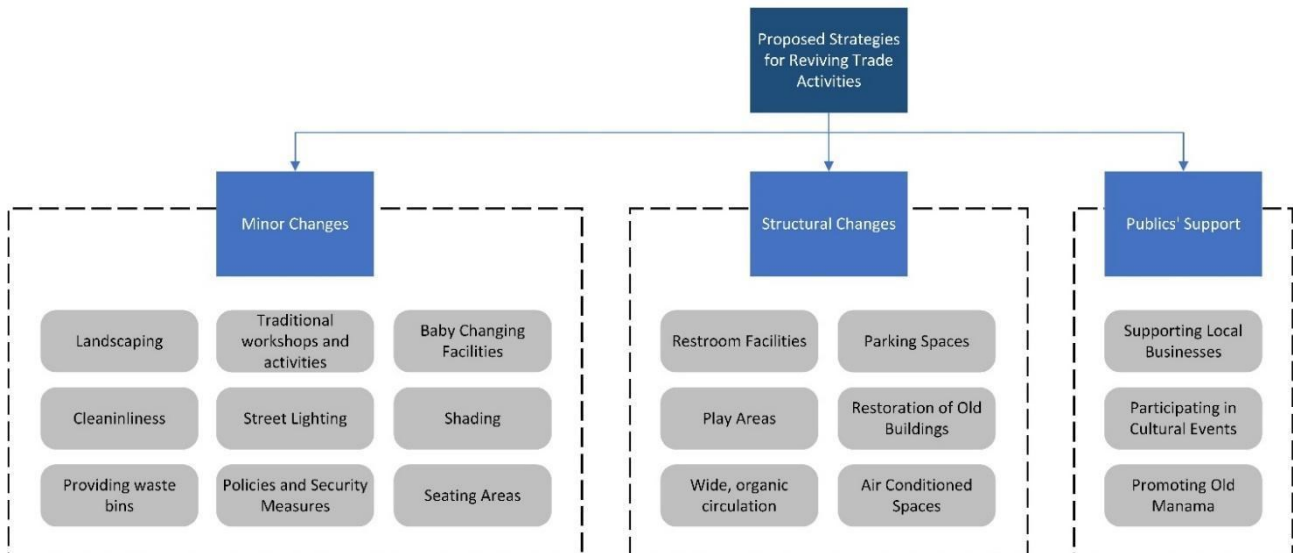


Figure 10. Summary of proposed strategies, highlighting minor adjustments, structural modifications and public support as the three main categories for reviving commercial activities in Old Manama.

The minor solutions require less time to integrate and encompass the combination of softscape elements, which include more landscaped areas and planting shrubs and trees, and the provision of hardscape elements, such as public furniture for relaxation, the creation of shaded spaces and improvements in street lighting. Additionally, there should be more clarity regarding the implementation of stricter policies regarding alcohol consumption and hygiene, the integration of enhanced security measures and the introduction of traditional tours and workshops that celebrate the local culture. On the other hand, structural solutions involve implementing long-term changes to the area’s infrastructure, such as expanding parking facilities, widening pathways and restoring old buildings. Support from the public includes backing local businesses, engaging in cultural gatherings and advocating for Old Manama using social media and personal recommendations. The insights derived from this data are of significant importance to both the planning authorities and BACA, and can act as a starting point from which to rejuvenate the area. BACA is continuously working on developing historic areas in Bahrain and could include the recommendations in the rejuvenation scheme for Old Manama. The planning authorities could also consider the findings and recommendations in future urban policy changes. The authors acknowledge that contextual factors such as cultural shifts or economic changes over time may influence the findings, as these dynamic elements can significantly impact commercial activities and experiences within trading environments.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the dynamics of traditional and contemporary trading environments in Bahrain. It successfully addressed the three objectives, namely outlining the social impacts of urbanization on trade, assessing the perceptions of the public regarding commercial activities in traditional trading environments (Old Manama), and identifying important architectural elements that influence trade in both traditional and contemporary trading environments. The findings highlight infrastructure, social and cultural diversity, overcrowding and economic opportunities as the most significant social impacts resulting from urbanization that have an effect on trade. The questionnaire results stressed the



importance of people's participation in design and the close relationship that the people of Bahrain have with Old Manama.

This study contributes to the academic field by providing in-depth insights for stakeholders and experts into the impact of urban design and architecture in enhancing commercial activities in trading environments. The findings highlight the significance of spatial layout, interior design, landscaping, adaptable design, interaction spaces, diversity of building typologies and circulation, all of which should be prioritized in the design of commercial streets. The findings of the study aid in proposing recommendations for changes to revive trade, and offer valuable insights for stakeholders and experts to inform and guide the development of urban design policies and the design of successful commercial streets.

The study is constrained by using two specific case studies in Bahrain. While the in-depth analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding, the research team is aware of the higher risk of bias associated with the two locations, which may influence the results. Future research could include additional commercial streets in other traditional and contemporary areas in Muharraq. The questionnaire administered as part of this research focused mainly on perceptions of Old Manama; therefore, further research could also address the perceptions of commercial activities in contemporary souqs and developments, such as Souq Al Baraha, Al Liwan and Sa'ada seafront. In addition, shop owners in traditional and contemporary souqs, as well as those with experience in both environments, could be interviewed to understand commercial activities from their perspective and add further insight, as this study only focused on the perceptions of visitors. Future research could also adopt further statistical analysis techniques, such as an ANOVA analysis to compare the means of perceptions between different groups of participants or a multiple regression analysis to determine the extent to which different independent variables predict the perceptions of commercial activities. The findings from this study are vital to reignite trading activities from the past within the Kingdom of Bahrain, through minor changes, structural changes and the public's support.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article; further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

CRedit Author Statement:

Conceptualization, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; methodology, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; software, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; validation, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; formal analysis, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; investigation, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; resources, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; data curation, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; writing – original draft preparation, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; writing – review and editing, N.S.A. and I.H.E.; visualization, N.S.A. and I.H.E.;



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