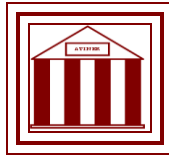


**Athens Institute for Education and Research
ATINER**



**ATINER's Conference Paper Series
PLA2013-0493**

**Liveable Public Open Spaces
According to Users and
Professionals: Case Study of
Muscat, Oman**

Hanan Aljabri

**PhD Student, Institute of Building & Urban Design
School of Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University
UK**

Harry Smith

**Senior Lecturer, Institute of Building & Urban Design
School of Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University
UK**

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.
All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the
source is fully acknowledged.

ISSN 2241-2891

2/08/2013

An Introduction to ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

Aljabri, H. and Smith, H. (2013) "Liveable Public Open Spaces According to Users and Professionals: Case Study of Muscat, Oman" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: PLA2013-0493.

Liveable Public Open Spaces According to Users and Professionals: Case Study of Muscat, Oman

Hanan Aljabri

**PhD Student, Institute of Building & Urban Design
School of Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University
UK**

Harry Smith

**Senior Lecturer, Institute of Building & Urban Design
School of Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University
UK**

Abstract

Public open spaces have played a significant role in the development of society and cities. There are presently increasing concerns globally regarding the essential value of those spaces. The understanding of successful public open spaces has greatly grown as the most liveable. Although there already exists much research in this area, enough emphasis has not been placed on this in Middle-Eastern cities. This paper brings fresh evidence on Muscat in comparison with international knowledge and contributes to the planning and urban design theories for other Middle-Eastern countries. The emergence of the Omani modern renaissance era in 1970 has changed Muscat dramatically in a very short period of time. Users' perceptions have as well changed, meaning that the demand for good quality public open spaces is growing. This paper examines the effectiveness of providing good quality public open space in Muscat by evaluating the liveability of four case studies of selected squares and plazas from users' perceptions on those case studies. In order to explore users' perceptions 120 face-to-face questionnaires were conducted in the four case studies. The paper then reflects on professionals' evaluation of the provision of public open spaces in Muscat by conducting 19 structured interviews with providers and academics. Structured interviews were also conducted with community representatives to find out constraints that hold potential users from using the spaces. The data shows that open spaces in Muscat require further consideration of users' needs in the planning and design system in order to deliver spaces that allow the people in Muscat to more effectively engage with their environment.

Keywords: Users, professionals, public open spaces, square, plaza

Corresponding Author:

Introduction

The appearance of public open spaces was associated with the first urban area formation more than 6000 years ago. During the Modern Movement in the mid-1920s health and sanitary concerns for cities developed, leading to a dramatically greater awareness of public space conditions (Gehl 2007). Later in the early 1960s, planning had removed public life from the new city districts and had squeezed it out of the streets and squares by allowing traffic and parking in the older parts of the city. A major turning point for the phenomenon of gradual erosion of public spaces and public life was initiated by the publishing of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, in 1961, by Jane Jacobs (Gehl, 2007). This 'Public Life oriented wave' in urban and urban planning studies has taken on a great momentum since then (Gehl, 1971, 2006, 2007), with the understanding of the importance of open spaces growing substantially as more and more public open spaces were rendered liveable and became well-used by the public (Francis, 2003).

There has been an increasing awareness of, and focus on, the significant value of public space. This concern has been supported by the developing evidence on the importance of public space quality to improve economic, social and environmental issues (Woolley *et al.*, *nd*: cited in Carmona 2010). The environmental benefits include promoting the concept of control pollution and contributing to energy reduction. For example, a well-designed open space may encourage people to choose to travel safely by foot or bicycle (Gehl, 2010).

Socially, public space provides opportunities for interaction among all groups in the society. It also offers a sense of place and is a source of community pride, which emphasises the sense of responsibility in the public towards their local environment (Scottish Executive, 2008). There is evidence that a well-designed space could reduce crime and the fear of crime. Well-designed public space creates the potential for the community to practise active healthy lifestyles by providing sports and recreation places which also open up opportunity for different groups in the community to raise environmental awareness through local groups, schools and individuals (Scottish Executive, 2008). Planning researchers such as Steadman (2006), Peters (2010) Marshall, (2008) and Miller (2007) have conducted studies on social issues that could also enhance public space environments (cited in Francis, 2003). Nonphysical values such as legal, economic, political, aesthetic and users' needs are often missed in providing open spaces due to concentrating on the physical and built features (Miller, 2007). User needs are defined as those amenities and experiences that the public seek in enjoying public open spaces (Francis, 2003). User conflicts in public open spaces develop when user requirements are not met, or when there is conflict between different user groups (Francis, 2003).

Economically, good quality and well managed open space has great benefits. It can improve commerce, retail and leisure developments, creating an attractive investment potential for users and customers (Scottish Executive, 2008). Civic spaces such as squares and plazas act as landmarks in identifying cities and

towns (Scottish Executive, 2008). Liveability of these spaces enhances the living style, working, investment and tourism in which they eventually improves the economy (Scottish Executive, 2008). During the twentieth century fundamental development took place in many European cities, such as Copenhagen, which improved the economic condition of the city and its citizens' life style (Gehl 2007). Moreover, the economic situation has had an essential effect on the concept of public spaces, their quality and physical appearance (Gehl 2007).

To link public spaces to public spheres an in-depth review of the overlapping process between physical places and the laws and regulations that rule them, the people who claim them through their use or demands, and the government officials in order to answer these demands (Miller 2007). Gehl (2007, 2010 and 2011), Jane Jacobs (1961), Marcus and Francis (1998) and others, stress that there are urban design issues which could enhance the potential of creating more liveable public space. Recently there has been great concern for the changes in the nature of governance and the extent to which planning systems can cope with current challenges (Hajer & Wagehaar, 2003; Albrechts, 2006; Vigar, 2009: cited in Curry J. et al, 2010). There is a new global trend in planning procedures which provides increased integration and a holistic institutional framework, which means a shift towards integrated planning (Curry J. et al, 2010). Thus, both urban design and planning practice are playing a significant role in providing more liveable public open spaces which entices and encourages the public to choose to spend more of their spare time in these spaces.

This paper presents part of a comprehensive research which intends to explore the process of providing public open spaces in Muscat. The paper focuses on reporting on the investigation of the liveability of squares and plazas in Muscat from the perspective of users and professionals. Muscat is the capital city of Oman, located in the south-east of the Arabian Peninsula, in the Middle-East (see figure 1). The climate in Muscat could be classified as a subtropical dry, hot desert climate, humid with low annual rainfall (Federal Research Division, 2010). The research uses the official classification of the Omani society according to their nationality as Omani and expatriate. The big inflow of expatriates in the last 40 years has made the social fabric in Oman very complex, especially in Muscat. The Muscat governorate accounts for the highest number of residents in Oman with 28% of the total population; 52.46% of these being Omani and 47.54% expatriate.

Research methods

The research was conducted based on a multi-method approach to capitalise on the advantages of quantitative and qualitative methods. A questionnaire was designed to explore the users' perceptions, which were contrasted with structured interviews to evaluate the open space provision process from professionals' point of view. Data collection was undertaken in July and August (2012). In order to

get a representative sample of users, 30 questionnaires were completed by the space users in each location via face-to-face interview. The questionnaire targeted users on weekdays and weekends in mornings, afternoons and evenings. In order to generate a random sample, participants were selected based on a rhythm of every other fifth person entering the space. Data was directly entered from the questionnaire into the SPSS database for analysis. After entering all questionnaire responses into the database the data was cleaned to identify inconsistencies and outliers. This was done by producing frequency figures for each question and then examining the outliers. Then, cross-tabulations were used to identify nonsensical responses. The open-ended questions, however, were analysed manually by quoting interesting responses verbatim.

Public open space is a planning and design product. The structured interviews were held with professionals – i.e. architects and planners in academic bodies, government and the private sector. Some of them were involved directly in providing the case studies. Decision-making is the main part in the production process, therefore, a policy maker at the legislative level was interviewed to explore the actors interacting in the process. Moreover, community representatives from the case studies' were interviewed to show the interaction of opinions. Interviewees were emailed in advance to introduce them to the research topic and to request an appointment. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were recorded, and then analysed in depth through examining each question separately. The two methods offered a clear understanding of providing and perceiving public open spaces in Muscat.

The case studies are all located in the centre of the city and were built after 1970 (see figure 1). Palace Square is the most recent case and was built in front of Alalm Palace to be used for royal reception ceremonies (see figure 2). It is also considered as a tourist spot. Municipality Square was built as a landmark on the boulevard of a commercial district. It showcases the modernization of Muscat (see figure 3). The plazas were chosen as the most appropriate in representing the plaza concept and features in terms of design and usage. Ministries Plaza was built as landscape frontage for ministries buildings (see figure 4). Muttrah Plaza is also landscape on the Muttrah cornice, next to the historic market and international marina of the city (see figure 5).

Both questionnaire and interviews attempted to explore the contribution of case studies to environmental, social and economic development of the city. A key limitation in conducting the questionnaire was communication, as the author had to skip many of the chosen participants according to the selection rhythm because many of the expatriates could barely speak either Arabic or English.

Findings from users and professionals

Contribution to the city structure

As a result of the limitation explained above, the number of Omanis who participated in the survey was 30% higher than expatriates. However, observation of these spaces, which was another data collection technique used in wider

research, showed that the number was lower. In addition, this does not reflect the demography of Muscat, which has a larger expatriate component. In the following findings, those resulting from the survey may therefore not sufficiently reflect the views of expatriates, but still provide a sound basis to draw conclusions on the case study spaces. It would be useful for any further research to reach a more representative balance of views from both Omani and expatriate users.’ From the questionnaire, strong positive relationships were shown between design of the space, the space making a good impression and contribution to the urban character of Muscat as a city. Over 70% of the participants thought that the case studies represent a very good/good characterisation of Muscat identity and character. The majority of the participants thought that the case studies do have a distinctive local character and contribute to pride in the city. Palace Square has the highest rating followed by Ministries Plaza, Muttrah Plaza and Municipality Square respectively.

For key informants who were interviewed, on the other hand, squares and plazas were new concepts imposed by the authorities as part of developing a national modernised city. According to them, Palace Square makes a good contribution to the setting and character of the city. It works well with the palace, which is one of the main tourist attractions of the city. Palace Square and Municipality Square are considered to be of national value and represent the modernity of the Omani renaissance era. According to academic participants, this square is the most symbolic landmark and it has potential to grow an even stronger connection to the nation over time. The plazas, according to the academic interviewees, might not make a symbolic contribution as landmark compared to the two squares, but they do make a good input to setting the city character.

Maintenance and place keeping

The majority of users of Palace Square agreed it is very well kept, to high standards, and the rest of them said it is well kept. The participants in Municipality Square were the least satisfied by the standard of maintenance and cleanliness. They criticised the bad condition of fountains, lighting, and soft and hard landscape. Additionally, cleanliness was not up to standard in their opinion. In the case of Ministries Plaza, users were mostly satisfied but a few concerns were mentioned regarding a broken lamppost. Good and very good were the majority answers from participants in Muttrah Plaza. They, however, stated the need for extra attention to cleanliness of the space and fountain maintenance.

Providers revealed that maintenance has been a big financial concern. Maintenance budgets are usually very limited, which has led to decline in the place. Lack of ‘place-keeping’ (Smith et al, 2009; Dempsey & Burton, 2012) to keep the space up to standard is viewed as waste of resources by the responsible authority. However, Palace Square is considered by interviewed participants as the highest rated in keeping the place up to standard. Municipality Square was provided with facilities to generate income, however, its this was not then directly spent on the square. Low management led to lack

of maintenance and cleanness, which today is a very big issue in this square. The two plazas were considered as having good maintenance and cleanliness but again, to some providers having those two locations on the main street of the royal court imposes big pressure on the responsible authority to maintain them.

Environmental aspects

Because of lack of day users, only 6.7% of the questionnaires were done in the mornings and afternoons, whereas evenings were much more lively. The questionnaire survey shows up to 47.5% of the participants were less satisfied with the design's consideration of the local climate. Having space designs dominated by hard landscape discourages day usage of the spaces, especially in the summer. "More trees" and "Shade" were frequently mentioned in responses. According to professionals, there is no serious consideration of environmental quality in the planning system. According to interviewees there were no environmental planning strategies or legislation to follow in providing the case studies. Some professionals found all case studies are to some extent usable during the evenings most of the year, except for a few months in the summer. Others found that case study places are not usable because they are westernised in their design by having hard landscape dominate. They added that they are unusable in the mornings especially in summer. Community representatives revealed that many people, especially from high income groups, do not use such places due to the climate, as they could afford other options. They said that there are people in the community who believe that there is no potential for having liveable public spaces in Muscat because of the climate. Moreover, this idea is rapidly growing as indoor places are increasing. These are attractive mostly to the new generations, since they have not experienced good examples and are more connected to indoor leisure facilities. An academic interviewee said *'people in Muscat are pushed to live in indoor artificial environment shopping malls It's a pity that if people want to go out they are forced to go shopping'*.

Academics and other professionals believed that proper consideration of climate in providing such spaces would encourage people to use them. They reinforced their argument with examples of other good liveable public open spaces in the city such as A'Sahwa Gardens and Shatti AlQurm. However, participants believed that climate considerations could be pushed further in the case studies of this research. Although the arcade in Palace Square gives a good shade, there is heat radiation from the hard materials used and the design layout does not provide proper air circulation. To interviewees the Municipality Square design needs landscape to soften up the space, to make it usable during mornings especially in summer. The Ministries Plaza design has better consideration of climate than the previous cases in the sense of use of landscape and materials. However, in the part where the fountain is climate has been less considered since it is dominated by hard landscape. Muttrah Plaza is dominated by hard landscape and, according to professionals, even the gazebos are beautiful but not carefully provided in

terms of shade and material. Interviewees thought it needs to be softened by providing more greenery.

Social aspects

The survey showed 16.7% of participants strongly disagreed and only 2.5% disagreed that the spaces were mainly provided as displays of power to satisfy the royal court, whereas 20% thought that the authorities have them balanced between satisfying the royal court and pleasing the public. 22.5% of respondents indicated a strong belief and 20.8% agreed that authorities provided these spaces mainly as displays of power to satisfy either the officials or the royal court. However, this is a critical question, which may explain why 17.5% of participants did not answer. One third of users in the case study spaces believe these are not user-oriented spaces. Up to 93.97% of the participants were never consulted on the way public open spaces are provided or asked to be involved; whereas only 8.55% of them had no intention in being part and having a say in planning their city. The majority of users in all cases have never been consulted in planning their environment. However, 91.45% showed willingness in having their say about planning their city.

The majority of interviewed professionals thought that the case studies are show-case pieces and people do not use or enjoy them. They are all provided next to motorways and highways, according to professionals to please the authorities and the royal court. They are not provided as user-oriented spaces since they all have basic visitor facilities missing. A community representative expressed that they are rather '*cosmetic touches*' to please upper level authorities. To an academic interviewee, '*right now public spaces are like exhibition spots and do not have a big role*'. A policy maker thought it is nice to have a pleasant landscape on the city's highways and streets but that this should not mean that residential districts should be forgotten. He added that it is the time to focus on content rather than on the context. According to such interviewees, the planning system has omitted providing such spaces with good integration with the urban function and with logical usage rather than providing them as just nice looking places. This is due to lack of integration in working between different authorities and lack of a comprehensive national plan in which all priorities are addressed and responsibilities clarified.

Safety

Survey participants were pleased with the safety. Palace Square scored the highest in safety, then Ministries Plaza, followed by Muttrah Plaza. Municipality Square had the lowest safety rate. There were concerns about some anti-social behaviour, which included playing loud music, vandalism, noise nuisance, litter and fly tipping. However, professionals agreed that the case studies were designed to provide safe spaces for users.

Users' needs

To focus on users' needs the survey participants were asked what would encourage them to use the square more often or to stay longer. Users thought providing visitor facilities based on basic necessity services and leisure activities is important in obtaining attractive well used spaces. Users complained about the lack of visitor facilities such as toilets, drinking water fountains, cafés and shops. Toilets, with a stress on their cleanliness, however, was ranked as the first missing need in all the cases. Respondents thought they are a major requirement, especially for children and elderly users. Some of them did not mind paying as long as they were clean.

Professional interviewees collectively agreed that public open spaces are not well used in Muscat. For interview participants, the main reason for the lack of usage of the case study spaces is that they do not provide for users' needs. They were produced by the government as part of development projects without thinking carefully about meeting community needs. They have no function in order to interest people to use them. For them, the case study spaces are used more by the low income expatriates than by Omanis. Squares and plazas have to represent community identity, being places they would not only use but also where they could express their emotions in celebration. This is because people will always think to celebrate somewhere familiar to them. Public spaces have changed in their use from necessary to optional, so providers must understand the users' needs. In the participants' view, the new lifestyle in Muscat society needs good quality functional space. Community representatives believed the quality of spaces has to be improved to expand their user groups. Today people in Muscat go to indoor shopping centres or shopping malls not only for shopping but as an outing. Providers stressed the need of providing for basic needs such as clean toilets in those spaces.

A few of community representatives and few of academic interviewees stressed that squares and plazas are concepts adopted from elsewhere, so they claimed that there have to be events organised in those spaces by the government on national occasions to encourage the community in order to build up their experience of using them more frequently. They also suggested weekly events being organised, as used to be the case in local traditional spaces and in some successful western examples. The government also needs to increase the awareness of the benefits of using public open spaces. Some of the community representatives believed it is entirely the government's responsibility to provide regular events in public spaces to encourage the community to use them. An academic interviewee stated that the community do not have the awareness of using such spaces. They need an external factor to encourage them to use public open spaces which gradually will build a positive experience in using them.

Palace Square was considered by interviewees as not unusable due to lack of facilities and activities that would encourage users. Moreover, it is located in Muscat state away from the all new developments where the majority of the residents live. Municipality Square was not seen as a place for people with better incomes where they get an opportunity to spend their spare time in better quality built environment. The two existing cafes and restaurant are very low quality.

Although Ministries Plaza is not designed to be used for exercise, most visitors go for keeping fit activities. However, interviewees thought Muttrah Plaza is the most used among the case studies because it is part of the cornice, a spot of natural beauty (see figure 5).

Economic aspects

Nearly 60% of survey respondents in Ministries Plaza thought it has no effect on the surrounding commercial activities. 43.33% of respondents found Palace Square did not contribute and only 23.33% thought it contributes. Unlike Ministries Plaza the square has better diversity in its surroundings, but the economic environment is probably not properly addressed. In Municipality Square responses were better than the previous whereas in Municipality Square only 30% of participants thought it did not contribute. This square has better diversity in the surroundings but the economic environment is not properly addressed. Muttrah plaza had the most positive responses, with half the respondents reporting it is contributing and only 23.4% of respondents finding it is not enhancing the economy. Participants thought that visitor facilities are missing in these spaces, which is not helping in attracting businesses.

Interviewees explained that effective use of open space must associate with commercial activities. Most of them thought that Palace Square makes no economic contribution but it has the highest potential in input to the economy among the case studies because of its tourist appeal. Interviewees agreed that Municipality Square is in a commercial district but it does not contribute to the economy as much as it could because of maintenance standards. Ministries Plaza is also seen as not making an input to the economy, whereas Muttrah Plaza was considered by some interviewees as making very little contribution. All interviewees agreed that case studies would do better with adding proper leisure businesses to them.

Discussion

Palace Square is highly maintained because it is the palace frontage and as a national symbol. However, places do not have to be very costly to keep them to a good standard - rather they have to be provided with a way to maintain themselves. Users were satisfied generally with the physical design, its contribution to the city, safety and maintenance. This square is mainly provided as a royal reception where users were not the first priority. Lack of attention to users' needs made it a not well-used by people.

Municipality Square is the only space which was provided as a national symbol and with proper user facilities, but lack of maintenance is a big drawback. It was provided with facilities but not well managed. Nevertheless, with the lack of importance of such value in providing process has led to low maintenance and it gradually ending up being abandoned by the community.

Ministries Plaza is located in Ministries district with very limited land uses in the surroundings. It also does not provide any visitor facility which will attract users. This consequently made it provide the lowest contribution to the economy compared to the other cases – according to survey respondents and interviewees. However, it scored high in level of maintenance and safety.

Muttrah Plaza has the most attractive natural beauty location as it is located on Muttrah cornice, however, it has the less impressive design. Users were satisfied generally with its contribution to the city, safety and maintenance. Not addressing users' priorities had resulted in lack of services and excitement.

Despite the high ratings given by respondents to the design and appearance of the case studies, the responses demonstrate a perception of weakness in the economic aspects of these spaces. Responses were more dispersed when it comes to the economic contribution. This is possibly because none of the case studies have good connections to commercial activities and lack user facilities which match Gehl's (2010) ideas. Interviewees reported that more careful thought needs to be given to public open spaces in Muscat in order to provide liveable spaces. As most of them respond to a new concept of open space in the country, provided by the authorities for the sake of city modernity and beautification all case studies are seen as having made a good contribution to the city character and appearance. However, they have made very little contribution to the economy, environment and social life. The design of case studies were not users oriented. In all cases appearance came before purpose.

To professionals, climate is a design challenge in Muscat. As society is more attracted to artificial environments, much more work must be done in this regard. However, this is not the only reason for low usage. All case studies were mainly designed as showcase projects and they are not user oriented spaces. Users require spaces where they may choose to spend their spare time. Lack of visitor facilities is one of the major reasons behind some people abandoning those spaces. They would rather choose to spend time in indoor artificial environments such as shopping malls, which are well serviced. Commercial activities are very attractive elements in terms of use. The locations of all case studies are not directly surrounded by any commercial activities, which does not give people further reason to use the space more. People not only required good design but also highlighted the need for good quality leisure services such as toilets, café, restaurants, sports recreational and shops – this finding echoes Francis (2003). Public involvement in the planning process is the first step in providing liveable public open spaces, corresponding with ideas cited in Curry (2010). It is now broadly accepted that public involvement is a fundamental principle in the planning process. It is vital to ensure that community requirements and values are adequately addressed to create spaces which are user-oriented.

Conclusions

This paper is part of wider research which evaluates the processes of planning and urban designing of public open spaces in Muscat. This piece of work presents an

assessment of the liveability of these open spaces based on the perceptions of users and professionals. The key issues discussed were contributions to the city structure, environment, society, and economy. The findings show that design aspects were addressed successfully in all case studies to some extent, but missing the larger picture of planning. None of the case study spaces designs considered climate appropriately. None of the case studies gave people different reasons to use the space. There is no sustainable management of the spaces with an economic basis which would help provide liveable spaces. Good quality space with proper leisure and basic users' facilities is essential to create user-friendly space. Involving the public in making decisions about their design is a fundamental issue in creating liveable spaces.

References

- Albrechts L., (2006) Bridge the Gap: From Spatial Planning to Strategic Projects' *European Planning Studies* 14(10) 1487-1500
- Carmona M. (2010) Contemporary Public Space: Critique and Classification, Part One: Critique' *Journal of Urban Design*, 15(1), 123-148 Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13574800903435651> [19th July 2011].
- Curry J., Illsley B., Jackson T., & Rapaport E. (2010): Community Innovation in the Soft Spaces of Planning' *International Planning Studies*, 15(4) 303-319 Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2010.517288> [5th July 2011]
- Dempsey, N., & Burton, M. (2012): 'Defining place-keeping: The long-term management of public spaces'. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 11(1) 11-20.
- Federal Research Division: Library of Congress (2010) A country study: Oman' *Country Studies*, Available at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/omtoc.html> [21st September 2011]
- Francis M. (2003) *Land and community design case study series: Urban Open Space, designing for user needs*, Washington: Island Press.
- Gehl J. (2007) Public Spaces for a Changing Public Life, Thompson C. W. And Travlou P. (edi.) (2007) *Open Space: People Space*, Oxon: Taylor & Francis
- Gehl J. ; Gehl Architects.; Perth (W.A. : Municipality). Council.; Western Australia. Dept. for Planning and Infrastructure. *Public spaces & public life*, Perth, W.A.: Dept. for Planning and Infrastructure,
- Gehl J. (2010) *Cities for people*, London: Island press.
- Hajer M.A. & Wagehaar H.(2003) *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society (Theories of Institutional Design)* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Marcus C, Francis C (1998) *People places: design guidelines for urban open space*, Part 4, 2nd edition. New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc.
- Marshall S. (2008) 'Them and us'—thinking of the user, *Institution of Civil Engineering: Urban Design and Planning* 161 (DP2) 45.
- Miller K. F. (2007) *Designs on the Public: The Private Lives of New York's Public Spaces*, Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Peters K. (2010): Being Together in Urban Parks: Connecting Public Space, Leisure, and Diversity, *Leisure Sciences*, 32(5) 418-433 Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2010.510987> [5th July 2011].

- Shaftoe H. (2008) *Convivial Urban Spaces: Creating Effective Public Places*, London: Earthscan
- Scottish Executive, Development Department (2008) *Planning and Open Space*, Glasgow: Crown copyright
- Smith, H., Pereira, M. & Burton, M. (2009) Physical and institutional requalification for long term 'place-keeping': experiences from open space regeneration in the United Kingdom. Proceedings of the International Association of People-Environment Studies, Culture & Space in the Built Environment Network & Housing Network International Symposium on *Revitalising Built Environments: Requalifying Old Places for New Uses*, Istanbul, October 2009
- Vigar G., (2009) Towards an Integrated Spatial Planning?' *European Planning Studies* 17(11) 1571-1590

Figure 1. Map of Sultanate of Oman and case study locations



Figure 2. *Palace Square*

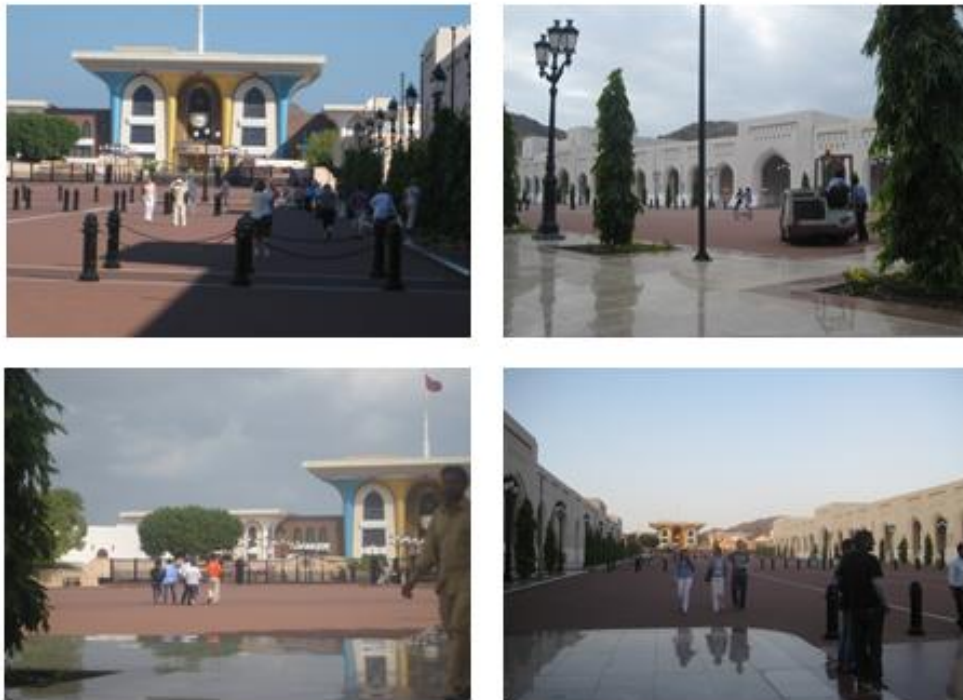


Figure 3. *Municipality Square*

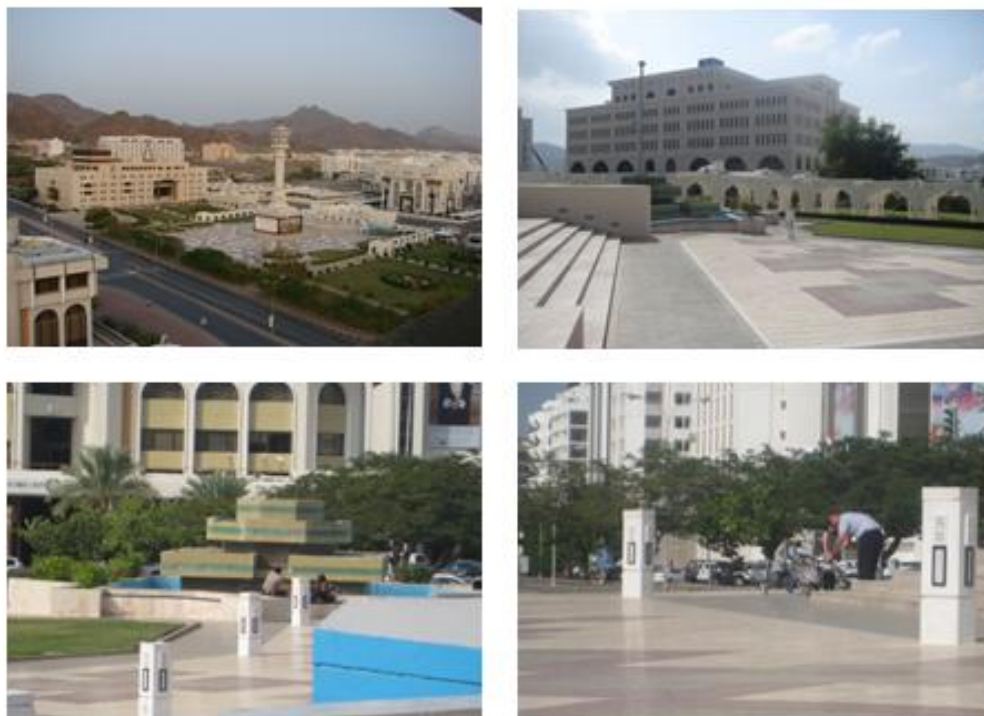


Figure 4. *Ministries Plaza*



Figure 5. *Muttrah Plaza*

