

Towards Cities That Resemble Us: How Can We Design More Human-Centered Communities?

Architecture today is no longer just about form; it has become an expression of people, place, and memory



Putting People at the Heart of Urban Planning

When we think about urban planning, images of towering buildings and complex infrastructure usually come to mind. But urban planning goes far beyond that—it also includes social, cultural, and environmental dimensions that deeply affect quality of life.

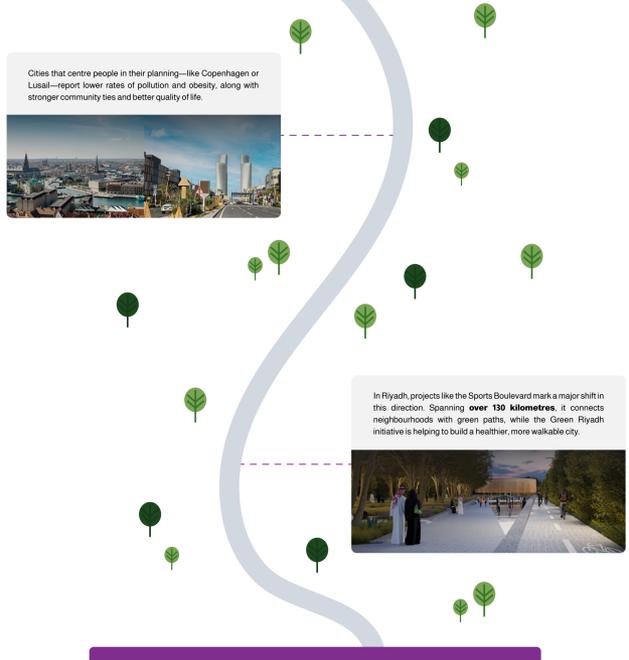
According to UN reports, over **56% of the world's population** currently lives in urban areas—a figure expected to rise to **68%** by the year 2050

This shift brings both challenges and opportunities, especially for fast-growing countries like Saudi Arabia.

Take NEOM, for example—not just a futuristic development, but a complete vision that puts people first. It leverages smart technologies, environmental sustainability, and urban design to enhance social interaction and human well-being

Redesigning Cities for Human Health

Over the last few decades, cities around the world have been dominated by cars, creating a host of environmental, health, and social issues. But many cities are now shifting back to a people-first mindset—promoting walkability and physical activity through sustainable urban design.



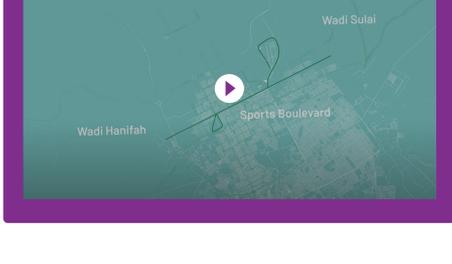
Cities that centre people in their planning—like Copenhagen or Lusail—report lower rates of pollution and obesity, along with stronger community ties and better quality of life.



In Riyadh, projects like the Sports Boulevard mark a major shift in this direction. Spanning over **130 kilometres**, it connects neighbourhoods with green paths, while the Green Riyadh initiative is helping to build a healthier, more walkable city.



The combination of greenery, walking paths, and reduced car dependency isn't just about aesthetics—it's a direct investment in public health and social cohesion.



If there were a walking and cycling path next to your home, how would you use it?

- Use it instead of driving
- Spend time with family
- Walk or jog daily

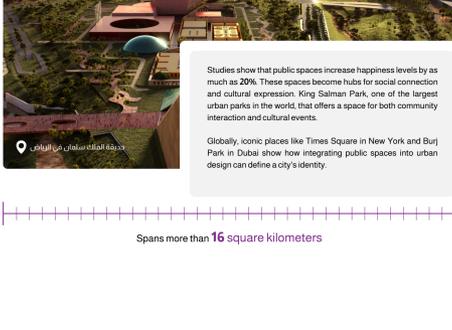
Public Transit: A Key to a Sustainable Future

The World Bank reports that cities with efficient public transport systems see up to a **45%** drop in private car use—reducing traffic pollution and improving economic productivity.

For example: the Riyadh Metro is one of the largest public transport projects in the region, while Dubai Metro has become a global model for success, serving over 200 million passengers annually.



Public Spaces & Art: The Cultural Soul of Cities



Studies show that public spaces increase happiness levels by as much as 20%. These spaces become hubs for social connection and cultural expression. King Salman Park, one of the largest urban parks in the world, that offers a space for both community interaction and cultural events.

Globally, iconic places like Times Square in New York and Burj Park in Dubai show how integrating public spaces into urban design can define a city's identity.

Spans more than 16 square kilometers

The Saudi Home: Between Needs and Identity

What makes a house ideal?

A study by King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals found that **74%** of Saudis prefer residential communities that blend green spaces, integrated services, and smart technologies. But this isn't just about convenience—it reflects a deeper aspiration for a balanced life that combines comfort, progress, and a strong sense of belonging.



What makes the ideal Saudi home for you?

- Privacy and peace
- Modern design and smart tech
- Includes green spaces and recreational areas
- Close to work and services

Architecture That Reflects People and Place

The Jeddah Central project is a great example of this shift—offering a modern urban model inspired by successful global cities like Singapore, while respecting local culture and creating a more sustainable, human-focused environment.



But homes need identity too. That's why the Saudi Architecture Map initiative, launched in March 2025 under the patronage of the Crown Prince, aims to redefine local architecture within the framework of Vision 2030. The initiative identifies 19 architectural styles that reflect Saudi Arabia's geographic and cultural diversity—strengthening a sense of belonging and showcasing the country's uniqueness on the global stage.



- In Al-Ahsa:** The homes shaped like oases, where the shade of palm trees dances across mud brick walls carrying the memory of the land.
- In Abha:** The colourful patterns of Al-Qatt Al-Asiri.
- In Jeddah:** The vibrant, market-infused Hejazi style.
- In Riyadh:** You'll see the sturdy and simple charm of Najdi architecture.

Saudi architecture, then, is not a single blueprint—it's a cultural language rooted in place, shaped by people, and enriched by both functional needs and spiritual depth. Every Saudi home is more than just a building—it's a story.

Toward More Human Cities

Urban planning should revolve around people—striking a balance between development, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability. We can achieve this by increasing green spaces, investing in public transport, and promoting designs that foster human interaction. The world's most successful cities aren't just technologically advanced—they are the ones that create meaningful, integrated spaces where people truly thrive.

If you could change one thing in your city, what would it be?

- Community events
- Public transportation
- Green spaces
- The streets

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