



# CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON MULTICULTURAL CITIES: THE CASE OF DOHA, QATAR.

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## Abstract

Population diversity is one of the main challenges facing metropolitan centers worldwide. Especially in emerging Arab Gulf countries, where the population is composed of multiple nationalities; socio-physical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural presence in the city is highly noticeable. Doha, the capital of Qatar, is an example of Gulf cities that attract an inflow of foreigners to live and work due to its economic prosperity. It is noticeable that utilization of urban spaces in Doha is affected by socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of its inhabitants. This study focuses on investigating the experiences of the multicultural groups within the city's spatial dimension. It aims at understanding the cultural, economic and spatial connections of these diverse groups and how the urban environment of the city can be improved to support the experiences of these multicultural populations. The paper explores the experiences of different nationalities according to the social activities distribution of the sub-cultures as an exemplary of other Gulf cities. In depth interviews, questionnaires and systematic observations were conducted to gather information from Qatari and non-Qatari populations focusing on their weekly activities and preferred urban spaces in the city. The paper argues that urban spaces define limits and boundaries for social experiences and interaction based on the cultural and economic background and suggests measures to improve the quality of urban experience of the diverse cultural groups.

**Keywords:** Multicultural cities, socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-physical, Doha, Qatar.

## INTRODUCTION

Population diversity is one of the challenges facing metropolitan centers worldwide. Especially in emerging Arab Gulf countries where the population is composed of multiple nationalities, socio-physical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural presence in the city is highly noticeable. Unlike Western labor-importing countries, where migrant workers represent between 8 and 10 per cent of the labor force, foreign work force in Arab Gulf states comprise the majority of the labor force. "In Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait, foreigners constituted a majority; in the United Arab Emirates they accounted for over 80 percent of population. Only Oman and Saudi Arabia managed to maintain a relatively low proportion of foreigners: about 20 and 27 percent, respectively" (Kapiszewski, 2008). Doha, the capital of Qatar, is experiencing the interaction between multicultural groups since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during its transformation from fishing and pearl catching settlement to a modern city. According to 2010 statistics, the total population

has increased 275% since 1997 and 128% since 2004 to reach approximately 1.7 million and non-Qatari's constitute approximately 2/3 of the population and 94% of the workforce (QSA, 2010). Foreigners are attracted to live and work in Doha due to tax-free income and high standards of living.

Yet, these multicultural groups experience Doha in dissimilar ways. They have different domains of experience and interaction. While all residents of Doha enjoy the panoramic Corniche waterfront during the sunny winter days and summer evenings, downtown streets are occupied exclusively by low income Asian workers during evenings and weekends. On the other hand, the exclusive areas of the Pearl development and Cultural Village (KATARA) are enjoyed by high income expatriates and Qataris. Shopping malls attract all cultural groups depending on their income level and ethnic background. This phenomenon is present in other Arabian Gulf countries; such as Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Oman that host large numbers of temporary migrant workers. This experience of multicultural