

# **The Impact of Urban Regeneration in Doha, Qatar**

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On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments

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Urban regeneration projects are sweeping Arab Gulf nations. Qatar has adopted, through neoliberal policies, to create a global urban image. There is now little left in Qatar's capital of Doha, which is truly original or representative of the traditional architecture and townscape that once existed (Scharfenort, 2013). In the late 1980's, nearly twenty years after Qatar independence from Great Britain, the nation created the Old Doha Regeneration Project. which was a plan focused on gentrifying historic streets in the heart of Doha. New high-class infrastructure is replacing the once prevailing architecture and way of life locals have been living with for decades on end. This process was accelerated when the 2022 FIFA World Cup was announced to be held in Qatar in 2010. It's estimated that \$220 billion dollars were invested in new construction for the event, which included seven new football stadiums, along with new hotels and infrastructure for the city (Worden, 2022). For my STS research paper, I will be analyzing how the reconfiguration of the economic and social presence of neighborhoods affect a local population and nation as a whole.

## **Background**

In the late 1980s, work on the Old Doha Regeneration Project started. Gentrification, which is the process of repairing or enhancing an area to attract more affluent people and companies and frequently results in the eviction of lower-income residents, has frequently been associated with land reclamation in Doha. The Pearl-Qatar, a new luxury complex in Doha that

appeals to wealthy locals and visitors, was built using land reclamation techniques. Many low-income households are unable to access these complexes since they are frequently portrayed as exclusive and affluent with high-end amenities and services. The first recorded land reclamation was during the 70's to develop and extend the city center to meet the needs of the new state (Al-Naimi, 2017). Land reclamation is "the process of creating new land from the sea. The simplest method of land reclamation involves simply filling area with large amounts of heavy rock and/or cement, then filling with clay and soil until the desired height is reached" (Stauber, 2016). Slow progress was made with the first high-rise developments being built in the 1980's and 1990's. This was the beginning of Qatar making serious strides towards globalization. Doha gained momentum with their plan when the Foreign Ownership Law was passed in 2000. This allowed for foreigners to own property for 99-year leases. Some of the world's richest people and corporations saw an opportunity to build infrastructure in this city looking to expand their economic standing. Mega projects quickly went underway including elite hotels, high-class restaurants, and sports arenas.

We'll examine the population and employment statistics to gauge the impact this had on the neighborhood's citizens. Almost 2.7 million people live in Qatar today, a rapidly populating country (World Population Review, 2023). The population was 613,300 in 2000. That is over a 15.5% annual growth rate, and it is the result of a huge increase in population in Qatar as a result of its 21st urban renewal plan. This is a much higher rate than seen in previous years. From 1980

to 2000, Qatar had nearly a consistent 6.6% growth rate. The city of Doha had massive population growth rates from 1950 to 1970, growing from a 5% growth rate to a 13% growth rate (Macrotrends, 2023). In contrast to the nation of Qatar, Doha currently sits at an all-time low in population growth rate at 0.92%. This is not consistent with other nations who endured an industrial revolution, such as 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. There was more of a demand for workers in cities such as Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and New York. When the industrial revolution began in America, “landowners didn’t need as many people working on their land anymore, so they moved off of it... That was, in essence, the beginning of the great migration, from [the post-civil war era] through the World War II era, African Americans moved in high numbers out of the Mississippi Delta, in particular, to the Midwestern cities” (Hammel, 12). City population growth rates grew exponentially as new infrastructure began making its mark on America’s most famous cities. This is important to note because an industrial revolution typically involves the transition from an agrarian or handicraft-based economy to a modern, industrialized economy. High growth rates typically indicate a rapid expansion of the industrial sector and increased productivity, leading to higher output and employment. However, Doha’s population rate currently sits at an all-time low.

Nadine Scharfenort, in her theoretical framework, looks at the effects of urban regeneration in one of Doha’s most populated neighborhoods, Msheirebm. Scharfenort states it is “losing its status as the cultural heart of the city” (Scharfenort, 2013). She infers the reason for

record low growth rates in Doha are due to a loss of identity with the city. Jobs needed are changing as the basis of the economy is shifting towards tourism. Urban regeneration closed many local markets and stores and are being replaced with high-class infrastructure. This also forces Doha employees to change their ways of interacting with people. With Doha now relying on tourism, residents must decide to either conform to the new norm or move to a place where they are still the norm.

## **Methods**

Integrating demographic statistics, responses from the local community, and policy is necessary to evaluate Doha's urban regeneration. Population and employment rates will be compared to policy and urban planning first. Different sectors will be examined, but I'll be concentrating on the industry sector. Due to its significant impact on infrastructure, the economy, and employment, Qatari Law No. 13/2000 will be extensively used. In addition to being compared to one another, the timeframe of planned infrastructure improvements and changes to policy, statistics on population growth, employment, GDP, and wages will also be examined. By analyzing any correlations, more conclusions can be drawn from the effects of the Old Doha Regeneration Project. To comprehend the societal and culture impact, I will be using Nadine Scharfenort's theoretical framework, "Large-Scale Urban Regeneration: A New "Heart" for Doha". She makes the argument for loss of city identity being the main culprit for the decrease of

population rates. This paper provides context to the history of urban regeneration in Doha's neighborhood of Msheireb, the once social hub of the city. She conducted interviews with Qataris on a 2012 research trip seeking to gain perspective on the impact of their altering home. These interviews will assist with learning how urban regeneration changes their view of the city, what they would like to see changes, and analyzing other impacts that cannot be represented with tangible data. This source will be used alongside data of Doha to understand the impact of the urban regeneration project. I will investigate how these rates shift following a change in policy or infrastructure. By having a timeline of events and rates, conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the Old Doha Urban Regeneration Plan.

### **The Economy, Employment, and Policy**

Data dating back to 1990, roughly the beginning of the Old Doha Regeneration Project, shows a dramatic increase in employment in the industry sector. Employment in the industry sector includes manufacturing, construction, public entities (electric, gas and water), and mining and quarrying. In 1990, 30% of Qatar's population worked in the industry sector (Trading Economics, 2023). This percentage stayed nearly consistent until the year 2000. From 2000-2008, the percentage rose linearly approximately by 1% every year. This rise comes after Qatari Law No.13/2000 was passed granting foreigners the ability to own land or a corporation in Qatar. The law required foreigners to be partnered with at least one Qatari person or entity and

can own no more than 49% of the share capital of a company incorporated in Qatar (Mouabrak, 2019). However, foreigners can own a majority of the land/corporation through being granted special permission from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI). Qatari Law No.13/2000 only pertained to certain sectors of the economy such as industry, tourism, leisure, and agriculture. All other sectors must be completely Qatari owned. From 2008 to 2010, the percentage of the population that worked in the industry sector skyrocketed from 41% to 59%. During this period, the industry sector accounted for 73.5% of Qatar's GDP (The World Bank, 2023). This can be directly correlated to Doha being picked as the host city for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. There was an initial 100-billion-dollar investment towards the seven stadiums and other infrastructure needed for the event. As the demand for construction and manufacturing decreased in 2016, the percentage of employment fell to 55% where it remained nearly consistent to present day. The industry sector currently accounts for 60% of Qatar's GDP, which ranks third in the world behind Brunei Darussalam and Timor-Leste. Though there have not been recent changes to this percentage, alterations were made to Qatari Law No.13/2000 in 2019 with Qatari Law No.1/2019. Foreign ownership regulations in place were significantly loosened aiming at increasing foreign direct investment (FDI). Now, foreign ownership can be applied to all sectors of the economy, outside of a couple strategic sectors. All these sectors can be 100% owned by foreigners and there won't be any more repatriation of profits. Also, Qatari Law No.1/2019 lifted their ban on foreigners holding real estate.

For the 55% of Qatar's population working in the industry sector, most are in the construction sector. During construction and preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Doha, construction workers were working around the clock to ensure all infrastructure would be complete in time. The average wage of these construction workers is \$6.20 U.S. Dollars per hour, which is below the minimum wage set by the Qatari government at \$275 U.S. Dollars per month (ILO Report, 2021). During construction for the world cup, industrial workers endured horrible working conditions. There were many reports of violations of human rights both for Qatari and migrant workers such as forced labor on days reaching 120 degrees, lack of safety equipment, physical abuse, lack of movement, insufficient pay, and confiscation of foreign passports (Amnesty, 2022). Five nation's embassies such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka were all able to confirm the deaths of at least 6,750 migrant workers due to poor working and living conditions. Qatar has not reported any deaths of both Qatari and migrant workers, or have admitted to violating human rights, but after the World Cup, the Qatari government introduced a series of reforms aimed at improving working conditions and protecting the rights of Qatari and foreign workers.

### **Doha Population Rates**

As stated before, Doha's population is experiencing all-time low growth rates. Present day, Doha's growth rate is 0.92% (Macrotrends, 2023). The last time Doha's growth rate was



increasing was in the year 2008, the same year rapid increases in employment in the industry sector began. From 1990 (roughly when the beginning of the Old Doha Regeneration Project) to 2000 (the year Qatari Law No.13/2000 was enacted), the growth rate of Doha steadily rose from 2.17% to 3.38%. From 2000 to 2008, growth rates soared to 7.18%. Growth rates remained consistent from 2008 to 2010, but from 2010 to 2011, the growth rate shot down from 6.29% to 2.29%. Doha was beginning their planning and construction in preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The population rate remained around the 2.29% mark until Doha saw their next massive hit from 2018 to 2019, when the population rate decreased from 2.26% to 0.97% in one year. Qatari Law No.1/2019 was enacted this year which eased the rules on foreign ownership. Macrotrends projects the population rate to increase to 1.32% by 2027, but then see another decline for the years following until 2035.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In Nardine Scharfenort's, "Large-Scale Urban Regeneration: A New "Heart" for Doha", she discusses the loss of identity for Doha and how it contributes to the decline in population rate. The paper focuses on the Msheireb Project. Msheireb is a neighborhood in Old Doha and the project worked in conjunction with the Old Doha Regeneration Project. Scharfenort begins by explaining that urban regeneration is induced by "the improvement of neighborhoods, the introduction of art and culture, the construction of iconic architecture or the revitalization of

communities, to enhance the social, economic and physical configuration of an urban neighborhood” (Scharfenort, 2013).

She then discusses the history of Msheireb and the alterations made to the neighborhood. Prior to the Old Doha Regeneration Project, Msheireb was the hub of Doha for commercial and social interaction. Msheireb served as the primary pearl trading hub in the early 1900s and was the residence of numerous pearl traders, brokers, and divers. The region was renowned for its bustling markets where traders would exchange fabrics, pearls, and spices. Urban redevelopment in the middle of the 20th century caused the pearl business to collapse and Msheireb to be gradually abandoned. The neighborhood had deteriorated by the 1980s, with many of the original structures falling into disrepair. Irregular, unpaved streets and asymmetrically arranged residential areas with one to two-story buildings characterized the city’s morphology. Rapid construction projects went underway in the 1990’s to house the growing population. With housing in such demand, “the city built simple, functional, and cost-effective buildings” (Scharfenort, 2013). Very few houses carried through decorative and architectural elements as the neighborhood saw before. Instead of Doha modernizing standing structures, they were torn and replaced with new rudimentary buildings.

Scharfenort notes that the neighborhood is still lively today, but is criticized by European and Arab expats, residents, and professionals as lacking “true evidence of an Islamic-Arabic

city.” The once center of Doha is now predominantly inhabited by lower-class Asians and Arab nationals living in run-down traditional houses or buildings from early modernization. Urban renewal is “usually undertaken for the purpose of attracting wealthier people to come live in that area while former residents are forced to move out due to a high rise in rents and living costs” (Scharfenort, 2013). Qatari law allows for only a 10% increase in rent for an annual lease renewal, but some districts in Doha have seen increases as high as 40% and there has been no action from the government to prevent landlords from doing this (France 24, 2022). 2012 Interviews Scharfenort conducted exemplify the urban blight of the area through the many complaints about poor maintenance and overuse of facilities. Scharfenort also added on that her interviews show the loss of social and economic significance of Msheireb to the vast part of the population “due to the rapid development, change of lifestyle, and introduction of new commercial forms” (Scharfenort, 2013). Sūq Waqīf, the center and once social hub of the city, was not considered a competitive location anymore proving the accuracy of these interviews. The development of newer and more modern shopping centers and malls in Doha has created a more competitive retail environment. Focused interviews with Qataris shed light on issues with congestion, pollution, traffic, noise, thus making downtown less attractive. These are issues most modern cities deal with, however, women in particular “felt uncomfortable due to the strong presence of male migrant workers” (Scharfenort, 2013). Scharfenort comes to the conclusion that the concept of Msheireb is consistent with the postmodern Arab Gulf coastal city strategy of

obliterating traditional infrastructure with new design while only lazily adding some indications of historic architectural patterns. Msheireb at least “leaves a little faith in future responsible and sensitive urban planning that finds a synthesis between traditional and contemporary design, something important for local heritage and culture” (Scharfenort, 2013).

## **Discussion**

After analysis, contempt is growing from Doha’s residents regarding the Qatari government’s lack of care for their citizens. In the interviews conducted by Scharfenort, Doha’s citizens feel no attachment to their home anymore; infrastructure has lost a sense of identity, new residents mold their culture, and shops and restaurants have become commercialized to align more with the preference of tourists rather than their own. Foreign experts agree that there is little evidence of Doha being an Arab-Islamic city. Residents are migrating to the suburbs in greater and greater numbers as a result of rising rent and a lack of connection to their city. All-time low population growth rates show how unappealing Doha is to live in. Not only does Doha’s infrastructure and culture turn Qatari people away, but urban regeneration has surged the price of rent. Landlords increasing rent as high as 40% per year is not feasible to many residents. The Qatari government has every opportunity to force landlords to abide by the law by charging no more than 10% more per year, but there has been no intervention.

The Qatari government has not been there for the people. Construction for the 2022 FIFA World Cup was the catalyst for employment in this sector to be third highest in the world. This was a world-renowned event and there was a lot of pressure put on the Qatari government for it to succeed, after all the work they've devoted to their decades long urban regeneration project. The Qatari governments only objective was to put themselves on a global economic pedestal, by any means necessary. Their citizens, along with migrant workers, were severely mistreated during preparation for the World Cup as shown through the forced labor in poor working conditions, below minimum wage pay, physical and verbal abuse, and lack of safety precautions. For an industry that contributes to 60% of Qatar's GDP, there was an absence of care for workers' health and livelihood.

Qatar's policy does not benefit the people either. Qatari Law No.13/2000 brought in a lot of economic opportunity to Doha, but it has consequential effects. This policy not only draws people out of the city because of the increase in mistreatment of industry workers, but because it alters the culture of Doha. Buildings have lost their original architecture and design, social hubs are being commercialized, and there is a lack of preservation for old neighborhoods that were once central parts to Doha. The Qatari government took a step in the wrong direction adopting Qatari Law No.1/2019. With foreign ownership laws more loosened than before, more of Doha's original infrastructure that represented the culture and history of residents that have lived there for generations will continuously be either become worn down or replaced.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, urban regeneration is a process that must be carefully carried out. Doha was once a city filled with infrastructure and culture that was unique to its residents. Through foreign ownership policy, lack of preservation of standing infrastructure, and lack of care for its citizens, Doha has lost its identity. What we can take away is the importance of urban planning and government intervention when dealing with urban regeneration plans. Innovation is great for society, but not at the cost of losing identity and culture. Going forward, there must be facilitation between urban planners and locals. These residents were the ones who created an identity for their city. It is important to have advancements in society, but regardless of scale, it is vital to ensure that the culture was preserved.

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