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Amending Modern Residential Environments

In Arabia's traditional society, housing closely reflected familial activities and needs. Traditional architecture adhered to prevailing economic limitations, responded to religious teachings, and grew compatible with harsh climatic conditions. The advent of modern nation-states and the integration of hitherto barter economies to the world market have resulted in both massive qualitative and quantitative changes in housing dwellings and their immediate space. The introduction of modern building techniques and the importation of myriad architecture styles has resulted in the construction of what could be termed a 'bulky' and inefficient dwelling space, both inside and outside. Moreover, due to the widespread reliance on the private automobile, a large proportion of the contemporary landscape has being devoted to an asphalted road network.

Focusing on modern Saudi Arabia's experience, the paper outlines major forces that have transformed traditional dwellings and their immediate urban space and ultimately shaped modern built forms. The paper introduces and analyzes traditional dwellings with reference to social and religious mandates. The paper traces structural and mundane modifications in light of national economic which have ultimately resulted in the "secularization" of living space. The improvement of lifestyles made possible by the oil economy have supplanted the traditional, climatically compatible and space efficient utilitarian architecture with modern, however gaudy, styles marked by extravagance. The grid, the square lot and the modern concrete house has become synonymous with modern built forms marked with massive concrete-built boxes and sprawl. The resulting modern urban landscape has being hostile to residents especially women and children. The paper closes with some policy guidelines aimed at amending modern residential environments.