

‘La Karama’: A Place for Everyone

Urban Revival of Al Karama, Dubai, UAE.

Abstract:

To begin with, at the center of ‘La Karama’ as an urban proposal, is the users of the specified area. By considering the general demographic and the nature of the area, *the submitted proposal relies heavily on participatory design, the creation of public spaces, as well as the creation of a variety of different, low-budget leisure zones to cater to the users.* Avoiding gentrification and unnecessary demolition is also a key consideration.

Introduction:

The site of Al Karama, located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, is one of the oldest and most populous residential area in the city. Considering this, the urban renewal proposal, **La Karama**, has three main objectives. Firstly, the proper and effective integration of the local population within this urban renewal project. Secondly, a complete avoidance of gentrification in the area. Thirdly, a high focus on sustainable development, especially from a socioeconomic perspective. The name, ‘La Karama’, follows the trend of newly established areas in Dubai, such as ‘La Mer’, and hopes, through the use of semantics, to socially elevate the area.

General overview of ‘La Karama’:

I. Site-specific conditions

Considering a user-specific approach to the urban renewal of the allocated plots, a lot of emphasis was placed on the site, as well as its specific conditions. Generally, as seen through the top view of the overall urban structure of Dubai (Fig.1.A.), Al Karama is located on the west bank of the Dubai Creek. Al Karama is one of the most densely populated areas in Dubai, and through studying its general demographics and statistics, ‘La Karama’ offers different urban solutions to the area. According to general population statistics, Al Karama covers approximately 2km², with an average population density of 33,508/km². Furthermore, as seen through the charts below (Fig.1.B), the area is dominated by expats- primarily South Asian expatriates - and men (Elsheshtawy, pg 212-213)



CALLOUT OF SITE

Fig. 1.A

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT
POPULATION STRUCTURE:

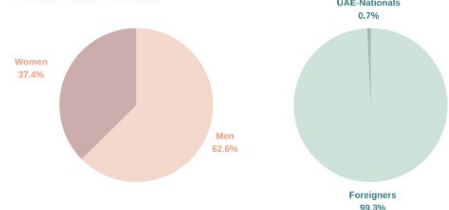


Fig. 1.B

To consider more plot-specific details, the proposed site itself was further analyzed (Fig. 2.A). Different variables of the site are considered, as well as main roads, general dimensions, and mass-void ratios. Such diagrams allowed us to analyze the proposed areas from different perspectives and conditions. One of the allocated plots exists right in front of the metro, the ADCB station, which is one of the most crowded and important in the district. In addition to the metro station, the use of bikes is quite rampant in the area, as well as other modes of transportation: and so, the allocated plots are an intermodal space. Our design proposal aims to place bike-users and pedestrians on a higher pedestal, especially following a **people-centered mobility approach**.



Fig. 2.A

Furthermore, the architecture analysis of the area can be generalized, as seen through the diagrams below (Fig. 2.C.), into residential and commercial zones. Different separation zones exist in the site (Fig. 2.B.), which, when analyzed, can allow for the interconnection of the different allocated plots; different characters of the street include car lanes, sidewalks, as well as commercial zones.

Fig. 2.B



The final diagram is especially important, because it showcases the lack of vegetation in the area, which the 'La Karama' proposal aims to improve. Furthermore, considering the surrounding heights of the buildings (Fig. 3.A.), which are on average four-stories high, in order to be site-specific and context-appropriate, the selection of urban revival techniques is further limited.

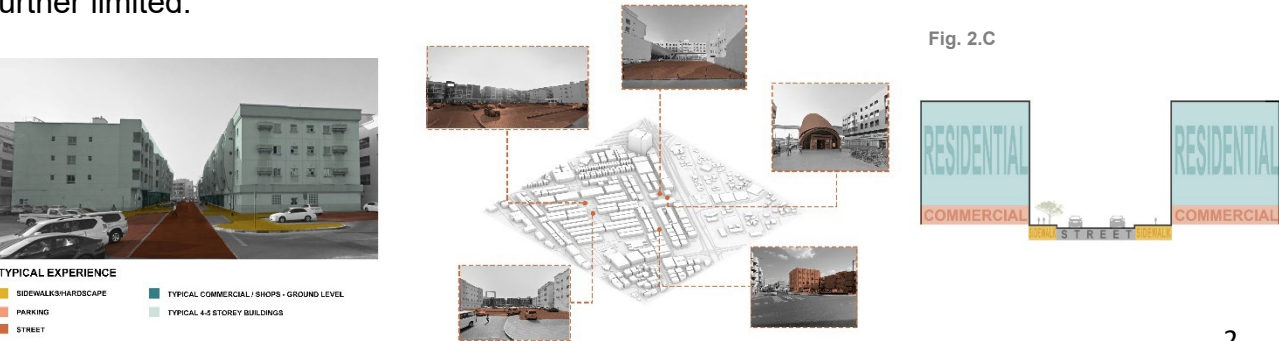


Fig. 2.C

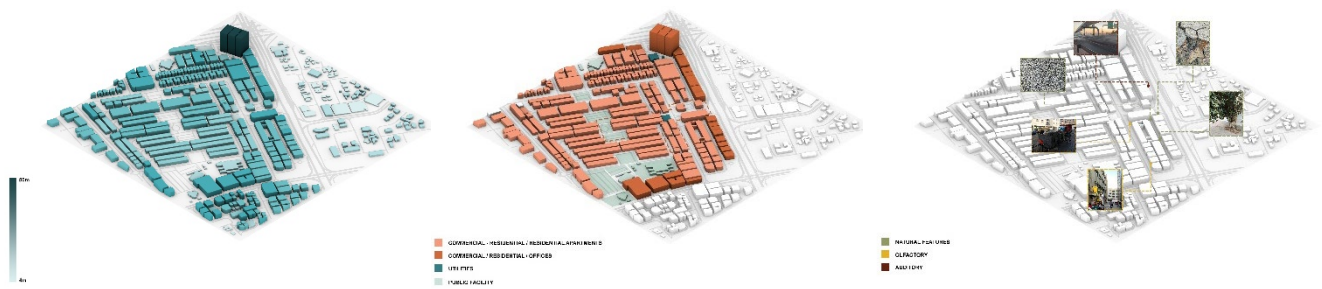


Fig. 3.A

To add to this, one of the most important variables to consider is Dubai's extreme climactic conditions of extreme heat. As evidenced through the diagrams below, Dubai's temperatures are often incredibly high, leading to high levels of discomfort faced by pedestrians and cyclists. Continuing from the previous note, vegetation can be, not only an aesthetic addition to the area, but also a source of shade.

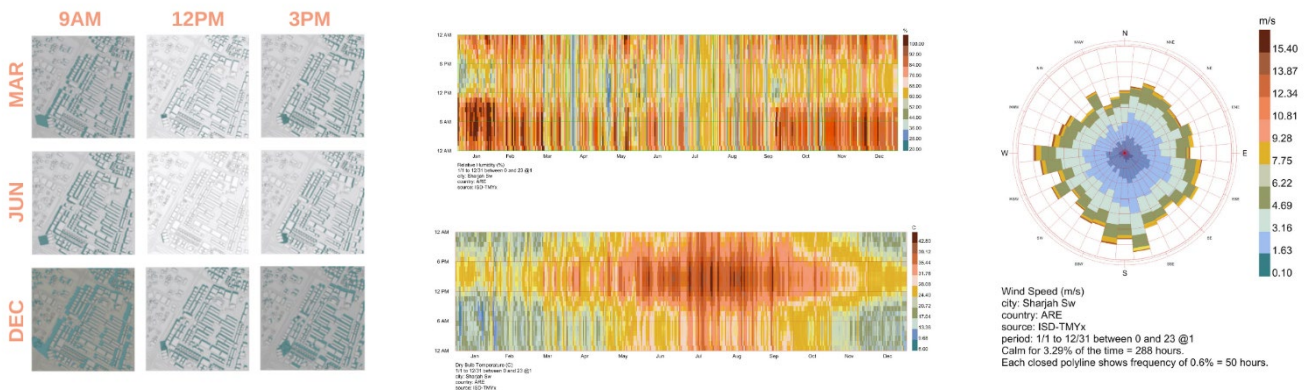


Photo-essay:

Reiterating these objective observations through the use of a photomontage, which accurately depicts the allocated site, and reiterates concepts mentioned above relating to bike-use, anomie, and loss of identity (Fig. 3.B.).

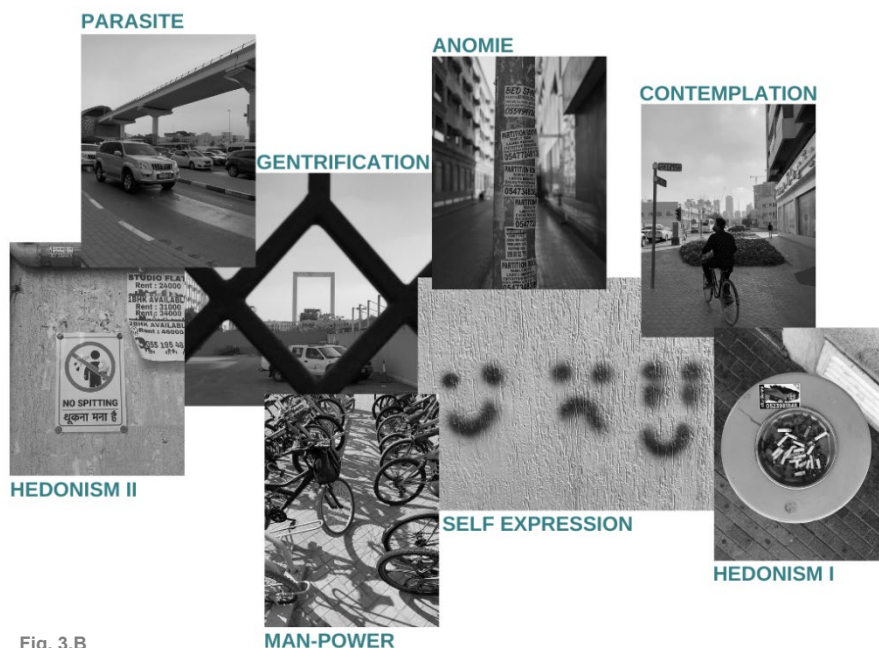


Fig. 3.B

II. Design Concept

After studying the area (Fig. 4.A.), as well as considering the user demographics and site-specific conditions, the most ideal approach to urban renewal was reuse and revamping, rather than complete renovation and reconstruction. This is also to avoid Dubai's long history of deconstruction and demolition, leading to further gentrification.



Fig. 4.A EXISTING BUILDINGS & FACADES

Dubai's existence as a transient city regurgitates feelings of anomie and estrangement within society, and so, our design approach was the creation of low-budget urban spaces that aim to strengthen the community bond and experience. And so, our urban renewal process can be summarized into three main concepts: participatory design, sustainability (environmental, social, economic), and social cohesion. The by-product is the creation of different kinds of public spaces to be used. ***The common variables shared by these urban spaces includes bike lanes, public seating areas, and walkability, but also, depending on the zones, 'La Karama' offers the following: urban gyms, urban libraries and art centers, urban outdoor music bars, and a new parking structure, best summarized through the sketches offered below (Fig. 4.B):***

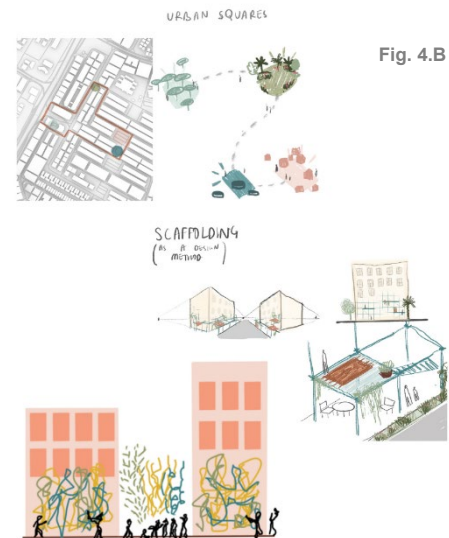
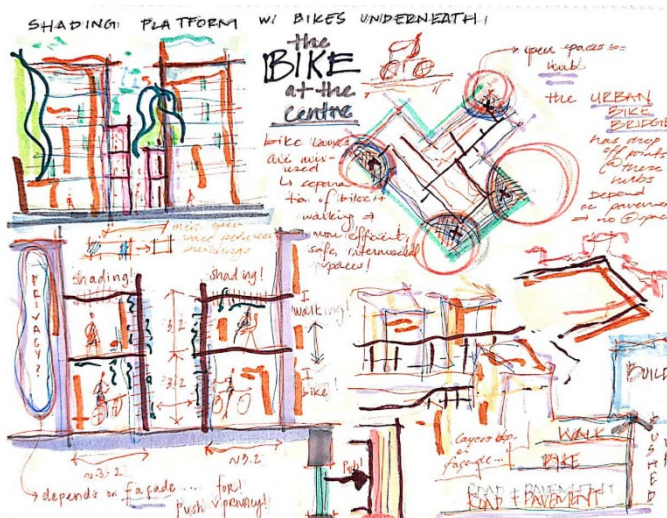


Fig. 4.B

"PARK AND PLAY"

ALLESIBLE ROOF
- GREEN ROOF
+ COMMUNITY GARDEN OR "FARM"

UTILIZE, TRANSFORM & REVIVE
"DEAD" PARKING LOT" → PLUG IN
FUNCTION + COMMUNITY ACTIVITY WHILE
STILL MAKING UP FOR NEEDED PARKING
SPACE!

5.B

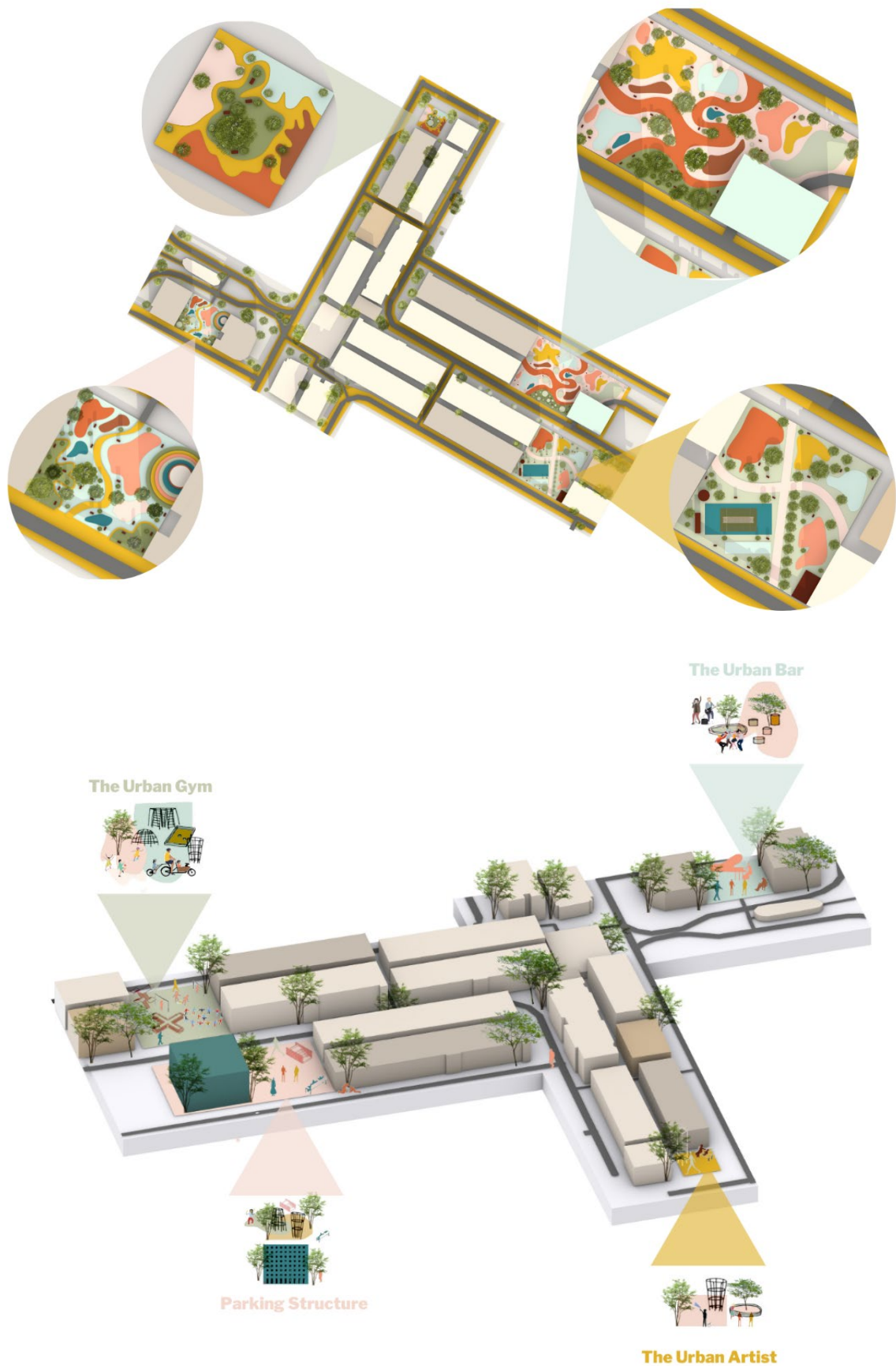
VERTICAL LOUVERS
Passive Sustainability
Shading elements

The diagram illustrates a sustainable building design. The building features a large array of solar panels on its roof and vertical louvers on its facade. A callout box labeled "VERTICAL LOUVERS" describes them as "Passive Sustainability" and "Shading elements". The building is situated on a landscaped plot with trees and a road. A cyclist is shown on a path adjacent to the building, and a car is parked on the road. The overall design emphasizes passive sustainability and shading elements.

IV. Quality of life

5

neighborhood scale, we wanted to ensure that the human scale is not lost. Through the creation of these different kinds of urban spaces, we ensure a democratic approach to urban fabric creation, **making safe spaces for everyone.**



The proposed outcome is best represented by our renders below. Even in terms of our render proposal, we aim to renovate and insert only, to emphasize the conservation of the history and the culture of the area.



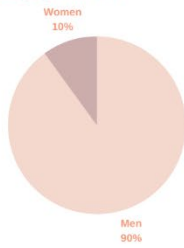
V. Questionnaire

To further strengthen and re-enforce our site analysis and our main urban concepts, the team visited the site and proceeded to interview a random selection of twenty users of the area- of the twenty, seventeen lived in Al Karama. The participants were selected at random at different times during the afternoon, at different locations within the allocated plot. Furthermore, many users of the area entirely declined responding. Different questions surrounding mobility, quality of life, and public spaces were asked, which can be best summarized with through the charts below:

QUESTIONNAIRE IN AL KARAMA:

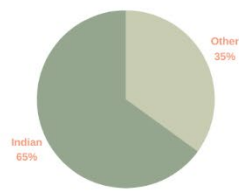
Ratio of Men:Women Interviewed

Average age of women: 31
Average age of men: 28.7



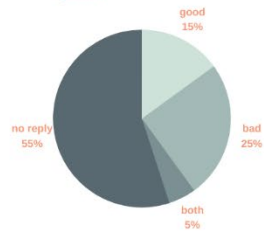
Ethnic Backgrounds

Other: Nepalese - Bangladeshi -
Nigerian - Filipino - Pakistani



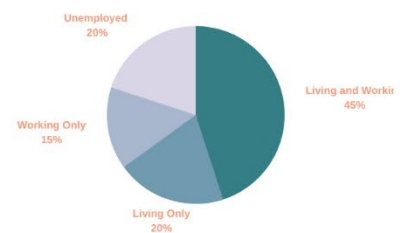
Feelings about area

Many simply shrugged and avoided the question.



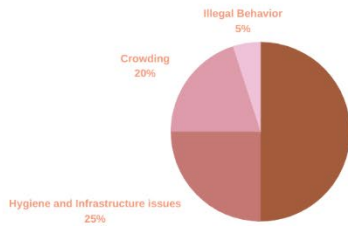
Status in Al Karama

Note: unemployed peoples are renting temporary bedspaces.



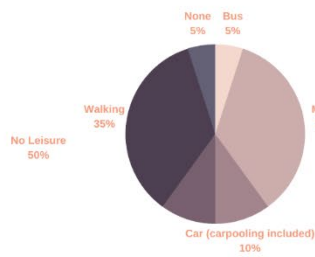
Issues in the Area

Frequently recurring issues relate to problems of space and partitions.



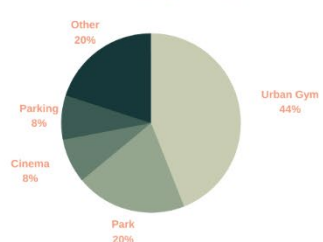
Mode of Transportation:

Other includes company buses. Often times, the metro was cited as expensive.



Proposed Plot Change:

Other includes a nightclub, restaurants, retail and shopping, and learning centre.



VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this urban proposal aims to give back to the members of the community in Al Karama. As studied in our site analysis and our questionnaire, La Karama follows a bottom-up approach that largely places the needs and wants of the dwellers of the area first and foremost. Given the trend of commercialization, both internationally and locally, an approach following participatory design allows for a new, refreshing outlook on urban design. And so, the result is a collection of safe, sustainable, and inclusive public spaces that allow for a preservation of identity, culture, and community.

Resources:

“Asia.” (Sectors and Communities) - Population Statistics, Charts and Map,
www.citypopulation.de/en/uae/dubai/admin/.

Tesorero, Angel. “Karama: A Symbol of Dubai's Ever-Changing Spirit.” *Khaleej Times*,
Khaleej Times, 18 July 2018, www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/dubai/karama-a-symbol-of-dubais-ever-changing-spirit.

Elsheshtawy, Yasser. *Dubai behind an Urban Spectacle*. Routledge, 2013