A Future Vision for the Multiuse House in Kuwait: Between Acceptance and Rejection

SURA SAUD AL-SABAH

Prior to the urban development of Kuwait, local residents performed many nonresidential and commercial activities within their houses, a condition that directly benefitted the house owners as well as the neighborhoods in which they lived. Although the diversity that such practices provided was subsequently lost for decades as a result of modern planning, this article argues that a revival of the multiuse house is currently underway. The article traces the causes for the loss of the multiuse house in the post-oil era, and illustrates some of the forces driving its resurgence, including the qualities that individuals are seeking through its revival. Interviews with Kuwaitis currently involved in multiuse house activities further reveal its social, economic and urban benefits. Finally, the article identifies measures needed to determine the overall acceptance/rejection of the multiuse house by the general public, and it reports on the outcome of a pilot survey revealing wide acceptance of the concept among Kuwaitis.

With the great increase in wealth that accompanied the development of the oil resources of the Gulf region after the mid-1940s, Kuwait's economic, political and social landscapes began to experience rapid transformation. Modern urban development especially challenged existing social behavior and everyday life patterns. The traditional urban fabric had until then been characterized by its diversity, and individual houses played an active role in enhancing this experience. In particular, Kuwaitis had engaged in many nonresidential activities from their houses, directly extending these to the neighborhood. Such activities included little shops (*dikkan*), baker shops, schools, as well as places to practice folk crafts and arts.

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Combining nonresidential activities with living space is a practice that has existed in every culture, past and present. However, it has generally remained "nameless as a type" and been largely disregarded by architectural and academic research.[1] This type of flexible living space will be referred to in the context of Kuwait as "the multiuse house." Modernist planning in the post-oil era drastically altered the urban landscape and largely led to its discontinuation. However, a clear revival of the multiuse house is now underway, as many small businesses and other nonresidential activities are springing up within houses. This is occurring despite the fact that existing codes and regulations do not support such practices.

This study aims to reveal the causes behind the revival of this mode of house use, and it will try to bring to light both its benefits and disadvantages. By seeking to articulate the motives of the individuals involved, its intent is to help bridge the gap between such individuals and decision-makers.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF THE MULTIUSE HOUSE

Is the current revival of interest in the multiuse house in Kuwait unique? Or is a revival of nonresidential activities within houses common elsewhere in the world? When did this trend start? In what cultures does it exist? What kind of spaces does it exist within? And who is involved in such uses? These are some of the questions researchers have recently sought to answer.

As the architect Frances Holliss has observed, the "building type that combines dwelling and workplace" remains "nameless as a type, which may explain why . . . [it has] gone unnoticed for so long."[2] The type has been referred to in literature by many names. Hollis has called it the "workhome," and a "live/work unit."[3] The architect Howard Davis, another longtime advocate for the form, has described it as the "family shop/house."[4] Meanwhile, the political scientist Shalini Sinha has described the individuals involved in this modality of building use as "home-based workers," and she has argued for the importance of their economic output as "home-based work."[5]

As part of Ph.D. research, Holliss initially studied the emergence of the "workhome" as a contemporary phenomenon in the U.K. However, she also emphasized how it reflected practices that had existed for hundreds of years, and she surveyed a wide range of buildings in the U.K. that had traditionally combined dwelling and working. Her larger aim was thus to establish the "workhome" as an identifiable building type with a continuous history. By exploring its contemporary manifestations she also hoped to contribute to the development of new architectural solutions and policies.

Holliss subsequently developed her study to include examples from other cultures, which she presented in her seminal book *Beyond Live/Work*. This work explored examples from the U.K., the U.S.A., and Japan to help establish "universal principles . . . to make sense of a vast range of past and present 'workhomes' and to design buildings and cities better to accommodate and support home-based work."[6]

Davis, too, has taken a comprehensive look at the different spatial manifestations of what he has called "living over the store," in structures that combine work/retail (usually on the ground floor) with dwelling space (usually above). In a recent book of the same name, he examined the building type from a cross-cultural perspective, providing a range of historic and contemporary examples from Asia, Rome, America, Northern Europe, China and Japan — within cities, towns and villages.

Davis has emphasized in particular the ability of such a building type to provide a flexible alternative work space, both in response to a "new economy" of self-employed "knowledge workers" and workers at the lower end of the economic scale. Along with the historical description of this building type across cultures, Davis's work has also accounted for its transformation over time and geography and the way its perpetuation has now become a "work of advocacy."[7]

In her political advocacy, particularly on behalf of women, Sinha has confirmed that home-based workers are not confined to developing countries, but can be found in developed countries as well. However, she has emphasized that this informal workforce has typically been exploited and provided with only marginal living conditions. The contributions of this vulnerable population to the economy thus remain invisible at the same time that it has largely being deprived of social protections and workers' rights.

Among other things, Sinha has cited estimates that there are "over 100 million home-based workers in the world and more than half this number are in South Asia — of whom around 80% are women."[8] Based on studies and surveys that aim to establish a comprehensive view of this situation, she has further pointed out that home-workers can be engaged in "piecework for an employer, who can be a subcontractor, agent or a middleman, or they can be self-employed on their own or in family enterprises."[9]

At the other end of the economic spectrum, the housing expert Sherry Ahrentzen has studied the example of homework among professionals in developed countries.[10] In particular, she examined a sample of professional home-workers (both self- and corporate-employed) in the U.S.A. Among other questions she has sought to address are the effects of combining divergent activities (childcare, leisure, domestic work, professional work) within the structure of the home and neighborhood.

Ahrentzen's work has mostly addressed this question in terms of the general spatial needs and preferences of such workers.[11] However, more recently, she has also approached the issue from a gendered perspective, aiming to "voice out" the different types of bonds between women and the houses in which they live and work. This has included looking at

African-American home-workers of the 1910s and 1920s, as well as contemporary middle-class home-workers. As she has written, "Recognizing homes as workplaces and workplaces as communities can affect how we establish policy and produce our homes and communities."[12]

From the above literature, it is clear that the desire to perform work activities from the home is a general human trait. There are likewise multiple spectrums of use that can be subsumed under the umbrella of the "workhome." As a living practice it has been manifest in the past and present, in developing/developed countries, and among professionals and nonprofessionals, skilled and unskilled workers, the well-off and the poor, and workers of both genders. The space employed may also vary significantly, as people may work from within houses, apartments, temporary structures, or whatever they consider "home." Nevertheless, architectural and academic research has paid little attention to the phenomenon, leaving the true needs of individuals, to use Ahrentzen's term, "unvoiced."

In Kuwait, a wide variety of activities are now being carried out by people in different spatial settings of "home." This study will focus, however, only on activities carried out in houses, specifically by women. It will start with a brief historical overview tracing the roots of the multiuse house from the pre-oil era (before the 1950s) to its current rebirth. This involves reporting on research into archival data, including old maps and diaries. The study will then focus on the experience of five women, of different ages and social status, obtained through interviews by the author. The houses they have used for their work activities are all located in residential areas (suburbs), and occupy 375- to 1,000-square-meter plots — a typical residential setting for many Kuwaitis. The activities of these women are varied: they include freelance interior design, tailoring, teaching children, life training, and personal fitness. The interviews with the women were complemented with field surveys by the author of the settings where the activities take place, in order to collect spatial data (layouts, modifications, special requirements, and restrictions).

Of course, in Kuwait, the practice of working in a home is not limited to women; there are many contemporary examples of men involved in multiuse house practice. Typical men's activities include aviaries, car workshops, and food-preparation businesses. Thus, although this study is restricted to women, it would be beneficial to expand it at a later date to include examples of men's experience.

HISTORIC TRACES OF THE MULTIUSE HOUSE IN THE PRE-OIL ERA

> *Every space, every narrow street, every form grew over time to answer specific needs. And as the city grew and became ramified, it became the expression of a culture: of sea-faring, desert-daring, pearl-diving, patriarchal society. . . .*[13]

In the early eighteenth century, the Utub tribe settled on a hill facing a spacious bay at the site of present-day Kuwait City. As described in the quote above from the Kuwaiti architect Saba George Shiber, the settlement subsequently grew into an important maritime center dependent on fishing, pearl-diving, shipbuilding and trade.

Initially, as Z.D. Freeth has written, Kuwait's mud-walled houses "were the same color as the ground, and they rose from it like an organic growth . . . enclosed by the protective curve of the old [city] wall" (**FIG.1**).[14] In this regard, the form of the Kuwaiti house grew out of numerous human,

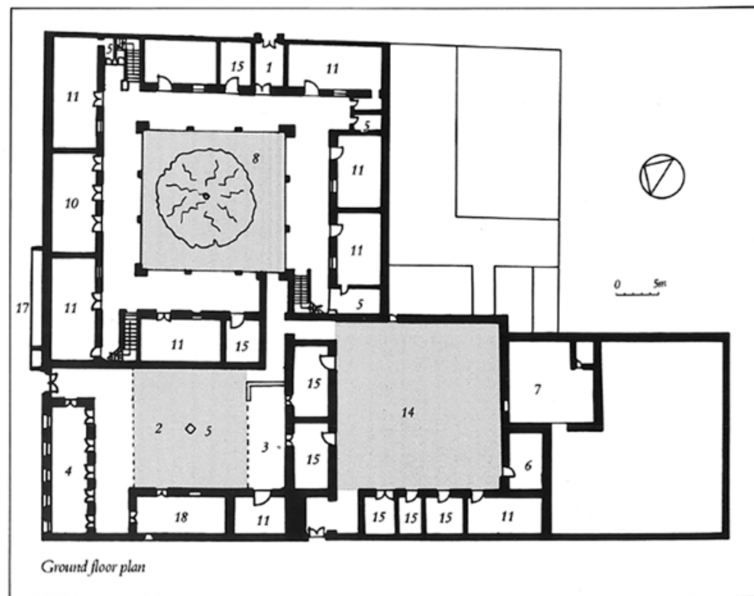
FIGURE 1. *Aerial view of Kuwait City in 1937. Source: F. Stark, "Freya Stark in Kuwait 1932, 1937,"* The Geographical Magazine, *Vol.V No.6 (October 1937), p.6.*

FIGURE 2. *Ground-floor plan of a traditional Kuwaiti courtyard house (al-Ghanim House). Source: H. al-Bahar, "Traditional Kuwaiti Houses,"* Mimar *13 (1984), p.74.*

***Al-Ghanim house**, main entrance. This building has been renovated and is currently occupied by artists. The courtyards and other interior spaces are used at present as working spaces for the artists as well as spaces for public art exhibits. The entrance doors are characteristic of the traditional architecture, although the bejurer or smaller inset door is absent.*

Key

1. *Entrance Passage*
2. *Men's Reception Court*
3. *Loggia*
4. *Men's Reception Room (diwan)*
5. *Bathroom*
6. *Kitchen*
7. *Animal Court*
8. *Private Living Court*
9. *Family Living Room*
10. *Women's Reception Room*
11. *Sleeping Room*
12. *Business Court*
13. *Well*
14. *Kitchen Court*
15. *Storeroom*
16. *Small Yard*
17. *Masonary Bench*
18. *Coffee Room*



environmental and climatic factors.[15] And, in general, individual houses followed similar design principles, with rooms arranged around open courtyards (**FIG.2**).

Within this general typology, the size of a house and the number of its courtyards typically depended on the affluence of its owner. There were three main social sectors: merchants, who owned larger homes with multiple courtyards; skilled artisans, who lived in houses with two to three courtyards; and the rest of the population (mostly seamen), who resided in humbler, one-courtyard houses (**FIG.3**).[16] House furnishings were very simple and allowed great flexibility in the use of rooms for different activities (living, sleeping, working, etc.). The cultural concepts of separating male and female quarters (*diwan* and *harim*, respectively[17]) and reinforcing privacy and security were further strongly manifest in house design.[18]

At the time, life in Kuwait was characterized by the duality of sea and desert life, which shaped local culture and folk traditions. Some of the folk crafts Kuwaiti men were renowned for included *bisht*-weaving and *dhow*-building.[19] Ships of all sizes, at different stages of completion, could thus be seen along the seafront, while men could be found in nearby alleys sewing sails, drilling wood, and hammering loudly.[20] Women's folk crafts included *sadu*-weaving, tailoring and embroidery.[21] These products would typically be sold in the market or out of individual homes. As a result of these activities, different skills would be acquired through practice and experience within families.

Ayoub al-Ayoub, the renowned Kuwaiti painter, captured the diversity of life in pre-oil Kuwait in his work, including the little neighborhoods shops known as *dikkan al fireej*

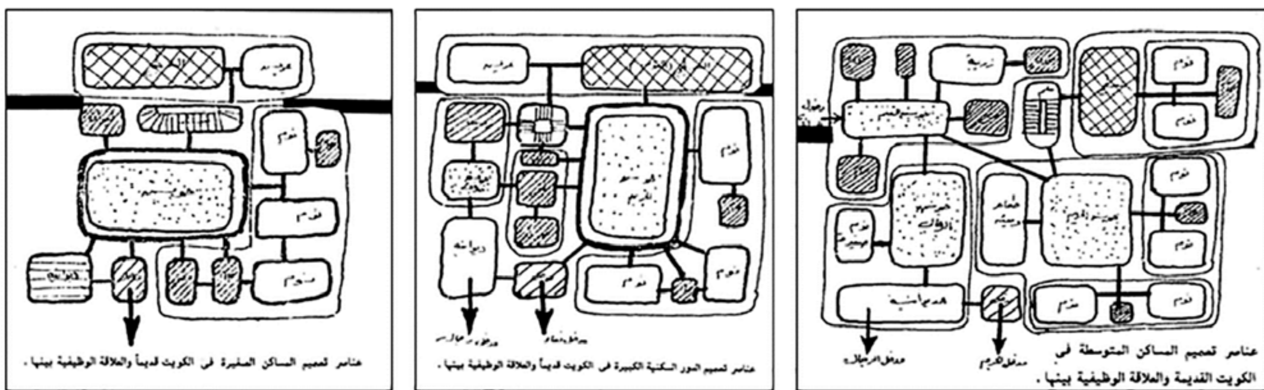
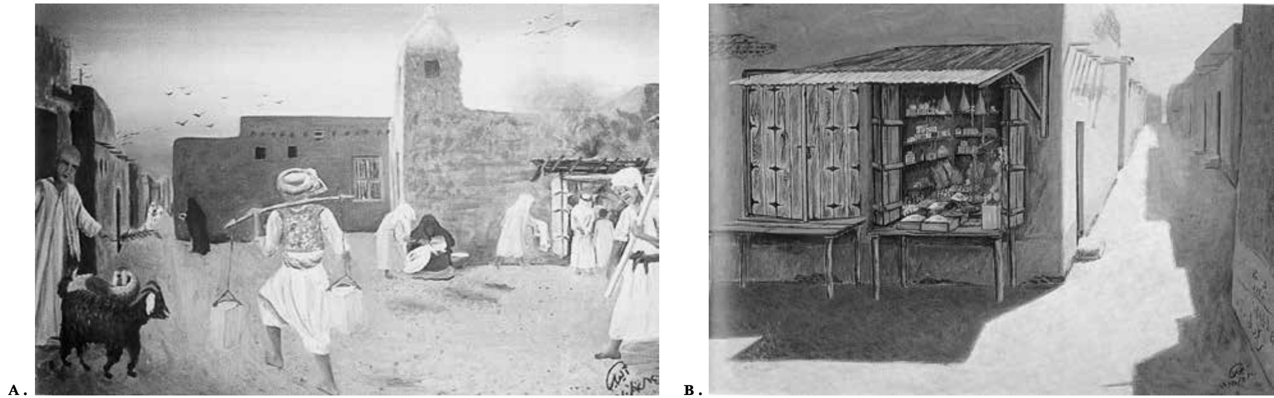


FIGURE 3. *Schematic diagrams showing different layouts of traditional houses in Kuwait: large house with multiple courtyards, medium-size house with two courtyards, and small house with one courtyard. Source:* Alam al Bina*, No. 82 (1987), pp.22–23.*



A. B.

FIGURE 4. *Ayoub al-Ayoub's paintings portray the diversity of the pre-oil neighborhood in Kuwait. A: "In the Morning." B: "The Dikkan Al Fireej." Source: A. al-Ayoub,* The Kuwaiti Heritage in the Paintings of Ayoub Hussein al-Ayoub *(Kuwait: Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2008).*

(FIGS.4A,B).[22] His paintings provide a record today of how the multiuse house was very much a reality in the traditional life of Kuwait, playing an important role in the country's economy and well-being. Likewise, Farah al-Nakib has described the urban quality of this old lifestyle — which grew out of a need to address basic needs, and where urbanity was not simply a matter of living in a metropolitan area, but of reinforcing a common lifestyle and social quality.[23] The result was functional diversity — a mix of residential, economic, social and political activities pursued within the same built fabric, fostering mutual dependence among inhabitants and a strong community spirit.

LOST FOR DECADES AS A RESULT OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY URBANIZATION

Soon after oil was discovered in the region, Kuwait rushed to join the twentieth-century industrial world. Kuwait City's subsequent change from a simple traditional town to a modern urban center took place at almost unprecedented speed, fueled by the enthusiasm of Kuwaiti leaders "to rebuild a bigger, better, more modern city."[24] And, as al-Nakib has written, the role of individuals in shaping the diverse, mud-brick city of the past was thereafter taken over by a self-proclaimed egalitarian state.[25] Hollis, too, has described the development of a new spatiality, driven by the government rather than local need. Specifically, she described it as being dictated by industrial rather than informational capitalism.[26]

A series of masterplans by foreign consultants contributed to Kuwait's development. The first, developed in 1952 by the British firm Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane, set the tone for all future schemes (FIG.5).[27] It envisioned old Kuwait town as a central nucleus, from which a series of rings and concentric roads would be developed. Between the rings, self-contained "model suburban neighborhoods" were designed as sites for the relocation of citizens displaced from the old town. The new pattern meant, however, that Kuwaitis would in the future have to commute to their work locations, as all functions (industrial, educational, health, etc.) were zoned into distinct areas. The planners further opted for the demolition of most of the old town to make way for a new road network and commercial and industrial developments. And via the "Land Acquisition Scheme" and a "Lottery System," Kuwaitis were dispersed to Western-style villa housing in the new low-density suburbs.[28]

Kuwait's traditional labor force possessed few skills useful to the country's new oil-based economy.[29] Instead, immigrants of mixed origins, with different social values, arrived in the country to occupy critical jobs.[30] At the same time, new business opportunities offered scope for success for the qualified local minority (the merchant class). But trade was controlled by "oligopolies," who set utility rates and rents at high levels.[31] And the result was an uneven distribution of wealth, as a wide vacuum developed between old social classes.

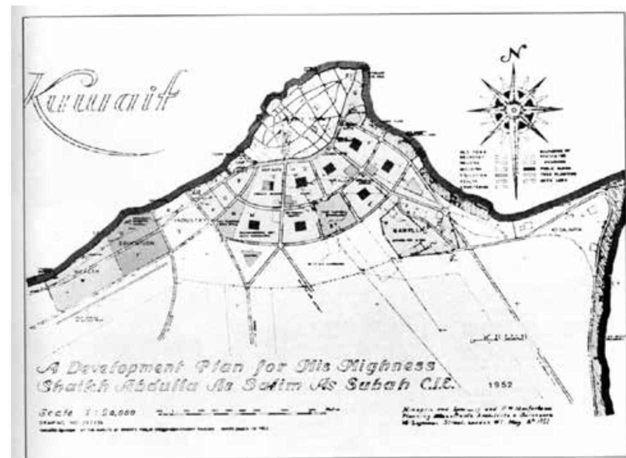


FIGURE 5. *The 1952 development plan for Kuwait. Source: S.G. Shiber,* Kuwait Urbanization: Documentation, Analysis, Critique *(Kuwait, 1964).*

The first decades of development saw a continuation of the local practice of *dikkan al fireej* (neighborhood shop), as some homeowners attained licenses to use designated spaces (usually garages) on the ground floor of their new houses for little shops (*bakkhar*).[32] These supported such activities as grocery stores (*baqala*), laundries, car repair, men's hair salons, and tailoring. But the issuance of such licenses was slowly restricted, as government officials realized such shops created competition with designated new commercial centers. They also regarded them as a nuisance to modernist "model" districts and neighborhood peace.[33] The gradual banning of *bakkhar*, however, deprived the general public of the ability to benefit from the general expansion of Kuwait's economy.

In the post-oil era, responsibility for Kuwaitis' social welfare (housing, education, healthcare, food supply, employment, etc.) also shifted to the state. In general, the local population passively accepted the new condition, without feeling they had to contribute much in return. However, according to al-Nakib, this fostered an atmosphere where personal privilege superseded public well-being, producing an idle and unproductive citizenry.[34] And since craft production only exists in a culture so long as it is needed, the pre-oil skills and folk crafts of Kuwait suffered greatly.

In the new suburban districts, post-oil houses took on a different form and function. New models were outward looking, air-conditioned, and two or three stories tall. In general, upper-floor rooms were used for private living, while those on the ground floor were set aside to entertain guests. The arrangement of rooms also became less flexible due to the introduction of larger and heavier European-style furniture.[35] And the strict separation that once existed between men and women's quarters was discontinued. Instead, people competed to display their affluence and recent travel inspirations, creating what Huda al-Bahar termed a "hodgepodge of architectural forms" (**FIG.6**).[36]

Among the new building types that appeared were also mass-produced homes built by the government to quickly provide for the displaced lower-income population and nomadic Bedouins. Amina al-Kandari has looked at issues with this form of housing in greater depth, and documented public criticism of these projects.[37] In particular, she pointed out that such mass-produced housing did not include spaces for nonresidential activities, except for the *diwaneya* (the traditional gathering space for men).

Random citizen distribution, rising wealth disparity, sharp distinctions between social classes, widespread dependence on programs of state welfare, high immigration rates, and a monopolization of the economy were all results of the speedy development of Kuwait following the shift to an industrial economy. Such developments shook the foundations of pre-oil society. Most importantly, activities that were once a necessary part of life, carried out by Kuwaitis from their houses and in their neighborhoods, ceased to be needed. The result was to reduce the house to space for dwelling and the display of personal affluence.

FIGURE 6. *Example of a post-oil contemporary house in Kuwait. Source: H. al-Bahar, "Contemporary Kuwaiti Houses,"* Mimar *15 (1985), p.66.*

Although the multiuse house disappeared, this was not a trend unique to Kuwait. Both Holliss and Davis have emphasized how across the world the "workhome" and "shop/house" suffered under the forces of modernization.[38]

CURRENT MOVEMENTS AND MULTIUSE HOUSE REVIVAL

Under the conditions of the new post-oil economy the idleness of Kuwaiti citizens continued for decades. However, there has now been a revival of concern that "there has to be something missing." And remedying this situation has required the active involvement of citizens in changing the country's socio-spatial reality.[39]

Today, Kuwait is witnessing a revival of activity from different sections of the society: political protestors, entrepreneurs, civil-society groups, and regular residents.[40] Such forces have voiced the need for change through social media, discussion panels linking different networks, and the arrangement of communal activities, among other means. Several of these are described below.

The Arabana Project was established in 2010 by two young architects. Their venue was a renovated warehouse in industrial Shuwaikh.[41] Their goal was to bring creative individuals (architects, artists, designers and other intellectuals) together and offer them support. Their concept was to create a vehicle (*arabana* means "cart" in Arabic) to encourage people to become active participants in making their built environment.

The Secret Garden is a public community-gardening project that started in 2014.[42] Initiated by Mariam al-Nusif and a small group of friends, it soon drew many others — Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, residents in the area and beyond, young children and landscape architects. Participants began by cleaning up a rundown park, but they also pushed the authorities to repair the damaged utilities, and they set up a compost bin, built furniture, and allocated plots for individu-

FIGURE 7. *Community spirit in the Secret Garden as people gather to revive their own public space. Photo by author, 2016.*

al gardeners. The site soon became a community space that brought a collective spirit back to its neighborhood (**FIG.7**).

MadeenahKW is a group of young female architects who have designed and led cultural walking-tours around the city.[43] Their goal is to develop a deeper connection between society and the built environment.

LegalizeKW is an initiative that aims to bridge the gap of communication with decision-makers.[44] Founded by several Kuwaiti youths, one of its aims has been to push for the legalization of home-businesses. Among other actions, the campaign's founders have prepared an online petition to be signed by home-business owners, which will be delivered to different government agencies and decision-makers.[45]

The above (and the many other such movements now springing up) reveal how local Kuwaitis are seeking to bring back a sense of community involvement. They have also brought to light the tension between the government and an innovative younger generation. The latter are interested in changing the laws to enable more flexibility so they can explore new ideas.[46] According to Holliss, this group has found that "regulations rooted in the industrial past are increasingly inappropriate to the new informational society."[47]

Many of those movements use the house as their springboard. As Holliss has argued, home-based work gives people a great deal of control over their lives.[48] The rising number of home-businesses has also raised the awareness of officials, especially at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Initial studies are thus being undertaken by officials regarding the licensing and control of home business.[49] However, current proposals reveal that the main aim of officials is to prohibit individuals from engaging in any form of commercial activity without a license and to enforce restrictions on such activities. The conditions that need to be satisfied to obtain a license also show that the purpose of these proposals is to *restrict* rather than to *aid* the legalization of the multiuse house.

THOSE WHO ARE PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR THE MULTIUSE HOUSE

> *Something different does not necessarily rise out of a conscious plan, but more simply out of what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their daily life.*[50]

As the above comment by Farah al-Nakib indicates, multiuse house practitioners may be participating unconsciously in a broader movement to reshape living environments in Kuwait. Based on interviews by the author, what follows are descriptions of the experiences of five individuals.

An interior design practice. S.Q. is in her early forties. A widowed mother of a seven-year-old boy, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and worked as a high school art teacher for fourteen years, starting in 2000. In 2014, she resigned in order to work as a freelancer from home. S.Q. informed the author that she regarded working as a freelancer from her house as an opportunity to pursue her passions for interior design and wood crafts. As a single mother, she realized this arrangement would also provide a flexible work schedule and enable her to spend more time with her son. She further considered the move an opportunity to earn a better income than she had made as a teacher.

S.Q. owns a two-story house within a residential neighborhood. For two years she worked mostly from a living room on the upper floor (**FIG.8**). She needed desk space there for sketching and for a printer, but would also carry a laptop around and work in other spaces in the house. Not having to pay rent, S.Q. made a reasonable profit. She also gained a lot of experience in the field and created a good client base.

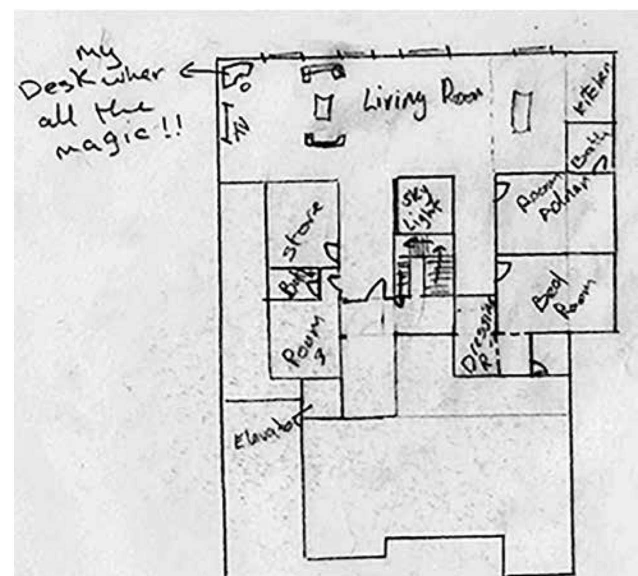


FIGURE 8. *Layout prepared by S.Q. to show the space she usually works in the first floor of her house.*

One thing S.Q. especially prized about working from her house was that her son could watch her and learn from her. She found much joy in passing her skills down to him. Her immediate neighbors were also very supportive and recommended her services to others. However, without the possibility of obtaining a license for her services or workplace, S.Q. said that many clients looked down on her and demanded lower fees. She also did not feel comfortable expanding her services within her house, even though she wanted a space to hold workshops, display her products, and meet clients that was separate and private from her living space.

After being labeled "a coffee-shop designer" (because she usually met clients in coffee shops), and with rising concerns about legitimizing her business, S.Q. finally decided to move her office to a commercial setting.[51] In February 2016, she set up her interior design consultation business in an industrial area. However, S.Q. now says she would have preferred to continue working from home if official licenses had been available to do so. The need to deal with the traffic and "parking wars" involved in commuting to her new office brings her to tears at times. Rental rates are also very high, putting her under a lot of pressure to cover expenses. As a result, she has had to raise her fees (to the dissatisfaction of many clients) and introduce more services and workshops. In her official space she hardly makes any profit, and has less time to be creative.

A children's training center. N.K. is an unmarried architect in her mid-thirties. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from Kuwait University in 2004. But after her years at university she also obtained certification in Finland as a life-skills trainer for children. She then applied those skills in a private school in Kuwait for two years, working as a children's art teacher at both the elementary- and middle-school levels. After gaining teaching experience, however, she resigned in 2007 to open her own training center for children in a multiuse house. Her aim was to combine her passion for teaching with her architectural degree. She considers it important to teach children from a young age in a joyful atmosphere about art, life skills, and their environment. N.K. believes this will lead to a new generation who will play a more active role in shaping their environment.

N.K. has a reservoir of talents: she works as a freelance architect, graphic designer, traditional artist, and potter. She pursues these activities by renting part of the upper floor of a multiuse house, which is located in a residential area (FIG.9). The rest of the house is divided into separate apartments that are rented for residential purposes. Parking space is not an issue because there is an empty lot across the street.

N.K. is on friendly terms with the other residents of the house and with the neighbors. She chose to locate in a residential neighborhood for many reasons. She says it is a safer and more convenient location for both the children and their parents. Her business also diversifies the activities available in the neighborhood and gives parents a value new option to engage their children (FIG.10). Many of her customers live within the neighborhood, while others come from other nearby residential districts. N.K. also lives in an area close to her training center, which allows her to save commuting time by avoiding main traffic routes.

Because women in general have to abide by stricter social norms in Kuwait than men, N.K. adds that locating her training center in a residential neighborhood provides a sheltered environment where she can work long hours in close proximity to where she lives (FIG.11). Driving home late at

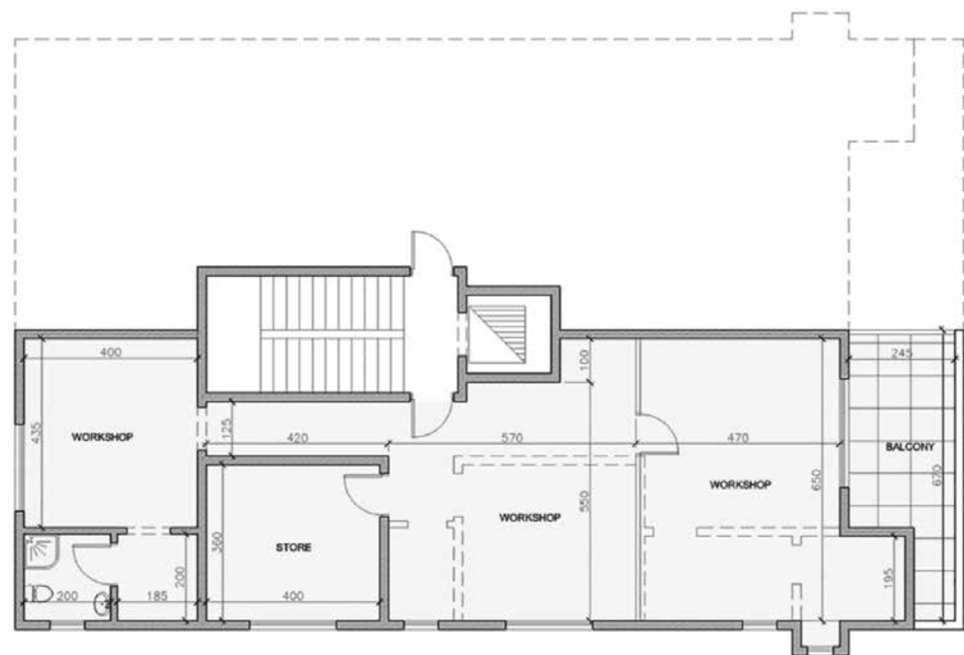


FIGURE 9. *Layout of N.K.'s training center in dotted lines shown the modifications she made to the existing space. Drawing by the author, 2016.*

FIGURE 10. *Kids immeresed in activities at N.K.'s training center. Photo by N.K., 2015.*

night does not feel dangerous. However, formal licenses are not available for a children's training center in a house. And the landlord charges market value for her space, and increases the rental rate every five years. The high rent keeps her under pressure to cover expenses, and she has been unable to expand her services.

A women's fitness center. R.O. is an unmarried civil engineer in her late thirties who is also certified as a physical trainer. In 2003, she started teaching fitness classes to women part time in numerous health clubs. Then, in 2007, she set up her own fitness center in a large hall within a women's NGO located in a residential area. As her client base grew steadily, R.O. as well as other women ran the training classes there.

Interestingly, R.O. never worked as an engineer because she realized her true passion was fitness training. Among other accomplishments, she became the first Kuwaiti woman

FIGURE 11. *N.K. spends long hours working on graphic design and stop motion videos in the safety of the multiuse house. Photo by author, 2016.*

to introduce Zumba, which has quickly gained popularity among women. But she aims to offer a variety of group fitness options suitable for everyone (e.g., Zumba, drums alive, and Bosu classes). Her overall goal has been to create a community of interdependent trainers, and for this reason she has allowed other trainers (some of whom she trained herself) to use her facility.

In 2014 the NGO needed the hall for their own purposes, and R.O. opted to move her training center to a relative's house in another neighborhood. She was fortunate the house had a basement with a separate access from the ground floor (FIGS. 12–13). Locating in the basement helps separate the loud music from the rest of the house, a concern she always has. But her relatives also made arrangements for her to use some of the living spaces as needed on the upper floors. The relatives can also still use the basement for special gatherings when they need to, and there is an empty lot in front of the house that provides ample parking space.

Choosing to relocate to a house was a fast, feasible and convenient option for R.O. And since the house is owned by her relatives, she initially benefitted from a one-year rent-free allowance (although she has since paid for it at a reasonable rent). R.O. notes that being in a house is very comfortable and feels safe. The classes that she and her other instructors offer are spread throughout the day in order to suit different people's schedules. Many of her trainees live within the neighborhood and surrounding districts.

R.O. also owns a sports apparel store in a mall in Kuwait City. It is under this license that she hosts events, holds workshops and classes in other locations, and legally represents herself when doing business with foreign companies. Licenses for a fitness center in a house are currently not available. She sometimes also uses her fitness center to display her shop's merchandise for marketing purposes.

A women's tailoring business. F.D. is in her early fifties and lives with her husband, two sons, and two daughters in their own house in a residential district. F.D. holds a diploma in accounting, and worked in the Ministry of External Affairs for eighteen years. In 2005, one year before her retirement, she set up a tailoring business in her house. As she explains it, she loved designing clothes, needed the extra income, and did not want to remain idle after retirement.

F.D. located her tailoring service in the basement of her house, which has a separate entrance (FIG. 14). Meanwhile, she and her family could live on the ground floor and rent out the upper floor as an apartment for extra income. Parking space is minimal due to tight setbacks (FIG. 15). Nevertheless, her tailoring shop has been running for eleven years (FIG. 16). During that time she has developed friendly relations with her neighbors and receives many customers from her neighborhood.

F.D. says that parking is sometimes an issue, but her neighbors are very tolerant and supportive. She adds that both her daughters have been encouraged by seeing her run her

FIGURE 12. *R.O.'s entrance to basement. Photo by author, 2016.*

FIGURE 13. *R.O.'s training hall in basement. Photo by author, 2016.*

own business. Her elder daughter helps with clothing designs, and her younger one makes baked goods in the house and sells them in exhibitions and over social media. F.D. has also devised a house-visit tailoring service for seniors and those with special needs, for which she has received much praise.

Having her business at home is very convenient for F.D. It saves her time in terms of commuting, and she saves on rent, increasing her profits. It also makes it easier to follow up with her employees and customers. Yet, because F.D. cannot officially license her business in the house, she has had to acquire a license for a different location to be able to hire staff.

FIGURE 14. *F.D.'s separate entrances to house and basement. Photo by author, 2016.*

FIGURE 15. *F.D. exterior showing tight parking space. Photo by author, 2016.*

FIGURE 16. *F.D. tailors workspace in basement. Photo by author, 2016.*

A women's life-training center. L.R. is in her late fifties, the mother of two married daughters. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Education and a Master's in Quality Management. For ten years, she worked as a high-school information-tech-

nology teacher in the Ministry of Education, during which time she became interested in different areas in personal development. In 1994 she resigned from teaching and attended several international workshops and acquired numerous training certificates.

After resigning, L.R. organized many workshops and training courses for women, renting different venues in hotels and clubs. Then, in 2008, she set up part of her house as a women's life-training center. L.R. has a passion for the topic of personal development, and she wanted to provide a service that was not yet available, yet which was important for the social and emotional well-being of women. This was her retirement dream — to do something she loved in her own house.

L.R. owns her own two-story house in a residential neighborhood. The house faces a street on one side but can also be accessed via a pedestrian path from the back (FIG.17). There is plentiful parking space, and she established her training center in a separate part of the ground floor (FIGS.18–19).

Among the reasons L.R. opted to locate her center in her house was the convenience of being able to live and work in the same place. There is also a lot of flexibility in the way she can use the space. For example, the same space may be used both for the center and for residential activities and social gatherings, and she selected the furniture to serve both needs. Indeed, one of her daughters hosts exhibitions there of the furniture she custom-makes. Furthermore, because the house offers the necessary privacy, L.R. has been able to add personal therapy, healing sessions, and different kinds of group meditation to the services she offers. Her trainees and workshop attendees always express satisfaction with the sense of privacy gained by having the workshops and classes held in a house.

L.R. has been able to create a relaxed, spa-like atmosphere in her home, and she always has herbal tea available for her clients. L.R. explains that her neighbors and other regular users of the pedestrian path know she serves tea when holding courses, and they often come in for a quick hello and a casual drink. Having her training center in her

FIGURE 17. *The back enterance to L.R.'s house overlooks walk path and has plentiful parking. Photo by author, 2016.*

FIGURE 18. *Reception and waiting area in L.R. training center. Photo by author, 2016.*

FIGURE 19. *Dual use space training center refreshment area/family dining area. Photo by author, 2016.*

house also means she does not have to pay rent, making it feasible to host smaller groups. The only disadvantage, according to L.R., is that she feels limitations on how much she can advertise her services in the current situation, as having a training center in the house is not yet legalized.

INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS AND DISADVANTAGES

As the cases described above indicate, there are similarities in the motives driving individuals to seek this form of house use. A passion for their chosen activities was a central concern among all the women. Also important was that the activities they chose were not generally offered in the existing private and governmental employment landscape. The women thus all aimed to provide services that were presently unavailable (specialized fitness training, personal-development courses, child training in art and architecture). Convenience

of access to work spaces and flexibility in work time were also common motivations.

Based on her research, Holliss has pushed for home-based workers to be regarded as a "workforce," rather than individuals. And to better clarify their spatial and environmental needs, she divided them into eight tentative subgroups based on the nature of their activities. Admitting that other categorizations might exist, she identified such workers as either "family caregivers," "backbone of the community," "professional and managerial," "24/7 artists," "craft workers," "top-up," "live-in," or "startup."[52] The nature of these groups is largely self-explanatory. For example, those classified as being the backbone of the community make "important social contribution to their immediate communities," providing some form of public service. Those classified as top-up are home-workers who are seeking to supplement income from another job or a pension.

Interestingly, the motives of the individuals in the present study often reveal a blending of the typologies described by Holliss. Thus, L.R. and F.D. combine the caregiver, top-up, and backbone of community typologies: they are seeking to earn extra income on top of their pensions and provide a community service while continuing to look after family members. S.Q. combined the role of caregiver (single mother) with being a 24/7 artist (interior design), a craft worker, and a startup business owner (although she later moved to a more formal business location). R.O. and N.K. fall into the backbone of community typology due to the services they provide. But N.K. combines this with the 24/7 artist and craft-worker typologies, as she pursues her multiple talents within the multiuse house.

No matter the nature of their activity, a major disadvantage for all the individuals interviewed was the current lack of direct access to licensing and official recognition of home-based activities. This situation poses legal concerns, especially for activities that require a long-term contract with clients. Thus, S.Q. felt pressure from not having her interior design services protected; indeed, her right to bill for work at professional rates was being undermined by some of her clients.

Without a protective legal umbrella, multiuse house practitioners may also hold back from expanding and marketing their services more widely when their value is recognized. They typically may thus feel the need to retain a low profile so as not to invite tension with the authorities.

Finally, if an individual or close relative does not own the house in which an activity is being provided, the economic benefit of the multiuse house may be lost. From N.K.'s example it is thus possible to see how landlords may exploit a house as just another commercial space, and charge full market value for rent. This hinders a service provider's ability to expand an activity spatially as it grows in popularity, and it diminishes the opportunities for creativity by increasing a practitioner's level of expenses.

THE SPATIAL CHARACTER OF THE MULTIUSE HOUSE — TYPOLOGY AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The workhome is not a building type that is commonly recognized and produced today.[53] However, since the beginning of Kuwait's modernization movement in the 1950s, house designs and building codes have been overly simplified, and one might argue that today they fail to take into consideration people's true needs. In particular, they do not allow for the designation of spaces in which to carry out nonresidential activities. All the individuals interviewed as part of this research were thus forced to adapt existing houses to cater to their needs.

Holliss has described three distinct ways that people use a workhome. The first is when an individual uses all the spaces in a house for both the nonresidential activity as well as living. This may be seen here in the example of S.Q., who could literally take her laptop into any space in the house and work on it there.

The second type of engagement occurs where a dedicated space in the workhome is allocated for the activity. This can be seen in the examples of F.D. and N.K. The former separated her tailoring business in the basement to provide privacy for the rest of the house; the latter rented space within a multiuse house separate from where she lives, solely to pursue her work activity.

The third type of engagement actually represents a mix of these extremes. It may be seen in the cases of L.R. and R.O.[54] In these examples, the spaces allocated for an activity are connected to the main living space so that they can also be used when needed for family gatherings and other domestic activities.

More specific spatial considerations described by Holliss were also found to be applicable to the cases in this study. These include concerns for flexibility, determinacy/interdeterminacy, public/private, visibility/invisibility, noise/quiet, clean/dirty, hot/cold, inside/outside, and storage.[55]

Even though spatial considerations vary depending on the nature of an activity, there were requirements common to all uses. First was the need to provide a sense of privacy through the separation of public and private spaces in the house. Within the multiuse house, this traditional quality was emphasized by all interviewees. Another traditional residential quality that appears to be making a comeback is the presence of a more flexible, open layout, incorporating looser arrangements of lighter furniture.

Other requirements tend to be more aligned with different activities. The separation of noisy from quiet areas, for example, was a key consideration for R.O. in locating her fitness center. Activities that involve greater numbers of people also need to take into account the availability of parking space, as in the examples of R.O., L.R., N.K., and F.D. on occasion.

Understanding such spatial considerations is essential if the design of the multiuse houses is to be improved in the

future, and if it is to be legitimized through building and zoning codes. This illustrates why it is important to take a more extensive look at the needs of different multiuse house users before proposing material solutions.

BENEFITS FROM THE MULTIUSE HOUSE REVIVAL

The individuals interviewed in this study shed light on the numerous benefits that follow from setting up nonresidential activities and small businesses within a multiuse house. These may generally be divided into three categories: social, economic and urban.

Social Benefits. The multiuse house provides social benefits on a variety of levels, affecting the individual, their immediate family, the community, and specific social groups (e.g., women and seniors).

On a personal level, the multiuse house allows individuals to nurture their passions away from the restrictions of formal education or official work landscapes. S.Q., N.K., F.D., and L.R. all left the official workforce to pursue their passions — while R.O. never entered it. This not only provided them with a strong sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, but in certain instances it also inspired members of their immediate family. Thus, S.Q.'s son learned design skills from his mother, and F.D.'s daughters were following in their mother's entrepreneurial footsteps by setting up their own businesses. This recalls an older tradition in Kuwait, where skills and crafts were passed down within families without the need for formal education.

On the community level, the services individuals provide from multiuse houses may directly benefit the neighborhoods in which they are located (and other neighborhoods in close proximity). N.K. thus offers activities for children in a safe and protected environment, while L.R. teaches about issues of personal development in a space with a high degree of privacy. Such services, by their nature, affect the well-being of the community: children learn important life skills and become active members in shaping their environment, while mental and physical health of the community also benefit from L.R.'s and R.O's services.

The sense of interdependence between individuals in the same field is illustrated in the case of R.O., who said she shares classes and workout spaces with other trainers. This interdependence among craftspeople and artisans was also a strong feature of traditional Kuwait. Likewise, the casual sense of neighborhood encounter illustrated by the cases of L.R. and F.D. was also once a traditional quality of life in Kuwait. Thus, L.R. takes pleasure in having neighbors stop by for a cup of tea on those days when she prepares it for her trainees. F.D. adds that because she has developed relationships with and also serves her neighbors, they are more tolerant and supportive when her customers occasionally occupy their parking spaces. This illustrates how a sense of collective well-being may be valued over personal benefit when it is influenced by positive interaction among neighbors.

Family and personal needs may also be served by the multiuse house. Thus, although L.R. and F.D. had retired from the official workforce, they did not wish to remain idle. Instead, the multiuse house provided them, as older people, with a setting from which to continue to serve the community, at their own pace. Women may also need to continue in their role as caregivers (as in the cases of S.Q. and F.D.). In this case, as Sinha has pointed out, the multiuse house provides "the opportunity to combine work with domestic chores, in flexible and sometimes better working conditions."[56] In many cultures, women may likewise have to abide by stricter social norms and expectations than men. And, as N.K. commented, a multiuse house may offer a sheltered, socially acceptable option in which to work extended hours.

Economic Benefits. Performing activities within a multiuse house presents numerous economic benefits. When an individual owns a house or knows its owners personally, the space they use may either be free or available at reduced rent. This provides an opportunity for individuals who might otherwise be unemployed to join the economy — especially women who may face time constraints as a result of caregiving responsibilities.

Thus, F.D. started her home tailoring business as a way to earn extra income after retiring from official employment. And since she owns her home, she is not under pressure to cover separate expenses and rent. Such conditions also provide individuals more time to be creative and offer better-quality service. L.R. explained that such a reduced level of expenses means she can hold training events for smaller groups. N.K., however, who pays market rent, is deprived of this benefit.

Of course, warning flags certainly come up here. In particular, rents in multiuse houses may need to be controlled to prevent speculators from exploiting any loosening of restrictions.

The multiuse house also provides a viable career and employment alternative, especially for newly graduating youth. In Kuwait this may help alter expectations related to formal employment and reduce pressure on the government to provide jobs. Instead, society can once again focus on creativity, and individuals may be freed to pursue their passions, helping to diversify and demonopolize the economy.

It should be emphasized that the individuals interviewed as part of this study generally provided services that were not otherwise available to Kuwaiti society. R.O. became the first woman in the country to offer Zumba classes and other specialized fitness training. N.K. chose to train children in important life skills not taught in school. L.R. was the first to introduce the Emotional Freedom Technique to Kuwait. And S.Q. ventured into carpentry — a skill once reserved for men.

Finally, the multiuse house provides a less risky environment in which to start a small business. Starting her interior design practice from her home allowed S.Q. to develop skills

and create a customer base before venturing into the more formal business arena.

Urban Benefits. The multiuse house has community benefits as well. For example, it reduces pressure on streets and roadways by enabling people to work within the same neighborhood districts in which they live. L.R., F.D., and S.Q. all described the benefit of not having to commute to a separate workplace. By contrast, N.K. has to commute to a separate multiuse house that she rents, but it is located in another neighborhood near her home.

The multiuse house further helps build a sense of community by diversifying activities within a neighborhood and increasing interaction among residents. This, too, may reinstate a traditional urban quality that existed in pre-oil Kuwait. Modernist "model neighborhoods" separated activities into designated zones (play areas, schools, shopping, work, etc.), requiring deliberate effort by residents to access these functions. The multiuse house may help bring these functions back within walking distance, allowing people to once again engage with surrounding buildings and get to know their neighbors. N.K., R.O., and F.D. all stated that they received many clients from within the areas their multiuse houses were located, or other areas nearby.

On an urban level, the multiuse house thus enriches neighborhoods and helps solve urban issues. However, before enthusiastically reintroducing multiuse houses into existing or new neighborhoods, their effects need to be carefully studied in order to avoid the mistakes of uninformed planning.

MEASURING GENERAL OPINIONS OF THE MULTIUSE HOUSE

A comprehensive survey is currently being designed to ensure broader public participation in shaping the future of the multiuse house in Kuwait. The survey will measure public acceptance/rejection of the concept, reservations with regard to which activities might allowed, concerns and hopes for how neighborhoods may be affected, and awareness and interaction with existing multiuse house practices.

The comprehensive survey is still under preparation, but the author conducted a preliminary pilot study of public acceptance/rejection of multiuse house practices in May 2015. This was randomly distributed online, and 106 responses were received in the course of two weeks. Most of the respondents were female (88 percent), and the majority were between 24 and 45 years of age. All of the respondents were Kuwaitis. The future comprehensive survey will be targeted toward both the Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti population.

The majority of participants (82 percent) in the pilot survey were not involved in multiuse house activities, although the remaining 18 percent were. In terms of acceptance and rejection, 70 percent of the respondents said they were in favor of multiuse house activities, while 30 percent said they were not.

The answers to open-ended questions revealed that respondents were aware and approved of a variety of activities. These included the sale of apparel, tailoring and fashion design, food businesses, sports-training studios, graphic-design services, children's party planning, architectural design, home-service nails and spa treatment, real estate management, investment management, furniture design, healing and training centers, and the design and production of handmade jewelry.

BRINGING BACK A TRADITION

> *Finding this apparently "new" building type has profound implications. It has the potential to change the way the city is conceived, to open new avenues of architectural thought and investigation, and to affect the way that buildings are designed.*[57]

As Holliss rightly pointed out above, the apparently "new" multiuse house is actually a building type deeply rooted in Kuwait's tradition. Multiuse house practice was very much a reality in pre-oil Kuwait, as many nonresidential activities took place within the house and were extended out into the street and the neighborhood. Among such activities were craft-making, baking, schooling, and food-production, which served individual homeowners as well as the larger community. Pre-oil house designs had features that supported such activities. Among these were flexibility, privacy, and a separation between public and private areas.

Twentieth-century urbanization brought the discontinuation of the multiuse house, as modernist planners conceptually separated the residence from all such activities and allocated them instead to designated commercial and industrial zones. Kuwaitis, like the members of many other cultures around the world, consequently lost their right to shape their living environments and perform nonresidential activities there. This hindered the ability of local Kuwaitis to contribute to their country's economy. Houses thereafter stood detached, each reflecting little more than its owner's wealth and recent travels, with spacious areas reserved to entertain guests. There was no longer a dialogue between houses, which instead reflected a widening social gap and the precedence of personal benefit over common well-being. Benefitting from generous state welfare benefits, Kuwaitis were also rendered idle, in the understanding that they did not need to give back to the state in return for the services they received.

In recent years, awareness has risen of the need for local Kuwaitis to participate in shaping their city according to their requirements. This has largely been driven by young people, who have lost patience with government employment and welfare payments, and who have sought to explore new creative opportunities. Facing resistance from officials, they have sought to claim their "right to the city" via numerous social groups and initiatives.

The multiuse house is another manifestation of individuals claiming their right to the city. Impatient with the lack of sensibly priced, well-located spaces to rent, Kuwaitis are instead reusing spaces within their houses to accommodate various activities. As Ahrentzen noted in relation to conditions in the U.S., this reflects a desire to do away with an enforced division that has divided people's lives — that between "home life" and "work life," between the private and public spheres.[58]

The individuals interviewed here shed light on numerous social, economic and urban benefits that the multiuse house offers. These include bringing diversity and community spirit back to neighborhoods. Government officials have sought to restrict this mode of house use, as it is regarded a threat to a controlled and monopolized economy. Nevertheless, individuals have continued to expand these practices, despite the lack of licenses and legal acceptance, in the hope that the legality of such activities will be officially recognized in the near future. And since this study began in mid-2015, the multiuse house reality has been rapidly changing and gaining greater attention. Indeed, the importance of its organization and legitimation is being realized by all parties.

As this article has tried to indicate, the multiuse house enriches neighborhoods and addresses many urban issues. However, before enthusiastically embracing the concept and reintroducing it into existing or newly designed neighborhoods, its effects need to be more carefully studied to avoid mistakes related to uninformed planning. In the short term, this means that temporary solutions need to be devised, until all the consequences of fully reincorporating multiuse houses into neighborhoods can be anticipated. The general public will need also to be involved in this process. Hence, there will be a need for further extensive interviews, field studies, and surveys to avoid destabilizing the established urban structure, putting extra pressure on existing services, or jeopardizing the peace and safety of residential suburbs. Gradual introduction of a new multiuse house policy would also help ensure public support to enable the resolution of any unexpected issues that may arise.

The pilot survey, however, has revealed that there is a wide acceptance of this form of house use among the general public. By interviewing individuals currently involved in the multiuse house practice, the author has further sought to "voice-out" their desires, dislikes and goals. This study has thus sought to open a dialogue through which the public can play a more active role in shaping the future of the multiuse house. As Davis has written, "Architecture has respected ordinary daily life over the centuries, and needs to do so again."[59]

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