



# SELF-ORGANIZED COMMUNITIES, URBAN GOVERNANCE AND THE CITY

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MUSCAT, OMAN

RESEARCH PROJECT ON LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE ARAB REGION

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## **SELF-ORGANIZED COMMUNITIES, URBAN GOVERNANCE AND THE CITY. LESSONS LEARNED FROM MUSCAT, OMAN**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>HAM</b>	Hay Al-Maarifa (Al-Khoud 6)
<b>ITC</b>	Integrated Tourism Complex
<b>LAS</b>	Land Administration Systems
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MERA</b>	Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs
<b>MM</b>	Muscat Municipality
<b>MoHP</b>	Ministry of Housing and Planning
<b>OMRAN</b>	Oman Tourism Development Company
<b>ONSS</b>	Oman National Spatial strategy
<b>SCP</b>	Supreme Council of Planning
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a nation that relies heavily on oil revenues since the 1970s (Al-Farsi, 2013), Oman's capital city Muscat is a classical car-based city, from rapid urbanization to trans-national and rural–urban migration, along with outdated urban policies. At the city scale, the role of land management is largely overseen by the public sector; however, in the last decade the role of the private sector and individuals became more prominent on the neighbourhood scale. This research aims to explore this development. Residential neighbourhoods in Muscat primarily consist of single-home, residential villas, covering over 40 per cent of privately-owned land. This phenomenon is related to Royal Decree No. 81/84 and No. 125/2008, which allocate state-owned lands to Omani citizens for residential purposes as a public welfare housing scheme. As a result, many are entitled to residential land. The Ministry of Housing is responsible for planning new residential neighbourhoods and for the distribution of the plots through a random selection system.

Since 2017, the Supreme Council of Planning has been working on the Oman National Spatial Strategy as a step towards unifying a national and regional development plan. Following distribution of plots to citizens, Muscat Municipality comes into action. From the provision of basic infrastructure within neighbourhoods to laying out regulations and building codes. The provision of neighbourhood infrastructure is usually executed in phases that span decades. This correlates to construction on these plots carried out independently by multiple landowners, as they see fit. Such neighbourhoods take decades to completely reach their fully built-up capacity (as illustrated in case study 2). Hence, such neighbourhoods tend to compensate for the missing facilities through communal initiatives, temporary or permanent solution until the municipality provides the adequate infrastructure.

Oman has a total population of about 4.6 million, with 44 per cent expatriates (NSCI, 2020), of which 88.4 per cent hail from South East Asia (NSCI, 2010) and are classified as low- to medium-skilled workers. The migrant population is heavily concentrated in Muscat's older residential areas built in the 1970s (Mansour, 2017). As they lack property ownership rights, most migrants rent apartments. With high social capital, they congregate in certain parts of the city, often developing their own unspoken governance system (see case study 3). Additionally, some of the newer developments in Muscat focus on integrated tourism complexes (ITCs), managed by private investors, where land and/or property can be owned or rented to high-skilled migrants (see case study 1).

Within these complexes, the governance system is driven by private investors.

By identifying self-organized communities in relation to land management bodies in Muscat, the research outlines various structures of neighbourhoods that could engage in a collaborative discussion, internally and external. This research aims to understand these different forms of landownership and habitation systems, in order to identify the role of citizens in land management and urban development within different neighbourhoods and their specific self-governance systems. Furthermore, the research explores the relations between the horizontal and vertical scale, on which both the civil society and the government operate. In order to answer the research questions, the literature review looks at the different connotations of urban self-governance and identifies the key parameters to conceptualize the discourse in the context of Oman.

**Theoretical framework:** Three uses of governance elaborated by Rhodes (1996) were applied to build the theoretical framework: as a new public management, as a sociocybernetic system, and as self-organizing networks. The paper conceptualizes the need for vertical (government and planning bodies) and horizontal structures (communities) to work in tandem within the planning process. Only with a unified goal and shared responsibility can the needs of the planning bodies and communities be met. Where the discourse of urban governance and land management is understood on the vertical structure, complementary discourses of self-governing and self-organized structures (along with co-production of spaces) is unpacked at the horizontal structure. The theoretical framework emphasizes the need for dialogue between the two.

**Methodology:** This qualitative research follows an instrumental case study approach by examining three neighbourhoods in Muscat with representative site selection parameters. In each case study the structural aspects of community self-organization/governance are analysed, to identify potential patterns in the evolution of the communities. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of each case study benchmarks the parameters of self-organization. Key stakeholders and their roles are identified within the organization structure, in order to understand their legitimacy/power, interest and resources in different case-specific stakeholder constellations. Furthermore, it identifies the gaps in the links between the horizontal and vertical planning bodies. This type of research provides a contextualized understanding of community self-

organization in each case study. The study follows a mixed-methods approach, utilizing primary data collection tools (such as direct observation, surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and spatial mapping) as well as secondary data collection tools (such as desktop research and grey literature analysis).

**Research questions:**

- 1) What are the gaps in land management in Muscat?
- 2) What are the forms of self-organized communities within neighbourhoods in Muscat?
- 3) What are the parameters and governing structures of self-organized communities in Muscat?
- 4) What are the multilateral networks between self-organized communities and regulatory bodies?

The case study selection criteria follow a careful selection of parameters to examine three representative neighbourhoods in Muscat, with the presence of self-organized networks or communities, and varying demographic characteristics (nationality, household structures, age groups and gender), socioeconomic status, characteristics of the self-organized communities, drivers of self-organized network and landownership/tenure system.

**Case study 1, Al-Khoud 6:** This case represents how neighbourhoods under the land distribution scheme are formed. With over 10,000 inhabitants, the neighbourhood primarily consists of young Omani families, living alongside university students and commuters working in adjacent areas. With the limited contribution of Muscat Municipality to the neighbourhood’s infrastructure and facilities, in 2008 residents of the neighbourhood took it upon themselves to design, fund and build a mosque, which is currently a platform for discussion within the neighbourhood. As most residents are property owners, collective decisions regarding land management could take place and be further directed to the responsible authorities for the required actions. Hence, the community managed to stop the distribution of plots alongside its border and to reclaim part of the area for a community park.

**Case study 2, Al-Mouj:** As part of the integrated tourism complex (ITC) project by Muscat Municipality, Al-Mouj is built and operated by an investor (Al-Futtaim Group). ITCs provide a new format of landownership where non-Omani are allowed to purchase real estate under certain conditions. Hence, Al-Mouj is a mixture of Omani and non-Omani

residents, mostly high- to medium-income families or couples. Although the neighbourhood follows key planning regulations from local practise, the format of a self-organized and internally managed neighbourhood was a first of its kind. The investor outlines all neighbourhood management schemes, whereby residents are obligated to attend meetings to set out regulations. Internal land management is organized by a neighbourhood administration that involves residents in social matters and follows the investors’ demands regarding spatial matters.

**Case study 3, Al-Hamriya:** One of the oldest neighbourhoods in Muscat, it was developed during the 1970s. Even though historically Al-Hamriya housed a mix of temporary migrants and local residents, today the area is densely populated by migrants from Bangladesh. They mostly live in rented properties, and a significant share are illegal (absconders), low-skilled, single workers. With no legal status, receiving incentives for essential services is troublesome; therefore, the residents of Al-Hamriya have become accustomed to catering for themselves (Annisa, 2018). With strong social capital, they organize themselves to cater to their financial, social and spatial needs. These self-organizing networks are principally driven by civil society. However, due to language barriers, uncertainty of own rights, lack of connection to the legal system and legitimacy, these initiatives lack longevity and are not scaled up.

**Findings:** Contributing to understanding land management in the Gulf region alongside the sustainable development goals, the research examines the role of residents within three representative neighbourhoods in two scales of operation and power. The comparison between the neighbourhoods identifies key structural elements of self-organized communities in Muscat in relation to urban policies and regulation that could support them. The benchmarking of the neighbourhood helps to set these structures within the horizontal and vertical axis of the governing of land management. The research then outlines levels of contribution and impact that each neighbourhood requires in order to achieve a true self-organized community that can responds to local and regional issues. The research concludes with a set of recommendations how to potentially integrate such self-organized communities into Muscat’s land governing structures and outlines the required multilateral networks between self-organized communities and regulatory bodies.

**Conclusion:** Through the identification of self-organized communities in relation to land management bodies in Muscat, the research



outlines various structures of neighbourhoods that could achieve a collaborative discussion, internally and externally. Three typologies are identified: typology 1 is driven by organized civil society of nationals; typology 2 is driven by the private sector; and typology 3 is driven by temporary, fragmented migrant organizations. Furthermore, the research brings forth contextualized recommendations for each organization typology.

For the first typology, the research recommends development of a neighbourhood facilitating body; for the second, it recommends inclusion of activities empowering “human networking” (Carley and Christie, 2000); and finally for the third, it recommends the development of mediating body, including the development of a neighbourhood facilitation body and improvement of human networking aspects.

## 1.1. Overview

Underpinned by petroleum revenue incentives, the development of Muscat is similar to car-based cities, a result of rapid urbanization. However, this was not the only factor for the horizontal urban expansion of the city, rather, it is the combination with rural–urban migration, transnational migration and urban planning policies. At the city scale, land management is largely overseen by the public sector; however, in the last decade, the role of the private sector and individuals emerged on district and neighbourhood scale. The research aims to explore this development.

With over one-third of the nation living in the capital, provision of land for housing has been a concern of the Ministry of Housing since the 1970s. Accordingly, two royal decrees have addressed housing concerns: Royal Decree No. 81/84 and No. 125/2008, with the allocation of state-owned lands through a random lottery system organized by the Ministry of Housing for residential purposes, as a public welfare scheme for Omani citizens (Elzain, 2021). Following the distribution of plots, Muscat Municipality is responsible for the provision and regulation of basic infrastructure, such as building codes, street and lighting, public parks, and utilities (implemented by external utility companies), within residential neighbourhoods (Elzain, 2021). Due to rapid and unregulated development of land by individual families, Muscat Municipality faces severe strain to provide these services, which have become economically unviable (Elzain, 2021). With individual family houses covering over 40 per cent of privately owned land (Nebel and von Richthofen, 2016), residents within neighbourhoods seek alternative modes of semi-permanent solutions to meet neighbourhood needs for basic infrastructure and amenities (see case study 2).

Administrative efforts in dealing with these issues have been tackled by the Supreme Council of Planning through the “Oman National Spatial Strategy” since 2017, as a step towards a unified national and regional development plan (Elzain, 2021). Similarly, alternatives for new developments in Muscat are created through the strategy of integrated tourism complexes (ITCs), managed by private investors, where land and/or property can be owned or rented to high-skilled migrants (see case study 2). Within these complexes governance driven by private investors can be noted.

Oman has a total population of about 4.6 million, where 44 per cent are expatriates (NSCI, 2020). Furthermore, 88.4 per cent of the expatriate

population hail from South East Asia (NSCI, 2010), and are classified as low- to medium-skilled workers. The migrant population is largely concentrated in Muscat (Mansour, 2017), in older residential areas built in the 1970s. Due to lack of property ownership rights, most rent out apartments. Relying on high social capital, they congregate in certain parts of the city, often developing their own unspoken governance system (see case study 3).

## 1.2. Research Gaps and Problem Statement

Currently, the Sultanate of Oman works with a normative and rational-systemic approach in development planning, in addition to partially following the neoliberal strategic planning approach. Under these two paradigms, development decisions are primarily top-down and conducted by the public sector. In recent years, various other nations in the wider MENA region are beginning to explore communicative planning and involve citizens in the planning process. However, Oman is progressing rather slowly in this particular discourse.

The research paper focuses on three major gaps, which formulate the problem statement:

- 1) Although in the last half decade, micro-scale, independent initiatives have emerged aiming to work with participatory, need-based processes, there is no overall comprehensive plan by the public sector to support participatory development and the involvement of citizens in the planning process. This research paper conceptualizes this issue as the first aspect of the problem statement bringing to light two types of community initiatives that need to be acknowledged in order to bring public and civic society actors together.
- 2) With renewed laws, regulation, policies and planning bodies emerging rapidly in the last decade, communication and transparency in the planning system is often the missing link from the operational level to the administrative and organization level. Furthermore, the large gap in the planning system needs to be addressed – not only between the different public sector bodies but also between the vertical and horizontal structures. Under the framework of this research, this is the second aspect of the problem statement.
- 3) Finally, the prioritization of a neighbourhood selected for urban development and/or upgrade is unclear. Evidently there appears to be a clear differentiation between developing and/or

upgrading newly constructed neighbourhoods, with a stronger local population as residents than the older neighbourhoods of the city which are dominantly inhabited by low- to medium-skilled migrant residents. A lack in prioritization of urban development and/or upgrade of the latter typologies is documented to result in an uneven development pace, which can hinder the holistic sustainable development goal for the entire city. This is the third aspect of the problem statement addressed in this research.

### 1.3. Research Aims and Objectives

This research aims to understand the different forms of landownership and habitation, to identify the role of citizens in land management and urban development within diverse neighbourhoods with varying self-governance systems. Furthermore, the research explores the relations between the horizontal and vertical scale, on which both the civil society and the public sector operate. Through the identification of self-organized communities in relation to land management bodies in Muscat, the research outlines various structures of neighbourhoods that could achieve a collaborative discussion, internally and externally.

Contributing to understanding land management in the Gulf region alongside the sustainable development goals, the research aims to examine the role of residents within three representative neighbourhoods in two scales of operation and power. The comparison between the neighbourhoods aims to identify key structural elements of self-organized communities in Muscat in relation to urban policies and regulation that could support them. The benchmarking of the neighbourhood helps to set these structures within the horizontal and vertical axis of governing land management. The research then outlines levels of contribution and impact each neighbourhood requires to achieve a true self-organized community that can respond to local and regional issues.

In order to fulfil the research aims and objectives, the research answers the following questions:

- 1) What are the gaps in land management in Muscat?
- 2) What are the forms of self-organized communities within neighbourhoods in Muscat?
- 3) What are the parameters and governing-structures of self-organized communities in Muscat?
- 4) What are the multilateral networks between self-organized communities and regulatory bodies?

### 1.4. Research Methodology

This qualitative research follows an instrumental case study approach by examining three representative neighbourhoods in Muscat with careful site selection parameters. The case studies are analysed and understood under the respective parameters of the two theoretical pillars – land management and urban governance. Under land management, the research identifies for each case study the land value, tenure, use, development, people and institutions involved as well as the rights, responsibilities and restrictions. Furthermore, under urban governance the research differentiates between the three forms of governance that each case study leans more towards: new public management, sociocybernetic system and self-organizing networks.

In each case study, the structural aspects of community self-organization are analysed to identify potential patterns in the evolution of self-organized communities. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of each case study benchmarks the parameters of self-organization. Key stakeholders and their roles are identified within the organization structure, to understand their legitimacy/power, interest and resources in different case-specific, stakeholder constellations. The findings are codified in a SWOT analysis for each case. Furthermore, by identifying the connection gaps between the horizontal and vertical planning bodies, the research provides a contextualized understanding of community self-organization in each case study.

About 180 independent surveys were conducted in the case study neighbourhoods, over the span of two months. This data was complemented by in-depth formats such as semi-structured interviews, life history mapping, focus group discussions and expert interviews, with both public and the civic society actors. This served as the primary data collection tool along with direct observation and intensive sociospatial mapping of each neighbourhood. Furthermore, secondary data collection tools such as desktop research and grey literature analysis contribute to the theory building.

The research concludes with a set of recommendations on which adaptation of such-organized communities could be integrated into Muscat's land governing structure and an outline of the required multilateral networks between self-organized communities and regulatory bodies.

The research faced a number of limitations. First, the data-collection process was delayed due to restricted

accessibility to the site during the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, there was a lack of accessibility to the latest information, collected mostly through experts and direct interviews, rather than web research. Third, the 2020 changes of Oman’s government structure impacted the comprehensive access to information. Fourth, due to the lack of complete spatial data from planning bodies, the researchers had to carry out very time-consuming, physical spatial mapping.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework (see Figure I) works with two pillars, one contributing to the top-down structure and the other to the horizontal structure. For the former, the research looks at land management and urban

governance, while for the latter it focuses on the role of the communities and self-governance to make a connection between the horizontal and vertical structures.

Thus, the paper conceptualizes the need for the vertical (government and planning bodies) and horizontal structures (communities) to work together within the planning process. Only with a unified goal and shared responsibility can the needs of the planning bodies and communities both be met. Where the discourse of urban governance and land management is understood on the vertical structure, complementary discourses of self-governing and self-organized structures along with co-production of spaces is unpacked at the horizontal structure. The need for dialogue between the two is emphasized in the theoretical framework.

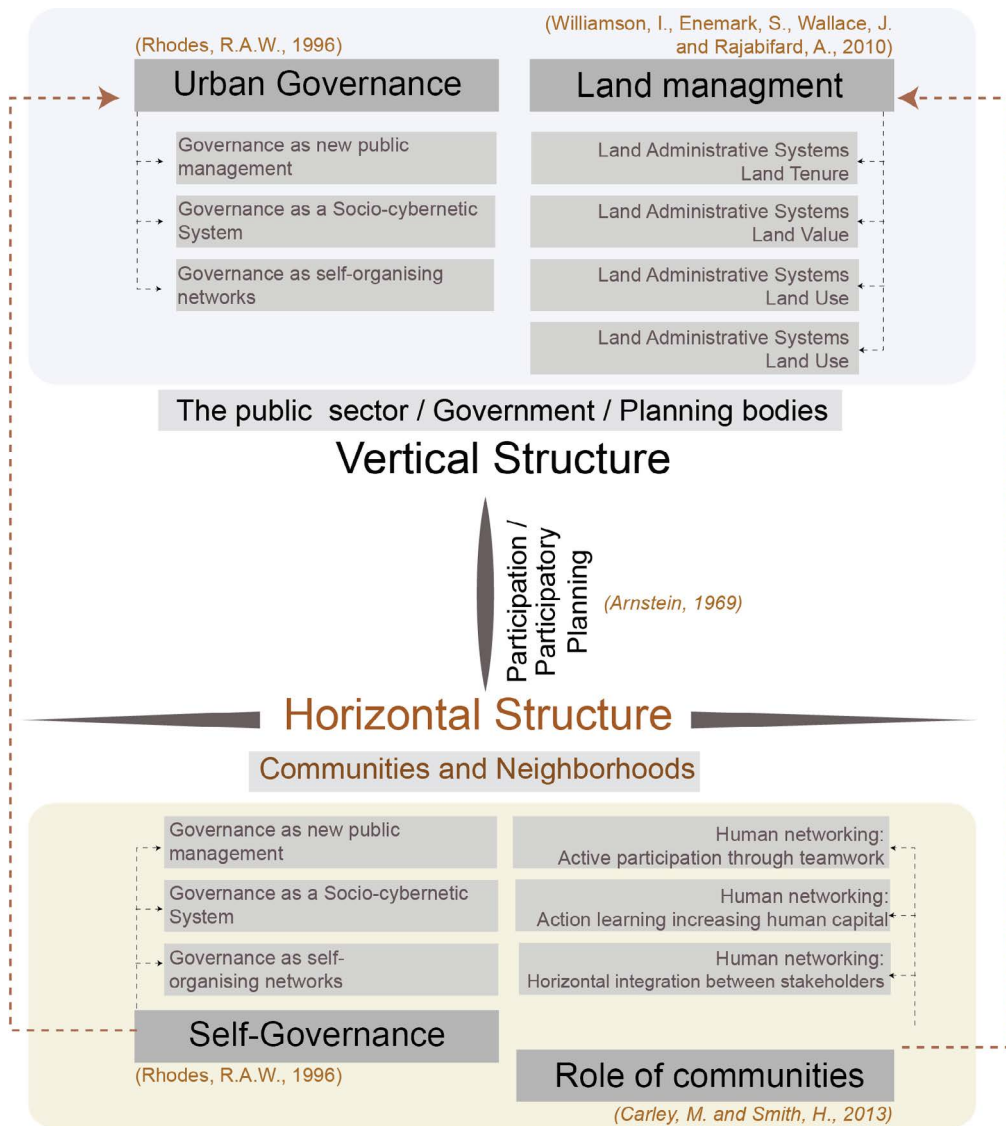


Figure I: Theoretical framework.

The literature review is divided into four sections. First, as a macro-scale overview, the research elaborates on the different development planning paradigms, aiming to situate the development planning of Muscat. Second, on the meso level, the research unpacks the land management paradigm in order to assess the parameters for the case of Muscat, identifying which to focus on at the horizontal and the vertical level. Third, at the micro scale of analysis the research unpacks the different understanding of governance and highlights the relevance of good urban governance at the horizontal scale, in order to identify points of connection of the research case studies to the vertical structure. Lastly, the research elaborates on how the needs of an individual and community can be unravelled and used as a starting point to connect the horizontal and vertical structures. Finally, the research elaborates on the power and role of civil society in development planning.

## 2.1. Development Planning Paradigms

Aiming to locate the state of development planning of Muscat on the micro scale, the following section contains three components as an introduction to understanding the development planning paradigms from 1960s to today. The research identifies the need to move towards the communicative, collaborative planning paradigm for Muscat.

**Normative and rational-systemic (1960–1985):** This planning era was driven by a mixed market economy approach, where the state was primarily responsible for planning and provision of services, and planning decisions were centralized, following a rationalist philosophy. In this approach, development planning was a linear process based on scientific methods, and the planner's role was to a large extent an expert and a technician, lacking the active involvement of other stakeholders like the private sector and civil society. Even though under this paradigm development planning had short-term, medium-term and long-term goals (executed in various phases), the manoeuvring space was minimal.

### Neoliberal strategic planning (1980–2000):

This approach continued to follow the philosophy of rationalism. Furthermore, this planning era was driven by a free-market economy with public-private partnerships, resulting in a reframed role of the state in the planning process, shifting from provider to employer. Privatization occurred with decentralization of administrative activities, where the role of the planner was brought to the forefront as technical facilitator. To some extent, this planning approach utilized methods that worked towards human and sustainable development.

**Communicative collaborative planning (1990 to today):** Following a philosophy of relativism, this era of planning focuses on creating public-private-civic partnerships, bringing the needs of the people into the planning process. Integrating the knowledge and narrative of the residents, this era of planning works with the civil society. The role of the planner in this paradigm is that of a mediator. Communicative collaborative planning works with methods of participation and towards a holistic sustainable development.

## 2.2. Land Management and Land Administration Systems

In this paper components of land management will be broken down and contextualized, by unpacking the land management paradigm of Enemark (2004). This paradigm provides a conceptual framework to understand land administration systems by placing practices and principles that classify land management as a discipline. The components of the land management paradigm are land policy; LAS (land tenure, value, use and development); institutions and people; rights, restrictions and responsibilities; and measures for success. Here land management encompasses the management of both land and natural resources, which are used effectively by the country with the support of different disciplines such as natural, technical and social sciences (UNECE, 1996). Land management discourse brings together aims and objectives and the operational components such as land rights, economics, use control, regulations, monitoring and implementation. Finally, land management considers the effects of globalization and technological advances.

**Land policy:** The public sector (government) sets and promotes goals, aims and objectives in order to deal with land management (i.e. land policies). These measures vary along a wide range of ecological, economic and social aspects, starting from sustainable development of agriculture, economics and settlement all the way down to poverty reduction and social equity (Enemark, 2004). The key stakeholder here is the public sector who holds the upper hand in regulating land related activities (e.g. property rights, use of land, economic elements).

**Land administration systems (LAS):** The component needed to facilitate the land policies is LAS. They safeguard rights, risks, restrictions and responsibilities with effective infrastructure for implementation. Each of the four major functions works towards operationalizing

one aspect of land policy (Williamson et al., 2010). The infrastructure of LAS includes institutional arrangements, legal frameworks, processes, standards, land information, management and dissemination systems, and technologies required to support allocation, land markets, valuation and control of use and development of interests in land. The major aspects of the four functions include the following:

- **Land tenure:** land rights, determining parcel boundaries, sale or lease of land, management of land disputes, etc.
- **Land value:** assessment of land values, taxation, taxation disputes, etc.
- **Land use:** adopting planning policies for land use, enforcement of land use regulations, management of conflicts, etc.
- **Land development:** building of physical infrastructure, implementation of construction, planning permits for land use changes.

**Institutions and people:** This principle acknowledges the fact that effective sustainable development requires good governance and capacity building and the engagement of people in both the social and the institutional framework. Emphasizing the importance of user needs, different stakeholder needs are taken into account.

**Rights, restrictions and responsibilities:** Rights refer to ownership of land; restrictions refer to controlling activities, and usage of land and responsibilities refers to commitments.

**Measure for success:** One of the key principles is to measure the "ability to manage and administer land efficiently, effectively and at low cost" (Williamson et al., 2010, p. 35), where the suitable laws need to be appropriated depending on the country context.

### 2.3. Good Urban Governance Modes

In order to answer the research questions, this part of the literature review looks at the different connotations of urban self-governance and identifies the key parameters to conceptualize the discourse in the context of Oman. Three uses of governance elaborated by Rhodes (1996) will be explored in this paper to build the theoretical framework: new public management, sociocybernetic system, and self-organizing networks.

Governance as new public management explores the

idea of managing the public sector under neoliberal policies. It encompasses two aspects, managerialism and new institutional economics, with the latter conferring the introduction of "incentive structures into public service provision" (Rhodes, 1996, p. 655). The changing role of the public sector comes about by distinguishing between making policy decisions (steering) and directly delivering services (rowing), with the role of steering being more significant than rowing (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993a). This form of government structure "empowers citizens by pushing control out of bureaucracy into the community" and, most importantly, "decentralizes authority embracing participatory management" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993b, p. 34); thus, bringing the vertical and horizontal structures of the planning process closer to each other.

Governance as a sociocybernetic system explores the idea that effective governance is based on the interaction and interdependencies of different actor groups. Kooiman's (1999, p. 258), understanding of governance stresses the "outcome of the interacting intervention efforts of all involved actors", acknowledging the fact that actor groups possess interdependencies and that no single actor(s) can have all the knowledge, information, sufficient overview, action potential, and resources to carry out a process effectively. This understanding of governance highlights the need for a collaboration between local government, private investors and communities. It touches on the concept of centreless society or polycentric state (Luhmann, 1982), where "the task of the government is to enable sociopolitical interactions...to distribute service among the several actors", and interactions such as "self – and co-regulation, public-private partnerships, co-operative management" emerge (Rhodes, 1996, p. 657).

Governance as self-organizing networks focuses on the role of such constellations, which are autonomous and self-governing, as they are managed independently by social institutions. Their "integrated networks resist government steering, develop their own policies and mould their environments" (Rhodes, 1996). This comes from the reality that "the control capacity of government is limited... lack of legitimacy, complexity of policy processes, complexity and multitude of institutions concerned" (Kickert, 1993, p. 275). Furthermore, looking at self-governance in the context of social institutions, Rauws (2016) elaborates that self-governance is a process of "collective decision-making and action", by "groups of people sharing common objectives in relative independence from public actors and institutions" (Moroni, Rauws, and Cozzolino, 2020,

p. 222). Furthermore, they themselves take steering and management responsibilities of their objectives and goals. In this case, the role of government remains at the periphery and not at the core of the process, leaving stakeholders with decision-making independence.

## 2.4. Role of Communities and Civil Society in Development Planning

In the following section, the research unpacks the parameters that contribute to good urban governance and its relevance at the horizontal scale, to identify points of connection to the vertical structure. An elaboration is made to enhance our understanding of both the drivers of self-organizing communities as well as the type of organizing systems, to understand the parameters of governance.

### 2.4.1. Drivers of Self-Organizing Communities

Organization can be defined either as following an instrumental or a self-organizing (spontaneous) order. Instrumental order mostly refers to the organizations that have clear goals and a working hierarchy. While a self-organization or spontaneous order exhibits a less rigid structure or a loose framework that ensures that each member can achieve their individual goals (Hayek, 1973). As a result, self-organization or spontaneous orders tend to be polycentric with a better chance of longevity than instrumental ones (Hayek, 1973). Within the neighbourhood scale, forms of self-organization or spontaneous order are more evident as the number of involved stakeholders with decision-making power is often higher than that of a single company or governmental institutions.

In addition, addressing the various needs found within each community would require excessive planning. The diverse needs within the community could be outlined through Maslow's (1943) pyramid of needs, ranging from the provision of basic life needs to self-actualization/relational ones. In a standard neighbourhood that hosts members from different economic backgrounds, addressing the residents' needs under the umbrella of community development could be tackled through the formation of self-organizations (diZerega, 1989). These organizations are often visible as community-based organizations, civic society groups, and other forms of local organizations that run evolving projects related to their needs within neighbourhoods.

### 2.4.2. Types of Organizing Systems

Within the field of social sciences, Putnam (2000)

in his outline on social capital defines two types of settings where a community comes together, bonding and bridging. Bonding is expressed as a direct tie between the individuals, similar to that of a neighbourhood that would meet in a community hall or within religious facilities. Bridging, on the other hand, concerns indirect ties, similar to how a recommendation from a local mayor could support and push forward a discussion between a community and a municipality. Hence, following the formation of these organizations, with particular focus on the neighbourhood scale, the collective aim and goal is the defining factor for the functionality of the organization. Smock (2004) outlines three types of ties that correlate to the formation of these social capital organizations: instrumental, affective, and normative. Often visible within neighbourhoods is a CBO working to achieve a physical goal that concerns the neighbourhood, hence referred to as an organization with an instrumental tie. Within communities that have an active religious group, organizations with affective ties are often created where groups form to conduct activities surrounding gathering and getting to know each other. Lastly, a normative tie emerges when communities attempt to achieve larger goals or principles within their neighbourhood.

## 2.5. Human Networking Capacity for Managing Sustainable Development

The final section in this literature review elaborates on the emphasis on human networking capacity for managing sustainable development. Carley and Christie (2000) elaborate sustainable development as an on-going process of mediating diverse needs (environmental, economic, and social), whereby the development of one does not harm the other. "Its successful implementation requires integrated policy; planning, and social learning processes; its political viability depends on the full support of the people it affects through their governments, their social institutions, and their private activities" (Carley and Christie, 2000). They also emphasize that political processes should come before the outcome and, therefore, advance three key aspects that need to be taken into consideration for sustainable development: strategic and philosophical reflection; research and development of new knowledge; and the development of institutional, regulatory and human networking capacity for managing sustainable development (Carley and Christie, 2000). The latter emphasizes two pillars, with (1) the implementation of policies focusing on top-down aspects, and (2) looking for new knowledge for urban, environmental and human development on bottom-up elements. According to the authors,

human networking encompasses four aspects:

- I. Active participation through teamwork and equity;
- II. Action learning to develop human capital;
- III. Horizontal integration between public, private and civic sectors;
- IV. Shared self-development and management.

They further emphasize that to achieve sustainable development, partnership between public, private and civil society is crucial. Public policies and programmes need to not only focus on short-term urban development but also long-term issues, requiring an emphasis on human and social needs. Where sensitive policies should be devised by the public sector, civil society must demonstrate visionary thinking as well as policy commitment. Therefore, the two important aspects for pursuing sustainable development are good governance and a long-term perspective.

To reach the micro-scale of neighbourhoods, efforts from both top-down policies and bottom-up needs are important. Individual households' positive commitment is to be rewarded in terms of incentives from the top. Thus, for effective sustainable development it is essential to combine bottom-up community involvement for the macro scale (national/ regional) and the meso scale (city). In addition to

horizontal connections between the public, private and civic stakeholders, vertical connections between instrument (policy) and actions on the ground is essential for effective sustainable development (Carley and Kirk, 1998). Furthermore, since decisions made at the micro scale have direct effects on the neighbourhood scale, a comprehensive link between regional, cityscape and local initiatives is to be incorporated into the framework. While aiming for the horizontal connection between different stakeholders, it is important to align and compliment the aims, goals and agendas of respective stakeholders to avoid conflict (Dodman and Mitlin, 2011).

Furthermore, sustainable development entails the comprehensive development of different parts of the city. If social polarization and segregation hamper the development of certain parts of the city, sustainable development as a whole cannot be achieved. At the city scale, larger institutions that have access to power and resources would develop faster than those that do not. Therefore, to ensure balance, developing other communities should be accompanied by effective support from the public sector, in terms of empowerment and self-development strategies (Carley, Smith, and Jenkins, 2013). In addition, the capacity of the communities to answer to their own needs has to be acknowledged. Vertical connection to the problems at the neighbourhood level requires both top-down and bottom-up initiatives.





### 3.1. Muscat Governorate

Located in the Arabian Gulf, Oman has a population of 4.44 million inhabitants, out of which 1.7 million are expatriates (see Figure II). Muscat Governorate, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman, is home to 30 per cent of the country's population (NCSI, 2020). This is the result of rural–urban migration dating from the 1970s, centralization of administrative bodies, markets and business in the capital. The city has been expanding in the land between the beach to the north and the mountains to the south and is poised to consume the available land in the near future (Nebel and Richhofen, 2016).

With the ever-expanding city border, residential lands account for the majority of city lands in Muscat (Nebel and Richhofen, 2016). Although, almost less than half the land (48 per cent) was granted in 2020 than in the previous year – 11,773 and 23,000, respectively (NCSI, 2020) – the high demand on provision of infrastructure and utilities by Muscat Municipality and the public authority remains (Elzain, 2021).

During the waiting period, which often ranges from a year to a decade, neighbourhoods seek to appropriate and accommodate their surrounding environment to meet these requirements (Elzain, 2021). The data gathered in the research paper through interviews and document review exhibits the various approaches taken by neighbourhoods under the Muscat land governing structure. It also outlines the policies and authorities responsible for urbanization of the capital city.

### 3.2. Land Management in Oman

#### 3.2.1. Land Policies

The Basic Statute of State (Royal Decree No.

101/96) set the base guidelines on which the country further developed policies and regulations (Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2020). Along with the 1<sup>st</sup> Five-Year Development Plan that was initiated in 1976, aiming towards setting the country's budget (Metz, 1993), an era of development in healthcare, education and infrastructure followed. A land allocation system under Royal Decree No. 81/84 and No. 125/2008 were set as part of the social welfare to provide suitable residential conditions for Omani citizens (Nebel and Richhofen, 2016). The Basic Statute of State, Article 11 under the Principles guiding the state's policy, exemplifies this aim:

Private ownership is safeguarded and no person shall be prevented from disposing of his property except within the limits of the Law. And no property shall be expropriated except for the public interest in case, stipulated by the Law and in the manner specified therein, provided that the person dispossessed shall be fairly compensated. (Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2020)

The various authorities and institutions responsible for planning and facilitating land management in accordance with the Basic Statute of State within Muscat are the Supreme Council of Planning (SCP), under the Ministry of Economy; the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development; and Muscat Municipality, following the Oman Vision 2040. Every twenty years, and the hitherto 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Development Plan, which focuses on economic diversification and sustainable development, is conducted by the Supreme Council of Planning. Authorities that provide facilitation and information to the public are the e-Oman governmental portal and the National Center for Statistical Information (NCSI).



Figure II: Map of Oman and location of Muscat.  
Source: Google Maps.

### 3.2.2. Land Administration System (LAS)

The traditional framework of land management in the Omani oasis took into consideration the availability of agricultural lands for farming, considered as lands that generate economic wellbeing. Residential settlements were located on non-agricultural lands, on the plateaus of hills with the assurance of availability of water resources, such as water springs, in addition to providing strategic security viewpoints (Damluji, 1998). However, following the 1970s and the exponential economic growth that resulted into rural–urban migration, such frameworks were no

longer applicable. Thus, authorities focused more on a provisional rather than a collaborative responsibility. In their list of indicators on general governance, the World Bank outlines the quality of land administration index (ranging from worst to best, 0 to 30) as a collection of the “reliability of infrastructure, transparency of information, geographic coverage, land dispute resolution and equal access to property rights” (World Bank, 2020). Looking at the rating of countries in the region (see Table I), Oman’s score of 13 is among the lowest.

The index data dates to 2016, prior to the launch of

Country	2016	2015	2014
Oman	13	13.5	13.5
UAE	21	20	20
Saudi Arabia	9.5	9.5	9.5
Qatar	24.5	23.5	23.5
Bahrain	17.5	17.5	17.5
Kuwait	17.5	17.5	17.5

Table I: Quality of land administration index.  
Source: World Bank Group, 2020

the hitherto latest 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Development Plan, which focuses on the importance of informative and communicative platforms with all stakeholders, from citizens, private and private-public companies to governmental bodies. Although the planning and initial implementation of these strategies are in action, the effect and result of a more transparent land administration structure is yet to be captured. Next the paper turns to outlining the land administration functions in the country: tenure, value, use, and development.

### 3.2.3. Land Tenure

The outline of land tenure in Muscat is done by the SCP, which carries the initial zoning and land strategy for the management of natural and human resources, according to the current five-year plan. Land zoning is then taken by the Ministry of Housing for the allocation of residential, infrastructural and services, commercial, and industrial lands. Land for generating economic activities is made available to Omani and non-Omani establishments (Annisa and Elzain, personal communication, 24 November 2021). Residential lands are distributed to the Omani public through the land allocation scheme, under the Royal Decree No. 81/84 and No. 125/2008, which warrants the transfer of governmental land for residential purposes to Omani citizens older than 23, using a lottery system (Elzain, 2020). These plots are distributed from the remaining land parcels of the city; thus, some plots are sold on the public market, as the allocation of the plot causes inconvenience to the new landowner (Nebel and von Richthofen, 2016). Consequently, the private land market has grown exponentially (Annisa and Elzain, personal communication, 24 November 2021).

### 3.2.4. Land Value

Land valuation in Muscat is initially set by the Ministry of Housing. Following the distribution of land for

commercial and residential purposes, lands sold in the public market go through valuation by private real estate agencies, that take into consideration the availability of good access, infrastructure, facilities and amenities, and the proximity of central business zones. Hence, properties awarded through the land allocation scheme are often sold in the market following the semi-completion of basic infrastructure by Muscat Municipality. This period varies from one to five years in respect to the number of landowners who have already begun construction of their houses. The Ministry of Housing seeks to control and slow down the process of selling land allocated under the land allocation scheme, with a waiting period of 2 years before the land can be offered on the public market.

Land taxation, however, is applicable in areas utilized for professional, commercial, or industrial activities, regardless whether the entity is Omani or a foreign (Sultanate of Oman Tax Authority, n.a.). As a result, residential plots are exempt from taxes, including rental of residential properties and sales/purchases of bare lots (Sultanate of Oman Tax Authority, 2020). Land sale transactions may be subjected to a one-time fee of 3 per cent of the total cost of the plot, payable to the Ministry of Housing.

### 3.2.5. Land Use

The recent restructuring of the planning bodies and rules indicates that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is set to follow the framework outlined in the Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS) for spatial zoning, in addition to the national strategy of the five-year plan. Consequently, cadastral maps are produced by the Ministry with clear indication of various plot typologies, allocation of infrastructure and nature boundaries. Residential plots are still distributed through the land allocation scheme. Muscat Municipality is responsible to ensure the safe and healthy building construction, as outlined in the Muscat Building Regulation. In the case of expressed

request by a resident, or multiple neighbourhood residents, regarding the allocation of a plot, an appeal is often possible with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

### 3.2.6. Land Development

Muscat Municipality, along with public authorities for water, electricity, waste management, and sewage water, is responsible for the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and utilities within residential neighbourhoods, with the exception of integrated tourism complex (ITC) neighbourhoods. Construction on a plot is carried out by the individual landowners, through the private or public-private sector. As stated, the approval of construction is regulated by Muscat Municipality, regardless whether the owner is an individual or an investor.

### 3.2.7. Institutions, People and Rights

The institutions involved in the planning and facilitation of land issues have experienced multiple changes and reforms in recent years. Nevertheless, the role of the Supreme Council of Planning remains essential for the preparation of holistic strategies for economic, environmental and spatial development. Its flagship project, the ONSS, provides a set of participatory framework guidelines. Both SCP and ONSS follow the Oman Vision 2040, the first vision that emphasized the importance of public participation in setting the future path for Oman through themed committees: people and society, economy and development, governance and institutional performance. The vision, initiated in 2017 during the "Future Foresight Forum" national conference, outlines strategies and best practices for public participation (eOman, 2020). With a clear focus on participation and the inclusion of the various stakeholders, primarily Omani youth, various initiatives aim to assert a communication dialogue: "All of Oman", "Face of the Future", and "Creative Youth Incubatory" (eOman, 2020).

On the level of land administration, the responsibilities of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development include preparation of land use plans, plot allocation, and provision of housing to Omani families of

limited means. Following the allocation of the plot to its respective owner, individual owners follow up with Muscat Municipality to receive the required building permit. Similar to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, municipalities have been recently restructured and updated to enable the decision-making process at the operational level, under Royal Decree No. 101/2020 on the System of Governorates and Municipal Affairs (Muscat Daily, 2020). Consequently, the transparency and modes of e-governance expressed in the land administration and planning are visible to the NCSI and eOman, which enable citizens to initiate the process of land allocation.

## 3.3. Self-Governance

Within the Sultanate, legal forms of self-organized communities or societies fall under Royal Decree No. 2000/14, which is based on the decree on social clubs and civic societies from 1972, and are regulated by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The fundamentals of these organizations are that they must not be profit based, and a clear structure with a minimum of 40 members and an advisory board must be established. As these organizations are heavily monitored by the Ministry in order to prevent corruption and misuse, smaller communities tend to seek alternative forms of self-organization in order to govern their surroundings and address their needs.

In the case of Al-Khoud 6, an average neighbourhood in Muscat, the community optimized the role of the mosque administration when dealing with financing of projects as it acquired legal rights for fund collections. Additionally, the role of the wali (governor) was utilized within the district to act as their legal representative within the ministerial structure. In terms of land administration and development, the case of Al-Mouj looks into private organizations taking official responsibility of their properties through legal and contractual agreements with official bodies, in this case Muscat Municipality and the Ministry of Housing. Communities that struggle with the consequences of legal representation and alternative fund collection, and lack the benefits of officially shaping their surroundings, are communities of low-skilled expatriates, as exemplified by the case of Al-Hamriya.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDIES: AL-KHOUD 6, AL-MOUJ AND AL-HAMRIYA

This research selected three neighbourhoods as case studies in Muscat. They vary spatially and socially but are representative of other neighbourhood typologies found in the city. Figure III shows the location of the three case studies within the city of Muscat. In addition to demographic factors, the research devised a number of selection criteria to elaborate on the case study sampling. The following site selection criteria were applied to reflect the two theoretical pillars of this research and its umbrella themes:

1. Land management: LAS (tenure, value, use, development); institutions and people; rights, restrictions and responsibilities;
2. Urban governance: drivers of self-organization; type of organizing system; and governance mode.

The site selection attributes include: demography, land development and urban governance. Under demography, the nationality of the residents, gender, household structure and socioeconomic status are considered, as they leave an impact on the land management and governance of the neighbourhoods. Under land development the land tenure aspect is considered. Under urban governance, the research assessed the type of self-organized body, in order to identify whether it is organized or fragmented, legally registered and/or privately managed. See Table II for an overview of the site selection attributes.

Al-Khoud 6 is a neighbourhood where primarily semi-to high-skilled Omanis reside who have received a land parcel from the government and relocated from other parts of Oman. With more families than singles, this neighbourhood is socially capable and organized itself into a civil society organization. Therefore, Al-Khoud was chosen as an example that showcases how community members can have an effect on urban development and be part of the governance process – even with the very prominent role of the public sector in land management.

Al-Mouj is a high-skilled, migrant-dominated gated community with some high-skilled locals residing in medium to high-end properties. It is managed by a private company, called Al-Mouj, which takes the major spatial decisions. With an even mix of families and singles, this neighbourhood has a higher socioeconomic background than Al-Khoud 6. Al-Mouj is governed by a private investor and the role of the community themselves in the development process is minimal. Therefore, this was selected as a case study that illustrates how a private investor can manage the land and the neighbourhood in Oman.

Al-Hamriya is a neighbourhood of mostly low-skilled migrants from Bangladesh, with the majority of residents living on a temporary basis in overcrowded two- to three-storey, rented apartments. Even though the neighbourhood is also home to families and skilled



Figure III: Location of the case studies within Muscat.  
Source: Google Earth, 2020.

## 04 CASE STUDIES: AL-KHOUD 6, AL-MOUJ AND AL-HAMRIYA

migrants, it is dominated by low-skilled, male workers who are often living illegally. Al-Hamriya was chosen to showcase the potential of migrant communities to

engage in informal land management, without direct connection to the public sector or participation in decision-making processes.

	Demography				Governance	Land Management	
	Dominant Nationality	Household structures	Gender	Socio-Economic status	Type of organizing system	Land Tenure	Type of neighborhood
<b>Al-Khoud 6</b>	High-skilled locals	Families and singles (3:1)	Male : Female 2:1	Medium	Organized, unregistered civil society	Privately owned and rented	Privately owned and rented
<b>Al-Mouj</b>	High-skilled immigrants and locals	Families, couples and singles (2:1:1)	Male : Female 2:1	High	Private, commercial	Privately owned and rented	Gated community
<b>Al-Hamriya</b>	Low-skilled immigrants	Families and singles (1:3)	Male : Female 1:2	Low	Fragmented, unregistered civil society	Rented	Rented

Table II: Attributes used in selecting the case study sites.

In this chapter, each case study is presented, first by providing the background of the site and its physical development, to then unpack each of the two pillars of the research: land management (land tenure, value, use and development; institutions and people; rights, restrictions and responsibilities) and urban governance (self-organization, type of organizing system, and governance mode).

## 5.1. Analysis of Al-Khoud 6 Case Study

### 5.1.1. Background and Introduction of the Site

Al-Khoud 6 is one of the neighbourhoods that has developed under Oman's land distribution scheme. The urban development of this neighbourhood showcases the manifestation of the land lottery system on urban space. With over 10,000 inhabitants, it hosts both permanent and temporary residents. While primarily inhabited by young Omani families, temporary residents such as students studying in the nearby universities and daily commuters make up a small percentage. Part of the community in Al-Khoud 6 has managed to develop a citizen-led organization, calling themselves Hay Al-Maarifa. A key aspect of our research is to understand land management and urban governance in the country by studying Hay Al-Maarifa in Al-Khoud 6 as a case study.

### 5.1.2. Land Management: LAS

**Land tenure:** Al-Khoud 6 is a residential neighbourhood planned and distributed to Omani citizens by the Ministry of Housing, as part of the land entitlement scheme. Frequently, some plots are sold in the local land market and purchased by other Omani citizens. Lands for infrastructure and public facilities within the neighbourhood are allocated to legal institutions, for example, roads and parks to Muscat Municipality, schools to the Ministry of Education, mosques to MERA etc.

**Land value:** The value of the residential plot is initially set by the Ministry of Housing. As some lands are sold via the local land market; private companies further elaborate on the land valuation. In the case of residential plots in Al-Khoud 6, land taxation is not applicable to residential land. Those landowners who use their plots for commercial or investment activities, such as shops and rental apartments, pay taxes to the Ministry of Commerce.

**Land use:** The uses of the land follow SCP regulations, while the Ministry of Housing plans and distributes land accordingly. Following the land allocation to recipients, owners can appeal the allocated land use if they provide a valid reason and the support of neighbourhood residents.



Figure IV: Geographical location of Al-Khoud 6.  
Source: Google Earth.

**Land development:** Here the research takes the example of Hay Al-Maarifa in Al-Khoud 6, where the neighbourhood residents managed to first build a mosque as well as stop land allocation along the wadi, furthermore managing to transfer the residential plots near the mosque to parking space. With the limited contribution of Muscat Municipality to the neighbourhood's infrastructure and facilities, the residents sought to provide for the needs of the community and initiated a process to design, fund and build a mosque, which today provides a meeting place and a platform for discussion within the neighbourhood. As the majority of neighbourhood residents are property owners, collective decisions regarding land management could take place and be further directed to the responsible authorities for the required actions. By effectively using their strong social capital, the community managed to stop the distribution of plots alongside the neighbourhood's edge and reclaim part of this area for a park.

### 5.1.3. Land Management: Institutions and People

On the macro scale, the presence of Muscat Municipality and its local Al-Seeb Directorate is visible through the provision of infrastructure within the Al-Khoud 6 neighbourhood. On the micro scale, the communication with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the provider of most of the plots, is initiated when neighbourhood residents suggest changes to the land allocation, to better align with their needs. The structure of the resident organization (Hay Al-Maarifa) exhibits a strong community, formed around the local mosque. The community's main interest is skill development for children, women and other residents; hence, residents organize various activities for people in the neighbourhood. The Hay Al-Maarifa Mosque and its extension (public hall and Quran school) act as platforms for discussion and participation within the community. Elected members within the community are in charge of maintaining communication with authorities.

### 5.1.4. Land Management: Rights, Restriction and Responsibility

The original owner of the land is usually the Ministry of Housing or the Ministry of Defence; however, after citizens receive the transfer of ownership, they are entitled to develop the land as they see fit, in accordance with the applicable laws and building regulation. The new landowner must abide by the agreement between the owner and Ministry of Housing. Changes to the assigned land use on the plot might be possible after securing approval from the Ministry of Housing and Muscat Municipality.

Any changes to the physical building must always be approved by MM. The responsibilities within such neighbourhoods like Al-Khoud 6 are clear as the majority of residents are Omani, originating from the interior of the county. Thus, a sense of community can be traced through communal achievements, such as building a mosque and activities in the facilities around it, following Islamic ethics in their living environment. As a result, the high community and social capital enhances the micro-scale governance of the neighbourhood.

### 5.1.5. Urban Governance

**Type of organizing system:** Hay Al-Maarifa in Al-Khoud 6 is an organized, unregistered civil society body that is strongly driven by the local community. Reflecting back on Putnam (2000), the community possesses strong social capital and succeeds to assemble primarily to "bond", through their various activities (see committees and activities in Figure V). Furthermore, they show competence in all three of Smock's (2004) typologies of ties. First, they showcase organization with an instrumental tie by building and funding the Hay Al-Maarifa Mosque. Second, they show organization with an affective tie with the activities that they organize in their self-built community centre. Lastly, they showcase the normative tie with the example of coming together to influence land allocation around the wadi in order to change the land use into a community park. With the latter example, Hay Al-Maarifa brings to light their willingness and efforts to communicate with the public sector authorities to "bridge" (Putnam, 2000) the gap between these two bodies.

**Drivers of self-organization:** Two primary influencing factors driving self-organizations are identified. One is the lack of capacity and resources by the public sector to take over the use and development of land on a rapidly developing neighbourhood scale. The second is the strong community desire and need to develop the land use of the neighbourhood. Together these two influencing factors empower community members to become the primary drivers of their self-organization.

**Governance mode:** The research concludes by showcasing that on a macro scale of land management the public sector acknowledges the land and infrastructure needs of the neighbourhood; however, the provision of services on the neighbourhood scale is inadequate. Thus, the governance mode on the micro scale can be seen as self-organizing networks where the activities are self-identified and self-governed. The paper's



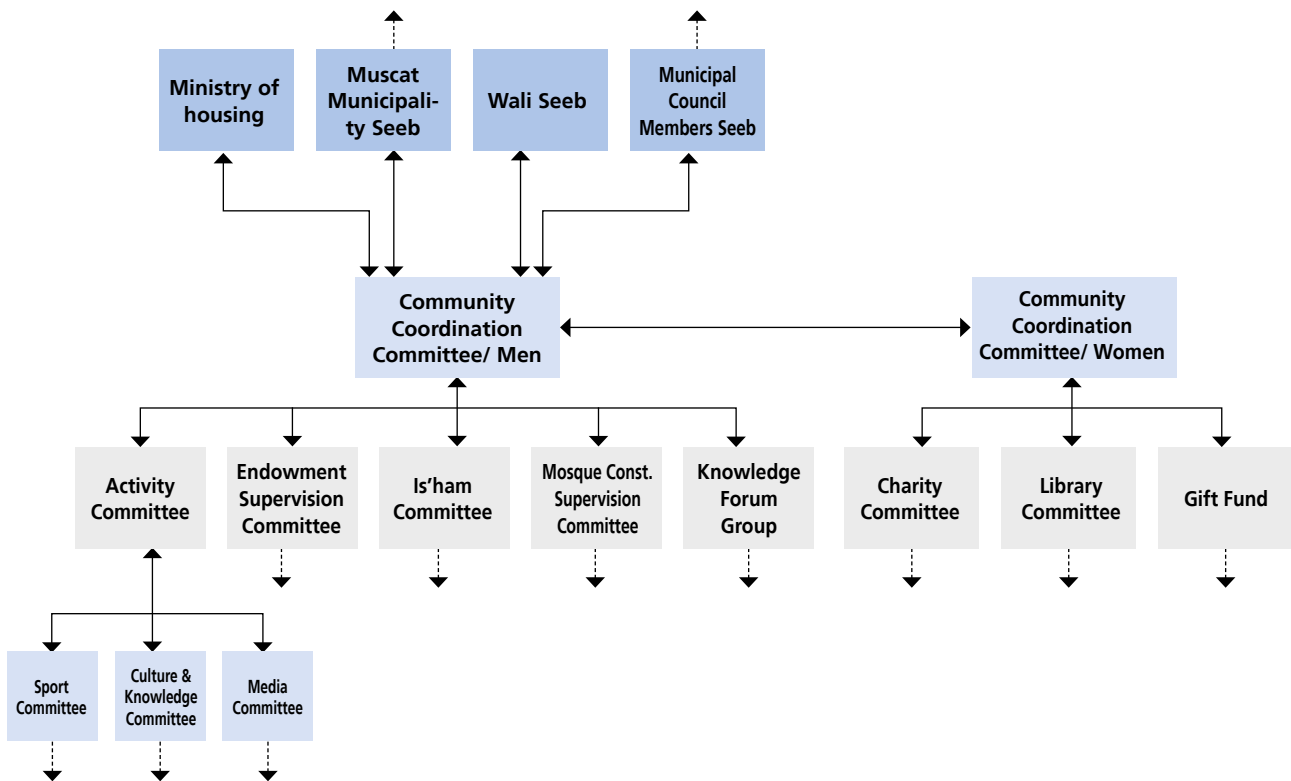


Figure V: Hay Al-Maarifa community structure.  
Source: Elzain, 2021.

recommendations build on the discussion of bringing forth communication and activities to facilitate governance as a sociocybernetic system where the public sector can interact through policies to distribute services among various actors.

## 5.2. Analysis of Al-Mouj Case Study

### 5.2.1. Background and Introduction to the Site

As part of the integrated tourism complex (ITC) project by Muscat Municipality, Al-Mouj is built and operated by an investor (Al-Futtaim Group). The ITC is a joint venture between the UAE-based Majid Al-Futtaim Properties, Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) and Tanmia (Oman National Investments Development Company) (Al-Mouj Muscat, 2020). The ITC neighbourhoods in Muscat provided a new format of landownership where non-Omani are allowed to purchase real estate under certain conditions. Hence, the neighbourhood is a mixture between Omani and non-Omani residents who are medium- to high-income families or couples. Although the neighbourhood follows key planning regulations from local practice, the format of a self-organized and internally managed neighbourhood was a first of its kind. Here, the

investor outlines all the neighbourhood management schemes, and residents are obliged to comply with these set out regulations. Its internal land management is, thus, organized by an internal administration that involves the residents in social matters and follows the investor's demands on spatial matters.

### 5.2.2. Land Management: LAS

**Land tenure:** Land tenure within the neighbourhood consists of residential neighbourhood planning and distribution by private-public investor (Majid Al-Futtaim, OMRAN, and Tanmia), as part of an ITC (Royal Decree No. 12/2006) agreement with Muscat Municipality, the original landowner. Additionally, residential plots are sold to Omani and non-Omanis.

**Land value:** Land value of built-up residential plots is set and primarily sold by the management of Al-Mouj (Majid Al-Futtaim). Land taxation is levied on the private-public investors on behalf of the respective authority, which is the Oman Tax Authority at the Ministry of Commerce. Furthermore, Muscat Municipality is entitled to 2 per cent of the profits earned. Lastly, the individual owners of residential plots are tax exempt.



Figure VI: Geographical location of Al-Mouj.  
Source: Google Earth, 2020.

**Land use:** Following the ITC agreement by the Ministry of Housing, water and electricity authorities, and the Ministry of Tourism, the land use of the neighbourhood is determined by the private-public investors accordingly to the rules and regulations prescribed by these bodies.

**Land development:** Within the neighbourhood, all infrastructure and facilities are provided by the private-public investor and managed by Al-Mouj Management (Majid Al-Futtaim), through the collection of fees from neighbourhood residents. Construction of plots are also carried out by the investor; however, following the purchase of the plot, individual owners may send a request to Al-Mouj Management to change or alter certain outlined elements of the residential plot, which must be first be approved by Al-Mouj Management before sending it for final approval by Muscat Municipality.

### 5.2.3. Land Management: Institutions and People

Within the neighbourhood, the community is led by Majid Al-Futtaim, visible through maintenance of the neighbourhood and communication with residents.

Other parties of the private-public venture are not active within the neighbourhood. Communication regarding construction and land development is carried out between Al-Mouj Management and Muscat Municipality. Infrastructure accessibility is provided by Muscat Municipality, and Mwasalat (Oman National Transport Company) provides public transport access to the neighbourhood.

The structure of people within the Al-Mouj neighbourhood is initially expressed by Al-Mouj Community, which is responsible for communication with residents regarding collection of services fees or request for changes. This communication is carried through online portals, telecom or in-person meetings. Al-Mouj Community is responsible for planning and implementing communal activities or events. These are mostly profit-based events. Residents can communicate internally with each other via an online platform provided by the company.

### 5.2.4. Land Management: Rights, Restriction and Responsibility

As Al-Mouj falls under Royal Decree No. 12/2006,

allowing the purchase of land by non-Omanis, the neighbourhood structure presents more non-Omani residents than Omanis. This is due to the fact that most of the real estates purchased are placed back on the market as rentals, being the more economic option for non-Omanis. Thus, Al-Mouj Community acts as the central communication hub, providing some sense of community within a neighbourhood of ever-changing residents.

### 5.2.5. Urban Governance

**Type of organizing system:** The research identified that a significant number of the real estates purchased by Omanis are placed back on the market as rentals in order to secure financial returns. Thus, the neighbourhood structure has more non-Omani residents than Omanis, with not only diverse sociocultural background but also varied duration of stay. In order to bring the residents together and have consistency in management, the Al-Mouj Community acts as the central hub for communication. Thus, the research identifies this case study to have a weaker social capital than the other two examples. Al-Mouj management takes over the role of bringing the community together to “bond” (Putnam, 2000) through various micro-scale neighbourhood activities.

**Drivers of self-organization:** This research identifies a lack of need for self-organization within this case due to the fact that, the private sector body directly caters to the needs of their customers. The organizing body is thus the Al-Mouj Management, who are

structured and follow an effective hierarchy in their role of organization and management.

**Governance mode:** The research concludes that on the macro scale, land management is “steered” by the public sector and “rowed” (Rhodes, 1996) by the private sector. Due to the diverse sociocultural mix within the residents and varying length of their stay, they play a very small role in governance. Al-Mouj thus showcases governance mode as new public management, where the managing body acts as the “bridge” (Putnam, 2000) that brings the needs of the community closer to the public sector. The recommendation from this research picks up on this topic, placing an emphasis on the development of such managing bodies within communities.

## 5.3. Analysis of Al-Hamriya Case Study

### 5.3.1. Background and Introduction of the Site

Unlike Al-Khoud 6 and Al-Mouj, Al-Hamriya was developed for residential land use in the early 1970s from farmlands owned by the renowned Wahibi family, some of whom still reside within or in the periphery of the area. Initially, the built housing served as accommodation for workers involved in the construction of Ruwi, the commercial, mixed neighbourhood nearby. Originally planned for temporary occupancy, the plots were developed with simple construction techniques into one- to two-storey residential houses with breeze bricks. However, a large part of this construction still persists

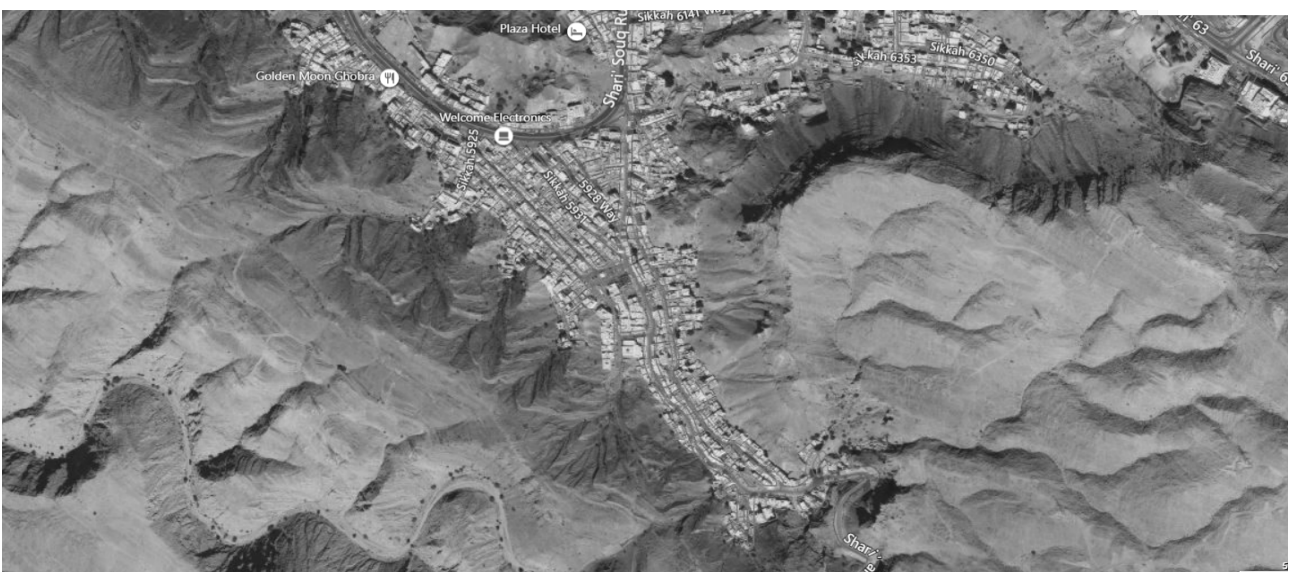


Figure VII: Geographical location of Al-Hamriya.  
Source: Google Earth (2020).

in the neighbourhood. Gradually, the neighbourhood became known for affordable housing with the lowest land and property prices in Muscat (Scholz, 2014), and attracted low-income, temporary migrants. Today, the majority of the residents living in these deteriorated buildings originate from countries in South East Asia, like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

### 5.3.2. Land Management: LAS

**Land tenure:** Lands for infrastructure and public facilities are allocated to assigned legal institutions accordingly, for example, roads and parks to Muscat Municipality and mosques to the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs. Residential land in Al-Hamriya is legally owned by individual Omani nationals and rented out to migrants. Since residential land in this neighbourhood, like many others in Muscat, cannot be bought by non-Omani nationals, the majority of the land is offered on the rental market by the Omani owners. Thus, the research identified the management of the rental property as a relevant aspect of analysis. The management of the rental property is undertaken in steps. First, the Omani national rents out the entire property to a migrant who acts as caretaker, managing the allocation of rooms and rents. Second, individual renters further rent out rooms or beds, communicating only with the caretaker. Due to this special situation, the first migrant renter/caretaker becomes the one to legally take care of the taxes and overall management. Furthermore, the migrant caretaker acts as a “sub-owner” without legal acknowledgement.

**Land value:** Al-Hamriya has some of the lowest land and property prices in Muscat (Scholz, 2014). As the development of the neighbourhood took place in the early 1970s, it is not a part of the land lottery system. Land taxation is not applicable to this form of residential land; however, landowners using the plot for commercial or investment activities, such as shops and rental apartments, are liable to pay taxes to the Ministry of Commerce. This research identifies the value (rent) of the built-up property as a relevant aspect rather than only the land value.

**Land use:** On the micro scale, Muscat Municipality takes care of larger infrastructure land use; however, on the micro scale land use is altered by the residents, frequently without formal permission. With the complex system of renting out properties, various typologies of shared housing options are appropriated both by the caretaker and renters, whose primary livelihood strategy is to minimize their living costs and maximize income modes (Annisa, 2018). The result is intensively shared housing typologies where the

beds in certain rooms are rented out, with one room illegally housing up to 8 individuals.

Change of property use from residential to small commercial use takes place without being recorded. Furthermore, due to intensive uses of indoor spaces for residential purposes, communal activities are often taken outdoors to open plots for residents. The usage of outdoor spaces is temporary, without permanent structures, and changes over the course of the day, week and season. The outdoors plots are appropriated for economic activities as temporary markets (unmonitored) or labour-recruitment areas (Annisa, 2018). They are also used for recreation, due to the lack of planned green space.

**Land development:** Utilities and infrastructure development/renovation in this neighbourhood is implemented and supervised by Muscat Municipality. Local public authorities are responsible for electricity, water, and waste management. The Municipality’s role is everything that relates to basic infrastructure such as streets, parks, and street lighting. When possible, facilities and infrastructure are managed and funded by Muscat Municipality.

### 5.3.3. Land Management: Institutions and People; Rights, Restriction and Responsibility

The residents of Al-Hamriya come from a similar cultural background; therefore, they develop strong social capital and form fragmented social groups, who come together to cater to their collective needs. Examples include appropriating a mosque on the rooftop of a housing or setting up an informal market in a common outdoor space. The organization of these community groups is narrowly needs-based and are often short term. They do not have a hierarchical organizational structure but are very efficient in catering to their specific needs. Residents living in the area for one to two generations or who are financially secure normally take over the facilitation role, whereas the actual interventions are done as a collective, self-organized process. The temporary use of the space is identified collectively by the residents. Oftentimes, unauthorized extensions of housing space are visible. Since the neighbourhood is not constantly monitored by authorities, it is clear that they show a certain level of tolerance to these residents, who then take advantage of the situation, maximizing the utilization of the available space.

### 5.3.4. Urban Governance

**Type of organizing system:** The research finds out that a good percentage of residents of Al-Hamriya are

temporary; therefore, the development of structured organization is difficult. The research did document smaller organizations active within the community, instead of a single, primary one. Accordingly, the activities largely cater to the needs of the community at specific times, i.e. they are need and project based and do not have a long-term strategy. In addition, the organizing system(s) in Al-Hamriya are driven by civil society groups that are fragmented. Due to the language barriers and the low financial and social standing, they are not registered and have limited communication with public sector actors. Residents of Al-Hamriya showcase the instrumental tie when coming together to cater to their need of a recreational area in their neighbourhood; however, due to lack of legitimacy, this only manifests informally on the spatial structures. Furthermore, they showcase an affective tie with activities built around meeting and socializing, while due to the temporary and fluctuating population, normative ties are difficult to maintain.

**Drivers of self-organization:** Two major influencing factors of self-organizations are identified in this case study. On the macro scale, the lack of integration schemes and lack of housing provision for low-skilled migrants are driving organization. On the micro scale, a dire need to provide basic services shapes self-organization towards alternative utilization of both indoor and outdoor spaces.

**Governance mode:** The research concludes by showcasing that public sector bodies are very effective on the macro scale of land management and provision of infrastructure. However, as the residents in this case study are temporary migrants, there is lack of communication between them and planning bodies. Thus, the governance mode in this neighbourhood can be seen as needs-based, self-organization by fragmented groups of civic society actors, down to the household scale. The recommendation of this research is to facilitate communication between the two scales.

	Land Tenure	Land Value	Land Use	Land Development	People and Institutions	Rights, Restrictions and Responsibilities
Al-Khoud 6	Residential neighbourhood	Land value set by MoHP	MoHP plans and assigns land use plans	Infrastructure is planned and supervised by MM	MoHP, MM, and Hay Al-Maarifa	Following the shift of the land from the MoHP to the Omani citizen, they are entitled to develop the land in accordance with the laws and building regulations.
	Planned and distributed to Omani citizens by MoHP	Some lands are sold in the local land market		Construction of property is done by individuals		Changes to the physical building must always be approved by MM.
		Land valuation by private companies		Owner 60 per cent built-up space		Following Islamic ethics within the neighbourhood; High sense of community and social capital.
Al-Mouj	Residential neighbourhood	Planned and distributed by private-public investor	Private investor plans and assigns land use that is approved by MM	Infrastructure provided by the private-public investor	Al-Mouj community, led by Majid Al-Futtaim (private investor)	Shift of ownership from MM to the Al-Mouj investor; Land is planned, developed, and sold in accordance with ITCs.
	Planned and distributed by private-public investor	Residential plots are sold to Omanis and non-Omanis		MM must approve construction		Changes to the physical building must be approved by MM and by Al-Mouj Community.
				40 per cent built-up spaces		Al-Mouj Community acts as the central hub for communication, providing a sense of community within the neighbourhood.

	Land Tenure	Land Value	Land Use	Land Development	People and Institutions	Rights, Restrictions and Responsibilities
AI-HAMRIYA	Residential and commercial land parcels	Initial rent prices set by Omanis, increased by migrant caretakers	MOH planned and assigned land use	MM planned and supervised infrastructure construction	MM, and fragmented, migrant community organizations	Omani national rents out the property to a migrant caretaker who acts as property manager, subletting it to individual migrants.
	Owned by Omanis, rented out to migrant caretakers		Temporary appropriation by migrant residents	Individual owners carry out construction on property		Changes must always be approved by MM; Changes are appropriated by residents.
				Appropriated by migrant resident		High sense of community and social capital; Major activities driven by economic needs and as a livelihood strategy by the migrants.

Table III: Findings matrix: assessment of land management parameters in the three case studies.

	Type of organizing system	Drivers of self-organization	Governance mode
Al-Khoud 6	Hay Al-Maarifa in Al-Khoud 6 is an organized, unregistered civil society body, strongly driven by the local community.	Lack of capacity and resources by the public sector to take over use and development of land in a rapidly developing neighbourhood; Strong desire and need of development of land use of the neighbourhood by community.	Sociocybernetic system; Self-organizing networks.
Al-Mouj	Driven by private investors.	Lack of need for self-organization within this case study due to the fact that, the private sector body directly caters to the needs of their customers.	New public management.
Al-Ham-riya	Driven by fragmented, small-scale, informal civil society migrant organizations.	Macro scale, the lack of integration schemes and lack of housing provision for low-skilled migrants; Micro scale, a dire need for catering to their needs of basic services.	Self-organizing networks.

Table IV: Findings matrix: assessment of urban governance parameters in the three case studies.

The assessment of the land management parameters of the case studies positions an understanding of the relation to the vertical structure, whereas the assessment of the governance parameters aids in understanding the position of the case studies on the horizontal structure. The role and collaboration of the public, private and civil society stakeholders can provide a direction how the vertical and horizontal structures can come together, thus addressing the research questions.

## 6.1. Forms of Self-Organized Communities Within Neighbourhoods in Muscat

### 6.1.1. Al-Khoud 6: Driven by Organized Civil Society of Omani Nationals (Typology 1)

With the land lottery system of land distribution, the public sector provided infrastructure and major services within the neighbourhood. Al-Khoud 6 primarily developed following the principles of normative and rational-systemic planning, with the public sector doing most of the “rowing” in the planning process. The establishment and effective operation of Hay Al-Maarifa in Al-Khoud 6 is a result of a self-empowered community with strong social capital uniting with the intention of fulfilling their psychological as well as self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). Although a formal process of registration of citizens’ initiatives aiming to support grassroots’ organizations is present, due to complex and time-consuming bureaucratic processes, there are noted difficulties in collaboration with the public sector. Nevertheless, a communication channel with the public sector has been established and functions well.

Due to the presence of a high number of Omani citizens, who speak the language and understand the legal, organizational and administrative processes, this neighbourhood has the highest potential of collaborating with the public sector. Still, a mediator is required between the public and civic actors. The community has organized itself to provide for their needs, such as building a Quran school, community centre and developing social activities for children, youth and women. The community organization working in this neighbourhood has successfully communicated with the public sector in order to change the use of a plot from residential to recreational. This is a self-sufficient community organization that can provide a lighthouse example for other cases.

### 6.1.2. Al-Mouj: Driven by the Private Sector (Typology 2)

From the planning, development and implementation of this gated community, it is evident that the development planning of this neighbourhood has been part of the neoliberal strategic planning paradigm, where the state takes on the role of “steering” and leaves the role of “rowing” to the private investor. An effective public-private partnership has developed in this neighbourhood; however, the role of the community in the planning or the renovation of the project has been neglected. Even though this neighbourhood could push to the governing form of new public management, a lack of community engagement still poses a barrier.

Managed mostly by the private sector, this community does not have the opportunity to form a self-organized entity. Since the entire planning, development and implementation is run by the private sector investor, there is minimal room to manoeuvre, appropriate or integrated suggestions from the community in permanent physical structures. Unlike the other two case studies, the self-actualization needs of this community are addressed by the investor via weak links between the private sector and community, such as Friday markets, fancy outdoor food carts and high-end recreational spaces.

### 6.1.3. Al-Hamriya: Driven by Temporary Migrants via Fragmented, Informal Organizations (Typology 3)

The original planning of this neighbourhood was completed many decades ago, with new generations coming to reside there. Primarily home to temporary migrants who do not speak the language and are not integrated into the legal system of the country, any form of legitimation and legalization is problematic. However, since the social capital of the community is strong, they self-organize into working groups to provide for their own needs.

The level of empowerment and effectiveness within this neighbourhood is very high; however, the missing link to the public sector provides strong challenges. As a result, most of the spatial development conducted by the community catering to their own needs is temporary. This community would benefit greatly from formal acknowledgement by the public sector, both as a community and of their contributions to the physical spaces within the neighbourhood. Even though they are seen as “temporary” residents, the effects they leave on the physical outdoor spaces are permanent.

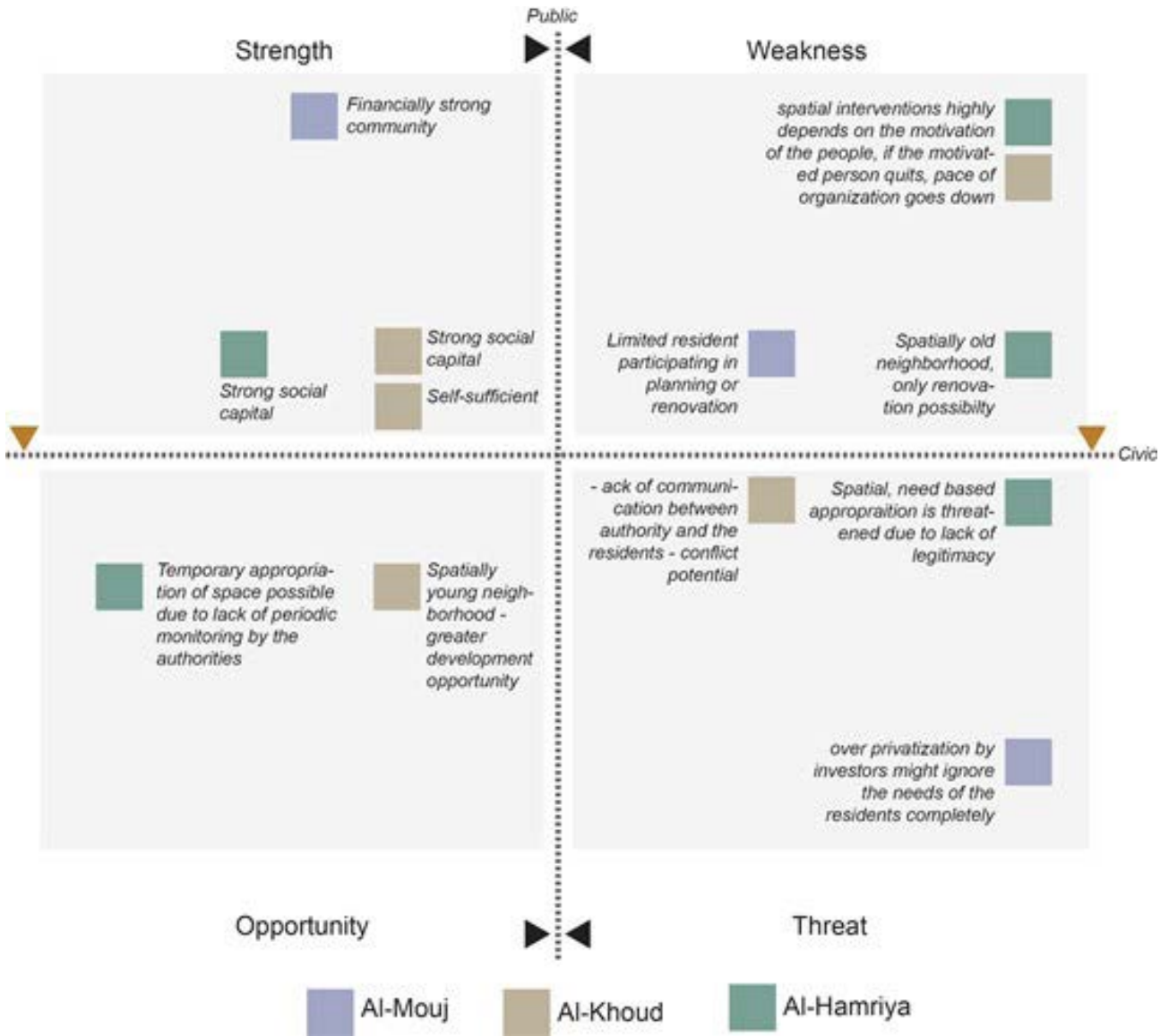


Figure VIII: Comparative SWOT analysis for the three case studies.

## 6.2. Multilateral Networks Between Self-Organized Communities and Regulatory Bodies

### 6.2.1. Al-Khoud 6: Development of Neighbourhood Facilitating Body

**Stakeholders:** Ministry of Housing, Muscat Municipality, Hay Al-Maarifa community organization.

**Recommendation:** Development of neighbourhood facilitating body.

In the development and management of Al-Khoud 6,

the public sector “steers” the laws and policies on land management and provision of infrastructure on the macro scale; however, on the micro scale the provision of direct services and infrastructure is out of their capacity. Consequently, the Hay Al-Maarifa community organization, building on the strong social capital of the community, is a key stakeholder allowing the residents to self-organize and cater for their needs.

A weak link in the communication and direct access to the public sector authorities is slowing down the realization of project ideas. Thus, in response to the necessity to create easier access to the public



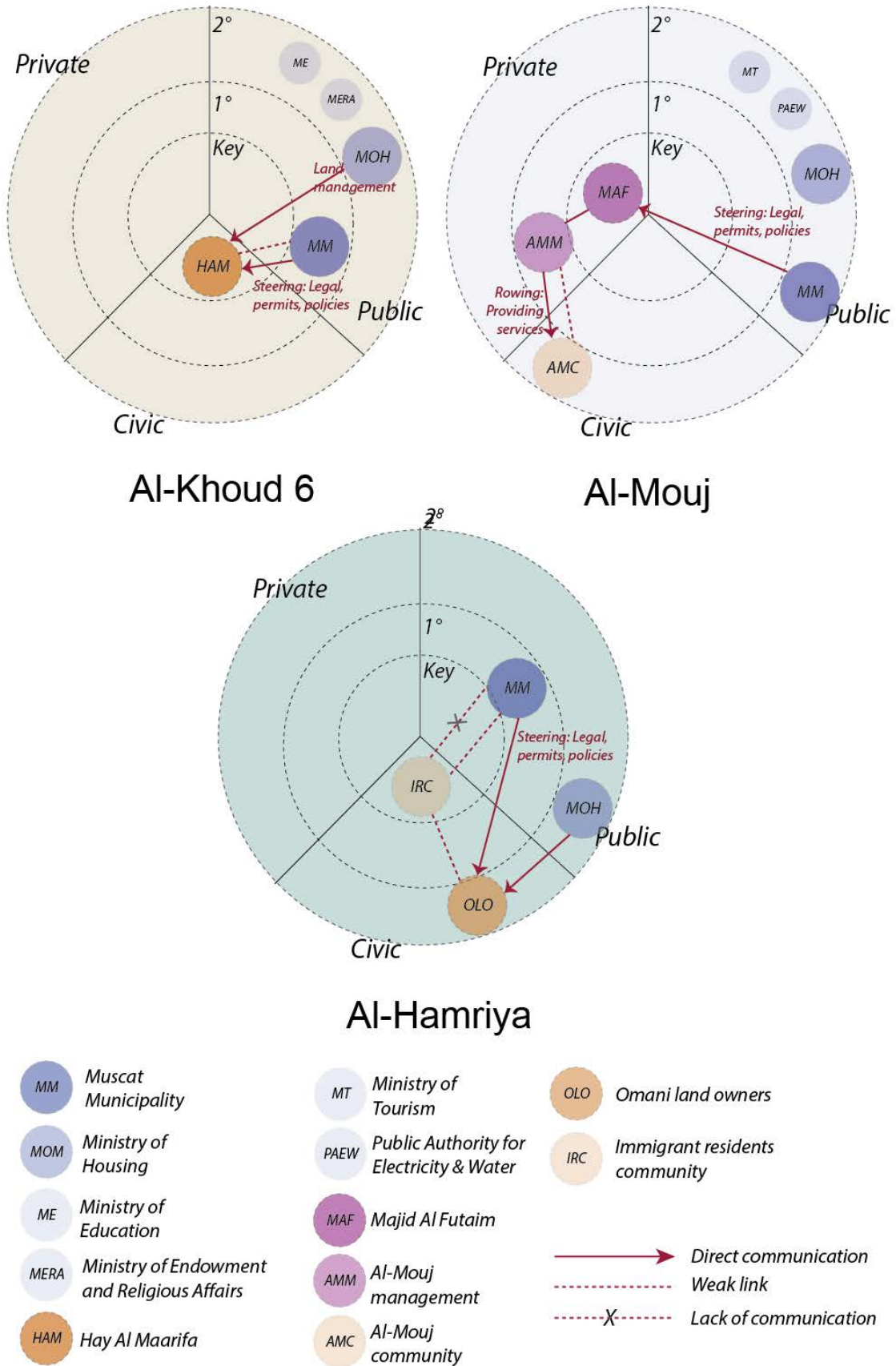


Figure IX: Multilateral connections between stakeholder groups.

sector, this research recommends the addition of a facilitating body to the process to fill this gap. The role of this body would be to create awareness of information on land management and neighbourhood development; to act as a facilitator, to bring the two sectors on the same platform; and to work on organizational and administrative aspects of project implementation. It could provide a template for similar bodies, to be customized and contextualized for each neighbourhood in the city.

### 6.2.2. Al-Mouj: Activities Empowering Human Networking

**Stakeholders:** Ministry of Housing, Muscat Municipality, Ministry of Tourism, Majid Al-Futtaim, Al-Mouj Management, Al-Mouj Community.

**Recommendation:** Activities empowering human networking.

In the development and management of Al-Mouj, the public sector steers the laws and policies on land management and provision of infrastructure on the macro scale. However, on the neighbourhood scale the role of “rowing” is undertaken by Majid Al-Futtaim’s Al-Mouj Management, which includes provisioning planning, development and implementation. Even though a strong link between the public and private sector has been identified through the research, a weak link categorized by the lack of residents’ active participation is identified between the private sector and the residents. A lack of active civil society also indicates a weak social capital and lack of empowerment.

For this typology, the research recommends an enhanced integration of residents into the planning and redevelopment projects, by implementing three out of the four aspects of human networking of Carley and Christie 2000: active participation through teamwork and equity; action learning to develop human capital; and emphasis on civil society sector, with accent on the idea of shared self-development and management. Furthermore, both bonding and bridging of social capital needs to be facilitated among the residents.

### 6.2.3. Al-Hamriya: Mediating Body, Neighbourhood Facilitation Body, and Improved Networking

**Stakeholders:** Ministry of Housing, Muscat

Municipality, Omani landowners, and fragmented, informal civil society organizations of temporary migrants.

**Recommendation:** Development of mediating body; development of neighbourhood facilitation body and improving human networking aspects.

In the development and management of Al-Hamriya, the public sector steers the laws and policies on land management and provision of infrastructure on the macro scale. On the micro scale, development of the neighbourhood is primarily undertaken through appropriation of spaces by the temporary migrant residents. Due to the fluctuating population, several need-based civil society actions are documented through this research. However, these fragmented, needs-based actions are not consolidated, resulting in a lack of strong horizontal links between actors. Furthermore, and more importantly, there is very limited connection between the public sector bodies and civic society due to the weak financial and economic capacity of the residents. This gap is further exacerbated by lack of access to the legal system, leading residents to pursue self-sufficient solutions, which are not sustainable in the long run.

For this typology the research calls for the following. First, the establishment of a mediating body would improve the communication between the actors in the horizontal structure, namely, between the Omani landowners, migrant residents and the organized but fragmented civil society actors. Second, the research also calls for establishing a neighbourhood facilitating body whose roles would be (1) to improve the communication between the public and civil society; (2) to consolidate need-based projects for spatial improvement; (3) the organization and administration of spatial improvement; and (4) generating legitimacy and resource allocation for development. Finally, the research further recommends the development of the human networking aspect of civil society, emphasizing shared self-development and management. In conclusion, the research emphasizes not only the need to enhance human networking aspects but also to establish legitimized mediation and facilitation bodies that can bridge the gap between vertical and horizontal governance structures.

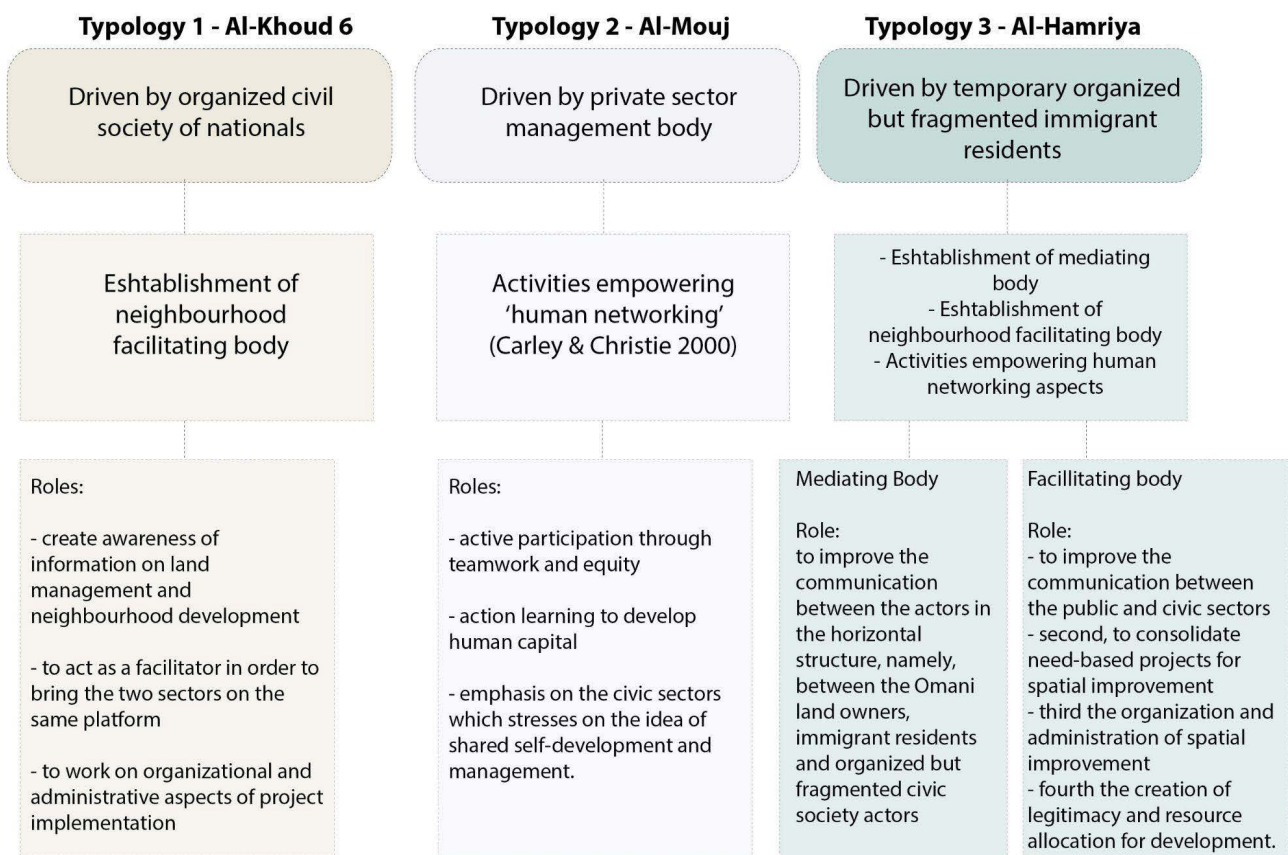


Figure X: Recommendations for enhancing land management for each typology case.



Answering to the needs of the community, Hay Al-Maarifa of Al-Khoud 6 has developed into an autonomous, self-governing body managing itself independently (an example of Rhodes's self-organizing network). The horizontal connection on the ground between the stakeholders (residents and citizens' initiative) is strong; however, the task of the public sector to enable co-regulation and public-civic partnership is not fulfilled, as Hay Al-Maarifa is not an officially registered community organization. Land management tasks such as decisions regarding changing land use or land development are complex, time consuming and a tedious. Hay Al-Maarifa consists of horizontally connected, empowered residents, who are both financially and organizationally capable of self-organization. Hence, the rowing role of the public sector (Rhodes, 1996) needs to be operationalized in such neighbourhoods to create a legitimate link between the public and civic actors. This would enhance a communicative, collaborative planning paradigm and the integration of the vertical and horizontal development structures.

In Al-Mouj, governance as new public management (Rhodes, 1996) can be seen with the concept of new-institutional economics, where there is an introduction of an incentive structure and public-private cooperation between the public sector and Majid Al-Futtaim group. Even though the co-operative management between the public and private sector is clear, the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making processes of land management such as neighbourhood, land use and development is missing. The residents themselves are financially well off with high organizational capital, but community cohesion and social capital are weak. Therefore, a horizontal connection between the stakeholders within the community should be established

first. Neighbourhoods such as Al-Mouj (gated communities) in Muscat need to devote significant efforts to raise awareness and empower residents to become involved in the development process. Active participation, developing human capital and a shared self-development management as the role of the community (Carley and Christie, 2000) is necessary to move towards a communicative planning paradigm (for the integration of vertical and horizontal structures). A potential connection and deeper collaboration between Mouj Al-Futtaim group and the residents of Al-Mouj is recommended.

The residents of Al-Hamriya demonstrate appropriate neighbourhood land use and development in line with their needs; however, their efforts are often illegal and illegitimate. Nevertheless, they showcase strong social capital and a sense of community and are proactively governing their surroundings as a self-organizing network. Citizen initiatives in low-income, migrant neighbourhoods lack both legitimacy and resources, remaining unregistered and fragmented, as residents have no idea when they would have to leave. A holistic overview of the informal land development, use and continuity in community leadership is missing. Therefore, in neighbourhoods with such social polarization, a slight improvement in the horizontal structure is called for but the main push should go towards legitimizing their efforts and enhancing the connection with the public sector.

In conclusion, the research showcases a need for an overall comprehensive participatory planning approach. The research calls to operationalize the connection between the vertical and horizontal structures by empowering the public sector to take up the rowing role and initiate partnerships at neighbourhood level.



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