Davos
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Alliance

INNOVATIVE
PRACTICE
CASE STUDY

At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace District

Diriyah, "The City of Earth", is the original home of the Saudi Arabian royal family and the home of UNESCO world heritage site, At-Turaif. The development of Diriyah seeks to combine traditional Najdi architectural styles with modern urbanism and a comprehensive quality of life programme, celebrating the Kingdom's rich heritage, and acting as a testimonial to Vision 2030's transformational changes.[1]

GEOLOCATION	Diriyah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
TIMEFRAME	2022 to present
PRESENTED BY	Diriyah Company

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DAVOS BAUKULTUR QUALITY SYSTEM

Definitions

GOVERNANCE	DIVERSITY
FUNCTIONALITY	CONTEXT
ENVIRONMENT	SENSE OF PLACE
ECONOMY	BEAUTY

The Diriyah project ($63.2 billion) is responsible for developing 14 square kilometres of land, with At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace representing the first phase of this development. The Diriyah project prioritizes the liveability, access, sociability and well-being of the local community and visiting guests through three core principles: sustainability across environmental, social and economic pillars; regeneration based on the historic environment, local traditions and natural ecologies; and pioneering integration of advanced technologies are intertwined with the centuries-old Najdi vernacular.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif is more than 200 thousand square metres. It is one of the world's largest districts built and inspired by the traditional Najdi construction techniques and mudbrick materials. Restoration and renewal of At-Turaif include the opening of multiple galleries, museums and parks, offering visitors an experience of Saudi history and culture in an authentic environment.

Bujairi Terrace covers an area of approximately 30 thousand square metres with space for dining and enjoying At-Turaif and the lush greenery of Wadi Hanifah. The development also features pop-ups and open spaces for the local community, small entrepreneurs and artisans to participate in creating a local traditional experience and benefit from the economic opportunities that Bujairi Terrace provides.

By 2030, Diriyah aims to attract 50 million visitors annually, create about 178,000 jobs and contribute more than $18 billion annually to the Kingdom's GDP.

Traditional Najdi design aspects exemplified by Bujairi Terrace. Diriyah Company

Key outcomes

Bujairi and At-Turaif strengthen connection to heritage while enhancing access and visibility to new visitors. In 2023, At-Turaif and Bujairi received more than one million visitors, demonstrating how Diriyah has helped towards unlocking Saudi Arabia's 56% increase in international tourist arrivals compared to 2019.[2]

ENVIRONMENT The project has aimed to foster and enhance local biodiversity. At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace are separated by Wadi Hanifah, a traditional Wadi ecosystem and seasonal river valley. Former farms in Wadi Hanifah were restored and upgraded to support local flora and fauna and enable more efficient irrigation. The Wadi was re-greened with date palms and indigenous plants strengthening the local ecosystem and biodiversity. Food produced from these restored farms are then distributed through local philanthropic organizations. Across the wider site, Diriyah has already planted an estimated 6.5 million trees, shrubs and bushes.

At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace are part of the Diriyah master plan, which has achieved Platinum Level LEED for Cities Certification, and a comprehensive quality of life framework has been developed by DC to continuously assess and improve the city's built environment, services and programming.

ECONOMY Diriyah aims to be a good neighbour by fostering stronger relations with its community and supporting local businesses, which in turn revitalize the development. To date, the first phases of At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace have created approximately 2,000 direct jobs spanning construction, facilities management, security and guest relations, and over a thousand additional jobs across the wider supply chain. Diriyah Company is committed to prioritizing female and community employment and opportunity[3]. For example, in 2023, around 80 community businesses opened in Souq Almawsim, a temporary market event hosted on the Bujairi site, which generated a total income of more than 1 million SAR (Saudi riyal) (approximately 300,000 US dollars). In addition, the Diriyah Engineers programme is training the next generation with practical professional skills and sustaining Diriyah's growth in the future.

CONTEXT The unique Najdi human-centred urbanism and architectural design of At-Turaif has been reinterpreted in Bujairi Terrace from both architectural details and materiality through to the street network – narrow sikkas, providing natural shade and walkable streets. Transport infrastructure is being placed beneath ground to further promote active travel within the site and a dedicated Najdi Traditional Material facility has been set up to produce sustainable traditional mudbricks and construction materials. The development of Diriyah also incorporates advanced Smart City solutions, which are sensitively intertwined with the Najdi vernacular structures.

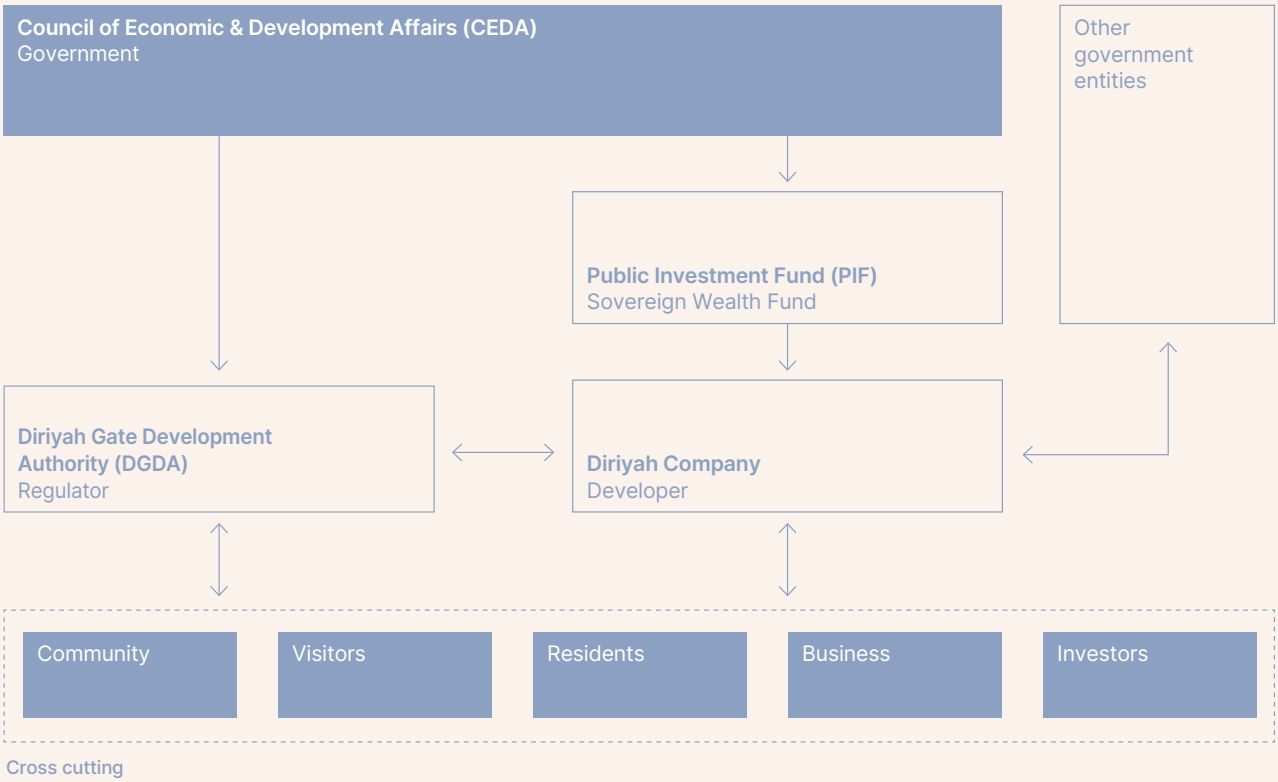
These principles will continue to form the foundation of future development phases such as Diriyah Art Futures, a research and educational center interdisciplinary promoting creative practice at the intersection of art, science, and technology. The design of which explores a contemporary reinterpretation of the Najdi heritage.

SENSE OF PLACE A prominent national symbol of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Diriyah is considered the birthplace of the first Saudi state. Therefore the Diriyah project is vital in shaping a strong sense of place locally and nationally. Diriyah was the place from which unification of the tribal lands began and evolved into today's Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, founded in 1727 by Imam Mohammed bin Saud. He made it his initial base and capital and Diriyah quickly became a centre of government and science for the region. It is a matter of pride for visitors to come and experience the birthplace of the entire Kingdom.

BEAUTY The driving principle behind the reviving and modernizing the unique Najdi architecture is to showcase the distinctive beauty of the centuries old urban fabric, which was almost extinct before the present work commenced to preserve and revive the historic site and develop the wider area at an urban scale.

> "At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace offer a unique example of human-centric development that draws on a rich tapestry of heritage and culture to encourage visitors to not only learn our story but become a part of it."
>
> Diriyah Company

Stakeholders



Replicability

Heritage as catalyst: Diriyah has adopted an integrated approach to heritage management, seeking to reflect the insights, beauty, importance of community and architectural principles inspired by At-Turaif into all its activities, from development to operations. This is done through programmes such as giving priority to community members to become guides for At-Turaif so that those sharing At-Turaif with the world have personal connections to it.

Community integration: the project seeks to understand and meet the community's needs through ongoing engagement and encouraging their participation in community initiatives. A core means by which the community is already integrated into the success of the project is by providing jobs, training and business opportunities. These opportunities have resulted in the Diriyah Company employing over 60% Saudi nationals, with more than 10% coming from the local Diriyah community. Further trainings and job opportunities are inherently focused on involving Saudi youth, as over 60% of Saudis are under 30.

Timeline

1727 Diriyah founded by Imam Mohammed bin Saud.

2010 At-Turaif district inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO for its tangible heritage value and for being one of the largest mud brick districts in the world.

2017 King Salman bin Abdulaziz issued a royal decree establishing Diriyah Gate Development Authority (DGDA) and forming its board of directors headed by His Royal Highness, The Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

2022 At-Turaif, the ancient mud-brick capital, revitalized and preserved to welcome visitors to experience and live the Diriyah story and unique Saudi hospitality. Bujairi Terrace launched alongside Turaif.

Lessons learned

Heritage and tourism-led transformation requires both a compelling destination and a good service offer, which are both reflected in Diriyah's ongoing visitor experience surveys. Diriyah's proximity to Riyadh and the diversity of tourism opportunities available meant it was vital to differentiate the experience for those visiting, working and living in Diriyah. This was done through building on the core natural and historic features of Wadi Hanifah and At-Turaif to provide opportunities that are not present in the wider region.

At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace have demonstrated the importance of authenticity and showcasing the traditional architecture, landscape, culture and hospitality of a place. There has been a very positive reaction to the restoration of the historic built environment with visitors often ranking the natural and built beauty as a reason for returning. Key to Diriyah's success so far is avoiding not over-engineering new additions to the detriment of the historic setting but rather aligning new development with the proven historic principles

Next steps

At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace are the small opening phases in the transformation of Diriyah. Next stages of the Diriyah project include:

- Enhancing sustainability measures and raising sustainability awareness of Saudi Arabian locals and international visitors.
- Continuing to monitor and improve visitors' and residents' experiences and continue implementing the Diriyah specific quality of life programme.
- Ensuring the learnings from At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace are reflected throughout the rest of the development through continued review processes.
- Exploring how Diriyah can increase engagement and opportunities for the community, such as ongoing pilot programmes to identify, train and hire Diriyah locals for soon-to-open Diriyah assets next to the Bujairi Terrace.

An elevated view of Bujairi Terrace. Diriyah Company

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The Davos Baukultur Quality System

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Endnotes

1. Vision2030. Overview. www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision-2030/overview/.
2. Saudi Arabia topped the UN Tourism's ranking for the growth of international tourist arrivals in 2023 compared to 2019 among large destinations, achieving an increase of 56% in international tourist arrivals compared to 2019. *Saudi Arabia Ministry of Tourism. (2024). Saudi Arabia Ranked 1st in the Growth of International Tourists Arrivals in 2023 Compared to 2019 Among Large Tourism Destinations* [Press release].
3. 25% Saudi females, 10% of which coming from the Diriyah community.

Cover image: A scenic view of At-Turaif UNESCO world heritage site. Diriyah Company