Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The heritage of Muharraq is unique in many ways – culturally, academically as well as economically. The antiquities in Muharraq are composed of historical, natural heritage, architectural and cultural elements which are unparalleled in the region. But mounting pressure of immigration and rapid urbanization is vitiating these values and unless immediate preventive measures are undertaken Bahrain and the region will relinquish this unique heritage, and deprive future generations of it.

This study has attempted to compile the historical facts about the town’s historical background and significance in the past, the origin of the town, its urban architecture and design and influence of cultures on its evolution until modernization began in the 1930s. It further explains how the postmodern era transformed the town with modern developments, but paradoxically the town lost more than what it achieved with modernization. It lost its native population who made the town a living place over the past century; it lost the culture and traditions that were the basis of the town’s economy, it lost the urban form and architecture which gave it a unique form. This study, finally, provides some quantitative analysis of loss incurred, based upon which were recommended the corrective and preventive measures that must be initiated immediately to stop any further losses, revitalize the town culture and heritage, revive its economic infrastructure to make it again a living place, re-establish it significance, and transfer them to the next generations to provide historical continuity by reactivating the historical environment while integrating it with the new environment.

This chapter provides recommendations for the conservation of the heritage urban fabric, architecture and traditional buildings, reviving some of the lost iconic elements of
historical significance and subsequently educating local people about all these elements of importance for the town’s survival and improving its economic, cultural and historical values for future generations. These recommendations have been categorised into:

i. Immediate - Urgent actions to be executed immediately, to prevent any further deterioration of the situation in the town.

ii. Intermediate - Short term planning and actions for reviving the heritage values and protections, restoration of lost heritage and attracting of tourism.

iii. Long term – Planning and action for increased public awareness, restoring urban architecture and heritage values for sustainable growth and development.

It is emphasized that conservation and preservation should have direct involvement of people and not just professional people, so that people are educated about conservation and public consciousness is created for achieving sustainable development and conservation of the area.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Immediate actions

The immediate plans recommend actions to be taken urgently in the study area or the heritage town of Muharraq and its immediate surroundings in order to prevent any further loss of urban fabric, traditional buildings and local population.

1. Establishment of conservation zones

The migration of Bahraini population out of Muharraq due to increasing expatriate population of low wage workers, the worsening of living conditions and the overcrowding is leading to a loss of the significance of a once distinct and unique tribal neighbourhood within Muharraq. To prevent this loss of identity, it is recommended that
an urban protection zone should be created. Based on the analysis in this study it is suggested that at least three levels of protection zones could be created covering the old town of Muharraq and its immediate surroundings.

The recommended protection zones are shown in map 6.1. These zones are defined based on the significance of various parts of Muharraq, which include:

- The three cores of Muharraq
- Significant neighbourhoods such as those belonging to royal tribes
- Other tribes in the town
- The buffer around the old town of Muharraq

The area around this old town of Muharraq had become important after land reclamation in the post modernization era. This area is primarily responsible for the gradual transformation and change in characteristics of the urban elements of the old town of Muharraq. Therefore to shield the old town from the influence of new developments it is mandatory to have a buffer zone around the study area in the immediate vicinity.

2. Change in house ownership and rental regulations

The most important factor which led to the deteriorating situation in the old town of Muharraq has been the migration of the Bahraini population, who once occupied the heritage buildings. The local communities abandoned their traditional homes due to over-crowding and deteriorating conditions, for better places which could offer more job opportunities, like the capital town of Manama. This left building in bad shape due to lack of proper maintenance, resulting in them either being given to expat peoples or being demolished. Therefore, to improve this situation, the immediate recommendations are-
Map 6.1 Proposed heritage protection zones with priorities of protection based on importance of area, neighbourhoods.
a. Rental regulations

As demonstrated in the analysis, the immigrant community who have often been living in old traditional houses are the main influencing factor for the worsening situation in some of the historically important parts of the town. It is very essential therefore to have immediate implementation of rental regulations in the old town or the study area, to curb any further inflow of expatriate communities into heritage parts of the town.

Furthermore, strict guidelines must be drawn to limit the number of people occupying any buildings. This would help control crowding in the neighbourhoods. Another possibility is the regulation of traffic and associated factors.

b. Incentives to owners

Another important factor that could help improve the living conditions, housing and encourage local people to returning to their traditional homes would be to provide various enticing offers or incentives to owners. These may include easy loans to restore traditional houses, reduction of government taxes, cheaper utilities, and the improvement of streets and traffic situations.

Also in case of disputed old buildings the government could take the ownership in exchange for a better place for the owner. Subsequently the government should restore and rehabilitate the building either for adaptive reuse or sell it to local people with a cultural relationship to the neighbourhoods and with the ability to maintain the building.

c. Privacy protection

The Islamic traditions and cultures are the basis of the origin of this town. The town was planned from the beginning to separate business areas from the living quarters,
and even the houses were built to protect individuals’ privacy. These attributes are on the decline and moreover, with the incursion of expatriate communities, the continuity of the cultural neighbourhoods is breaking down. This sense of cultural homogeneity and privacy needs to prevail to make the conservation of cultural heritage work effectively.

3. Protection of heritage and other buildings

As demonstrated in maps 4.15 and 4.14, there have been significant demolitions or alterations of old buildings in the old town of Muharraq. These are some of the traditional buildings which constitute the important and irreplaceable part of the heritage of the town. This demands urgent action to be executed immediately. This action would include:

a. Halt in demolition – An immediate action to stop any demolition of buildings in the old quarters of Muharraq should be enforced.

b. Building regulations – Guidelines must be issued to all the owners, prohibiting any alteration and suggesting reconstruction of the old or traditional buildings in the area until further guidelines are issued outlining the defining codes for changes in buildings from the exterior or interior.

4. Demarcate the heritage town

Apart from these immediate measures towards protecting individual buildings and making codes and conducts for the people living in the area, there should be immediate steps towards improving the general urban environment of the old town. The overall improvement would mean gradually restoring the confidence of local inhabitants to return to their traditional houses. Also useful would be the increase in tourism and
the consequent investment for an overall improvement of the economic situation of the town. Some of the immediate measures could be:

a. Demarcation of historically significant parts of the town with proper sign boards. Prominent display boards could describe the historical significance of various prominent heritage points in the neighbourhoods.

This would help increase awareness of the people about the town and its historical significance as well as increasing tourism.

b. Parking and vehicle regulations in the zones

An immediate action for all the owners of the buildings in the old town of Muharraq should be enforced to implement a buildings code. These regulations should pertain to alterations, reconstructions or changes to the characteristics of the buildings, in order to prevent any significant deviations from the traditional values of the neighbourhoods.

6.2.2 Intermediate measures

The intermediate or short measures are recommendations intended to be executed in a few years’ time. These should work toward reviving all the aspects of heritage, including the urban fabric, the traditional people and the traditional buildings. These measures are crucial for the future as they would form the basis for long term measures, because it is envisaged that conservation is vital function for the society and material heritage plays an important role. It would model the social impacts and influences of conservation, just as ecological models create an understanding of the natural environment to inform environmental conservation. So, proper care and
conservation of antique objects and places is essential for the prosperity and positive development of the town. These measures should be put forth into planning activities immediately as a conservation framework.

1. Revival of traditional urban fabric

a. Detailed Assessment of all buildings – During the study a field survey was carried out in a part of the study area in order to determine the obvious and known buildings in the area which still preserve a certain heritage. These were determined from the interviews with the local people and the knowledge gained through extensive literature review in order to determine which building are important (such as those belonging to famous peoples, etc).

For the purpose of preserving the heritage of the Muharraq, however, it is recommended that a detailed house to house survey should be carried out. This would allow for a comprehensive valuation of the property in terms of its heritage significance. This would also help in constructing a detailed map of the town in terms of its current status heritage, which in turn would facilitate appropriate steps for reviving the town, restoring it heritage houses, implementing long term policies governing ownership, rental and economic revival of the town.

b. Restoring houses – The aforementioned task of constructing a detailed map of the heritage buildings would be useful. A map of this type would help in planning and prioritizing activities to restore the houses. These could be enacted as per the policies to be formulated for the conservation and protection of the heritage of Muharraq.
c. Training craftsmen – An immediate plan should be made to determine and undertake measures to train people in understanding the significant heritage architecture and to impart a detailed knowledge of the buildings’ design and regulations. This would involve training craftsmen in restoring the buildings to their past traditional designs. This is essential in order to build or restore buildings in traditional styles. Since traditional architecture is a testimony of a bygone era, unless the buildings are constructed with same style, technique and material, they will not produce continuity of urban fabric in areas where traditional buildings already exist.

d. Small business attractions – One of the critical requirements toward restoring the heritage town is economic revival. One of the short term measures that is recommended relates to the attraction of small to medium scale investors for reviving the old traditional market places, coffee shops and conforming to the traditional values of the old town of Muharraq.

Another important concept for tourist attractions could be to set up souvenir shops around the town and other parts of the country. These could sell attractive items depicting the heritage of the town, its historical significance, and its pre-historic importance. The small gift items should be vibrant in colour and the designs should resemble the traditional and cultural artistic values.

2. Educating the Younger Generation

A crucial and possibly most significant step would be to teach the younger generation about the heritage of the country. This could be achieved through various means and would give them a sense of their ancestors and the value of what they inherit. This could be passed on to their next generation. For this to occur, some of the steps could be:
a. Directly engaging young Bahrainis in activates relating to heritage conservation and restoration. This is likely to increase their interest in heritage and they would hopefully grow-up appreciating what they had inherited. This may then be passed onto the next generation.

b. Educating the younger generation about the meaning of their heritage and their relationship to it. This could be achieved thought school curricula, lectures and exhibitions depicting their culture and history. There might also be occasional visits to the historical parts of the town along with proper guides explaining its significance. Apart from academic education, it would be useful to provide training on handicraft courses; encouraging them to repair their houses. Thus, a good training program will be very effective for public participation.

3. Management of open spaces

The amount of open spaces being created in the old town of Muharraq should be managed carefully to avoid any future conflict with its heritage urban fabric. These spaces should be managed effectively in accordance with the rules and regulations that would be formulated for the governance of the heritage town of Muharraq. These spaces could be used for a variety of purposes, including:

a. Development of multi-storey car parks – Managing the vehicular traffic requires rules to govern movement of vehicles in the heritage town. Furthermore, due to the extensive population of the old town there has been a significant rise in the number of private vehicles. In order to restrict the movement, the essential requirement would be to construct ample parking spaces to allow for both local inhabitants and visitors to park their vehicles.
This could be facilitated by the construction of multi-storied car parks in the large open spaces. In these, only two or three stories should be allowed above ground and further stories should be constructed underground. These buildings should also conform to the overall urban architecture.

b. Open spaces could also be used to construct new houses which comply with the overall urban fabric. Efforts could also be made to restore some of the old heritage buildings that have been lost due to demolition and to construct museums, educational centres or art galleries which relate directly to the urban heritage of Muharraq.

4. Rehabilitation of streets

In the beginning and during the analysis, it was emphasized that Muharraq represents an Islamic town. It is typical of one in the style of its urban fabric, its road network and the organization of the living and commercial buildings and spaces. The roads had typical hierarchical structures, which separated living quarters from public roads to maintain the privacy of the living quarters. Also, the living spaces had no empty spaces. During analysis, however, it has been identified that Muharraq still preserves much of its heritage value. Because a lot of buildings have been demolished, however, the creation of empty space within the neighbourhoods has disturbed the integrity of the road network. Recommendations for managing the open spaces have already been addressed earlier. Now in order to manage the road network to and bring it into compliance with the traditional fabric, the recommendations are:

a. Vehicular traffic management – This can be addressed by first facilitating proper parking facilities for local as well as tourist vehicles. The issue of parking-space
has already been discussed. The second aspect of this problem is to restrict the movement of vehicles by space and time, implying that certain roads should be devoid of vehicles at all times. These are those in the suq area. Other roads, such as those with traditional coffee houses and shops, could have traffic at a certain time of the day while no traffic should be allowed at other times, such as in the night-time. This would help regulate vehicular traffic management in some of the historical parts of the town and help create convenient access for inhabitants and tourists.

b. Revival of the suq with traditional values - the suq or the market place has been an important part of the society. It occupied a unique position in the town, being close to the shore. Due to extensive land reclamation the suq lost its connection to the sea and hence its significance. Although it still exists as an important market district within Muharraq, due to modernization it is losing much of its cultural or heritage significance. Urgent action should, therefore, be undertaken to plan for rebuilding and restructuring the suq in all its glory and with all its attractions. In this way it may be made more vibrant and its traditional nature may be reinvigorated, making it attractive for both locals and tourists alike. These plans could involve:

- Restricting traffic into the suq area
- Creating and restoring shops and walkways to their old architecture
- Restoring types of business to their old styles, to a certain extent
- Restricting business ownerships and the workers to local populations

5. Restoration of lost heritage

Analysis of parts of Muharraq shows the existence of a significant number of heritage buildings which are still surviving. Some of these are well known buildings
which are already being taken care of; while others remain without specific preservation or care. Yet others have been lost forever such as

- The Sheik Hamad house
- The wall of Muharraq
- The Fort of Muharraq (Bu Maher)
- The House of sailors

It is therefore necessary to plan and start rebuilding some or part of this lost heritage in order to revive the history of the neighbourhood and attract tourism. This in turn would help foster economic benefits for the community.

6. Regulatory Authority

Setting up a separate government entity or regulatory authority to monitor the planning, execution and implementation of the recommendations or any other associated measures would be an essential task. This conservation and heritage protection regulatory authority could act as a supervising body which would be responsible for strategic planning, monitoring and conflict resolution. It could hand over responsibilities to other governmental bodies or private parties and will act in the capacity of supervising those tasks.

6.2.3 Long term planning and Implementation strategies

This section outlines recommendations for long term measures toward achieving overall sustainable growth and development of the town while still preserving the heritage values. In other words, long term plans and policy should be formulated to have economic development through heritage conservation. These measures would help in job creation and economic prosperity of the town and in rebuilding confidence
for local Bahraini people to return back to their traditional neighbourhoods. The recommendations put forth herewith are actions to be performed in the next couple of years. These would require extensive policy planning for the rehabilitation of the Bahraini population and for the gradual relocation of non-Bahrainis to other places. It would also involve town planning and capacity building for the management of all policies in order to ensure sustainable growth with continuous improvement of heritage values of the town. These recommendations include:

1. Rehabilitate Bahraini population

The most affected of all the heritage elements has been the local Bahraini population which has been forced to abandon their traditional homes and move out of town, which has led to the infiltration of expatriate people deep into the traditional parts of Muharraq. As mentioned in earlier recommendations, appropriate steps must be taken to develop an environment conducive to facilitating a reversal of this outward migration of Bahrainis and relocate non-Bahrainis to non-traditional parts of the country. Recently, towards this initiative, the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with local authorities, embarked upon takeovers of houses of heritage significance and which are in severe danger of being lost due to poor maintenance and occupation by poor wage expatriate workers. The conditions in these houses are so bad that it threatens the lives of people, so the Ministry of Culture had to forcibly relocate those people and then took over these houses, and now it is restoring them with original construction materials and designs.

2. Tourism development

Tourism development would be an important tool towards economic prosperity and development of the town. It has been demonstrated throughout the analysis that
immense opportunities exist in terms of the ancient heritage. These should be exploited for the economic, heritage and cultural revival of the town. This would, in turn, facilitate job opportunities - especially for the local citizens. One of the recommendations based on the current situation is:

a. Create heritage walk-ways – The heritage walk-ways are pedestrian paths connecting some of the historically significant parts of the town. In this case it is confined to the three neighbourhoods, but could be extended to other parts. These walk-ways could be an important element of tourist attraction as they would allow proper access to the relevant parts of Muharraq, which, along with proper guidance, could highlight the historical importance of the various quarters and buildings.

Map 6.2 shows the heritage walk-ways created for the part of Muharraq comprising three neighbourhoods, which still preserve significant heritage elements of the town. The walk-ways are intended to facilitate tours around the central core and suq area of the second core of Muharraq, providing access to some of the important buildings, parts of the public and private road networks and other important parts of the town.

b. Souvenir shops – Tourist always prefer to take souvenirs from the places they visit. The Government should therefore facilitate the setting up of such shops in order to ensure that attractive and colourful items are sold which depict the heritage and culture of the town.
3. Educating People

An important and most useful recommendation for the long term sustainability of the cultural heritage would be to educate people. In this way, awareness may be increased about the history and significance of the town in the past. Some of the recommendations which could help in educating people could be:

a. A Study centre – Setting up a learning centre to educate people about the rich history of Bahrain and Muharraq and its significance as an important commercial hub on the trade route between the Far East and the west, etc.

b. School of Islamic architecture of Bahrain – One of the important elements for education would be to set up centres for imparting knowledge about traditional Islamic urban fabric and architecture. This would help people appreciate the importance of their town and would tend to help in maintaining long term prosperity.

c. Heritage museums – Immediate plans should be made to set up a showcase of the heritage or a museum which could display a variety of elements pertaining to the heritage and culture of the town. Some of these elements would include urban and building architecture, defence structures, and components that were in place during early phases of the history of Muharraq prior to establishment of peace in the town.
Map 6.2 Proposed Historical Pathways in Sheikh Abdulla, Bin Khater and Al Kharo neighbourhood. These pathways could be developed as major heritage tourist attractions paths showcasing heritage buildings, roads and neighbourhood traditions. The photographs shows the recent pictures taken along these pathways.
4. Increased investment by the private sector

Most of the aforementioned recommendations require a substantial investment for a long period of time in order to ensure continuous growth and improvement of the heritage, culture and overall prosperity of the town. It is therefore important to ensure capital flow for the long term success and viability of these developments. This capital flow relies on attracting investment from the private sector. This participation of private investors is expected to expedite many of the aforementioned measures, such as

- developing the tourism sector
- revival of lost and open spaces
- facilitating loans to the local population

In this respect, the Ministry of Culture is leading efforts towards attracting investments from various financial and other institutions to help protect and promote the national cultural heritage to the world (BNM, 2008).

6.3 Conclusion

To conclude it can be emphasized that there is immense potential for spatial and analytical techniques to further improve this work. This would enhance the quality and quantity of data inputs and would thereby improve the results and help in better planning and decision making for the purpose of conservation and protection of the heritage of the town. Furthermore, there are numerous possibilities to improve the quality of data, especially demographic and urban data which would help to significantly improve the outcomes of spatial analysis. Other areas which require improvement include the construction of a detailed inventory of each house in order to assign values in terms of its heritage significance. Finally, this study expects to be a model for the conservation and revitalization of historical Islamic towns by preserving their ancient heritage and intangible culture and traditional values as resources for the generations to come.