



Architecture of Food: A Study on the Impact of Food Malls in Kuwait

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Abstract:

Food and architecture have not often been discussed together despite their intimate connections. They both produce creative pieces of art and share a technical side that relies on careful measurements and aesthetic proportions. Yet, for the most part, many contemporary researchers have overlooked them. This paper intends to better understand how food and architecture are related by examining Kuwait's rising food culture scene as a case study. Over the past decade, the phenomenon of the 'food mall' has emerged and grown rapidly around Kuwait City. The architecture in question caters only for restaurants, café's, and anything related to food. Many of these buildings have risen among residential neighbourhoods. In order to understand this trend and its implications for people and their built environment, this study employs questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings show clear impact of globalization on Kuwait's food consumption patterns and the architectural landscape. Thus, the food malls are perceived as entertainment in a country with limited venues for recreation and have used interesting architectural concepts such as shipping containers, lakes, dancing fountains, and gardens to lure customers. As a result, the bond between food and architecture has led to unhealthy eating habits and shifting lifestyles among Kuwaiti youth. This paper contends that a more sustainable and balanced approach to the outdoor food design and experience is necessary to elevate people towards a more sustainable and healthy quality of life.

1. Introduction

The study of architecture and food tells us a story of culture and expression of identity. Food becomes a portal to understand people, their traditions and way of life. The saying 'you are what you eat' does

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not only refer to how food is related to a person's health but it also reflects who they are. For the Arab, with food being from the desert and at the crossroads of trade, spices have been a key ingredient for many national dishes. Food is a family affair and the concepts of hospitality and generosity have long been hallmarks in Middle-Eastern cultures. The Italians have been known for their food; natural, colorful and a celebration of life. There are more than three hundred different types of pastas, with each a name, texture, and taste. In China, they believe food like architecture needs to have harmony and balance, and to look appealing with many of their dishes using vibrant colours, especially red as their traditional colour.

As the world becomes more globalized, cuisines from around the world have never before become so accessible. Now chefs and architects are coming together to produce diverse fusions of tastes, experiences, and places. The merrgence of these two fields has regenerated a new urban morphology. As a result, molecular gastronomy, a sub-discipline that focuses on social, artistic, and technical aspects of food, has gained attraction among the public. Different kinds of restaurants provided new social experiences, events, and architectural spaces that elicit the senses. Almost every city has developed its own contemporary version of food systems, which strikes a balance between the local and global. While some have embraced globalization, others have been more hesitant to have international brands takeover local businesses and allow other food cultures to dominate their own.

In Kuwait, the food craze has led to the 'food mall' phenomenon. It is a building that only serves food in all its forms. Restaurants have usually gathered in historic plazas, streets with sea views, and shopping malls. However, in Kuwait a new architectural creation was born, which completely transformed people's food experience. Despite providing new entertainment venues, it has produced many negative consequences. The first is the impact of these buildings on the residential areas, which caused increased traffic congestion and some loss of privacy. The malls have changed the dynamics of these once low-key suburban communities. Another consequence of restaurant

complexes is that they support an unhealthy lifestyle for Kuwaitis, who now rank among the most obese people in the world (WHO, 2014).

Therefore, this study intends to examine this phenomenon and its impact on people and their built environment. It does this through a mixed method approach: questionnaires to gauge public understanding of the food mall and semi-structured interviews that examine the design and effect of the food malls on the residents of Bul Hasani, where the idea spread most and, subsequently, throughout Kuwait. The study uses this approach as a means to understand how globalization has affected food, people, and architecture in Kuwait by eliciting people's attitudes on and understanding of food malls: their design, qualities, and impact on everyday life.

2. Architecture and Food

There are many gaps in the literature when it comes to understanding relationships between architecture and food. Besides a few articles and books on the subject, there has been limited academic research on the topic. Nonetheless, the existing literature may be divided into four concentrations. The first is interested in the intrinsic similarities between the creative process of cooking and building with particular attention given to the experience, event, and final product (Miralles, 2006, Kirshenblatt and Gimblett, 2007, Horwitz and Singley, 2004, Fisker and Olsen, 2008, Levi, 2016). The second is market research, which aims at understanding consumer behaviour and design in a purely commercial perspective (Astuti and Hanan, 2012, Allen and Associates, 2017). The third is diverse and regional case studies into the meaning of food as it is associated with place, culture and environment (Fisker and Olsen, 2008, Salmon, 2012, Zampollo, 2013). The fourth is the impact of globalization on food consumption, covering how local communities have changed their eating habits, health, and lifestyles (Kennedy et al, 2004, Schmdhuber, 2004). The present study, while acknowledging all the strands in the literature, will give particular attention to overlaps between the latter two areas.

The human-nature relationship was the first relationship between

people and the food they hunted, gathered, and later farmed. Thus, people always had a connection between their food and the places they ate it in, be it a cave, forest, mud brick house, tent, ship, apartment, café, or shopping mall. The experience of eating bonded people to their physical environment. This connection has been evident in many early civilizations. In Mesopotamia and Egypt people built cities along major rivers and used irrigation systems to farm the land. Food or access to food through trade or natural resources was a major factor that initiated new towns and cities around the world. Salmon (2012) exemplifies the connection that food has to identity, culture, and mutual respect by Native Americans' attitude towards their environment. He argues that people require a mutual participation with nature in the 'dance of life' (p.1).

Food eventually went from a means of survival to an expression of desires, tastes, experiences and wealth. It is very much related to social class and identity. In researching food habits, Jensen (2003) argues that eating behaviours express one's identity and the choice of food may in fact reflect their personality, group, family, generation, gender, school, religion, or nation. Food has been a way to celebrate, socialize, and worship. Muslims come together to break their fast in Ramadan, while Christians congregate at thanksgiving. It is a social and spiritual connection. Furthermore, the evolution of people's perception of food has been directly related to their standard of living. Since antiquity, banquets and feasts have been a sign of wealth. The poor would eat grains and vegetables, while the rich indulged in meats and exotic fruits.

With the advent of new technologies and ease of global travel and trade, food and its varieties have become more affordable and readily available. It went from the domestic space to the city space, thus "food and meals move toward performative experiences and where food and meals to a greater extent are social events drifting from the space of the dinner table into the domains of the city" (Fisker and Olsen, 2008: 64). As people's income increased they wanted to experience new cuisines and events in an architectural setting. Thus, the presentation of food

has become a means to create spaces in the city where citizens, artists and chefs can challenge each other (p. 64).

3. Impact of Globalization on Food

Globalization has impacted many facets of everyday life around the globe including food and its consumption. It is defined as, “the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 1990,64). It has also been understood as, “progressive integration of economies and societies” (Gunter and Hoveen, 2004,1) around the world. In this paper, globalization refers to cross-border movement of goods, services and capital; an increased flow of commodities, technologies, information, financial capital, modes of distribution and marketing (Shetty, 2003). Many researchers have tackled different viewpoints of how globalization affected people and the built environment (Salama et al, 2017). However, there are only very few studies that have covered food within this context.

Research shows that the main factors behind changing dietary patterns have been urbanization, increased income, capital flow and market liberalization (DeHann et al, 2003, Popkin, 2003, Kennedy et al, 2004). However, urbanization has been the greatest influencing force associated with a myriad of lifestyle changes. Today, 55% of the world’s population lives in urban areas, and is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 (UN DESA, 2018). As a result, industrialization has been growing to historic levels in order to meet rising demand for global foods and goods. Worldwide trade has accelerated the spread of international food brands, cafés and fast food franchises in almost every country. The variety and choices of foods have generated greater competition among manufacturers, distributors, salespersons, and restaurant owners to draw customers’ attention specifically towards their product, store or business (Strong, 2002).

Among the challenges of globalization are the extreme contrasts of changing food patterns. Some countries face mal-nutrition and poverty, while others obesity and its side effects. This reveals the

negative impacts of globalization. Although it enabled a greater availability and diversity of foods, globalization also completely transformed people's lifestyles, eating habits, and consequently their health (Kennedy et al, 2004, Schmdhuber, 2004). Moreover, the dysfunction in global food supply and demand relationship was exposed in the 2007/2008 food price crisis, which has increased food insecurity in many countries (Braun, 2009). Today, there has been increased awareness of these impacts on society and a shift towards a more organic, local and sustainable food culture. It appears that a desire for environmental conscious food is consistent with international trends towards sustainable development.

4. Food Culture in Kuwait

Kuwait food culture has been rapidly growing in the last few years. Food in all its forms: restaurants, cafés, and even home businesses have been a very popular small business venture among young Kuwaitis due to a high public demand. As Kuwaitis travel more, they bring back with them new ideas and flavours from around the world. Today, the restaurants are as diverse as the people living in the country with cuisines from Lebanon, Morocco, India, America, Italy, Brazil, China, and even South Africa. Many of these businesses are franchises with a few local brands, which reflects the extent of Kuwait's globalized food sector. Moreover, Kuwaiti entrepreneurs have been among the first in the Gulf to have a variety of home delivery applications. The food culture has indulged and pampered customers in Kuwait, to pick what type of cuisine a customer wants, where they want to enjoy it, or have it delivered.

As a result, this dynamic has led many food malls or restaurant complexes to be built in a very short period of time. In the past five years, there have been around 50 of such projects opened in areas all around Kuwait. They have seen intense activity particularly in residential seaside suburbs south of Kuwait City. The *baladia* or municipality has classified these areas as tourist/semi-commercial zones that may allow food malls, hotels, and other small commercial enterprises to be built in plot lands that do not exceed 2,500 square

meters. This provided a perfect area for private real-estate companies to build commercial food malls. These new malls have not only competed in the variety of cuisines they offer but also in their architectural and landscape designs. Some use artificial lakes and gardens with musical fountains, while others provide an enclosed courtyard fleeing away from everyday traffic. One design used shipping containers for the façade and called it 'the Port' restaurant complex. Each food complex has been a unique creation to lure customers.

Table (1)
List of Food Malls in Kuwait from 2000-2018

No.	Name of Food mall/complex	Location	Completion date
From 2000-2005			
1	Shamiya Cooperative food mall	Shamiya	Pre 2000
2	Marina Mall Crescent	AlSalmiya	2004
3	Marina Waves	AlSalmiya	2004
4	AlMusalh real estate company	Mahboula	2004
5	AlTijaria real estate company	Mahboula	2004
From 2006-2010			
6	Salhiya Plaza	Kuwait City	2006
7	Dome	AbuHalifa	2006
8	Food Complex	AlFuntas	2006
9	Arjan Strip and Movenpick Hotel	AlBidaa	2006
10	Dhaifa Village	Kuwait City	2008
11	AlSeif restaurant Strip	Kuwait City	2009-2018
12	Zone Restaurant Complex	AlSheab	2009/2010
From 2011-2015			
13	The Village	BulHasani	2011
14	Green Island restaurant complex	AlSheab	2011/2012
15	Spoons restaurant complex	Mahboula	2012
16	Arabella	AlBidaa	2013

Cont/ Table (1)
List of Food Malls in Kuwait from 2000-2018

No.	Name of Food mall/complex	Location	Completion date
17	Menus	AbuHalifa	2013
18	Divonne complex	Funaitess	2013
19	AlShaya Restaurant Complex	AlJabriya	2013/2014
20	Piccadilly Mall	AlSalmiya	2014
21	Levels	Mahboula	2014
22	Light	Mahboula	2014
23	Miral Complex	AlMungaf	2014
24	Sea View	AbuHalifa	2014/2015
25	Cube Mall	AlSalmiya	2015
26	Murouj Mall	Sabhan	2015
27	Sidra	Mahboula	2015
28	Mubarak AlKabir St.	Kuwait City	2015-2018
From 2016-2019			
29	Marina Walk	AlSalmiya	2016
30	The Spot Restaurant Complex	AlMesilah	2016/2017
31	Kuwait Opera House	Kuwait City	2017
32	Dahia Cooperative food mall	AbdAllah AlSalem	2017
33	Blajat Street Complex	AlSalmiya	2017
34	Boulevard Restaurant Area	AlSalmiya	2017
35	Palms Kuwait	AlBidaa	2017
36	The Yard	Funaitess	2017
37	Arjan Square	AlSalmiya	2017/2018
38	Tasters Eat Retreat	BulHasani	2017/2018
39	Waves	Kuwait City	2018
40	Khalejia Plaza	Kuwait City	2018
41	Murouj Mall extension	Sabhan	2018

Cont/ Table (1)
List of Food Malls in Kuwait from 2000-2018

No.	Name of Food mall/complex	Location	Completion date
42	Blooms	AlMesilah	2018
43	The Port	Funaitess	2018
44	The Lake	Funaitess	2018
45	The Dinning	BulHasani	2018
46	Darah Mall	BulHasani	2018
47	Dine Zone	BulHasani	2018
48	Vibes	BulHasani	2018
49	Mall 30	BulHasani	2018
50	Food Complex 2	Mahboula	2018
51	Flamingo	BulHasani	2018/2019
52	House real estate company	AlMungaf	2018/2019

Source: The Author, 2018.

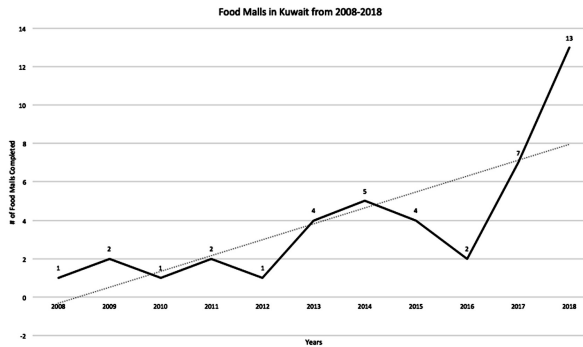


Figure (1) - Number of Food Malls from 2008-2018.

Source: The Author, 2018.

As can be seen in Table (1) and Figure (1) food malls have rapidly spread around Kuwait within the past decade. The complexes have particularly concentrated on coastal areas that have flexible municipi-

pality regulations. Figure (2) illustrates Kuwait's urbanization from 1951 until 2015, while Figure (3) depicts the food mall spectacle from 2011 until the present. The year 2011 was a pivot point for food malls, as the first one was opened in the seaside residential area of BulHasani. It is noteworthy to see the relationship between urbanization and an increase in commercial and food related spaces. Also interesting is to see the boom in commercial activity after 2011 in the south of Kuwait. Finally Figure (4) presents the wide range of how architecture is being used for food, in terms of creating different experiences and spaces. Most malls use a natural visual element such as water or greenery to compete for customers.

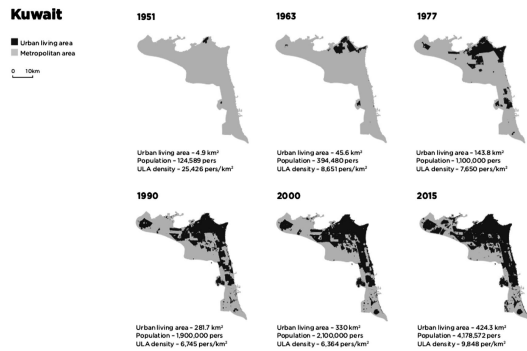


Figure (2) - The urbanization of Kuwait's metropolitan area from 1951-2015.

Source: Rode et al, 2017.

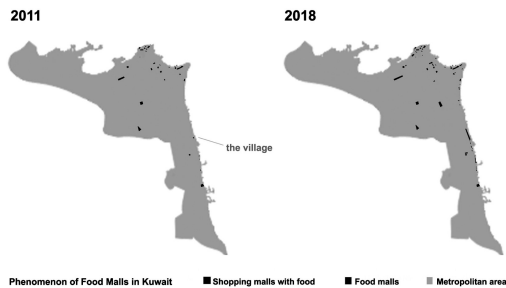


Figure (3) - The Phenomenon of Food Malls from 2011-2018.

Source: The Author, 2018.



Figure (4) - Photographs of different variations of food strips, buildings, malls, complexes around Kuwait.

Source: The Author, 2018.

5. Mixed Methods

In order to understand multiple perspectives of this socio-economic construct, the study employs more than one method. From the 1990s researchers started to integrate and connect qualitative and

quantitative data. This was done by using results from one method to be further explored using another method (Tashakkori and Teddlie: 2009), or by analysing data side by side to strengthen each other such as using qualitative quotes that support statistical results (Creswell and Plano Clark: 2007). This strategy becomes essential in understanding specific social phenomena, hence this research employed more than one method to study people's diverse perceptions of the food mall and to gauge their understanding in relation to their contemporary lifestyles. The first stage was an exploratory questionnaire, which intended to elicit people's general attitudes on the topic, while the second stage followed up the findings using interviews. The interviews aimed at gaining insights on how the food malls affected the residents and visitors of BulHasani coastal neighbourhoods.

5.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Computer application software has been used to distribute the questionnaire online. This has been done by sending emails from the researcher's contact lists and using various social media. Students from the department of architecture at Kuwait University have also been sent the email. The text introduced the research project and provided a link for interested individuals to participate in the survey. BulHasani witnessed the first food mall built in 2011, which triggered the phenomenon in Kuwait's seaside residential communities. Since then the area saw 7 other food malls built within a few years and over 20 in adjacent coastal areas. Therefore, the second stage in this study used interviews as a platform for dialogue between the residents and visitors of BulHasani.

For the residents, the researcher visited a house in the area and conducted interviews with several of its members and with interested individuals at the local Mosque, as well. As for the visitors, the researcher interviewed people at the local food malls, the village and vibes. After approaching the potential interviewee, he/she was given a brief introduction on the topic; if interested the interview would commence and take from 10 to 25 minutes. For the residents, 5 were conducted at the house and 1 at the Mosque. From the 10 individuals or groups approached at the food mall, six accepted to be interviewed. In total, the study conducted 12 interviews to achieve the saturation point. Guest et al's (2006) paper suggests that saturation is achieved

after 12 interviews in their study, which interviewed more than 60 participants (Guest et al, 2006: 59).

In this study, data analysis “does not take place in a linear form and that one part of the process overlaps another” (Rabiee, 2004: 657). Likewise, Krueger (1994: 1) asserts that analysis occurs in parallel with data collection as a “continuum of analysis”. Every piece of data collected throughout the stages of the study has been used in the data analysis. The researcher made observational notes; the interviews were recorded and transcribed; and open coding was employed to obtain the emerging themes discussed below.

6. Findings

6.1 Questionnaires

The survey obtained 238 responses, of which 39 underage responses had been disqualified, leaving the final participants’ count to 199. Table (2) shows the demographic breakdown for the questionnaires. Most of the participants reflected Kuwait’s younger generations with slightly more women than men. The results are presented below for each question.

*Table (2)
Questionnaire participants’ demographics*

	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	36	18%
	Female	163	82%
Age	Below 35	173	87%
	Above 35	26	13%
Nationality	Kuwaiti	161	81%
	Non Kuwaiti	29	19%

Question 1: In the past month how many times did you eat at restaurants?

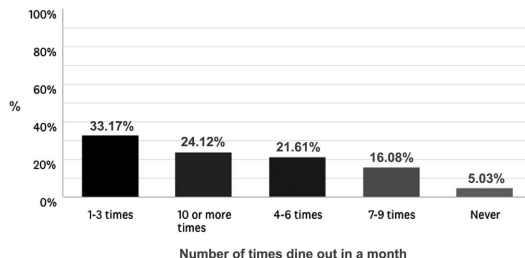


Figure (5) - Number of times participants dined outdoors per month.

**Table (3)
Ranking of frequency of dining outdoors in Kuwait**

Rank	Number of times dine out in a month	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-3 times	66	33.17%
2	10 or more times	48	24.12%
3	4-6 times	43	21.61%
4	7-9 times	32	16.08%
5	Never	10	5.03%

Question 2: Where do you prefer to eat outside?

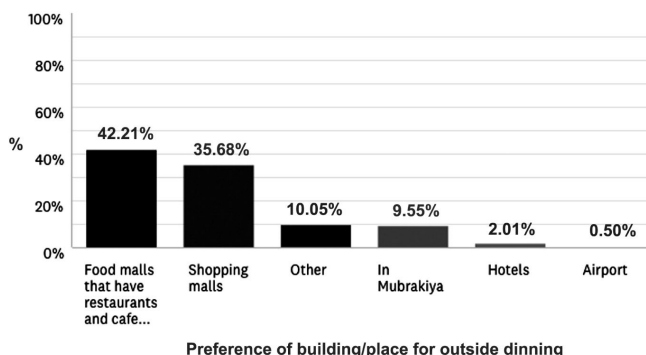


Figure (6) - Participants' preference of building/place type for outside dining.

Table (4)
Ranking of preferable place to eat outside

Rank	Preference of building/place for outside dining	Frequency	Percentage
1	Food malls (that have restaurants and cafes only)	84	42.21%
2	Shopping malls	71	35.68%
3	Other	20	10.05%
4	In Mubraikiya (Traditional souq or market)	19	9.55%
5	Hotels	4	2.01%
6	Airport	1	0.50%

Question 3: What quality of restaurants do you dine in a given month?

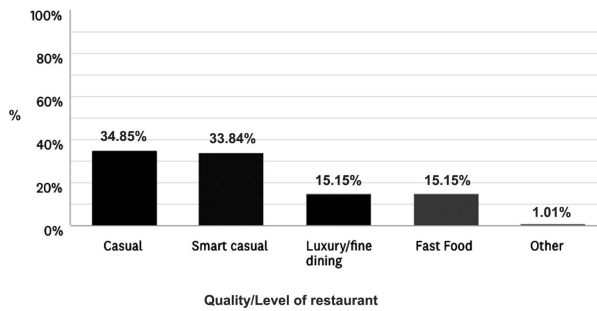


Figure (7) - Ranking of the level of restaurant people most visit.

Table (5)
Ranking of the level of restaurant people most visit

Rank	Quality/Level of restaurant	Frequency	Percentage
1	Casual	69	34.85%
2	Smart casual	67	33.84%
3	Luxury/fine dining	30	15.15%
4	Fast Food	30	15.15%
5	Other	2	1.01%

Question 4: Do you select your restaurant based on the architectural or interior design of the building?

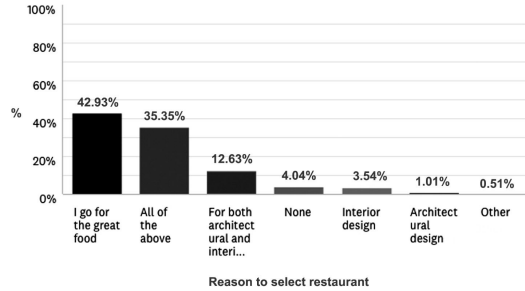


Figure (8) - Reason to select restaurants in Kuwait.

Table (6)
Reason to select restaurants in Kuwait

Rank	Reason to select restaurant	Frequency	Percentage
1	I go for the great food	85	42.93%
2	All of the above	70	35.35%
3	For both architectural and interior design	25	12.63%
4	None	8	4.04%
5	Interior design of restaurants	7	3.54%
6	Architectural design of building	2	1.01%
7	Other	1	0.51%

Question 5

Table (7)
Ranking of the most desired restaurant atmosphere identified by the participants

Rank	Restaurants in mall-desired atmosphere	Frequency	Percentage
1	Relaxing, Calm, quiet atmosphere	102	51.2%
2	Spacious, open, with nature	20	10.0%
3	No Comment	16	80.0%
4	Music	15	7.53%

Cont/ Table (7)

Ranking of the most desired restaurant atmosphere identified by the participants

Rank	Restaurants in mall-desired atmosphere	Frequency	Percentage
5	Lightning	13	6.53%
6	No Music	9	4.52%
7	Restaurant design	8	4.02%
8	Outdoor/indoor experience	5	2.51%
9	Clean	5	2.51%
10	Good smell	4	2.0%

Question 6

Table (8)

Ranking of the most positive restaurant quality identified by the participants

Rank	Positive design qualities of restaurants	Frequency	Percentage
1	Modern	25	12.56%
2	Creative	23	11.55%
3	No comment	19	4.52%
4	Comfortable seating	14	7.03%
5	Lightning	13	6.53%

Question 7

Table (9)

Ranking of the most negative restaurant quality identified by the participants

Rank	Negative design qualities of restaurants	Frequency	Percentage
1	Too much colours	25	12.56%
2	No comment	23	11.55%
3	Small space	22	11.0%
4	Busy or distracting design	14	7.03%
5	Noisy	10	5.02%

Question 8

Table (10)
Ranking of the most identified attribute of Kuwait's food culture identified by the participants.

Rank	Attitude towards food culture	Frequency	Percentage
1	Great food culture with delicious food	114	57.2%
2	Unhealthy	16	8.04%
3	No comment	16	8.04%
4	Diversity of food choices	12	6.03%
5	Food capital of the world	6	3.01%

Question 9

Table (11)
Ranking of the most identified attribute of Kuwait's food malls identified by the participants.

Rank	Attitude towards food malls in Kuwait	Frequency	Percentage
1	Positive attitudes: Great and good ideas	85	42.7%
2	No comment	21	10.55%
3	Negative attitudes	19	9.54%
4	They are too much of them	13	6.53%
5	Provide variety of food choices	12	6.03%
6	Did not visit	12	6.03%
7	Want to see more of them	6	3.01%

6.2 Interviews

There were 12 interviewees, 6 with BulHasani residents and 6 with BulHasani visitors of food malls. Table (12) below presents interviewees' demographic background.

Table (12)
Interviewees Information Table

#	Group/Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Employment	Address
1	Resident 1 (R.1)	78	Male	Kuwaiti	Retired	BulHasani
2	Resident 2 (R.2)	80	Male	Kuwaiti	Retired	BulHasani
3	Resident 3 (R.3)	60	Female	Kuwaiti	Retired	BulHasani
4	Resident 4 (R.4)	34	Female	Kuwaiti	Ministry of Finance	BulHasani
5	Resident 5 (R.5)	37	Female	Kuwaiti	Self Employed	BulHasani
6	Resident 6 (R.6)	21	Female	Kuwaiti	University Student	BulHasani
7	Visitor 1 (V.1)	21	Male	Kuwaiti	Moethen in Mosque	AlGurain
8	Visitor 2 (V.2)	27	Male	Somali	Imam in Mosque	AlQasour
9	Visitor 3 (V.3)	31	Female	Kuwaiti	Ministry of Interior	BuFutaira
10	Visitor 4 (V.4)	50	Male	Kuwaiti	Retired	AlFuntas
11	Visitor 5 (V.5)	22	Male	Kuwaiti	Student	Khaitan
12	Visitor 6 (V.6)	22	Male	Kuwaiti	Student	BuFutaira

7. Discussion of Findings

The findings provided good insights on the phenomenon of food malls in Kuwait and their impact on people and the built environment. The data from both stages of the study have been analysed, resulting in the emerging themes and sub-themes discussed below.

7.1 Impact of Globalization on Food in Kuwait

Kuwaitis' relationship with food has never been so fast changing, complex and sophisticated at the same time. The findings highlight that the impact of globalization is indeed in every facet of life and society. This has caused the transformation of the Kuwaiti diet from local and natural produces of the desert and sea into a diverse and rich food scene from around the world. A few interviewees addressed this point, saying "*In the old days, it was only Kuwaiti dishes 100%, and it stayed that way throughout the 1970s and 1980s*" (R.1). He continued that it was after the Iraqi occupation that the food culture shifted with

investors starting to bring in “*international franchises and it had an impact on the citizens and residents of Kuwait. Food became a fusion between Kuwaiti, and a variety of Western and Eastern cultures*” (R.1).

The shift in food culture greatly affected the way in which people are attached to their houses, as one interviewee argues, “*People are not home oriented anymore; they like to go outside*” (R.3). As mentioned in the literature, this has been due to people eating from a domestic place to a city place. Another interviewee stated “*In the past people ate in their homes and it’s very rare to eat at restaurants and now most people eat at restaurants. There are many reasons for this, the majority of people nowadays in society go to work and they do not have time to cook, so this may have encouraged the development of eating outside*” (V.2). Changing lifestyles also played a significant role in transforming people’s relationship with what and where they ate their food.

The impact of globalization on food, people, and architecture may be divided into the following categories: food as culture, food as entertainment, experience and event, how food changed people’s lifestyle into unhealthy eating patterns, and finally the design and types of restaurants and food malls.

7.1.1 Food as Culture

The vast majority of responses from both stages of the study recognized the impact of Kuwait’s food culture. In fact it has influenced almost every aspect of their lifestyles to the extent that one interviewee proclaimed “*It’s our only culture, what else will you do in Kuwait?! You either go to a restaurant and eat or you go to the movies and eat...our day is revolved around eating*” (R.4). In the questionnaires, 52% of the responses had a very positive attitude of Kuwait’s food culture and 42% identified the food mall as their first choice for outside dining. Similarly, in the interviewees, almost all of the visitors of food malls celebrated the diversity of food selection in Kuwait’s food culture and enjoyed these venues as places to study, dine, and socialize.

Kuwaitis enjoy to travel and in their vacations they frequently dine outside getting exposed to a variety of different cuisines. Over time they acquired specific tastes, which in turn led to a diversity of

restaurants. The food culture even has its own sub-culture and dynamic where social media and marketing have led to many food hypes that include American burger joints, Turkish grills, and healthy yogurt cafés. Kuwait became known for its good food in the Gulf. The variety of food types and places has been consistently recognized in both stages of the study. One interviewee remarked *“I like the food culture because there is a variety of options, if you want something healthy you can find it and if you want junk food you can also find it. They all taste good”* (R.6).

As discussed in the literature food is directly linked to culture and identity. Therefore, to what extent has Kuwait’s food culture altered people’s identity in Kuwait? One response may provide insights into this understanding; the participant asserts that food malls are an indicator of how people in society are *“getting lazy...people go to eat just for the sake of ‘going out’ and meeting people...obesity levels will increase. The more luxurious the restaurant/café the better you’re seen by others, which leads to spending more than enough money for food”* (Q.65). The food culture has influenced people’s way of eating: what they eat, where they eat and how they look, which indicates how it has affected their character, image, and identity.

7.1.2 Food as Entertainment, Experience and Event

The findings suggest that outdoor dining is one of a few entertainment venues in Kuwait. Around 61% of the responses from the questionnaire stated that they dine outside more than 4 times a month and 24% dine more than 10 times. The explanation for this notion has reoccurred in the interviews with many participants, one of whom emphasizing that *“There is nothing else to do in Kuwait but enjoy in areas with café and restaurants. This is recreation for us in Kuwait. They are gatherings with your friends; it is part of social life”* (V.6). Another participant reaffirms this concept by describing food malls as *“recreational and entertainment areas; in Kuwait there is nothing else. If they do not come here, where will people go?”* (V.1).

In Kuwait, the food mall has become a place for entertainment in Kuwait that provides people with a variety of food choices and a place

to socialize with friends and family. Therefore, these places may be considered a manifestation and unique creation of Kuwait's food culture, which in turn developed into a distinctive trait for Kuwait's commercial built environment. In comparison with other nations, one participant pointed out *"In the U.S you see strip malls, there is restaurants and other shops and in Europe you don't see that at all. I think it's only in Kuwait"* (R.4).

7.1.3 Lifestyle Changes and Unhealthy Eating Patterns

The idea of 'unhealthy lifestyles' has been highlighted repeatedly by both genders and varying age groups and nationalities in both methods of the study. This is also associated with the global trend of rising obesity levels and chronic diseases. One participant understands this to be a direct consequence of outdoor dining, asserting *"Food in restaurants is full of oils and is not healthy and especially if you eat it at a daily basis"* (R.3). She continues, condemning food malls and their role in high obesity rates *"Even children are getting more obese, before children used to have outdoor activities and play soccer but now when they get out of the house they just eat"* (R.3). Moreover, while some have questioned the quality of food, others have gone further by asking about the ingredients, when describing food culture, *"It lacks ethics, we barely know the ingredients/calories of the food we were consuming, it's so hard to cut gluten in your diet if you're allergic to it"* (Q.100).

7.1.4 Different Understandings between Generations

The study also revealed yet different understandings of Kuwait's food culture and its affect on people and their environment. The findings show that the younger generation tends to be more in favour of outdoor dining compared to the over 35 age group, of whom around 50% say they ate outdoors 1-3 times per month and 19% never dined out. All the interviewees in their twenties have had positive attitudes towards Kuwait's food culture and food malls. One advocated their presence, stating *"I feel they are very convenient, they are close and they have a variety of options... It made my life much easier since if I have friends over I can just order from there, in the past if I wanted food I had to drive 40 minutes to get it"* (R.6). This is consistent

with prior research, which showed that younger generation's food practices are related to their social relationships. They use food in relationships as a means for caring, talking, sharing, integrating, trusting, reciprocating, negotiating, and belonging (Neely et al, 2014).

7.1.5 Design of Food Places

The architectural and interior design of restaurants and food malls has played a major role in promoting Kuwait's food culture. The findings show people's desire for a calm/quiet atmosphere (52%) that is modern (12%), with creative designs (11%). This may explain the different types and concepts of food malls, which tend to have nice landscaping, water features or sea views. Investors are competing, as one participant argues "*If you want to open a business, a restaurant today, not every idea will work, you need to set yourself apart with a creative idea of high quality*" (V.2). Yet, it does not explain why people visit food malls that do not have these physical and spatial attributes, as one participant highlights "*Some malls do have nice views like the lake, and there is other malls the port, its like cargo boxes, who would want to go there. Some of them overlook a parking lot, why would I want to go out when I look at a parking lot*" (R.4).

Along these lines of inquiry, there are two questions. Why do malls with only food arise? And why do they not open normal malls instead? Some participants advocated a more multi-use destination that may provide more services for the area than places that just encourage food consumption; one participant asserted "*A mall should have a playground, walkway and some shops*" (R.3). Other discussions revealed that these types of business are more in demand and they give a higher return on investment. If so, the food mall has been used as a medium to gain more profits without any regard to people's health or negative effects on communities.

7.2 Impact on Local Neighbourhoods

The findings have revealed undesirable consequences on the residents of BulHasani's neighbourhoods and community. Among the most highlighted is the concern that food malls bring with them increased traffic congestion in the area, entrances and exits, inap-

appropriate behaviour from outsiders especially at night, less privacy for homes overlooking the malls, and environmental pollution by people littering the nearby beaches and streets. Because of these side effects, BulHasani, once a quiet, posh seaside residential area where people purchase houses to avoid the hustle and bustle of everyday life, has been transformed into a busy semi-commercial district with seven food malls.

The entrances and exits, which are not designed to accommodate heavy automobile movement, are congested with bottleneck traffic. Almost all the residents of the area who participated in this study have stressed this fact. One of them pointed out “*BulHasani is a small area that only has two entrances and exits. So what you think will happen when these entrances and exits are full of people?*”(R.1). Another resident said “*People who live here are annoyed! It’s overcrowded in the entrances and exits*” (R.4). This situation has not only affected their movement in and out of their neighbourhoods but also the time it takes. One resident contended “*I have to take a longer way in order to come to the area*”. She continued that traffic congestion and overload of people have led to “*Police coming in order to regulate the way*” (R.5).

Many also argued that these commercial ventures should not be allowed to flourish in residential areas. One participant argued “*We have around 5 malls in one area; they should not be permitted by the government*” (R.5). Ironically even one visitor of the food malls agreed with this argument. He argued “*These projects should have been planned to be placed in the right area, with proper entrances, exits, and circulation, that may accommodate a large amount of people*” (V.2). The overburden is not only on the streets but also on other public amenities and infrastructure such as overconsumption of electricity and water.

With more people visiting food malls, bad habits may come with them. One resident commented “*Weird and inappropriate behaviours in front of my house, for example, people would just walk by and throw their garbage... They will have dinner or lunch in the food malls and then walk around the neighbourhood or in the beach and sometimes pollute the area, sometimes you will see cups, a bag from a restaurant*” (R.6). The notion of disturbing the peaceful atmosphere in this area has also been

reaffirmed by another resident who said “*The people who come for the food malls roam around the area and disturb the residents*” (R.1). Another interviewee said that there were families who came after 11 p.m. and who were of questionable characters. He argued that the food malls are a disturbance: “*At 2am we hear cars and buggies and I see them throw garbage from their windows, I don’t know if they are of right state of minds, so we as residents demand to have a permanent police unit in the area!*” (R.2). This loss of privacy and peace in some houses has been an issue highlighted by residents who live next door to the malls. Figure (8) below illustrates how homeowners have improvised living in the intersection between houses and restaurants.



Figure (9) - Photographs of how BulHasani residents are shielding their houses from food malls.

Source: The Author, 2018.

7.2.1 Opposite Perceptions between Residents and Visitors

While the residents view food malls as a negative phenomenon, almost all the visitors to these places have a positive attitude. In fact one visitor stated “*For the area residents, it’s not that much traffic and if they wanted something to eat, it’s close to them*” (V.4). It seems that the visitors are not aware of how their presence has affected the local community. On the contrary, they see it as a place to dine outside for entertainment. Only two visitors acknowledged the bad consequences of these places on the residential areas, with one visitor admitting “*It is a negative thing for the residents, but for us it’s a good thing because we don’t have anywhere else to go*” (V.1).

7.3 Decline of the Food Mall?

Despite support of food malls from Kuwait's youth, there has been a few indications that may suggest the 'burst of the bubble' or economic crash of this wide spread socio-economic construct. The village has been one of the first restaurant complexes and started with international franchises but now has seen an exodus of reputable restaurant brands which are replaced by fast food and casual dining. It turns out that the new businesses use space to expedite their delivery service for adjacent areas. As a result, the mall has morphed into a different commercial entity, which is less attracting for customers. Furthermore, there are around 2 food malls that have stayed empty for a year now. Is this the beginning of the rise and fall of the food mall or perhaps market readjustment after years of rapid expansion?

Discussions from the interviews may shed insights into these observations. One interviewee argued "*There will come a day when the restaurants and food malls in Kuwaiti society will collapse. Citizens will start becoming self aware that they are wasting their money going to these places!*" (R.1). This prediction is shared among many others, as one commented "*The phenomenon is too much, we see food malls in every kilometre or 100 meters. This is a negative thing! Anything that is overdone loses its value, and I think one day because their abundance, it will affect the investors. The fundamentals of businesses are when there is an increase of supply there will be a decrease in demand*" (V.2). This has been reiterated by another participant "*People (investors) who started this trend took advantage and sold the property, and now whoever bought them are paying the price. It is not bringing them a good profit on their investment, more than 50% are empty and some tenants are leaving*" (R.2).

8. Contribution to Knowledge

The findings improve our understanding of how food, people, and architecture are related and contribute to discussions at a global scale. Recent studies have claimed that the global food system is 'broken', with billions underfed or overweight (IAP, 2018). The food industry is also responsible for a third of all greenhouse gas emissions, which is causing global warming and extreme weather events that damage food

production (Carrington, 2018). The food malls have been feeding this environmentally unsustainable progression.

This current research also opens up a dialogue within the socio-cultural aspect of food and society. The data indicates that support for the food malls has been driven by the youth, which complements and furthers recent understandings into youth's food practices and social relationships (Neely et al, 2014). In this lens, the findings also reveal how outside dining is connected to identity formation. Pervious research has focused on how food contributes to the creation of individual and collective identities in a mostly domestic environment (Fiese et al, 2006, Valentine, 1999). Others have discussed how unhealthy eating is bad for young people's health as it relates to identity and belonging (Stead et al, 2011). Yet, the current research provides another perspective on how outdoor dining has been used as means for entertainment and socializing among young people. It also considers food malls as a socio-economic vehicle for new architectural experiences, events and food becoming a social generator.

9. Recommendations

This research may be useful for a number of professions, e.g. architects and designers. The findings may also demonstrate how overdesigning can be counterproductive in a food commercial setting. For policy makers, it highlights the need for careful planning and a reevaluation of current municipality regulations. For nutrition promoters, the findings may contribute to a better understanding of food malls in terms of people, foods, and place dynamics. In this regard, the study recommends three solutions to move towards more sustainable areas, healthier food, and better-built environment.

1. Education: It is imperative to have an educational framework for the public to create a more sustainable, active and healthy lifestyle. It is time to give classes on nutrition early on in schools, and government agencies should similarly provide workshops, seminars, and lectures for adults. Many in the medical world believe that prevention is the key to limiting obesity-related diseases rather than treatment. This will also save the government millions in the long term.

2. Community Engagement: Also needed are major initiatives from grassroots non-profit organizations, social media, businesses, neighbourhood groups, and concerned citizens. A combined and redirection of efforts are crucial to raising awareness towards a better quality of life, promoting extracurricular activities among the youth, and ending the food mall frenzy in residential neighbourhoods. Marketing campaigns are effective tools that are underused by most communities due to costs; therefore, the private sector needs to play a greater role for finding solutions.

3. Legislation: Finally, in order to move forward government restructuring is required - a government agency that oversees nutrition in all its aspects. For instance, laws that require restaurants to display calorie counts on the menus are necessary. Studies have shown that food labeling in restaurants helps reduce calorie intake (Pulos and Leng: 2010, Morley et al: 2013). Moreover, the *baladia* (municipality) needs to repeal the law that allows these food malls to be built in almost all Kuwait's urban seaside communities. It has caused havoc to the residents, affected the harmony of built environment, and overburdened the area's infrastructure.

10. Conclusion

This research shows a direct link between globalization and changing food consumption patterns, which has led to the food mall phenomenon in Kuwait. At the macro level, it is a direct product of global enterprise, trade, and cultural diffusion. At the micro level, it depicts the working of various social, cultural, and economic dynamics in Kuwaiti society. Within this fluid and evolving context emerged a generation addicted to food and all that it has to offer, be it home deliveries or outdoor experiences. As a result, restaurants and food malls have become a playground for social interaction. They have also provided an arena for architectural experimentation with creative and innovative designs to attract customers.

The current study shows how people use food as entertainment and a source of social production in a country with limited recreation areas because of hot summers. In 2016, Kuwait recorded a temperature

of 54 degrees Celsius, one of the highest temperatures ever recorded on earth (Shaikh, 2016). Walking outdoors under these conditions is unbearable and absolutely encourages the use of cars as the primary source of transport. This explains, despite acknowledging unhealthy lifestyles, the participants' overwhelming positive attitudes towards food malls. It is a place where they can enjoy their time in a cool indoor environment. Ironically, these and similar spaces worldwide have led to global warming and rising temperatures, which illustrates a truly unsustainable cycle. The good news for now is that the spectacle of food malls may be coming to an end with many new venues are abandoned, without restaurants. Therefore, it is now more than ever of great importance for swift intervention by governments to counter increasing environmental threats in Kuwait and internationally, in order to preserve a better quality of life for future generations.

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