

## The Changes in Retail Trade Patterns in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

التغيرات في أنماط تجارة التجزئة في مدينة مسقط – سلطنة عمان

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### الملخص:

تعتبر تجارة التجزئة من أهم الوظائف التي تقوم بها المراكز الحضرية، شهدت هذه الوظيفة تطورات حاسمة في العقود السابقة في مدينة مسقط، عاصمة سلطنة عمان، وذلك نتيجة لعوامل متعددة أهمها نمو المدينة سكانيا ومكانيا، وتطورها الاقتصادي. يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة التغيرات التي حدثت في قطاع تجارة التجزئة في مدينة مسقط خلال العقود السابقة. المنهجية: استخدمت مناهج متعددة في البحث أهمها الملاحظة المباشرة، قياسات من المرئيات الفضائية والتحقق من النتائج في الميدان، عمل خريطة استخدام الأرض وحساب استخدامات الأراضي التفصيلية، تطبيق استبانة على عينة من المتسوقين في سوقي السيب والخوض كنماذج للأسواق التقليدية، وعلى عينة من المتسوقين في خمس مراكز تجارية في ولاية السيب. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن هناك تغيرات جذرية حدثت على قطاع تجارة التجزئة في مدينة مسقط، أهمها ظهور العديد من الأسواق والشوارع التجارية، تأسيس عدد كبير من المراكز التجارية كبيرة المساحة ومتعددة الوظائف، أثرت هذه التغيرات على اتجاهات وسلوك المستهلكين.

### الكلمات المفتاحية:

تجارة التجزئة، التنمية الحضرية، مسقط (عمان)، السوق، مراكز التسوق، سلوك المستهلكين

### Abstract:

Retail trade represents one of the most significant functions of urban centers and cities. In Muscat, this function has undergone substantial transformations over the past few decades. These developments have been driven by several interrelated factors, including rapid urban expansion, population growth, and sustained eco-nomic progress. The research employs multiple methodological approaches, including field observation, analysis of satellite imagery, survey of land use maps for two major markets in Muscat, Al-Khoud and As-Seeb and detailed calculations of land use patterns. Additionally, a questionnaire survey was administered to samples of shoppers and pedestrians in the Al-Khoud and As-Seeb markets, as well as to shoppers in five shopping malls across the city. The findings reveal profound structural changes in Muscat's retail trade sector, most notably the proliferation of traditional commercial streets, the establishment of numerous local markets, and the rapid emergence of large, multifunctional shopping malls. These transformations have had significant implications for consumer preferences and shopping behaviors.

**Keywords:** Retail trade; Urban development; Muscat (Oman); shopping malls; Souq; Consumer behavior

## 1. Research Problem

Urban function refers to the role that a city or urban area plays in a larger economic, social, and cultural system. Urban areas can serve many different functions. Retail trade is considered one of the most important urban functions. These functions include, in general, residential, administrative, industrial, religious, spiritual, recreation, etc. Urban areas can serve multiple functions at the same time, and the importance of different functions can vary between cities and overtime. Understanding the urban function of a city can be important for city planning, economic development, and other policy decisions. Cities are often economic hubs, serving as centers for business, commerce, and industry. This includes serving as headquarters for corporations, as well as being home to a large number of small businesses.

In urban centers all over the world, the retail trade sector has witnessed crucial changes in the last decades due to a variety of reasons, e.g., population increase, urbanization, changes in behavior of consumers, globalization, competition etc. (see Grewal D. et al. 2007, Abdelghani 2013). Muscat, as the capital of the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed major changes since the 1970s because of the urban development process advanced by the government and private sector. As a result of urban development, crucial changes have occurred in the retail trade sector in the city.

Greater Muscat is located on the northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula and is known for its stunning natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and modern infrastructure. Muscat is the political and economic capital of the Sultanate of Oman and is ranked at the top of the urban hierarchy in the country with a population size of 1.3 million inhabitants, followed by the city of Salalah 331,000 inhabitants, then Sohar with 233,000. The population size of Muscat represents about 30% of the total population in the country which had 4.5 million inhabitants in 2020 (NCSI 2021). Greater Muscat consists of 6 provinces (Fig. 1), As-Seeb which has 478,000 residents, Bushar 382,000, Matrah 231,000, Al-amrat 121,000, Quriat 58,000, Muscat 31,000.

The city is witnessing a rapid increase in population accompanied by a high growth rate of the built-up area, which increased from 6.5 km<sup>2</sup> in 1970 to 68.1 km<sup>2</sup> in 2000 and then to 115.3 km<sup>2</sup> in 2017 (Abdelghani et al. 2020). This urban growth of the city led to the emergence of many residential neighborhoods, the redistribution of land use, the development and change of urban functions. One of the most important urban functions that has undergone significant changes in recent decades is the retail trade industry.

Also, Muscat is a key hub for business and commerce in the region and is home to many international corporations and organizations.

Despite the development of the retail trade industry in all cities of the world in the past decades, and the preparation of quite a few scientific research on this subject in many countries, there is a clear lack of studies conducted on the issue of the development of retail trade in Arab cities. Therefore, the scientific problem of this research is summed up in that scientific knowledge gap. So, this paper tries to bridge this scientific gap and enrich the Arab literature on this subject.



Source: Derived from cartographic data of the National Survey and Geospatial Information Authority (NSGIA), Oman.

Figure 1: Muscat Governorate

## 2. Research Aims

This paper aims to identify and investigate the changes in the retail trade function in Greater Muscat since the 1970s. It analyzes the process and the factors leading to these changes, as well as their impacts on shopper trends and behavior.

## 3. Research Questions

How have retail trade patterns in Muscat evolved over the past decades?

What are the observable manifestations of these changes?

In what ways has this transformation of retail trade patterns impacted consumers' behavior regarding new trade patterns?

## 4. The Academic and Practical Importance of Research

The importance of research is summed up in two main points. The first is related to the scientific importance, as the paper helps to open the scientific discussion on the issue of the development of retail trade in Arab cities, especially the Gulf cities. The second is an applied benefit, where the paper can help in understanding the methods and processes that contribute to the development of that sector in the city of Muscat, and then it works to describe the different geographical dimensions of that phenomenon, and to provide important information and knowledge for those interested

in city management, the retail trade sector in general and urban planners.

## 5. Previous Studies

Retail Trade is considered as one of the most important urban functions that cities perform. Therefore, the retail trade sector in the cities has been receiving significant attention and scientific research for a long time (Tokatli N. et al. 1980). Some of this research is supported by scientific research institutions, while others by relevant economic institutions, in order to understand the reality, development and future trends of retail trade. Numerous studies focused on the impact of economic globalization on the structure of retail trade (Weltevreden J.W., 2007), and some focused on changing trade patterns, while other studies focused on the evolution of consumer behavior and culture that accompanied the physical development of retail components (Ackerman D. et al. 2001, Goldman A. et al. 2005). The new trends in research of retail trade for example, but not limited are: the competition between the old retail trade patterns such as the old shopping streets, shopping kiosks and the new global hypermarkets (Abdelghani 2013), the relation between International trade and retail trade market performance has attracting the attention of economists and analysts (Meinen P. et al. 2018), evolution of retail formats: Past, present, and future (Gauri D. et al. 2021), E-commerce and the market structure of retail industries (Goldmanis M. et al. 2010), the competition for Internet commerce with traditional brick-and-mortar retailers (Brynjolfsson, E. et al. 2009).

## 6. Research Methodology

This paper aims to investigate the changes and the development of the retail trade sector in Muscat based on four approaches: 1) determine and detect the physical changes in retail trade streets, areas and shopping malls in the city. 2) a survey of the land use of two main retail trade streets and. 3) counting of visitors and pedestrians of markets and shopping malls. 4) using the observation and a questionnaire to investigate the attitude of customers regarding their shopping behavior, which reflects the competition between the traditional retail trade streets and the newly established shopping centers. Four retail trade areas and streets (Souq As-Seeb, Souq Matrah, Souq Al-Khoud, Souq Rwei) as well as four shopping malls (Lulu, Al-Jomla, Al-Bahja, Ramez) have been selected for this research. 196 questionnaires were answered by visitors in Suq As-Seeb and Suq Al-Khoud (143 in As-Seeb, 53 in Al-Khoud), and 369 questionnaires were answered by visitors of shopping malls (122 in Lulu, 65 in Al-Jomla, 62 in Al-Bahja and 120 in Ramez).

## 7. Results Discussions and Recommendations

### 7.1 The changes in retail trade in the Gulf region

In recent decades, the cities in the Arab countries, in the Gulf region, have been experiencing substantial social and economic changes, which are caused by internal and external factors. An important factor is the strong boom in the region as a result of high oil prices, since the 1970's. The availability of capital and business, in these cities, made them a popular destination for global investors, internal migration and for a large number of immigrants from other regions of the world, especially the surrounding areas (South Asia and North Africa). Another factor that led to changes in the cities of this region is the will of the states to diversify their economic bases to reduce their dependence on oil. This was achieved through a variety of economic bases, a diversity of activities of the population and the creation of new economic alternatives. Here, the factor of economic globalization should be mentioned, which has opened new opportunities for the region with free movement of goods, ideas and people.

One of the most affected sectors, with the above-mentioned factors, is the retail trade, which is experiencing considerable changes. The forms, structures, functions and importance of retail trade, in cities of the Gulf region, have clearly changed during the past two decades. Retail trade has come to play a more important role in the economies of the states and cities. The changing and restructuring of retail trade is, in quality and quantity, an international phenomenon found in all the world's cities. The extent of retail trade development depends closely on the city's size, demography, its political and administrative status, and its local, regional and international importance. For example, the changing and restructuring of the retail trade, in a small city in the Sultanate of Oman, like Izki or Al Khabora, differs quantitatively and qualitatively from the tremendous development of the same trade in the capital, Muscat. The phenomenon is inspired by the reality of the cities in the Gulf area, many of which have witnessed a change in the function of retail trade and seen new components added to it, e.g., the emergence of giant shopping centers or hypermarkets and online electronic trade. Since its appearance, at the beginning of the third millennium, shopping centers are a symbol of globalization and modernization. They have dramatically changed not only the Omani traditional retailing structure, but also consumption behaviour.

The development of retail trade in Muscat could be determined in three major changes: 1) The establishment of a large number of new retail trade streets and areas (Souq in Arabic means market, plural is Suqs, markets) as well as shopping malls. 2) Continuous changes in land use patterns within these streets and

malls in order to adapt to the market economy and new capitalism as well as to meet the changing demands of customers. 3) Changes in behavior of customers as a result of the appearance of new retail trade areas and centers.

## 7.2 Establishment of new retail trade streets (Souqs) and shopping malls in Muscat

Since the 1970s retail trade in Muscat has grown significantly, with the development of old markets such as Matrah Suq in the far east of the city and As-Seeb Suq in the far west. It has also witnessed the construction of a number of commercial and retail trade streets, such as the Ruwi Suq in Wilayat Matarh and Al- khod Suq in As-Seeb Wilayat. Now the main retail trade markets in Muscat can be determined from east to west as following:

- Suq Matrah includes traditional Omani goods such as frankincense, incense, daggers as well as silver and gold jewelry in addition to such imported goods as textiles, and electrical appliances. Since the 1970's this market has experienced some developments, initiated by the government. Its importance was diminished by the establishment of other new trade retail markets.
- The Ruwi business district arose in 1972 in the basin of Ruwi. In the eastern part, there are the central business district with its central banks and airlines, while its western part involves the market of Ruwi, which includes a long chain of shops specialized in selling new imported goods, the most important are gold jewelry, men's wear fabrics and ready-made clothing (pants and shirts), watches and electrical appliances.
- Al-hamria market is the normal extension of Suq Ruwi in a westerly direction, and was established in the same period of time.
- Suq Al-wadi Al-kabir originated in the late seventies and includes a mixture of Omani traditional goods and modern commodities.
- Al-watiah commercial area is located west of old Muscat, directly on the highway, specializing in car dealerships. Many famous car agencies have their main branches in this area.
- Al-qurum commercial area is located to the east of the Sultan Qaboos highway and has a group of shops, which offer modern, high-priced goods and commodities.
- Al-khuwair commercial area is located to the west of Sultan Qaboos highway and contains a group of restaurants, bookshops and private clinics.
- Al-azaiba commercial area is located directly on the Sultan Qaboos highway and extends perpendicularly toward the sea and is characterized by large shops selling cars.
- Suq As-Seeb was a small traditional market in the past. Since 1974, it has been developed and modernized and now includes a mixture of traditional goods

and commodities, such as, incense and frankincense, dried fish, as well as imported goods such as clothing, watches, gold, sunglasses, electrical appliances as well as tailoring and dressmaking.

- Al- khoud commercial street had its origins under a plan with the establishment of the residential district of Al-Khoud in Wilayat As-Seeb. The foundation of this market began after the construction of a recharge dam in the dry valley of Al-Khoud, in the mid-eighties and with the establishment of the Sultan Qaboos University. It includes a wide range of restaurants and cafés that fit the middle-income population, as well as a chain of stores specializing in commodities, such as sunglasses, fabrics, clothing, stationery, baked goods and construction tools.
- Commercial Street of Al-hil is also located in the Al-hil neighborhood within As-Seeb wilayat, parallel to the Sultan Qaboos highway. It appeared in the nineties and consisted of a collection of restaurants, auto repair workshops, construction material shops and tailoring and dressmaking.
- Al-Mawaleh Central Market for vegetables and fruits was established by the state in 2004 and occupies a large area (175 000 square meters). It is situated in Al-mawaleh, directly on the Muscat- Nizwa highway. All imported vegetables and fruits are assembled and stored by a professional company and sold to wholesalers and retailers from this market. There is also a retail trading area included.
- Commercial area on Um- abila is located in the northern part of Wilayat As-Seeb, where a big residential district was constructed in the 80's. Most of this market deals in car repair and selling used cars. The other part is used for selling daily goods and commodities.

It is worth noting, that the commercial historical position and exclusivity enjoyed by the Matrah commercial market, until the mid-seventies, began to decrease significantly with the development of some small old traditional markets that existed in the past. Markets such as the As-Seeb market and with construction of modern commercial areas such as Roy, Al-wadi Al-kabir and Al-qurum, the Matrah market was no longer the only destination targeted by a majority of visitors and customers for shopping from the many regions of Oman. Now there are other attractive shopping places and markets, which have led to change the regional map of retail trade, not only in Muscat, but also in the Sultanate.

## 7.3 Establishment of shopping malls

Since the beginning of the third millennium, there has been a marked change in retail trade patterns in Muscat. The state has allowed foreign investors to establish and manage international shopping centers/Malls. The period from 2000 has so far witnessed the construction of a large number of shopping centers/Malls, which range in area from 1000 square meters to more than 100,000 square meters, as is the case in Muscat City

Center in Al Muwalh in As-Seeb Willayat. Until 2011, Muscat had 36 shopping centers with different areas. The construction of shopping centers has never stopped. In April 2019, one of the largest shopping malls in the city was opened, the Mall of Muscat, which is located in the Um-abila district in As-Seeb Willayat. The Mall of Muscat has one of the largest aquariums in the Middle East and has Oman's first snow park (Muscat Daily).

In the Willayat of Boucher, near the Muscat Expressway, The Mall of Oman, which been opened at the beginning of 2022, is the largest shopping mall in Muscat. In 2019 there are more than 60 shopping centers/Malls in the city. The shopping centers include international brand grocery stores such as Carrefour, Lulu, shops for fashion, electrical appliances, accessories, restaurants, cafes and children's playgrounds. Since its inception, the malls have affected the retail trade patterns in Muscat, where it has led to stagnation of some types of retail trade in traditional markets.



Source: Field study  
Photo 1: Al Bahja shopping center



Source: Field study  
Photo 2: Ramez shopping center



Source: Field study  
Photo 3: Lulu shopping center, Nezwa Road



Source: <https://www.majidalfuttaim.com/en/media-centre/press-releases/detail/2021/06/majid-al-futtaim-unveils-upcoming-mall-of-oman-at-a-virtual-event-for-tenants>

Photo 4: Mall of Oman

## 7.4 The internal structure of the As-Seeb and Al-Khoud Markets

The historical development of retailing in the capital of Muscat leads us to an important question: Are there differences in the internal structure between the old developed markets and the newly established ones, which have been constructed with the growth of built-up areas in the city? To answer this question, it was necessary to make a detailed survey of land use in the market of As-Seeb (as an old market, developed after 1970) and the market of Al-Khoud (a newly established market) (see Fig.2)

In the course of field work, the shops and stores' activities were recorded in detail. To facilitate an understanding of the retail land use, the diverse activities of retailing have been grouped into 16 categories. As is evident in the following table, Fig. 3 and Fig. 4.

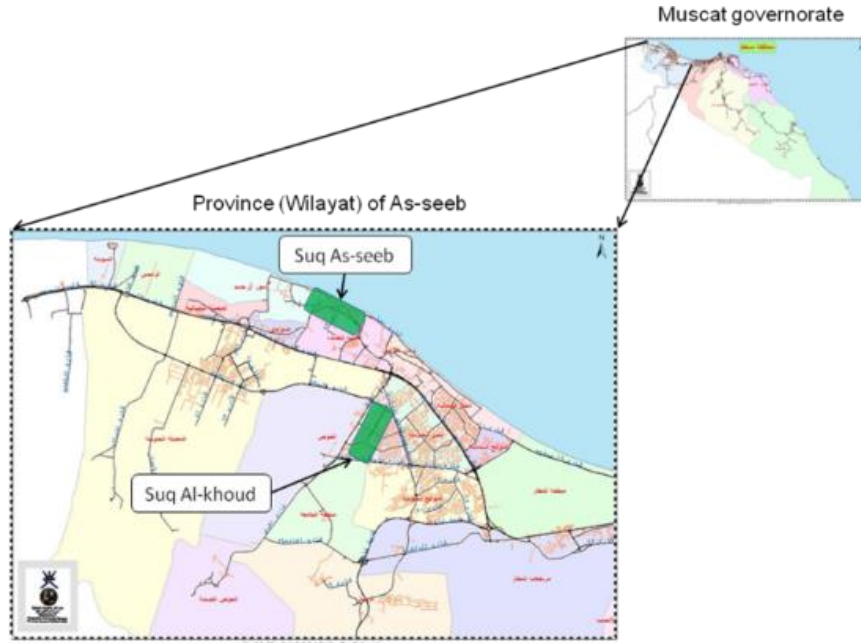


Fig. 2: Location of Suq As-Seeb and Suq Al-Khoud in wilayat of As-Seeb, Muscat

Table Tab. 1: Land use categories in Suq As-Seeb and Suq Al-Khoud 2018

Land use		Al-Khoud % of total Nr.	As-Seeb % of total Nr.
1	Restaurants & Cafés	7.84 %	4.62 %
2	Groceries	4.9 %	7.02 %
3	Women's clothing	18.63 %	8.31 %
4	Men's Clothing	1.14 %	9.05 %
5	Fabrics and textiles	0.82 %	2.71 %
6	Jewelry	2.45 %	4.13 %
7	Furniture	1.96 %	10.34 %
8	Mobile phones	1.47 %	1.29 %
9	Electronic appliances & computers	9.97 %	7.57 %
10	Watches and glasses	3.27 %	2.28 %
11	Beauty salons	8.5 %	3.82 %
12	Footwear	1.47 %	2.59 %
13	Mixture of goods	5.56 %	9.0 %
14	Cars and bicycles	3.76 %	4.06 %
15	Others	25.65 %	18.9 %
16	Perfumes & fragrances	1.96 %	1.23 %
17	Unknown	0.65 %	3.08 %
	Total	100%	100 %

2- Includes shops selling Food, desserts, nuts, honey, Omani sweets and bakeries

3- Includes shops selling women clothing and sewing workshops

4- Includes shops selling men's clothing and sewing workshops

6- Includes shops for selling Gold & Silver

7- Includes shops selling furniture and furnishings, carpets, curtains and their factories

8- Includes retail, service and repair of mobile phones

9- Includes shops selling, service and repair of electronic appliances

10- Includes shops selling and repairing watches, prescription glasses and sunglasses

11- Includes beauty salons, hair stylists for ladies and barber shops for men

12- Includes stores selling shoes for men, women and children

13- Includes shops selling a mixture of goods such as clothing, gifts, shoes, watches, kitchen utensils and toys

14- Includes shops selling cars, bicycles, spare parts for cars and bicycles, car accessories, car rental offices, auto repair workshops and bicycle repair workshops

15- Others: Includes clinics, travel agencies, brokerage offices, offices of advertising, offices of shipping, selling glass and supplies for events and weddings, photocopy shops and house paint

16- Includes shops selling perfumes, fragrances and frankincense

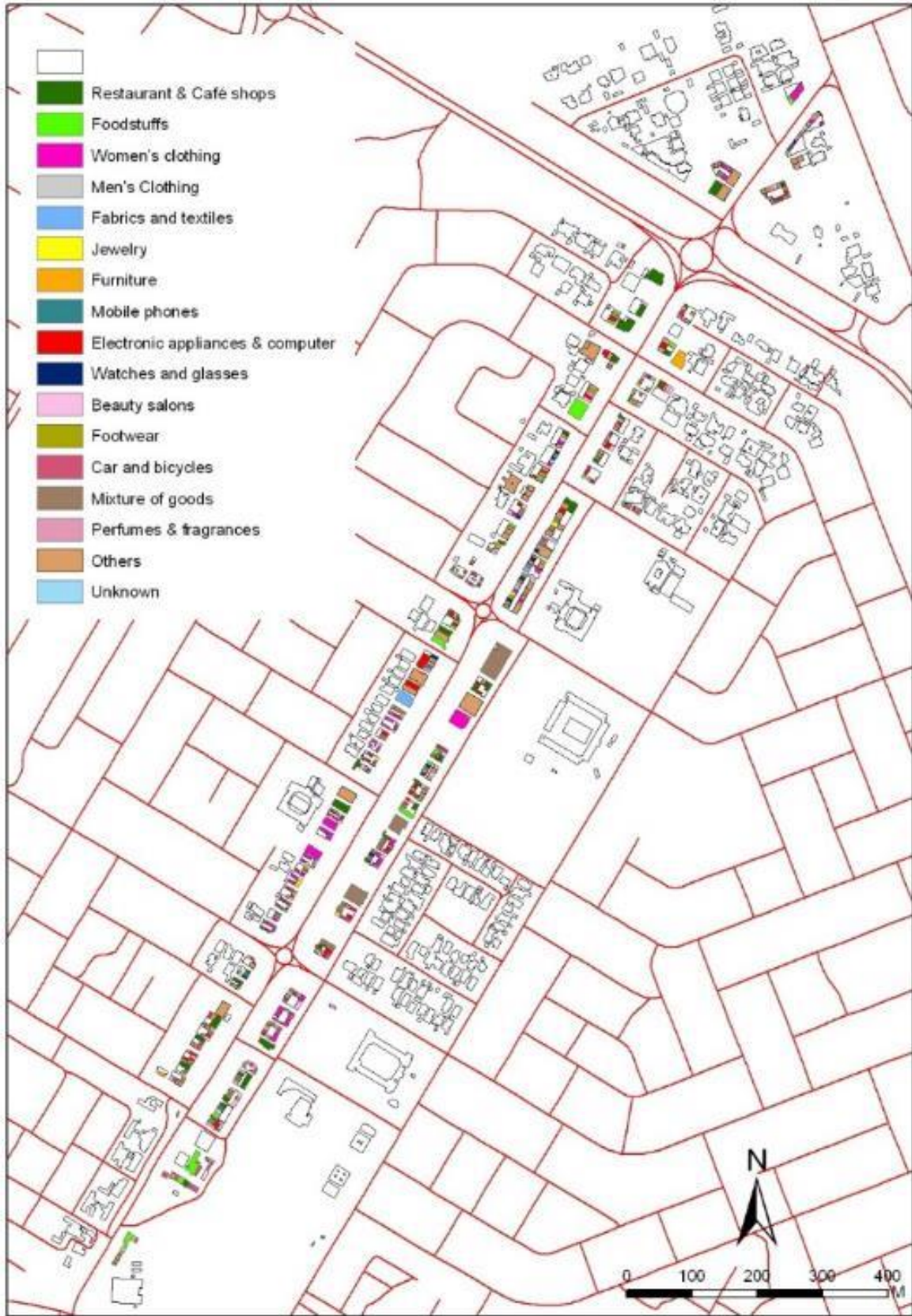


Fig. 3: Land use map for Suq Al-Khoud 2019

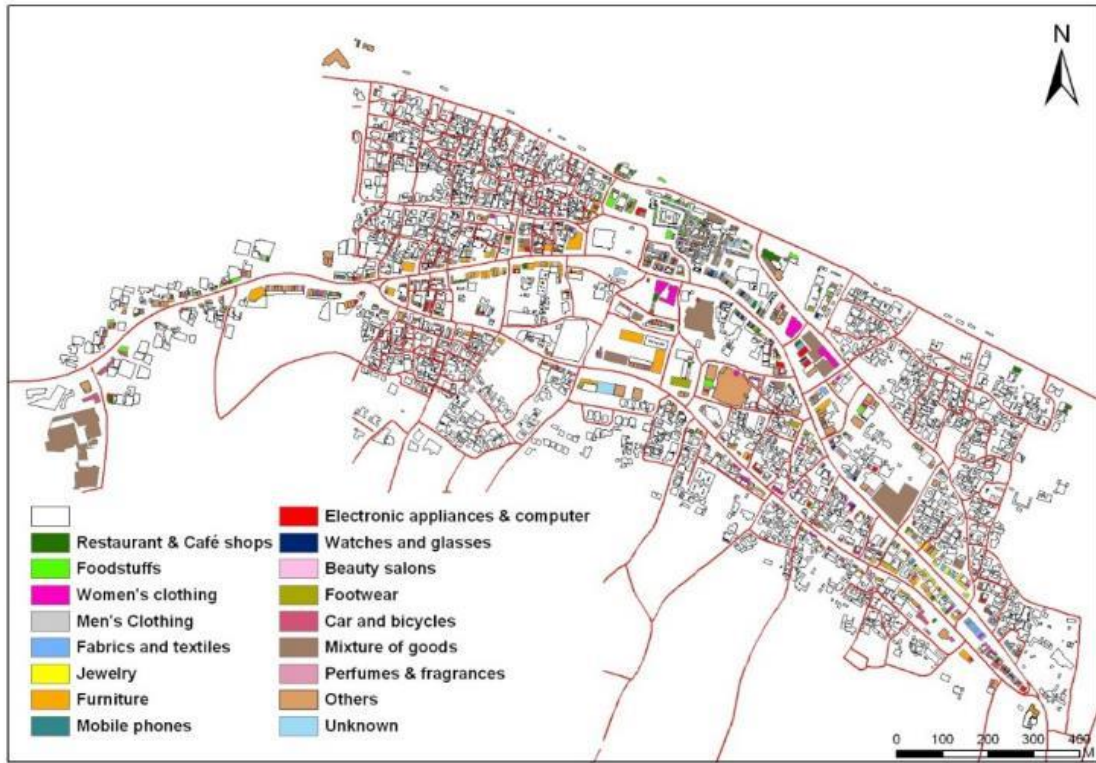


Fig. 4: Land use map for Suq As-Seeb 2019



Fig. 5: Agglomeration of specialized food stores in As-Seeb 2019



Fig. 6: Agglomeration of shops specialized in selling and sewing men's clothing in As-Seeb 2019



Source: Field study

Photo 5: The Indian and Bangladeshi workers dominate the work in the sewing workshops



Source: Field study

Photo 6: The Indian and Bangladeshi are the primary workers in the handcraft workshops

Through the analysis of Fig. 3, Fig. 4 and data of table 1; it is worth mentioning the following points:

- The proportion of restaurants and cafés in Al-Khoud (7.84 %) is clearly superior to their proportion in As-Seeb (4.62 %). The reason for this is that this district is a major housing area for students of Sultan Qaboos University, who rely heavily on these restaurants and cafés for dining, particularly dinner. Consequently, many of these restaurants open at 4 pm. As for lunch, the students receive it on campus, in the university restaurant, free of charge.
- The proportion of specialized food stores in As-Seeb is 7.02% to 4.9% in Al-Khoud. There is, in addition to groceries and food stores, a large number of butcher shops, in which live poultry can be bought; fresh fruit and vegetable shops; mills for spices, nuts and grain; and specialized shops for Omani sweets. The light green colour in figure 5 indicates to the agglomeration of food stores in As-Seeb. In Al-Khoud there are no shops selling live poultry, no mills, and only two shops for selling Omani sweets.
- The percentage of shops specialized in selling and sewing women's clothes in Al-Khoud is clearly high (18.63%), compared with 8.31 % in As-Seeb. The new construction of Al-Khoud (1986) allowed for retail trade adapting to the developed demand related to women's modern fashion. Therefore, we

find a clear focus on shops selling and sewing women's clothes. One of the characteristics of newly established markets in Oman is the high proportion of shops related to modern fashion.

- By contrast, the percentage of shops specialized in selling and sewing men's clothing in As-Seeb is high (9.05%) versus only (1.14%) in Al-Khoud. The expatriate work force from India and Bangladesh dominates in the sewing and handcraft workshops like shoe repair (Fig. 6 & Photo 5).
- The goldsmith/jewellery trade is one of the features of traditional markets, in general, in Arabic countries, and has a particular importance in the Gulf region. In As-Seeb the proportion of this type of trade is more than 4% compared with 2.45% in Al-Khoud (Fig. 7)
- Concentrated in As-Seeb is an agglomeration of shops selling furniture, carpets, curtains and workshops manufacturing them and is located in the street parallel to the main shopping street, increasing the percentage of this type of retail substantially, to 10.31% versus 1.96% in the market of Al-Khoud (Fig. 8, Photo 7 & 8).
- In Al-Khoud the ratio of barbershops and women's beauty salons is higher than that in the As-Seeb (8.5% to 3.82 %).



Fig. 7: Agglomeration of shops specialized in goldsmith/jewellery in As-Seeb 2019

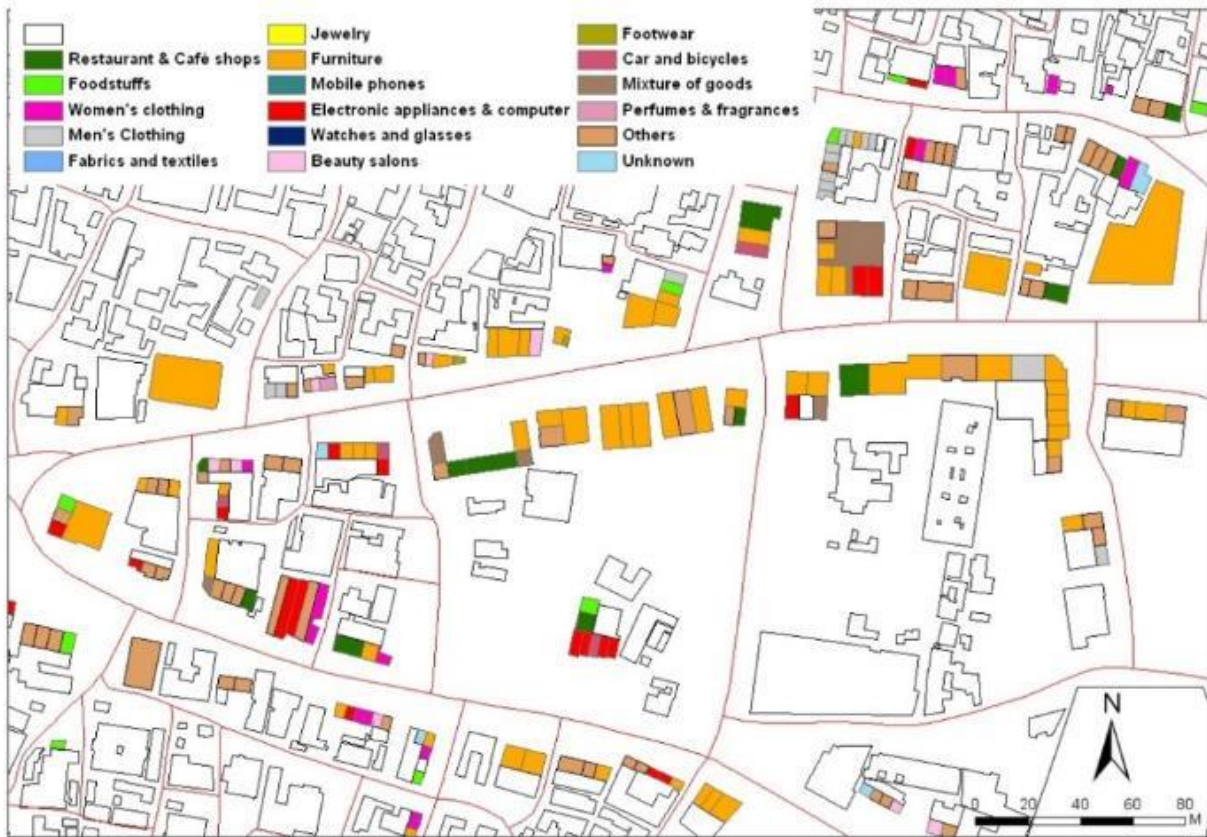


Fig. 8: Agglomeration of shops and workshops for furniture, carpets and curtains in As-Seeb 2019



Source: Field study

Photo 7: Workshops for manufacturing furniture in Suq As-Seeb. This scene illustrates traditional retail trade in Suq As-Seeb, characterized by mixed land-use patterns (commercial/artisanal). The workshop functions as a 'transitional zone' merging manufacturing with display, enhancing the economic vitality of traditional markets. Geographically, it reflects spatial flexibility by utilizing the sidewalk as a public display area

### 7.5 The number of visitors and pedestrians of markets and shopping malls

The number of visitors in a commercial street or shopping center helped to provide a lot of analysis and multi-faced interpretations. This methodology is used in some studies relating to retail trading in German cities (see Monheim 1998). In the areas of retail trade, the search into the volume of visitors and pedestrians is an important aspect, as it reflects the interest, desire and potential of the consumers. The volume count of visitors and pedestrians may seem a relatively easy technique for the study, but there are complex contexts which must be taken into account: periodic cycles and processes of transformation; variations over short distances, due to differences in land use; special and random effects. Rolf Monheim infers that these multiple conditions and complex contexts should not be a hindrance in using such a technique and instead should be encouraged to be used regularly. For our current investigation, the count of visitors and pedestrians in traditional markets and shopping malls is an important element. Due to warm weather conditions and long distances between residential districts and main markets

and shopping malls as well as cultural and economic dimensions, visitors of these places almost always travel by private cars to directly access the parking areas of shopping malls or shopping streets. In Oman, in general, the main transport is by private vehicle. It was therefore difficult to calculate the pedestrian volume entering a market or mall. Instead, there is an accounting of the number of cars entering the parking area of the shopping malls. In the case of the As-Seeb and Al-Khoud markets it was necessary to accurately determine their main entrances. Figure 12 shows the daily cycle of car volume for 4 shopping malls (Al-Lulu, Al-Jomla, Al-Bahja, Ramez) and for the traditional markets of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud. Due to most stores and shops in traditional markets (not in shopping malls) in Oman, closing daily between 13 to 17 o'clock, the counting of car volume was limited to two periodical times: mornings from 9 to 13 o'clock; and evenings from 18 to 22 o'clock. So, in the morning, late morning, late afternoon and evening these shopping streets clearly have high volumes. Contrary to that, a very low volume was observed during the hours between 13 and 17 o'clock, when the streets were used only for travel and not for shopping, since most shops are closed at this time. The open time in shopping malls extends from 8 am to 12 am. Therefore, the af-

ternoon period witnessed a considerable car volume. The air-conditioned atmosphere in shopping malls is an influencing factor. The peak of car volume, namely the visitors, remains in the period after five pm.

Daily cycle of the absolute vehicle volume in As-seeb, Al-Khoud and shopping malls

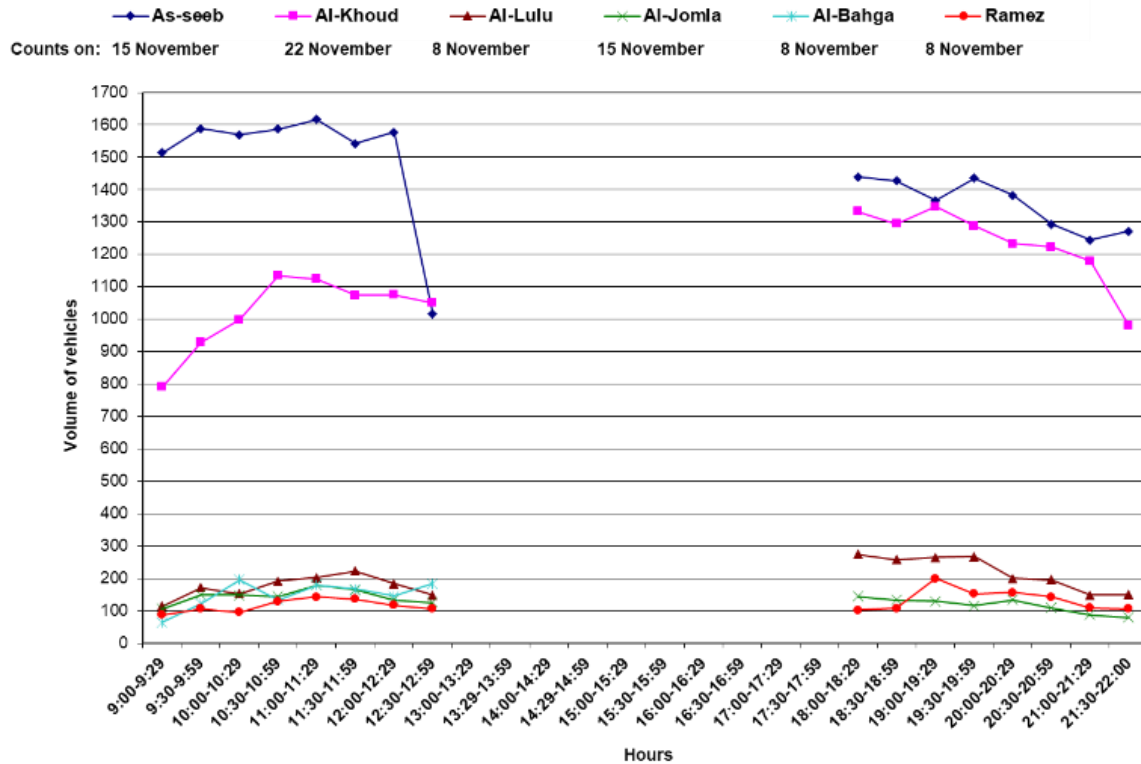


Fig. 9: Daily cycle of the absolute car volume in As-Seeb, Al-Khoud and shopping malls (2018)

Because the weekend in Oman is on Thursday and Friday, the morning period on these two days experienced a large movement of visitors' cars. It was on par with the quantity in the evening period. This is shown in Figure 4, where the field study was conducted on the Thursdays of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2018, which was a day of rest from work, schools and universities. The volumes of vehicles in the markets of As-Seeb, Al-Khoud and in shopping malls are almost equal in the morning and the evening periods. Unfortunately, it should be mentioned, a count of car volume was not easy because, it was difficult to separate between the visitors' cars who visited the market for shopping and those using the streets for commuter traffic. The volume of vehicles in the markets of As-Seeb in the morning period was relatively high, where people come to purchase fresh goods from the weekend market. Such goods are not available in the market of Al-Khoud, so the volume of cars in the morning period was relatively lower. The volume of vehicles in shopping malls is almost equal in the morning and the evening periods.

### 7.6 The favourite day to do shopping

Linking the results of this Figure with the responses from interviews to the question; what is your favourite day to do shopping? We find that 33.4% of the sample of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud prefer to go shopping on Thursday or Friday (the weekend in Oman), and 11.4% prefer to shop on Wednesday; that means nearly half of the respondents (44.9%) prefer shopping on these three days. The responses of the shopping malls' sample are no different from that, where 47.2% of the respondents prefer shopping on, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. It seems that it is a global phenomenon, shopping on the weekend.

The clear difference shows in a proportion of respondents who shop every day, shown in the sample of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud at about 10.4%, while in a sample of shopping malls only 1.5%. The reason for this: in addition, that As-Seeb and Al-Khoud are commercial areas, they include considerable residential quarters, so the residents can purchase some of the goods every day without using cars. They profit from an advantage of spatial proximity and juxtaposition of these two markets. Nearly one fifth of the two samples do not have a determined day for shopping.

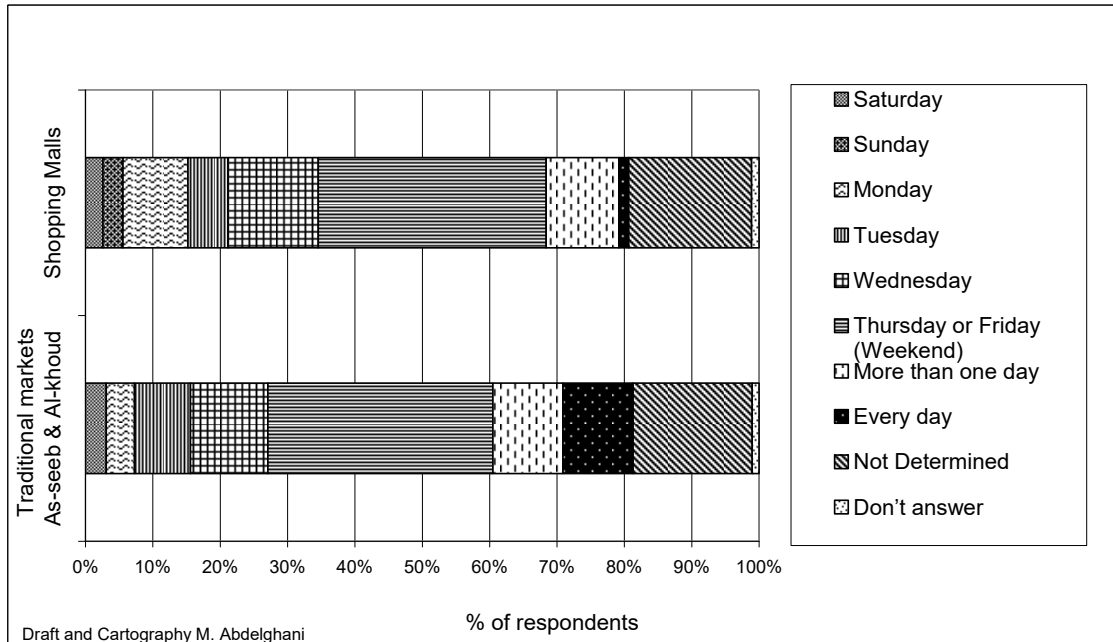


Fig. 10: The favourite day to do shopping

### 7.7 Preferred time for shopping

As already mentioned, the shops in the As-Seeb and Al-Khoud markets close in the afternoon from one until five o'clock, and the streets naturally are not air-conditioned. On the other hand, shopping malls operate continuously from eight am until midnight, and the buildings are characterized by a pleasant environment and central air conditioning, which makes the atmosphere within acceptable and enjoyable, especially in the summer. These characteristics impact people's attitudes regarding their shopping time. The study revealed that 20.5% of interviewees in shopping malls

also preferred to shop at the period from one to five pm, while that percentage, in the sample of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud is about 8.3%. Some shops, such as pharmacies and restaurants in both markets are still open during the afternoon. 15.6% of respondents, in shopping malls preferred to shop in the morning, before one pm, while the proportion in the sample of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud is about 8.3%. By contrast, the proportion of respondents that goes shopping in the evening, after five pm, is 63.2%, in the sample of shopping malls, while it clearly rises in the sample of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud, up to 77.1% (see Fig. 11).

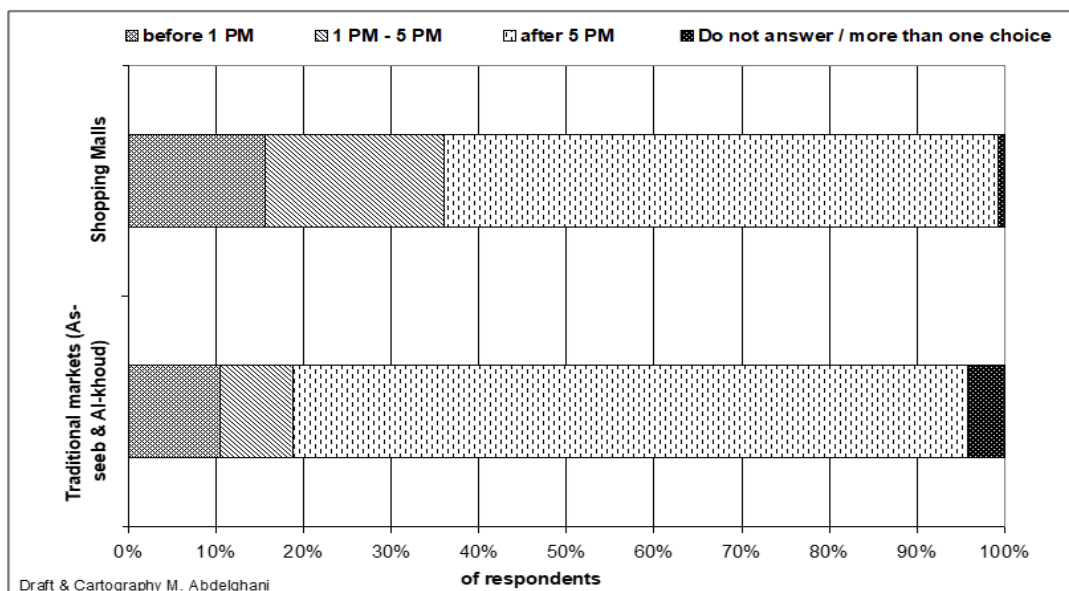


Fig. 11: Preferred time for shopping

## 7.8 Area of Influence of traditional markets and shopping malls

The area of influence is a good indicator in measuring the importance of the market or business district, and their position within the composite retail trading system.

In our questionnaire, we needed to take into account, the permanent resident status of respondents. In addition to the large number of respondents who had a permanent residence in

As-Seeb or in other districts of Muscat, there were some respondents who had temporary residence there during the workdays, due to their work or study, and go back to their home province at the weekend. Some appeared in the sample from provinces far away from Muscat, such as from Salalah. Many of them were interested in doing a large shopping from shopping malls and the market of As-Seeb, especially on Wednesday evening, before they travelled back to their families on Thursday afternoon. They were keen to purchase a variety of goods and commodities like groceries, which cover the needs of their family for a week or more. There were many cases in the research that referred to this. In this context, we can talk about the influential area of shopping malls and markets.

The movement of shoppers from faraway provinces to shopping malls increases greatly on the weekend of

each month when people get their salaries. Then, they come to do the main shopping for the month, called (Al-Azba) in the Omani dialect. People often combine their visit of shopping malls, such as Muscat City Center, or Lulu with a visit to traditional markets, such as As-Seeb or Al-Khoud.

## Area of influence of the traditional markets of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud

About 63% of respondents, who were interviewed, lived in residential neighborhoods and districts in wilayat As-Seeb. 6.5% lived in wilayat Al-rustaq in the Batinah region, and 5.4% came from wilayat Abri in the north of the Sultanate. 2.15% came from Nizwa, with the same percentage for wilayat Jalan Bani Bu Ali and wilayat Mudhaibi. The area of influence of both markets extended far, to include a considerable number of wilayat. They attract visitors and customers from wilayat: Sohar, Khasab, Buraimi, Samail, Ibra, Dimaa Aloutaiien, Bidya, Alkabil, Al-hamraa, Sur, Salalah, but only by a small proportion (1% for each wilayat). Numerically, the area of influence of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud includes 20 wilayat, regardless of the relative importance of them. By comparing the area of influence of the As-Seeb market with that of Al-Khoud, it has illustrated the great importance of As-Seeb, as is shown by the considerable extent of its influence area (Fig. 12, Fig. 13 & Fig. 14).

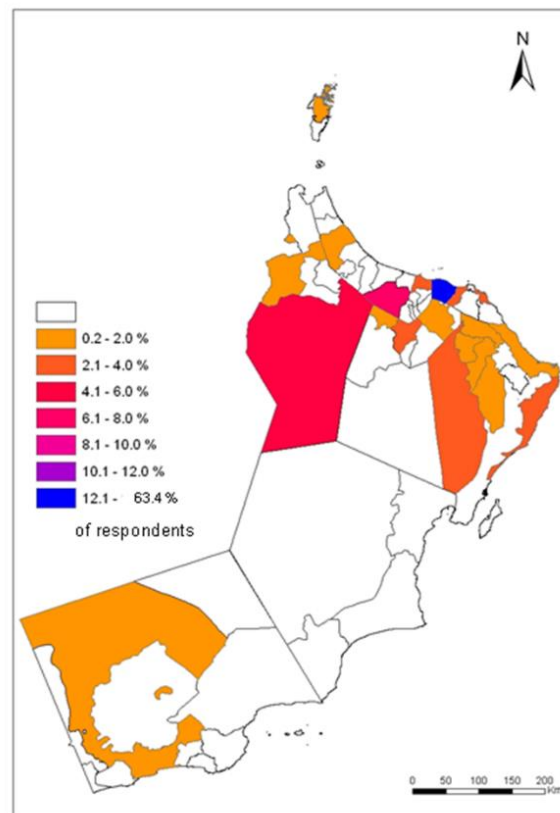
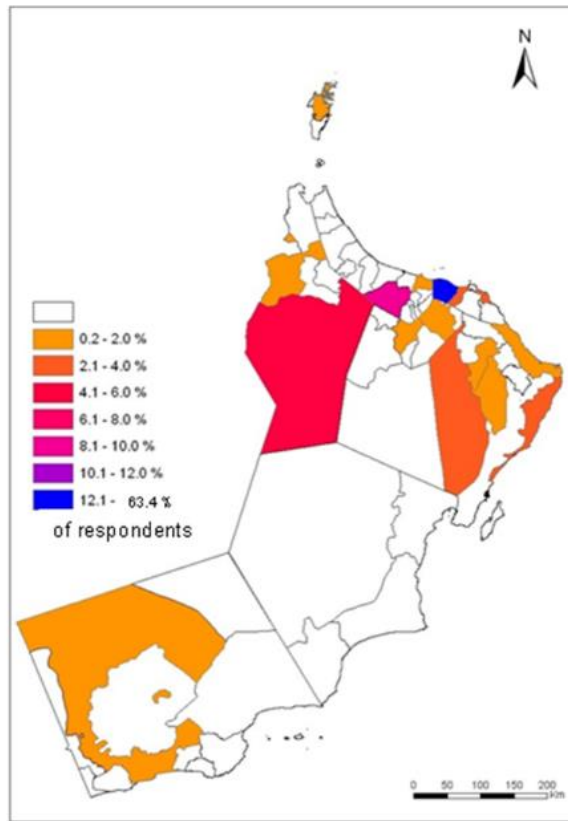


Fig. 12: Area of influence of traditional markets As-Seeb and Al-Khoud



Do not depend on the map of political and administrative boundaries

Fig. 13: Area of influence of As-Seeb market

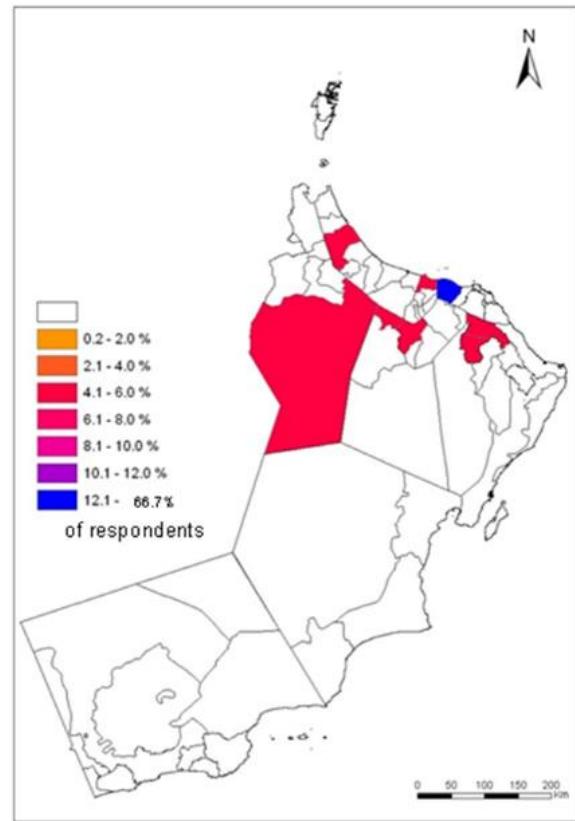


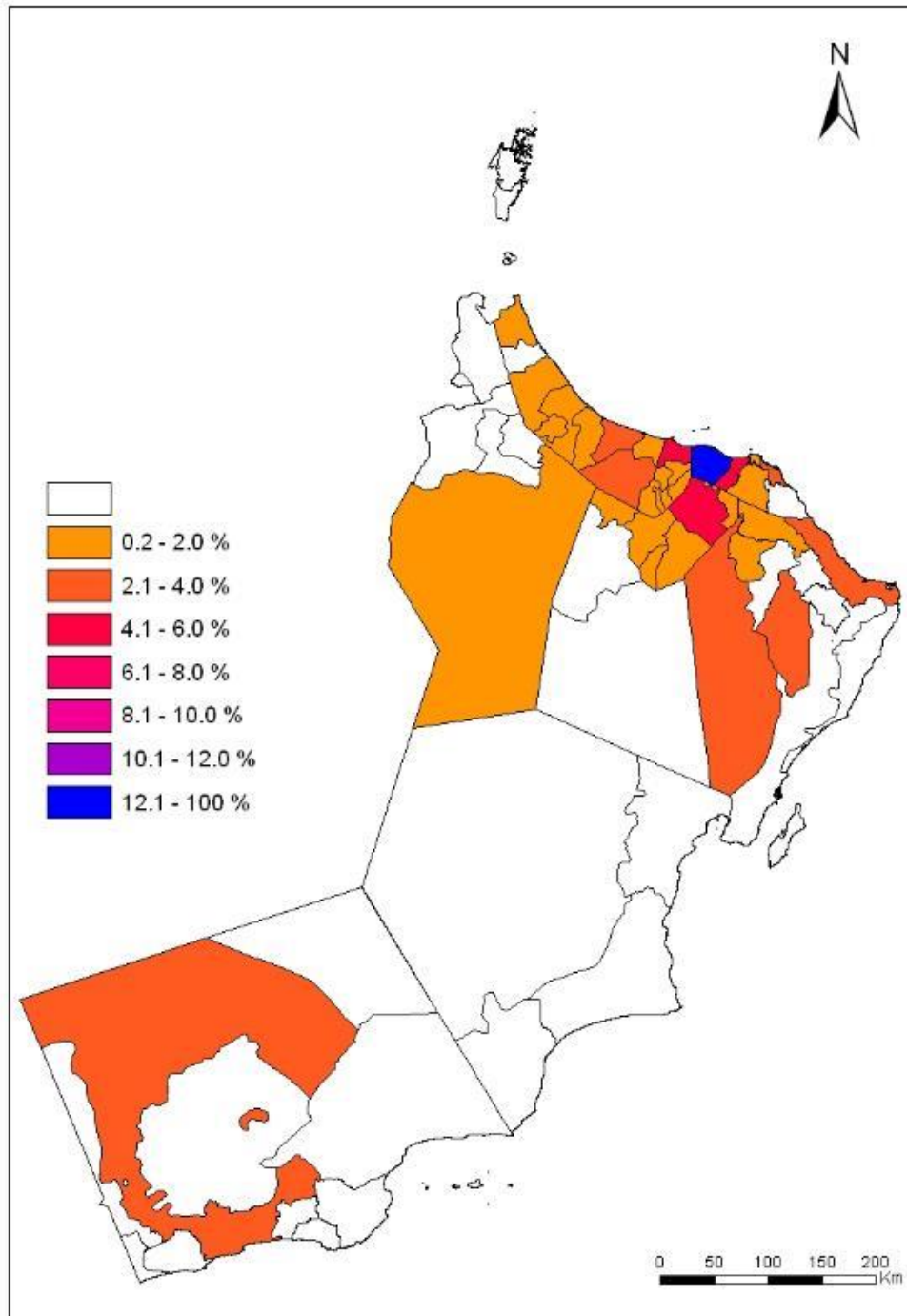
Fig. 14: Area of influence of Al-Khoud market

### Area of influence of shopping malls

Taking into account the total samples studied, in the four shopping malls, the area of influence for them is greater than that of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud together. It is expanded to include 30 wilayats. About half of respondents came from different neighbourhoods and districts in wilayat As-Seeb. 4.8% came from wilayat Bawshar, in the governorate of Muscat, with the same percentage for both wilayats, Barka and Samail. By taking into consideration that the markets of As-Seeb and Al-Khoud and the four shopping malls, Al- Lulu, Al-Bahja, Al-Jomla and Ramez, are all located administratively, within wilayat As-Seeb., and if we can draw the catchment area of those markets and shopping malls together (which includes 30 wilayats, numerically), it becomes clear how far wilayat As-Seeb carries a significant weight in the retail trading sector, not only in the capital area of Muscat, but rather at the level of the entire country. As-Seeb has become a strong competitor to the markets which were most famous in the past like Matrah and Muscat. This is a significant indicator for restructuring and regionalization of the retail trade in Oman. I expect that the retail catchment area of wilayat As-Seeb will be much larger, if we can do our

research at Muscat City Center and conduct some interviews there.

As is evident from the data of the questionnaire, shopping malls attract a large number of customers from other regions away from greater Muscat, so their impact on small retail trade in villages of the other regions is greater than their impact on traditional retail in the city of Muscat. This is reported by many respondents. The traditional markets in the capital have developed so as to enable them to continue their activity, while small shops in the villages could not do that. In a previous study of the author, it has been clarified that the shopping centers were able to attract many customers, especially in specific sectors of retail trade, the most important was the grocery, fashion, cosmetics and make-up, and electrical appliances. While traditional markets continue to be important in other types of retail trade, including local food, traditional clothing, gold and jewelry (see Abdelghani, 2013). Shopping centers offer a wide range of attractions for customers which are not available in traditional markets. This can be illustrated in the following quotations from the interviews.



Do not depend on the map of political and administrative boundaries

Fig. 15: Area of influence of shopping malls

*“Shopping malls have features that are not available in traditional markets. The malls have special offers and drawings. Traditional markets do not offer this. In the shopping malls there are signboards to guide the shopper. In the traditional markets these are not available. Malls have air conditioners that make us feel comfortable. There are no air conditioners when shopping in traditional markets. Especially in the summer, people prefer to shop at night to escape the intense heat during the day. In shopping malls, shopping carts are*

*available for shopping, and this is not available in traditional markets. There is an excellent feature of malls, in that there are security personnel, but in the markets, there are no security people. In addition, shopping malls have an information center, in case a child is lost. Traditional markets do not have an information center (32-year-old female respondent).*

*“People are looking for convenience and saving time without having to resort to too many places to buy their*

requirements. Shopping malls provide all supplies and goods which are needed by each individual” (27-year-old male respondent).

## 8. Conclusion

The change in retail trade patterns is a global phenomenon, accrued in many cities around the world. In the case of the Arabian Gulf cities, the change is rapid and clear. Several factors have led to this change. The most important being the continuous population increase, the high percentage of expatriates, high urbanization rates and high purchasing power of the population, as well as globalization which has led to the transfer of capital and consumption patterns to those countries.

The study discussed the change in retail trade patterns in the capital city of Muscat and provided some components which contributed to that change:

- Establishment of new markets and retail streets in conjunction with the continuous urban sprawl of Muscat City to meet the growing needs of the population
- Development of existing old markets and retail streets
- Establishment of a large number of shopping centers/Malls which are characterized by international brands and are not only places for shopping, but also places of entertainment and leisure
- The emergence of the competition between traditional markets and shopping centers for attracting customers
- continually changes in land use patterns of retail streets and malls for adapting with the market economy and new capitalism as well as to meet the changing demands of customers. This variation of land use is according to the nature and activity of the markets.
- The markets and shopping centers in Muscat are able to attract customers from distant regions in Oman, as demonstrated by the catchment area.
- changes in behavior of customers as a result of appearance of the new retail trade areas and shopping centers and transfer of a global consumption behavior to this region.
- One of the direct economic consequences of this exogenous development is the degradation of the old markets, Souqs, in Muscat and other Omani cities. As a result, governmental planning authorities and institutions have launched urgent studies and research to determine ways to improve their status and ensure their survival. Similar attention should be given to older corner shops that suffer from the competition from the new global hypermarkets.

All of this evidence undoubtedly confirms that there are new trends and patterns of retail trade in Muscat which could apply to all Gulf Arab cities.

## Future proposals for research in the retail trade industry

The retail trade industry is constantly evolving, and there is a need for ongoing research to support its continued growth and development. Some areas of future research in the retail trade industry include:

- Artificial intelligence: Research in this area will focus on using these technologies to improve the shopping experience for customers, including providing personalized product recommendations, streamlining the checkout process, and optimizing inventory management.
- Customers behavior: Research in this area will aim to better understand customers behavior, preferences.
- Sustainability: As consumers become more conscious of the impact of their shopping habits on the environment, there is a growing need for research in the area of sustainability in the retail trade.
- Omnichannel retail: Research in this area will focus on improving the omnichannel shopping experience for customers, including improving the integration of online and in-store shopping experiences.
- Blockchain: Research in this area will focus on using blockchain technology to improve supply chain transparency, reduce fraud and counterfeiting, and increase efficiency in the retail trade industry.
- These areas of research will help the retail trade industry to continue to evolve and meet the changing needs and demands of customers, as well as support its growth and development.

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