

Comparison Between Traditional and Modern Architectural Identity

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ABSTRACT : Many Iraqi cities are losing their character and becoming more ambiguous. Basra is the second main city in Iraq after the capital Baghdad; it is the most important economic, cultural, touristic city in Iraq. A city distinguished by its architectural style and identity. However, this identity was threatened many times by external and internal factors leading to distortion or obliteration of the city such as a colonial influence in the early 20th century, modernity movement, policies of old governments, and the three recent wars in 1980, 1991, 2003, have led to a significant effect on society and demography of the city. After 2003, many of the investment companies in different sectors entered Basra city to carry out different projects. These companies adopted foreign, alien designs, which reflect their ideological culture. However, it was far from a city spirit, didn't respect the city's history and identity, and didn't care for the culture and traditions of the city. The aim of the paper is to justify the need for an urban design strategy framework that should guide authorities and professionals for maintaining architectural identity in Iraqi cities while enabling modernization. It adopts the case study research with comparative analysis to measure the influence of modernity on the Basra city identity. The findings achieved in the research so far illustrate that the global modern architecture has played an important role in the transformation of the Basra city identity. Therefore, there is a need for the development of an urban design strategy framework to produce urban design solutions that should consider maintaining identity while enabling modernization.

KEYWORDS Traditional Architectural, Modern Architectural, Baghdad Architectural.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Architectural identity issue has become a real global concern, especially in the last three decades. Many cities have started losing their character and becoming more and more ambiguous. The identity is the mixture of similarities and differences, which generates a sense of distinctiveness for the identity of individuals, groups, and societies by distinguishing themselves from others. Identity is the basis for sense of belonging; it is the way that people could associate themselves as member of communities and groups (Adam, 2012).

Architecture is part of the identity phenomenon so the impacts of changes in buildings and places on communities are critical to maintain the identity. Architectural identity is a cultural phenomenon that could help integrate the social life progression and dialogue from past to the future (Humeyra, 2012). Architectural identity formation could be achieved through interaction between many historical collective factors.

Change in modernity is very common. Hence, change is the human intervention to shift the mores of cultural structure (Heynen, 2000) and architecture is also cultural structure. Subsequently, architectural identity is influenced by this change. There are two types of architectural changes; the first is preservation changes which could be leading to the stability of phenomena generation and, the second type destructive changes which are trying to Change in modernity is very common. Hence, change is the human intervention to shift the mores of cultural structure (Heynen, 2000) and architecture is also cultural structure. Subsequently, architectural identity is influenced by this change. There are two types of architectural changes; the first is preservation changes which could be leading to the stability of phenomena generation and, the second type destructive changes which are trying to generate new types of phenomena (Jorge and Nuno, 2012). As Amos Rapoport (1999) says that it is not logical after modern developments if we revive the traditional systems because the originality will be lost or if we full change toward contemporary systems so the result will be a huge waste for communities. Therefore, the hybrid case of communities will continue, as a mixture of traditional and contemporary systems, it will be close to a traditional image sometimes while other times will be closer to a

modern image. Frampton (1987) mentioned that critical self-consciousness which involves individuals and groups who borrows from other cultures, so they try dismantling, understanding and adapting with the new, according to their conceptualization and the values systematic. It is a natural issue for communities that seek to conserve their identity. Thus, when searching for architectural identity, one should expect to find several overlapping identities.

II. ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY

Architecture is phenomena of mixing of art and emotions; it is a harmonies issue and creating the “pure spirit” (Vogler, 2006). It is a one of the cultural productions but the problem that it is a tangible product while others are not, in addition it's more stable and remains than the others, especially when the culture changes, which give architecture the ability to express history. Because of that there is a profound interconnection between identity and cultural meaning of the places, so it not easy to measure it. According to Thompson, (1996) architecture is the best way to give identity for people and cities because it describes and reflects the lifestyle for local communities. Determination of architectural identity is not only done by architect, but rather, many others local factors shared by the community in the formation and design process such as the socio-cultural interpretation of the built form by the local people in addition to the built environment contextual conditions. The formation of identity process always builds on previous symbolic images or source of inspiration and never starting from scratch, these are considered as the bedrock of identity formation.

Currently there are two techniques to maintain the local identity in modern architecture, which are the spirit of place and symbolic identity. Spirit of place is related to site- specific design while the symbolic identity is about the architects' personal discovery of local symbolism. Both of them can be used either independent or in mixture (Robert Adam, 2012).

Sometimes, special skills of new architectural design process could introduce a new identity, while at another time an ancient identity which was lost but still strong in the place memory may be recovered through the design process; memory of place may be used by new architecture as a starting point to develop a new identity by introducing new functions. Develop and transform the symbols of the built environment by architects contribute to the formation of the identity for people and communities. So, they have a unique responsibility to do that (Robert Adam, 2012).

The two main references that could be used in architecture to form identity: These are time and space. Time is connected to history while space connected to geography. Time is associated with the concept of tradition and appears as rooted from the past while space provides the physical construction assets that reflect the contextual background of identity. However, the claim today is to make design from a global perspective with no or little consideration of local values and identity Figure 1.

III. MODERNITY IN ARCHITECTURE

Modernity is the period that expresses historical transformation by linking the historical events, people and ideas through a number of disciplines, periods and locations to build the present meaning (Simon, 2005). It is the movement that gives a particular quality for the present to distinguish it from the past which point the way to the future (Berman 1994). Modernity is a break with traditions and rejects all the heritage of the past. It may also mean the process of selecting elements of other civilizations or cultures, which are different from them. For Habermas modernity is a civilized phenomenon has a numerous forms and logical context with several meanings (Afaya, 1998).

According to Habermas, the Modernization theory is modern forms analysis and assessment in social life. He described that modernity is more than a period. It indicates to the set of different conditions such as social, political, cultural and psychological, which are shaped through historical events (Finlayson, 2005).

In architecture, modernism is a term, which describes any new work trying to distort the previous relations and rules of traditions (Stern, 2009), while (Berman, 1994) explains modernity as a non-continuation or alteration of past. It's a new style of power, which could achieve as a new form of human self-conscience. Ibelings (1998) clarifies that the aim of the new modernity is to use separate buildings programs, out of time and place by using technology of globalization in order to change, transform and built an appropriate environment, which reject a cultural background.

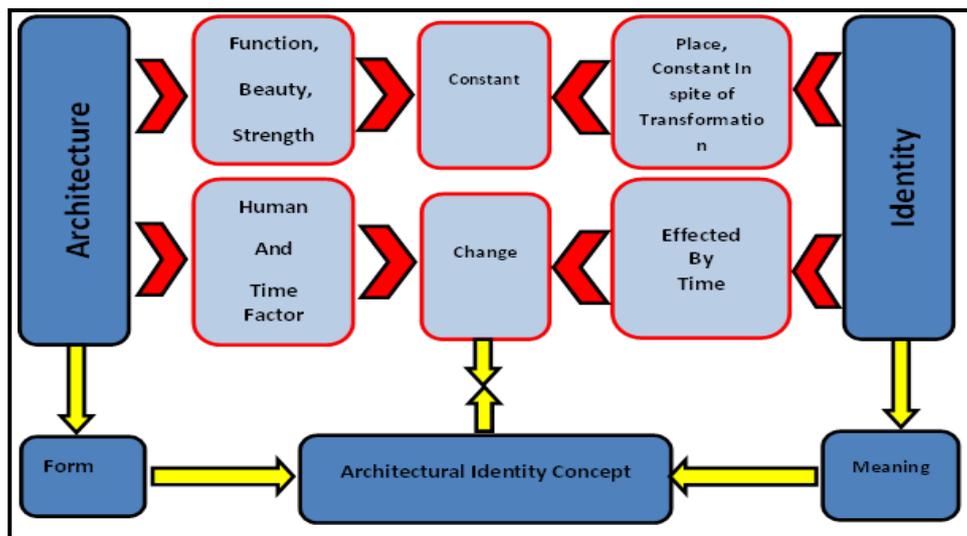


Fig.1. Relation between identity and architecture (Time and Place)



Fig.2. Modern Architecture in Basra City (Mnawi Basha Hotel)

IV. THE CASE STUDY: BASRA CITY

Basra chosen as an appropriate target for this study because of the following points:

- Historically, Basra is the first city established by Muslims outside the Arabian Peninsula, thus it owns an important historical character making it more significant with a distinct civilization and heritage.
- Basra is currently classified as the second Iraqi city after the capital Baghdad, in terms of population and the importance.
- Economically, Basra is the economic capital of Iraq because it contains a multiple fortune; it is a richest oil city in Iraq and one of the richest cities worldwide for oil production too, and this led to:
 - The presence of oil and spread of oil fields around the town influenced on land use plan of the city, where there is a many forbidden areas and other reserved, this led to restricting the expansion of the city, at the same time, the large population growth that happened during this period has created an enormous momentum in the old city center. This influences on city planning and its capacity, thus impact on the traditional city identity.
 - The oil presence is considered an important attraction factor for workers, therefore the city suffered intense immigration from other regions, especially neighboring regions, to obtain job opportunities, and this in turn has led to a change in the habits and traditions of society, as well as social relations, this led to a social transformation and then to the transformation the architectural identity of the City.

- Basra is the only Iraqi port of the Arabian Gulf. Thus, as with other coastal cities, it's always in the case of direct contact and on-going interaction with other civilizations through friction with the foreign community it affects and is affected by others.
- The strategic site of the city, where it is a border town with three countries that has led to cross-pollination between Basra society and the society of other neighboring communities of habits, traditions and conventions, which in turn has been reflected in social, cultural and architectural city identity.
- Basra city is considered as a magnet for tourists, because it contains historical monuments, in addition to the attractive tourist areas with varied topographical regions, which have attracted visitors and tourists to city. Therefore, the identity of the city has a great role to play in enriching this aspect.
- Frequent wars have plagued the city, starting from the First World War to the Second World War and concomitant of foreign occupation, in addition to the three last wars which are clearly reflected in architecture, culture, demographic and social life of the city, all of which have had a dangerous impact on the social, cultural and architectural identity of Basra.
- Multiple and large numbers of investment companies and projects, which entered the city after 2003, especially foreign companies. They often do not respect and don't care for the privacy and identity of the city. Projects with alienated kind and design styles, which are far beyond the spirit of the city and do not reflect cultural identity. Based on all of the above, Basra is considered as a commercial, national, economical, artistic and historical center. In addition, the pluralism of the city makes it a gathering place for multiple cultural, social and architectural identities, which makes the identity of the city threatened and unclear. Furthermore, it requires further research and study.

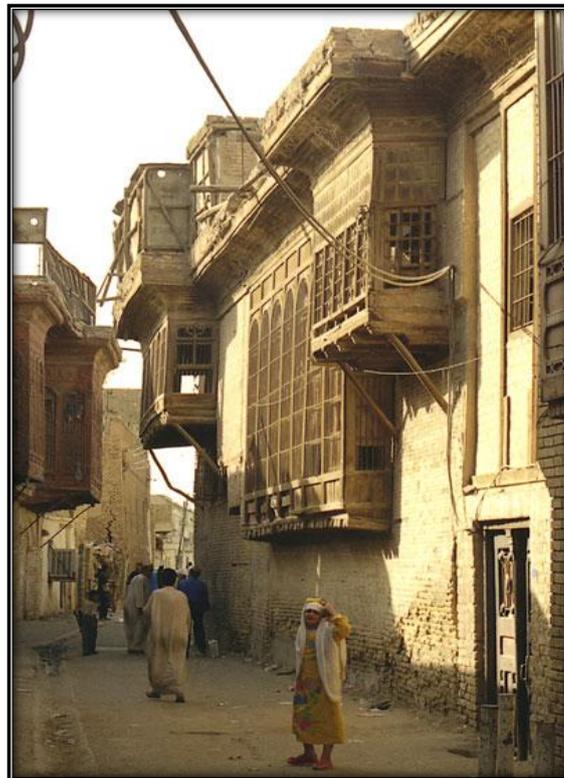


Fig. 1. Traditional neighbourhood in the Iraqi cities

V. CITY IDENTITY IN URBAN DESIGN PRACTICE IN IRAQ

Since the early of past century, most Middle East countries started use modern architecture while ignoring the local architectural identity. Architectural identity could be as a clear tool for political system of any country. The western colonization power had forced the Middle East countries during the colonization period to adopt their cultures and traditions (Al-Sultany, 1982). During the past century, many factors such as colonial, technology development, new materials of building and construction, oil discovery and westernized lifestyle had a major impact on Iraqi cities identity. The discovery of oil in Iraq in 1927 was one of these major transitions, which led to huge transformation in all life aspects such as economic, social, cultural, and architectural. These factors resulted in creation of a modern architectural identity, not related to the traditional, cultural and local built environment and allowed intrusion of foreign traditions without any filtration.

Modernity in Iraq has been a very significant issue of urban development. The contrast between modernity and local traditions and values in the second half of the 20th century became a clear truth in the social life of most Middle East cities. Loss of local identity and spiritless modern development became the main characteristics of the cities.

Wilson, the first British colonial architect named in Iraq as the head of the Public Works Department, He spoke of “the tremendous influence that architecture can have on public life generally but especially on education. Iraq has been the home of a certain style of architecture, which has influenced the rest of the civilized world. However, present circumstances need a new style of building. It is hoped that it will integrate the best of the traditional decorative features. It is also intended to use natural building materials available in the country, so that what is built may truly become an Arab Renaissance” (Caecilia, 2006).

The lack of public awareness was the main reason led to transformation, which were unconsciously moving inside society and changing the local built environment, and consideration of transformation as a kind of liberation form rather than as a problematic one. The rush towards modernization without filtering process was a problem more dangerous than modernization itself. The full idea of architecture with identity will be achieved when the modernity viewpoint towards traditions and past is changing because it is considered all of the historical and traditional set of values should be retired. Therefore, since 1970 most architects around the world have found that it was crucial blunder since their bases of architecture were formed for half of the century and then they began to compensate it by taking inverse steps (Manzoor, 1989).

Generally, all Iraqi cities, and especially Basra, there hasn't been enough studies on identity and architecture. However, Basra and other cities have been suffering considerable social, economic, and cultural change and dramatic transformation in the architecture and urban built environment (Ali, 1988). Modernization of the city has not given enough attention of local environmental factors such as social, traditions, habits, values, climate and characteristics of the place. In addition to ignoring the history of the city, the three wars in Iraq that were in 1980, 1991 and 2003 should be seen as the dramatic historical incidents, which influenced on Basra city culturally, socially and architecturally. All these led to loss of the local identity of the city. Due to the lack of studies that deals with the architectural identity of Basra (Bazi, 1989), many attempts of architects have been failed to acquire positive impact on the local identity.

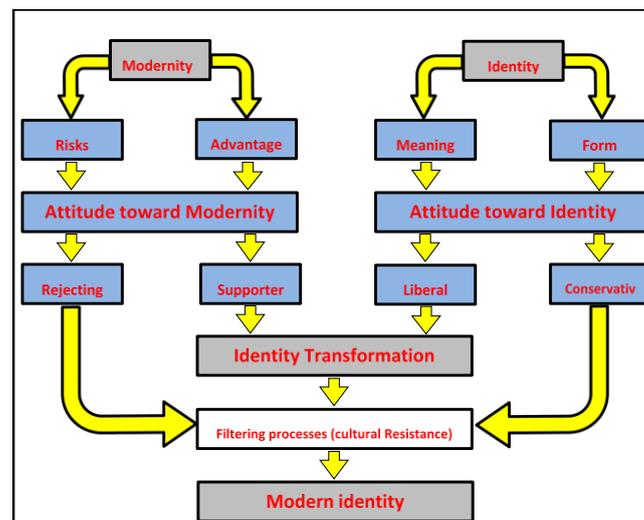


Fig. 2. Identity Transformation in the Iraqi Environment

VI. CHALLENGE OF BASRA CITY ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY

Basra is a city distinguished by its architectural style and identity, which has made and developed over the time (Bazi, 1989). However, this identity is now prone to deterioration and its unique style prone to extinction. This is Because of the lack of studies to clarify the characteristics of architectural identity in the traditional architecture of the city and benefit for the future design to maintain city architectural identity.

Basra's identity was formed by history, tradition, habits, topography and the climate of the city. In addition to features of Arabic Islamic cities, the cross-pollination with other civilizations through trade or colonial, which has given the city a particular feature that has distinguished it from other cities (Ali, 1988), this identity was threatened many times by external and internal factors at certain times with certain circumstances to transform, distort or obliterate or blunt it, firstly by Ottoman period, British colonization, modernity, and finally globalization. In addition, there are many internal factors such as the policies of previous governments, and the three recent main wars in 1980, 1991, 2003, which led to a significant effect on society and demography of the

city. As well as this disappearance, most of the architectural city landmarks were lost due to the dereliction and destruction that occurred during war periods, Figure 5.

After 2003 many investment companies entered Basra city with a variety of disciplines to carry out different projects in various aspects. These companies adopted foreign, alien designs, which reflect their ideological culture. However, it was far from the city's spirit and did not respect the city's history and identity. Moreover, it did not care for the culture and traditions of the city, which represents a real dangerous threat for the architectural city identity in particular, and culture identity in general. Because of that, modernity and globalization are necessary in present times. Hence, all people and cities worldwide cannot dispense it. Because Basra city is in significant need of rebuilding and urban regeneration projects especially after the destruction that happened in the city during the wars periods, it is often a necessity after major war when rebuilding a city to focus on new development. Therefore, there is a need to have a framework of guideline that can be utilized in current and future design considering local identity while enabling modernization.



Fig. 3. Neglect of Architectural Identity in Iraqi Built Environment

VII. TRANSFORMATION OF ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY IN IRAQ

The Arab community was suffering from civilizational isolation, then opened up for the world after the First World War, and connected with different civilizations. This impacted on the overall existing civilization and architecture in particular, as a huge number of imported civilization elements had affected the overall architectural character (Makiya, 1982). Connection, and the large number of the newly acquired elements, led to dominate a clear impact on this civilization, especially in architecture, which was the main reason for transformation to modernity that broadly and clearly used in Arabic culture. This was gradually changed to focus on traditional building of the past and was mixed with modern design, which was strange for the local identity, architectural characteristics, cultural heritage, and historical roots. The rationality of modernity failed to protect the old, so mingled with it (Al-Naem, 2001). There were three trends for Western culture's influence on the Arab architectural region styles, these are explained below:

- Many of the Arabic people have been affected by Western thought, since the artistic imagination succeeded to persuading Arab community, that the modern classic Western style is an integral part of the Arabic culture.
- The second trend had a significant impact for the first architects, who were aware of the negative impact of modernity on the Arab city urban fabric, which focused on the traditional fabric. With the influence of this belief, the traditional build was the essential reason for the spread of identity when they refused public architecture.
- Another group of Arab architects started to refuse this mechanism, which involved mixing between their communities and Western ideas. It was necessary to introduce traditional Architecture in a modern movement, which tried to distinguish parts of the city such as the old places, museums, and public squares, in order to associate the people with originality (Jadraji, 1995).

Iraqi urban environment was also affected by this foreign intellect during the British occupation, the output of architectural identity had been influenced at an urban level according to civilization trends, which imported and

used new technologies in construction. Civilizations overlap creates opportunities for the emergence of thought trends on an architectural output level as a reaction to this overlap (Al-Sultany, 1982).

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The previous available studies about Basra city could be classified as historical, descriptive, and exploratory studies, which were not analytically useful studies to clarify characteristics of architectural city identity so that they cannot be used in urban design applications on the field. It is, therefore, essential that any future development should be informed by an understanding of these problems and shortcomings. The motivation of conducting the studies on the traditional architectural identity and assessment of its characteristics is to find the way to transfer or recreate the useful logical principles in order to maintain local identity. This is not done by the blind imitation and copy of its appearance, but through the conscious and deep understanding of esoteric principles of identity. Therefore, there is a vital need to develop a framework to guide professionals in producing urban design solutions, which will consider maintaining identity while enabling modernization. This framework should be based on i) understanding the concept of identity in architecture, ii) aspects of environmental and social, cultural identity, such as privacy, safety, belonging, and place memory and iii) analyzing traditional and contemporary identity. Studying architectural identity of different nations through history can provide us with important lessons that can be useful to develop the general knowledge of architecture and practice that make architectural identity a free human right for all nations on this planet. Historical events show that changing the traditional architecture to the modern architecture has been influenced directly by the elites and less by the common majorities.

During this process, present architectural identity has shifted its meaning from being a reflection of the local milieu to abstract reflections of distinct movements using lines, colors, materials, shapes, forms and masses as elements to achieve their particular architectural identity. As a consequence, a large number of cities in the world have been transformed to scenes of crowded architectural identities.

Some contemporary cases such as Development of some central districts of Oslo can provide us with important lessons about how to consider architectural identity in present development projects by considering the local milieu through an open process. This means living cultural milieu gets an open possibility to mould and influence the applied architecture and urban design.

The radical global changes in many countries including the resent Arabic countries rise the necessity of changing the old established thinking and practice about architectural identity. It will require making architecture a real reflection of people's culture, needs and participation. We need adopt new ways of architectural education and practice that will consider the multiethnic realities and will adopt democratic and open decision making process.

The case study of Iraq shows that misusing local architectural identity can have negative consequences to the local culture, society, economy and environment of the entire country. The case study also shows that even local architects efforts to achieve modern local Iraqi architectural identity had failed because they used only one cultural heritage as source for their projects and ignored the reality that Iraq is composed of several cultures and each particular city has its distinguished architectural identity. The case study also shows that using star architects as elite group cannot justify ignoring local realities because Architecture is not Hollywood and architects are not Hollywood stars where users are considered as the audiences. Solving this conflict cannot be done without understanding how this problem is integrated in modern architectural knowledge and practice. Since this is a global phenomenon, we need global research and efforts in order to identify its global dimensions and their social, economic and cultural affects. All these efforts can be achieved and supported by real liberal architecture.

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