Contemporary Arab Architectural Trends and Heritage: Iraq as a Case Study

Prof. Dr. Awad Saad Hassan
Dean, College of Architecture and Planning, Sudan University of Science and Technology

Prof. Dr. Khalid Ali Elkhazen
Head of Interior Design Department, Sudan University of Science and Technology

Eng. Jeanan Moayad Abdullah
PhD studant, College of Fine and Applied Art, Sudan University of Science and Technology

Abstract

The rapid progress of technology and other factors have a severe impact on the characteristics of contemporary Arab Architecture. These factors led to chaos in Architectural production and loss of identity due to the Prominence of a two-way problematic problem. First, the return to traditional Architecture (Heritage) with its theoretical and applied values. Second, the western modernity (The disposal of the past). Third, the other current trends in Architecture, which appealed to the need for continuity of traditional heritage and linking it to the concepts of modernity at the same time. Hence the problem of the research is in the lack of clarity of the Architectural concepts, despite the multiplicity of Arab Architectural trends that seek to create contemporary Arab architecture. Besides, the absence of identity and the lack of clear orientation in the perception of heritage. The research aims to identify a mechanism to analyze the contemporary Arab Architectural reality, and the production of Architectural pioneers in Iraq as a case study by presenting the analysis of contemporary intellectual currents and their way of dealing with heritage. Further more, the evaluation of contemporary reality and its problems to reach conclusions, and recommendations that help lay the foundations for the future vision to build an Arab identity in contemporary Architecture.

Keywords: Contemporary Architectural Trends, Iraqi Architecture, Identity, Heritage, Modernity.

1. Introduction:

Architecture is a reflection of any civilization and the spirit of the times. The contemporary era of Arab Architecture has lost its most essential conditions for its success and its distinct identity, which lies in respecting the characteristics of space and time, regarding the capability in reflecting the common traditions, intellectual orientation, cultural values, living system, cultural history and spiritual values. Architectural trends have adopted the importance of heritage in contemporary Arab Art and Architecture, and other trends have influenced modern Western trends. On the other hand, some architectural trends have pointed to the need for integrating heritage with current Western trends.

These different approaches, which tried and try hard keeping up with modernity and had been influenced by Western production, defending the loss of heritage on the other hand, has been

presence and emerged in various Architectural outputs that led to the continuous loss of identity, in addition to other problematic which will be analyzed and evaluate in this research.

1.1   Research Problem

- The lack of clarity in the Intellectual construction of architecture despite the many Arab Architectural trends that seek to create contemporary Arab architecture.
- The absence of Architectural identity due to the lack of clear orientation, especially in the perception of heritage and how to deal with it.

2.1 Research Objectives:

- study Architectural trends of contemporary Arab in general and Iraqi as a case study, focusing on Architectural thought on which each trend based on, through analyzing their approach dealing with heritage and modernity.
- focus on the reality of contemporary Arab Architecture and its problems in presenting unique identity, and the causes of many other problematics in contemporary Arab architectural production.

3.1 Research Hypotheses:

- Architecture is a product of successive stages with integrated levels to reach satisfactory solutions in place and time.
- Arab architectural heritage is the product of an Arab man in the same place but different time, and Modern Western architecture is the product of a Western man at the same time but the difference in place.
- Identity is a natural product of an Architecture that belongs to the man in his special place and time.

4.1 Research Methodology:

- The research chose an analytical, descriptive approach in presenting contemporary Arab intellectual currents, and the contemporary Iraqi architectural trends (as a case study) by analyzing each of them according to their view to heritage and its impact on architectural production.
- The second phase of the research used the critical analytical approach in evaluating the reality and its problematics that revolve around innovation, identity, and technology of the contemporary Architecture.

5.1 Research Terminology

- **Heritage:** is all that man inherits from his past, whether it is a concept or practice, and includes all areas, including architecture.
- **Modernism:** Term includes every modern intellectual and material products, but the research indicated the term to express Western output (Architecture).
- **Contemporary:** includes intellectual and material production, including architecture, since the beginning of the twentieth century due to the beginning of intellectual currents and Arab architectural trends to the present.
- **Intellectual Currents:** is the multiplicity of opinions or attitudes towards a particular issue and has an impact on each, social and political life and thus on the various aspects of life including art and architecture.

- **Architectural Trends:** The intellectual and material contexts pursued by a group of architects influenced by certain intellectual currents.
- **Thought:** The tool or mechanism in the process of thinking.
- **Identity:** A set of unique and fundamental characteristic that characterize an existing Architecture in a certain place.

6.1 Research structure:

By defining the problem and objectives, the research deals with the topic structure as follows:
- Western contemporary architectural trends and the reason for their classification.
- Contemporary Arab intellectual currents and their classification.
- Contemporary Arab architectural trends in Iraq as a case study.
- Evaluation of the contemporary Arab architectural.
- Conclusions and recommendations.

2. Western contemporary architectural trends.

There are several classifications of modern western architectural trends and vary according to the reason of the rating scale. Some of them were discussed in the research as follows:
1.2 Collins' classification (1975) of modern architecture (1950-1750).
2.2 Udo Kultermann (1993) classification of twentieth-century architecture (1910 - 1970).
3.2 Philosophical Classification of Global Architecture Trends.
4.2 Leuthauser (2005) Classification of Contemporary Architecture (1784-1990).

3. Classification of Arab contemporary Arab intellectual currents

1.3 Classification of the Contemporary Arab Society of Social Researcher Boulos Khoury (1999)
2.3 Classification of intellectual currents according to their view of heritage.
A. The liberal current (rejecting heritage).
- The Arab Architectural approach that rejects heritage.
- Examples of Iraqi Architects who reject heritage (the West as a reference).
B- Salafi current (heritage as a reference).
- Salafi Architectural trend (heritage as reference).
- Examples of Iraqi Architects who depends on heritage as a reference.
C. The compromise currents.
- The compromise trends in Arab Architecture.
- Examples of Iraqi Architects in the trend of compromise.

4. Analysis of contemporary architecture

In this aspect, the contemporary Arab reality analyzed through the study of the internal and external problems that affected Arabs life, thoughts and currents in general.

5. Principles of identity in Architecture

The study focused on some intellectuals and architects who referred to the essence of identity in architecture.

6. Evaluation of Contemporary Arab Architecture in Iraq

Through the analysis of the Arab reality and contemporary architectural trends, the research found that there are several problematic points concentrated in each of the following:

1.6 Problematic of creativity

2.6 Problematic of Identity

3.6 Problematics of technology

7. Conclusions:

- Contemporary Arab architectural trends haven't been able to emerge from the cycle of "sense of difference" and the vast distance and deep gap between the Arab reality and the reality of progress, in both, heritage and the West.
- Contemporary architectural trends always oscillated between two extremes of the impossible equation. They aspire to achieve compatibility and integration between the two, which are entirely different, competing and conflicting under their belonging to a different time and place, and two different civilizational models: the authority of the Arab model of Islamic (heritage) and the authority of the modern Western model.
- Contemporary Arab thought within the three trends could not escape the circle of terminology by taking heritage as a symbol of originality and the West as a symbol of modernity.
- The error of introductions necessarily leads to the failure of the results. Using heritage as the concept of originality represents an early conclusion that any intellect, theory or practice would be authentic only by the following of heritage as a reference. As well as As well as, no product would be modern if it did not follow the traces of the West, which indicate that, terminology has become an obstacle to the construction of contemporary Arab architectural design.
- Contemporary Arab Architecture through its intellectual and practice reflects the prevailing general intellectual currents, which was synchronized in a sense, that it was a mirror for the era. The state of chaos and confusion witnessed by contemporary Arab Architecture indicates a state of confusion seen by the general reality of Contemporary Arab thought.
- The Arab Architecture within the current trends hasn't been able to reach its objectives and has remained individual architectural experiences.

8. Recommendations:

In order to establish the foundations for the future vision of identity in contemporary Arab Architecture, the research recommends:

- The necessity of self-understanding of the Arab mind in place and time, as the real starting point for every thought and trend.
- The study found that the evaluation of the future of Arab Architectural production should be the basis on the expression of the needs and desires of the Arab man in place and time, away from terminology, such as heritage and modernity, which become a burden that hinders the strategy of thinking. Such terms, as the case study shown, has led to increased confusion in understanding the Arab reality, concerning the contemporary intellect and practice by drowning in the legitimacy of terms.
- The identity in architecture determined by constructing an intellectual, architectural approach that accommodates and meets the requirements, needs, behaviors, and traditions of the Arabs today, respect to the specificity of the place (climate, terrain, available resources) and technology, to help to transform concepts to practice. Thus identity will be an inevitable result when access to solutions satisfactory to man in place and time.