Problems and Potentials of Promoting Vernacular Heritage to Regain Cultural Identity of Historic Cities: Insights from Bahrain

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Abstract

The rich vernacular architectural heritage of Bahrain has been subject to dilapidation as a result of rapid urbanization and its complex physical, social and economic dimensions. In fact, the two major cities of Muharraq and Manama have been undergoing profound changes facing serious challenges and problems threatening the fine organic traditional urban areas rich with vernacular settings. Large scale developments, high-rise buildings, shopping centers and infrastructure expansions, coupled with economic changes, have led to notable urban transformations. Undeniably, globalization has dominated all aspects of life with its clichés, challenges and potentials. In this situation, an important question is how could cultural identity be sustained in fast-transforming cities in Bahrain?

This paper focuses on sustaining the cultural identity of Manama and Muharaq. It employs a qualitative research method: lived-in, participatory observations. It examines the physical aspects and discusses a wide range of issues and their interrelations including appropriate land-use systems and building regulations, financial resources and incentives, education and heritage, as well as urban and architectural practices. It thus proposes a holistic approach integrating between the various scenarios of restoration, functional rehabilitation, in-fill and new developments. stakeholders' involvement and institutional developments.

The paper argues that the approach should filter between short-term solutions and far-sighted strategies, between private interests and public good, between market efficiency and social welfare, between bottom up approaches and top down ones, between physical development and heritage protection and between large scale and small-scale developments. It argues that, comprehensive policy measures must be taken focused on the possibilities of turning the 'wicked' challenges into 'potential' opportunities.

Keywords: Vernacular Settings, Architectural Heritage, Urban Identity, Urban Transformations, Bahrain.

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Introduction

In a fast urbanizing and globalizing world, the issue of city identity has become a matter of great concern. Alienation, animosity and visual pollution are typical characteristics of many urban areas today, and have different and serious implications on people and the environment. In fact, the emerging chaos of the cities has become intolerable and requires careful assessments of conservation strategies as well as 'modern' urban and architectural approaches - their invalidity and inefficiency. It is also evident that the issue of urban identity should not be treated only as a mere stylistic and nostalgic matter. On the contrary, it should be integrated in the heart of the processes which shape, manage and finance urban developments.

In this context, growing urban areas, especially in the Gulf in countries such as Bahrain, have become arenas of many contradictory forces associated with the growth of commercialism and attitudes of consumption. They are subject to architectural fashions and professional egoism, and many misconceptions regarding progress and modernization. Some of these values appear to transform cities into mere functional spaces with material values. Undeniably, they have overtaken the local genuine forces that used to shape the traditional settlements. Therefore, many modern cities stand in isolation from their heritage and culture and, in many cases, function against the very grains of that culture. This discontinuity with tradition is likely to cause an identity crisis, disorienting people and creating dehumanizing cities loaded with enormous social, economic, physical and environmental problems. Hahn & Simonis describe these problems as follows:

> "Cities have become a symbol for and a product of the careless treatment of scare and sensitive environmental goods. …. Cities have thus become a symbol for the neglect of organic, cultural traditions and the destruction of the identity of places. Respect of traditions and factors specific to certain places is, however, of highest importance for a symbiotic development of the human environment relationship. As individual characteristics are different so it should be with cities, with urban planning."
>
> Hahn & Simonis, 1991:199

Indeed, as cities become more complex and obscure, signs and exhibits grow larger while the feelings of strangeness minimizes people's self-esteem and sense of potential fostering attitudes of negativity and defeatism. In these contexts, identity becomes 'bizarreness of uniqueness' manifested in colour, texture, shape and location depending on visibility and impact. It reflects different sets of values from the traditional local ones; buildings and spaces become symbols for economic and political power, importance and status, achievement and wealth, ours and theirs, and finally displays the disparities between the poor and the rich. Unfortunately, the pre-requisites are visibility and surprise; the creation of impact and a distinct image in an observer's mind for capturing his attention. Unsurprisingly, this goes even to the extent of borrowing symbols and motifs from earlier periods or from other cultures in order to legitimize the imposed new social and physical order.

In Bahrain, traditional cities have been experiencing different stages and developments resulting from rapid urban growth, population increase and socio-economic changes. Added to these are the other institutional changes such as the division of Bahrain into five municipalities and encouragement of the private investments. Thus, there is a shift from traditional incremental urban growth, to modern planned interventions buttressed by global forces. Hence, the urban structure and form of the historic cities: both Muharraq and Manama have undergone tremendous changes coupled with the transformations of social, cultural, economic, and environmental facets. One of the outcomes is that both cities and the communities are losing their identity derived from the vernacular traditional values and practices deeply embedded in the historically produced and nurtured cultural heritage.

In this context, this paper examines how to promote architectural heritage to regain cultural identity of historic cities: Manama and Muharraq. Its aim is to explore the stages and characteristics of urban developments in Bahrain and their inevitable manifestations of the traditional and the modern built environments.

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Its objectives are:
1. To identify the general features and constraints of the urban developments in Bahrain.
2. To identify the challenges and constraints for re-heritagization of the historic cities.
3. To identify concepts and strategies that can promote wholesome urban developments.

Theoretical Framework

It is well known that cultural heritage could play a significant role in contemporary urban developments, although they do not do so at present. In fact, the significance of cultural heritage is not just to remain as relics of the past but as a living influence that could shape the present and future of cities in order to invest local culture and identity. According to Lowenthal (1998) however, traditionally, heritage has been looked at through a material lens, with an emphasis towards the conservation and restoration of iconic buildings.

Fortunately, this is not the case any longer. It is now accepted that heritage encompasses more than the physical structures and their historical forms and embellishments. In fact, heritage includes the social, spatial, and historical realities surrounding it, that has enriched with meaning and values. It is now known that this approach often neglects the non-physical dimensions of cities, particularly their relationship with the people. In other words, it undermines the potentials cultural heritage has in creating a historical sense of place in cities. This view produces a deeper understanding of heritage as being invariably fused with the 'sense of place,' of historical sites. Moreover, it is also an idea that takes into account the emotional, cultural, and experiential bonds people form with their environments, which are culturally rich in historic settings.

It can therefore be argued that heritage is not just a physical thing or space but a complex co-habitation between things, spaces, places and social practices giving rise to culture. In support to this, Tuan (1974) points out that the relations between people and their surroundings are not static but evolves over time. Indeed, he shows that they bridge the past, the present and the future as well as people across time. Undeniably thus, this relationship legitimizes the call for integrating heritage into urban developments, in order to ensure that cultural identity remains as the cornerstone of cities as they grow and contribute to the production of a historical sense of place.

Shamai (1991) articulates this idea in terms of three facets of place as follows.
1. place distinctiveness (the unique features of a location),
2. place continuity (the ties between a place and its historical context), and
3. place dependency (the extent to which people rely on a place for social and cultural identity).

These facets emphasize the need to preserve both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage that contribute to sense of pace and identity. As Jokilehto (2006) points out, it adds another significant characteristic popularly known as authenticity, which refers to both the material integrity of a structure as well as its experiential and cultural originality and uniqueness (UNESCO). As Cohen and Cohen (2012) argue, retaining and enhancing authenticity of a place is essential in preserving the emotional bonds people have with historical places as they adapt to contemporary developments.

Alexander (1977) and Gehl (2010) make this abundantly clear in their central thesis in their arguments. They highlight the need to create spaces that are humane and promote social interaction and construction of intimacy. In fact, these principles are implicit in the idea of preservation of heritage. They emphasize the importance of maintaining the quality and character of historic spaces, in order to ensure that they remain culturally relevant in contemporary urban contexts. However, more often than not, urban developments lead to commodification of space, which erode local identities, negate cultural values and diminish sense of place. Indeed, Dovey (1999) warns of the negative repercussions of prioritizing commercial interests over cultural preservation that lead to loss of place.

In this context, Rossi (1966) provides a useful framework to understand how cities can maintain historical continuity. She suggests the interpretation of cities being constituted of urban layers adopting new developments. She argues that urban planners can create

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environments that value the past and promote new developments by enabling the historical and contemporary facets to exist as layers. She points out that establishing such a cohesion between tradition and modernity will make the cities become culturally vibrant spaces, fostering a strong sense of place for people.

As urban spaces continue to grow, sense of place becomes a critical factor in ensuring that heritage is integrated into the future of cities. This integration is not limited to the preservation of buildings but includes the protection of the social and cultural dynamics that make a place meaningful. In fact, throughout history and across the world, urban spaces and buildings have been engaged as intrinsic symbols of nations. As known, classical styles of architecture of both the West and the East have accomplished this task in their constructed monuments. In the West, they have rekindled a rootedness to a celebrated collective past and have instilled a sense of legitimacy to the states that have authored them and have provided identity to its people (Goodman, 1988). Similarly, classical orientalism sanctified by cosmic energies and supernatural habitations has brought about a sense of peoplehood and has invoked power to their rulers. More often than not, their architecture has authored accepted ideologies to construct national consciousness as a socially cohesive imagination in order to foster a strong attachment to a geo-political body among a given population.

It is thus undeniable that, if skillfully crafted, architecture and urban spaces can bring about consensus and inculcate a sense of belonging, necessary for constructing identity, and help sustain its people in collective unity. Smith (1991) writes that symbols ''have always possessed the emotive collective qualities'' that can bring people together, and that architecture is indeed such a symbol.

Symbols as material productions of people are invested with latent and manifest meanings: often political or ideological. Indeed symbolism is central to the construction of identity. Hobsbawm (1992) says that, culture, symbolism and tradition are at the base of identity. He points out that traditions are often constructed and given a sense of historical continuity and legitimacy, when they are just manifestations of older customs or very recent makings.

Nevertheless, often, the meanings so claimed appear to be misinterpretations of the historic past or myths. If identity is constructed by sharing a collective memory, and shared sense of belonging to a set of values, norms, historical memories and narratives, then cultural heritage indeed are the most visibly powerful ways in which they have been created, shared and sustained. Reconstructing and heritagizing and celebrating places and buildings concretize identity and enable its manifestation to persist.

Urban landscapes, however, are spaces that lead to disputed claims. As recent wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan as well the on-going Palestinian struggles over land show, landscapes, spaces and buildings are indeed the battlegrounds where conflicting interests and interpretations of people are expressed and contested. In this context, Perera (1998) argues that, throughout the world, spaces of communal identity and spatial representations of people are often at odds with each other. For instance, communal identity has become and remains a manifestation of these differences. Often, most forms of top-down homogenization of a people living in a particular space become at odds with the processes of a particular social group to construct a politically defined territory for themselves. Moreover, urban landscapes can themselves constitute conflicting symbolisms, created by the different actors and the people who may have differing conceptualizations of their purposes of being there and identities. Undeniably, these conflicts arise from differences between people themselves: between majorities and minorities, religious sects or various ethnic groups.

Cities thus have significant roles to play in forming identity, and its engagement as an underlying justification for preserving cultural heritage is unchallenged. Multiple processes are instrumental in producing such identity, although often the vernacular traditions and cultural heritage are considered as the most potent. Vernacular traditions contribute to the continuity of historical narratives, establish social and cultural relevance and produce the collective consciousness of the communities. However, as Colquhoun argues, ''the use of the past to supply models for the present depends upon the ideological distortions of the past'' (1996:207).

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Therefore, the ability for cultural heritage to determine identity per se is unpredictable. Nevertheless, each community anchored to a defined physical space that provides them the roots of their collective identity adopt multiple techniques and strategies to re-define identity as an essential component of their being. However, as Winter (2005) points out, such strategies involve the preservation of spaces and place in the settings where they live, often amidst hostile ''others'' while simultaneously battling the disintegration of their own self against which the sense of identity have to be consciously yet cautiously constructed.

Woodward (2002) points out that establishing difference is in fact one of the underlying intentions of preserving cultural heritage in order to produce identity either personal or national. However, the notion that identity is an expression against the 'hostile other' has been recently contested. For example, Findlow (2000) points the finger at most of the gulf cities such as Dubai; a newly emerging Arab city and shows that it did not derive its identity by engaging the 'defined by the other' notions of identity. It established a unique identity by itself. Thus, Woodward (2002) shows that the processes of establishing identity is not fixed. According to him, it is fluid, multi-faceted and is always evolving.

In the case of Bahrain for example, often, preferred histories are mapped as far back as the Dilmun and Tylos civilizations. To add another 'layer', more recently, unique national cultural landmarks have been conceptualized with reference to the recent histories of the settlements in Muharraq and Manama. Although there has not been a designed national monument in the past, a new ''national monument'' has recently been constructed celebrating local pearl traditions, and associated with the culture that has emerged from the sea surrounding the island. Simultaneously, people keep referring to the vernacular Bedouin practices; an imagined past. As Findlow (2000) says, this is indeed a process of self-discovery that requires the resurrection of the past histories of the island in general and specifically the cities such as Manama and Muharraq.

These theoretical ideas demonstrate the issues of cultural heritage, preservation of the urban spaces and structures, not just in terms of the physical aspects of heritage but also the less tangible qualities that contribute to the significance of place. They also show how the practices of urban developments relate to identity, cultural heritage and preservation of the historical values, symbols and artefacts.

Research Methods

This research examines how to promote architectural heritage to regain cultural identity of historic cities of Bahrain: Manama and Muharraq. Its aim is to explore the recent stages and notable characteristics of urban developments in Bahrain and the inevitable manifestations of tradition and modernity in its built environments.

It employs case study method and an extensive examination of documents such as local newspapers, and project leaflets supported by everyday observations, informal discussions and participant observation as research methods. As Patton (1990) says, these methods are useful in exploring complex issues within evolving situations still shaping up but has limited research and information.

The first and second authors have lived in Bahrain as residents since October 1994 until 2015, and then as naturalized Bahrainis since then. The third author lived in Bahrain as a resident since 2000. They have been able to observe these transformations for a considerably long period of time. In fact, some of them have been part of this dynamic sometimes as observers and sometimes as participants deriving insights into the setting and its transformations. In constructing this paper, the authors have brought data from the three sources as follows.

1. Documents such as local newspapers, research papers and project leaflets related to the present and past developments of Bahrain.
2. Self-reflections of everyday observations of happenings, and informal discussions with residents of Bahrain as well as the students of the University of Bahrain.
3. Reflecting upon situations where participant observation happened during events.

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The insights generated from the three methods offer qualitatively rich information. Thet are triangulated in order to establish a greater validity and reliability of the information as wellas the insights. As Patton (1990) has advocated, this qualitative approach emphasizes depth versus breadth and reveals the nuances of the involving situation of Bahrain.

Findings
The Context of Bahrain

In the last few years Bahrain has been experiencing a political transformation encouraging many socio-economic and cultural developments. Adopting a constitutional democratic monarchy followed by municipal and parliamentary elections represent a benchmark in the history of Bahrain. These progresses are guided by a developmental vision, which builds on the past policies and achievements and responds to global and local changes. Consequently, different ongoing processes have emerged such as: decentralisation and the establishment of five municipalities; the formation of an increasing number of societies and clubs with social, professional or environmental focuses; increased awareness about accountability and transparency; encouraging women participation; and the initiation of many studies such Bahrain Urban Strategy and Management Development Plan for the Ministry of Works and Housing. Undeniably these positive outcomes could pave the path for a prosperous sustainable urban future which promotes place uniqueness and identity. This is the ultimate aim, when cultural / social, economic and environmental aspects are working in mutually complementary and supportive manner.

In addition, there are several other factors which could play positive supportive roles such as: the relative small population and geographical size of the country; the support for and familiarity with the concept of sustainability and cultural heritage; the availability of both financial, institutional basis and human resources; the absence of serious problems encountered by many developing countries; and the various developments in the different socio-cultural, economic and environmental areas. All these factors and developments taken place in Bahrain provide the seeds and a fertile ground for nurturing city identity within the framework of sustainable urban.

Muharraq and Manama: A Brief Introduction

Muharraq is the island mass adjacent to the mainland of Bahrain that had evolved through a long process of tradition, innovation, adjustment and refinement. Occupied almost exclusively by the original inhabitants, it has been and continues to be the cultural capital of Baharin. As Dayatane (2012) points out, its architecture has been a clear expression of how the society has interacted with the natural environment and how it has organized and consumed available materials in response to a complex set of interrelated social, cultural, spiritual, religious, economic and physical needs. In the past, a strong unity had been established between culture and the built environment and between the man-made and the natural surroundings. El Masri (2010) adds that a subtle visual language which represented the community, its spirit and values had been established by the use of local materials and skills and meaningful forms and elements.

Undeniably, if there is an architecture in Bahrain that reflects the deep roots of people inhabiting the island, it would be of the traditional urbanism of Muharraq. The revitalization and urban renewal of Muharraq, launched in the 1980s, has thus been not only an attempt to develop the region which was in a dilapidated state, but also a conscious attempt to redefine the cultural identity and the nation of Bahrain. Since the 1990s, Bahrain has recognized an enclave of Muharraq as the heart of the nation through the establishment of the Sheik Ibrahim Cultural Centre, comprised of the renovated and represented residences of the Sheiks and cultural gurus of the past.

Manama on the other hand is a city close to the northern shores of the mainland and has been where the ships have anchored during the historical fishing and pearling periods. As a result, the inner labyrinth of Manana are lined up with traditional houses which have been the residences of fisherman as well as the workers.

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Similar to Muharraq thus, Manama is rich with cultural heritage handed down through generations. Its old souq is perhaps the epitome of this architecture. The renovation of the Manama's old souq brings the representations of cultural heritage more directly to the public consciousness, when it renovates the old central building and introduces two covered walkways on either side. The wavy roof with exposed timber rafter-work shades a number of mushrabiyas placed on the walls in order to generate a sense of tradition and continuity. A deliberate statement of national significance, the souq is a central part of the spatial landscape of Bahrain as much as it exhibits the importance of fusing tradition with modernity in the definition of its present. It is the core of the city of Manama, where the ordinary public go shopping, as opposed to the newly constructed Bahrain Financial Harbour, which is a global financial centre, occupied more by the elite. As a significant point of reference, the Bahrain Financial Harbour to souq axis has been perceived symbolically as the axis of evolution of Bahrain as a nation, as it rhythmically conjoins the many nuanced approaches that stretch from historicism to globalization.
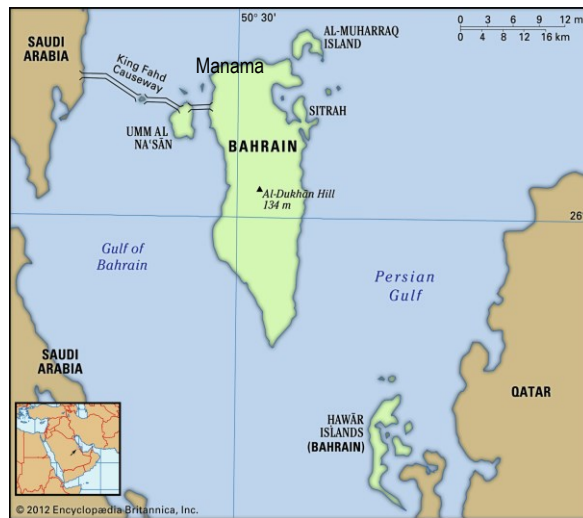
Fig. 01: Manama and Muharraq
Source: https://www.google.com

Urban Developments of Muharraq & Manama

Bahrain spatial planning has been experiencing different stages and developments to respond to rapid urban growth, population increase and socio-economic changes. This has been associated with the establishment of different institutions entrusted in overseeing the design and implementation of urban planning policies and housing projects.

More recently, there have been several ongoing processes; most importantly are the Ministry of Works & Housing Management Development Plan (2004) and Bahrain National Planning development Strategies (2006), to enhance urban planning system in Bahrain in response to physical, political and socio economic developments. Adoption of constitutional democratic monarchy, division of Bahrain into five municipalities, encouragement of the private investments and empowerment of women are just to name few. From traditional urban planning system, to modern and more recently to be influenced by global forces, the urban structure and form of both Muharraq and Manama have been undergoing four different stages experiencing rapid changes and transformations in their social, economic, environmental and physical structures as seen in the Table 1.

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Table 1: Urban Development in Bahrain: Stages & Characteristics
Source: El Masri & Al Raouf (2006)

Stages	Urban Characteristics	
Late 19th C. to 1930's	• Life depended on agriculture, fishing, pearling & trading • Community-oriented & family-driven despite involvement with world at large • Culture founded on Islamic principles hybridised with Middle-Eastern, Asian & African traits. • Slow & measured growth balanced between local & regional forces • Dense & organic urban fabric based on districts (*Farij*) system responded to cultural & natural requirements and reinforced community & territorial identity. • Courtyard house characterised by bent entrance to ensure privacy, flexible rooms' usage, & innovative ventilation techniques: courtyard, Badgir / Wind Tower, Waresh (Al-Oraifi, 1978; El-Masri, 2005a; Waly, 1990; Yarwood, 2002?).	**Form Follows Family**
From 1930's to 1960's	• Shift from agriculture & pearl diving based economy to oil based economy • Desire to keep pace with rest of the world, particularly West • Changes accommodated progressively as demands grew • Construction of extensive road network & extensions over reclaimed lands followed modern grid planning system leaving core of old core almost intact • Infra-structure provision in peripheries extended inwards to improve old stock • Massive foreign labour influx and introduction of 'modern' town planning supported by British colonial power, and the pursuit of modernisation process • Gradual destruction of traditional areas encouraged by: • Desertion of locals to modern housing areas & Invasion foreign labour (cheap accommodation) • Uncoordinated building activities & lack of comprehensive conservation	**Form Follows Function**
From 1960's to 1990's	• Urban changes accelerated under pressure for modernisation & population growth. • Massive government projects: new cities (Isa Town 1963 & Hamad Town 1982), urban renewal & rural projects implemented in prosperous economic condition, based on western model of planning • Formation of many public urban institutions • Private initiatives limited to private housing in the form of villas and residential compounds to cater for increasing number of expatriate, and the need for office buildings (Diplomatic Area neighbouring the old core of Manama) • Further deterioration of traditional areas	
Since 1990's	• Urban developments characterised by slow start from 1990 to 2000, accelerated in 2000 -2006, to be intensified between 2006 -2008, and to strongly being affected by late 2008 economic crisis. • Continuous government involvement in urban projects in addition to emergence of real estate & land market with increase globalisation phenomenon • Neighbouring states moving on the fast tract, Bahrain certainly does not want to be left behind" Goveas (2006). • Massive urban developments: Diyar Al Muharraq & Amwaj Islands in Muharraq; Financial Harbour, Reef Island, Lulu Towers, City Center, Manama Lagoon, Bahrain Bay in Manama; and Bahrain International Circuit, Durrat Al-Bahrain, Al Areen Desert Resort and Al Salam Resort in the rest of Bahrain are visible signs and symbols of a massive architectural / urban production in the age of globalisation. • Recent economic crisis (late 2008) affected implementation of many iconic projects in the Gulf including Bahrain. Cancelling, resizing, phasing or re-evaluating is common trend nowadays.	**Form Follows Finance / Fashion**

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Urban Structure: from Tradition to Modernity

Since the 60's, the accelerated urban growths have left many scars on the compact organic traditional areas in Muharraq and Manama. Modern building forms and urban grid systems, with no relation to the local culture and architectural heritage, developed under the increase influences of external forces; the pressure for modernization and rapid construction; and the inability to develop institutional frameworks and traditional architecture to keep pace with the needs of a growing and changing society. Al Hathloul says:

> "Entering into the new Millennium, the Arabian Gulf Countries will be facing serious challenges due to fast population growth and escalating needs for urban infrastructure; housing and employment opportunities. As such, these countries must pursue a more holistic approach to urban planning and management as to enable them to deal with the macro urban issues and the bottlenecks that will impede their future development. Among these bottlenecks are the inefficiency and non-transparency of their land markets; shortage of affordable housing; lack of effective institutional coordination among agencies concerned with the delivery of services as well as agencies responsible for the protection of the urban environment which will be threatened by city rapid growth."

Al Hathloul 2004:642

Indeed, these are dilemmas shared by many cities in the Gulf (Hamouche, 2004; Mahgoub, 2004; Al Biss & Al Salafi, 2004). Foreign experts and labour, lack of local expertise and comprehensive conservation strategy, and misunderstanding of the potential and value of traditional settlements have led to rapid deterioration of traditional buildings and settlements in both Manama and Muharraq.

Heritage of Muharraq and Manama does share many of the physical characteristics of the Arab cities, such as narrow alleyways, compact houses, mashrabiyas, lived-in roof tops as well as traditional constructions employing limestones, rather than burnt bricks or mud. Interestingly however, there is plenty of wood doors and windows as well as mashrabiyas and furniture that have come from the extensive trade with India. In fact, The Asian Indian culture has influenced the culture of Bahrain from food to clothes as well as the production of spaces and places such as souqs and communal places such as way site cafes.

However, they also suffer from the same problems caused by urbanization, modern foreign planning and building systems replacing the traditional local processes. Modernization, lack of institutions and expertise, and globalization as well as the traditional and modern processes: organic dynamic patterns versus grid rigid system; local materials technologies and skills versus modern imported ones; mix uses of functions versus zoning, social/cultural values versus professionals' preferences and regulations add to these.

Table 2: A Comparison between the Traditional & the Modern Built Environments
Source: El-Masri, 2007

TRADITIONAL	MODERN
Process	
Evolving guided by adjustments & innovations (Trials & Errors)	Spontaneous follows styles & fashions
Philosophy	
Harmonious living within society & with Nature Respect cultural conditions	Growth, modernisation, progress Influenced by international conditions
Decision	
Local influenced by cultural, social, economic, natural conditions & available materials & skills	Fluctuating between interest groups & influenced by global factors- media, trade, exchange of skills, ideas & fashions
Morphology / Fabric	
Organic, hierarchical, & dynamic Mix use	Rigid of grid system Zoning, land use & building regulations
Identity / Character	
Collective allowing for individual personalization (variations within overall unity)	Individual based on images (rich/poor; modern/tradition) & client & architect preferences

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Expression of shared values & common patterns of life	Expression of regulations, status & modernisation
Strong community and territorial identity	Lack of sense of community
V i s u a l C h a r a c t e r i s t i c	
Subtle, harmonious, understandable	Confusing, bizarre, foreign
E f f e c t s	
Reinforce orientation, attachment, belonging and sense of community	Loss of orientation, creativeness, appreciation of nature and sense of community

Urban Growth: Salient Features & Constraints

Urban growth of Bahrain, including Muharraq and Manama, has been the product of their times and the relationship between society and space. Bahrain urban growths also exhibits many similarities of the urbanisation trends in the Arab Region in general and in the Gulf Region in particular, despite the fact that these countries display striking variations in their patterns and indexes of urbanization; in their capitals agglomerations and overall densities; and in their economic bases and natural resources (Khalaf 1983).

These salient features & constraints could be summarised as follows.

Table 3: General Features and Constraints of the Urban Scene in Bahrain
Source: El-Masri, 1998

Salient Features	Constraints
Rapid Urban Growth	− High percentage of urban population compared to total population − High population growth & percentage of foreigners − Increase demand for infrastructure, housing & land reclamation − Need for institutional capacity building & comprehensive urban strategies − Need for decentralised urban management and holistic regional planning
Need for Economic Development	− Decrease dependency on Oil & need for economy diversification − Fragmented industrial structure (except Aluminium) − Need to adapt to technological and managerial advancements − Need for job provision
Diminishing Identity of Built Environment	− Rapid construction of modern buildings & need for comprehensive conservation strategy − Rapid socio-economic changes & reliance on foreign planners and architects − Misunderstanding of traditional architecture & inability to develop its potentials − Deterioration of old areas, Disfigurement of urban Structure & lack of infrastructure − Depopulation of local communities

The rapid urban growth and the recent massive architectural production have not been matched with comprehensive urban planning and urban management system, despite the many positive developments and initiatives. What has often unfolded is a process of 'initiations' of sites and localities for development and urbanisation on the basis of single or multiple projects. These are then followed by 'incremental developments' that emerge and grow around the locations transforming them to significant places although there are few exceptions (Al Khalaf, 2007). Unlike the process of following a carefully orchestrated master plan; a planning process that has been called into question, the ever evolving planning practice has given way to the social, political and financial pressures of the society in which the planners follow, rather than lead, and help shape, rather than give shape to the spaces and forms of urban centres.

This approach, which may be called 'Mushrooming', in fact has transformed a number of significant locations to evolve as hives of activities and places that are likely to generate and survive on their own with marginal linkages and interactions with other locations. A number of such locations can be recognised such as, Seef Mall, Bahrain Mall, Dana Mall, Manama City Center, and the Saar enclave. For some time, Bahrain seemed like having acquired appropriate modern centres of consumption sufficient to keep its populace reasonably well engrossed in the western modernism while retaining strong attachments to Bahraini culture.

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Architecture in the Age of Hyper-Production

In the Gulf, the accelerated wave of development is project-driven and has snowballed by means of a number of high profile, iconic buildings and building projects. In addition, a number of other signature-developments are in the pipeline to be designed by the world's most leading architects in order to infuse symbols similar to the already reputed, currently known projects spearheading the present phase (*Form Follows Fashion*). From the Palm to the World; from the tallest building to the cloud; and from the twisted, the up-side, the rotated to the dancing towers, the approach emphasis on icon-ism and visibility. The massive architectural production has been encouraged by increase in oil prices; search for feasible investments after the 9/11; availability of infinite supply of cheap labour, mainly from Asia; ability to provide an atmosphere of political stability and security; and ability to introduce sophisticated financial and managerial mechanisms (Kirchner & Rab, 2007).

In fact, the Gulf has become an international architectural lab for projects never experienced before in terms of scale, idea and complexity. Architecture in the age of "*hyper-production*" is characterised by several trends/fashions. In many of the projects, the Star / International Architect is a pre-requisite to produce eye-catching buildings and to promote the idea of uniqueness, iconic and landmark. This is something been repeatedly refer to as "*wow factor*". Complementing this phenomenon is the growing field for marketing and branding of the projects; attractive brochures booklets and CDs, containing carefully phrased slogans and glossy highly rendered images, are widely used for promotion and marketing especially in the ever-increasing number of property exhibitions in the Gulf. It is known that demands for 3Ds rendered images, physical models, and printing publicity material escalate for about three month before property exhibition. However, this image driven approach has led Ivy (2009) to question: what has happened to drawing?

> "The range of techniques and the craft present in the sheets of handwork remind us what we have lost in our transition to the electronic. The analogy lies in the piano's transition to the electronic keyboard, where technical ability has thrived but dynamics has disappeared along the way. Rather than the subtle variations in tone, or the slight tremolo and the staccato attack, the nuance that lies in variation of technique, pianists found little but loud and soft in the new technology, resulting in the tonal equivalent of hitting the same key, forcefully, over and over – banging, rather than playing."
>
> Ivy,2009:209

This age of massive architectural production is also dominated by another phenomenon of rapid project preparation and implementation. Millions of square meters need to be planned and designed in the course of few months. In the age of globalisation, projects have increased in scale and complexity, but their time frames have been compressed to catch market opportunities and launching and exhibitions schedules. Ironically, this boom has also led to rising attention to tradition, heritage and culture; project to be inspired or guided by tradition, or dialoguing with or translation of tradition are frequently appearing in many project briefs. The importance of traditional architectural has been commercially recognised in the Gulf to create buildings and spaces founded on cultural heritage of Arabia. The opportunity exists; is it however going to be an exploration of heritage DNA or simply scanning of few books and postcard? The role of architect/ planner is in question and the knowledge of the cultural context is imperative. Equally important is that the available and future research on the subject should be explored, distilled and planned. Research should feed into practice and vice versa; it should be a two ways process based on dialogue and integration.

Sustaining Urban Identity

In a fast-urbanized and globalized world, the issue of identity and its implications are increasingly complex and multi-dimensional. Traditionally, people were able to maintain strong identity in their buildings and spaces because everything was locally influenced, produced and managed. This is not the case of our modern cities, because the power of decision

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flows between the different groups of capital (commercial, industrial, international, small businesses), the central government, local government and coalitions of special interest groups. Cities are also internationalized through global trade, media, economic connections and free exchange of people, ideas and money.

Needless to say that the current rejection of internationalism and mounting problems of present cities require new approaches to urban design and planning not only in the pursuit of identity, but also in order to produce liveable and wholesome cities. While they exist in most cities in Asia and the Arabian Gulf, It is visible more so in the cities of Bahrain: Muharraq and Manama.

In dealing with the issue of identity in urban areas, several important concepts should be carefully considered as outlines in the Table 4.

Table 4: Important Heritage / Identity Concepts
Source: Authors

Concepts	Explanations
Complexity	• City not only physical entity, functional container, accumulation of goods or commodities, or pattern of land uses • City should respond to social, cultural, spiritual, economic, physical & environmental aspects
Dynamicity	• City not static tends to be modified in response to changes in dominant patterns : Local & Global • City Identity not fossilized but seeks to fuse traditional with modern, regional with universal
Locality	• Human needs & aspirations, social systems & cultures different so cities should be with unique flavour derived from local / regional contexts. • Place uniqueness is to be seen as reconciliation between peoples & cities and between human & nature
Authenticity	• Identity not mere superficial elevation treatments, but to be expressed in space arrangements, buildings relationships & architectural vocabularies. • identity not blind copying from the past, but through investigation to learn from its principles, references, values, qualities, images, & wisdoms
Continuity / Futurity	• Relating architecture & urban planning to history of place is to visualize built environment as living memory and to contextualise creation process. • Past is part of present and both will be part of future; continuity between old & new should lay strong foundations for future growth & development ensuring that present efforts & investments are adequately placed in long term developmental frameworks. • Recognizing uniqueness of ecology and natural history of the place, identity has also an ecological dimension in adjusting the relationship between man and nature from domination to symbiosis.

Challenges

Designing contextual architecture, which incorporate the culture and ecology of the place, puts people at the centre aiming to humanize the city, to provide a vibrant environment, and to address the problems of space disharmony, estrangement, and disorientation. Translating the previous concepts into actions has to overcome many challenges because it necessitates many changes and adjustments of existing processes and practices. These challenges could be summarized into three main action areas. First is the adjustment of existing planning and urban design approaches from physically economic orientated to incorporate cultural, social and environmental dimensions as well; short term versus long term benefits, international versus local open minded; and growth versus development. Second is the discovery of architectural heritage by analyzing it built forms, devices, images, principles and ideas for adaptive contemporary reuse. Such analysis should lead to a deep understanding of its urban and architectural principles, construction systems and of the potentiality of application at present time. This aims not only to re-establish / re-connect with the past but most importantly to harmonise local and international impulses; all are to form the cornerstones for sustainable urban developments. Third is the improvement of professional practices to cater for the complexity and totality of forces of time, place and culture. They should be aware of the social and cultural obligations of their professions in order to resist fallacies and commercialism and to re-adjust the defects in the dominant public taste.

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Directions

Sustaining identity of the built environment is an evolving task aiming for meaningful and humane cities. It would require remedying, as much as possible, the mistakes of the past, adjusting present approaches and practices, and responding to future needs and aspirations. The task is enormous considering the complexity but the situation is not incurable and as Mumford pointed out:

> "There is a way back from the concrete jungle to a green world. It requires both social and technical steps – both planning and invention".
>
> cited in Hahn & Simonis, 1991: 199

Three integrated directions- conservation, regeneration and innovation-could re-shape and shape the city within the context of ecology of the site and the culture of people. Integration means the three directions are planned to operate in mutually supportive and complementary manner; the city is treated as one body of different parts within the regional and national context.

Conservation

Traditional areas and historic buildings echo the 'spirit' of a culture and act as the living memory of the society. They are expressions of the collective attitudes and the common patterns of life, and as such they are a source of identity and inspiration. Old areas should be like living museums where people are not only spectators, but also participants through experiencing architecture – seeing, hearing, smelling, tactility and movement of the body.

In many cases of the Arab world including Manama and Muharraq in Bahrain, traditional areas are suffering from form deterioration, invasion of commercial activities, and being cheap accommodation for labour. Bringing life to these areas, through conservation - restoration, new functional rehabilitation, replacement or in-fill - should tackle fundamental issues.

1. First is integrating between old and new urban areas; old areas stand as isolated island cut from the rest of the city by insensitive urban grid system disregarding the morphological structure of the organic dynamic nature. The survival of these areas depends, to a large extent, on connecting old areas with the rest of the city by introducing compatible transportation systems and infrastructure networks.
2. Second is harmonizing between new and old areas in terms of scale, building typology and urban morphology, as well as enhancing quality within old areas by appropriate in-fill urban design projects and landscape schemes.
3. Third is developing appropriate incentives, land-use systems, building regulations within a comprehensive planning mechanism capable of translating conceptual abstract manifestos into effective practices. This mechanism should classify opportunities for conservation, functional rehabilitation, replacement or in-fill, than setting clear guidelines for intervention.
4. Fourth are encouraging financial investments from a combination of sources: public, private developers, and from the provision of financial incentives to the owners through soft long-term loans.
5. Fifth is developing traditional construction crafts, which do not freeze up with old techniques and materials, but also able to invent and progress with the use modern materials and technology.

Renewal

Uplifting the quality of modern urban areas is essential to bring back liveability and human scale to our cities. The rationality of sciences and technologies are not the answers to the city crisis; the answers lie in improving urbanity and re-humanizing cities again. Renewal is committed to identify ugly places – vacant plots and neglected buildings - in our cities and to propose remedies by bringing them into effective use.

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Henderson declares that:

> "Cities are not shaped solely by major developments. They become the sort of places they are as a result of what happens on innumerable small sites".
>
> Henderson,1996: 6

The success depends largely on generating funds from urban renewal schemes from private and public sources, ensuring community participation and developing appropriate administrative and legal frameworks.

Rejuvenation of unattractive city areas demands inserting of meaningful open spaces and encouraging pedestrian networks; and redesigning of traffic networks and harmonising between different building styles and types. There are several options to transfer "unloved" areas into friendlier places by: making them safer and providing adequate accesses; and softening and enclosing spaces using imaginative landscaping concepts. This also involves inserting parks and functions such as open museum, gallery and café shops to attract people and to bring them together; and by introducing landmarks such as gates, sculptures and landscape features in which other artists, children and local communities should be involved. Addressing the ugliness of the city can also focus on individual buildings by creative insertion, demolition, repair, and functional re-use. Mix use, appropriateness and imagination could have lasting positive effects in urban renewal projects. Introducing such as roof gardens, insertion new function, and modifications of elevations are few alternatives. Increasing built up-areas, tax on undeveloped sites, improvement maintenance tax could generate substantial funds to carry renewal initiatives.

Innovation

Attempting to reclaim architectural continuity, in newly developed areas, is to find balance between stability and change, between tradition and modernity, and between internal and external influences. The attempts require genuine architectural expressions that respect the values of the past and yet open the door to a future full of modernity and promise. Architects must also involve in a progressive creativity adding new dimension in the pursuit for truthful meaningful, liveable 'modern' cities.

As Yeang explains:

> "Whether the designer may like it or not, all new constructions takes place in the present where contemporary influences, technology, context, world trade and economy, all of which are already there in the present and have the contended with. Rather than negating contemporary ideas and forms of construction, the design question to the regionalist is therefore to seek ways in which the imported technologies, materials, ideas and built forms can be effectively localised (where appropriate) to best fulfil the building, the programme and to be beneficial to the local community."
>
> Yeang,1987: 28

These approaches depart from the simple imitation of the past to the innovative interpretation, reflection and expression. Yeang (1987) says that instead of leaving cities to be carried away by the currents of modernization/globalisation, attempts should focus on localizing international ideas, materials and technologies in order to synchronise between tradition and modernity, and between the regional with the universal. It bears awesome responsibilities from government to people, from professional to clients, from teachers to students and from society to environment. It strives at creating meaningful, comprehensible and engaging urban areas, which are not ordered by global forces, professional mannerisms, and short terms goals; but conditioned by the inseparable relationships between place uniqueness, human needs, economic growth, and natural integrity with the framework of sustainability.

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Conclusions

From modernisation to globalization; spaces, places and people have been uprooted and transformed often beyond recovery in many of the traditional cities around the world. Indeed, it has been more so in the Arab world particularly in the Gulf and Bahrain is no exception. Since the discovery of oil, international travel, modern industrial productions and generation of energy have driven the engine of globalization and have simultaneously created several urban transformations, at different levels and different intensities, in the Gulf Region. In order to construct a healthy way forward, it is necessary to examine the history and continuity of the traditional cultural practices and forms of spaces and places in the face of modernisation - globalization with their various emerging fashions, influences and trends. During the process, attempts must be made to initiate a more profound, strategically sound principles and efficient sensible practices based on understanding the transformations of culture and space and how the problems of these transformations could be viewed more as opportunities rather than wicked, insurmountable problems.

This paper shows that city identity is the product of the planning system, the professionals' creativeness and peoples' awareness. The complexity and elusiveness of the concept are clear. Nevertheless, if any concrete result is to be achieved, identity of our modern cities should not be treated as a materialistic stylistic matter in isolation of the social, cultural, economic and environmental dynamism of urbanization and or globalization. Cultural identity should therefore, be integrated within the processes, which shape, manage and finance the cities. In this way, identity can be established in relation to ecological integrity, to developing economic bases and to improving social conditions. This is nor neither copying of tradition, but requires rethinking and innovating, and changing priorities of productions and behaviours.

It concludes that in Bahrain, the positive developments in the different socio-economic, physical and environmental, need co-ordination and integration in order to preserve and promote uniqueness of places, and to move towards culturally rooted architecture. This requires interventions conceptualising the appropriate measures to be taken. As has indicated, building on the rich architectural heritage, capitalising on the constructive present initiatives and coordinating between the different aspects and layers of the built environment would enable culturally rooted approaches to flourish in the face of rising tides of modernisation.

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