

Contemporary Libyan Architecture: Possibilities vs. Realities

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Introduction



This paper is not of a conclusive nature. It provides a look at traditional Libyan architecture; where possibilities lie, in contrast with modern production; where reality rules.

In teaching and practicing architecture, Mr. Jaquelin Robertsons' set of prescribed architectural values often came to my mind: "In general, build within and not against the existing cultural and natural context unless there is profoundly perceived reason for violating this setting. This means reinforcing the found orders and systems more often than not and observing the social contract that exists between most buildings in any architecturally satisfying community. Articulate and enhance social ceremony and local tradition. Abide by the manners of the place and time. Use the implied architectural conventions. Do not intend to invent new vocabularies for their own sake; languages take a long time to develop; you throw them away at great risk. Suspect variety for its own sake, value consistency and modify repetition."¹

I went back to Libya recently after 14 years. I left young relatives to find them married with children, which was expected, or older with grandchildren. Most of them looked the same but a little older and, some, a lot heavier. What I did not expect was the Libya that I found.

History and Background



Fig. 1: Map of Libya³⁰

Libya's official name is: The Great Socialist Peoples Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. It is located in North Africa and bounded on the north by 1,770 km. of Mediterranean coastline, and surrounded by Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia. Arabic is the formal language; Italian and English are widely understood in major cities (Map: **Fig.1**). The area is slightly larger than Alaska (1,759,540sq.km) and the population (July, 1999 est.) 4,9 million of which 97% are Muslims. The growth rate is 2.4%.²

Libya has been subjected to varying degrees of foreign control. Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines ruled all or parts of Libya. The Greeks and Romans left impressive ruins. Muslims led by Amr Ibnul Aas, conquered Libya in the 7th century AD. In the following centuries most of the indigenous peoples adopted Islam and the Arabic language and culture. The Ottoman Turks conquered Libya in the 16th century; Libya remained part of their empire until Italy invaded in 1911 and, after years of resistance, made Libya a colony. From 1943 to 1951 different parts of Libya were under the control of Britain, France, or Italy. Libya was the first country to gain its independence through the United Nations, in December 1951 and became the United Libyan Kingdom. In 1969, a military-led coup abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the new Libyan Arab Republic.³

Tripoli is the capital of Libya. During the 18th century, the city of Tripoli, (El-Madina El-Qadima), over-spilled its original walls. This outer area was redeveloped in the early 20th century by the Italians, who created a set of administrative buildings, official residences and general

residential areas for the Italian colonial population.²⁷ A direct translation or adoption to European social models was applied which were not compatible with the realities of the Libyan society.

After the 1969 revolution, dramatic changes took place in the city of Tripoli. Colonial influence and European heritage were seen as undesirable. Street names were changed, all signs were written in Arabic only. An enormous influx of people into the city resulted in a five-fold increase in Tripoli's population in the seventies and eighties. To accommodate this huge increase, new suburbs sprang up all around, and a lack of planning resulted in sprawling metropolitan area with severe traffic congestion at peak times. Other large cities, like Benghazi, faced similar fate.

Part 1: Possibilities

Possibilities prescribe the set of elements or factors that could or should influence the design of any built environment. There are the constant factors like weather, environmental conditions, etc., which should be used to enhance the quality and usability of buildings. And there are the variables that, even though might stay static for a period of time, could face changes that will strongly influence the outcome. These variables include; culture and social structure, economics; population increase; education; politics; technology; materials. And these are the ones that give similar locations different entities and characters.

I chose samples of traditional Libyan architecture from different regions to render a wider presentation of the possibilities that, till recently, existed. They provided solutions that proved to be sensitive to the regional and cultural characteristic, and presented architecture that engaged in a stronger dialogue with societal and natural contexts and evolved as cultural expressions.

Traditional Libyan Architecture



Most of the traditional Libyan architecture has become historical architecture. Libyan culture was as varied as the regions of that area. There exist cultures related to religion; Islamic culture; cultures associated with geographic features; desert, mountainous and Mediterranean cultures; and cultures related to the type and origin of people; Berber and Bedouin cultures and to a large extent, a mix of more than one of these cultures. If we view architecture as cultural expression, we should expect similar variations in the built environment as well.

Old City of Tripoli

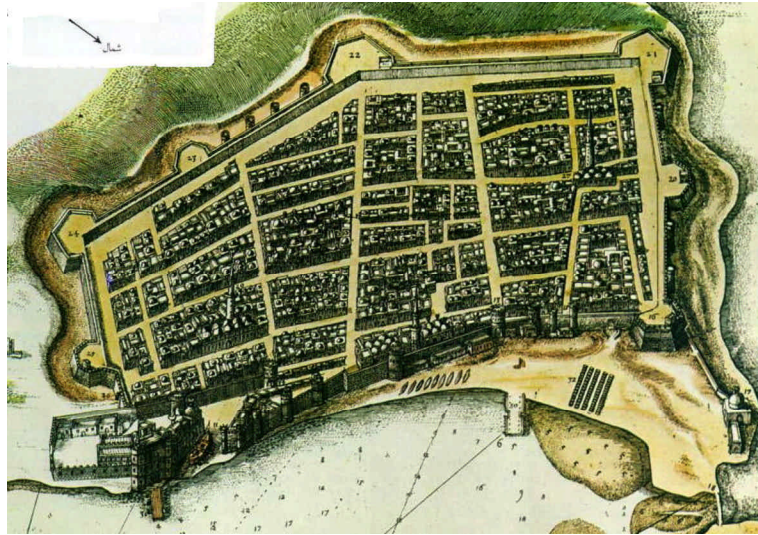


Fig. 2: Map of El-Medina El-Qadima (The Old City) in the year 1654

El-Medina el-Qadima (the Old City of Tripoli), a very densely developed and populated area of 46.5 hectares, constitutes the traditional core of the Libyan capital (**Fig 2**)²⁸.

Tripolis, as an Arab-Islamic city, was founded amongst the string of cities in which Muslims settled after Prophet Muhammed's Hijra to Medina. Tripolis, can be classified as an armed camp or *fustat*, a military town-camp, Tripolis foundation has followed the normal model of the Muslims, whereby they used the main mosque, the Dar El-Imara, and the souk as the focal point of the town. Surrounding this center were the Khittas which, when the town was later fully built, formed its different quarters.⁴

Located on the Mediterranean, the old city of Tripolis was a fortified citadel protecting Tripoli from seashore invasions. Defense, consideration of climate, customs and traditions were major factors in the shaping of this city (**Figs. 3a, 3b**)²⁹.

The old city contains a network of narrow, winding streets, mosques, sahas (plazas), and blind alleys. Central courthouses of one or two stories are the common house form. Covered colonnades usually shaded the private court. The upstairs rooms overlooked the court. Trees and plants were integrated in this open space and in upper class homes it might contain a water fountain.

Buildings are constructed using limestone bonded by mortar, original city buildings were mostly white washed with eventual use of tiles in the interior walls. The openings to the outside are small windows placed strategically to protect privacy and many were covered with “ein-elzaroor”; similar to the mashrabiah.



Fig. 3a: View of El-Medina El-Qadima from the sea



Fig 3b: View of the eastern wall of El-Medina El-Qadima

The main Souk is covered and controlled by gated entrances that are locked off hours for security. It housed traditional trades and crafts, clothes, jewelry and an open section for spices and food items. Portion of cluster stores are integrated with the residential area (**Fig. 4**).

At present, most of the buildings in the old city have become shelters for the rural poor or poor foreigners who pour into the city seeking better life. Many parts are at a serious state of neglect, some of the buildings are in eminent danger of collapsing (**Fig. 5**). Ames Steele, in his analysis of similar cases, illustrated that” The architectural heritage of long established cities has continued to decay rapidly since most of this heritage has either fallen into disuse or not been adapted to a new use that will continue to prolong its life.”⁵



Fig. 4: Souk El-Musheer, Old City of Tripoli



Fig 5: Deteriorating parts in the Old City

Few of the buildings in the Old City have been assessed, restored, and conserved and an adaptive re-use is in place. Two examples are Dar El-Qaramanali, now the Peoples Library (**Fig. 6**), which previously housed the British Consulate, and the Documentation Administration which was a French school (**Fig. 7**).



Fig 6: People's Library, Old City of Tripoli

Fig. 7: Documentation Administration, Old City of Tripoli





Souk Al Musheer in Old City of Tripoli



Old City of Tripoli



Scenes from Old City of Tripoli showing café (Top Left), Suk Al Gazzara (Top Right) and a residential street (Left)

Old City of Ghadames

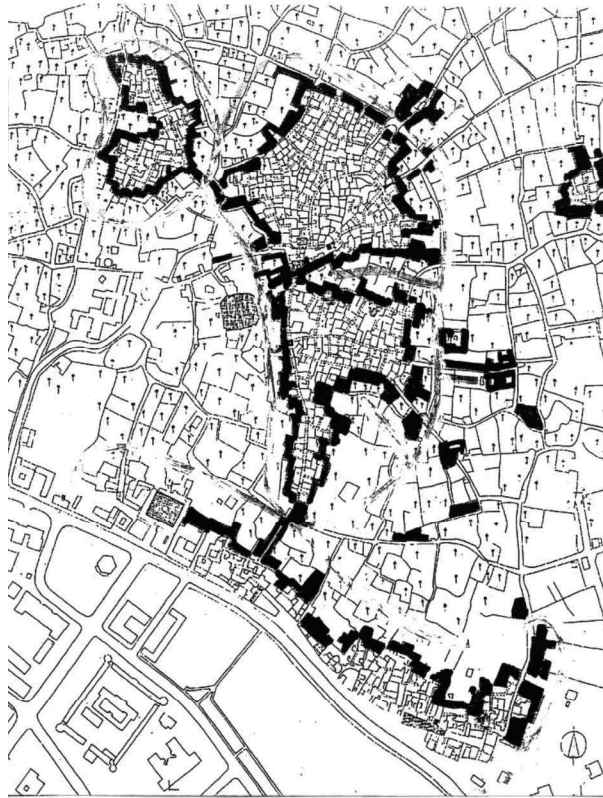


Fig. 8: Map of Ghadames

Located about 600 km southwest of Tripoli in the desert region, Ghadames is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement that is representative of a culture. Ghadames and its oasis cover an area of 225 hectares, 10 hectares of which are occupied by houses in the old city. The site of the houses was determined by the location of Ein-el Faras spring, the main water source that provides a refined irrigation system.

Roughly circular in shape including the farms, the old city (**Fig. 8**) is composed of a cluster of houses; those on the outside, with their reinforced external walls, protect the city. This rudimentary enclosure includes gates and projecting bastions. The city is composed of 111 buildings, including mosques and zawiyahs.

Building elements of walls and roofs had sufficient thermal resistance. They consisted of heavy, thick walls of mud, stone and hay that were composited, shaped in blocks and seasoned for over a period of a year.



Fig. 9: Family Living Area

The old city has conserved its historical authenticity. It includes an almost unique system of covered streets with formally arranged squares. Some are exclusively for the use of categorized age groups (15-40, 40-60, and the wise men over 60). Streets and squares are often lined with built-in benches.

The homes in the old city are built on at least two main levels. The ground floor has a lobby with storage for the farming tools. This lobby, which provides privacy, leads through a single door to the family living area. This space is an artistic masterpiece. It is functional and culturally reflective of customs and traditions. The walls are heavily and brightly ornamented with mirrors, brass pots, and weaved fabrics. The space is lit and aired through a sky-opening centered in the ceiling. A second level is created in this space by using few steps on two of the sidewalls. One of the stairs leads to parent's bedroom and the second will continue to more storage spaces for grains, dates, and household items, and it ends up on the roof. The kitchen, sleeping and living areas are found on this open terrace-like roof

The 2 or 3 floor houses avoided central open courtyards to improve their thermal insulation (**Fig. 9**). Open-air terraces (roofs) were reserved for women who would move there freely across the town using the walls and roofs as pathways (**Fig. 10**).

The concept of family privacy and the role of women in the family and the society is reflected in the use of public, semi-private and private spaces. Men and women did not socialize together outside the immediate family environment. Environments dedicated to women only or to the entire inner family are the private spaces in the house. They also utilized several outer courts dedicated to various levels of social interaction among men.

The lessening flow of Ain-el Faras spring was partly to blame for the desertion of the old city in favor of the modern town (**Fig. 11**), which was built entirely between 1975 and 1983, as well as for the decline of trade and agriculture. Most inhabitants have kept their homes in the old city for the celebration of certain festivals. The old city usually comes to life during hot summer months, when the air conditioning in modern homes is unable to cope with the torrid heat of the Sahara and only the traditional houses of the old city maintain a degree of coolness, I was told by inhabitants that the temperature in the old city does not exceed 25c. Community members still attend the Friday prayer in the old towns mosques.

The overall population of Ghadames is between 8,000-10,000. Ghadames' economy relies now heavily on tourism and agriculture.

Even though I am not aware of the existence of any guidelines to maintain and enhance character and integrity of this city, the setting of social and financial incentives and the training and use of local craftsmen led to an appropriateness of the use of materials and methods, to the perfection of the technical details and the quality of workmanship. The result, I believe, was a historical accuracy of the restoration. Although a limited revival of old crafts was initiated as folklore activities for touristic purposes, traditional crafts may survive as techniques but not as symbols of the culture.

To a great extent, local inhabitants are involved in the entire process of restoring their old town with unmatched pride in their own architectural heritage.

As a consequence of the new development, families and the established community agonized through the break-up, the much higher cost of housing and subsistence is causing the delay of marriages of many young men and women, many people have suffered disorientation and insecurity after the loss of their familiar surroundings.

Efforts by the UN team and the local government are taking place. Experimenting with mass production of the traditional local building materials. The components of these materials are readily available and abundant within the area. Success in these experiments will provide, besides the explicit economies of using local materials, a result product that has tremendous potential of harmonizing with natural context



Private Residence: The use of arches and decorations





Family space on the roof



Front view of a new private residence



Kuba after restoration



Fig. 10a: Old City Roofs



Fig. 10b: Family Space on Roof. The opening provides light and air to Sadr El Bait



Fig. 11: New Developments in Ghadames

Qasr Nalut:

Nalut is located in the mountainous area between Tripoli and Ghadames. Weather is much cooler because of the higher altitude and that reflected on the traditional house design. Homes were dug into the ground or in the side of the mountain and an open court was created to provide the homes' only source of light. All rooms open to this court while insulated by the thick layers of the mountain. Few of these excavations exist.



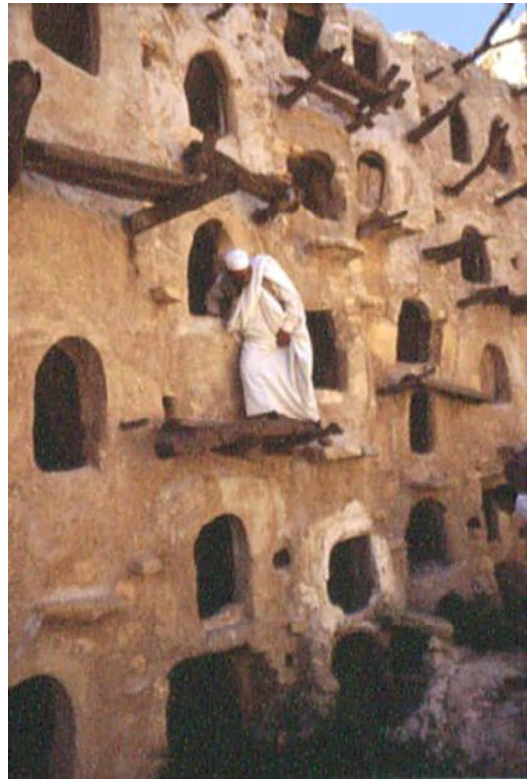
The Mosque in Nalut

The unique structure of Qasr Nalut was a grain storage castle fortified by high walls with a single gate. Spaces were built out of mud, gypsum and local materials, and were constructed adjacent and on top of each other in a cluster or beehive form. Each family had its own storage space where they stored grains, olives, and oil in clay pots. The size of the storage unit reflected wealth and status. The guard checked everyone entering this space since people kept their most valuable commodity here.

Qasr Nalut's location provided natural protection. It was constructed on a cliff on one side, which made it almost impossible to reach, and surrounded by strait high walls with no openings on the other three sides. City homes, the mosque, and the olive press were set around the Qasr



Family storage space in Qasr Nalut



Souk-Al-Dalam, Darna



Fig. 12: Sania in Darna

Darna is often referred to in Libya as the “Bride of the Sea” for its beautiful location on the Mediterranean, and its luscious gardens, fruit trees, and waterfalls. It is bounded in the south by the rolling hills of the Green Mountain, which dominates the landscape of this coastal region of eastern Libya (**Fig. 12**).

The area of “Souk-El-Dalam” is one of the oldest existing areas in Darna. It is a complex of traditional specialty stores. One branch houses the produce market, which was deserted after the construction of a souk in the new area. Other branches house traditional clothing, jewelry, spices and inscents (attara), and kharraza (shoe repair). The arcaded open market and the famous Abu Shusha Cafe are well know parts of the souk (**Fig. 13**)

The Grand Mosque “ Aljamaa Alkabir”, which was constructed in 1689 by Mohammad Bey, is adjacent to the Souk and connected to it with an arcaded corridor. The mosque, in spite of going through additions and unsuccessful restoration attempts, is still one of the most important monuments in the region (**Fig. 14**).

Only few homes are left in the Old City. Many old homes have been replaced by the standardized buildings that are sweeping the country. Courthouses were the traditional characteristic of homes in that area. Most had distinct semi-public space that housed water source (sabil) available for passers by for drinking and ablution (washing before prayer.) This space usually leads to private family court shaded by trees and grape vines. Room doors and larger windows open to this court where most of the daily activities took place. Small high windows that guard privacy are used in the exterior parameter to generate ventilation.

Traditionally, extended family lived together, each, in a long rectangular room. Both ends of the room contained a (Sidda), a built-in sleeping quarter, one for the parents, the other for children or guests. The middle of the room, where the door opens, provided living area with access to the personal family storage under the Sidda.



Fig. 14: Aljama Al Kabir Entrance, Darna

Several Muslim military leaders and disciples of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are buried in one of Darna's landmarks, the Cemetery of Al-Sahaba (disciples) with its' unique architectural style. It is located in the middle of the city (**Fig. 15**).

I wanted to include the city of Benghazi as I found out that most of the monumental buildings have been demolished. I was unable to offer sufficient data.



Fig 13: Abu Shoosha Café- Old City of Darna



Two views of Al Quds Mosque, Darna, built under a mountain



Fig 15: Al Sahaba Cemetery, Darna

Part 2: Reality

Libya, unlike other states in the region, was economically stable with oil revenues sufficient to provide good standard of living for its small population of less than three million people. In the seventies and eighties the number of graduates in different fields increased dramatically providing the country with specialized and capable architects, engineers and professionals of related fields. The main task for these professionals was to translate society's values into an improved environment; they had live examples from different regions of the country of how people's environmental needs had been met in the past and what possibilities exist for meeting them at the time. Ronald Lewcock puts it eloquently: "One of the best justifications of the specialized skill of the architect is that he or she makes possible the continuation into the future of valuable qualities of the environment, form, texture, material, and of detail and decoration, that would otherwise disappear."⁸

Social, political and demographic changes have taken place in Libya in the last 20 years. The population almost doubled as a result of a high birth rate and of opening the borders to neighboring countries to provide much needed labor. Emigration from rural areas to the major cities increased and the State was faced with growing needs in housing, infrastructure, and social facilities for the increasing urban populations.

Contemporary Libyan Architecture

The State's first approach to provide housing was by adopting quick, low-cost solutions in the form of mass housing for low-income groups. Older versions were of poor quality and badly built that eventually led to deteriorated areas.

Outside experts were brought in. They played a major role in the shaping of the now exiting environment. As Fazlur Khan elucidated," without proper understanding of or empathy for the cultural, social and religious characteristics of a country, western technologies, often innocently but forcefully and efficiently propose the direct use of Western mass production."⁹ Through the use of international references rather than local ones, the end result was a copy of methods and technology that was not related or based on any local cultural philosophy.

Associating cultural presence with backwardness in time was experienced in many societies including the Libyan. The public's lack of appreciation and understanding of certain architectural language, and the absence of communication between architectural students and architects and the public to promote architectural values, resulted in architects working separate from and not expressing public values. Architectural education lacked a clear orientation and direction, and little had been done towards the inclusion of cultural issues in the curricula.

Absence of the private sector was partially attributed to the interpretation, by the public, of the quotation from The Green Book: "Al-bait lisakinih", which translates to "the house belongs to the dweller". Owners were unable to collect rent or even to claim their properties. This reality discouraged the financially able sector from investing in real estate leading to a shortage in housing. It also caused distrust among the owners and the users.



Views from modern Benghazi³⁰



View from Modern Tripoli ³⁰

The increased population and the housing shortage pushed some old cities' homeowners to improve their dwellings or to demolish and substitute existing structures with new buildings. By working around and diverting rules and regulations, some of these owners introduced foreign structures to the harmonious weaving of these traditional settlements (**Fig. 16**).

In 1992, Libya was divided into 1500 mahallah (communes). Each mahallah is vested with its own budget, and legislative and executive powers, such as they were in the Basic People's Congress. Revolutionary committees supervise the Mahallat.¹⁰ This new political arrangement did not discharge the centralized bureaucratic government, which administered all housing and all other sphere activities. The absence of the consumer from the decision making process, left the situation in the hands of policy makers that do not see what needs to be done in the same way as those in need see it. This lack of user (community) participation led to the creation of an inharmonious environment, the least to say. And as Dr. Jamal Akbar illustrates, "Contemporary environments reflect the values and norms of decision makers rather than the needs of users. The standardization of manufactured materials, similarity of environmental professional values and almost unified curricula of schools of architecture and planning have resulted in similar solutions every where, thus eroding cultural diversity"¹¹

Mr. Turner, in his various studies, touches on several important issues. He believes that the first condition of the restructuring of housing is the people's reassertion of their rights to determine and act upon their own needs and priorities. It is impossible for distant administrators and professional specialists to be experts on People's needs and priorities, and impossible for them to know how that immense variety of priorities and effective demands can best be met with locally available resources.¹² He emphasizes that when dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for key decisions in the housing process, on the

other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfillment and a burden on the economy. ¹³ Mr. Turner attributes the personal and social stress that people experience as a result of mismatched housing to the shortage of dwelling space or services and the consequent reduction in or complete lack of choice. ¹⁴

High-rise apartment buildings, Western style department stores and complete townships with all social amenities, were standardized and duplicated all over the country. Most of these buildings were climatically and culturally unsuitable and proved to be socially unacceptable to the users. Gradually, Libyan society was forced into a new lifestyle.



Zawia: A growing city west of Tripoli ³²

Attempts were made by individuals to influence architectural outcome by injecting “Islamic and local elements” to built structures. OR was it what Hisham Sharabi calls ‘ the concept of Neo-patriarchy’” which is generated by the political will to disguise fragments of modernity imposed by the modern economy and modern technology; where pieces or elements of tradition are juxtaposed or inserted in an urban space or social environment, and are ravaged by deteriorating, distorting, disintegrating forces operating in mentalities, collective behavior, discourse, physical landscapes, villages, houses, and religious beliefs.”¹⁵In the case of the new buildings in Libya,

the blind use of forms from the past without a full understanding of their meaning and the rampant and uninformed application of ‘Islamic’ and local decorations on some of the export architecture, presented lame efforts to respond to the cultural needs.

The UN embargo on Libya, imposed in 1990, had its economic ramifications. The State’s large scale projects were replaced by single family and small housing buildings by the private sector; and except for the construction of the new town of Sirt to house the government seat, construction in most of the country was in stand still situation including the freezing of many projects at different phases.

In most countries, as Alfred Van Huyck points out, the private sector plays an important role; the quality and adequacy of housing is directly related to the capability of private sector construction firms. But for the private sector to enter the field it must have reasonable expectations of freedom of operation, with only as much regulation as necessary to protect the public interest.¹⁶ In this case, the uncertainty of the situation limited any architectural progress or major activity.

Did the political, economic and social changes that Libya went through in the last few years lead to a cultural change? Mr. Ashraf Salama, in his presentation at the 5th Colloquium on Architecture, implies that "The culture of a group is changing over time, since its' underlying standards, beliefs and value system are not constant phenomena. They keep the identity of a group static for a period of time and then a process of change and development occurs, leading to another content of identity for the same group."¹⁷

SUMMARY

Restoration and Conservation

Conservation presents the brightest side of architecture in Libya. There is a wake of awareness of the value of heritage as a representative of culture and there are attempts to conserve and restore historic sites and buildings.

Ghadames is a successful example of people's participation in restoration and conservation projects. Restored areas became places of recreation and cultural activity for the city, and the conservation, management and maintenance became the responsibility of the local government and community.

The people of Darna are putting forward immense efforts to restore and revive their rich culture. They are in great need for educated, structured support to direct these efforts.

The Old City of Tripoli is faced with several challenges; to stop the deterioration and the ad-hoc additions to the houses in old residential districts that are destroying both their physical and social fabric, to restore historically significant buildings by searching into the causes of deterioration and finding the proper solutions, and by developing conservation strategies. Darna , Benghazi and Nalut are some of the other locations that share similar situations.

I like to borrow Mr. Dogan Kuban's analysis of mosques, that what makes them truly symbolical is their relationship to the soil, the physical environment on which they where built, the cultural and built environment in which they where created.¹⁸ And I apply that to old cultural cities as well. I also support the judgment made by the jury of the 5th cycle of the Aga Khan Awards, that historical edifices should be placed in the context of historic and urban environments with contemporary functions that accommodate uses and perform services in order to enable their continued importance in the lives of the people and to sustain their existence.¹⁹

Architectural Education and Practice

Architectural education is mainly offered through two institutions, Architecture Departments at Garyunis University, Benghazi, and Al Fatah University, Tripoli. The course of study covers approximately five years of compulsory courses. The programs emphasize theoretical studies and no requirements of practical experience. In spite of some efforts to inject local architectural studies, architecture education in Libya is still highly influenced by Western references and textbooks and lacks a clear direction. For architecture and planning to be compatible with culture and sociology of the people they serve; there needs to be emphasis on social needs by offering social science courses. And as the role of the architect must be related to the needs of its society, architectural students need to be brought nearer to the people and their culture as well as to build a responsible attitude towards the environment. Noticeably, there is not much correlation between architecture education and reality of what is taking place in the area.

Another factor in the field of architectural education is the faculty members. Till recently, the majority of faculty members were foreigners whose presence in the country is highly dependent on the political situation. Coupled with the accepted system of appointing and excluding school and department faculty members as dictated by situations and with the participation of school and department members including students and up the hierarchy. These two measures created instability among the teaching staff as well as lack of continuation of philosophy and method, not to mention the variety of educational backgrounds, mostly Western, that students are subjected to. Due to economical factors, many Libyan faculty members are practicing in offices simultaneously, which might be providing immediate practical experience to students.

As for architectural practice, there is no formal registration or licensing requirements for professional architects. This allowed engineers and surveyors to practice architecture as well, which reflected negatively on the built environment. There is a clear absence of architectural debate and active professional bodies and shortage of professional publications, local and foreign.

By-laws, planning and building codes have no adaptation to traditional and conventional building practices. They are mostly of foreign origin.

The Built Environment

In my way to Nalut, a four-hour trip south into the desert, I had a very uncomfortable feeling that the slum areas of Tripoli were never letting go of me. It looked like someone loaded a big truck of those foreign, unfitting buildings and dropped them along the way. They looked like big balls of weeds flown there by "Khamaseen" winds. They were badly composed foreign sentences in the midst of a cultural masterpiece.

It is normal to see what seems to be un-finished buildings being inhabited as it became an acceptable practice to leave the steel reinforcement rods sticking out at the top of buildings and not to finish the exterior of buildings, which is mostly a result of lack of funds and owners

disregard for building laws and regulations that are rarely enforced. Landscaping of the site is not a common practice yet. There are quite a few neglected and unfinished structures scattered around.

For the majority of buildings, unless one is aware of the actual site of a given building, it is virtually impossible to guess its' regional location, and sometimes even function as that might change at different stages of construction.

At and near old culturally responsive structures, new buildings stand witness and warning to what is and might be coming

Observations

On Knowledge of Users and User Participation

In old cities, users built homes that responded to their needs and knowledge of the environment; the new built environment reflects no understanding of Libyan architecture and its' related social-cultural dimensions. Secluding the users from the building process and decision-making resulted in a less adaptable and responsive structures. To produce suitable architecture, the main material of consideration should be the whole human group that is to live in these forms and volumes. Emphasis should be on social, behavioral and cultural awareness and knowledge.

Mr. John Turner, years ago, provided valuable insight into the effects and influences of consumer participation, he argued that the design, construction, improvement and management of homes and neighborhoods are the responsibilities of local communities, not of the state or the market. And that when the community is recognized as the dominant sector in housing, a much richer and more accommodating variety of alternatives can match a wide variety of political, economic and cultural contexts.²⁰ Further more, he believes that where authority is not in the hands of the people, or where control over the immediate ends is not in their hands, there can be no genuine culture. Remote ends are divorced from everyday life and culture becomes a spurious activity, or product, even when manipulated by the minority who control the means of mass-production.²¹

On Values and Vocabulary

The importance of learning the vocabulary is to produce the proper language. I refer to vocabulary here as the interpretation of values that should translate into shapes and volumes. Akbar Zargar expresses this concept as, "In architecture there should not be nostalgia for traditional forms, but an effort to recapture the spiritual and social context associated with that architecture." "The common model of approaching the past is to be strongly impressed by fascinating forms and try to copy them in new buildings. This simplistic approach ignores the very real fact of the 'present', on the one hand, on the other, denigrates the past and its architecture by ignoring its social and economic context."²² Hisham El-Kadi advocates the creation of architectural pressure groups in different localities to promote architectural values.²³

On Local Components

The absence of studies pertaining to local materials and the impact of environmental conditions on buildings contribute to the deterioration of relatively new projects; a result of unsuitable imported technology and inefficient traditional technologies. Inadequacy or lack of maintenance is another factor. And as Dr. Ozkan points out, “The introduction of inappropriate, imported or imposed technology has been diagnosed as one of the major ills of contemporary developments in architecture which have contributed to the disfigurement of the built environment.”²⁴

On Universalism

To preserve the balance between universalism, modernization and a sense of local identity, without proper modification for the local culture, heritage, climate and building tradition, can only express a bareness of spirit and create an environment that is irrelevant and inefficient²⁴

The changes that were imposed on the people of Ghadames in the new development led to major social deformations, as it ignored a strong and highly structured social context.

On Possibilities

The review of traditional Libyan architecture presented architecture that symbolized certain values pertinent to a specific culture.

As old forms are the most obvious points of reference for continuity; ⁶ recognizing the living tradition could lead into evolution into modernity suitable to the local society,⁷ and to provide solutions sensitive to the regional and cultural characteristics of the area

On Reality

With the housing situation the way it is lately, the people gradually gave up most of their personal requirements and conditions. The majority, after paying the full price of the house in advance and still waiting a few years before buildings are finally finished, are thrilled to get any residence at all. Suitability of these residences to the people or vice versa will eventually reflect on their social behavior as well as on the built environment. As Mr. Turner sums that up, “Housing is a sphere of action in which everyone takes part. Homes and neighborhoods either sustain and support people in a society, or they burden and oppress them; buildings and services either improve or deteriorate. What happens depends on what all sectors and people-households in their own communities, market producers and distributors, state agencies and all intermediaries- do or fail to do.”²⁵

In reviewing Libyan architecture, I felt that time has stood still since I left. Events that occurred in Libya during this period hindered the potential cultural growth. Yet, after partial and possible total lifting of the sanctions imposed on the country, Libya is on the verge of new era.

The question is: Could the proper action be staged and thought through before a jump into the point of no return takes place?? As I look at what happened in Egypt, I get more skeptical.

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