THE LIBYAN ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents and analysis the changes of the urban and architectural features of the Libyan architecture. Such features which are a reflection of a number of direct and indirect factors, which may include political, economical and social as well as the environmental factor which had a big impact on formulating architectural characteristics of the traditional buildings and towns: Tripoli, Benghazi, Ghadamis, Hoon and Al-fogha.

It will concentrate on the architectural features changes of the city of Tripoli as a case study through the last decades. Starting from presenting, the traditional buildings followed by the Turkish and Italian buildings, the Kingdom era projects and coming up to the changes of the Revolution of 1969. This period will be divided into two main parts: the first part covers the period between 1969-2006, and the second period from 2006-up to the present time. In addition to that, there will be a presentation of the so-called modern architecture as well as some recommendations for protection our heritage from the collapses and disappearance.

Key words: Architecture, History, Tradition, Libya, Heritage.
Introduction

The urban and architectural features of cities and towns are a direct response to a number of local and international factors. Indeed, it is interplay of a group of factors i.e. (political, social, economical and environmental). The result of this interplay is changeable and renewable from time to time, which distinguishes one culture from another.

The most common feature of the new buildings is their similarity in most of Libyan cities and towns. Many projects, which are planned, designed, and or constructed in Tripoli or Benghazi, have been implemented in other cities and towns throughout the country with almost the same characteristics and features. Architecturally; buildings appear with a new design and construction features. The absence of courtyards, huge glass facades and using of imported decorative materials and elements, are together considered as a new character and needs for modern life. Many high-rise buildings and glass towers are under construction nowadays, mainly in Tripoli.

What distinguishes the Libyan cities today like many other cities around the world is the lack of coherence and harmony character, which caused an architectural and urban confusing and inconsistent features, and consequently the absence of a clear identity distinguishes from one another despite the different of local conditions affecting each in addition to the non-responsiveness of planning regulations and standards that define urban planning style building and continued growth. The lack of oversight led to the emergence of the firm slums and bad architectural features become a reality, which is caused of failure of the local authorities to develop solutions, and finally imposed it to be an integral part of the architectural composition.

One of the basics should be adopted is the need for standards aimed at protecting the urban and architectural heritage, and develop scientific methodology take into consideration the lessons learned from the past culture to build the present and lay the basics for the future.

Most previous studies in this field did not develop scientific and integrated solutions, which enables architects and planners from deploying them in the planning, design, construction and urban renewal processes, so that a continuation of modern architecture and development of the traditional , taking into consideration the development of live and modern human needs.

Architectural Features of the Old City of Tripoli

The city of Tripoli passed through several historical stages. It is considered by many historians as a Phoenician origin. The succession of colonial campaigns on the country began passing through Rome, Byzantine campaign Knights of Saint John, the Ottomans and Italian colonial period, produced a multiple ruler and architectural
features, many of them demolished as a result of military colonial campaigns. A few is left by Italian and Ottoman colonialisms [1, 2, 3]. Fig. 1.

Figure 1 Alsarai Building Museum

Figures 2, 3 Part of the old town of Tripoli

Many of the buildings located within the walls of the old city of Tripoli are in a bad architectural and construction conditions and some of them are in ruin state (Fig. 2 and 3).

The growth of the city was and still in response to the changing of many requirements which, are changeable and or renewable. Sometimes they are accepted and rejected at other times. The development of land for transportation systems of various kinds especially in historical area has negatively affected the physical fabric, since many of these traffic systems require suitable roads for various uses as well as parking with extensive areas. This situation has had a negative impact on the urban structure and the physical fabric of existing cities and towns especially the historical and traditional ones. The modern social culture participated in destruction of many traditional buildings and replaced with new ones not relevant to the historical and social surroundings. In addition it is often rejects all that is old even if it has a high historical value. The weakness of institutions concerned to preserve of historic buildings and cities, has contributed directly to the emergence of an acceptable architectural features confused about the inherent architectural values.
Many historical buildings exposed to substantial additions and amendments, which lose their identity such as: Asarai Al-hamra museum and many other residential and communal buildings, which located within and outside the fences of the old city [4]. The traditional city of Tripoli like other traditional cities is characterized by simplicity of design and construction methods as well as the use of local building materials such as stones and bricks for walls, gypsum and palm trees trunks for roofs all that participated to create a distinguished character in the city.

The compact system of construction which adapted to the natural environment and responded to the social and economical requirements have been high-regarded as an expression of deep social and environmental awareness of the Arab-Islamic community.

**The Architectural Features of Colonial Architecture**

Libya through history and for strategic, political and economic reasons was invaded by many of the world colonial powers such as Greek, Romans, Knights of Saint John, Ottomans and Italians.

The only architecture that has had a positive impact on people’s hearts and become an integral part of their daily lives is the authentic Arab Islamic architecture. Libyan society is an integral part of the Islamic Arab society, The human behavior which is part of the values and principles derived from religion, customs and social traditions have had the greatest impact on formulating the urban structure of the city and link the different functions of social relations that stresses the privacy of each family and each individual member of society, as well as architectural features that reflect the conduct of humanitarian community which, is committed to religion and customs. Emphasis will be concentrated in this part of the research paper on the architectural and urban features of Ottoman and Italian architecture.

**Architectural Features of Ottoman Architecture**

Ottoman architecture in Libya is characterized by its adaptation to local environment as well as the Islamic character. Since the entry of Ottomans to Libya in 1551, they were concerned with fortifying cities and castles, turning many of the churches into mosques, such as fortifying the Old City of Tripoli and the change of the Church of Leonard located inside Asarai Alhamra building to a mosque [3, 4]. They gave much importance to the architecture of mosques, markets and baths. In addition many buildings are named by Ottoman names, especially mosques, such as Ahmed Pasha Mosque, Drghout Pasha Mosque, Osman Pasha Mosque, and others [5, 6]. Fig.4 and
Islamic architecture is prospered greatly during Ottomans period in Libya. Turkish concentrated to build up palaces, mosques, schools, baths and markets as well as houses. At the level of architecture of mosques, we find that the existing evidences reflect the distinctive architectural features are characterized by their simplicity of design and spirituality form and substance. The decorations carved on stones, marble and timber, in addition to the simplicity of domes and minarets has an important role in the reflection of architectural and urban features for this period [6].

Architectural Features of the Fascism Architecture

This stage started with the Italian occupation of Libya in 1911. It can be divided into two main stages. The first stage covers the period of 1911 to 1928. It is characterized somewhat by the Mediterranean architecture, which was prevailed in the cities of southern Italy. In this stage the Italian Architects used some features of local architecture especially in residential buildings and services, in addition to the use of orielis, domes, vaults, bricks fired that parallel of the Ottoman assets. The second stage is distinguished with the emergence of fascism in Italy, which had highlighted scale buildings with symbols and signs Romanian [7].

Italians often not concerned about the Libyans socially, economically and physically. More than 80000 Italian colonists were even in 1970, residing in the best agricultural land and in urban areas where are prohibited to Libyans and Arab. Libyans were living in the underdeveloped remote areas around cities, on hillsides and in the desert villages where they lack the most basic requirements of living. As a result the migrants settled in slums and underdeveloped areas around cities and towns, in particular the cities of Tripoli and Benghazi [13]. These areas were characterized by primitive residential shelters of tin and wood tents. By 1970’s most of these areas were demolished and partly replaced by a new buildings and better services and community facilities. In major cities especially in the cities of Tripoli and Benghazi the Italian architecture is characterized by evolution, which reflects the insistence of the colonial settlement and remain where they are considered Libya as the fourth coast of Italy. The Italian architecture features in this period in Libya is an integral part of Italian architectural character i.e. (the Central Bank of Libya and the National Library
Building formerly the headquarters of the ruling Italian) in addition to an administrative and residential buildings spread out in the city center. Fig.6, 7 and 8.

**Figure 6** The National Bank of Libya  
**Figure 7** The National Library in Tripoli  
**Figure 8** The Most Popular Architectural features of Fascism

**Architectural Features of the Libyan Architecture: 1952-1969:**

This part covers the royal government period of Libya. It is distinguished by an economic vulnerability and limited resources on the level of the country in general and in particular the city of Tripoli. However, with the exception of some governmental buildings that were necessary for management in addition to the premises of the foreign communities in particular the Italians that settled the country so in 1971, the local population were living either in modest dwellings lacked the main services such as electricity, sanitation, water, telephone, road,... or in underdeveloped areas around main cities [13]. The situation of cultural, social and economic which prevailed in that period, both at the state level and at the individual level created architecture can be divided into four main parts as follows:

1- Architecture of the power: includes palaces and governmental buildings. These buildings are characterized by prosperity and strength which are reflected by the large and distinctive architectural expression of the domes, arches and ornaments in addition to the vast green spaces and beautiful gardens.
2- Fascist architecture: It is created by the Italian colonial during their administration of the State. It is distinguished by highlighting the architectural features which confirm the identity of Italian fascism at that time.

3- Local architecture: The architectural features of the local Libyan architecture are presented by simple residential and service buildings such as mosques, Koran schools, markets and public buildings.

4- Slum and underdeveloped areas: This type of settlements was the hallmark on Libyan cities. Where they were temporary buildings set up tin and wood with lack of the most basic requirements of healthy-life. However, during seventies they were removed in stages and replaced by new projects and buildings.


The urban and architectural development in Libya in this period has been associated with the development of the economy and social life. The main objective of the development plans adopted by different institutions, both public and private was the construction in all areas of residential and community facilities. They concentrated on solving the problem of quantity at the expense of quality requirements. Hundreds of thousands of housing units, thousands of school and healthcare buildings and other service has been built in all towns and villages [13].

In residential area, for example, theoretically plans emphasizes the need to focus on planning and design aspects and quality needs according to the local condition i.e. social, economical, and environmental of each region... But reality says otherwise, since similar plans, and designs, architectural and urban features of the most public and private projects assure the lack of commitment to those plans and directions in practice forms. Fig 9, 10 and 11.

Figures 9, 10 Public Buildings
The absence of public participation in the planning and design of buildings especially housing has led many people to make changes to the buildings where they reside different from the original designs, such as close balconies and windows, in addition to amendments on changing the functions of some interior spaces of building. Everyone make changes according to his beliefs and culture. They use different colors and building materials. This situation contributed to the formation of new architectural character incompatible with the original building in line with the spirit of the architectural identity of the urban fabric of the cities or towns. Thus, the city became a random composition and appearance.

The observation in today’s architecture, that few are characterized by simplicity and beauty inspired by the natural, social, and economic environment and creating a kind of integration between people and the environment, in which they live. A lot of new buildings lacks identity and accepted architectural features, either through excessive use of architectural decoration and colors, which, deviates from the simplicity of design, or through the imitation and quotation of European architecture through the use of a huge glass surfaces and openness to the outside rather than on the direction of the internal courtyard. The courtyard is considered the most architectural heritage element missing in today’s architecture.

Although there are laws, regulations and planning standards that govern the planning, design and implementation processes, however, the weakness of regulatory institutions has led to the creation of informal buildings in most towns and villages. Shops, workshops, car repair, carpentry workshops are scattered at residential communities and entertainment areas for, which created an informal distribution of different uses of buildings and land with architectural features, lacked of unity and identity.

The city of Tripoli has become inhomogeneous mixture of functions and of architectural features which may lead to loss its identity, unity, purity and
humanitarian measurement, if not remedied through strict procedures. Every city must have its own physical and architectural character which emerges from the spirit of the environment in all components, benefiting from the experiences and lessons of the past.


It is clear that the architectural culture of many people both at the public level or at individual’s level started to take another new direction differs from the past. It is no longer much interested in heritage and preserves it, except some intellectuals and professionals who are committed and ordinary individuals who are committed and built the future through the development of the past. The culture, which began spreading in our society nowadays, is the culture of high buildings (towers) with huge glass facades that considered as a symbol of economic progress which leads to urban and cultural development.

The sustainable urbanization is of which emanates from the local environment of each region and city, and which responds to the economic and social requirements of each area. As presented in figures number 12, 13 and 14 many of projects in which some of them are under construction in the city of Tripoli reflect the new directions of architecture, with new features and character which, are exotic to the architectural cultural that spread around in most of Libyan cities and towns.

![Architectural features of under construction investment towers in Tripoli](image1.png)

**Figures: 12, 13 14** Architectural features of under construction investment towers in Tripoli

It is the right of every generation to put their marks and develops their life according to their culture and beliefs which are supposed to be an extension and development of previous generation’s culture.

The architecture is part of human behavior based on culture and responsive to religion, traditions and customs, economy and future visions and through the simulation of other civilizations.
The future architecture should be adapted to local conditions i.e. environmental, social, and economic and reflected through the cultural dimension of society so that sustainable architecture contributes to the creation of great civilizations.

Architectural Heritage Preservation

The concepts and philosophies that define the development to preserve traditional buildings and sites of historical value stems from our perspective and our analysis of the architectural and urban fabric as one unit, spatially and functionally, and not just masses and physical spaces. In addition it is a reflection of visions and high humanitarian contents as well as natural shell of human intervals with the surroundings. Therefore, the development, preservation and rehabilitation processes must be conducted in the utmost seriousness, precision and care. The success of such programs depends on developing a mechanism of administrative and technical intervention needed for success, such as public participation, direct economical and institutional support [10, 13].

The conservation and maintenance programs must be created in a scientific and professional way qualitative and quantitative for the individual and group of buildings as well as the surrounding environment, in addition, to the archeological sites of historical value. The success of such programs depends upon:

1- Public support: through direct and indirect participation of public. This may include individual people, professionals and relevant administrations
2- Economical support: can be done through public institutions, private organizations and individuals with interest in urban and architectural heritage.
3- Institutional support: It includes institutions and all public departments and state companies.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that:

1- Study and analyze the existing condition of any city or town before any development may take place so as to benefit of the architectural elements and features and historical heritage value, which could be considered as a basis for any future development.
2- Study and analyze the various factors which have influences on the emergence and development of city i.e. environmental, social and economical that contributed in the formation of urban, architectural and cultural elements of the area and how human through history has been able to adapt himself with these factors.
3- The human behavior has a significant impact on the quality of architecture. It is based on human values emanating from the religion and customs as well as the experience of previous generations in all areas of concern rights. However, it must be taken into account the future requirements of life and new technology, which will help to create a mature culture reflected at distinguished urban as well as architectural fabric and character. The bypass cultural backwardness leads to underdeveloped environment and the emergence of random ugly and an acceptable architectural.

4- Keep away of others imitation. However, each society is distinguished by different environmental and local conditions. The glass buildings may suit one environment where there is a need to a big quantity of natural solar energy inside the buildings but it doesn't suit the hot arid climate areas and conservative societies.

5- Public participation played an important role of building civilizations. Generally, traditional towns are the best example for that. It is advisable that people should directly participate in every development processes, so that such participation would be positive and constructive.

6- Develop scientific and practical programs to preserve buildings and sites of archaeological and historical value. Such programs should be used as bases for the preparation of a new development projects, taking into account the future requirements of life.

References


