



Conserving Amman's Identity Within the Global Effect On Local Architecture

Jawdat Goussous¹, Myrna Haddadin²

The University of Jordan, School of Engineering, Department of Architecture engineering. Jordan.

Abstract

Globalization processes have been increasingly transforming cities due to the exchange of information, technology, people and so on. For instance, rapid urbanization and technological advances have resulted in more and more standardization of built environments, depriving human habitats of regional and cultural identity. As a result, this study investigates the effect of this urban shift on Amman's identity and traditional buildings, looking forward to conserve resident's identity and their cultural heritage regardless tourism. This study is achieved by a deep analysis of Al Abdali downtown development. The research method included reviewing of textual and visual material, site visits and interviews with the public. In order to reach the aims and purpose of the research one should identify the importance that conserving traditional buildings have on Amman's identity, the way Amman's identity was shaped, the identity that is meant to be constructed by projects such as Al Abdali, and finally the way the new image was expressed.

Keywords: Globalization, identity, built environment, Conservation.



1. Introduction

Globalization is a group of interchanging processes which includes flow goods, technology, information, and people (Held, 1999). Over the past few decades, globalization processes have been increasingly transforming cities, for instance, rapid urbanization and technological advances have resulted in more and more standardization of built environments, depriving human habitats of regional and cultural identity, in which the trend of standardization is becoming an international malaise as the same building methods, materials, and styles are applied. Jordan is one of the cities that are witnessing a production of a growing body of knowledge and technologies that influence the built environment, in addition to the capital flow and investments due to the Iraq war.

The aim of this research is to identify the factors that shape Amman's architecture and urban identity. The study also aims at understanding how identity, as well as power relations, is constructed through the built environment itself, and how identity is expressed in Amman's recent developments. This research concentrates on the need to preserve our traditions and identity from demolition regardless tourism

There are many advantages for adopting conservation of our cultural heritage sites, such as:

- It preserved people's Identity (their unique character), believes, etc.
- It provides the satisfaction of continuity in life for people
- It plays a good educational role for those who visit historic and cultural sites
- It creates new jobs
- Keeps the traditional skills
- It reminds people by the important events happened in the history

These values may interact, and they may involve subjective assessments in determining conditions for conservation interventions. They may change over time, but are worth respecting and preserving. All heritage values were divided by Feilden and Jokilehto into two basic categories:

1. Cultural values that include identity, art and rarity values,
2. Socioeconomic values, that include economic, functional, educational, social, and political values (Feilden & Jokilehto, 1993)

In this study the concentration is on the cultural values, these values are the outcome of the relationship between people and their cultural heritage. They are reflected in their general interest in heritage objects and their outstanding significance, interpretation of the building's character that has shaped their identity, awareness of difference from other people's culture, and knowledge of the degree of conservation intervention needed to save their heritage. Built environment reflects the sense of place:



As well as the traditional buildings represent the identity of people, it can also provide

the “sense of place” that has developed over time is unique and cannot be replicated. One such sense of place is a renovation project possessing significant historical implications is Seattle’s Pike Place Market (Washington State, USA). It is originally constructed in 1907 in a relatively new city; the market was a functional gathering place for the selling of produce. It consisted of numerous buildings haphazardly blending together in no particular architectural composition. The market continued throughout the next 50 years in its traditional function; . Figure 2.

Figure 2, a&b: Renovation of Seattle's Pike Place Market, the first picture shows the Market in 1907, while the second one is in recent days



Source: <http://viaducthistory.com/neighborhood/PikePlaceMarket.htm>

Identity as a reflection of the built environment

How identity is shaped, and how it relates to the production of the urban built environment, particularly under the processes of globalization, is significant for understanding how and why a certain development takes the shape it takes.

The official collective identity is what the nation-state pro-motes as its national identity. But, how can one understand national identity? Many scholars and historians view the national identity as “constructed”. The notion that national identity is “constructed” is owed to Benedict Anderson, it tells that the nation is “an imagined political community” print-capitalism helped one nation to imagine other nations beyond its own geographic boundaries (Anderson, 2006).

Anthony King suggests that what we call the city “exists only in our heads or in the discourses of those who work in the various arts and media”, this is because most people live in a fragment of the city. City fragments are “the bases of communities”; they are where demonstrations as well as celebrations take place; they are the places



of memory and nostalgia. As such, these fragments become the base of an “urban identity” and the material of the “narratives and tales of the city”(King, 2007).

Harvey argues that under modernism the relation between place and individual and communal identities became stronger (Harvey, 1990). Harvey tells that the loss of urban fabric under modernism brought about by the capitalists’ creative destruction, which meant the loss of traditional sites that are full of collective identity and memory (Harvey, 1991). This loss is meant to be compensated by the commodification of the city and its spaces and places (Ibid). Thus, modernism as a founding ideology came to shape the social reality of the city’s citizens.

Identity as a reflection of the built environment

How identity is shaped, and how it relates to the production of the urban built environment, particularly under the processes of globalization, is significant for understanding how and why a certain development takes the shape it takes. Identity is about “sameness” and “oneness.” Nezar AlSayyad and Kathryn Woodward take such definitions as the starting point to understanding identity, yet both agree that differences are what make identity (AlSayyad, 2001).

It is even more difficult to comprehensively study the relation of identity to the built environment with reference to only one kind of identity. Individual and corporate identities are strongly relevant when the identity of a certain decision maker, architect, or developer prevails to shape the built environment. Popular collective identity becomes significant when the public takes part in decisions related to the production of the built environment, and it helps us understand how members of the public interact with and make sense of their built environment (Anderson, 2006).

Donald concludes that the city is an “imagined environment,” that embraces the translation of the places they have made into the imaginary reality of our mental life”. In tandem with Donald, Alev Çinar and Thomas Bender likewise see “cities as imagined places”. The city is just as the ‘nation’, it is an abstract concept that is referred through a variety of representations (Çinar, A., & Bender, T., 2007).

1.3 Identity under Contemporary Globalization

How does the concept of identity as a construct and the urban built environment as active in materializing identity relate to how globalization processes affect identity and the construction of identity through and its expression in the urban built environment? Culture and identity are inseparable; some scholars talk about “cultural identity.” In fact, many scholars tackling cultural transformations under globalization link those to the question of identity change under the processes of globalization.

Robertson finds that national identities are not endangered by contemporary



globalization processes. On the contrary, he argues that the drive for nationhood is an important part of the process of globalization (Robertson, 1995). Harvey understands the search for identity under globalization as an “opposite reaction” to the continuously transforming world under globalization. Likewise, Castells also believes that cultural identities will not disappear under globalization, rather, the search for and the expression of identities becomes fundamental under globalization (Castells, 1996).

Capitalists, according to Harvey, are well aware that the varied products need people of “different identities” who would feel the need to consume those products. Since commanding the market requires a consistent change of products and product qualities, it follows then that identities should be manipulated consistently to create people’s need for such products or commodities. Thus, as many scholars agree, under contemporary globalization, not only does the diversity of identities among nations become important, but also the fragmentation of identity into “consumer identities” becomes significant. Harvey and other scholars see such identities as superficial and defined by the “style,” “look,” and “image,” among other things. (Harvey, 1991).

2. Settings (Al Abdali Downtown Project)

Al Abdali project has been associated with contemporary globalization processes since the late twentieth century, the same goes to Jordan. Al-Abdali project is named according to its location (connection of the name Abdali to the founder of Jordan). The developers of this project, who had no idea about the origin of this area’s name, suggested for this project names such as Al-Jawhara, and The Upper Downtown. (Rajjal, 2010).

It’s a Public-private partnership. The state’s share about 44 percent of the project’s shares in this investment. State-owned land the project occupies. Abdali Investment and Development (AID) company.

The large-scale projects in the Abdali development are carried out mostly by non-Jordanian developers and small scale ones are carried by Jordanians developers. Work on the plans for the Abdali development began in 2001-2002. Construction work on the project began in 2004. The project was scheduled to be completed in three phases (AID, 2008). Old buildings on the site of Phase II are yet to be demolished. The project occupies 350 dunum and will have a built-up area of 1.7 million square meters (AID, 2008).

3. Analysis The effect of the creative destruction in Al Abdali project

Following the theorization of Harvey, urban transformation, particularly under contemporary globalization processes, can be understood in terms of capitalism’s creative destruction. As capitalists look for more innovative means of production that



will yield more profits, they destroy the built environment they produced previously in order to replace it with a new built environment that enables the new innovation (Harvey, 1990).

For the Abdali New Downtown to take place, buildings that already exist on the sites of the future project had to be demolished. The site of the Abdali development primarily included military facilities and the Central Intelligence Agency buildings. It was suitable at that time to locate state institutions at the margins of the city, so these buildings were built in the 1960s and 1970s, on this site as it had not yet become the center of Amman. These buildings remained unchanged till 1980 even though Al Abdali became in the middle of the city.

After the state signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, and modernization processes were underway. The state was no longer at war, and as a sign of adopting modernization and the democratic processes the state's defensive and repressive apparatus were shifted away from the center of the city. Thus, the site could be cleared for redevelopment. In addition to the state-owned buildings, the process of creative destruction targeted privately-owned residential, commercial, and educational buildings on the site of the future Abdali project.

The demolition of buildings and urban spaces on the site of Al-Abdali project had negative results on residents of Al-Abdali's neighborhood, as well as the city's residents. Those who lived, worked, or went to school there had to take longer and more expensive trips to school or work, but that cost did not detract from the benefits accrued to the developers. The people who occupied the site had their good and bad memories associated with this site fading away. After decades from when the project has begun, some of the adults I've interviewed can't even remember the major buildings of the previous site, and many of them in the city identified Al – Abdali site with the new project.

4. The effect of the city image concept on Al Abdali project

The building's image became an important form of investment, in addition, creating a distinguishable built environment for living, working and entertainment, proved to be profitable, moreover, producing spectacular urban spaces has become a common practice, therefore:

1. The developers produced these developments to enhance their corporate image and increase their profits,
2. Architects designed such developments to boost their portfolio. (Harvey, 2001).

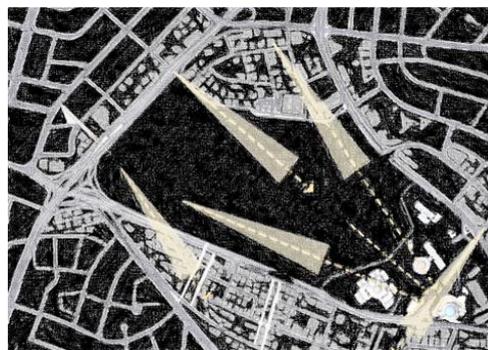
The large scale, high visibility, high cost, and anticipated high profit of Amman's 21st megaprojects made them a good means through which to create a city image. But what

image did these megaprojects seek to construct and how did they construct this image? The Abdali project was designed to create an image integral to the new image of Amman and the city's, as well as Jordan's, economic development. They indicate that the improved image of Amman has a positive effect on the economy (AID, 2008). The



key goal of Al Abdali project is to develop a vibrant, tightly knit, architecturally distinctive, and modern urban nucleus that would change the past image of the site and becomes a pole of excellence, attracting the best talents to live, study, work, and entertain (AID, 2008). Thus, developers seek to develop an image that would make Amman a global and modern city. The images seen from Al Abdali is as important as the image of Al Abdali, thus, Al Abdali development main composition plans' lines are formed by the view corridors (Ibid). It was these "view corridors" that "guide the alignment of streets and the placement of high-rise buildings" (Ibid).from Al Abdali is as important as the image of Al Abdali (see figure 4)

Figure 1: The analysis of the view corridors at the Abdali New Downtown by Abdali planners.

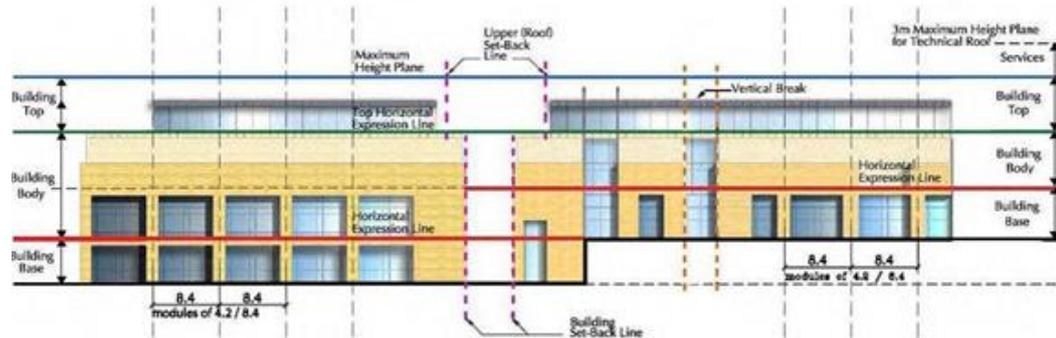


Source: Abdali Investment and Development (AID), edited by the researcher

Wrong understanding of the tripartite, as Al Abdali buildings consist of building base, body, and top (Abdali Mall Company, 2007). To keep on with the spirit of old buildings, Al Abdali developers used stone (AID,2008). On the other hand, they used the warm yellow stone that differs from the surroundings to distinguish the project, in addition the stone was smoothed, in contrast, the traditional stone was rough. Moreover, the rough off-white stone was not allowed to be used in Al Abdali Project. In addition, that some buildings are seen as combination between old and new architectural vocabulary and materials (curtain walls, stone cladding, and small openings)



Figure 2: The illustration of design guidelines for building façades at the Abdali New Downtown by the Abdali planners

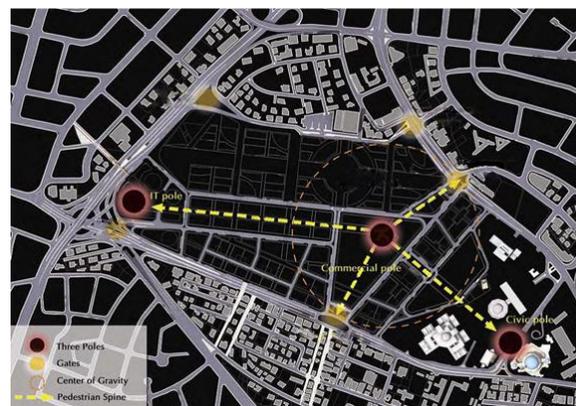


Source: Abdali Mall Company, 2007

4.1 Commodified Spaces

In capitalists' continuous pursuit of profit, and, particularly under contemporary globalization processes, they produce built environments of various scales, even whole cities, as commodified spaces for public consumption. The Abdali New Downtown was the most significant example of consumption spaces in the city. Thus, the Central Market Place, also called the Abdali Mall, constituted the core of the Abdali development. Thus, the plans for this development showed three main poles: the IT Pole at the western end of this development; the Civic Pole at the eastern end; the Commercial Pole, which consisted of the Abdali Mall, at the center.

Figure 3: The site plan showing the IT, Civic, and Commercial poles of Phase I of Al Abdali Downtown project.



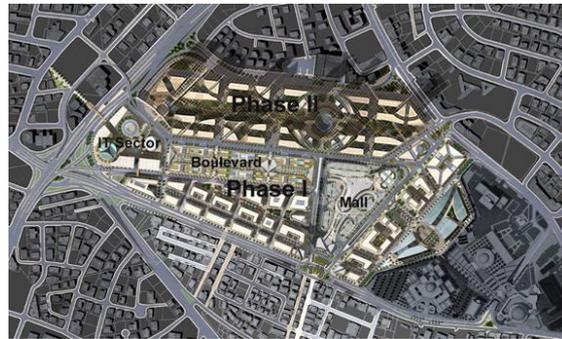
Source: Abdali Investment and Development (AID), edited by the researchers

The Abdali project was planned around the commercial component, that is, the Abdali Mall. It is not surprising then that this component was located in the center of the Abdali



development where the axes connecting the development's poles and those connecting the northern and southern gates intersected.

Figure 4: Site plan regarding phases of the Abdali New Downtown.



Source: Abdali Investment and Development (AID), edited by the researcher

In planning the Boulevard, the Abdali planners had in mind the commercial interest and viability that commercial spines may create (AID, 2008). As a result, the boulevard was designed with restaurants, retail stores, and cafés along its sides, in the lower stories of office and residential buildings bordering it on the sides (AID, 2008).

5. Conclusion

Amman's identity is a composition of different civilizations. The state institutions constructed Jordan's official national identity with reference to Islam, and Islam was a

significant element in popular identity. The most significant feature of the built environment in Amman that connects the city and its residents with Islam is the mosque. The location of King Abdullah I Mosque just east of the Abdali New Downtown begs the discussion of the relation between the Abdali development and the mosque. King Abdullah I Mosque was the most prominent building in this central area of Amman. Adopting modernity does not necessitate embracing the Western culture that produced it, and different nation-states could produce varied modernities. Jordanians formed a hybrid modernity in which characteristics from Western and non-Western modernities were adapted and became one dimension of the multiple dimensions of the Jordanian identity. According to Al Abdali developers, the impact of the Abdali development on the economy of Amman and the country would be assessed based on, among other things, conversion of the physical presence to a vision for the future economy (AID, 2008)



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