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PLURALITY AND DIVERSITY IN ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN RESEARCH

Ashraf M. Salama

Keywords

architectural education;
design studio;
slums;
heritage;
charrette;
public participation
public space;
human perception;
social ecology

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Abstract

Demonstrating the essence of the journal as a truly international platform that covers issues of interest and concern to the global academic and professional community, this issue of Archnet-IJAR, volume 11, issue # 2, July 2017 includes various topics that manifest plurality and diversity as inherent qualities of architectural and urban research published in the journal. Topics include architectural education and design studio teaching, urban and rural slums, heritage and historic environments in various contexts, participatory planning and the charrette process, assessment of public spaces and plazas, and human perception of the built environment. These topics are debated and analytically discussed within cities, settlements, and urban environments in Bahrain, Bangladesh, California-USA, Libya, Scotland, and Spain. The issue also includes three papers selected from the Fifth Architectural Jordanian International Conference – 1-3 November 2016, which uniquely speak to the context of Jordan and the wider Middle East. The edition ends with a book review that highlights emerging issues related to border landscapes and social ecologies.

A. M. Salama

A. M. Salama*,
Professor of Architecture
Head of Department of Architecture, University of Strathclyde,
Research Lead of CRAUCGS: Cluster for Research on Architecture and Urbanism of Cities in the Global South
Research Lead of BEEAPRU: Built Environment Education and Architectural Pedagogy Research Unit
75 Montrose Street, Glasgow G1 1XJ United Kingdom
*Corresponding Author's email address: ashraf.salama@strath.ac.uk

After 10 years of voluntary hard work, Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research advances its position among the world leading journals in architecture and urban studies. In addition to the various scientific and research databases including Avery index to Architectural Periodicals, EBSCO-Current Abstracts-Art and Architecture, Directory of Open Access Journals, Pro-Quest, Scopus-Elsevier and many university library databases, Archnet-IJAR is now part of the Web of Science Core Collection of Clarivate Analytics (formerly Thomson Reuters) and the Emerging Sources Citation Index <http://ip-science.thomsonreuters.com/mjl/> The Journal was recently invited to be part of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and for inclusion in its abstracting and indexing database which will add value and impact to Archnet-IJAR.

More great news about the achievements of Archnet-IJAR is that in the recent ranking of *Scopus* (May 2017), the journal has moved three places and topped many prestigious journals. It is now ranked for Architecture (Q1) 23 out of 87 and for Urban Studies (Q2) 60 out of 134. Another great achievement is that Archnet-IJAR continues to advance its position among the world leading journals in Architecture and Urban Studies where in the latest journal ranking and metrics of Scimago (SJR) Laboratories (June 2017), Archnet-IJAR has moved up 5 places and its performance exceeded many well known and well established journals that have been in the international refereed press for more than 40 years. As part of Scimago, Archnet-IJAR is now ranked: for Architecture (Q1) 18 out of 117 and for Urban Studies (Q2) 57 out of 138.

Following these achievements this issue of Archnet-IJAR, volume 11, issue # 2, July 2017 comes to demonstrate the essence of the journal as a truly international journal that covers issues of interest and concern to the global academic and professional community. The issue includes various topics that manifest plurality and diversity as inherent qualities of architectural and urban research published in Archnet-IJAR. Topics include architectural education and design studio teaching, urban and rural slums, heritage and historic environments in various contexts, participatory planning and the charrette process in the context of Scotland, assessment of public spaces and plazas, and human perception of the built environment. These topics are debated and analytically discussed within cities, settlements, and urban environments in Bahrain, Bangladesh, California-USA, Libya, Scotland, and Spain. The issue also includes three papers selected from the Fifth Architectural Jordanian International Conference – 1-3 November 2016, which uniquely speak to the context of Jordan and the wider Middle East. The edition ends with a book review that highlight important emerging issues related to border landscapes and social ecologies.

On architectural education and design studio teaching practices Marta Masdéu and Josep Fuses argue for the need to re-conceptualize the design studio and to incorporate pedagogical approaches such as distance learning and blended learning in order to revolutionize the studio environment as a learning space and a learning paradigm that needs to be continuously updated. They effectively develop the case for the design studio as a new participatory and delocalized learning space (Masdéu and Josep, 2017). On the other hand, in a different context, Fay Al Khalifa discusses the notion of autonomy in learning architecture in the context of the University of Bahrain (Al Khalifa, 2017). She examines the effect of using a mixed methods approach to integrate theoretical and practical assignments relevant to students' performance and understanding of complex architectural concepts and phenomena.

On the topic of slums, Aisha Abubakar *et al.* embark on a journey to define slums through a rigorous and rational thinking process. Summarising various trends, definitions and

approaches to solutions of slums, their work critically analyses more recent and structured approaches that attempt to grasp the complexity of all realities constituting the slum as a crucial key to their management. In pursuing this tough quest Abubakar develops a series of conceptual diagrams that illustrate the thinking process involved in slum definition (Abubakar *et al.*, 2017). The work concludes with a proposed Slum Property Map as a dynamic way that enables a deeper and a comprehensive understanding of slums and their underlying components, properties, and parameters.

In the context of the United Arab Emirates and the wider Gulf region, Joseph Hobbs (2017), from a geography-discipline perspective, examines how the architectural, social, and cultural heritage of this unique context may contribute to better development of this region's lived environment. His work proposes that adopting and adapting the vernacular architectural heritage to the modern built environment should not be the fundamental goal for heritage-informed design. He calls for understanding and examining the social processes underlying the traditional lived environment with the ultimate goal of reaching social sustainability. In a totally different context, the argument for heritage conservation persists where Rahman and Imon discuss the socio-political forces that shape human interventions in waterfronts in the context of Dhaka. Their work explores the way in which the conservation of the historic waterfront can contribute to the improvement of quality of life in Old part of the city. They also develop a series of suggestions toward protecting both natural and built environments (Rahman and Imon, 2017).

Ainslie Kennedy presents an analytical overview of the charrette process as performed in the context of Scotland. With a focus on charrette commissioning, construction, and delivery she examined over forty charrette reports developed and published between 2011 and 2016 utilizing a conceptual framework and a content analysis procedure (Kennedy, 2017). In essence, her work concludes with a typology of charrette-approaches unique to the context of Scotland.

The work of Georgia Lindsay explores the United Nations Plaza in San Francisco by arguing that the introduction and construction of the new Plaza has not fulfilled its promise to fully transform the social and economic life of the area. Yet, it has succeeded in creating a public space and a new scene of urban culture (Lindsay, 2017). Within the same interest of understanding social and economic dynamics as they relate to public spaces, Salama, Remali, and MacLean (2017) explore how successful urban spaces could impact the growth and performance of an urban context, not only as a physical urban reality, but also as a generator of social life. Utilizing St. Enoch Square as a case study, their work employs a multi-layered methodological approach constituted in a series of tools that include behavioural mapping, visual preference survey, walking tour assessment, contemplating settings, and observing physical traces and by-product of use in order to interpret various forms of experiences that take place. They conclude that results of implementing such methods combined would establish enhanced argumentation and rationalisations of different aspects of urban life in urban open spaces (Salama et al, 2017).

The work of Aghael and Özer is innovative in the sense that it applies two contrasting theories; Mental Map and Space Syntax on two Libyan cities, Al Khums and Bani Walid (Aghael and Özer, 2017). Their work advances the discussion on how various qualities and properties of the built environment affect human perception.

In this issue three papers were identified *the Fifth Architectural Jordanian International Conference – 1-3 November 2016*, after going through another round of reviews following the criteria of Archnet-IJAR, reflecting a wide spectrum of issues. The work of Al-Jokhadar and Jabi presents the different qualities of vernacular houses and neighbourhoods in the different

regions of the Middle East and North Africa in an attempt to build a vernacular model and apply it to high-residential developments. They offer a parametric exploration of sustainable solutions that are potentially appropriate and may facilitate the synergy of socio-climatic requirements, the well-being qualities of the residents, and the particularities of a locality. The work of Fakhouri and Haddad, presented in the form of a research or consultancy report, aims to define the key constraints and opportunities through conserving architectural and urban heritage in the historic cores of As Salt and Irbid. Abu-Alatta and Freewan (2017), argue, and rightly so, that the recent developments in Information Technology (IT) and digital media have introduced new opportunities to design studio teaching and learning and new dimensions to design and architecture. In light of this, their work examines the way in which the immersion of Virtual Reality (VR) in architectural design studio affects spatial perception within the design process.

Within the journal policy and interest in plurality and diversity three topics continue to be on the rise with a focus on cities, settlements, and spaces in the Global South. These topics are manifested in three themes: Built Environment Education, Sustainable Design and Development, and Architectural and Urban Heritage. Archnet-IJAR has recently explored the potential benefits of research and publishing partnerships, which include our forthcoming special issue, guest edited by Professor Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, entitled: *Emerging Issues on Architectural and Urban Heritage in the Digital Era*. This is coupled with our recent contribution to the Education and Training Forum of PLEA 2017 organized early this month in Edinburgh. This was a very successful activity that may result in a series of special sections of selected papers from over 30 contributions, which were presented as part of the forum and were published in PLEA 2017 proceedings.

We are currently exploring partnerships with other colleagues across the globe and within the UK. This includes partnering with University of East London through the International Conference for Sustainable Design of the Built Environment (SDBE), which will be held in The Crystal, London, UK on 20th and 21st December 2017. Extended conference papers will be invited for publication in a special issue of Archnet-IJAR in 2018 to be guest edited by Dr Heba Elsharkawy of the University of East London. The SDBE conference is a unique opportunity for academics, researchers, architects, urban designers, engineers, building consultants and professionals to meet and share the latest knowledge, research and innovations on low carbon building design, building performance, simulation tools and energy efficient building related technologies.

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