Evaluation of style preferences in architectural design among the undergraduate students from different nationalities in North Cyprus

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to find out style preferences of undergraduate architecture students in Nicosia. The primary source data for study were the interviews with architecture students. A total number of 50 undergraduate students from five different countries were chosen for the interviews. A standard questionnaire is used to collect data from the students. During the surveys the students were asked about their nationalities in order to analyse if they had an effect from their nationality on their preferences of architectural style. Also their heritage conservation knowledge and awareness have been evaluated. With this research the style preferences of architectural students were investigated, in addition the importance of cultural heritage conservation has been underlined. In this respect, it has emphasised that it is very important to include heritage conservation within the architectural education framework.

Keywords: Style, modern, traditional, cultural heritage, architectural education.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there is great interest in modern architectural designs; this can lead to the loss of traditional rural architectural design perspective in young generations. Furthermore, the protection of the heritage has been greatly influenced by the increase in the urban transformation projects all over the world. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the architectural design preferences of the architects of the future. Previous studies showed the results of the research indicating the differences between respondents having different backgrounds done by qualitative and quantitative surveys. Imamoglu (2000) explored preferences at the same time familiarities of the students regarding traditional and modern house facades. Respondents were 72 Turkish architecture and non-architecture students. Drawings of traditional house facades and facades that belong to the modernist tradition in architecture were used for the research. The drawings of the facades of eight houses in two sets were used during the survey. The complexity level of the house facades are arranged to increase gradually from the simplest to the most complex one. He concluded that despite some minor differences, the general pattern of the results appeared to be applicable for different measures, rating and preference. The background of students as being architecture student or non-architecture student and also the house types as traditional and modern were some of the measures. Other research has been carried out in Turkey by Erdogan et al. (2010). Erdogan et al. (2010) investigated the differing interpretations of 83 undergraduate architecture students on different architectural styles at early years of their education and the senior students as pre-architects. 21 public buildings (Early modernist, late modernist, high tech and deconstuctive designs) built between the end of the 1990s and the early years of the 2000s were selected for the study. Erdogan et al. (2010) founded that late modern schemes were preferred by the new students. On the other hand, pre-architects did not strongly stress on any specific style. Another finding was that some new learners had descriptions closer to senior architecture students than others. They concluded that students exposure to environmental factors like having relatives in this field and being already familiar, following the magazines or other media, familiarity with architecture or individual interests in the field of architecture may be important factors underlying their representation and interpretation of architectural stimuli.

Wilson (1996) made a cross-sectional study on architectural preferences of 150 British students of two different architecture schools having a similar technologically based orientation. The students were from five different levels of their education. Each student was interviewed separately and asked to consider colored photographs of contemporary architecture. They are expected to classify the photographs according to their personal preferences and explain why they liked. The results showed that students generally develop standards of judgement as characteristic of the architecture profession and shaped by the specific school they are trained. It is also indicated that students' evaluations of the buildings is clearly based on architectural style.

Although the architectural preferences have been the focus of many research, there has not been any study on evaluation of style preferences of undergraduate students in architectural design. In recent years there have been tremendous interest on modern architectural designs; this may cause loss of traditional, rural architectural design perspective in new generations. Lately, heritage conservation has been strongly influenced by the increase of urban regeneration developments. Therefore it is necessary to understand young generations preference in perspective of architectural design. This study focused on the style preferences of undergraduate architecture students from different nationalities (Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Jordan, Egypt) in north Cyprus.

1.1. Modern-Contemporary architecture

The concept of modern architecture is generally explained on the basis of social attitude by expressions of clarity, smoothness, pure forms, integrity, refinement and simplicity. It is defined by clear lines and minimal interiors that allow the structure to express itself. Modern architects express themselves through simplicity without unnecessary design details (Little, 2014). Rashid and Ara (2014)

emphasized the features of modern style by its simple forms, visually expressive structures. Briefly modern architecture can be explained with its features as open floor plans, steel or concrete structures, large surfaces of glass painted white, usually stucco over brick or another minimal exterior expression and absence of ornament. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (Figure 1), Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius are among the famous architects of modern architecture.

Figure 1. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe-Farnsworth House-Chicago-1951
(http://www.getthefive.com/articles/the-eye-candy/ludwig-mies-van-der-rohes-farnsworth-house-less-is/)

The terms, "modern" and "contemporary" create some kind of confusion that directing the people to ask: What is the difference between modern architecture-design and contemporary architecture-design? Modern architecture focuses on steel, concrete and glass as innovative industrial developments of its time while contemporary architecture uses the same materials with forward thinking. Contemporary means now, architecture of its time, therefore innovative and forward-looking (Figure 2) (Little, 2014).

Figure 2. Zaha Hadid, Kusnacht Villa in Zurich, Switzerland.
(http://88designbox.com/home-design/futuristic-house-by-zaha-hadid-architects-628.html

It is very difficult to define contemporary architecture precisely and formally. It allows architects to test fantastical designs, unique shapes by using computer software aided by sophisticated computer software. Frank Gehry created extraordinary curvilinear and shape of the Guggenheim Museum built in Bilbao, Spain, in 1997 (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao-1993-97(https://www.britannica.com/topic/Guggenheim-Museum-Bilbao)

Figure 4. Interior of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/architecture/articles/2012/november/23/buildings-that-changed-the-world-the-guggenheim-museum-bilbao/)

Figure 5. Zaha hadid-Patrik Schumacher-Saffet Kaya Bekiroğlu, Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku-Azerbaijan-2007-2012
(http://www.archdaily.com/448774/heydar-aliyev-center-zaha-hadid-architects/52852152e8e44e8e7200015f-heydar-aliyev-center-zaha-hadid-architects-photo)

Another example of contemporary architecture is one of the masterpieces of Zaha Hadid Heydar Aliyev Center built in Baku-Azerbaijan in between 2007 and 2012. During the design of the building, a continuous, fluent relationship between the building interior and surrounding plaza is established. Elaborate formations like undulations, folds and inflections of the plaza surface, curvilinear lines of the building are the main features of this contemporary example of architecture (Zaha Hadid Architects, n.d.).

Architecture is not only an absolute art, it is the art of innovation and creativity which has relationships with time, space and also culture, sometimes with politics. Architecture formed by the interaction of human beings with environment and of society and history. Hence, it can be considered as the reflection of social spirit to a location. Traditional architecture, as the witness of the history and as built cultural heritage, gives information about the identity of the location. If the architects imitate the modern architecture examples by neglecting their own traditional architecture, they fail to appreciate the values of their own culture and history (Azarshahr et al. 2013). Building the future by taking lessons from history should be the most important approach for architects. In recent years, sustaining the traditional architecture examples and protection of cultural heritage gained importance throughout the world. In all countries, traditional architecture of a location, as the reflection of the past should be considered as a guide for future developments.

1.2. Traditional architecture and cultural heritage

Traditional architecture is an architectural style which is based on local needs, climatic conditions, availability of rural construction materials and reflecting local norms of the society and traditions. It can be considered as the identity of that location. In this study, there were respondents from five different countries each of them having their own considerable traditional architecture assets.

Cultural heritage, as the reflection of history, is an important part of society and community well-being. Throughout the world, all the countries increasingly recognise the value of cultural heritage. For the sustainable development of towns and cities, built heritage is a very important part of the cultural heritage (Tweed & Sudherland, 2007). The definition used in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society:

"Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time." (Dumcke & Gnedovsky, 2013, p.6).

According to the World Heritage Convention, the term cultural heritage refers to: Single monuments architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, building groups and sites, archeological sites, territorial systems, landscapes, and intangible heritage (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972).

1.2.1. Iraqian traditional architecture

In Iraq, conservation, restoration, rehabilitation, re-use, etc have been of special importance during this past decade, mainly because of the effects of the war. Many buildings including traditional ones have been the targets of air raids and long-range missiles during the war. Some of them have been restored even more than once (Mehdi, n.d.). Besides the effects of the war, Iraqian cities have been witnessing a chaotic urban transformation that is not in consonance with the national architecture policy protected by the lawsince the 1970s (Zeed, 2015). Architectural heritage of Iraq is under the threat of extinction. Iraq's historical landmarks are gradually being destroyed and replaced by modern structures despite laws such as the Antiquities and Heritage Law. Buildings neglected for dozens of years, demolished and replaced by new ones with modern-looking cladding made of aluminium and plastic (Bassem, 2015).

Fi gure 6. Iraqi traditional architecture(http://pocketcultures.com/2011/09/09/letter-from-basra-iraq/)

Figure 7.Baghdad , Iraq : Old quarters east of the Tigris(http://looklex.com/e.o/baghdad.htm)

1.2.2. Syrian traditional architecture

In Syria, there is a rich diversity in traditional building types, varying according to the region and people's lifestyles. Two main lifestyles generate a major difference of construction and dwelling in Syria.One of them is nomadic lifestyle which requires a constant migration from one place to another depending on pastures and water. These populations having a nomadic lifestyle are called "Bedouins" and they usually live under tents. The sedentary lifestyle is the second lifestyle usually linked both to cities and to countryside of Syria. There is a diversity in the typology of houses according to the geographical locations like seaside, mountain, valley, etc. There are also clear differences between the traditional city houses (Characterized by stone constructions with variety of types and colors and of building typologies with inner courtyards) and traditional country houses (Generally small, ranging from a two unit house to the houses with a courtyard where rooms border the courtyard used more as the garden of the house). The preservation of local traditional architecture, which is often subject to vanishing because of reconstruction or change in use, inhabitants' inevitable operations implemented to improve their living conditions to answer the modern needs, is very important for sustainability of traditional architecture in Syria (Corpus Levant, 2004).

Figure 8. Syrian traditional buildingnear Aleppo. (https://roundhouses.wordpress.com/category/30)s/)

Figure 9. The fountain of Courtyard of Al-Wakil House in Aleppo. (http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/courtyard-houses-syria)

1.2.3. Traditional architecture of Nigeria

Nigeria's traditional architecture in different geographical regions showed that it responded extensively to local climate, technological and socio-economic characteristics. Therefore, traditional architectural designs represent the cultural lifestyle of the people and symbolizes the heritage of the inhabitants. The origin of these traditional building structures are the natural materials available for local builders, religious beliefs of people, culture and taboos. Traditional Nigerian life and culture changed by the emergence of colonialism in Nigeria. This created a weak link between traditional architecture and contemporary architecture (Agboola & Zango 2014). A cultural transfer including technological transfer occured with all failures and achievements. It can be expected in a country under a powerful colonial effect. Modern architecture in the country as a means of progression has been reinterpreted and articulated to fit the specific needs of the Nigerians. The architects in the country regarded the challenge of modern architecture as a progressive ideal and introduced the variations suggested by climatic and socio-cultural necessities (Adeyemi, 2008). In Nigeria, when the modern and traditional architecture is considered, professionals, designers and the researchers emphasize that, for functional architectural forms, efforts should be directed towards harmonizing the concepts of traditional and contemporary designs (Agboola & Zango 2014).

Figure 10. Architecture of northern Nigeria
(http://architectonicsandstyle.com/appreciating-traditional-hausa-architecture/)

Figure 11. Indigenous Hausa Tubali Architecture
(http://www.nairaland.com/2196866/indigenous-hausa-tubali-architecture)

1.2.4. Traditional architecture of Jordan

After the foundation of Jordan, Jordanian architecture has passed through various stages. In the past century, there were a number of buildings concentrated in the Jordanian towns and villages, with local styles from the Eastern Mediterranean countries. Their plans were rational, forms and details were simple. Builders used building materials like mud, wood and rough stone available from nearby environments. They adopted traditional systems in construction. Especially in public buildings and houses Ottoman and English architectural styles had an obvious influence. After independence, the modern architectural period began as a consequence of the changing social and economic conditions in Jordanian society, which accepted the Western model as a goal. They wanted to imitate and access it. This was because the effect of elite people who are educated in Western countries and are influenced by their culture. By the end of the last century, major developments in Jordanian architecture started parallel to the intellectual and technological progress in the world. At the same time the number of new graduate architects from Jordan universities increased. In this period, although the buildings, which are described as modern, diversified with new types and forms, they have kept their relation to architectural heritage by using various forms and methods. The general situation of contemporary architecture in Jordania is heterogeneous. The reasons of this can be explained by blends of cultural and social factors, political interventions and economic and demographic changes, visions of contemporary architects who live in a contradictory intellectual environment and influenced by distorted social and cultural values (Rjoub, 2016).

Figure 12. Petra- Jordan
http://www.trthaber.com/foto-galeri/mimari-harikasi-antik-kentler/833/sayfa-6.html)

1.2.5. Traditional architecture of Egypt

Ancient Egyptian architecture is the most fascinating and magnificent architecture of the ancient world. Beliefs of the ancient Egyptians were the main driving force behind the construction of the Egyptian monuments, temples and pyramids. For example, it was believed that the pyramids were the eternal homes of pharaohs and temples were built to honor gods and pharaohs. For the construction of these buildings, a variety of materials were used, including stones and bricks, but the wood was notably lacking in ancient Egyptian architecture. Because Egypt was in a dry landscape and a large amount of wood as construction material was not available (Moffett et al., 2003). The monuments still stand out as the main cultural elements of Egypt. Because they play an important role in defining Egyptian identity and the development of the country's economy (Abulnour, 2013).

Figure 13. The Pyramids of Giza(http://www.ancient.eu/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza/)

Figure 14. Karnak Temple (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/87)

Figure 15. Siwa Traditional Home - Egypt
(https://www.flickr.com/photos/132084522@N05/16925171355)

2. Methodology

This study aimed to find out style preferences of undergraduate architecture students in Near East University-Nicosia. Primary source of data for the study was interviews of architecture students. A standard questionnaire with ten questions is used to collect data. A random sample of 50 international undergraduate students having five different nationality profiles was chosen for the interviews. Respondents from Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Nigeria and Jordan participated in the survey. During the surveys, besides the demographic information, the students were asked about their style preferences. Also their heritage conservation knowledge and awareness have been evaluated. The details of the survey are as follows:

Gender profile: From the Iraqian students 90% were male and 10% were female. From the Syrian students 80% were male and 20% were female. All the Nigerian and Jordanian students who participate in the survey were male. 90% Egyptian students were male and 10% were female. Overall 88% of all the participants from five nationalities were male and 12% were females in total.

Table 1. Participant's gender profiles %

Participants	Male	Female
Iraqian Students	90%	10%
Syrian Students	80%	20%
Nigerian Students	100%	-
Jordanian Students	100%	-
Egyptian Students	90%	10%
Overall	88%	12%

Age profile of the participants: Overall 20% of all the participants from five nationalities were between the ages 18-20, 18% were 21-23, 11% were 24-26 and 10% were older than 27 in total.

Table 2. Participant's age profiles %

Participants	≤ 18	18-20	21-23	24-26	≥ 27
Iraqian Students	-	10%	50%	40%	-
Syrian Students	-	30%	30%	40%	-
Nigerian Students	-	50%	40%	10%	-
Jordanian Students	-	60%	20%	10%	10%

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Egyptian Students	-	50%	40%	10%	-
Overall		20%	18%	11%	10%

3. Results

When the results of the foreign students' preferences in architectural design style were evaluated, it can be argued that 60% of Egyptian students seem more interested in traditional designs. Out of this, 40% majority who were interested in modern designs are a more common style in architecture. Also they mentioned that there are restrictive factors within historical environments. Some emphasized the point that modern architecture is more flexible with respect to architectural principles (Graph 1).
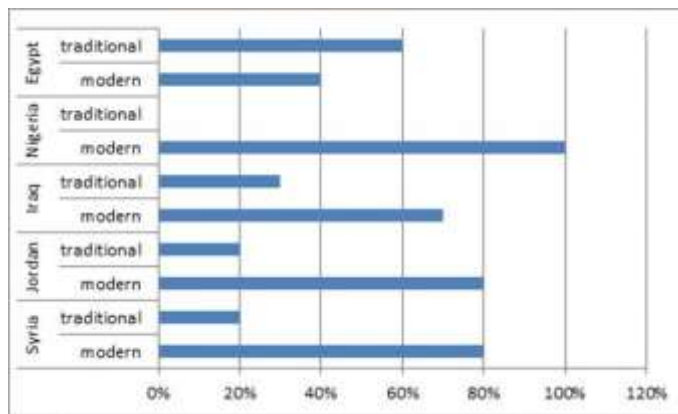

Figure 16. Participant's style preferences

However, the students from Nigeria preferred modern designs by the result100%. 50% of Nigerian students agreed that modern designs are more common nowadays. 40% have chosen the modern designs because they think modern style gives them a higher chance to be creative and they can develop new ideas and concepts. 40% think that there are restrictive factors when designing in historical environments (Graph 1).

On the other hand, 35% of Iraqian students are interested in traditional architecture. 65% preferred modern designs. 60% of Iraqian students preferring modern designs agreed that modern designs are more common nowadays and the rest of them think that there are restrictive factors when designing in historical environments.

By the result of 20% Jordanian and Syrian students are least interested in traditional architecture. 80% from both nationalities preferred modern designs. They agreed that modern designs are more common nowadays and some of them think that there are restrictive factors when designing in historical environments (Graph 1).

4. Discussion

According to the results of the survey we found out that among all the students participating in this survey, Egyptians were the most interested students in traditional architectural designs. It can be argued that Egyptians value on traditional architecture style is due to their cultural history which is an economic asset at the same time an intangible cultural heritage. It is known that each region has unique histories, cultures, political lifestyles, heritage (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Egypt has plenty of different historical richness that go back almost 3000 years and is considered one of the most significant archeological tourist destinations in the world (Helmy & Cooper, 2002). Egypt is one of the

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four destinations of Africa's tourism, followed by South Africa, Tunisia and Morocco (Rogerson, 2007). Tourism is the largest industry and very important for the economy in Egypt. It is identified as one of the major sources of economic growth (Ibrahim, 2011). Thus, Egyptians know the economic benefits of their archaeological past and cultural heritage as a renewable resource, they do not allow destruction within these important sites. Every child growing up with this consciousness therefore may have an effect on students' architectural preferences.

5. Conclusion

History is like a bridge. It connects the past with the future. Cultural heritage, tangible or intangible, is part of the culture and history. In this respect innovation and development will be impossible without knowing the history. Firstly, the awareness of cultural heritage should be raised in childhood period. Protection of cultural assets should be one of the main subjects from the begining of education life. Therefore, also in architectural education, the studies on evaluating cultural heritage with an innovative perspective is considerably important and should be emphasized at all levels of education, in addition it should be more involved within the Architecture degrees curriculum.

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