The Place Identity

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Abstract The word identity is being used a lot nowadays and it had been extended to cover various fields. This strong word deeply affects anything that it follows, determining its unique characteristics, as describing a group of people to be English, or an interior space to be Chinese, or a city square to be French, or a town to be Greek, and even more to determine which era of time did all of them belong to, as no one may confuse an ancient Egyptian temple with a new Indian one. This paper studies the identity, to explain how it characterizes the people or the place and how does it evolve along the history and through the memory, and to understand wither if identity is a product of culture, or is it the one that produces the places' culture.

Keywords: identity, heritage, behavior, preserved communities, built environment, architecture

1. Introduction

The first man inhabited the earth, lived there trying to reach heavens. He built houses and formed villages and cities, which expressed his unique unparalleled identity in each different place, adjusting to the changes he faced through history. Thus, people visit their old cities to confirm their accumulative identity as they get closer to their memories, which is linked to a specific place, time, and group of people. These memories reconstruct the past, organize the present and predict the future. Thus, memories varies but the history has an only one truth [1].

2. Methodology

Evaluating the architectural work is much more important than just criticizing it, as it enables us to understand the flaws of the design, how did it happen, what are the disadvantages, and how to avoid their occurrence again, it also helps us to perceive the good and aesthetic features of the analyzed work, to determine the advantages and also who to reach an improvement hopefully through clear steps. In this paper we are going to discuss an analysis process, trying to handle the architectural work from all its aspects.

In general, the methodological basis of the research rests on some fundamental concepts, while studying the image of the city made it necessary to address the basic conceptual vocabulary of urban cognitive science.

3. Main Part

History and society play a fundamental role in formatting the image of a city. It is reflected, in particular, in the individual characteristics of the different places.

3.1. Architecture and the Place Identity

How dose Architecture differs from one place to another? Do politics economics, religious affiliation, the group ethos and values affect the built environment? And how?

Identity is responsible for the connection between people and their past, guarantying the continuity of their culture, which explains why the built environment suffers from an obvious identity loss, associated to the globalization. As the residents of a place determine their understanding of its identity, and they feel either belonging or left out to search for another place. The place identity develops over time depending on the ties between the community and its individuals, signified by the adjusting culture influenced by the traditions and modernity. The place identity appears in the design features, architecture elements, building process, material, symbolism, texture and color, to show the characteristics of the place. And expressing the architecture identity helps understanding the tie between the built environment and the culture [2].

3.1.1. The Past Heritage and the Local Identity

Each environment has its own image and form, built by the inhabited society, it's a product of culture not nature. And old neglected memories disappear in the past, strong important memories survive as symbolic figures in the present, witnessing the past and promising the present, that is how the historical buildings identify the public attitude towards modernity, through translating their meanings to the contemporary language confirming the national identity. As a result, we protect our historical environment -our very identity- from the threat of turning it to large tourist industry projects, or even neglect and destruction. We preserve it for the future, for people to be familiarized with their heritage, not as an attempt to revive the previous systems but to reveal the local identity [1].

3.1.2. The Built Environment and the Surrounding Circumstances

The built environment has a dynamic interactive relationship with the society. As in the past, the political and spiritual leadership was proved through the ancient massive power remains, and now, technology, globalization and other social advances forces the society to a new communal lifestyle [3]. Even with the strong relation between the built form and the socio-culture patterns, yet we find intrusive building traditions and outsider architecture elements as an identity destructive force.

3.1.3. The Political Space

Architecture is connected to the politics as it can express the city's general state controlled by the local authorities, and also the global sense, influenced by transformations and revolutionizing of the big society as a whole. These two directions, determine the space's possibilities and restrictions, bordering the space's future [4].

3.1.4. What is the Culture?

The culture is an expression of all the intellectual activities of the dynamic changing civilizations, which are determined through the community, performed by the members, shared with the group and transmitted to the new generations. Culture is a set of rules, values, norms and beliefs stating the vitality of the community [5].

3.1.5. What is the Identity?

Identity is not a found object, it is not a self-conscious thing and it cannot be fabricated, as it is composed by the civilization trail through history, developed through confronting problems that the community perceive to be real [6]. The true unique contemporary local identity can be reached by re-examining the traditions, values and principles of the place. It appears as a clear progressive expression of the present, never as a stable copied fragment of the past.

3.1.6. Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is the developing characteristics of a group based on the interaction between the group members and the contrasting outsiders, it is subjective and dynamic, associated with the images and actions of the past. Ethnic identity is not totally manageable, but partly enforced, as it depends on the groups' creation and modification of its own image and on the outsiders' interfering vision as well [7].

3.1.7. Identity and the behavior

Identity became a language used in different fields usually referring to theories and characteristics attached to what is described. It should be well supported and measurable, which requires studying the society as a group of people committed to social relationships Influenced by several factors [8].

Identity theories started when people questioned the society's identity, is it self-structured? How does it change over the time and how strongly is it connected to the behavior? The main problem is to find out how the identity produces an expressive and well representative behavior, then we will understand the identity, and even

may predict the future. And peoples' behavior can be generalized, when living in the same environmental circumstances with the same background, culture and interests, which gives us the ability to control the design principles and the built environment by realizing the residents' general needs and desired modifications [9].

3.2. The Architectural Codes

Architectural signs don't express only the primary functions, but there is always secondary functions varying along the history. As the architectural forms, commonly have obvious functions -the building main purpose-, and other communicative, aesthetic, moral or meaningful message, all considered as secondary functions [4].

Architectural codes and sub-codes make it possible for the building to have variable readings, as the architect design for several primary functions and open secondary functions to raise the question of what is meant by these codes. And if the design method is the spoken language, it would represent the final object through elements of sounds, syllables and words. The architectural design has its own representatives like iconic signs, indications, diagrams, symbols [4].

3.3. The Image of the Environment

The city is a construction in space in a vast scale through a long spans of time. City design is therefore a temporal art, always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it and the memory of past experiences. We are an important part of this spectacle, though our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, mixed with other concerns.

We can also say that the city is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own. While its outlines may be stable for some time, it is ever changing in detail, and only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form. There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases. As the public image is the common mental pictures carried by large numbers of the place inhabitants determining what is expected to appear through the interactions of common culture, and the basic physiological nature [10].

3.3.1. Imageability

We will look for the physical qualities which relate the identity and the mental image structure. As it is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured mental images of the environment [10].

Primitive man improved his environmental image by adapting to the given landscape. He made minor changes in his environment with cairns or tree blazes, but substantial modifications were confined to house sites or religious enclosures. Only powerful civilizations can begin to act on their total environment at a significant scale [10].

3.4. The Architectural Character

We can classify the constructed environment according to the building's function to civic, industrial, agricultural,

transports, telecommunications buildings, etc. And the civic buildings are classified to residential, social, cultural, touristic, public and administrative, that main function can be called the buildings' General character. The Specific character -that diverse buildings with the same functions- is pointed out by size, volume, shape, color and structure. The Exotic character is unusual and exciting like Arabic, Japanese and Chinese architecture. And the Graceful character depends on elegant shapes with fine details, delicate proportions. And the buildings must consider the following main characteristics:

- **Solidity**: is the ability to resist the effects of time through durability, stability and bearing capacity.
- **Utility**: is the building's correspondence to its function, and it is judged through: the structures, placement, orientation, connection between the rooms, easy access horizontally and vertically and the consideration of physical and hygienic conditions.
- **Aesthetic**: is how pleasing and elegant the construction looks, depending on the size ratio, beauty expressions, proper rules of symmetry, contrast between lights and shades, full and hollow and the combination of shapes, sizes, decorations and finishes. Aesthetics are fundamental to humans, because "beauty" is a part of their spirit, always associated to pleasure, and "hideousness" is associated to discomfort [11].

3.4.1. The Dialectics of the Design Process

Concepts are a design problem with guide lines for the designer to reach a solution. Professional architects share non-professional citizens in evaluating the built environment, trying to be impersonal and objective, as concepts should be connected to our personal experiences, expressing a problem or an objective solution, and through studying the users' behaviors that mirrors the feelings, religion and culture, not just function adaptations, we can understand how certain rules are related to particular places, to create buildings suitable for the participants and linked to the place, representing the uniqueness of cultures. Yet the architectural design also requires involving other fields, to accomplish a good lighting quality, safety planning, circulation efficiency, cost savings, as the design reflects esthetics, physical hygienic and economics through the considered thermal condition, ventilation, illumination, shape, form, stability, cost price, productivity and energy consumption. And the building's function, shape, volume and structure meet the human necessities, natural conditions from a specific time and place [12].

3.4.2. The Architectural Design

Architects agreed that elements, proportions, and materials characterize the traditional architecture, but they hesitated if we should use these vocabularies again or not. Some believe that reviving them is necessary to reach a contemporary identity truly related to the traditional. Others totally disagree, and only respond to the environmental circumstances, climatic conditions and to the individuals' needs.

- **Pragmatic design**: inherits the traditional architecture features as a copy from the paste.
- **Iconic design**: reviving the traditional architecture image using its vocabularies producing new buildings for different functions.

- **Analogic design**: produces traditional architecture without exactly copying the old elements.
- **Canonic design**: forms the cultural identity through applying the traditional principles without duplicating its elements.
- **Symbolic design**: reinterprets the elements and principles of traditional architecture, avoiding the copied vocabulary.
- **Metaphoric design**: creates new dramatic contemporary identity, not associated to the traditional [6].

3.4.3. Design Rules of the Architectural Shape

The architectural forms should respect the laws of balance, contrast, order, unity, and dominance. As reducing the identical elements series prevent the monotony and shows variety and contrast between the elements with ensuring the unity of the architectural composition, to avoid the duality and maintaining the unity effect.

- **Balance** is mostly realized in the symmetry when shapes, volumes and masses are equally distributed.
- **Contrast** laws is recognized in opposition, like between big-small, warm-cold and light-dark.
- **Order** is based on organizing and ranking the horizontal and vertical elements with a proper size ratio respecting the whole structure.
- **Proportion** is an artistic value, realized through the harmony of elements respecting the whole composition. The golden section can be exemplified through dividing a line into two segments, so the ratio between the smaller and the bigger segment equals the ratio between the bigger segment and the total line.
- **Rhythm** is a consecutive functional repeating of various elements of the group. The spatial rhythm is determined by the shape of space as frontal, central, deep, complex, horizontal or vertical. The rhythm might be also functional, realized in the importance of the interior spaces and the separating elements. It even could be realized in the progression, as the modified dimensions' ratio.
- **Harmony** is resulted from the wright proportions, rhythm, and determining the artistic ratio.
- **Symmetry** achieves the balance in shapes and volumes and between solids and voids in the construction [11].

3.4.4. Geometry in Architecture

Geometry in architecture plays an important part, as it can be imposed on the physical fabric, for identifying place, considering the lines of passage and sight and the six-directions-plus-center, as the human being has a front, a back, two sides, the ground below, and above is the sky. All of these six directions share the same center.

- **Social geometry**

Where the people come together, they overlay a social geometry, identifying their own places, in particular ways, through the six-directions-plus-center. Architecture order these social geometries, responding with aesthetic and symbolic power, to make their physical realization more permanent to reach the Ideal geometry.

- **Complex geometries**

Architects became bored with the simple relationships, so they experimented the complex arrangements in which one geometry is overlaid on another [13].

● **Architectural composition rules**

The architectural space elements are the line, surface and volume, combined in series, motifs or assemblies.

The line: curved or straight, horizontal, vertical or inclined.

The surface: delivers different impressions influenced by the exterior form, materials and colors.

The volume: the three dimensional element of architecture gives varies sensations depending on proportions, dimensions, size and form. It might be a simple regular geometrical form like the sphere, cube, cone, etc.), it might be a complex one combining several geometric forms), or it might be a random volume without geometric features.

Series: compositions of identical elements orderly repeated.

Motif: an arrangement of the series.

Assembly: unifying elements with different relationships like similarity and variety.

The feelings lines, surfaces and volumes transfer:

These feelings depend on the artistic taste and sensitivity of the appreciating viewer not the careless one that remains indifferent to the treasured architectural creation.

- Straight line: strength, rigidity and determination.
- Curved line: flexibility, femininity and delicacy.
- Spiral: ascension and detachment from the ground.
- Circle: control, focus of the interest and balance.
- Ellipse: motion, exploration and restlessness.
- Cube: safety, integrity and determination.
- Sphere: perfection and finality [13].

3.4.5. The Architectural Axis

Architecture concepts could be defined through space characteristics and geometrical form, and the Axis is the geometrical element that defines the space and forms, through emphasizing the horizontal and vertical determining directions and circulations, to deliver a message or to create beauty and balance.

- **Broken axis**: The broken axis is not a flaw, it is just a geometrical deformation.
- **Tilted axis**: Architecture generated Cartesian geometry with dominant Intersection perpendicular axes, it is widespread in most churches. It is also realized on the human bodies.

Axis, power and the space organization

Architecture is the most representative of the absolute dominance the authority's power over the society, and axes construct the Geometry that creates the base of the architectural form and the meaningful order.

- **Classical dominant** single axis expressed political and religious power in the buildings. It was replaced with the axial plurality according to the democratic situation.
- **Modem axiality** handles multiple axes according to the changing functions, trying to get out of the static grid scheme with Intersections in various angles, to give a visual perspective of the modem space characteristics [14].

3.5. The Architectural Space Elements

Space is an immaterial element, formed through borders as (walls, platforms, columns, arches, domes, etc.). It can be divided to volumes (Figure 1), according to its closure degree to:

a- **Zenithal space**: above what man can perceive.

b- **Parietal space**: the surrounding left, right, forward and backward space.
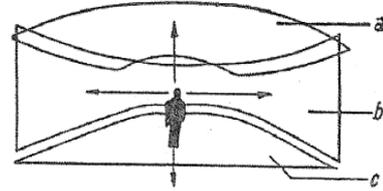
c- **Supporting space**: the horizontal ground [11].

Figure 1. The Architectural space, (Ianca & Georgescu, pp. 30)
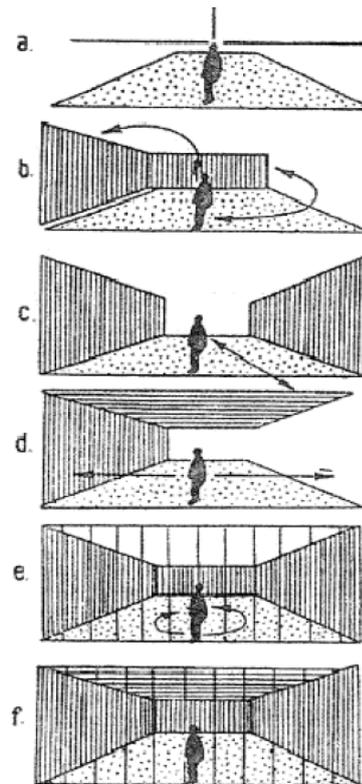

**Figure 2.** The spatial situations, (Ianca & Georgescu, 32)

And the man perceives his environment (Figure 2), through the following typical spatial situations:

a- **The exterior space**: the movement is open to all directions.

b- **The curved space**: connects the areas separated by construction elements, like the interior and exterior.

c- **The tense space**: the movement is in a single direction between the front and back or the left and right.

d- **The transitive space**: it leads from interior to exterior gradually through a lodge, terrace or a porch.

e- **The circular space**: open in the zenithal space and bordered in the parietal, like patios and squares.

f- **The interior space**: the movement is controlled in all directions and bordered by construction elements like rooms and chambers [11].

The architectural space (Figure 3), apart from of its function, have the following contents:

- **The access space**: connects the interior with the exterior like the lobby and the entrance hallway.

- **The passing space**: links the rooms with similar or different functions like the corridor.
- **The collector-distributor space**: has several entrance-exit points and it ensures connecting the building parts, like the hallway and foyer.
- **The terminal space**: it only has one exit-entrance point for its stationary purpose like the bedroom or the office [11].
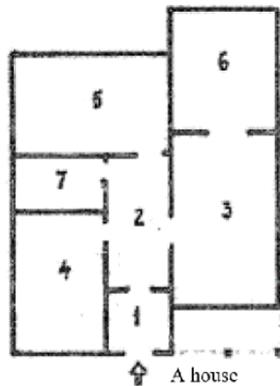
1- Access space; 2- Distributor space;
3- Terrace; 4, 5, 6, 7- Terminal space.

Figure 3. The Architectural space content, (Ianca & Georgescu, 32)

3.6. The Architectural Building Elements

In languages, knowing all the dictionary words wouldn't necessarily make a great novelist, however, this gives more choice and accuracy in talking and writing. And similarly, architects work with the palette of elements, to be able to represent the identity of the place in appropriate ways, as places can be identified through a range of basic elements, as floors, roofs, walls and also the structure and the building materials.

- **Floor**: with raised or lowered areas -platforms or pits-, markers, focus points and barriers.
- **Roof**: might be flat, domed, or an open light well, or a vertical shading element to protect from low sun.
- **Wall**: a vertical element that forms rooms, paths, foyers, it contain openings as windows or doors.

The building elements vary from a building to another, they differ with the function, size, place and time. As some buildings have a central court yard, or unique decorative elements, others are simple with a specific orientation [13].

3.7. Other Architectural Elements

• **Light as an architectural element**

Light is a condition, either natural or artificial, direct or indirect, with a direction and illumination intensity, it can be manipulated by design to give a place a certain character, as a roof-light in a small garden at the heart of the house, a spotlight in a theater to focus attention [13].

• **Ventilation and temperature as architectural elements**

The response towards the climate varies, attempting to make the buildings more adaptive, as massive thick walls to increase the time lag, courtyards provide natural light and to transfer the night's cold air to the spaces during the day or wind catchers for a better ventilation.

• **Colors as an architectural element**

The Color is an important element that influences people's comfort and state of mind. The color sets are divided to Simple colors, like yellow, red and blue; Complex colors containing a combination of simple colors in different proportions to reach varies hues and intensities; Neutral colors, as black and white. All these colors give people different sensations. Warm colors like red, orange and yellow give heat and intimacy sensation, cold colors like blue and green give a cool sensation.

The characteristics of the most used colors:

- **Red**: alive, exciting and intense with more yellow than blue with a tiring effect on the eyes.
- **Yellow**: a bright calming color with a sensation of joy.
- **Blue**: cool, visible even in poor lighting and it weakens the red intensity.
- **Black**: is considered a cold, light absorbing color, it gives a seriousness, gloom and depth to the space.
- **White**: is a calm serious, bright and positive color with an expansion effect and no intimacy. It reduces colors' intensity except its contradictory black [11].

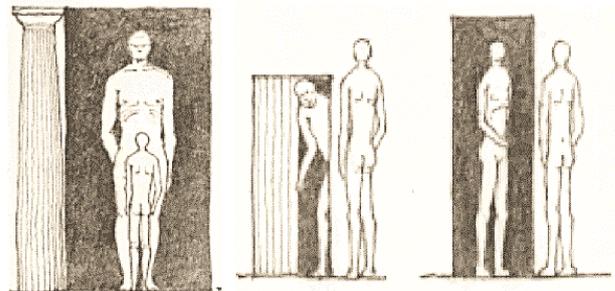• **The scales as an architectural element**

Figure 4. The architectural scale, (Unwin, 2003, 107)

- **The human scale**: when comparing the building with the human body and its proportions.
- **The proportional scale**: when comparing buildings or the building elements with each other.
- **The physical scale**: when calculating the building's structural elements through the structural mechanics principles [11].

A large doorway exaggerates the status of the occupant, and diminishes the status of the visitor, small doorway diminishes the status of the occupant, and enhances the status of the visitor and a human-scale doorway puts the occupant and visitor at equal status [13].

3.8. Architecture and the Community

Architecture is a popular mass of culture, produced by a groups of people that confirms a widely spread way of life. It generally results from community acceptance to what is commonly built. It is an important part of everyday life, like usual music and daily clothing, it might be fancy and serious. Architecture is also a business influenced by economic conditions and different cultures, with a signified message and function that is induced through the elements of hidden persuasion. And if we say that Writers deal with publishers and Painters with galleries, then we can realize that Architects are never independent, as they deal with whole community as an important client. That is why we consider the Domestic Architecture to be the most

expressive of the identity of the place, as it represents the community, with its different segments [4].

3.8.1. The Built Environment and Mental Health

Mental health is directly affected by the surrounding built environment characteristics, like high-rise or Poor-quality housing, design elements, residential crowding, noise sources, malodorous air pollutants, some toxins cause behavioral disturbances, Insufficient daylight.

Developing the design principals is an attempt to define the domestic zones trying to enhance natural surveillance opportunities, decrease insecurity in the public housing and influence the behavioral impact. For example, adding outdoor lights, enlarging the shared yards and clarifying the walking lanes, increase the feeling of safety.

3.8.2. Constructing the Communal Identity

Many new developed settlements were duplicated from an existing house models and urban patterns, they only focused on lowering the costs, and they neglected the place culture, values, norms and explicit identity. It is necessary that architects and planners consider traditions to be the main design tool in the new housing communities preserving the needed values and generating new fundamental ones to revive the communal life through design theories, as the planning concepts must adjust and respond to the social and economic dominance, which is based on facts and values, reflecting the identity of the society, with respecting architecture and urban regulations [15].

3.9. Peoples' True Identity

People try to find their true identity by understanding themselves and their environment. Any attempt to fabricate this process is considered manipulation, like using outsider architecture elements would be simply duplication, but taking the principles, applying them with different methods and materials compatible with the environment, climate, culture and traditions to reach a local product, that expresses their true identity [9].

Understanding our identity is not a self-conscious try just to have an identity as an end, but our true identity expresses ourselves, our environment, our life circumstances, and our past, as it is coming from the real obstacles we faced.

3.9.1. The Preserved Communities

The traditional communities preserve traditional knowledges and experiences that connect us with our origins. We learn sustainably from them as they are handling nature in it most complex ecological order. Architects should study, translate, criticize and evaluation the past in order to construct a better present [15].

Monumental architecture is a structure that exceeded the required functions like the pyramids, temples and palaces. These structures reflect the power of political leaders and state the social relations. Usually expressing domination and subordination, but also social integration [3].

3.9.2. The Dilemma of Generalizability

In the last two decades, the building environment witnessed major transformations due to the conflict between the modernized imported ideas and the traditional values.

Architecture language imported external foreign vocabulary of the built form to be associated with the outer world image progress and future orientation as a response to globalization and the development of the society culture. The architectural production is at the center of opposing forces of the culture, religion, values and methods of expression of the contrasting past and present [2].

3.9.3. Cities along the History

Cities are influenced by different elapsed historical periods that shaped its distinct contemporary architecture and urban characteristic.

- **The Traditional city** used local natural materials, creating forms with a unique aesthetic image.
- **The Colonial city** used outsider elements with different treatments creating foreign forms.
- **The Modern city** resulted of new technology, materials and globalization [16].

3.9.4. Contemporary Architecture and Identity Loss

Modern contemporary architecture can clarify the political state, economy, traditions, globalization and the quality of life. It even could expose bad taste and neglect, especially through residential architecture, as it represents the peoples' belonging to the place. We expect architecture to define our identity, but it cannot create the identity for us, it just express the surrounding state, so it cannot be responsible for our identity loss [1].

4. Conclusion

The rhythm in architecture is similar to it in music, except that music is an intangible material but architecture is a tangible composition. As Le Corbusier says that good architecture is a brilliant poem with fine vocabularies in a perfectly organized sentence. These architectural elements allow us to not only criticize the work, but to analyze it, to reach its strength points and weaknesses, with an opportunity to improve the design process and to develop the built-environment, to suite the users. The analysis should evaluate each element separately as the floors, roofs, walls, elevations, orientation and landscape; and also the building as a whole, considering the function, aesthetics, geometry, axes, scale, proportions, balance, harmony, contrast. Yet it is most important to study the building influences on the society and their traditions and mental health. As if we understood how the final product affect the inhabitants and the surrounding environment, we could easily control our design to point it where ever we need, reaching the ideality.

The architectural character is an identification of the place, it provides continuity to the historical context. And using the technology and new materials does not weaken the sense of belonging to the past. That is how the architect has a huge role in balancing the traditional values with the growing needs and modern technology.

5. Recommendations

- The major task for architects is to decrease the conflict between traditions and modernity, through

redefining new design concepts and technology according to the community roots, respecting the local design principles of livability, comfort, privacy, open-space, house design, light, climate control, scale, materials and construction methods.

- The concept of new architectural ideas should be based on experience, practicality, locality, modernity and the combination between being conservative and radical.
- No space or building should be completely replicated, as the requirements and surrounding circumstances almost have never been repeated.
- We should discourage the unjustified adoption of foreign principles and the blind imitation of the standards of local design. Besides developing the principles and standards of the design through combining the best past experiences with the requirements of the modern life, considering the socio-economic, political and cultural needs of the people themselves [17].

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