LEBANESE HERITAGE: PRESERVING VALUES TO BUILD IDENTITY

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The urbanization of the populated Lebanese centers, along with the urgent requirement to provide homes and services for local people, immigrants and war refugees, altered the appearance of the historic center of many cities, damaging the historic public buildings and gravely threatening their survival. Affecting the direction of the rapid urbanization is a permanent conflict, between the creation of a new, post-modern cultural identity and the promotion of traditional architecture as a tentative way to establish new connections with the Lebanese historical heritage. Traditional culture and ancient architectural constructions are the results of historical processes and the products of the Lebanese society that need to be preserved and transmitted to future generations. Understanding the past is an indispensable tool for the comprehension of the Lebanese society. How can we preserve the values of the Lebanese heritage and transfer them to the future in building up the new country identity? The paper presents research conducted at the Lebanese American University School of Architecture and Interior Design by assessing the values of Lebanese heritage to be transferred to future generations.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, Perceptual, Functional, Sustainable, Restoration.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Lebanese country had many, disputed war events linked with a multitude of collective remembrance. Beirut, the Lebanese capital, is a city where past war memories are interlaced with the recent reconstruction interventions, projected into the future of the country. Its built environment includes a wide range of specimen architectural projects and memorial structures. After the civil war, the reconstruction of the country and the capital presented new postmodern cities, characterized by advanced infrastructure, new materials, and cutting-edge architectures. Unfortunately, the governmental reconstruction policy has given little attention to the preservation and safeguard of historic buildings that were damaged or abandoned during the war events, selecting only some of the most significative examples to be restored and preserved. The historic urban fabric is often neglected, and many abandoned buildings, are currently in a bad state of conservation, subject to the risk of imminent collapse, losing the values of the traditional, local culture. In the reconstruction of the new contemporary Lebanese cities, there is a need to preserve the national heritage, to fill the gap between the past and the future of the country.

Traditional culture and ancient architectural constructions are the results of historical processes and the products of the Lebanese society that need to be preserved and transmitted to future generations. Understanding the past is an indispensable tool for the comprehension of the Lebanese society. However, there is a lack of interest in preserving and rehabilitating the public heritage in Beirut and the other cities. Frequently, the lack of an open dialogue between the

public institutions involved in the rehabilitation of the Lebanese heritage, and the absence of a coordinating master plan for the restoration projects integrated with the reconstruction of the country, have lead to critical approaches in managing the public heritage which does not consider the number of environmental results that the conservative approach could generate. In fact, the old urban settlements and the historical buildings usually present a high degree of flexibility and high capacity to be adapted to the environmental, social, economic and cultural conditions of the contexts in which they are located, permitting a more sustainable approach and providing an alternative direction of growth for the cities. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-ICOMOS 2010) has described in 2002 the values of the heritage for safeguarding the culture of the countries, anyhow without providing clear definitions or rules to be adopted (Landorf 2009, Gullino *et al.* 2015). The approach of restoring and reusing old buildings does not lie in the simple act of maintaining the old materials, but in a much broader understanding and appreciation of the culture and history of ancestors, the memory of those cultures and their knowledge that need to be preserved and transferred to the future generations. Moreover, functional, economic, and social values in the restoration and conservation of traditional architectures strongly encourage and develop local employment and industry.

The case studies selected, analyzed, and assessed in this paper, represent diverse categories of heritage: urban, architectural, and landscape that has many historical, functional, perceptual, and socio-cultural values. Their preservation as an object of culture can produce economic, environmental, and social benefits. From the economic and environmental point of view, the restoration and reuse of heritage can reduce the quantity of money necessary for the new structure; it also reduces the pollution and preserves the natural environment. From the socio-cultural point of view, the restoration of heritage enhances the values of the local cultural identity, which is particularly missed in Lebanon after the end of the civil war. The primary purposes of the presented paper are thus the analysis, codification, and assessment of some principles related to the social, functional, perceptual, and sustainable values of the Lebanese heritage to be preserved. The aim is to define some possible innovative strategies and alternative models for incorporating the assessed values both in the field of restoration and, in the national master planning strategy of designing sustainable architectures for building up the country identity.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW: BEIRUT'S TRANSFORMATION AND THE LEBANESE CAPACITY OF PRESERVING NATIONAL HERITAGE VALUES

The Lebanese capacity of reinvention and transformation has been proven during the past centuries (Traboulsi 2007), as a consequence of massive migrations, conquests, trades, and several internal conflicts. The national borders frequently changed in the East limit and the current capital Beirut was part of many diverse empires. Although Beirut, had shared a similar fate many other capitals in the XX century, it remains unique because of its contested history that produces a city out of the norms. Many authors and publications have documented the physical transformations that Beirut has undergone throughout the years (Tabet *et al.* 2001). However, in the literature, there are also many debates about the multiple and contradicted construction phases of Beirut, referring mainly to the Ottoman and French plans for regenerations by the end of World War I. Between 1840 and 1920 Beirut has undergone several urban expansions primarily due to the urban migration from Mount Lebanon that chased the growth of the capital by the end of the 1860s during the civil war between the Druze and Maronite population.

The current condition of Beirut city must be accepted together with its unique social and conflictive political contexts. Beirut grew up in population and assumed its new status as the capital of the independent Lebanese state in 1943 (Daniel and Daniel 2011). The new condition

was the complex result of a broader cities modernizations framework, either initiated by the Ottoman reforms (Hanssen 2005) or, later on, by the spread of new town colonial planning ideas (Al-Harithy 2010). One of the most radical interventions was the plan of Martyrs' square, designed in 1925-26 and completed by the late 1930s that was superimposed on top of the old Ottoman urban fabric hiding the traces of the historic urban setting. After World War II (1945) and with the independence of Lebanon state in 1943, several projects aiming at the modernization of Beirut and the affirmation of the national state were planned, and part of them realized. In the 1950's Beirut became a very cosmopolitan city so that the small Ottoman urban settlement was not any more recognizable due to the significant physical transformations. The fast-recent development in Beirut remains today driven by the private sector with little monitoring by the State that created the new modern structure and urban fabric of the capital. As a consequence, the rapid urbanization promoted by the private interests has produced a negative impact both on the spontaneous growth of the urban fabric, and on the preservation and restoration of the national heritage. In fact, in Beirut the past wars together with the rapid urban expansion, definitively altered the national heritage, damaging the remains of the urban fabric and some traditional buildings. Thus, there is a need to recognize and promote the heritage values to be preserved and safeguarded, restoring the neglected urban fabric, and the abandoned buildings, to establish a new relationship with the past and the local culture (El Sheshtawy 2008).

3   METHODOLOGY

Due to the complexity of the Lebanese history, the research study started from the selection, analyses and comparisons of significant heritage samples, still existing in Lebanon and pertaining to different heritage categories: urban, landscape, architecture. The selection was made through the investigation of the Lebanese history of the literature review and the analysis of the most significant values that are associated with the heritage definition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Education (UNESCO). The criteria for the selection of the analyzed case studies and the adoption of heritage values derived from interviews and questionnaires submitted to students and instructors at the School of Architecture at Lebanese American University. The number of the collected questionnaires was 235 and the survey data analyses were arranged through a division into four areas of interests: functional, socio-cultural, historical and perceptual, which were additionally subdivided into the specific principles of assessment. The minimum score was 1 and the maximum was 3 and some intermediate values were permitted ranging between 0.3 to 0.7 for each score.

In between many options, the assessment has highlighted few case studies which were particularly significant and representative of each category: a sample of historic urban fabric in Batroun, the coastal city located in northern Lebanon having very old Phoenician origins, in addition to various typologies of Lebanese historical architectures such as the Hippodrome in Sour the roman city, established in 2750 BC, together with the Byblos fortified citadel, constructed by the crusaders in the XII century, and the old Beirut train station which has been abandoned in the late 1970 due to the civil war. Additionally, Horsh Beirut, the more extensive park of Beirut, located in the south of the capital extension was an essential sample of landscape heritage of the old Lebanese forest, and finally Beirut Martyrs' square, the famous piazza that in 1931, was named to commemorate the martyrs killed in this place during the Ottoman Empire.

Figure 1. Analyzed case studies, from left to right: Sour Hippodrome, the fortified citadel in Byblos and Batroun historic urban fabric.

Figure 2. Analyzed case studies, from left to right: Martyrs' Square in Beirut, Horsh Beirut and Mar Mikhael the old train station.

The research aims to identify and estimate the heritage values pertaining to the local culture and the contemporary needs, capable of providing principles and guidelines for the planning and design of any restoration project and also new architectural structures. The analyzed heritage case studies aroused the reflection on the exploration of alternative heritage restoration solutions for integrating functional, formal, perceptual, and socio-cultural values with a sustainable growth of Lebanese urban center and peripheral areas. The subject of restoring the architectural heritage, widely explored in the past for its cultural value, has been the object over the past decade of a renewed interest, especially in terms of the local values and identity that has to be transferred to the future generations. The complex system of traditional heritage values, is usually preserved and maintained by local communities, and belongs to a broader universe, constituted by specific "worldviews": oral traditions and expressions, knowledge and practices linked to the local culture, social values, ritual and festive events, in other words the intangible heritage which characterises a human group. These systems of values, so rooted in the Lebanese culture, constitute some of the essential socio-cultural values that were adopted in assessing the selected case studies of heritage. The adopted approach for the assessment and codification of the data provided by the comparison between the analysed Lebanese heritage case studies, provided a more detailed classification of the main principles according to four areas of interest of in the field of heritage restoration and sustainability: socio-cultural, functional, historic, and perceptual, which have been initially defined as for the following descriptions:

(i) Socio-cultural value is the capability to guarantee and increase the cultural diversity, the sense of belonging, the local knowledge, the personal and communal welfare, the recognition of cultural values (both tangible and intangible) and social cohesion.

(ii) The functional value indicates the capacity to reach and maintain the maximum level of reached service, to emphasize the social welfare.

(iii) Historical heritage value refers to the aptitude of the sample to integrate with the historical context of a place, limiting the negative impacts, representing its cultural characteristics as a monument, including those related to the use of an old formal language which shows various historical layers.

(iv) The perceptual value indicates the various level of personal perception of suitability, relaxation, comfort, and security of the heritage sample. It also includes the perception of the heritage unicity and desirability linked with the place.

Additionally, in the questionnaire for the assessment, we have adopted for each area of interest, five principles of heritage values to be investigated, that have permitted a more comprehensive collection of data, as presented in Table 1. The scores on the table represent the average values of the conducted survey data analysis, collected through the questionnaire.

Table 1. Areas of interest and principles of assessment for the assessment of the Lebanese heritage values in the selected case studies. The minimum score is 1, the maximum is 3 and some intermediate values range between 0.3 to 0.7 for each score.

Areas of interest	Principles of Assessments: Score 3= High 2= Average 1= Low	Sour Hippodrome	Byblos citadel	Batroun urban fabric	Martyrs' Square	Horsh Beirut	Beirut train station
FUNCTIONAL	1. value of **different uses**	1.7	1.7	2.7	2.7	1.7	**3.0**
	2. value of space **appropriateness**	2.7	1.7	2.3	2.7	**3.0**	1.0
	3. value of **surrounding context**	2.3	2.7	**3.0**	2.3	1.7	2.3
	4. value of **safety and security**	**3.0**	**3.0**	2.7	2.3	2.7	1.7
	5. value of **accessibility for users**	1.7	2.0	2.3	**3.0**	2.3	2.3
SOCIO-CULTURAL	6. value of **social interaction**	2.3	2.7	**3.0**	3.0	2.3	**3.0**
	7. value of the sense of **social inclusivity**	2.3	2.3	**3.0**	2.3	2.3	**3.0**
	8. value of **social acceptance**	2.0	2.0	**3.0**	2.3	2.3	2.3
	9. value of **ethnic diversity**	1.0	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.3	**3.0**
	10. value of **cultural diversity**	2.7	2.3	2.7	**3.0**	2.0	**3.0**
HISTORICAL HERITAGE	11. value of **historical context**	**3.0**	**3.0**	2.7	2.7	2.0	2.7
	12. value of **an object of culture as a monument**	**3.0**	**3.0**	2.3	**3.0**	2.3	**3.0**
	13. value of the **old language** in the place	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.7	1.0	2.0
	14. value of the **different historical layers**	2.7	2.3	2.3	2.0	2.0	2.7
	15. sense of **memory**	**3.0**	2.7	2.3	1.7	1.0	2.7
PERCEPTUAL	16. sense of **suitability**	2.0	2.7	2.3	1.7	**3.0**	**3.0**
	17. sense of **relaxation**	2.0	3	2.7	1.7	**3.0**	**3.0**
	18. sense of **unicity**	1.3	1.7	2.3	1.7	**3.0**	2.7
	19. sense of **desirability**	**3.0**	**3.0**	2.3	2.7	2.3	2.7
	20. sense of **comfort**	2.3	**3.0**	2.0	2.3	**3.0**	**3.0**

4 RESULTS

The paper first attempts to identify and assess the values pertaining to the Lebanese national heritage by comparing some significant, selected case studies. The collected data showed a high score on the assessment of the perceptual values followed by the historical, socio-cultural, and functional. Some heritage case studies reached higher score in the historical value assessment due to their old origin and the layered presence of ancient events that enhance the perception of

the historical values, other, more recent place, have a current function that enhances the socio-cultural values of the area, such as the old Beirut train station Mar Mikhael or the historic urban fabric in Batroun. Finally, the selected case studies of landscape heritage, Horsh Beirut, got very high scores in the perceptual area, and the assessed principles demonstrate how the place transmits the values of comfort, relaxation, unicity and suitability firmly, although it does not have any high score for the functional use of the space. To conclude, most of the results showed that currently, many functional uses of the selected heritage case studies are not appropriate for their recognized values.

5 CONCLUSION

The research intends to compare many other selected heritage case studies, that should be capable of incorporating proven values pertaining to the areas of interest of in the field of heritage restoration and sustainability: socio-cultural, functional, historical, and perceptual. However, in giving this partial view of a complex, long-term investigation for assessing heritage values in Lebanon, there are some limitations because the research project is still on process and most of the analyses and collected data are still in their preliminary stages. All the outcomes need to be further investigated and compared with other similar case studies of Lebanese heritage, which are under further development at the Lebanese American University in Beirut.

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