

# **Socio-cultural contradictions in the arab/Islamic built environment an empirical study of Arriyadh, Saudia Arabia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the beginning of this century, in-acculturation which is the full acceptance of foreign ideas and concepts, have produced a negative impact on the Arab/Islamic socio-cultural milieu. Instead of the synthesized approach to the transfer of ideas and concepts or in another word acculturation, the in-acculturation approach resulted in many socio-cultural contradictions in the Arab/Islamic built environment. Every built environment consists of distinctive features that relate to social, cultural, economics] and environmental parameters inherent in that particular built-environment.

Before the 1950s, the built-environments of the country of Saudi Arabia were a natural continuation of city —building techniques throughout history. The most significant period that affected that urban continuity was the advent of the religion of Islam. However, since the 1950s, fast and dramatic changes- with mainly Western connotations- had occurred in the built environment that had affected it in social and cultural terms. These urban changes were not synthesized with the socio-cultural norms and ways of life of the residents of these built-environments. In another word, a process of urban in-acculturation had been taking place in the urban structures of the country's cities and towns.

This paper attempts to understand and explain the process of in-acculturation by investigating the deep roots of two distinctive civilizations; the Islamic and the Western. The city of Arriyadh was chosen for an in-depth empirical investigation for this paper.

Parts of the resultant field study analysis were used for this article in order to share some of the benefit of the main research. Using both, quantitative and qualitative approaches, it examines the socio-cultural contradictions, the urban identity, and the causes of failure in the built-environment.

The study reveals that the traditional built-environment had less socio-cultural contradictions, clear urban identity, and perceived in positive terms. While the contemporary built-environment resulted in socio-cultural contradictions and ambiguous and distorted urban identity and perceived as containing negative socio cultural handicaps. The paper will end with thoughts and recommendations arising from the research findings on the preservation of the traditional urban environment

## **1 SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS IN THE ARAB/ISLAMIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT WESTERN & ISLAMIC THOUGHTS AND PHILOSOPHIES: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH**

Let us begin with a very essential question, why look at the traditional past of a civilization as we consider its future?

The significance of analyzing and studying the traditional past of a civilization – our concern here is with the architectural and urban aspects – such as the Arab/ Islamic civilization lies in the importance of intensifying the historical and urban consciousness of its members and community as a whole.

In addition, such a study would help us to understand and comprehend the circumstances imposed by present –day needs and problems, as well as the requirement of the future. Abdulhaleem, I. argues that:

“...The historical consciousness of the civilizational presence of any city, and of the historical depth and extension of that presence, is vitally important in order to enable the city to define its reality and to give expression- architecturally and Urbanistically- to its identity and requirements, both present and future...” (Abdulhaleem, I., 1984:43)

Abdulhaleem raises the issues of a duality between the acquired and inherited. The evidence of this two-fold aspect could be found not only in the architectural expressions but also in all government institutions and public life itself. The contemporary architecture and urbanism in Arab/Islamic cities are an embodiment of the conflict between the acquired which is foreign, mostly Western, in its origin, secular in its thinking, materialistic in its economy and cumulative in its laws, and the inherited which is Islamic in origin, religious in ideology, social in economy and regenerative in its laws.

### **1.1 The Acquired and the Inherited: Reasons of Failures**

Finding a common element or theme between the acquired and the inherited or the contemporary and the traditional (pure aspects of a civilization), has always been a sensitive issue that has puzzled thinkers and philosophers for a long time.

Trying to reach an objective solution for that equation, and creating a balance between its two sides is not an easy task that could be solved by nostalgic feelings since this will hamper the objective mind from seeing things on their true meanings and explanations.

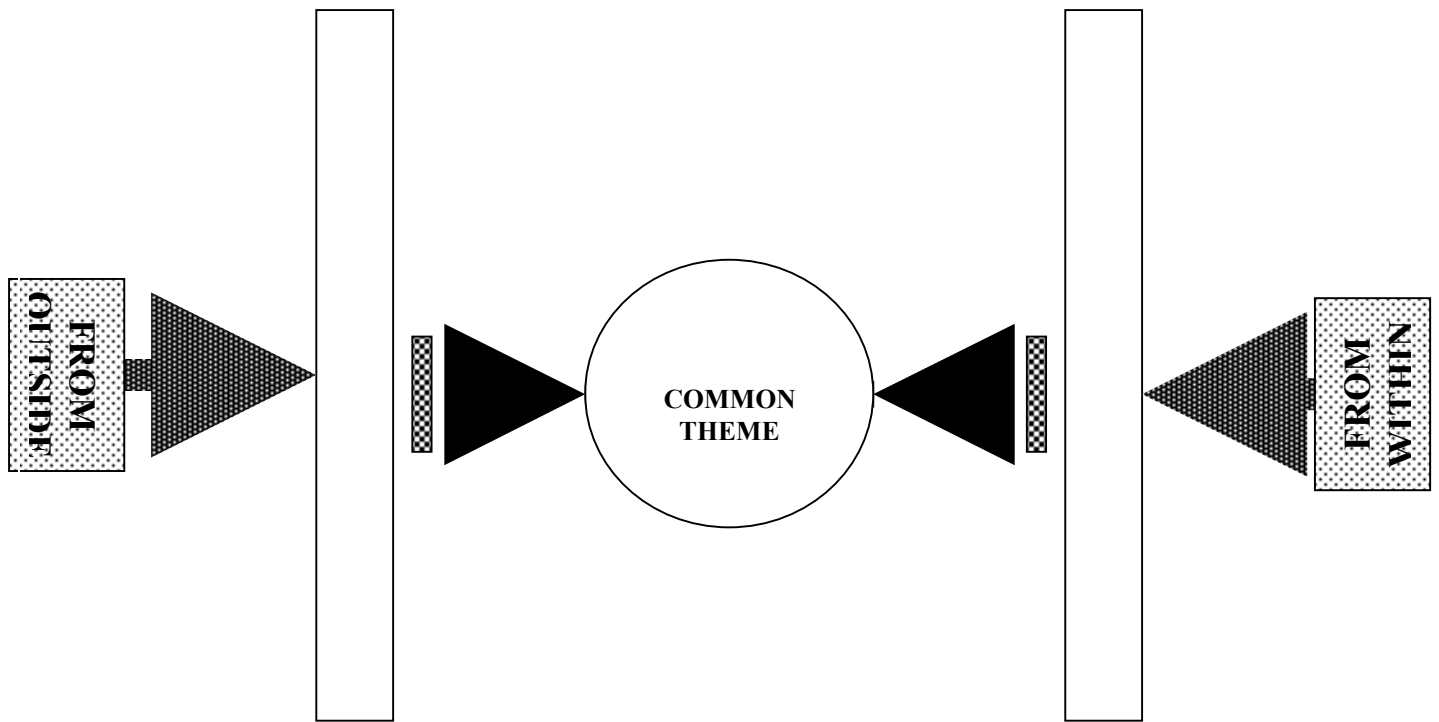


Figure 1: The Common theme between the **acquired** and the **inherited**

It is known that the theory of “cultural borrowing” came into light by the end of the last century and is strong today. And it is also known that research into that concept of “cultural borrowing” was not developed into the Arab / Islamic ways of thinking and comprehension as a natural development, but it was developed through different psychological factors that we could call as the “inferiority complex” of imitating a more advanced technological civilization.

Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406), the sociologist and historian of the 14th century AD, argued that: “...the loser always looks out to imitate – copy - the winner in his thoughts, clothing, religious beliefs, and all his ways...” (Fattah, 1985:327 translated by Author).

As a result of that, all the suggested solutions for that very difficult “equation” were not genuine enough and did not describe a natural necessity. Those recommended solutions came from ideas and viewpoints that were foreign and alien to the reality of the Arab/Islamic world. They were borrowed heavily from principles and thoughts of Western philosophy which, in many ways, differ from the process that led to the development of the Arab/Islamic thoughts and philosophies in its creation and development.

In order to understand the process that led to the alienation – feelings of inferiority – of the Arab/Moslem ways of thinking which was translated into the architectural and urban environment of his urban spatial structure, let us go back in time and try to construct a comparative historical analysis on the process that led to the development of both Western and Arab/Islamic philosophy and schools of thought.

Since its inception by the Greeks in the sixth Century BC, “Laws of contradiction and conflicts between opposites” dominated Western schools of thought. In order to explain what is meant by the “Laws of contradiction and conflicts between opposites”, we have to go back in history and try to trace the development of Western thought.

The contradiction between opposites was obvious between the two schools of thought of the absolute unity theory of Parmenides in 544 BC, and the immortal effusion theory by Heraclitus in 504 BC.

The absolute unity theory saw existence as a whole, one, constant and infinitely eternal. It could not deteriorate or disappear and that it will always be there in existence.

Therefore, Parmenides did not believe in the principles of motion, movement, impossibility, and transient time.

On the other hand, the immortal effusion theory saw existence as always in motion, (not constant) and therefore changing every time from one state to another disallowing relative, temporary and absolute stability.

The followers of the “absolute unity” school of thought ended in proving the existence of a rational being. This being or God is absolutely perfect and the “perfectness” does not allow him to be linked with any thing in this materialistic world which is imperfect. In the other hand, the opposite school of thought “immortal effusion” ended up in proving the absolute materialistic existence with an extreme atheist viewpoint. It sees this materialistic existence as explaining itself. And that everything is material, even thoughts, principles, and morality. This school of thought looks at the social system we live in, and the individual, as revolving in a completely changing and immortal cycle although it consists of distinctive units.

The contradiction between opposites continued with the model or utopian philosophy of Plato and the natural or empirical philosophy of Aristotle as known to the Moslem scholars.

The inner development of western thought and philosophy was realized during the middle ages between the two schools of thought. That development was realized in nominalism and realism. Nominalism (St. Augustine) rejected the existence of names and things outside the human mind. It implied absolute abstractness of the essence and nature of names and that they were just “a blow of air that does not have any meaning”.

The other school of thought of the middle ages of the Western Civilization, realism, implied the existence of the absolute abstractness of names and things independently outside the human mind. And that they exist, regardless if whether the mind senses them or not. According to the realists (St. Thomas Aquinas), the world of materialistic particles recognized in reality were the world of extinction and non-being. So in accordance, they could not really exist in the absolute sense of the word.

With the beginning of the modern age, the contradiction and conflict between different schools of thought were more apparent. This was obvious between rationalism and empiricism. The rationalists (Rene Descartes) relied heavily on the mind in order to understand and explain the world. The mind, itself, as the source of all knowledge and it is independent from the senses. On the other hand, the empiricism school of thought (John Locke) stressed that all knowledge originated from trials, sense, and reality. This school of thought was heavily influenced by Aristotle's natural philosophy.

In the 19th century, the Marxist school of thought (Karl Marx) emphasized that the principle of conflict between opposites was the ultimate, eternal and immortal law in which history has no choice but to submit to it. Marxism stressed that the individual human being was the result of the conditions of his circumstances, and therefore has no choice but to submit forcefully to his materialistic conditions.

In comparison with the Western development of schools of thought, the Arab/Moslem thinking developed on the basis of a divine book called the ‘Kora’an’. It was based on completely different inner development to what was discussed earlier in the development of Western thought. The law which governed that development could be called the law of “coalition, customary and averages”. This attitude toward coalition relied heavily on the consensus of the Umma or Moslem community as a whole, and was based on the Kora’an and Sharia law. Throughout the historical development of Arab/Moslem thinking, extremist or radical thoughts were either eradicated from the process of development or contained in a way that ensured that those thoughts were controlled with the process of time and evolution.

On the other hand, the West – in his traditional way of thinking and civic cultural infrastructure – is pluralist in creation and evolution. What is meant by that is the pure Greco – Roman cultural roots and fundamentals on one hand and the religious philosophy – Christianity – on the other hand. The Western religious philosophy has Eastern roots and fundamentals that were different from the Greco-Roman ways of thinking in creation and evolution. It took over three centuries before Christianity could have a foothold or a presence in the Western ways of thinking. At that stage of evolution, there existed some kind of a line between the reality of the Western secular thought and the spiritual values and teachings of the religion.

As a result, the Western history – in opposite to the Arab/Moslem history – was a continuous and lasting effort to ensure and protect the separation between the secular and the spiritual so that matters of life are not mixed with religion. That pluralistic approach of essence and infrastructure of the Western philosophy continued emphasizing the separation between history and religion and that they were not compatible in outlook and knowledge except in a few limited periods of history.

For our comparative purpose at hand, as was explained before, the Arab/Moslem ways of thinking were based mainly on the Kora’an and Sunna (tradition of the prophet), followed by the two important concepts of ijma’a (meaning consensus) and qiyas (meaning analogy). Arab and Moslem thoughts emphasized assimilation and synthesization. And that mind and matter were as equal as theology in the sense that both worked as sources of knowledge.

In comparison, the Western scholastic theology and philosophy acted as two different and distinctive areas of knowledge. Philosophy dealt with the actual realities of truth to the human mind; on the other hand, theology studied the spiritual facts of immortal things. That differentiation was emphasized by St. Thomas Aquinas (1274 AD) and Dennis Scot (1308 AD), and that both theology and philosophy acted independently from each other. Arab and Moslem schools of thought rejected that differentiation between philosophy and theology. And as was discussed previously, they equaled them to each other as sources of knowledge implying that there is no religious fact that exist without some support from the mind. Al-Gazali (1058-1111 AD), a philosopher and intellectual of the 12th century AD, wrote:

“...if theology – scriptures – was as a mind from the ‘outside’, then the mind itself is no more than a theology from the ‘inside’. And that both, theology and mind have to agree on deciding rules and laws...” (Fattah, 1985:326, translated by Author)

Al-Razi, another intellectual of the 14th century AD, went even further than that and he stated that:

“...if the evidence of the mind contradicted the evidence of ‘isnad’ - which is the chain of authentic authorities on which a scripture or a tradition is based – then the ‘isnad’ have to be evaluated within the criteria acceptable to mind and logic, since that religion was not in fact proved without the evidence from the mind...” (Fattah, 1985:326, translated by the author)

On the other hand, there existed a school of thought that differed with Al-Gazali and Al-Razi and other intellectuals of that period. The pioneer of that school of thought was the philosopher Ibn-Rushd (1126-1198 AD), known in the Western culture as Averros.

Ibn-Rushd differentiated between philosophy and theology and there was a medieval Islamic controversy between Al-Gazali and Ibn-Rushd on the interpretation of theology and the concept of consensus (Bello, 1989). Many historians argued that the writings of the philosopher Ibn-Rushd had a major effect on the development of the Western philosophy from the 13th century AD onwards and its struggle for the differentiation between philosophy and theology. However, the Ibn-Rushd school of thought (Averros) acts as an example of the containment process that was evident throughout the development of Arab/Islamic philosophy and ways of thinking.

The influence of philosophy could be considered very minimal on the whole of the Arab/Islamic schools of thought and did not have a major effect on its development as some researchers had suggested, like Danner in his book, *The Islamic Tradition*. Many

Arab/Islamic intellectuals of that period cautioned against what they termed “the disease of un-controlled reasoning” by philosophers and intellectuals (Danner, 1988). A recent writer observed that:

“...The Islamic mind differs from that of the West ...It differs from it simply in that it still clings to certain concepts of the absolute, the West has, for the time being, abandoned. Whether, in so doing, the West has achieved a triumph, must surely remain a matter of opinion. What does seem clear is that, for better or worse, the two intellectual modes are, for practical purpose, largely incompatible.” (Hiskett, 1993:69)

The Arab/Islamic schools of thought did not approve of any pluralistic division between philosophy and scholastic theology. Moreover, throughout history, these schools emphasized that they acted on equal basis.

## 1.2 Acculturation or In-acculturation: Is it a dilemma?

The pure aspects of the Arab/Islamic socio-cultural milieu remained constant since its inception. That culture evolved through acculturation with many different great civilizations like the Greek, Romans, Persian, Indian, and others.

In the early stages of that period in human history, the thinkers of that Islamic civilization were under no pressure. There existed no psychological or political “inferiority complex” which hindered the concept of acculturation with other cultures and societies. The acculturation concept emphasizes the integration and synthesis of alien concepts and thoughts into the mainstream indigenous socio-cultural framework. There was a balanced cultural absorption throughout the period of that particular civilization, the philosopher Al-Kindi (801-866 AD) emphasized the tolerance of accepting foreign knowledge. Al-Kindi wrote:

“...We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth from whatever source it comes to us, even if it is brought to us by former generations and foreign peoples. For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself...” (Hourani, 1991:76)

The independent will to create and evaluate was the key factor to the greatness of that period. The people of that period excelled in many spheres of life. The result was evident in the literature, sciences, medicine and our main theme in this paper “the built environment”.

In the contemporary Arab/Islamic period, the thinkers work in a very limited “breathing space”. They are under tremendous political, economical, social and psychological pressures. Their independent free will of choice has been diminishing to a great extent. The benefit from the Western thought is very limited because the majority of the contemporary thinkers (being architects, city planners, civil servants, poets or others) rely heavily on Western thinking instead of the inner-self development of their own creative thoughts. As one contemporary writer emphasized: “What each one of us wants to know today is how to get out of ourselves, how to escape from our mountains and sand dunes, how to define ourselves in terms of ourselves and not of someone else, how to stop being exiles in spirit.” (Laroui, 1977:384-5)

However, to give an example of the socio-cultural contradictions in the area of the Art, the Islamic art emphasized the concept of abstractness. The Islamic art is usually non-representational and non-individualistic. This is so, because the teachings of the Islamic culture does not approve of imitating human figures, since it implies a paganistic outlook and that God is the only Creator. On the other hand, Western art is usually representational and individualistic in its sculptures and paintings. Contemporary artists in the Arab/Islamic world work with differentiated ideas. If one travels through the built environment of many cities like Cairo, Damascus, and others, he will notice huge sculptures of human-figures. Many people are offended by their presence on their squares and streets because they are not accepted as an Islamic art. The same applies to other so-called “creative minds”. The result was a heterogenetic collection of thoughts that separated them from the “realities on the ground” and distanced those thinkers from the problems and aspirations of the culture itself. In another word, the example mentioned previously in the area of art shows a classical example of in-acculturation or the inability to integrate a foreign concept into the mainstream socio-cultural framework.

There was and still exists a weak connection between thinkers and intellectuals, and their own culture, norms and ways of life. Unfortunately, few people realized what was happening since the beginning of this century. There existed a heavily

unbalanced evaluation and criticism of the Arab/Islamic thoughts and traditions. Albert Hourani, one of the thinkers of the period, called it the “Arab renaissance” (Hourani, 1991). To him and others, the hidden contradictions of completely imitating a scientifically superior culture were not foreseen. A result that will be demonstrated empirically on the urban spatial structure.

The modernization theory advocated by many resulted in a pattern of in-acculturation. The hope and desire to advance and modernize since the beginning of this century was carried on, unfortunately by losing socio-cultural individual characters and the denial of rich historical experiences. The historical experiences produce the autonomous culture of any human group. These historical experiences are called traditions and they constitute the heritage of any cultural grouping. In the Arab/Islamic culture, the word is derived from the concept of inheritance. Al-turath meaning tradition and heritage is derived from the word Al-mirath meaning the inheritance of an individual. While the inheritance (mirath) is distributed among the deceased family, the turath is the spiritual, intellectual and experiences handed down from generation to another. In another word, it is the presence of the father in his son or daughter or the past in the present. This presence includes; theology, language, literature, ways of thinking, aspirations, and nostalgic feelings.

According to Al-Jabiri, the tradition, heritage, or turath is: “...the turath is whatever present with us or in us from the past. This past could be ours or somebody else’s past whether it was the distant or close past...” (Al-Jabiri, 1992:45)

Since the concept of tradition contains many elements of imitation, many questions could be put forward. Among these: How can tradition evolve and change through time? And how can we continue to see tradition as one and the same tradition? In another word, does continuity exist in a changing tradition? And the most crucial dilemma to any socio-cultural setting is whether to preserve its own socio-cultural tradition, or to establish a sense of continuity with that tradition. In our own culture of the Arab/Islamic world the answers to these questions and dilemmas were not looked at seriously.

In consequence, the regenerative impulses in the architecture, town planning and other disciplines of life were seriously hampered. Hassan Fathy, a renowned Egyptian architect and town planner, cautioned against full acceptance of imported town planning principles and concepts. (Fathy, 1972)

The idea is not to deny the acceptance of modern knowledge or the blind imitation of tradition. The argument is to have a sense of continuity with the past by open evaluation and criticism of tradition. The past should not be always sanctified and authoritative but should be given its own weight of value. "...You may create a theory, but the new theory is created in order to solve those problems which the old theory did not solve." (Popper, 1968:132)

Anderson argued in his writings on history, theory, and criticism of architecture. He wrote that: "...The tradition we prize is not a mere accumulation of knowledge, and undifferentiated catalogue of past events, but rather a vital body of ideas, values, mores, and so forth that we have as yet found resistant to criticism." (Anderson, 1970:81-82)

The theory of cultural borrowing did not emerge as a natural development. Instead, it came about through different imposed factors. One of those is the desire of some elements in the society to disregard the socio-cultural tradition entirely. This position denies a given society's freedom of choice and implies a lack of authenticity and non-participation on the part of a traditional culture and population. Their position, as Laroui maintained is based on the assumption that progress is necessarily an intervention from outside and they were happy importing as many ideas and materials as possible from the presumably superior cultures. The cultural borrowing phenomena would have worked and flourished if there was an objective theme which followed the earlier successful attempts of cultural absorptiveness. The pure aspects of the socio-cultural milieu were kept constant. The "dynamism" representing cultural borrowing worked effectively through assimilation into the Arab/Islamic culture.

The suggested themes of modernization at the end of the nineteenth century failed because instead of enhancing acculturation, they produced in-acculturation. The results were that:

- Solutions were not genuine enough.
- Solutions did not describe a natural necessity.
- Solutions represented an extremity of thought and the full acceptance of Western models.
- Solutions borrowed heavily from Western philosophy, which differed from the process that led to the development of the Islamic thought, in creation and development.

After this brief discussion of the historical development of Western and Islamic ways of thinking, philosophies, and the original cultural aspects of two distinctive civilizations the next part of this paper will deal with the question of socio-cultural identity. In order to test what has been already discussed, the empirical results of part of a comprehensive and focused field study conducted in thirty six neighborhoods of the city of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, will be presented in the following section of this paper. The study covered an area estimated to be 1782 sq.km. Moreover, this resulted in the accumulation of 504 completed questionnaires.

According to Norberg-Schulz (1965), the built environment has three related aspects; the physical, social and cultural issues. With this understanding, the following section will discuss, with empirical results, the concept of socio-cultural identity and its significance to the physical built environment.

## 2 SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The main hypothesis of this paper is that socio-cultural identity in the built-environment of Riyadh city has changed dramatically since the 1950s. The urban transformation from a traditional built environment to the contemporary urban setting was not matched with changes in Arab/Islamic way of life and rules of conduct. Therefore, this resulted in socio-physical contradictions between the contemporary built-environment, and the residents of the city's districts and neighborhoods (in-acculturation).

In order to clarify the hypothesis even further, there are two main elements connected with this empirical investigation;

- A physical environment
- Socio-cultural identity and related values

Both of these two elements have changed, but at different degrees. Whereas before, in the traditional urban spatial structure, there was a harmony between people and their built-environment. Nowadays, the harmony is distorted and not clear. Therefore, there is a gap (mis-match) between socio-cultural identity and the physical environment of the city of Riyadh.

Since the 1950s, the identity of the built-environment has changed dramatically in contrast to the socio-cultural identity of the Riyadh city's residents. The identity of the house, street, neighborhood and the urban form as a whole have changed. This has not been through natural evolution or acculturation, but as a result of new internal and external factors. This very rapid change was either imported or imposed by the contemporary urban rules and regulations. Consequently, an identity distortion has occurred in the society leading to high levels of dissatisfaction with the contemporary urban environment. Largely, the problem of identity was expressed in terms of the relationship between the urban and architectural heritage of the past and the contemporary needs of the present.

### The Analysis

In order to investigate the distortion that had occurred in the identity of the urban scene, our field study sample was asked about their socio-cultural identity and its compatibility to the urban environment. (34%) of the total number of respondents said that the contemporary urban environment suited the Arab/Islamic socio-cultural identity. However, (60.30%) of the respondents did not agree, and stated that the traditional urban environment was more compatible with the Arab/Islamic socio-cultural identity.

Furthermore, when the respondents were asked the same question but in a different phrase (that the traditional city suited its residents socially and culturally and that the contemporary one, contradicted its residents socially and culturally), more respondents (73.80%) agreed with that particular statement.

In continuing to investigate the state of socio-cultural identity in the Arab/Islamic world as a whole, our respondents were asked whether they thought that the changes that have been occurring during the last hundred years (e.g. the changing urban environment, the changing house decorations and styles, the changing educational methods, changing clothing styles...etc.), represented a specific state of socio-cultural identity. (54.80%) of the respondents said that these variables in socio-cultural identity represented some kind of a crisis in the culture's identity. While (31.90%) of the respondents did not agree with the others. They argued that these variables do not affect the Arab/Islamic socio-cultural identity. These responses did not significantly correlate with the level of education of our respondents. Many respondents, regardless of educational background, felt there was a problem with the socio-cultural identity issue.

ITEM	Primary	Intermediate	High School	Junior College	University	Post Graduate
A	10	32	43	17	227	43
B	3	4	13	6	43	15

Notation: A: The traditional city suited its residents socially and culturally. And the contemporary one contradicted its residents in socio-cultural terms. B: Do not agree with the above statement

Table 1 Socio-cultural contradictions in the built environment and the level of Education.

To investigate the cause/causes that resulted in the **contemporary** state of the urban environment, our sample was asked whether they thought it was simply **imported** from outside the Arab/Islamic culture in respect to urban and regional planning in the contemporary built-environment. (54.20%) of the respondents did not think that changes in the urban environment was simply the result of an intervention from the outside world. However, (29%) of the respondents thought it was. Clearly, it is **deducted** that more educated and professional respondents can not simply blame the outside world for the drastic changes that happened in their own urban spatial structures. Rather, they see it as a combination of causes within the Arab/Islamic entity.

The Arab/Muslim architects and planners and the official decision-makers in the government were blamed for most of the **urban contradictions** present in the contemporary urban environment. **Logically, it is argued that if we want to have an urban environment compatible with our socio-cultural norms and values, then we have to change our own urban and regional planning regulations in a manner that will suit our own society.** Many of the respondents see the **solution** for the socio-physical contradictions in the contemporary urban scene **from within**, and not from outside.

This educated attitude to the causes of failure in the urban environment takes us back to the **acculturation and in-acculturation** concepts discussed in the theoretical part of this study. Unfortunately, the process of **in-acculturation** continues to be the norm practiced by the high decision-making level of the country. Ironically, nothing has been done to alleviate the problems facing the contemporary urban spatial structures. Even professionals and decision-makers that use to advocate such changes have not done what they have been preaching, all through their professional careers.

CATEGORY CHOSEN	SCALE OF ESPONSE (Aggregate)
The Arab/Islamic community	231
The Arab/Muslim architects and planners trained in a foreign system of education.	257
Expatriate architect and planners who are contracted in the area	229
Arab/Muslim intellectual who followed mainly Western philosophy and schools of thought	173
Official decision-makers in governmental agencies.	237
The colonists and their impact on the culture as a whole.	191

Table 2 Causes of failure in the Arab/Islamic built-environment according to the survey sample

The Western observer to the contemporary Arab/Islamic scene, who has witnessed the disastrous effects of the European “modern movement” originated in the 1920s and the 1930s as a reaction against what was called the “academic style” of the 19th century and

expanded greatly during the 1950s and 1960s (Blake, 1974), that Western observers seem to be puzzled that decision-makers in Arab/Islamic countries are not questioning the validity of imported urban planning and zoning concepts.

That same observer became more surprised because many architects and planners in Europe and the United States have been showing a growing interest in the timeless values of traditional architecture in general. They are looking at these timeless values as a reference for modifying and rehabilitating the current Western planning methods since its major failure was probably its ignorance of organically grown traditional urban settings (Alexander, 1975). Unfortunately, these lessons in urban planning and architecture have been ignored by the decision-makers in the Arab/Islamic scene. The superiority of the foreign model and the feeling of inferiority within, have resulted in the importation of complete urban 'packages'.

This type of importation disregarded the cultural context; the rules of conduct and behavior in addition to other environmental factors. Most of the time, these "urban packages" were chosen for prestige and not function. The wholesale importation of alien urban planning policies has left the traditional urban setting to decay or have been rigorously destroyed. In the meantime, modern villa/grid patterns of settlements have been erected in a very short time scale especially since the 1973 period of economic boom. These new settlements have contradicted the specific cultural and environmental needs of the urban environment.

In addition, the identity with the urban scene has been culturally eroded and continuously undermined. The self-determined urban regeneration is weakened because the organic innovations are no longer from within the society itself (Bianca, 1982). In contrast, the Western architects and planners live on their failures and mistakes. While their Arab/Islamic counterparts do not attempt to genuinely rectify the mistakes and failures practiced for a long period in the contemporary urban spatial structure.

In concluding this paper, it might be appropriate to write the thoughts and observations of a contemporary writer on the urban spatial structure. This writer is not a specialist on the field; however, his thoughts represent a large segment of the society of the country as has been deduced in the empirical results of this study. He wrote:

"...Why did we lose satisfaction with ourselves? Moreover, why couldn't we adapt to the contemporary reality? Simply stated where is our identity?"

The answer is very painful and sad. We have built large and spacious houses and competed with each other to build the most extravagant of dwellings. We competed to import the best available house furnishings. Then, we tried to convince ourselves to accept what we have done!! At the same time, we were looking for something that was already lost. We are trying to cure some of the nostalgic feelings within us. Inside the large house, we had built a small nostalgic setting. We put the tent and

built the fire in search of our identity! We put large and numerous paintings of traditional urban settings in our living rooms!! We try to look for help from Japanese technology, but there is no taste or smell. We try to put mud colors in the facades. Something inside us is screaming to get our identity back which was lost in the traffic of contemporary life. Let us go back and discuss these matters with ourselves so we can arrive at a good and lasting cure. " (Al-Rabiya, 1992: Translated by Author)

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