

**Significance of Prominent Urban Design Projects:
Inherited Meaning and Symbolism in
King Abdulaziz Historic Center in
Arriyadh, Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract. Over the past four decades, the built environment in Saudi Arabia witnessed phenomenal change and reconstruction as a result of rapid urban growth and modernization trends stimulated by economic and demographic development. Today, Saudi physical environments are often characterized by harsh visual contrasts between indigenous and modern urban pattern and architectural character. The designed buildings and their settings are physical evidences of such attitude. In the past, the local building materials, the construction methods, and the traditional features of the human settlements not only had practical value, but also authentically conveyed the indigenous architecture and its culture.

The paper aims to describe the relationship between the urban pattern and the architectural character and urban form and the culture of the society through study of a prominent project in Arriyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia like the King Abdulaziz Historic Center (KAHC). The urban designers, landscape architects and architects of KAHC arranged its elements in a memorable historical setting to convey embedded meaning and symbolism whereby the viewers draws their meaning and derivation from cultural, political and social significance. Every element in KAHC is derived out of a concept that represents an entity of its own. Each creates an environmental "domain" that shapes and influences human perception and behavior. Activities in KAHC take place not only in the immediate proximity of the urban element but also extending outward to a larger behavioral and "domain" thereby helping to shape larger behavioral and environmental patterns.

The paper attempts to show how prominent spatial and physical structures in urban landscape projects link humans to their environment through their symbolic, social, ritual and practical functions. The citizens and visitors of KAHC will discover such link through observation and exploration of multiple visual images of traditional and modern architectural shapes and urban forms.

Introduction

The King Abdulaziz Historic Center (KAHC) is a civic urban design project located north of Arriyadh City core. Arriyadh city core is composed of several spatial and physical elements of cultural, religious, economic and political importance.

King Abdulaziz was a quintessential knight who rose from a royal family and saw the collapse of the second Saudi Dynasty in Arriyadh in the late 19th century. He lived in an exile for more than ten years. He returned to Arriyadh in 1902 leading an attack on *Al-Masmak*, a fort occupied by a prominent supporter of the *Al-Rashied Dynasty* in *Hayel*, which seized Arriyadh in 1882. Subsequently, after a harsh struggle, King Abdulaziz declared the capture of Arriyadh from atop the minaret of the Imam *Turki Jom'ah* Mosque. The year 1902 marked the way for the King to continue a march for unification of fragmented *sheikhdoms* and *emirates* in the Arabian peninsula into one state.

In 1932, and after three decades of struggle, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was declared as an independent state (Fig. 1). Subsequently, Saudi Arabia stressed on building its institutions as a modern state of firm foreign and internal policies. The discovery of oil in 1938 in commercial quantities enabled the new born modern state to build its solid institution on a solid foundation base by not sacrificing the immutability of Islam.

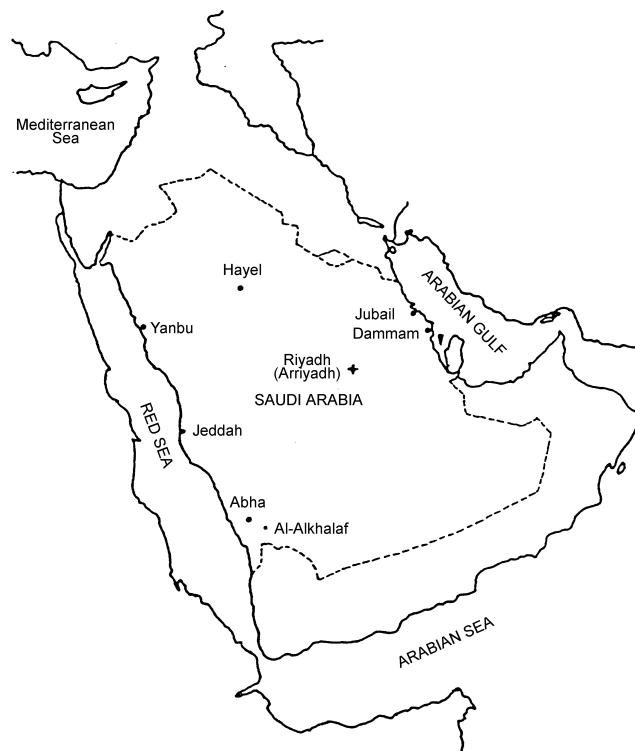


Fig. 1. Map of Saudi Arabia showing the location of Arriyadh within Saudi Arabia

In late 1990's, the decision-makers decided to celebrate the centennial of the start of the unification march by building a memorable project on the same ground that King Abdulaziz administered the unification process. Instead of expending on short-term festivals, the investment of construction of public projects that may sustain in Arriyadh has become an objective. KAHC is something of a national obsession in the centennial celebration of the re-capture of Arriyadh and the birth of the third Saudi Dynasty (Fig. 2).

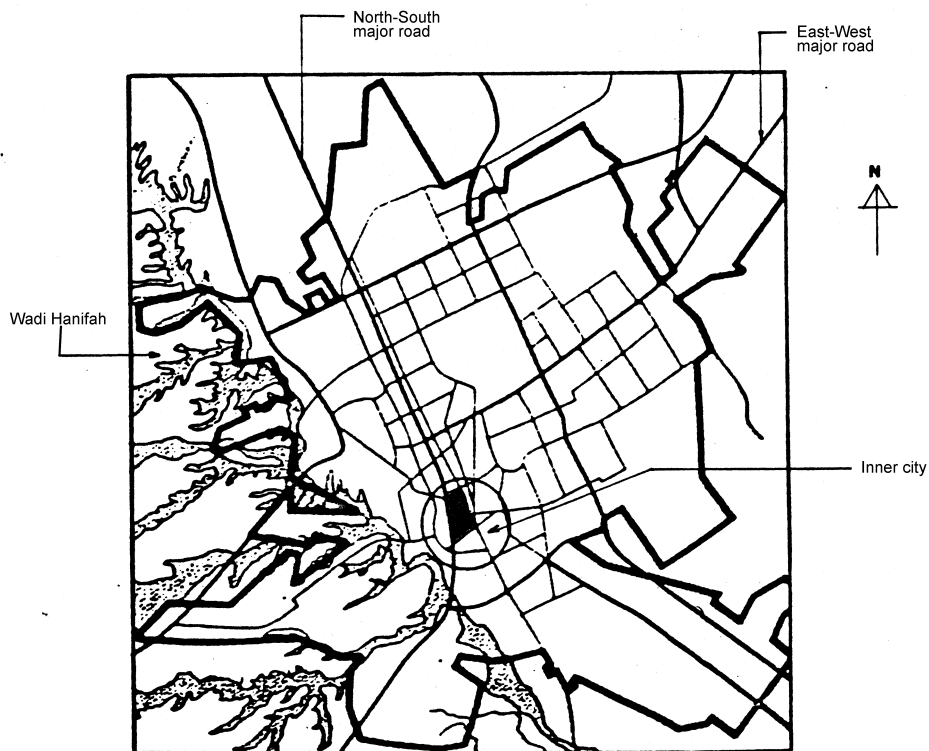


Fig. 2. Map of Arriyadh showing the location of King Abdulaziz Historic Center (KAHC) and the two major expressways connecting the city of neighborhoods to Arriyadh city core.

The symbolism of this remarkable event is expressed in unique urban form, which has had to adapt itself around old and new edifices. In this discussion KAHC is viewed as a serious urban design attempt to link the present with the recent historical past. It provides a continuing dialogue between professionals (architects, landscape architects and urban designers) on one side and architectural and urban critics on the other, about the significance of prominent urban design projects like KAHC. It builds an exploratory

agenda of inherited meaning and symbolism and how they are integrated physically in KAHC. The hierarchy of use of open spaces and buildings in KAHC has provided various domains for a number of activity patterns like citizens and visitors of Arriyadh who utilize the place for leisure. Although each activity is unique in its spatial quality and placement in relation to the project, they are all joined in a sequential order that facilitates and supports Arriyadh community.

Today, there has been a growing recognition of the interplay of physical (climatic, geographic, and technological) and nonphysical (economic, political, cultural) forces in the design of buildings and spaces [1]. There has been a new effort to arrive at interpretations based on symbolic cultural expressions found in architecture, art, religion and folklore including aspects of culture, popular attitudes, and common experience[2]. This vision is viewed in KAHC as an attempt of urban development which embraces the past and the present and which cuts across political and economic boundaries. KAHC urban designers realized that when the urban fabric of modern development of the project destroys both the intimate scales of the indigenous architecture of the old setting and its links with context, interaction is lost. So they designed an urban park and built new visual elements to express the relation of the individual to the group and its surroundings. The integration of traditional urban to pattern the new urban concept of KAHC makes the individuals feel the significance of the new without sacrificing the old. This is what made the professionals and government officials involved in KAHC to give renewed attention to increasing spatial scale of the urban park as a lung that supplements the other elements of the project with life. The integration of the new urban elements with those like the mosque and the adobe palace resulted in the design of harmonious domains.

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of urban landscape in the form of central park in bridging indigenous architecture and urbanism in today's practice. This demanded the restoration of the old and the construction of new urban elements which are accurately reflecting the country's rich heritage.

The paper attempts to focus on core questions of the role of urban design projects like KAHC in exploring problems of how to inherit meaning and symbolism of importance to the culture of Saudi Arabia. It brings to present a critical reinterpretation of tradition and seems to talk about the importance of preserving the traditional vernacular environments and "transferring their symbolic potential" to new construction. The main subject matter of the article (the KAHC complex) is treated in more detail. It focuses on the KAHC complex itself, and discusses the project fully in its historical, political, cultural and urban context.

2. Problems, Objectives and Methodologies

The decline of indigenous architecture in many parts of the world and the loss of the traditional physical environment, and its replacement by a foreign, imported type not

always in harmony with the culture of those societies has happened too often, and little attention has been paid to the subject. The physical environment in its architectural and urban characteristics, at any point in time, is as much a part of cultural heritage as is art, literature or music. At the same time, just as new art forms are developing, so are new spatial and physical structures. The loss of traditional physical environments is not only a cultural loss, but also it has a diverse and often irreversible effect on the way of life of the society concerned. If societies are to preserve traditional built environments and adapt them to conform with the more positive aspects of modern life, the end result should not be to produce a 'museum in the open' for the sake of visitors, but to preserve the integrity and values of the community itself, upgrading facilities to comply with modern standards. Practicing architects and educators would benefit from a more direct discussion of the conflict between the modern and the vernacular. The real tension that exists between the two often has modernization attitudes and its promotion of secular values at its root. While modern economic concepts and world trade have created a clash with the traditional way of life.

Studying notable examples such as King Abdulaziz Historic Center motivates the establishment of a hypothesis that the traditional architectural and planning concepts rather than exotic concepts in architectural character and urban forms, constitutes a relevant base for generating contemporary built environments capable of maintaining a sense of continuity with tradition. This research methodology explains how the paper links visual observation to the systems of meaning and symbolism.

3. The Creation of KAHC Urban Design Concept

The traditional physical forms in the original KAHC urban site were in continuous piecemeal transformation under the initiative of those that actually occupied, controlled and used them. The contemporary KAHC project represents new urban design concept, which happened to be developed largely on what already existed from vernacular forms (Fig.3). The relationship between architecture and urban context is manifested by two broad initiatives. The first gives priority to cultural continuity with the existing locality and its history. It is achieved through a process, which links urban identity and local memory. The second is concerned with morphological continuity of an existing locality and its historical stratification. It is an urban system which seeks links with physical features, geographic site, topographic characteristics, and existing physical and morphological patterns, in other words, with the form and structure of the locality (Fig. 4).

Arriyadh first began change into its present form in the mid 1970s with the approval of the first master plan of the city prepared by Doxiades and Associates, an internationally well known planning consulting firm. The master plan was based on super block (2 km x 2 km) of new and wider roads, redevelopment zones, shopping centers, public parks, and a plethora of new buildings designed by Saudi and World class architects.

The site of King Abdulaziz Historic Center was kept as historical site within the

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Fig. 3. A scheme of King Abdulaziz Historic Center (KAHC) showing the most important elements.



Fig. 4. The integratin of King Abdulaziz Mosque and Palace into the other elements of the project was a prerequisite for the scheme. This symbolizes the rule of the ruling Palace and the Mosque in Saudi Arabia where the Mosque represents the legislation authority, the ruling palace represents the executive authority.

(ADA) started the process of planning and design of KAHC till it was completed in 1999. KAHC is developed on the basis of an urban design concept prepared by Ali Shuaibi & Rasem Badran and Arriyadh Development Authority. A series of buildings, some renovated, some newly built, grouped around central urban park which formulated the ground of such concept. KAHC the project represents a return to the roots where it consists of part of the original Al-Murabba^c Palace and other mud buildings, built in 1938 as the King's residence and office. The complex was renovated by Beeah. The King Abdulaziz Archival and Research Center (Al-Darah) was designed by Rasem Badran and Omrania (Figs. 5 & 6). The King Abdulaziz Mosque built in 1960's was renovated also by Arriyadh Development Authority (ADA) to serve the visitors of the project and the community around KAHC (Fig. 7). The heritage mud buildings were considered by the urban designers as physical constraints that must be respected (Fig. 8). The site landscaping was designed by Bodeker; the National Museum and Antiquity Department buildings was designed by Moriyama (Figs. 9-14). The King Abdulaziz Library and Auditorium was designed by Omrania. Arriyadh water tower was designed by VBB of Sweden and constructed in 1968 and renovated by the ADA. These different

urban elements have been arranged around the urban park. The 100-palm tree oasis symbolizes the elapsed years since the capture of Arriyadh. The building and the urban park are open to the public. The citizens and visitors of Arriyadh find KAHC as a place of recreation. With its high quality of urban spaces, magnificent architecture and well thought out interlinks of traditional and modern forms and spaces, KAHC forms a focal point in the center of the Arriyadh civt (Fig. 15).



Fig. 5. Al-Darah and Al-Muraba^c, on the left and king Abdulaziz Palaces on right of the picture overlooking to King Abdulaziz Mosque on frontof the picture. It symbolizes the integration of ruling palace (Muraba^c) an executive authority and the Mosque as a legislative authority.



Fig. 6. Al-Diwan; the Reception Hall in Al-Muraba^c Palace. In this palace, King Abdulaziz met foreign high officials as well as local top officials.



Fig. 7. King Abdulaziz Mosque was renovated to match with the architectural features of KAHC. This Mosque was constructed on the same site of the traditional mosque in 1984. this mosque means to Arriyadh inhabitants a lot where the King would hear publically the grievances of people on his way to the palace.



Fig. 8. King Abdulaziz Palaces were remodeled and maintained as part of KAHC project.



Fig. 9. The National Museum is located east of KAHC. It comprises one of the most important cultural nodes in KAHC.



Fig. 10. A view that comprises the National Museum on left and Al-Darah on right.



Fig. 11. A view that comprises the National Museum main entrance and the public park.



Fig. 12. The entrance hall of the National Museum links the twomain wings of the Museum and serves as a festival space.



Fig. 13. The holy mosques hall is adorned by Zebra arches, similar to that in Al-Madinah mosque. It is the largest hall in the Museum.



Fig. 14. Traditional Architectural heritage Hall in the National Museum is equipped with full scale models of architectural features.



Fig. 15. The well and Al-Saniah (the mechanism of raising underground water) are part of the culture in Arabia.

The King Abdulaziz Historical Center was recently inaugurated in Riyadh as an exercise in blending tradition with modernity [4]. Designed and built over a span of 6 years with a cost of US \$175 million. The urban design reflects the fine design skills of Saudi and Jordanian while the architectural design and landscape architecture are shared and managed by Japanese, Canadian, and the Saudi (Omrania and Al-Beeah) planning and architectural firms. Covering some 93 acres, the project in the heart of the historic quarter of Riyadh, comprises an urban park, a museum, a Friday mosque, a public library and an auditorium. In addition, there are several historic buildings included, such as Al-Murabba^c Palace and Al-Daraah.

The public urban park is divided into five large walled gardens. Such forms a central landscaped longitudinal space which constitutes the spine of the project. Since statues and classic icons are not permitted in Saudi Arabia due to religious constraints, the urban and architectural designers and the landscape architect resorted to an outstanding melange of hard and soft materials to inspire awe. Along the spine,

primroses, rock, gravel, ceramics, and geometrically patterned marble come through as a feast for the eye. Meandering channels mimic traditional desert streams, leading from a central well to fountains and pools dotted with rocky islands.

To the east of the central spine, the National Museum is an expression of subtlety. Not only does the massive curvilinear stone façade conjure up an image of a creeping sand dune but it also helps offset the horizontal thrust of the building [4]. The curved façade serves the architecture of the museum's foyer by providing an inviting entrance that appears to draw in visitors.

While the long colonnade delivers one into the foyer, this hall draws the visitor into the museum's north wing where there is an exposition called "Man and the Universe." After the visitors completed their tour of the north wing, they are literally 'delivered' across a bridge to the 'enlightenment' of Islam. The architectural metaphor, so aptly represented by the architect in the concept of the bridge and deliverance, is in itself enlightening and notable. So is the architectural treatment of the interior and lighting of the south wing where design fluidity, transparency and luminance cannot fail to impress.

When the visitors leave the museum, their attention is drawn to the contrast between the museum's horizontal mass and the vertical volumes of Al-Darah (the archive of King Abdulaziz). Here the architect is clearly flirting with the crude texture of stone, the hi-tech feel of polished metal and the use of skylights. The building comes through as a statement that blends old and new yet again. The chic interior invites curiosity if only for the ramps, levels, loggias and screens which permeate it.

The Saudi National Museum in Riyadh is in the architectural vanguard to Middle Eastern museums. With this in mind, the Deputy Ministry for Archaeology and Museums should capitalize on the skills of nationally renowned architects for delivering design for regional museums. Special attention should be given to landscaping of the surrounding grounds in a way that would not only embellish the museum, but also touch our soul with the beauty and élan of modern landscaping. The call for a new concept in Museum design should not be dismissed as superfluous for reasons of costs. Instead, it ought to be seen as a modest quest of indigenous people who are anxious to put their regions back into the vanguard of design.

4. Underlying Theory of Inherited Meaning

Seen from the standpoint of history, archaeological evidence alone is often not enough to establish the meaning of an open space, freestanding building or group of buildings in the open urban landscape. However, by considering the building within its culture, a fuller, richer meaning often becomes clear [5]

The identification of architecturally meritorious structures is a major step in successful planning and design of the physical and built environments. Excellence and

aesthetic value in a structure enhances the interaction between it and the viewer. When a new structure promotes a respect for history and culture, it does not necessarily relegate its user to live in the past. While most cultures can retain the traditions and the values honored by their ancestors, taking in consideration that they cannot live the same lifestyle. Instead, traditional values can be reflected in the urban pattern and architectural character and in life choices of citizens. Blindly following international styles leads to a cultural void and merely imitating traditional architecture cannot do justice to a rich heritage.

The interaction between physical structures and their built environment as one entity and the user or visitors should not be treated separately from human behavior [6]. The built environment is a function of architecture, an integral part of the design problem to be solved, even though the planning and urban design processes are intangible activities, unlikely to produce visible volumetric elements like KAHC. KAHC is an architecture and urbanism which refines political, social and ritual activities into an appealing built form and urban landscape. This may leave the impression that the professionals working in the design of such project do not need strong architectural skills, but in fact, the opposite is true. There is a need for urban designers with strong design skills who can spot design deficiencies and define an appropriate solution. The differences between urban planning, urban design, architecture and landscape architecture must become merely in the matter of complexity, process, public communication, scale and time - not substance. In other instance, there are rules and codes that govern the use of structure which regulate their set up in the environment [7]. Codes ensure that there is a degree of regularity and order in society. The rules indicate what actions society views as acceptable, undesirable, or dangerous. They establish expectations, and aspects of behavior. Certain regulations limit certain behaviors and permit others [8]. They form a pattern, which reflects social and ritual values.

The domains of the physical environment in KAHC are defined by boundaries: physical or imaginary. A physical boundary in private spaces or public buildings of limited access marks the edge or outer limit of the place, physically separating and distinguishing it from its surroundings. The imaginary boundary is viewed in public articulated spaces where the distinction is made between sacred and profane through symbolic aspects of the built environment. Boundaries enable users to distinguish between places and to associate messages, meanings, and rules with them. People mark, differentiate, and separate places to varying degrees according to culture. The rigid boundaries are associated with taboos, while fluid boundaries are more intimate. A great range of physical elements can act as boundaries. Any change that allows distinction can be a boundary, even a small one such as a difference of materials or a line on the ground.

The approach to a place contains information people need in order to find and

identify it and to anticipate what will be found within. Entering a space itself symbolizes and accommodates the transition from one realm to another. For example, finding physical distinctions between the front of a mosque and the rear indicates that ritual conventions and distinctions are in operation.

Public buildings and spaces in KAHC are seen different in size, density, form, age, and relationship to natural surroundings. Each has its own physical characteristics, organizational rules, and associated behavior patterns. In addition, each has an image, by which people who know the place understand it. Some types of orientation patterns in the physical environment have images, which are particularly strong and widely shared.

Place images focus feelings and knowledge about them. Images represent the meaning, which a place holds for the user. The meaning grows from personal experiences, preferences and the education within a particular culture. Users build these images out of fragments of experiences selected for their significance. The experience may be a direct sensation of the place. Selected fragments are organized into a coherent image, which reminds the user of the place and helps him to recognize it.

Strict religious codes are prominent in the enculturation process of affiliate behavior. This process can help us better understand the interaction between viewers and form, structure, and symbolic meanings of the built environment. For example, the religious rituals performed in the mosque are considered part of the space domain, which is defined by a physical structure and paths. This structure denotes the sacred from the profane. The perception of the domain is defined by the form and image of the structure and the path strongly orients the core of ritual place.

The elements of the physical environment are valued because they have meaning or significance, which lies in how people perceive them, not in how they actually are [9]. The relationship between a certain element and its surroundings defines its domain. The domain may be physically defined by boundaries, objects or changes in physical characteristics. The perception of the space or building and its domain are found to be positively related to the frequency of use and access [10]. In application, domains are found to elicit strong feelings of security, rituality and identity. The concept of a domain is important to environmental designers concerned with the creation of a meaningful and coherent physical environment. The domain is an important determinant of the pattern of interaction among people within the domain of the space or building. The domain is the extent of the users' physical and emotional interaction with others. The extent of people's interaction with a structure can be related to psychological needs such as security, identity and self-actualization. Perceptions, cognitions, emotions and motivations all affect the interaction process between the structure and/or space and viewer. An understanding of this process is essential to the urban design process.

Domains create strong associations between users and the constructed environment.

Such an intimate relationship is central to the collective behavior of the users. While domains are perpetual, the associations that shape them are the result of the social and cultural transformations that the users experience. Steele [11] has observed that man's sense of place is the result of physical, social and personal factors. Open-space arrangements, along with prominent structures, help orient people in social space, and in this way clearly influence the extent and form of communication among inhabitants. It has been argued that space organization is the primary function of culture; through space organization, culture both prevents and encourages social interaction [7]. The characteristics of a traditional architecture include the physical manifestation of the equilibrium between social homogeneity and heterogeneity in a social system requiring both the segregation of domestic life and participation in the economic and religious life of the community.

5. In Search of Local Authenticity

The local authenticity of traditional physical environment in old Arriyadh possesses five key symbolic and functional features shown in five important urban elements. Firstly, the minarets of the mosque that guides believers along narrow alleyways in the densely built environment to the *massajed*, the places of worship. Secondly, the fortification elements that are composed of warning and defense towers and fortified gates. Each contributed to the protection of inhabitants and their belongings. Thirdly, Qasr Al-Hokm; the governor palace where the ruler or his representative meets in an open Majlis, the public, people and official guests of the country. Fourthly, the Souq (market place) where commercial transactions and social activities take place. Fifthly, the house where citizens reside and perform their private life in a confined and secured place. Each urban element in the city serves symbolic, ritual or commercial purposes. The minaret as an integral part of the mosque serves ritual and identification purposes to the place of the worship. Qasr Al-Hokm serves as a symbol of the state and its power in controlling the country. Fortification and allied structures serve as a symbol of readiness to defend the interests of the community and the state. The Souq serves as a place of exchanging goods and services. The activities and availability of goods are symbols of prosperity. The residence serves as a symbol of settlements. These five key elements were planned in an associated design language, which was structured and modified by community residents and suited to their values, social norms, and needs.

The participation of the decision-maker, master builder and user in the design and construction of an authentic physical and built environment contributed to the creation of meaningful settings. The concept of domain is emphasized by the placement of the urban element into the setting as is seen through Arriyadh historical, architectural and cultural perspective. The historic importance of the KAHC urban site helped the urban designers to give definition to the physical environment resulting in a vivid interaction between the users and the physical environment. The awareness of people in inherited ritual and cultural values, environmental conditions, and an understanding of political protocols made it possible to design a modern physical environment that preserves the sense of

local authenticity. The KAHC urban site provided an arena for drawing from historical precedents. The urban form and architectural characteristics of Arriyadh are inexhaustible sources for continuing dialogue between designers and theorists interested in society under rapid growth and modernization pressures. Importing urban form and architectural style to a culture without understanding the significance of traditional architecture is a great loss of traditional identity in the built environment.

The meanings in modern planning and design approaches seem to be based on theoretical and authoritative grounds [12]. It represents perspectives and attitudes that are based entirely on the perceptions and value preferences of designers, clients and decision-makers. While some of these professionals try to incorporate older images of traditional physical artifacts, they do not base them on the same type of spontaneity, which created the strong symbolism. The symbolism that people choose to have around them may reflect their perceptions of who they are or may reflect their perceptions of who they aspire to be or may simply reflect a rejection of the past [13]. The assessment of the current state of KAHC architectural and urban development identifies a sense of chronology, which contributed physically to local authenticity. Symbol formation in KAHC provides an urban and architectural vocabulary that helped in solving space and place identity problems.

6. The Symbolism of King Abdulaziz Historic Center

The KAHC was planned to coincide with the centennial festival of the establishment of the third Saudi dynasty and the emergence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the unification of fragmented tribes, emirates and sheikhdoms.

KAHC consists of historically accumulated political, ritual, and cultural functions. Their domain in culture made KAHC elements as places of symbolic importance to local people and regional revitalization. Space and building can maintain and improve the play of various functions and the preservation of the vernacular environment. In order to foster the characteristics of a project like KAHC in such a way as to preserve the individual identity of Arriyadh, the administrators and professionals of the project attempted to make it a more attractive and comfortable place to use.

In some cases, older buildings have been transformed to accommodate new functions and have been maintained to serve the new functions. The design requirements of new buildings include elements to serve the indigenous culture and adoption of modern technology. The process introduced new cultural connotations. As such, a higher socio-spatial order existed. The new buildings not only serve practical functions and purposes but they carry meaning, symbolism, and social significance.

The physical attributes of traditional buildings serve as a base for architectural language in that they enhance the generation of meaning in different contexts and styles. Rules in architectural psychology assert that the cognition and perception of their physical attributes can structure the level of meaning. Perceived meaning represents a

captured design experience, and this knowledge can be used as feedback for newly emerging buildings. For example, the National Museum is considered a spectacular example of modern architecture. This new building type has brought together the architectural tradition of the Islamic world through modern design and technology to meet the necessities of contemporary needs.

The symbolism of KAHC is manifest in several physical elements. The museum symbolizes and narrates Muslim history as well as King Abdulaziz's struggle for unity. The adobe palace symbolizes the modest life of the originator of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The mosque symbolizes the faith of Muslims, a faith, which enabled King Abdul-Aziz to conquer the enemies. The Addarah Building (archive center) symbolizes the intent of rediscovering the lessons of the achievement. The public park, with its 100 palm trees, symbolizes the centennial of the capture of Arriyadh.

The urban elements in KAHC, at the very least, represent the victory of 1902. This is how the symbolism is intended to work. The problem is that no one really knows whether the symbolism of unification of a nation can be presented in artifacts. When we look to most important urban elements, one finds that two key original buildings were complementary to each other. One was the headquarters of the King (residences and offices), which represented the executive authority, and the other was the mosque which represented the legislative authority. Both are with prominent attributes. The mosque has an instantly recognizable physical form and approach. The minaret became a key symbol of Islam. Qasr Al-Imarah (Governance Palace) is the other element of Muslim iconography. It represents the power and order of the state. These two elements are emphasized in KAHC built form for symbolic and aesthetic reasons.

The mosque, museum and other buildings are washed with white, signifying purity. The park design is based on two major elements, the palm tree, the symbol of life, and water, the secret of life. The contents of the museum and the archive buildings enhance the propagation of information and knowledge. Therefore, purity, life and knowledge are manifested physically by the KAHC urban elements.

7. Concluding Remarks: The Re-invention of Tradition

The most notable example of the evolutionary design process at work in Saudi Arabia is the rise of modern architecture and fall of traditional architecture due to changes in the sociopolitical and economic structure of the country. Traditional architecture and urbanism flourished at a time when there was a dependence on local resources, i.e., indigenous master builders and natural materials for construction. In traditional era, the settlements in the Arabian peninsula were subjected to periodic raids from nomadic warriors. When a strong central authority was established in the early 1930's under the leadership of King Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was born, nomadic raids were eventually eradicated and the security of

trade was insured. Consequently, the trading of new building materials with other countries and the expatriate flow were enhanced, and the car also was adopted as a means of transportation. International experience started to enter the market and dominated on vernacular experience.

Most of the distinctive architecture and urbanism which distinguished the Saudi Arabian towns and cities and their environs was abandoned and left to decay, and the few that survived ceased to function.

A variety of new design and building techniques were adopted. The new era witnessed the emergence of new building types to cope with immediate needs and to improve urban life and the physical environment.

The modernization in Saudi Arabia is linked with the adoption of the international architectural style in its early urban development. It is an imported design approach that ignores the indigenous urban pattern and architectural identity of the built environment. It is not other than that imposed style enhanced by modern technology. In order to deal with time and place and express traditional values in contemporary and future architectural design, one should actualize the modernity of tradition in the context of reconstruction in which ecological, economic, humanistic and cultural concerns are intelligently integrated. This is an evolutionary design process, which is to envision a new and original form for the demands of new physical environments.

Several professionals in Saudi Arabia have rerouted the usage of vernacular forms, which once possessed significance in function. When vernacular forms lost their principal function, people were not ready to maintain them. As a result, most of these forms were destroyed and the few that remain are often left unused. So far, new construction, which honors traditional features, has largely been limited. They bear new vernacular design concepts. They are thought to be of symbolic importance to the place and space and so strengthen the interaction between the structure and the environment.

If one compares marked urban and architectural elements seen for a short time in the walled city of Arriyadh, KAHC clearly exhibits distinct yet common features. It is well-planned, attractive, comfortable and healthy in the city core. The urban elements are neither employed partially nor casually for beautification purposes. The space, buildings and artifacts are used in their entirety for deliberate spatial effect and are arranged in a particular way. For example, the physical relationship of the minaret to the project symbolizes the importance of the mosque and its central role in Islamic society. The symbolism is reflected in the minaret as part of the rituals practiced by the society. Likewise, the prominent location of the urban park not only served a functional purpose, but stressed the significance of the desert as an over-riding part of life in the region.

The associated meanings embodied in each urban element were handled in, and

modified through, an interpretative process used by people in dealing with their day-to-day activities. The role of the Governor Palace and mosque as beacons in the Islamic community cannot be undervalued. Beyond their symbolism to outsiders, each individual building had further meaning to local people because of events that took place around them. In this way, the palace serves as a device of shared memories and cultural reaffirmation.

Inherited meaning and symbolism are deduced by understanding of underlying historical, cultural and political achievements and are transformed into distinguished design objectives and urban design concepts and elements. These can also be transformed into images, which reflect King Abdul-Aziz Historic Center as one prominent urban design project. Professionals and administrators involved in the design of such projects are overwhelmed with the potential power of symbolism and emphasized it in KAHC. They related every spatial and physical element of the project to specific cultural domains and political events.

Continuity of tradition needs planning, design regulations and guidelines as well as the establishment of a code of practice to govern and control the proper implications of immutable and mutable in the society. Through an awareness of cultural values, environmental conditions and geography, an interaction between certain meanings in KAHC was achieved.

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العرة من مشاريع التصميم الحضري المهمة تأصيل المعاني والرموز في مركز الملك عبدالعزيز التاريخي في مدينة الرياض

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ملخص البحث. شهدت البيئة المبنية في المملكة العربية السعودية خلال العقود الأربعة الماضية تغيرات ظاهرة نتيجة التطور الحضري السريع نحو التحضر، والمدعمة بالنمو الاقتصادي والبشري.

في الغالب تتصف البيئة العمرانية السعودية في الوقت الحاضر بالتباين البصري الحاد بين القديم والحديث ويعبر أكبر شاهدا على ذلك الاختلاف في نمط الكتل العمرانية والطرز المعمارية بين القديم والحديث.

كانت مواد البناء في الماضي وطرق الإنشاء ومظاهر الحياة في المدن والقرى ليست فقط ذات قيمة عملية لكنها ترسخ ثقافة وعمارة محلية أصيلة.

تهدف الورقة إلى توضيح العلاقة بين النمط العمراني والطرز المعماري بالثقافة المحلية للمجتمع من خلال دراسة أحد المشاريع الهامة في مدينة الرياض عاصمة المملكة العربية السعودية ممثلاً بمركز الملك عبدالعزيز التاريخي. يمكن استنباط تلك العلاقة من خلال استقراء الفكر التخطيطي للمصممين الحضريين ومعماريي البيئة والمعماريين والقائمين على المشروع. فالمحاولة الجادة من قبلهم لترسيخ هذا المفهوم تلمس في الطريقة التي فيها ترتيب وتنظيم عناصر المشروع في موقع تاريخي ذي طابع تذكاري، يمكن تلمسها من خلال تأصيل المعاني والرموز والتي يمكن للزائر لهذا المكان الخلوص بما عند زيارة هذا المشروع الرائد. فكل عنصر عمراني ومعماري من مركز الملك عبدالعزيز التاريخي مشتق من مفهوم يمثل هوية خاصة للمكان والنشاطات فيه، فكل منها له خاصية في تشكيل والتأثير على الإدراك الحسي للفراغ والسلوك للمستخدم.

تحاول هذه الورقة تبيان كيف يكمن لبناء فراغي ومبني في عمارة البيئة الحضرية ممثلاً في مركز الملك عبدالعزيز التاريخي أن يربط الإنسان بمحيطه من خلال الوظائف الرمزية والاجتماعية والدينية. فالزائر لهذا المكان سيكتشف تلم العلاقة من خلال إمعان النظر في عناصر المشروع ذات الصور الذهنية المتعددة المطبوعة في الأشكال التقليدية والحديثة.