



Organisation of the Islamic Conference
Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture



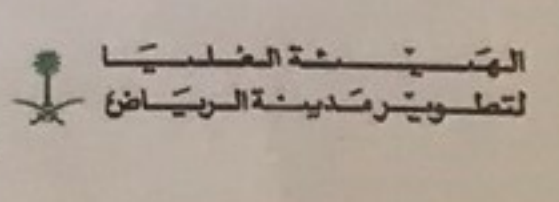
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Saudi Commission for Tourism & Antiquities



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ABSTRACTS



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Emergent 'Double Identity' of Historic Cities; Problems of Urban-Architectural Heritage in Islamic Domain

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Abstract

The paper draws attention to rapid transformation of urban environment in major cities of Islamic countries with particular reference to Saudi Arabia, and intends to emphasize danger of emerging "double identity" due to misinterpretation of urbanization. This study builds arguments on foundations of paradigm shift from 'heritage as drawback' to 'heritage as opportunity'. Therefore, the study takes ominous stance towards imposition of alien spatial instruments, at the peril of treasures of local identity particularly on a land once has cradled the establishment and continuity of successive civilizations. Therefore, heritage conservation should further include genuine, physical and spatial traces of civic fabric of the Islamic society, avoiding, however, urban-architectural forgery reduced to skin-deep façade mimicry of oriental, Islamic and arabesque features made of contemporary materials that results in distorted eclecticism of Disney Architecture, background, sources, roots and aims of which are different from socio-cultural context of Islamic cities. Emerging urban scene fails in mirroring current transformation of the society. Particularly, solo performances of glossy buildings and abrupt dichotomy of street fronts between main arteries and back streets, seem to portrait wrong impressions of fragmentation and segregation, whereas the Islamic society is characterized by a unified, integrated and synchronized public realm. However, particularly in tourism industry, unique architectural characteristics of locality are certainly preferred to their contemporary counterparts. Here, the emerging sensory urban-scape in the current urban building boom that can be associated with the cultural and economic leap in Islamic regions (Arab Renaissance) today, is critically evaluated by means of examples selected from Saudi Arabia, and cross-analyzed under the light shed by precedents of urban conservation against the well-disguised trickery of rapid urbanization as the (secret) agent of globalism. Thus, the paper proposes judicious planning policy which integrates urban conservation into its own body, and further proffers an alternative strategy for the "hybridization of new and old", instead of the current tendency of the "polarization between them".

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