Heritage conservation and architectural education: “An educational methodology for design studios”

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Received 14 August 2013; revised 18 December 2013; accepted 31 December 2013

KEYWORDS
Architectural education; Heritage conservation; Conservation teaching

Abstract Protecting the built heritage and conserving the local traditional and cultural values of communities for future generations present a real challenge for developers, architects, and professional education programs which are responsible for preparing the courses focused on heritage conservation aspects, learning respectful aware design with cultural context, and qualified graduates in planning, design, and implementation of conservation projects.

The paper aims to propose an educational methodology for dealing with heritage conservation projects: “adaptive reuse of historic buildings” in design studios of architecture and interior design programs, by promoting a design philosophy which supports the integrated approaches of revitalizing heritage values of the traditional communities and creates new activities appropriated with: conservation principles, sense of historic buildings and its cultural context, and continuous with local communities needs. The main issue of the paper is to formulate design processes which can assist and develop students’ abilities to reconstruct and represent the heritage building’s interior within the historic context of sensitive conditions to its architecturally and historically significant features adopted with the new activities. The paper presents two examples of student’s senior project titled with “adaptive reuse of Jeddah historic houses as a tool for developing the cultural tourism” (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). By evaluating the design processes, concepts, and outcomes the paper concluded that the architectural education programs which focused on revitalization and conservation of communities’ heritage values – throughout developing student’s creative and investigative skills – can be considered as an effective approach in cultural heritage conservation projects.

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Introduction

The obligation to conserve the architectural heritage of our local communities is as important as our duty to conserve the significant built heritage and its values or traditions of previous eras. More than ever, architectural heritage everywhere is at risk from a lack of appreciation, experience and care.
Some have already been lost and more are in danger. It is a living heritage and it is essential to understand, define, interpret and manage it well for future generations.

Most schools of Architecture in the Arab world in different orientations and affiliations do not represent an extension of the traditions of building and attention to issues of heritage and history of architecture is mostly of academic interest that comes from where the curricula or substance. However the international recommendations and approaches which are focusing on “how to teach heritage conservation” are applied on a wide range.

So the paper aims, in synthesis, to put conservation’s teachers in confrontation, in its wider acception, in order to:

- Analyzing resemblances and differences in the contents and educational methods of teaching heritage conservation in relationship with local values and communities needs.
- Looking over the way conservation’s teaching fits in different schools’ curricula, as regards times, ways and wideness (national and international).
- Evaluating educational objectives and strategies; exchanging ideas and observations on teaching methods, discussing their roles on architect’s formation.

So it is necessary to develop the concept of architectural education in order to contain the architectural and urban heritage conservation, which should be an umbrella or philosophy generally not a method or curriculum. At the same time, in the Arab countries with its valuable outstanding cultural heritage, it is an obligation to promote new goals, approaches to develop new methodologies for teaching built heritage conservation in the architectural education.

Heritage conservation and architectural education

There is a strong relationship between heritage conservation and the Architecture programs, which meant of learning how to deal with heritage, conservation processes, and how to design with understanding history, culture and values, graduating the qualified architects, who are responsible for the design to preserve, reuse, reconstruct, and implement the conservation projects.

The prince Sultan Bin Salman [1] (the president of General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities in Saudi Arabia) evaluated that relationship by “Confirmation inherited moral and physical constants that make personality and identity of communities. Interpret creative variety achieves the idea of renewal advocated by everyone, and this can be achieved through the mechanism of education that deepens and embodies the goals of society. In the field of Architecture and Urbanism it becomes more urgent because architecture inherently is “hereditary science”. The legacy of expertise and skills is often passed from one generation to another through participation and direct learning, which embodies the idea of “teaching heritage” architecture – especially from the point of view of some that are considered to preserve the architectural heritage – is a way to three-dimensional education”. On the other hand the international society had wide approaches to promote the importance of learning the conservation principles, processes through the architectural education.

The international recommendations and frameworks

Over the past four decades, the different approaches of conservation have tended to merge, and the principles of teaching conservation of the built heritage have been given an international backing through the recommendations of UNESCO and the doctrine promoted within the membership of ICOMOS, ICCROM, and other international association, which are promoting the importance of formulating new methodologies of teaching heritage conservation.

The Amsterdam Declaration, Jokilehto [4] which in the fall 1975 concluded that the Council of Europe’s European Architectural Heritage Year, emphasizes: “The architectural heritage will survive only if it is appreciated by the public and in particular by the younger generation. Educational programs for all ages should, therefore, give increased attention to this subject.”

From this time on, an increasing number of training programs have been organized at universities and technical training institutions. In 1993, ICOMOS adopted Guidelines on Education and Training in the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites, giving a general outline for the contents of educational and training programs. The document states: Jokilehto [4] “There is a need to develop a holistic approach to our heritage on the basis of cultural pluralism and diversity, respected by professionals, crafts persons and administrators. Conservation requires the ability to observe, analyze and synthesize.

These guidelines are very much important to develop new concepts and thoughts in teaching conservation including theoretical, applied and training courses based on the experience gathered in ICCROM’s, ICOMOS and UNESCO best practices and international efforts. From the mid 1960s, focus was on the built heritage, followed by the conservation of historic urban areas and cultural landscapes.

Since that time, the criteria considered when preparing the teaching conservation courses have been discussed, and the main issue was how to teach heritage conservation in the architectural education.

One of the main criteria of teaching conservation is understanding the identification and assessment of the significance of architectural heritage, which should be the core of conservation courses. The main factors which form the cultural heritage significance due to Madrid Document [5] may rest in its tangible attributes, including physical location, its associated landscape and setting, design (for example, color schemes), construction systems and technical equipment, fabric, esthetic quality and use, and/or in its intangible values, including historic, social, scientific or spiritual associations, or creative genius. In the other hand, the valuable interiors -such as fittings, associated furniture, and art works- have to be included.

1 ICOMOS: The International Council on Monuments and Sites is a non-governmental international organization dedicated to the conservation of the world’s monuments and sites.
2 ICCROM International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage worldwide through training, information, research, cooperation and advocacy programmes.
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