

The Aesthetic and Functional Values of the Surrounding Plazas of Heritage Mosques

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Abstract:

The surrounding plazas of heritage mosques are considered an integral part of the identity of these mosques, where many historical layers have been accumulated. Therefore, these plazas were a witness to successive civilizations and events. It is an element of understanding the heritage domain and its surroundings. The plazas are not only areas to access or transit to the mosque but are considered a major area and a vital facility for movement, interaction, communication, and the practice of religious rituals and customs.

The aesthetic design of the city begins with the creative and successful artistic and design formation of its squares, especially squares of heritage character. Studying, analyzing, and applying the visual and aesthetic determinants precisely leads to the creation of a design that raises the efficiency of the entire site and the city in general. Moreover, we are working on the integrative study in all aspects of engineering and aesthetically (urban planning, design process). Paying attention to the required details and the elements that make distinctive plazas in order to be suitable with the general aesthetic form. These successful examples are clearly and distinctly seen in the plazas and squares of many western cities.

Keywords:

Heritage plazas, functional plazas, sustainable development, historical public areas, heritage mosques.

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Introduction:

A large number of the old mosque plazas, particularly those in Islamic Cairo's neighborhoods, are dilapidated. Over time, they have experienced arbitrary events and modifications that have diminished their worth and capabilities. The majority of these historic plazas' maintenance and repair plans follow particular, conventional methods and policies. These plans frequently conflict with and have a detrimental impact on the standards of heritage development and preservation. Furthermore, they do not specify design concepts that are appropriate for certain locations. The responsibilities of the planner and the designer are not integrated together. Establishing a cooperative framework that allows them to set up design principles for those unique places and support creative visual vision. Human behaviors and activities are essential components of heritage sites and are among the components of urban legacy that are distinguished by artistic and cultural richness.

Life Concept of Heritage Plazas:

Heritage plazas are spaces that belong to heritage buildings or structures; they are areas with distinct historical features, both urban and architectural, that originated in ancient times. [1]. These areas contribute to the value of the cultural, historical, and architectural heritage. Just as a plaza is linked to a building or a group of buildings around it, the individual or the visitor is linked to the heritage places or buildings starting from the external space. Those spaces serve as an introduction to the archaeological building. Heritage places and

squares have become shaped by cultural contexts and societal and historical events. [2] They have a huge impact on the quality and experience of surrounding environments and the well-being of society, and they provide meaningful links to our past. [3] They are not only a component part of the urban fabric but rather an introduction to that heritage and reflect the historical societal reality of it, human behavior and activities, and the customs, traditions, and rituals that were held in previous decades but were affected and changed with the change in form and city planning over time. [4]

The History of Plazas:

Most old civilizations had plazas; for example, the Roman and Greek Empires had famous historical plazas and squares. [5] In the Greek Empire, the plaza was called the agora, which was often located either in the center of the city or near the port. During the Roman era, it was called the Forum. Despite the military system for which Roman planning was famous, they did not ignore the importance of the plaza square as an urban center that connected the important elements of the city around it. The square was also famous for its pizza in Italian cities and in the Renaissance era, which is considered the golden period of urban development in the urban square. Designers in that period were interested in how to connect the urban space within this square to the surrounding site. [6] Their design concept has remained and developed over centuries, until modern cities. They have been established for various purposes, such as religious events, social gatherings, and political speeches; moreover, they used to be a market place. They were also famous

for festivals; therefore, plazas were a vital space in

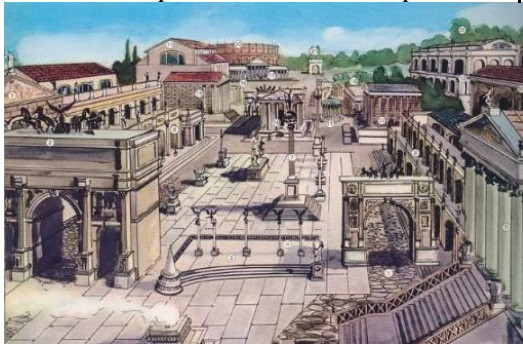


Figure 1 the Roman Forum [14]

Powerful Advantages and Functions of Heritage Plazas:

1- Establishing various economic activity

Heritage plazas play an important role in establishing various economic structures in the surrounding area of the plaza. Heritage sustainable development zones should consist of a group of policies and strategies for all forms of establishing projects and businesses, formal and unofficial. In particular, it could be places that allow businesses to conduct informal trade in an organized and legal manner. This, in turn, would provide livelihood opportunities for the local residents and enhance their incomes and standard of living. This is the fruitful cycle of public space. Provides poorer urban residents with livelihood opportunities. [8]

2- Cultural significance:

Heritage sites have cultural significance and enrich people's lives. They are historical records that are important expressions of identity and experience and reflect the diversity of different civilizations, telling us about who we are and the strong past that we have built. Heritage plazas enable exchanging cultures, establishing links between local communities, and spreading out their traditions and habits. The role of the community should be promoted through volunteer events, educational talks, posters, and other forms of outreach.

3- Linking the past, and the future:

Heritage plazas provide useful links to our past and have an important role to play in the future of our cities, towns, and rural environments, through their cultural, social, historical, political, economic, and physical contexts. It is considered the best way to ensure the continued role of a heritage areas in the community is to use it. Moreover, heritage areas



Figure 3 Social gathering in Piazza Del Camp.

cities over the centuries. [7]

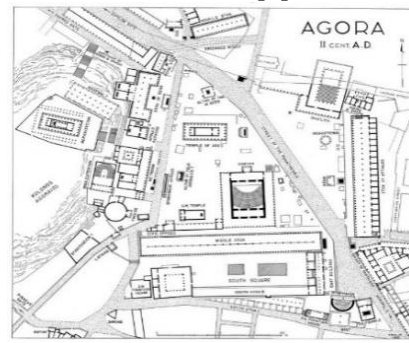


Figure 2 the master plan of Agora [14]

can have a huge impact on the quality and experience of our built environment and the well-being of our communities. [3]

4- Inferential Value:

The squares and plazas have indicative value in the city; usually, they include either a landmark or a memorial or are surrounded by a historical building. In both cases, they add distinction to those squares in terms of the facade of the buildings or the memorial, along with the design and planning of that plaza. In some cases, there are more than one function for them, like allowing the practice of religious rituals, regulating traffic, and practicing various activities.

5- Balance and flexibility

By creating proportionality between the buildings and the space, it forms a plan with a flexible composition; as it has unstable areas and shapes, it is not a negative vacuum. Among the functions of the plazas are enjoyment and adding joy and pleasure to those areas. Plazas are necessary in crowded and densely populated places to provide space for breathing, relaxation, and sometimes to regulate movement and traffic. [2]

6- Social communication

The plazas, with their different designs, allow a different type of communication between individuals, so communication is freer and different from communication in other places. It allows individuals and social groups to feel a sense of belonging to the larger entity, enjoy access to the public area, and participate in collective affairs. [8] The rules of communication in public spaces are more flexible than in other places because they allow unexpected communication and meetings through walking and movement. [2]



Figure 4 Trafalgar Square, London [15]

7- linked to nature:

Plazas provide an opportunity to reconnect with nature, which is missing during city life, especially



Figure 5, 6, 7: Examples of applying landscape and water elements through different ways in plazas [16]

The Relationship Between Mosques and Urban Squares.

In the noble hadiths, our Prophet, peace and mercy upon him, emphasized the great importance of the mosque's status and the importance of going there. The role of the mosque was not just limited to worship; it was also a place for discussion, meeting delegations, education, and providing multiple services. The mosques have been developed over the ages, and there have been schools attached to mosques and surrounding plazas. Therefore, we can see that the mosque played a central role and was a pivotal meeting point. The mosque, which represented the heart of the Islamic city, emerged as a major element in the city's urban square, which included a number of buildings. The mosque and its relationship with the urban center of the Islamic city started in the Prophet era and continued to appear in some cities, such as Basra and Baghdad, linked to the palace or the emirate's palace. The role of mosques was distinguished by its religious purpose and its association with society on special occasions. An influential relationship between the mosque and the square has formed after discovering the effective role that the square plays in giving the mosque its urban and functional value in the urban fabric of the city. [9]

Heritage Mosques and Challenges of preserving its plazas:

Despite the association of grand mosques with squares, their role began to erode a long time ago, and some studies have shown some contradiction, as it is considered that there is no longer an urgent need for the square and that the mosque can perform the role required of it. This is unjust to the rights of the heritage mosque, the urban square, and their development. The relationship of the mosque to the square and the urban blocks attached to it disappeared within the urban fabric of the Islamic

in the capital. Plazas are designed to include elements of nature, such as plants, water, and fresh air.

city. This role began to decline due to some factors. These factors are divided into: [9]

Human factors:

- Urban expansion and changes, whether horizontal or vertical, make some heritage sites and buildings lose their beauty, distorting the general visual appearance due to the presence of modern buildings and changing the character of the place.
- There is a lack of awareness about the aesthetic and historical value of heritage buildings and areas.
- Migration: The indigenous people migrate from these areas; the social structure and form change with other residents, but at a lower level of civilization. The new residents do not belong to the area and are not qualified to deal with those types of areas, which results in the deterioration of those places and heritage monuments.
- The negative behaviors of some visitors and the presence of inappropriate commercial activities create inappropriate interference and reduce the value and elegance of those important sites [10]-

Economic factors:

- Lack of funding sources and weak government resources make it difficult to allocate appropriate budgets to carry out urban and architectural heritage preservation operations and follow up on maintenance operations on a regular basis because it is not a priority in developing countries.
- The high value of land, especially in downtown areas and heritage sites, encourages people to dare to demolish heritage buildings, change the features of the heritage space, and replace them with modern buildings and projects with inappropriate activities that

generate financial profit, thus turning these infringements into a fait accompli that cannot be removed.

- Population increases and the emergence of slums with a lack of alternative solutions badly affect the general area.
- Governmental negligence, such as the lack of adequate and necessary supervision to protect these sites.

Political factors:

- The absence of laws and legislation that codify the limits of dealing with heritage, such as demolition, removal, or development, especially the latter, which often changes the features of the monument and distorts the heritage space.
- The multiplicity of responsible parties concerned with preserving these places of a special nature causes conflict in organization, planning, setting laws, and protection, and makes coordinating transactions extremely difficult. That, in turn, reflects negatively due to one party's control over their various contents and a lack of coordination with other parties.
- Establishing a specialized entity or body that includes multiple specializations works to develop a comprehensive vision for preservation, development, and follow-up, and at the same time is responsible for respect, commitment, and continuity of application of these laws and regulations, or changing them as necessary [11].
- Negative actions, such as interest in private utilitarian interests without preoccupation with the public interest and neglect of citizens who lack a sense of the importance of the urban heritage environment, have a role in demolishing and obliterating many heritage landmarks to replace them with facilities characterized by poverty and ugliness. Therefore, awareness of the concepts of beauty and preservation of capabilities must be deepened. Heritage of tampering, change, and attrition.

Administrative and technical challenges:

- Carrying out preservation work is a very meticulous process, but when carrying out incorrect development or restoration operations (such as not following international scientific requirements, using inappropriate materials, making electrical installations, adding air conditioning units, water connections, and renovating drainage), the heritage value will be changed and distorted if it is not done. Within careful and thoughtful arrangements [10].

- With regards to the designer, the architect, and the planner who carry out the artistic aspect, they must find relationships between preserving and employing heritage environments with creative thoughts. They need to apply appropriate variables to those environments so that there is a harmonious and equal unity in the process of visual presence. Forming an integrated image and protecting the heritage place socially.
- Negative actions, such as interest in private utilitarian interests without preoccupation with the public interest, citizens who lack a sense of the importance of the urban heritage environment, have a role in demolishing and obliterating many heritage landmarks to replace them with facilities characterized by poverty and ugliness. Therefore, awareness of the concepts of beauty and preservation of capabilities must be deepened [11].
- The nature of heritage plazas differs depending on several factors, including the historical value, the functional role, the owner (government or individuals), and the nature of the population. All of these factors affect, in one way or another, the occurrence of transformations in those places, their basic function, and the loss of aesthetic value, as happened in Cairo. Khedive Ismail: When the function inside the building changes, the outside changes accordingly. [11] This occurs as a result of the lack of attention and scrutiny from the competent authorities when rehabilitating heritage areas regarding the type of activities and the extent to which these activities are compatible with the nature of the place, as well as the resulting effects.
- Lack of qualified technical and trained administrative staff capable of implementing or following up on conservation projects, the role of which is not limited to the work of archaeological restorers but rather requires multiple specialized cadres to deal with the various details in these projects and their content, such as technical, restorative, administrative, and technical details [12].
- The scarcity of specialization and professionalism in some areas of restoration, along with the low level of awareness among some architectural cadres and designers to carry out preservation and maintenance operations in an accurate and sensitive manner, results in a difference in the efficiency of the work carried out from one project to another. [11]
- Changing the features of monuments, deforming heritage sites, and their

disappearance do not only occur as a result of natural factors such as wind and rain, but there is also another group of factors such as the lack of sufficient budgets for maintenance and preservation, poor organization and management, and a lack of awareness of the value of heritage [13].

Environmental challenges:

- With the difference and urban expansion, vehicles of different types were allowed to enter and penetrate these archaeological areas, causing damage to these areas due to vibrations because the width of the streets was not designed to accommodate these vehicles, or the emission of sulfur gases resulting from car exhausts caused severe damage [12].
- Changes in the groundwater level in old areas affect the foundations of buildings and lead to the uneven subsidence of some of them. When the groundwater level rises, it causes leakage and leaching of water, causing cracks and fissures in the walls, threatening the safety of the building, as well as the processes of expansion and contraction resulting from continuous changes. for temperatures[10].

Religious factors:

- There are places of worship that are not only based on religious or spiritual worship practices, but they also provide community and cultural services.
- The continuous care and preservation of heritage places of worship is a priority. There is a task to identify problems and challenges at those sites, such as ease of access and exit, crowd management during very crowded religious seasons, and public safety.
- Accommodating the changing religious needs and taking into account the interests of visitors varies according to the nature of the religious monument and its activity. There are also a number of places of traditional religious worship suffering from deterioration, obliteration of landmarks, or demolition. [1]

Conclusion:

Plazas around the world are different from one region to another due to their cultural and historical context. Therefore, their problems are different. Developing heritage areas is a global problem because developments and changes worldwide have negatively affected these sites. These prompted specialists in the developed world and many concerned parties to create international standards, and guidelines to take care of these heritage areas. These guidelines work to preserve and develop heritage plazas to become an important part of their urban development plans. Understanding heritage plazas through their functions and historical value

is the right path to be developed through them. The future of plazas in developing countries requires a set of policies involving planning criteria, suitable economic activities, social actions, and environmental quality as essential demands for achieving sustainability. These strategies result in conserving and reviving natural resources and cultural heritage.

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