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E-B
Environment - Behaviour
Proceedings Journal

AicE-Bs2016Edinburgh

7th Asia-Pacific International Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies,
St Leonard Hall, Edinburgh University, United Kingdom, 27-30 July 2016

e-IPH
e-International
Publishing House Ltd.,
United Kingdom

Physical Environmental Quality and Urban Design Education in Palestine and Turkey

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Abstract

Urban designers fail to design high quality environments either because of economical constraints or educational limitation. This study aims to compare physical environmental quality and education system in two countries, Palestine and Turkey. The quantity of design education departments in each country, the course contents in each department, the quantity and profession of instructors in each department, presence of a course related to environment and behaviour studies or design theories were compared. What needs to be improved in design education to create better environments is discussed as well as the directions for future studies.

1. Introduction

Urban designers and planners should create environments that would satisfy the user needs. However, designers fail to design such environments quite often, and they do so more often in some geographies than in others. For example architecture in Palestine and in Turkey shows a noticeable difference. The architecture in Turkey is much more advanced than in Palestine. There may be two reasons. First, the economical constraints may limit the applications of good designs and maintenance of good environments. Second, designers do not gain the necessary knowledge to create better environments through their education. As a former student in a Palestinian university and a current student in a Turkish university, the second author of this manuscript argues that in Palestinian universities

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the education system in the departments of architecture and urban planning have failed to evolve over the past decades. On the other hand, the education system in Turkish universities seems to be more developed.

Built environment is about the professional's practice but unfortunately links between this practice, education, and academic research are often oversimplified (Salama, 2010). Design education in Turkey and Palestine is similar in this respect. However, in Palestine the links between practice, research and theory is more often neglected. Usually what is thought in academia is different from what is in real practice. In other words, after graduation students become practitioners and they design environments based on their intuition and general knowledge but not in full integration with what they learned in academia. One reason for this gap is that; design research in developing countries often follows the research in developed countries and fails to produce local knowledge that would lead design in practice. In other words, the knowledge in developed countries may not be able to solve the complex problems of developing countries. Similarly in design education, students may lost their interest and become passive listeners when they are taught the experiences of other cultures.

Without doubt the gap between theory and practice should be diminished during design education for the development and innovation in the practice. In parallel Salama (2010) highlighted the importance of this integration and active strategic learning as such:

"The built environment is variant, diverse, and complex. Buildings and spaces are major components of this environment: planned, designed, analyzed, represented, built, lived in and occupied. They are also experienced, perceived, and studied. They should be redefined as objects for learning and need to be transformed into scientific objects."

or even in more simple but strong words what (Salama, 2010) quoted Habraken (2006) when he argues that:

" ..Teaching architecture without teaching how everyday environment works is like teaching medical students the art of healing without telling them how the human body functions. You would not trust a medical doctor who does not know the human body. Knowledge of everyday environment must legitimize our profession…"

In other words one needs to understand the two way relation between physical environment and human to design better environments that would meet users' requirements and increase user satisfaction. This means that the emphasis given on the relation between people and environment in education and in practice should be analyzed. In developed countries a voluminous number of studies have been published to understand the relation between environment and behaviour (Bechtel & Churchman 2003; Canter & Craik, 1981; Bechtel, 1997; Craik, 1973; Bechtel Marans Michelson, 1987). Those studies usually focused on issues such as environmental aesthetics, environmental perception and cognition. In Turkey such issues might not be the hot topic but they are neither ignored (Goregenli, 2010). This study aims to compare the city views in two countries, Palestine and Turkey, in terms of environmental aesthetics. The photographs of the city views from each country is compared subjectively. Results showed poorer conditions for Palestine city centres. Then education system in two countries are compared based on the following criteria; quantity, quality design education in each county, presence of a course related to environment and behaviour studies or design theories. The data related to education in each department is gathered through the meta data on the web for each department and via a pilot survey. A pilot study was held to understand to what extent user needs are discussed in planning departments in Palestine. Results showed differences in design education in two countries. In Palestine, planning education is usually given under the faculties of engineering and the programs of planning are integrated in the architecture study plan and the students start the planning concentration only the last year before graduation while they study all remaining courses as architecture design students. On the other hand, in Turkey planning education is usually given under the faculty of architecture and instructors usually specialized in areas related to planning. What needs to be improved in design education to create better environments is discussed as well as the directions for future studies.

2. Methodology

First the photographs of the city views representing the general physical environmental conditions in Palestine and Turkey were compared subjectively. In Palestine 4 pictures were selected to represent the general physical environmental quality at the city centre in Ramallah, Gaza and Nabulus (Figure 1). In Turkey, 4 pictures were selected to represent the general physical environmental quality at the city centre in Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, and Izmir (Figure 2). According to 2016 population statistics in Palestine, total population is 4,816,503 million people and population in Gaza is 583,870, in Ramallah (and ElBireh as these two cities are attached urban wise) is 84.027, and in Nablus is 153, 061. In contrast total population in Turkey is about 79 million. Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir are the three largest cities in Turkey with 2015 populations as 14.657.434; 5.270.575, 4.168.415 respectfully. In other words, Palestine total population is about equal to Ankara's population in Turkey.

Results showed poorer conditions for Palestine city centres considering the amount of vegetation, environmental coherence and variety. Despite the high pedestrian density, no necessary spaces are reserved for pedestrians. Similarly pedestrian comfort and upkeep on the streets are low, the building façade's architectural quality and façade material and colour coherence are poor. The parameters listed above are discussed extensively in the literature of developed countries and given high priority in the practice of urban design. Although such issues are also discussed by design experts in countries such as Palestine and Turkey, they are not the main concerns in the application of urban design projects.
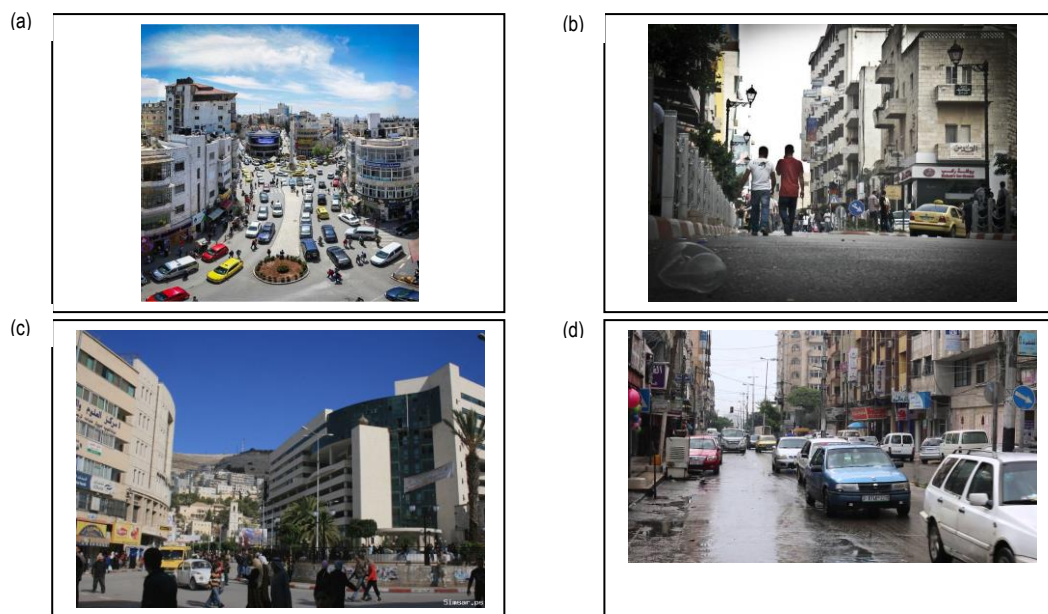

Fig. 1. The general physical environmental quality in Palestine at the city centre in (a,b) Ramallah; (c) Nablus; (d) Gaza..

Fig. 2. The general physical environmental quality in Turkey at the city centre in (a) Bursa; (b) Ankara; (c) Istanbul; (d) Izmir.

Next to what extend the above mentioned issues are discussed in courses in design education in general and architecture, planning (as well as urban design and landscape design) in particular was investigated. Urban design issues are related to all of the above mentioned disciplines. Thus it is not feasible to focus on one discipline when the main concern is urban design. Moreover, in some faculties these departments could follow joint programs.

In parallel to population differentiation in Palestine and in Turkey the number of universities and design related departments vary widely in two countries. In Turkey there are about 166 universities (104 public and 62 private). Among those universities about 122 have architecture department (Akyüz Levi, Coskun, Erkarslan, 2015). Although about %70 of the universities in Turkey has architecture departments, not all departments are active. In other words among all architecture departments only %70 of them are accepting students, remaining are in development process. In Turkey there are about 20 planning schools, %40 of which are in development process and still not giving undergraduate or graduate education. In Turkey both architecture and planning schools have formed associations (Turkish Planning Schools Association and Architecture Schools Departments Head Organizations) to monitor the education in all departments around the country and highlight the similarities, differences and requirements for better education as well as discuss issues for accreditation of those schools with European counterparts. Those associations organize at least one meeting annually. However, those meetings are organized separately for each department. Majority of these departments are formed under the Faculty of Architecture. Almost in all departments issues related to environment and behaviour are discussed in at least one or two courses. If those issues are not discussed in theoretical courses they are discussed in studio exercises.

In Palestine there are 15 universities and 5 of which have architecture departments. Compared to Turkish universities only %33 of all universities in Palestine has departments related to design. All those architecture departments are formed in and continues to operate in the Faculties of Engineering. In other words there are no Faculties specifically for design fields in Palestine. All departments related to design operates under the faculty of Engineering. Moreover planning and architecture is taught under one department called Architecture. In Palestine, architecture departments course titles and contents were investigated to find out whether issues related to

environment and behaviour in general and environmental aesthetics in particular exist. In parallel Turkish departments courses related to environment and behaviour and environmental aesthetics are taught via at least one or two courses.

Table 1. Existence of courses related to Environment and Behaviour

University Name	Number of courses	The Grade Level
Islamic University	3	2. B.A
		1. MCs
An-Najah National Uni.	3	3. BA
University of Palestine	2	2. BA
Palestine Polytechnic Uni.	1	1.BA
Birzeit University	2	2. BA

In comparison when municipalities of 17 cities in Palestine were investigated through their web sites, it is found that no department was found to deal with issues related to environmental aesthetics. All municipalities were contacted to find out whether a department that indirectly consider the issues related to environmental aesthetics is present in the municipality. Only the Nablus Municipality responded the survey and revealed that landscape committee in the municipality indirectly concerns issues related to environmental aesthetics. In comparison, in Turkey almost all municipalities have separate departments to deal with environmental aesthetic issues. However when their regulations are investigated it is seen that majority only considers the issues related to signs on streets. Other issues are usually neglected.

Results and Conclusion:

This study aims to compare the city views and design education in two countries, Palestine and Turkey. Results showed differences in environmental design quality in Palestine and in Turkey. Same applies to design education. Although such difference could not be attributed solely to design education (as social, political cultural and economical issues are as important as education) one reason why environmental quality differs could be the quality of design education. Yet discussion on the quality of design education in two countries is beyond the scope of this study. This study mainly tries to describe and compare the objective parameters related to design education. Future studies should investigate the quality of design education in countries with better and worse environmental qualities.

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