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EDITORIAL: ADVANCING THE DEBATE ON ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING, AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH

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PREAMBLE: THE ROAD AHEAD

With an acceptance rate that does not exceed 25% of the total papers and articles submitted to the journal, IJAR – International Journal of Architectural Research is moving forward to position itself among the leading journals in architecture and urban studies worldwide. As this is the case since the beginning of volume 5, issue 1, March 2011, one must note that the journal has been covered by several data and index bases since its inception including Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals, EBSCO-Current Abstracts-Art and Architecture, INTUTE, Directory of Open Access Journals, Pro-Quest, Scopus-Elsevier and many university library databases across the globe. This is coupled with IJAR being an integral part of the archives and a featured collection of ArchNet and the Aga Khan Documentation Centre at MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

In 2014, IJAR was included in Quartile 2 / Q2 list of Journals both in 'Architecture' and 'Urban Studies.' As of May 2015, IJAR is ranked 23 out of 83 journals in 'Architecture' and 59 out of 119 in 'Urban Studies.' Rankings are based on the SJR (SCImago Journal Ranking); an Elsevier- SCOPUS indicator that measures the scientific influence of the average article in a journal. SJR is a measure of scientific influence of scholarly journals that accounts for both the number of citations received by a journal and the importance or prestige of the journals where such citations come from. See here for more information (<http://www.scimagojr.com/index.php>) and (<http://www.journalmetrics.com/sjr.php>). While the journal is now on top of many of the distinguished journals in Elsevier- SCOPUS database, we will keep aspiring to sustain our position and move forward to Q1 group list and eventually in the top 10 journal list in the field. However, this requires sustained efforts and conscious endeavours that give attention to quality submissions through a rigorous review process.

This edition of IJAR: volume 9, issue 2, July 2015 includes debates on a wide spectrum of issues, explorations and investigations in various settings. The issue encompasses sixteen papers addressing cities, settlements, and projects in Europe, South East Asia, and the Middle East. Papers involve international collaborations evidenced by joint contributions and come from scholars in universities, academic institutions, and practices in *Belgium; Egypt; Greece; Italy; Jordan; Malaysia; Palestine; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Serbia; Spain; Turkey; and the United Kingdom*. In this editorial I briefly outline the key issues presented in these papers, which include topics relevant to social housing, multigenerational dwelling, practice-based research, sustainable design and biomimetic models, learning environments and learning styles, realism and the post modern condition, development and planning, urban identity, contemporary landscapes, and cultural values and traditions.

ADVANCING THE DISCOURSE

The multifaceted nature of architecture, planning, and built environment research is clearly manifested in this issue of IJAR. The issue involves a wide spectrum of views related to housing research. Five papers juxtapose these views in various contexts. Agatangelo Soler

Montellano addresses the notion of indeterminacy as one of the rising trends in flexible housing design. Based on a series of users interviews, photographs, diagrams and new drawings that show how people spatially and socially use their apartments Montellano assesses the validity of indeterminacy as an architectural response to social change in the context of Spain (Montellano, 2015). Relating to social and demographic transformations and spatial challenges Sebastiaan Gerards, Roel De Ridder, Sylvain De Bleeckere present their findings of exploring multi-generational dwelling in the context of Flemish communities in Belgium. Utilizing a 'research by design' approach to explore and at the same time encounter design issues the authors experiment with this new housing concept in a specific, but realistic setting through a workshop format. The exploration results in establishing key considerations for further research, toward an effective implementation of multi-generational dwelling in Flanders (Gerards, De Ridder, De Bleeckere, 2015).

The work of Mohd Firrdhaus Mohd Sahabuddin and Cristina Gonzalez-Longo takes a different route and places emphasis on thermal comfort in the context of Malaysian social housing. Their work introduces a new typology that aims at enhancing thermal comfort and argues that traditional values should be integrated into social housing design to achieve a certain measurement of natural ventilation in a typical Malaysian residential unit or a house (Sahabuddin and Gonzalez-Longo, 2015).

Raffaello Furlan argues for the need to reestablish the relationship between cultural traditions and house form. Furlan addresses the nature of vernacular architecture in a precise context by placing emphasis on the architectural form of vernacular houses built in Brisbane, Australia in the post WWII period by first generation Italian migrants. His exploration involves various aspects including the spatial organization, materials and construction techniques, decorative elements on the façades, and ways in which these were materialized through migrants' cultural traditions (Furlan, 2015). The study of Seyed Reza Hosseini Raviz, Ali Nik Eteghad, Ezequiel Uson Guardiola, and Antonio Armesto Aira aims to establish guidelines for future flexible housing design. It involves two case studies relevant to Dutch housing with a focus on the spatial organization and its potential in achieving efficient spatial configuration (Raviz, Eteghad, Guardiola, and Aira, 2015).

In dealing with the relationship between people and their surroundings and the creation of sustainable environments Marta Brković, Oriol Pons, and Rosie Parnell offer a participatory post-occupancy approach within which their study was undertaken in the context of Barcelona, Spain. In essence, their work juxtaposes schools and schooling and argues that new models for exploring the pedagogical potential of sustainable schools should be developed and the efforts of all relevant parties should be synchronized; from architects to governments, from students to teachers.

The work of Sharifah Mazlina Syed Khuzzan, Jack Steven Goulding, and Farzad Pour Rahimian hypothesizes that learners can learn better with a bespoke personalized learning environment, in which the deployment of teaching and learning material is directly augmented towards their individual needs. They present findings from the development of a holistic conceptual Diagnostic Learning Styles Questionnaire (DLSQ) Framework, which is comprised of six interrelated dependencies (i.e. Business Strategy, Pedagogy, Process, Resources, Systems Development, and Evaluation). The convergence of these dependencies directly influences pedagogical effectiveness. Validating their argument they maintain that such a framework can enable better augmentation of organizations and educational institutions of their strategic priorities and learner-specific qualities (Khuzzan, Goulding, and Pour Rahimian, 2015).

In the context of rapidly growing Middle Eastern cities, Ashraf Salama and Anna Griching offer an overview of landscape interventions in three Middle Eastern cities (Cairo, Doha, Riyadh) and identify three levels of contribution of contemporary landscapes that correspond to three landscape typologies: the edge, the center, and the backbone. They examine a number of issues

underlying each landscape typology and offer an interpretation on the contribution of each typology to its context and to the city within which it exists (Salama and Grichting, 2015). On the other hand, placing their work within the notion of 'architecture and realism' Renatro Capozzi, Adelina Picone, and Federica Visconti offer a philosophical interpretation that contrasts realism with the post modern condition in the context of a city and present a series of key projects and pedagogical design exercises that manifest such a juxtaposition (Capozzi, Picone, & Visconti, 2015).

Expanding the scope of her earlier writings on traditionalism, authentication and fabrication of the built environment of Muslims, which was published earlier in IJAR (Al-Lahham, 2014) Abeer Al-Lahham critically examines the concept of the neighborhood in light of the 'New Urbanism' discourse and the capacity of these to achieve their promises in creating coherent structure for contemporary societies. Her examination reveals that these were merely housing schemes and manifest failures in achieving what they claimed to (Al-Lahham, 2015). In London; a totally different context, Saul M. Golden, Ian Montgomery and Taina M. Rikala develop an argument that call for architects to act more explicitly to promote greater openness and use-value, rather than more objectified and controlled exchange-value approaches to the public domain in private-led development interventions. By comparing a number of parameters in two cases the individual practitioner's experiences of architecture practice with explicit intentions to influence better quality shared city space, and examining professional norms relevant to commercial clients and wider society, they conclude that employing a wide range of strategies can contribute to better engagement of people in contemporary urban societies (Golden, Montgomery, Rikala, 2015).

Two papers are developed in the context of the Mediterranean. Pantoleon Skayannis, Angelos Kyrtzakos offer a chronological development of planning in Thessaloniki, Greece since the mid-eighties. Specifically, they discuss the Lachanokipoi area of the 'Western Entrance' of the city and highlight three periods of development with a focus on economic drivers and trajectories. Their work concludes with a call for urban renewal of the area as an integral part of the general spatial plans adopted by city authorities (Skayannis and Kyrtzakos, 2015). Another research intervention in the Mediterranean region is articulated in the work of Derya Oktay, Havva Alkan Bala. By utilizing an attitude survey they offer a holistic research approach to measuring urban identity in the context of Kyrenia, Northern Cyprus. Their findings indicate that although historic landmarks are so powerful in constructing the urban identity, traditional urban pattern and social life have not been found significant in constructing the images of the city unless local residents frequent them. Among other findings their survey reveals that the new housing developments that lack locally appropriate architectural and contextual qualities do not necessarily influence the urban image of the area (Oktay and Bala, 2015).

Shehada, Ahmad, Yaacob and Keumala also emphasize issues related to conservation of heritage buildings in a paper. They argue that Sustainable building conservation can be accelerated by an appropriate reuse selection and evaluation criteria and procedures. They develop an inclusive methodology in order to optimize adaptive reuse selection of heritage buildings. Utilizing a Delphi Method (DM) with fuzzy logic theory, they apply their methodology on Khan Al-Wakalah as a case from Palestine. Findings demonstrate that there is a clear evidence of a link between the criteria and the key substantial factors and that such a link is of great importance and should be further considered in the evaluation and selection processes (Shehada, Ahmad, Yaacob and Keumala, 2015).

Shatha Malhis, Fatima Al-Nammari utilize the space syntax methodology in addition to interviews and ethnographic analyses to examine the three-floor gallery plans of the Abu-Jaber Museum that correspond to the two stages in the evolution of the Abu-Jaber House: 1880, when it was originally constructed to house the families of three affluent brothers; and 2007, when it was rehabilitated into a local heritage museum. In essence their work establishes the three-way

interaction between spatial structures and architectural language, interpretations of conservation priorities and curatorial principles (Malhis and Al-Nammari, 2015). Nelly S. Ramzy on the other hand builds her work on Biomimicry as a growing area of interest in architecture. She demonstrates that adopting biophilia and biophilic design principles leads to enhanced outcomes in terms of sustainability as well as human psychology and users well being (Ramzy, 2015).

The sixteen contributions presented in this edition of IJAR offer a wide variety of ideas, concepts, arguments, and research findings presented by authorities, distinguished academics, and committed scholars. Reiterating, they offer a great venue for achieving excellence in research in architecture and urbanism while paving clear pathways for debating the complexity of built environment. In this respect, I seize this editorial to thank my two co-editors for their excellent efforts both at the technical and editorial levels, and extend my gratitude to all members of the International Advisory and Review Boards for their support, review efforts, insights, and overall guidance. I invite academics to contribute high quality research and critical arguments that aim at enhancing architectural discourse and debating the contemporary urban condition and to submit quality work for consideration in future issues of IJAR.

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