

# The Convergence between Tradition and Modernity and between Innovative Design and the History of Culture- Irbid City as a Inspection

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**ABSTRACT---** *The aim of this paper is to present the reader with the practices, the challenges and the benefits of the changing patterns in urban planning.*

*There is a necessity to implement measures that focus on the population's needs, and to merge the potential of urban planning and the townspeople's memories in response to the phenomenon of the redevelopment of downtown. The opportunity of the insertion of municipal administrators, developers, designers and most importantly townspeople in the process, ensures the commitment to arising outcomes and enhances the potential of urban planning. Also, the process should have a restricted number of clear goals to avoid losing the space potential and the connections to the memories of the city's residents.*

*Redeveloping cities' downtowns have been a critical issue to tackle as the need arises to revive and modernize the old parts of the cities, usually ending with the destruction of the history and the space memories in those parts leading to the loss of its connection with the city's residents and erasing the spirit of the city piece by piece. One example of such approaches is observed on the reconstruction of Beirut, Lebanon Central District (BCD), starting from 1991 and the reconstruction of Al-Abdali which is one of the most strategic and old locations in the city of Amman, Jordan in 2004*

*For this reason, this paper is devoted to discuss information, which can form the basis for the urban development. And set theoretical ground rules for cooperation with the public and allowing for their participation in the urban development process.*

**Keywords—** *Urban Design; Heritage; economic integration; urban design; urban perception; urban planning, memory of the space*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Irbid is located to the north of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan . It is considered one of the most beautiful cities in the Kingdom and is nicknamed “The bride of the north” for its beauty. It is located 80 kilometres (km) from the capital Amman, and holds a Population of 1.77 million persons (2015).

Its total area is approximately 410 square kilometres (Km<sup>2</sup>), including Irbid Hill, which is considered one of the largest archaeological hills in the region, approximately 200,000 square meter (M<sup>2</sup>) (0.2km).

There are documented archaeological sites from the first, second and late bronze ages indicating human activity in the

area that dates back to the 5th century BC, making it one of the oldest human settlements in Jordan.

Irbid's importance as a cultural and financial centre was highlighted during the Hellenistic age, as it became a centre for the trade routes in the region linking the north with the south, and it was identified as “Arabella” under the Greco-Roman, Decuples period.

## II. HISTORICAL URBAN GROWTH

In the past few decades, Irbid has witnessed excessive urban growth rates associated with the large increases in the population. This fast growth in the city is mainly caused by two factors.

The first is represented by the movement of a considerable number of refugees following the 1948 and 1967 wars, resulting in a high population concentration and hence a high urban demand. A demand further increased by the refugees who moved from Iraq (1991), South Lebanon (1992) and finally from Syria (2004-2018), Table1 (Department of statistics)

The second is seen over the past few decades, in the active movement of people, manly farmers who sold their lands and came from the rural areas around Irbid to the city itself looking for better opportunities. Such active urbanization processes in the study area can be easily seen through comparing two aerial images over the area at two different dates (years 1953 and 2000)

## III. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The Methodology of the study for this paper adopts a series of steps geared towards measuring development actions on Irbid downtown as follows:

Review and assess the main findings of the urban downtown at the historic core of Irbid.

Comparison between the main urban issues that affect both cores of Beirut, Lebanon and AL Abdali, Amman in order to understand the similarities and differences in terms of understanding the obstacles they are facing.

Finally the paper attempts to present suggestions and recommendations towards enhancing the everyday quality of life in Irbid.

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IV. THE DESCRIPTION OF IRBID'S CITY CENTRE.

The analyses of the city's organizational scheme showed that it has not grown in an organized manner, on the contrary it grew without any urban planning (Tawalbah, 1982). The streets were narrow and bending, the houses and shops close together, and as a result the municipality tried to demolish some of these buildings to open streets.

Irbid is considering the commercial centre for the Northern districts of Jordan. Visitors to Irbid downtown during the day hours from outside the city amount to half a million people visiting mainly for shopping and official paperwork, transitions and cultural practices.

The downtown is predominantly a commercial hub, noticing how 41% of buildings in the core site have commercial uses, 17% are residential, and 19% are of mixed use (residential and commercial) (Jaber, 2009).

The commercial center of the city, which contains all the main markets, public buildings, banks and offices, is about 3 km<sup>2</sup>, which is about 8 Percent (8%) of the total city's area.

The unexpected growth of the population and the uncontrolled, unplanned urban expansion, in addition to the reliance on individual vehicle transportation forms, have produced an excessive pressure on the city's urban infrastructure, which demands better and urgent development of the city's urban planning.

In the first field survey of the city, completed in the 1910's, the boundaries of the plots were set according to the existing buildings with its organic shapes. The areas of the plots vary according to the area of the existing buildings (Image3) Creating deformed organic plots most of them with an area no more than 50-100 m2 (survey, 2019). Table (1)

Table 1: Downtown area and Number of plots

Plot's area(m2)	Sum of Area(m2)	%of the downtown area	Number of Plots	%of the downtown Plots
<100	18853	11%	375	40%
100-200	42431	25%	288	30%
200-300	37642	22%	152	16%
300-400	14856	9%	44	5%
400-500	12295	7%	28	3%
500-600	45913	27%	54	6%
Total Area(m <sup>2</sup> )	1,71,990		941 plots	

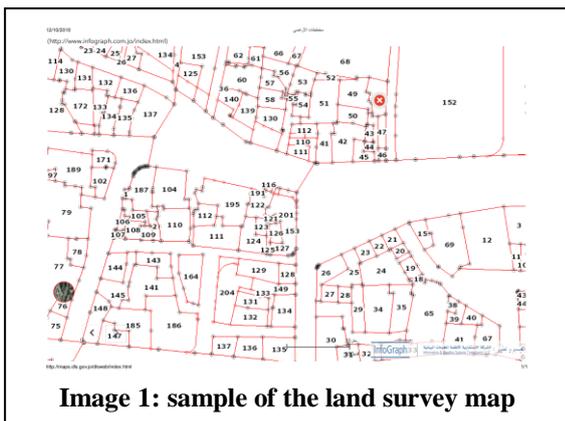


Image 1: sample of the land survey map

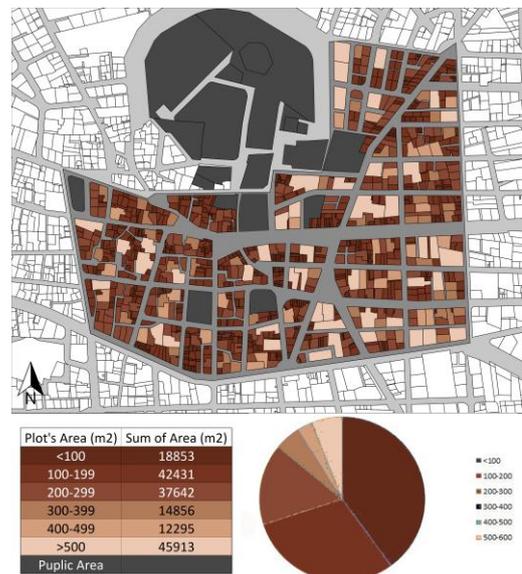


Image 2: Downtown Plots Areas

V. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDINGS IN THE DOWNTOWN OF IRBID & RESULTS

The greatest number of buildings in Irbid appears to be from about 1870-1930 when most of the public, institutional and commercial buildings and large private houses were erected.

The early buildings were single story, constructed in rough uncut stonework with some dressing around doors and openings. Walls were thick and usually with stones on both sides. Roofs were supported occasionally on vaults but mostly on stone arches and unsown joists supporting a mud roof.

The next phase appears to be a simplification of elaborate stonework with the introduction of new materials, in particular the I-beam, which enabled the vault to be abandoned. The I-beam was adopted with reinforced concrete for floors; roofs and balconies. The ashlar became smoother, with no emphasis on stones or joints. Surrounds to doors and windows were simpler and more European in character, although the arch (semi-circular or segmental) was nearly always used.

During the last phase in the 1940s, the arches were replaced by wider window openings. Flat arches were made of radial stones and probably concrete lintels behind. Few decorations remained, except for carving lintels. Walls were reduced in thickness and made of concrete with smooth stone facing.

In those traditional constructions, several problems and structural failures were emerging, such as dampness in the walls, structural settlement cracks in arches and vaults, rusting of I-beams and of reinforcement in concrete slabs, and disintegration in stonewalls.

Not to mention that neither the owners, nor the occupiers are currently spending enough to maintain the buildings. (Municipality, 2009).

The people in this area are generally satisfied with low cost of living that prevails in the Area, yet they are willing to move out for search of better house conditions and more space.

The following is some additional information provided by the survey that has been carried out in this area.

- The majority of buildings were constructed before 1950. 76% of the buildings in the implementation area are classified as old.
- 62% of the those buildings, which consist of one to two floors at most, are in poor to fair conditions, mostly concerning structure and maintenance.
- The high percentage of buildings with problems and defects shows a lack of maintenance. Most of the old buildings in the implementation area have defacement (alterations and paintings), while 36% of them have modern additions. These ratios show the rapid changes that occurred in the old buildings. (Municipality, 2009)
- There are virtually no public open spaces. Or parking areas for vehicles.
- Most of the residential buildings today are uninhabited. 40% of the buildings' areas are too small, about 10 to 20 m2. And the small area of the plots will not make it possible to construct new buildings.

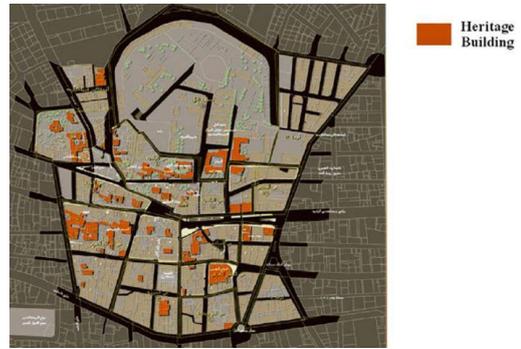


Image 3: Location of the Heritage buildings

The owners have demolished historical buildings that give the city its character and replaced them with concrete commercial buildings without giving much attention to the city's identity and significance.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to rescue, rebuild and develop the architectural identity of historically significant areas and the commercial downtown (Leen A. Fakhoury 1, 2017).

This study will show the importance of restructuring the city and restoring its historical identity through creating architectural sites that attract residents and tourists alike, treating problems facing historical buildings such as multi-ownership and protecting what remains to stand.

Successful economic development is increasingly about creating great walk able and connected places. The small area of the plots stopped in the way of a lot of development and rebuilding because the development needs to reuse the plots with more than one floor. They need spaces for vertical circulation, elevators, staircases, etc. so most of the buildings are still used with the old structure and as one floor small shops entered from the street.

Cities and settlements originated from people's need to come together for various reasons, such as protection and a sense of security, the exchange of goods and services, the access to information and resources, the use of certain equipment and more importantly social contact with other people and the engagement in communal activities. (Moughtim).As Matthew Carmona says "The coming together of people in space and time facilitates an important social dimension which has subsequently been taken as the essence of the 'urban' in a cultural sense." Consequently, the constant importance of urban centres is among the most dominating themes in the current discussion about the city, (Moughtim). Following to the fact that the absence of public gathering places in people's lives denies them the 'promise of the city' because the urban area has failed to, as Oldenburg says, "nourish the kinds of relationships and the diversity of human contact that are the essence of the city." (Oldenburg 1 999, p. xxviii)

Urban planners have recognized that heritage sites represent a link to the past. A link that is evident through the layers of evolving traditional forms of architecture and city building and the sense of place it has created within. Beatley and Manning (1997) Therefore, protecting and maintaining

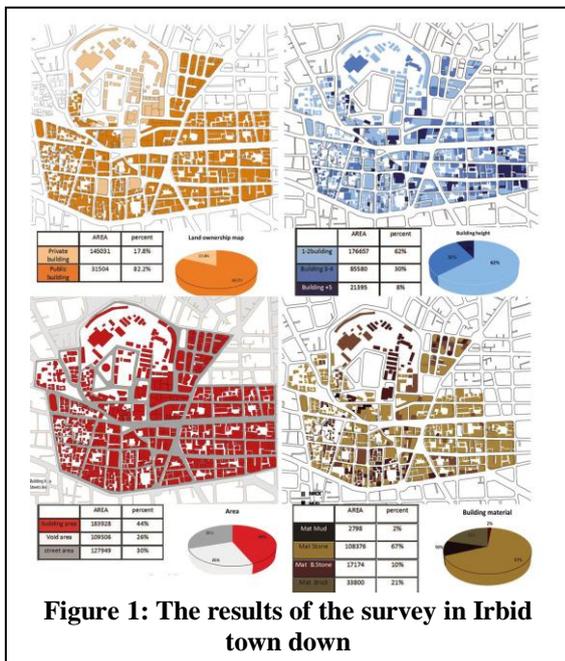


Figure 1: The results of the survey in Irbid town down

## VI. THE PROBLEMS OF THE CITY

While Irbid has grown through the reforming of the urban economy, social and spatial reconstruction and transportation. Irbid has begun to lose its characteristics.

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those heritage sites for future generations is a significant decision made on the basis of their importance, which comes from the meanings they have for the people, the values they represent and the functions they provide. Lowenthal (2000)

On the other hand, modernization conveys an improvement in the quality of life for the people as it simply provides them with the spaces and functions they require to lead modern lives, adding a new architectural layer within the fabric of the city's history. As a result, cities face significant pressures for redevelopment and modernization, hence the need to realize a balance between conservation and redevelopment within the scope of modernist planning and goals. (Brenda S A yeoh)

Matthew Carmona mentions that "The creation of good urban environment and an attractive public realm is not just the prerogative of professional specialists and their patrons, as urban design cannot be abstracted from the day-to-day life of urban areas, all those involved in the creation and functioning of such areas have a role to play in ensuring their success. Hence, a multitude of parties are concerned with the creation of urban environments and places - including central and local government, local communities, the business community, property developers and investors, occupiers and users, passers-by and future generations. All of these groups have an interest and a role to play in urban design." he further adds that "People should be involved willingly from the beginning in the improvement of their surroundings .... But participation cannot be imposed; it has to start from the bottom up" (Matthew Carmona)

It is highly critical to consider the population of the urban space, their needs, culture, habits, and their connection throughout the collective memory of space with their surroundings. It's a very delicate task to not disregard those people and involve them in the creation of their environment. "Cities are a reflection of its population" (Moughtim ) and any intervention in the city must take into account that each section assumes the character of its inhabitant, and must respect their history and memories (Moughtim)

"Building cities is the method by which man creates a built environment that fulfils his aspirations and represents his values. The city is an element of people's spiritual and physical culture and, indeed, it is one of the highest expressions of that culture." (Moughtim)

### VII. (BEIRUT, LEBANON)

This case study will focus on the reconstruction of Beirut's Central District (BCD), carried on by Solidere real estate Company starting from 1991. After the devastating civil war of 1975-1990, the downtown center was heavily damaged and decisions had to be taken in order to rebuild Beirut's urban fabric and sense of national identity.

The disappearance of the Central District from the daily lives of the citizens of Beirut left the city without a center for almost twenty years, and what was previously a concentric city transformed its configuration into the currently polycentric one, which sadly failed to demonstrate

the essence of Beirut's urban fabric which presents a rich history and a layering of various cultures.

In the beginning of the 20th century the city developed economically and demographically, following the development example of European capitals such as Vienna and Paris. During the French mandate, starting in 1920, urban renovation and concern for a Western public space became more and more important.

The country disintegrated into civil war in 1975, and after fifteen years of fighting, Lebanon was left in a ruinous state, and in 1983 a private engineering firm, OGER Liban - owned by billionaire Rafiq Hariri, commissioned a master plan for the reconstruction to the consultancy group Dar Al-Handasah. At the same time demolitions, without any control, started in the central areas that were called for rehabilitation in the 1977 plan. As a result some of the most significant parts of the urban fabric, such as the traditional souks, were erased. (Abbas, Beirut, Lebanon Conservation and reconstruction in the Beirut Central District, 2018).

Not to mention that the residents who had been living in the war-damaged buildings have been removed. Most of the traditional city's center has been bulldozed and over half a million square meters of new land has been reclaimed from the sea. (Makdisi, Reconstructing History in Central Beirut).

The reconstruction process in Beirut started in 1991 and in particular the Central District project was seen as a chance to re-establish its cultural and economic role catching up with the competing Middle Eastern countries, but by 1993, approximately 80% of the structures had been damaged beyond repair, whereas previously only one third had been reduced to such appalling circumstances as a result of damage inflicted during the war itself. For example, the old tower of Beirut, with all of its memories and associations, is gone forever.

It seems evident that the plan to "reconstruct" Beirut's market areas (souks) has been a sub-project within Solidere's larger scheme. The former souks have been replaced by an underground parking garage for tens of thousands of cars. The clearing and demolition of buildings and sites in the BCD (Beirut Central District) mandated by the Master Plan has paved the way for reconstruction of that district over an area of 60,000 square meters (Makdisi, Reconstructing History in Central Beirut).

Many voices have criticized that a combination of factors has destroyed the heritage and the memories of the old center to generate a new space for Solidere's vision of Beirut. In Assem Salam's words "To pretend to protect this memory by preserving a few monuments while obliterating the context onto which they were inscribed can only diminish their real nature"

Although very "politically incorrect", the Solidere project has been well implemented and marketed with claims to create a modern city that addresses also the Lebanese society's aspirations as well as the recovery of their identity. However, Solidere is to some extent making use of the past, and the nostalgic impulse that war generates toward it, as a marketing tool to rebuild a district that is projected to be economically valuable. Thinking about urbanism or analyzing briefly the architecture, one can question



the real concern for a past that has been forever lost. In inventing the market center of the future, Solidere destroyed the identity and constructed a fiction of the past (Abbas, Beirut, Lebanon Conservation and reconstruction in the Beirut Central District. 2018)

As Erikson says, "when the landscape goes, it destroys the past for those who are left: people have no sense of belonging anywhere." And Samir Khalaf continues, "They lose the sense of control over their lives, their freedom and independence, their mooring to place and locality and, more damaging, a sense of who they are."

Another case study will focus on Al-Abdali area AL-Abdali area is one of the older parts of the city and contains several important religious and civic buildings. The Palace of Justice, Ministry of Education, King Abdullah I Mosque, Church of the Annunciation, and the Coptic Patriarchate are all located on Suleyman Al-Nabulsi Street.

The Jordanian Parliament and House of Senate and Representatives are located on the King Hussein Street and in the same block as the Palace of Justice.

Al-Abdali area has been chosen for a development project on a former military site to create the new downtown as it is considered one of the most geographically strategic locations in the city of Amman, Jordan. Al-Abdali Project is being developed on 384,000 square meters (0.148 sq mi) of land, intending to create total built-up area of over 1,700,000 square meters (0.66 sq mi) consisting of hotels, prestigious residential buildings, a central business district that attracts foreign investors, commercial outlets and a variety of leisure opportunities. It is being developed as a smart district that strives to become a regional business and tourism hub.

The problem was that the chosen area had very few empty plots of land since as far back as the year 2000, and a result, expansion was achieved by demolishing the old low-rise buildings in the area. One example is the Thursday night –



**Image 4: One of the demolished buildings. The owner hanged an announcement he said that he didn't agree to leave the area (we will stay).**

Friday morning flea market, which used to take place on a plot of land that, had been a former bus stop for inter-city buses in Al-Abdali area ever since 1988. The Friday market was visited by a lot of customers every weekend, especially those leaving the mosque after Friday prayer. It used to sell different things ranging from second hand clothes to fruits and vegetables. At the beginning of October 2014, the Friday market has been moved to the Ras Al-Ain area.

The drastic change that occurred in the space and the massive sudden shift of the functions in it, as the new development project demolished and replaced the old familiar places that the residents and the visitors frequented; it also lost collective space memory in the eyes of the inhabitants of the city. The new development became alien, and rejecting of those people, making no connection with them or their history, habits or needs. The project, instead of reviving an old sector of the city and changing it into a cultural super hub for the city, it demolished a part of the city's identity and destroyed the connection which that space had once had with the population creating an invasive urban body, which pretended to blend into the modernization of Amman, while in reality it is abandoned by the general public, treating it as a new and a foreign space.

Al-Abdali Boulevard Company is a partnership between AL-Abdali Investment & Development Psc and the United Real Estate Company- Jordan. AL-Abdali Investment & Development Psc was formed in 2004 out of a successful public private partnership between the government owned Investment Corporation; the National Resources and Development Corporation (MAWARED), and Horizon International for Development; an international construction corporation specialized in investment and development of large scale real estate and construction projects owned by Sheikh Bahaa Rafic Al-Hariri in the same model as his 1994 Solidere redevelopment in downtown Beirut.

## VIII. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

The social dimension is one of the five key aspects of urban design. It's the relationships between people and space. Hence, by shaping that built environment, urban designers influence patterns of human activity and social life. Space and society are clearly related: it is difficult to conceive of 'space' without social content and, equally, to conceive of society without a spatial component The relationship is best conceived as a continuous two-way process in which people (and societies) create and modify spaces while at the same time being influenced by them in various ways. (Nia, 2017)

The social dimension of urban form mainly deals with the spatial arrangement and interrelationship of the characteristics of the people who build, use and value the urban fabric. (Gehl, 2010)

The city's identity creates images in people's mind. The city's identity relates to its Physical, socioeconomic, socio-cultural structures and history.

## IX. SUGGETED SOLUSION

"Good city appearance is not an abstract aesthetic phenomenon; it depends on the evaluation of the people who regularly experience the city". (Jack Nasar, 1975).

The value of the city downtown in the hearts of the city's residents and visitors emerge from the individual memories and experiences in that particular space, the action of destroying or demolishing the space that usually takes place in the redevelopment of the city downtown result in the alienation of its city residents



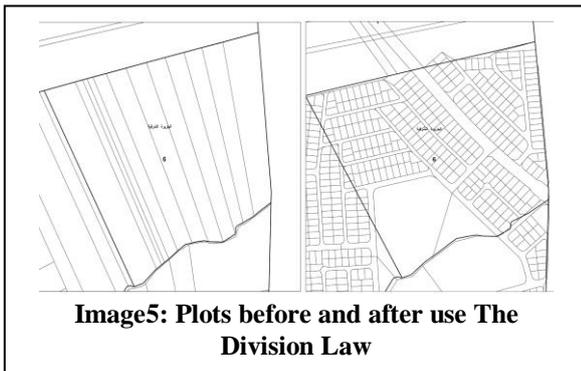
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as a new space is introduced which is inherently different.

Therefore, there is a suggestion to use Law of division within the municipal areas Law No. (11) For the year 1968, published in the official newsletter No. 2076 dated 15/2/1968

This law was used only to deal with reorganizing the agriculture plots which were so narrow and long that it was difficult to subtract any part of them to use for opening new streets. According to this law, each plot area was first measured and its initial cost was evaluated. This is achieved by a specialized committee set up for this purpose. After which, the urban planner reorganized the total area into more useable plots, which were redistributed to the original owners, where each owner received what is equal to 67% of his original plot area, while the remaining 33% were subtracted for streets and public services such as parks and others. The following figure demonstrates the plots before and after rezoning.

If the law of division were to be applied on the plots in the downtown area, it will allow the owners to have the advantage of unifying their small plot areas with the adjacent ones and for them to have a share in the new building, which is to be constructed on the larger, more beneficial plot size, following the regulations and rules set up by the municipality, for the purpose of specifying an architectural style that will unify the city's characteristics and reflect its identity.(Article 7, paragraph A, of the law of division),(Article 15 of the law of division)



**Image5: Plots before and after use The Division Law**

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