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ISLAM VS ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN ORDER IN THE TIMES OF CHANGES
Social and Cultural Aspects of Housing Architecture Transformation
in the Arab Countries of Northern Africa

Abstrakt

ISLAM A ARCHITEKTURA I URBANISTYKA W CZASACH PRZEMIAN
Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty przekształceń zabudowy mieszkaniowej
w krajach arabskich Afryki Północnej

Świat arabski Północnej Afryki ukształtowany został przez islam, który określił sposób życia oraz zasady postępowania społeczności muzułmańskich. Styl i formy życia wykreowane w cywilizacji islamu stały się w dziejach świata jednym z ważniejszych paradygmatów kulturowych. Uwarunkowania te wytworzyły charakterystyczny obraz miasta arabskiego, jego struktury urbanistycznej oraz stosowanych form architektury.

Od lat 70-tych XX wieku kraje arabskie doświadczają ogromnych przemian: politycznych, gospodarczych, społecznych i kulturowych. Obserwujemy powstawanie nowego modelu życia oraz tworzenie się nowej kultury zamieszkiwania, która jest odzwierciedleniem szerszego spektrum zmian mających miejsce w tych społeczeństwach. Realizowane obecnie struktury i formy zamieszkiwania wzorowane są na rozwiązaniach "zachodnich", które są odmienne od rozwiązań tradycyjnych. Są one niedostosowane do wymogów środowiska naturalnego i pozostają w dużej sprzeczności z zasadami określonymi przez Koran i sunnę. Rozdźwięk pomiędzy wymogami religijnymi a warunkami tworzonymi przez współczesne modernistyczne rozwiązania architektoniczno-urbanistyczne powoduje liczne niedogodności, które często uniemożliwiają ich mieszkańcom realizację stylu życia i form zachowań zgodnych z wymogami islamu oraz odwiecznymi zwyczajami.

Artykuł jest omówieniem obserwacji tradycyjnej i współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej, przeprowadzonych przez autora w Algierii (1978) i Libii (1984-1988). Zmiany w sposobach kształtowania przestrzeni urbanistycznej i form mieszkalnych zmuszają do postawienia pytań dotyczących możliwości realizacji współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej w sposób zapewniający zachowanie tożsamości miejsca i kontynuację tradycji budowlanej zgodnie z wymogami islamu oraz warunkami naturalnymi środowiska.

Słowa kluczowe:
Islam, mieszkalnictwo, współczesne przemiany, Afryka Północna.

The very birth of the new revealed religion of Islam in the 7th century A.D., its history and expansion from the Arab Peninsula outside have all made the faith one of the prime factors to have influenced the history of the Middle East and Northern Africa. It brought an all-sweeping change in the political map of the region and determined all aspects of human life. The lifestyle and forms of life evolved and cultivated in the Muslim civilization have become a major cultural paradigm in the world history leaving their mark on each and every side of social relationships in the Muslim societies. Just like in the past, Islam continues to determine the Muslim psyche, their spiritual life and its physical expressions. Religious guidelines, commands, and bans touch on all aspects of private and community life. *"We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things…"* Koran [Qur'an] reads (Sura 16, line 89) and goes on to define all relationships and give detailed instructions on the way of life and code of conduct applicable to both every individual, and whole Muslim societies.

Distinctive for Islam are the relatively simple principles set forth in the Holy Book of Koran [Qur'an]. These are elaborated upon in the Sunnah, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, and supplemented in many Hadisas. The word "Islam" means "obeying" the Lord. Obedience, in turn implies absolute subordination to God's will and uncompromising compliance with all guidelines, commands, and bans of Koran. The Koran text touches on all human activities defining the way of life, the conditions the religion determines, the law underlying organisation of the society, the rules of politics, economy, and science, and the moral code binding on the Muslim societies. All these rules supplemented with other, purely regulatory components such as the legal status law, property law, commercial law, and penal law, have been codified in the Muslim book of law called the "shari'a".

For the Muslim societies the Islam doctrine lies at the very foundation of their existence, and their culture is saturated with religion present in the daily life. For them religion is the key to the law, obligations, and customs. The power of Islam gives the Muslims the sense of belonging to a single community, the "umma", in spite of all cultural, political, economic, and territorial differences found in the vast expanse of the various geographical regions the Muslims live today.

All regulations and interpretations deriving from the doctrine translate directly to the rules and interpersonal relations among members of a single family and larger community, between man and woman, the faithful and non-believers. The rules are easily spotted as governing human behaviour and mutual relationships between members of the same community, and the adopted architectural and town-planning solutions enable following them. All these factors have added up to create a characteristic picture of an Arab town, its urban structure and the architectural forms used. In his work: "The Kuwait Urbanization", Saba George Shiber writes: *"Arab countries as far removed from each other ... contain cities, towns, villages and hamlets that show striking resemblances to one another which characterize them unmistakably as Arab."* [3, p.15]. The similarities are rooted in geographic and climatic conditions, the history of the region, and the cultural heritage amassed and cultivated through the centuries. Nevertheless, this air of unmistaken identity is primarily the effect, expression and manifestation of the religious reality, the regulations and commands derived from the Holy Book of Islam, Koran, and tradition.

The family is the cornerstone of the Muslim culture. It is the kernel unit of social life and lies at the heart of the developed urban structures. The rights and duties, the commands and bans relating to the family and contained in the Koran and the Prophet's Sunnah result in a clear distinction between its private and public lives. Through understanding these laws one can gain an insight into the very essence of the Arab city. Moreover, one can also comprehend the destruction inflicted upon it over the last one hundred years, especially by pursuing contemporary architectural and urban projects.

Dwelling upon the traditional town structure in the Islamic world we will be struck by the admirable compatibility between the social and cultural models of human behaviour on the one hand, and the spatial sense and layout of the structures and forms used in building. The Muslim societies did not have any central administration to manage space development. It was the local communities themselves who made and controlled the decisions as to the development of their residential structures guided by the purpose of creating an appropriate environment that would satisfy their individual and social needs. These circumstances enabled abiding by religious rules in interpersonal, spiritual, and material relationships in a manner which not only safeguarded the rights of the Muslim community, but also fully satisfied them.

The essential assumptions underlying housing developments in Muslim societies were the sense of community bond, privacy, and ownership. Such features as privacy, "respect for women", well-wishing approach to neighbours and joint property users contributed to the evolution of the idea of brotherhood called 'asabiyah" within Muslim communities. The Arabic word "asabiyah" can be traced down to the concept of "usbah" meaning a "group". Ibn Khaldun used the word "asabiyah" to indicate "close co-operation" between individuals found in the Bedouin social life. No lapse of time has managed to diminish this bond among local Muslim communities. If such feelings and principles are respected, they will determine a strictly defined living environment.

Works on a new town used to begin with selecting the appropriate site and drafting the location of the key elements defining the town structure, to name e.g. main or Friday mosque (jammi mosque), the citadel, and the main traffic routes. That was the urban macro-planning process. Now, on the micro scale level the quarters or large estates delineated by the key traffic routes were allocated to future resident groups who then together decided about the form and arrangement of the estate internal functions. They laid out the traffic grid and arranged the location of open grounds and closed quarters, i.e. the streets, squares, courtyards, lots, and homesteads. The process was governed by a set of administrational regulations called the "ahkam". The regulations set rules and provided a

means of controlling social and administrative matters in the city quarters, i.e. the ownership title, leasehold, joint ownership, privacy, the rights and duties arising from the fact of neighbouring on other users, and the right of use of public buildings and space.

The main public area in a town and its functional and spatial backbone is the central market called the "suq" or "bazaar". It is typically arranged in the form of a wider street flanked with open shops, warehouses, and workshops. The market is closely connected with the location of the main city mosque. In the immediate vicinity of this structural backbone other elements characteristic for a fully developed Islamic town are located, to name e.g. minor mosques (mosque, masjid) and schools (madrasa), the baths (hammam), hotels and inns (funduq, khan), and all sorts of tea and coffee houses. The main city street branches off into a network of minor streets that lead to the residential quarters or individual districts, then turn into narrower paths, and finally dead-end lanes (cul-de-sac) providing access to individual houses.

The grid of the city's open grounds mirrored the same hierarchy. The large open space next to the citadel or the Friday mosque (the "maydan") was used for all-city religious and social events. Housing estates would have their own, smaller squares called the "wekalah" or "fina". These grounds were designed for and maintained by the owners of the houses flanking them. They were used to load and unload goods and let the animals take a brief rest. Merchants could also sell their merchandise from mobile stands. The residents living around such squares could use the grounds, but not take possession of it.

Individual blocks or quarters were allocated to clans or social groups formed based on common ethnical, family, religious, or vocational bonds. Representatives of these groups laid the roads and divided the land into lots to be used for housing. Their distribution followed the complex inner social organisation of the group. The land (khitta) was held in common possession and management (musha). The Islamic law provides for different circumstances and regulates very special relationships between the neighbours giving them reciprocal rights which to an extent limit their use of property so as to safeguard privacy, ownership rights, and use of semi-public space. The residential quarters were arranged around a bazaar, and at night they could be isolated from the grounds by locking the gate leading onto the square. The quarters were occupied by relatively small and homogeneous communities. The sense of a group bond generally present within each community was highly stable and triggered solidarity among its members, irrespective of their social or property status. The law vested the community with certain obligations and duties. The feudal rulers or later the state authorities identified the quarter community with an administrative unit having its own representation and council.

From the early days of the Islamic societies religion, law, education, and rule were integrated into a single and efficient system. Their population could not separate one element from another. That is why the Friday mosque combined the functions of the place of worship, the court, and the centre of intellectual life and education. Other mosques, depending on their location and status in the hierarchy, played similar functions, though on a lesser scale. Educational institutions, i.e. religious schools, were located at mosques or in their immediate vicinities. Some other schools found near the bazaar taught vocational skills such as weaving, metal working, or leather processing. The religious judges (qadi) could use the bazaar-adjacent mosques to resolve any doubts or disputes related to entering or performing commercial transactions.

Islamic towns and estates are arranged in a hierarchical order. In this way physical balance is struck between social unity and diversity which, due to its social, geographic, and religious aspects, requires full privacy and isolation of the family life from the city hubbub on the one hand, and joint community action, union, communication, and full involvement in the public life on the other hand. Public sites are open to all, however the freedom of interpersonal contacts is reserved to men only. Women's freedom is substantially restricted in this respect.

By virtue of the law the woman's social status is subject to the man. She is also given fewer religious rights and duties. The man can prohibit his wife to leave home other than on his approval. He can also prevent her participation in public holidays and meetings, even if with her own relatives. When in public, the woman should be escorted by her husband or a male representative of the family.

Mutual relationships between men and women are extremely important in Islam. Their nature is reflected in housing forms and lays the foundations for the essential urban structures, and their shape is strictly determined by Koran. The scripture lists and defines each and every situation men and women can come across in this world. The Islamic customs perceive the woman as the "good name of the house", and make the man responsible for looking after her and safeguarding her honour (hourma). The Arabic "hourma" covers a whole range of social behaviours and physical methods developed to protect the woman's "honour". The Arabic word "hijab", literally meaning the

"veil" is identical with the name of the visual representation of the "hourma" and depending on the circumstances can indicate the "screen", "privacy", "modesty", and "proper conduct". All this is reflected in specific architectural and urban solutions. The stairs leading to the roof terrace had to be placed so as to prevent spying on the neighbouring house, and the entrance to a house or shop had to be placed so as to make it impossible to peep in the houses standing opposite it. Physical measures such as screens in the windows or reed mats or curtains in the outer doors are put up to protect women from gazes of strange men. "Hijab" requires women to wear appropriate clothing with a scarf, shawl or veil over the head when outdoors. The attire is considered "appropriate behaviour in space".

The woman is protected in a number of ways and using many elements: physical barriers ranging from a veil hiding her face to sophisticated architectural forms of the tent or house, all intended to protect her from the prying eyes of male members of any other family, but her own. The barrier variety is high, and its transparency can be modified as appropriate. Isolation finds its expression in the woman's clothes worn daily when out of home. The dress (galabija or farashija) and the veil over the face (kwef or haik) are intended to let the woman feel relatively at ease in the public forum. In some regions of the Islamic world this type of clothing is considered a refined and fashionable attire. Actually, the veil undoubtedly provides protection from the elements, particularly in the desert.

Space organization at home mirrors the cultural principles set forth in the Koran and Sunnah. In Arabic, the home is sometimes called the "maskan", the word most probably related to "sakun" meaning peace and quiet in contrast with the intense noisy life in the streets. In the regions they conquered the Muslims found different homestead models. Out of these they chose and adopted a modified form of the Greek and Roman atrium house. That model was far better suited to their cultural "hourma" values than the tower blocks they erected in their homeland in the western and southern regions of Arabia. The family house is organised around the central unroofed ground (courtyard, patio, atrium) and has a single entrance from the street. This central space enables building and strengthening mutual relations between members of the family. Following the "hijab" rules, the spatial organisation of the Muslim home must ensure maximum privacy and isolation of women from men other than her family. The rule translates to a number of solutions typical for the Islamic architecture such as e.g. a 90^0 bend in the length of the corridor leading to the entrance hall, lattice-like partitions inside to separate the women's quarters, lace-like window screens called "mashrabiyah" to protect the women from stranger's eyes and at the same time help to control the microclimate inside, and – provided the space was sizeable enough – two separate courtyards to separate male and female guests. Male guests are received in the smaller courtyard called the "salamik", while female guests in the larger, family yard called the "haramlik". In the densely built up area the inner courtyard can be used as an open patio, the place to indulge in the sun, shade, evening breeze, the green, and the changing seasons while retaining full privacy of the home at all times. The double-yard plans were only found in very rich houses or palaces. Other plans consistent with the 'hourma' concept reserved the reception room for the male guests. The room faced a terrace or an outer yard. In rich homes, while the men enjoyed themselves in the courtyard or the "eiwan", i.e. a roofed recess forming an annexe to the courtyard, the women would be accommodated in rooms raised a few steps above the base level, hidden behind screens. The spot selected for the "eiwan" would typically let the nature mitigate the tiresome climatic conditions.

Being introvert in form, that is understood, perceived, and functioning inwards, the Islamic house has a very simple, even austere street-facing wall with generally only one opening, i.e. the entrance gate. The outer walls are built to a height that will provide absolute safety and prevent the inside from being peeped into from outside. All openings on the ground level, if any, except for shops, are small, protected with bars or massive shutters, and typically placed higher than the eye of the passer-byes could reach. The windows of the upper storeys can be larger and protrude slightly from the wall, though only to the extent that will not infringe on the peace and privacy of the families occupying the neighbouring houses (that is overlook their courtyards and roof terraces). The decorated walls of the inner yard (patio) contradict the appearance of the external walls. The decorations can often be sophisticated, the yard planted and fitted with a pool which mitigates the severity of the climate.

"The Arabic house is never finished". Every family grows and expands over time, and so does its house changing in form and showing traces of the extension process. This phenomenon can be observed in different types of housing, in structures following traditional building models and those erected today. The secret lies in the shape the house is given in its early stage, which if appropriate, enables extension at a later date.

The power and the extent of the impact Islam exerts impact on the urban structures and architectural forms ever-present in different, frequently very distant countries, is evidenced in the features of the buildings erected. The specific Islamic customs and morality, on the other hand, are reflected in the house structure, whose architectural form is described as introvert, organic, spontaneous, or hidden. These features caused that

the concept of a city in the Arab world is dominated by the image of a compact town surrounded with city walls, with narrow winding streets and lanes, crowded and noisy suqs or bazaars, rounded mosque domes and spiky minarets from where the muezzin's voice travels around calling the faithful for prayer five times a day. Such towns did not only bend perfectly with the local landscape, but were also excellently suited to the extreme climatic conditions. Furthermore, they proved ideal in daily life providing appropriate background and space to cultivate tradition and live a life consistent with the teachings of Islam. In addition, even though from the contemporary point of view they were fitted to a very modest standard, the traditionally built body of a town was nevertheless spell-casting and vividly appealing to imagination.

With all permanence and stability of traditional Islamic societies, various modifications can be noticed to have taken place over the centuries, particularly in areas bordering on other civilisations, where the two cultures intertwined. Transformations were triggered by wars, pilgrimages, voyages, migrations, the Turkish and later European colonisation. Nevertheless, it was a slow and rather evolutionary than swift and revolutionary process. The conditions stimulating acceleration first occurred in the 20th century, however the changes not only accelerated, but also reached an unprecedented qualitative extent. The last 30 years have witnessed particularly deep social and cultural changes taking place in the Muslim societies, all deeply affecting the forms of human behaviour and indirectly the shape of the contemporarily created housing environments. Under strong pressure of change the societies undergo transformation, alter their behavioural patterns, and the ways of both forming and reading space. Although religion and tradition largely continue to determine the behaviour of Muslim communities, their daily lives are substantially and perhaps irreversibly changing. The ever-present behavioural patterns, reactions, and customs developed over the centuries are now going through rapid transformations. Old patterns are being replaced with new ones, though nobody knows how permanent. All this has an enormous impact on the contemporary architectural and urban solutions and create a new reality.

Since the onset of the nineteen-seventies the Arab world (including North African countries such as Algeria, Libya, or Egypt) has experienced rapid economic, social, and political changes. Their extent is huge and the acceleration rate staggering. They affect all aspects of the community life and translate to deep cultural transformations in the societies. The change of the economic standing, the effects of mass travels, the development of mass communication and transport, the wide access to global achievements have all given rise to a range of new needs which come as a challenge to the contemporary generation. Emerging from all those changes is a new model of life and the evolving new housing culture, which reflects the broader spectrum of changes the societies are going through. The transformation of the existing residential environment typically follows the path of western civilization achievements, or represents a peculiar form in which it is perceived. New technologies and their building patterns, as well as the contemporary materials are rooted in a totally different and culturally alien Euro-American tradition and culture. Consequently, these inflict huge damage on the ways space has been organised and perceived by the Muslim societies. They are also acutely in conflict with the principles set forth in the Koran and Sunnah. The changes affect the way of life of the Muslim communities tripping the previous balance between architectural form and lifestyle. The ultimate effect is a pervading sense of deteriorating living conditions. The changes are so swift that people can neither control them, nor live up to them.

The developments which took place in the world economy in the sixties and seventies triggered changes in the nature of town-planning in the Arab countries, and the scale and intensity of the urbanisation process. The growing income generated on oil and other raw materials, the new policy the Arab states adopted towards the western countries, and the individual temporary migrations abroad in search of a job have all caused deep cultural transformation. Domestic migrations, on the other hand, have accelerated the growth of urban sprawls, especially in the suburban zones around the established cities. Over the said period towns have doubled, sometimes even trebled in size. The process has taken varied forms and affected primarily the already existing towns. Large residential estates are built under the state supervision (Algeria, Libya) or through spontaneously spreading residential projects which fill in all unoccupied space mainly around the town perimeters. In places both forms of investments are pursued at the same time. The scale of the phenomenon has occasionally been unprecedented (Cairo, Baghdad). Stretching over miles, residential areas spread by inertia, initially along roads, then in between them. All in all, they have formed huge, unstructured housing areas where any structural division is delineated by the road network or specific terrain sculpture. Unable to cope with the avalanche-like urbanisation processes, governments of many Arab countries have decided to introduce legislation in order to control increased migration, rapid and leaping spreading of cities and their degradation and build a law-based policy to get them properly developed. This control tends to be restrictive rather than stimulating, and yet it has neither managed to accelerate housing programs, in spite of substantial progress achieved in terms of the quality and number of homes built, nor countered excessive city growth and the almost flood-like scale of migration of the rural and nomadic population to larger towns.

Having regained independence the Arab countries took much effort to make up for the lost time, eliminate any developmental backwardness, and bridge the gap between their own societies, and those of the developed countries. Seeking attributes of modernity at any cost and driven by ill-comprehended sense of modernity, in the process of rebuilding their economies from their post-colonial condition and creating a new reality the countries all too often rejected everything that might resemble traditional local housing designs well-tested in centuries-long evolution. The landscape of the North African countries developed structures showing features of "western" architecture mostly transplanted rote straight from Europe. Erected in the local reality the new buildings arranged the living functions in ways contradictory to the Islamic principle of introvert orientation. They had no centrally located and open yard – the element of prime importance from the point of view of not only the microclimate, but culture as well. They had big windows opening onto the streets. The residential blocks built in larger cities are often of the sky-rise type. They have balconies and loggias copying the European form so that the contemporary cityscapes show more resemblance to southern Italy or France than the country of their actual location. The buildings do not meet the requirements of the North African climate or culture, especially when the occupants are large families from the country where tradition is still very much the way of life. In these architectural solutions obeying the underlying rule of Islam, i.e. separation of men and women, frequently makes it impossible to live a functional family life or receive guests. The most negative impact have high-rise blocks composed of multiple repetitive sections arranged to a typical plan the European housing industry developed to economise on the construction costs. The blocks are located haphazardly and do not link to the existing body of the city or topographic conditions. These solutions represent typical features of modernist urban arrangements in Europe. They are adopted in governmental programmes which embrace building large new estates, districts, or even whole towns. They are pursued under the banner of improving the living conditions of the population and represent formal solutions both geometrically and functionally. Once the buildings have been populated, the process of giving them a treatment (modernised) instantly begins. The occupants attempt at remodelling and adjusting them to their true needs, or bringing them in line with their own understanding of architecture. Such buildings soon become decrepit and turn into slums. Landscape degradation is further aggravated by the approach to spatial development, prevailingly haphazard. The buildings are scattered mutually unrelated from either the compositional or functional point of view. They stand in utter contrast with the traditional method of arranging a compact town structure which creates proper microclimate and social environment. The prime change in the outer form of the house consists in regular wall openings (windows, balcony and terrace doors) in the outer walls of the buildings. This idea behind this approach is to allow establishing contact between the house interior and the city life outside. While in detached family houses belonging to the middle class and built on separate lots this pervading new rule is toned down by the green which gives isolation from the town hubbub, it has turned out a total failure when applied to large governmental projects embracing contemporary blocks and estates arranged in a relatively primitive way.

A vast majority of urban and architectural solutions adopted lately in the countries of Northern Africa (Algeria, Libya, Egypt) are ill-adjusted to the natural environment, do not live up to the inhabitants' social expectations, and give minimum credit to the local tradition, culture, climate, or the physiographic features of the terrain. In this way Islamic communities are irreparably losing their sense of architectonic identity and continuity. The contemporary solutions, even though their standards or technical parameters are much higher than previously, generally do not create any conditions conducive to what Islam sees as the "proper conduct".

The changes in the Islamic housing today affect all aspects of the building industry. Smaller families (usually two generations), declining polygamy, fewer offsprings, looser family bonds, particularly among higher social circles (the richer, better educated) all translate to the residential architecture. Homes become smaller, large houses designed for large families are turned to tenant buildings composed of flats rented to smaller families. The family bonds are getting weaker. The fact that male family members migrate to towns in search of permanent or seasonal jobs undermines the bonds and the dominant role of the husband at home. Public schooling facilitates women's emancipation and opens the way to higher social acceptance of women taking functions instead of being reduced merely to wives and mothers. The developments in the woman's position find their expression in e.g. a less rigorous approach to veiling the face which is limited to just wearing a scarf on the head.

Maintaining the proper microclimate and retaining elements of the architectonic tradition requires continuity over time and in the form of the housing solutions chosen. Traditional solutions are, however, dying out under the pressure of the changing lifestyle, technological solutions, shortage of space, administrative decrees and the new building law, frequently copied after Europe. The more than enthusiastic approach of the middle class to the European ways of arranging home functions, and fitting and furnishing house interiors has caused fundamental changes in the organisation of the living space. The homes of the local elite are perceived as the model inspiring the masses of the Arab town population. The building methods employed on new villa projects, the applied architectural forms and structures, and the materials used are a token of contemporary solutions and the perceived "modernity". Therefore, they become the reference sites and the dream aspired to by the remaining social groups

eager to become par, often at any cost. Such new perceptions, models, forms, designs, and aesthetic standards add up to the contemporary residential architecture. The degree to which the process has advanced and produced a different forms varies from country to country depending on how open the given Arab state is, what relationships and forms of co-operation it has with the "western" countries, how highly educated the society is, what cultural level they represent, how aware they are of their national identity, how many foreign or "western" lecturers the universities employ, how many western specialists are involved in governmental programmes, and how available is foreign workforce to operate or maintain highly specialized technologies of the contemporary economy.

The contemporary housing prevents the inhabitants from living a life and following the behavioural forms consistent with the ancient customs, rhythms, and principles set by Islam. The discrepancy between the religious requirements and the conditions created by the contemporary architectural and town-planning solutions causes numerous inconveniences. The occupants try various means to minimize or eliminate such inconveniences, and in effect the new architecture soon becomes decrepit and the urban solutions degenerate. Having received a flat or house the new occupants instantly start altering the building substance they found on arrival. They put up partitions, build parapets along terraces and balconies, and reduce the window sizes to minimise the wall openings and enhance the sense of privacy inside. In many estates windows have been observed to be totally erased by planking, filling with chipboard or even metal sheets in an attempt of getting rid at least some of the openings. Also, the commonly installed thick and heavy wooden shutters (blinds) intended to enhance the microclimate inside the house remain closed at all times making the proposed idea of opening the interior to the outside world pointless. All these facts prove that the designed architectural and urban solutions are inadequate. It is also a common practice that the roofs and grounds in front of multi-family blocks are taken possession of to create semi-private spaces and put up some sort of screening barriers.

In the new reality the inhabitants are frequently incapable of finding their place or behaving to the letter of Koran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah. That is why it is absolutely vital to identify the values and purposes the contemporary Islamic society sees in the functions, forms, and symbolic and social connotations of the town and home. Precise identification of their significance and the ways they worked in the past followed by their setting side by side with the contemporary technological opportunities, and gaining an understanding of their very nature and depth still unquestionably imprinted on the Arab world, will create a chance of realising what changes are actually taking place in the architecture and city planning in those countries today. Hopefully, it can also create a chance to direct those processes in proper way consistent with the heretofore tradition. To do so is an extremely important task, if the cities of Northern Africa (Islamic) are to develop in harmony with tradition and the local cultural heritage. Hassan Fathy, in his: "Architecture for the Poor", writes: *As a direct result of ... lack of tradition our cities and villages are becoming more and more ugly. Every single new building manages to increase this ugliness, and every attempt to remedy the situation only underlines the ugliness more heavily."* [2, p.20]. The fascination with "modern" housing in the Arab countries has, however, grown so common and so deep today that in the present situation it is hard to suggest to those societies to simply go back to their traditional solutions, though admittedly such attempts have been taken.

There is no relation to the traditional solutions or the neighbourhood in the areas subject to urbanisation processes (both those planned and pursued by the state, and those spontaneously undertaken by the population themselves). This lack of link, as well as illegal seizure and misuse of semi-private space violate the so far commonly accepted principles of defining and reading space in the Arab town. In this way the rules of traditional formation of the urban structure which for centuries have remained in harmony with the rules of Islam are infringed upon. This triggers numerous conflicts between the residents and the users of the spaces taken possession of. The new situation forces the necessity to develop new definitions and specifications of the role of social space (public, semi-private, and private) in the city so as to bring it in line with the laws and feelings of Muslim societies. This is a way to open a chance of developing new solutions which, without resigning from the contemporary facilities and full use of the modern technological and material achievements, will be consistent with the all-Arab line of achievements enabling the retaining of cultural continuity and identity of the site, while at the same time meeting the aspirations of the Muslim societies of the 21st century.

When contemplating the state of housing developments in the Arab countries of Northern Africa and the direction the transformations head we stumble upon questions about where the future architectural and urban solutions lies. The projects pursued today cause force the Islamic societies to living ever more often in an environment arranged far from traditional models and hard to accept for religious reasons. This leads us to raise questions about the traditional Islamic architecture (in Northern Africa). Does it still stand a chance to survive, or are we perhaps witnessing the emerging new and already permanent dwelling model vulgar as it is in its contemporary expression? The model is actually neither European, nor aligned with the traditional 'modus operandi' of the Arab society. Is there a chance to overcome the witnessed crisis, or perhaps there is no way to find

a solution? What path will the Arab world ultimately choose in the complex situation of the civilisation conflict with the West? What new problems will emerge on the way? Will Islam continue in its function of the prime determinant of all legal and customary terms governing the developed housing, or will a chance for a change only arise once Koran has been re-read anew and the a fresh interpretation has been commonly accepted?

Not all Koran teachings are absolutely unequivocal. Alongside definite and precise prescriptions it also contains certain ideas that call for explanation or interpretation. Whatever is not prohibited or prescribed falls into the domain of free and personal construction by any individual or interpreter. This dubiousness has in the past led to the emergence of a number of schools of interpretation. As such, it also allows hop that the teachings and prescriptions of Koran can be re-read and re-interpreted again. From our contemporary, pan-human point of view, though maybe only shared by members of the western civilization, some of its commands and prohibitions are open to discussion, to say the least. These include, e.g. the relationships between the master and slave, the application of the revenge law, or the relationships between man and woman. The latter seem particularly unclear in the perspective of the contemporary trend aiming at giving men and women an equal status in all possible spheres of life and activity. If Koran were to be re-interpreted along this line, it could change the whole structure of the Muslim world. So far, however, any attempts made in this direction have clashed with the official standing of the Muslim society, not yet ready to take any such step.

Perhaps the numerous Muslim communities living in the western countries will be more ready to modify the interpretation of Koran in the process of accepting modern housing solutions characteristic for the European (western) lifestyle. This, however, will depend on the members of the Islamic societies themselves. Quoting after Bernard Lewis, author of "The Arab in History" [1, p.222]: *The crucial change comes down to the fact that now it is for them to make the choice".*

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ISLAM VS ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN ORDER IN THE TIMES OF CHANGES
Social and Cultural Aspects of Housing Architecture Transformation in the Arab Countries of Northern Africa

Abstract

The Arab world in Northern Africa has been moulded by Islam which has determined the life style and behavioural patterns among the Islamic communities. The style and forms of life that have evolved in the Muslim civilisation have grown to become a major cultural paradigm in the world history. These criteria have determined the characteristic picture of the Arab town, its urban structure, and the employed architectural forms.

Since the nineteen-seventies the Arab countries have been undergoing an immense transformation of political, economic, social, and cultural nature. We are witnessing the emergence of a new model of life, and the birth of a new dwelling culture, all reflecting a broader spectrum of changes occurring in these societies. The residential structures and forms introduced nowadays are rooted in the "western" solutions, so different from the traditional concepts. They are ill-adjusted to the constraints of the natural environment and largely divergent from the principles laid down in the Koran and Sunnah. This clash between the requirements imposed by the

religion and the environment created by the contemporary modernist architectural and town-planning solutions cause numerous inconveniences which frequently prevent the residents from pursuing the life style and behavioural patterns consistent with the demands of Islam and ancient customs.

The article outlines the author's observations of the traditional and contemporary housing development, accumulated in Algeria (1978) and Libya (1984-1988). The changes in the concepts of urban space and residential forms give rise to questions about whether and to what extent the contemporary forms of housing can be utilised so as to retain the identity of the place and continuation of the building tradition following the letter of Islam and the natural surrounding.

Key terms:
Islam, housing, contemporary transformation, Northern Africa.

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ISLAM A ARCHITEKTURA I URBANISTYKA W CZASACH PRZEMIAN
Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty przekształceń zabudowy mieszkaniowej w krajach arabskich Afryki Północnej

Abstrakt

Świat arabski Północnej Afryki ukształtowany został przez islam, który określił sposób życia oraz zasady postępowania społeczności muzułmańskich. Styl i formy życia wykreowane w cywilizacji islamu stały się w dziejach świata jednym z ważniejszych paradygmatów kulturowych. Uwarunkowania te wytworzyły charakterystyczny obraz miasta arabskiego, jego struktury urbanistycznej oraz stosowanych form architektury.

Od lat 70-tych XX wieku kraje arabskie doświadczają ogromnych przemian: politycznych, gospodarczych, społecznych i kulturowych. Obserwujemy powstawanie nowego modelu życia oraz tworzenie się nowej kultury zamieszkiwania, która jest odzwierciedleniem szerszego spektrum zmian mających miejsce w tych społeczeństwach. Realizowane obecnie struktury i formy zamieszkiwania wzorowane są na rozwiązaniach "zachodnich", które są odmienne od rozwiązań tradycyjnych. Są one niedostosowane do wymogów środowiska naturalnego i pozostają w dużej sprzeczności z zasadami określonymi przez Koran i sunnę. Rozdźwięk pomiędzy wymogami religijnymi a warunkami tworzonymi przez współczesne modernistyczne rozwiązania architektoniczno-urbanistyczne powoduje liczne niedogodności, które często uniemożliwiają ich mieszkańcom realizację stylu życia i form zachowań zgodnych z wymogami islamu oraz odwiecznymi zwyczajami.

Artykuł jest omówieniem obserwacji tradycyjnej i współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej, przeprowadzonych przez autora w Algierii (1978) i Libii (1984-1988). Zmiany w sposobach kształtowania przestrzeni urbanistycznej i form mieszkalnych zmuszają do postawienia pytań dotyczących możliwości realizacji współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej w sposób zapewniający zachowanie tożsamości miejsca i kontynuację tradycji budowlanej zgodnie z wymogami islamu oraz warunkami naturalnymi środowiska.