

Morphological Transformation of Traditional Cities: The Case Study of the Historic Center of the City of Najaf

Authors : Sabeeh Lafta Farhan, Ihsan Abbass Jasim, Sohaib Kareem Al-Mamoori

Abstract : This study addresses the subject of transformation of urban structures and how does this transformation affect the character of traditional cities, which represents the research issue. Hence, the research has aimed at studying and learning about the urban structure characteristics and morphological transformation features in the traditional cities centers, and to look for means and methods to preserve the character of those cities. Cities are not merely locations inhabited by a large number of people, they are political and legal entities, in addition to economic activities that distinguish these cities, thus, they are a complex set of institutions, and the transformation in urban environment cannot be recognized without understanding these relationships. The research presumes an existing impact of urbanization on the properties of traditional structure of the Holy City of Najaf. The research has defined urbanization as restructuring and re-planning of urban areas that have lost their functions and bringing them into social and cultural life in the city, to be able to serve economy in order to better respond to the needs of users. Sacred Cities provide the organic connection between acts of worship and dealings and reveal the mechanisms and reasons behind the regulatory nature of the sacred shrine and their role in achieving organizational assimilation of urban morphology. The research has reached a theoretical framework of the particulars of urbanization. This framework has been applied to the historic center of the old city of Najaf, where the most important findings of the research were that the visual and structural dominant presence of holy shrine of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) remains to emphasize the visual particularity, and the main role of the city, which hosts one of the most important Muslim shrines in the world, in addition to the visible golden dome rising above the skyline, and the Imam Ali Mosque the hub and the center for religious activities. Thus, in view of being a place of main importance and a symbol of religious and Islamic culture, it is very important to have the shrine of Imam Ali (AS) prevailing on all zones of re-development in the old city. Consequently, the research underlined that the distinctive and unique character of the city of Najaf did not proceed from nothing, but was achieved through the unrivaled characteristics and features possessed by the city of Najaf alone, which allowed it and enabled it to occupy this status among the Arab and Muslim cities. That is why the activities arising from the development have to enhance the historical role of the city in order to have this development as clear support, strength and further addition to the city assets and its cultural heritage, and not seeing the developmental activities crushing the city urban traditional fabric, cultural heritage and its historical specificity.

Keywords : Iraq, the city of Najaf, heritage, traditional cities, morphological transformation

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