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## FULL LENGTH ARTICLE

# Identity in urban spaces of residential compounds: Contributing to a better environment

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**Abstract** Man is the core of any study and his needs, inspirations, and contributions are the main motive for scientists and researchers. Man's daily life is directly affected by the surrounding environment, as the daily contact with nature is essential for his psychological health. In this context, houses are essential, as people devote much of their effort, time, and money to rearrange, and decorate their living spaces. Correspondingly, these living spaces have a great effect on their owners.

Some Communities make an outstanding contribution to the “big picture” of the environmental scene where ‘Identity’ is a major element; this picture (=environment) affects its inhabitants (=stakeholders) directly and indirectly.

Stakeholders should feel involved in the environment they live in or deal with, and closely attached to its elements to obtain a comfortable urban space. Identity plays a major role in giving this feeling to each user of that space: especially the most common used spaces by all of us: the ‘urban residential spaces’.

Thus, this research will focus on the existence of ‘identity’ in urban spaces of different residential compounds in order to find answers for the following questions: Is identity reflected in urban spaces of residential compounds? Do the design elements used by the urban designers reflect identity? if yes, what are the key design elements (to be used as criteria) and their priorities? An empirical study will go through different projects in Egypt in order to find the needed answers.

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## Introduction

The term ‘Identity’ is replacing the term ‘Culture’ nowadays. Recently many strategies have been followed by cities, particularly those with perceived problems concerning image and identity. One of policies implications has been the designation of ‘cultural quarters’, as areas where a ‘critical mass’ of culture-related activity is seen are providing the basis for further related uses [1].

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Researches on the 'place & identity' are highly required nowadays, to explore the ways that locales imbued with personal and social meanings. On the other hand, residential areas were and still are the core of study for a large number of researchers because of their important effect on 'Personal and social meanings'. From that point, this research will focus on 'Identity' in residential urban spaces from the following aspects: the issue of gaining a control over space in order to feel a positive sense of self-identity; the issue of using, arranging, or decorating that space in order to create a psychological comfort and reflect, identity or personal well-being; and the issue of maintaining significant places of the past, so that sense of control and identity experienced at an earlier age gets supported by reproducing the essence of a significant past environment [2]. Moreover, residential areas are the type of areas that mostly affect all of us as they are the most areas that we deal with as they are the primary means of everyday interaction between humans and the environment. Approximately 75% of people in developed regions live in urbanized areas, and an estimation of 41% of urban land area is used for houses and their surroundings as mentioned in the report of UN 2010 [3]. Designers, through their designing process, are always seeking to meet 'Man' needs by providing him by a feeling of involvement and interaction with the space, and consequently a feeling of love to that space.

All the previous could be achieved by focusing on 'Identity' as a key element of the design process.

An empirical study of several residential compounds in Egypt will take place, at the aim of figuring out the percentage of existence of the sense of 'Identity' in these communities reflected by their urban residential spaces, in addition to identifying the priorities of design key elements (= the tools out of setting criteria) which affect the identity existence in these spaces and consequently contribute to a better urban residential compound. Assessment will take place by interviewing stakeholders in order to focus on the main keys of design and their priorities to them as a guide for designers to achieve their desired goals, and a step toward a better environment.

### Identity in urban residential spaces

#### *Identity*

With the new design and management improving visual esthetic qualities of the public space and creating a strong visual identity, the new public space has arguably started to function as a catalyst for image-led regeneration of the city center. New design has also generated a strong "visual identity" for the Haymarket. The use of high-quality construction materials, particularly ornamental and elegant ones, and expensive and distinctive artworks and design elements has embellished the Haymarket and created a "chic" architecture. Each claim may shape one part of the city, or one aspect of a place, and the interaction among these claims and counter-claims shapes the complex city of people and places. Resistance, transgression and competition are as much signifying characteristics of these places as the claim to cause a fixed or abstract. The goal of designers to control the character of a housing scheme of its spaces can be achieved by a different use of the place, one that they did not envisage or accept. The intentions of local authorities to formalize development

and promote a sanitized identity for the city may be met by the colonization space by groups that threaten that image. The traditional authority and status of a place may be undermined by the growth of population around it and the expansion of places and activities. Actions may have more unintentional consequences and challenges than there are different than the desired outcomes. Furthermore, the strong visual identity has been developed by introducing "variety and diversity" to the design through various manufactured and imported images, which are not only in harmony with each other but they also create a landscape of visual identity, called a 'scenographic variety' as for Crilley (1993) [4], and in response to abstract space, which is fragmented, homogeneous, and hierarchical, the uniqueness of personalized and collectivized space reasserts itself, and such organic concepts of spatial integration arise as personal space, social space, the image of space, residential space, and even global space [5]. However, knowing a place well requires long-term residence and deep involvement as it is possible to appreciate the visual qualities of a place by one short visit. Though particular parts or elements may be highly influential, place identities (scene of place) are a creation of the areas as a whole rather than any specific part or element. The scene of place does not exist in any particular part but in the combination of those parts into a greater whole. A building, for example, is part- but only one part- of the place experience -Dovey (2010: 16-7)-, which describes places as 'assemblages', arguing that: "*the scene or meaning of a place are neither found within the material urban form nor are they simply added to it, rather they are integral to the assemblage. . . . .to see places as assemblages is to avoid the reduction of place to text, materiality or subjective experience. What we call 'sense of place' is a phenomenon that connects or spans this materiality | expression dimension*" [6]. In conclusion, we can say that the three categories (activity, physical image, and image) combine together to form the scene of the space, from which 'identity' could be managed. That is why these elements are our objectives in this study; in addition, these elements will be used as key design elements when assessing the identity of the urban space.

#### *Urban residential spaces*

The implications for planning, design and management with ecology explored: urban dwellers should be able to choose their preferred way of interacting with the residential settings that should accommodate a wide variety of user needs [7]. Attention is shifted to urban development with a much focus on commercial activities and everyday life, particularly, the residential buildings [8].

The urbanization of the world, which is one of the most impressive facts of modern times, has wrought profound changes in virtually every phase of social life. The complicated phenomena of urbanism may require unity and coherence if the sociological analysis proceeds in the light of such a body of theory. The empirical evidence concerning the ecology, the social organization, and the social psychology of the urban mode of life confirms the fruitfulness of this approach [9]. Residential and commercial districts were to co-exist with the national life of the capital. The symbolic, ceremonial function of public space is expressed in monumental formality, giving a contextual frame to which all segments of the fabric are tied.

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