

Street Furniture Influence in Revitalizing the Bahraini Identity

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ABSTRACT



“Bab Al Bahrain” Avenue is one of the liveliest streets and its location is in the intermediate of the historical part that gave the avenue a strong historical dimension in the urban context of Manama city, Kingdom of Bahrain. Moreover, the avenue has economic and cultural significance activities. The socio-economic value of “Bab Al Bahrain” and the attached “Gold Market” make the area is the most crowded one in Manama. The existing users of the avenue are variable between residences, local visitors and tourist. Unfortunately, with the rapid urban development for the Manama City in general and Bab Al Bahrain area, and the changing for the economic base for most of the original families they moved to other suitable places to them while new non-Bahraini replaced them. As a result, the sense of identity and belonging is not considerable. Consequently, the identity for these areas is on its way to disappear. This research analyzed the street furniture condition and focused on the act of street furniture role in revitalizing Bahraini identity in such an area. Moreover, the research draws the point of revitalizing the sense of belonging for the residences, which will influence positively the open spaces’ conditions and the visual quality.

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1. Introduction

In places that have heritage characteristics (figure 1), it is not easy to design street furniture. Integrating and creating a sense of place by the use of landscape elements in designing these areas is often difficult. In most of the historical areas all over the world, street furniture plays a significant role in presenting the identity and the belonging for the residences, which influence positively upon the open spaces conditions and the visual quality. In Bahrain in general, there is strong emphasis and concern towards preserving the historical areas. It is focal point as a significant alternative for the

national economic resources in Bahrain 2030 (KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN, 2016). In Bab Al Bahrain in particular, respecting sustainability concept, several preservation projects were directed to have the max benefit from such area to enhance the social and economic of the country. Street furniture as one of the major landscape architecture design elements plays significant role

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in preservation projects by showing the identity of the heritage and transfer the senses of belonging to the users and visitors of the area subject (Skidmore Owings Merrill, 2007).



Figure 1. Heritage characteristics for each heritage area (Al-Kubaisy, 2010).

In opposite, in the case of the old part of Manama city, there is inappropriately occurred there, which reflects negatively in the form of the losing of Bahraini identity for users of these areas. However, the challenge is how the design can give feeling of pride to the users of the city. Moreover, a suitable design for practical functions and specific purposes are part of the challenges as well. Such challenging can open up creating issues for the landscape designers of open spaces within the heritage areas. It may enable them to show the identity of the places and shape spaces that can succeed in achieving the satisfaction of users to enhance the quality of the areas over the long term (Elghonaimy, 2019).

The research problem lies in the absence of a sense of belonging of the users in the area, which led to a low level of the concept of identity in the area. So, the objective of this research is to disclose the loss of identity resulted from the urban changes due to the developing projects, specifically on the example of Bab Al Bahrain Avenue, Manama city (figure 2).



Figure 2. Inspiring the belongings in street furniture design from social and cultural elements (Researcher).

While Manama was an administrative and commercial center in the last decades in Bahrain, but it has significantly changed because of the prompt migration from and to the city. These significant changes were in terms of inhabitants' characteristics (socio-economic) and activities. Moreover, in the condition of respecting sustainability, the research is divided into theoretical part to conclude the identity issues. While the second part will analyze the street furniture subject in term of the type of user (social), variation in time and environmental factors and Activity (economic) in Bab Al Bahrain. The

research will end by presenting the conclusion and recommendation of the study.

2. Street Furniture and Identity

Lynch (1960) clarified that the identity in urban spaces is formed by the entire values and characteristics of a city and should reflect the unique feature and individuality of the spaces (Lynch, 1960). The concept of identity is subjected to the urban context of the target area with human, expresses diversity and originality issues. Identity is a phenomenon that doesn't exist in similarity and replication place. (Isin & Wood, 1999). Moreover, identity is the sum of different social, economic and environmental features that are used to show and distinguish assets within properties. The speciality of the social, ideology and culture, consistency is a significant concept that should be present in identity. Then, having a triumphant sense of Identity to users, the sustainability of certain conditions is necessary. Figure 3; shows the major four affective factors in creating the identity, which is relating to history (the origin or heritage), Social (considering value and personality of social needs), landscapes architecture (Environment and factors depending on topography), and appropriate technology (Gürsel, 1993).

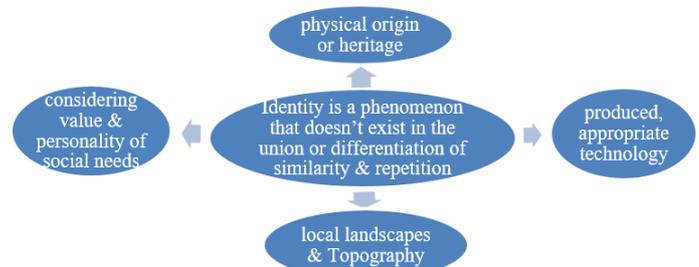


Figure 3. The major four affective elements in forming the identity (Researcher).

Cities with historical dimensions, urban area identity can be defined, from the cultural point of view concerning its history, as it is the complete components distinguishing one city from others (Sirel, 2005). Moreover, in cities with history and heritage, cities' formation depends on the social structure, which reflects the identity of the city. Moreover, historically, the dynamic of the cities continuously changing of the urban structure, (Nalkaya, 2010). In other words, identity in cities is such significant reliability brought by a progression from the city history to recent time. Another definition for the cities' identity that it is the formation of the urban people and their lifestyle based on the physical, cultural, socio-economic, historical and formational factors. (Çöl, 1998). From the landscape Architecture point of view, identity

is the sum of the components, which defines a city and distinguishes it from the others.

The smallest unit constituting of the identity starts from the landscape architecture of the outdoor spaces, especially street furniture within the neighborhood. The geographical features, and the local traditions, as well as the lifestyles, are the components completing the identity of an area. Emerge time and shape help in forming city' identity, which is arising from the:

- a. Natural and manmade environment, which includes the levelling of the area and climate circumstances, vegetation, landmarks and lightweight structures to obtain aesthetic results, and positive result of the environment
- b. society' cultural, social behavioural and its social and commercial characteristics
- c. Artificial situation (streets, avenues, squares, monumental architectural buildings, examples of civil architecture).

All this is a systematic procedure under certain circumstances to achieve the desired results. ([World Culture Encyclopedia, 2000](#)).

3. Identity in Bahrain

After the Second World War, the identity in Bahraini urban areas and the structure of the building components changed, where many public spaces were added, and others were changed in functions. Therefore, within the recent realization of 'regional identity' in architecture, the role of landscape architecture became more important. It led to further interest in enhancing the urban spaces and emphasising the identity with the landscape design elements. The identity in landscape design in the arid regions provides a design that is suitable for the environment and the culture with low cost and less maintenance. Using native species within natural and semi-natural schemes supports the idea of regional identity (figure 4). It occurs by preserving local visual character, conserving native biodiversity and reducing energy inputs in the landscape design, as well as, providing aesthetic and environmental functions such as shade, reducing glare and heat, retaining moisture in the soil and the air ameliorating wind, dust and soil erosion, and reducing desertification ([Elghonaimy, 2011](#)).

The proper integrates with designing street furniture for such historical areas creates the identity and the sense of place around it. This integrating by the use of the street furniture' elements comprising use to facilitate the movements of vehicles and transportation in the areas. Moreover, the use of street islands and the walkways adjacent to the street are used to make the road more aesthetically and appealing in urban areas in general and historical spaces in

particular. However, in such historical areas, the conceptual design vision for street furniture's has to consider many significant issues. For example, while designing these areas using such, we need to be careful that if placed near intersections especially in the old part of towns with the narrow and crowded streets, may obstruct the view of drivers ([Masoud, 2010](#)).



Figure 4. Inspiration of the Bahraini identity from heritage elements.

In historical urban spaces, the design of the street furniture has to set up based on site identity and the functional requirements. The historical urban context affects the existing and desired patterns and serves its purpose efficiently. In such areas, most of the street furniture elements are custom made. Identity and following sprite of the site context is significant thought while designing. The furniture matching with site identity is substantial and in high quality, which is not necessarily costly. There are several visions and ways of thinking in designing street furniture as well as selecting the types and materials. For example, there could be a consistent selection, which gives a constant tone to the surrounding historical urban context as well as the streets and walkways. Furthermore, various parts of the streetscape should reflect cultural and social issues. Moreover, it could be designed to work as artworks. Furthermore, multiple elements of the streetscape should reveal the identity of the place and respect the culture and social issues. ([Crankshaw, 2009](#)). Al Abdullah (2010) mentioned that in analysing the streets, we need to consider the important type of streets for pedestrians in these areas, which are Destination, Transitional and Passing by. For each type, designers study specific consideration in designing. ([Evyapan & Tokol, 2000](#)).

In general, there are four essential criteria involved in selecting and placing items of street furniture:

- a. function (i.e. seeing how necessary an item is and how it can serve its purpose),
- b. siting and layout (i.e. deciding where each item should be placed),
- c. form and appearance (i.e. making sure there a continuity or at least a linkage between the designs of different items),
- d. Durability (given expected usage), and cost ([Evyapan & Tokol, 2000](#)).

As well known that streets inside the historic urban areas have always served three interrelation purposes, which are gathering places, soq and joining place. As a gathering place, the open spaces provided a suitable environment for social exchange in different levels. As a marketplace, the streets within the urban space facilitates commercial accomplishments in different levels. Finally, public spaces allowed the influences between all the functions. (European Urban Knowledge Network, 2018). However, streets inside the cities show a variety of social characteristics and urban changes, which are depending on the concepts of time and space. (Gülin Beyhan & GÜRka, 2015). Madanipour (1996) explained that while studying street furniture projects, landscape Architects put Time, Place, and Activities as major considerations in the first stage due to the high value to influence the qualitative performance of the voids and spaces is at the forefront of these considerations.

4. Background about Bab Al Bahrain, Manama, Bahrain

Bahrain is an independent Arab state nation in Western Asia, located on latitude 50.85 East and latitude 26.24 north and consists of 36 islands. The climate of Bahrain is hot and humid weather and the rainfall is very low and irregular (Smith, 1999). Most of Bahrain's population is concentrated in cities, most of them in Manama. Manama has modern buildings and wide, tree-lined roads. The rest of the population lives in ancient parts where one can see the architecture and traditional identity of the Bahraini people. (World Culture Encyclopedia, 2000).

Since 1921, Manama became the capital of Bahrain and was for a long time a trading center in the Gulf area, where traders came to break and trade their products. It means "the place of rest", Manama is home to a very diverse population, from a long time ago Jews, Muslims, Hondo, and Christians lived door to door. Bab Al Bahrain Avenue is one of the busiest streets in Manama (Figure 5), Locals and tourist are filling this area. Bahrain has a strong history of urbanization. It has a respectable history, which created worthy built environments. (Elwazani & Lerma, 2006). It should be noted that Bab Al Bahrain Avenue has the significance of being a Destination, Passing by and Transitional.



Figure 5. Bab Al Bahrain location in the beginning of the busiest streets in Manama.

Bab Al Bahrain Avenue is an excellent example to show the Bahrain identity problem. The area has a strong historical dimension in the urban context; it has economic and cultural significance. The variation between users influenced upon creating diversity in the socio-economic activities. (Al-Nabi, 2012). The physical analyzing for the street will include the revising of the landscape design elements (hardscape and softscape) (figure 6). Therefore, there is a need for accurate detection about the significant reasons for this current street furniture' design inappropriately for the historical value within such area. A theoretical background about the Bab Al Bahrain area that followed by analyzing and surveying the existing condition was considered in the research plan. A special questionnaire for the different types of users was designed considering the variety in time, the different type of users and variable activities for this busy area. The target of this stage is to have a clear image from the various users, authorized representatives, and the urban expertise about inappropriately dealing with the urban quality despite the intense concern from the authority to enhance the urban quality for these areas.

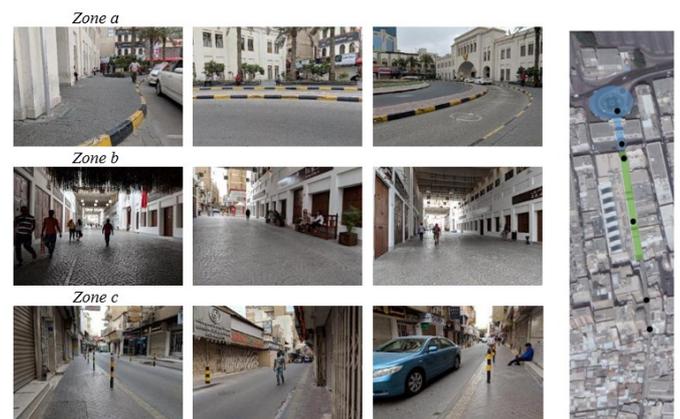


Figure 6. Using the physical landscape design elements (hardscape and softscape) in the 3 sections of Bab Al Bahrain Avenue (Researcher).

5. The Analyses of Bab Al Bahrain Avenue

Historically, the inter-area had many developing stages until the existing stage. Physically, the study of the avenue was divided into (figure 6&7);

- a. The first consists of the building of Bab Al Bahrain and the surrounding (the fountain - shaded

- areas where it has seats - the first area relatively has the constant design for a long time.
- b. Second, the second area had many developing stages through significant changes, and in the final development, it had been turned into a pedestrian path with the covered part of the market.
- c. Third, we get into the "Gold Market", and it is the uncovered part with a regular street.

The avenue will be analysed in term of time of use, type of users, and activities.

5.1 Time of Using

From the site visits (figure 8) and documenting the users' activities in term of type and time, it is a busy area with multi-culture users and multi disciplinarians and economic activities.

5.2 Type of Users

Both locals (traders, labours, commercials, and social) and tourist are using the street, as it holds a cultural attraction as well as an economic attraction.

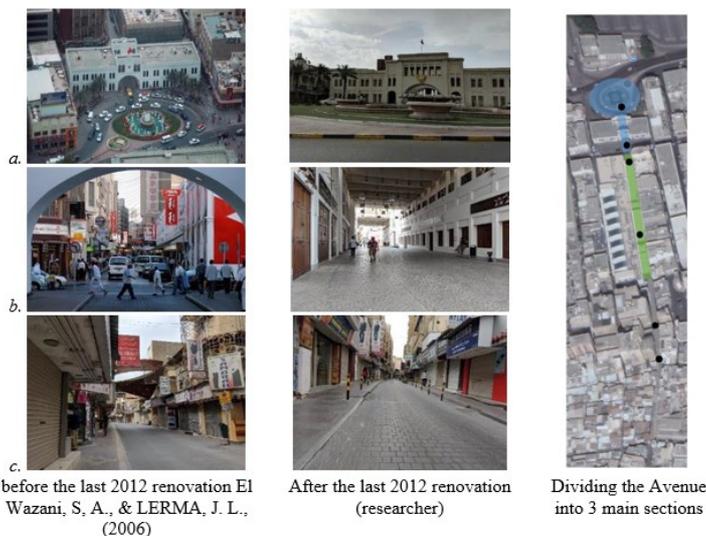


Figure 7. Analysing Bab Al Bahrain Avenue (Researcher).

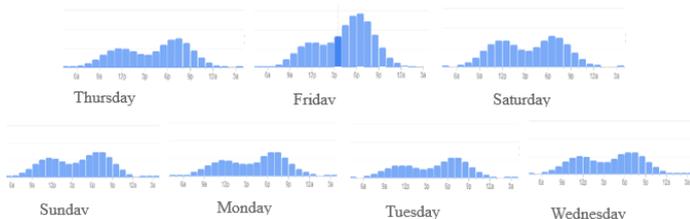


Figure 8. Average Time of Using/week: study of observing for 3 months to show the times where Bab Al Bahrain Avenue is used, afternoon and evening (google, 2018).

5.2 Activities

The avenue has many activities that can be done by taking pictures near the second part with the landmark "I (heart) Bahrain", (figure 9) near Bab Al

Bahrain, and the hanging coins. Users can have a rest within the sitting area in the Cafes and the shops in the context; they can sit around and enjoy the space. The above featured an estimation for the use of Bab Al Bahrain Avenue, where there are two times where space is busy used, afternoon and evening, the purpose towards the weekend the usage peaks drastically specifically on Friday afternoons.



Figure 9: Anagrammatic view for the Bab Al Bahrain (zone a the main gate) and main approach of the avenue (zone b in "I love Bahrain" part).

From Table (1), the observation is as follows:

Table 1. The analysis for using the avenue.

a. According to Locals:			
Factor of correlation	Time	Place	Activities
Social, cultural, & aesthetic: Human behavior & resources;	Weekends are busier specially on the afternoon	Zone a & b	cultural attraction
Physical: Urban characteristics and resources ;	Summer	All zones	Sitting area, photo shooting
Environmental via natural resources;	-	-	-
Economic, which affects System of urban management.	Summer (mostly on cruises season)	Zone c mainly because it is more traditional and has more shops	Shopping
b. According to retailers:			
Factor of correlation	Time	Place	Activities
Social, cultural, & aesthetic: Human behavior & resources;	Before and after opening hours and at break times	Mostly foreign retailers in Zone c & Locals in Zone b	Chatting & meeting
Physical: Urban characteristics and resources ;	All day	Zone b & c	Sitting area
Environmental via natural resources;	-	-	-
Economic, which affects System of urban management.	9am - 10pm	New stores in Zone b & old in zone c	Selling
c. According to Tourists			
Factor of correlation	Time	Place	Activities
Social, cultural, & aesthetic: Human behaviour & resources;	Weekends are busier specially on the afternoon	Zone a & b	cultural attraction
Physical: Urban characteristics and resources ;	Summer	All zones	Sitting area, photo shooting
Environmental via natural resources;	-	-	-
Economic, that affects System of urban management.	Summer (mostly on cruises season)	Zone 3 mainly because it is more traditional and has more shops	Shopping

6. The Observation

The first and second area had highly affected the usage of the space when compared to the third area where it lacks elements, the first area we have many people in informal gatherings, around the fountain and the shaded vaults, as well as sitting on the plantation retaining walls and the windows. Observing from the analysis of the placement of the physical landscape design elements (hardscape

and softscape) in the three sections of Bab Al Bahrain Avenue were as follows:

6.1 Pavement

Several pavement types exist in all different zone and sometimes make it missy:

- **The sidewalk on Bab Al Bahrain:** 45 degrees Herringbone pavement is used in a grey color to indicate the use of it as a pedestrian path.
- **Around Planters outside Bab Al Bahrain:** Linear brick pattern surrounding the tree pots in both red and grey colors to create a boundary for the plants.
- **Pedestrian Walkway under the two pathways of Bab Al Bahrain:** small squares bricks differentiating the path under Bab Al Bahrain area.
- **Vehicles Road:** a combination of different size of bricks acting as a road for vehicles. (Figure 10)

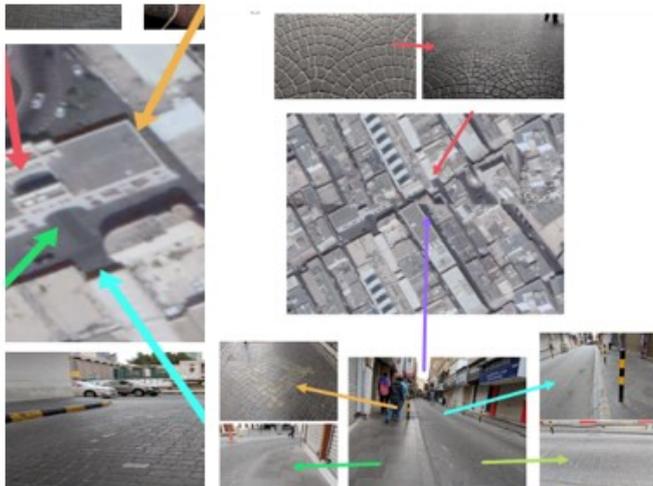


Figure 10. Pavement design and distribution (Researcher).

6.2 Water Feature

The only water feature in the area is the fountain, which is located in the first zone in the middle of the roundabout. It mainly pumps the water then recycle it to the lower pool then back again upwards. This fountain existed there for a very long time ago as shown in Figure (11). By that, it is acting as a very important node in the area for the locals and the coming tourists.

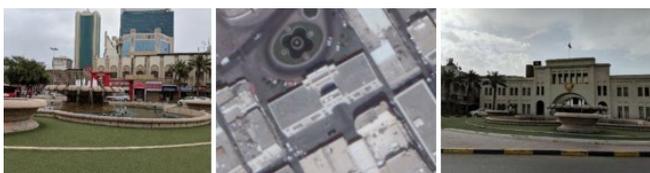


Figure 11. Water fountain (Researcher).

6.3 Lighting Elements

Many types and functions of lighting exist in this street:

- **On the ground at zone 1&2:** Wash light linear and circular have been placed to light on the edges of Bab Al Bahrain monument.
- Other ones were placed between shops in zone 2 to enlighten the shaded corridor.
- **Above the shops in zone 2:** shows the downlights placed above the stores which are sometimes replaced by lanterns.
- **Main Lighting inside zone 2:** Big downlights are directed to the edges of the middle corridor.
- **Hanging downlights in zone 2:** There are many lanterns laid on a linear pattern perpendicular to the shaded corridor. LED bulbs suspended from the roof of the two paths in Bab Al Bahrain.
- **Above the shops in zone 3:** Figure (12) shows a different type of LED or Florescent light placed within the on-store billboard to light the front of the stores and by that the narrow street.

6.4 Sitting Furniture

- Group of furniture placed together applying the concept of "BASTA" which is commonly created by Bahraini people in the neighbourhoods for setting and gathering with family or neighbours.
- Three large wooden sofas covered with pillows and a single wooden table used as "Basta".
- This setting area is placed on the right shaded corridor area (or Liwan area) of the main Bab Al Bahrain entrance with wall photo gallery could enjoy while setting in the "Basta".
- This type of landscape furniture used in this cultural street could enhance the culture and relate users with Bahrain's traditions and history.

6.5 Lightweight Structure

Many of light structures could be seen in this avenue, (figure 13:16) some has specific functions, and some are just for aesthetic or enhancing users experience, types of Lightweight structures seen are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| a. Shading structures | b. Barriers |
| c. Garbage bins | d. Shading structures |
| e. Other like sculptures | f. hanging materials |
| g. vending machines | h. Advertising panels. |

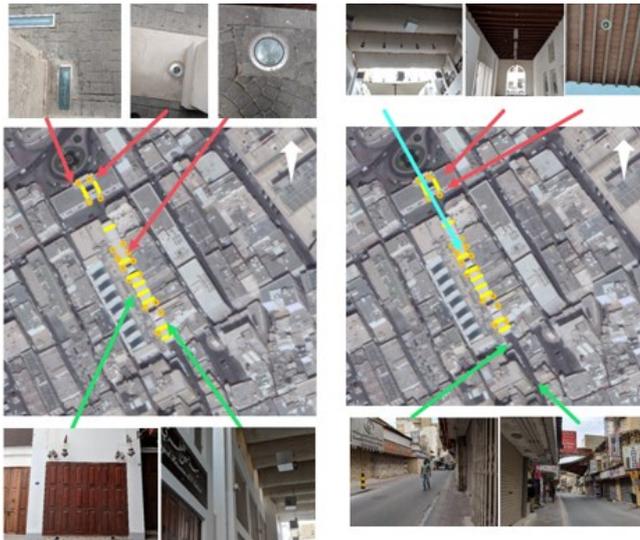


Figure 12. Lighting elements (Researcher).

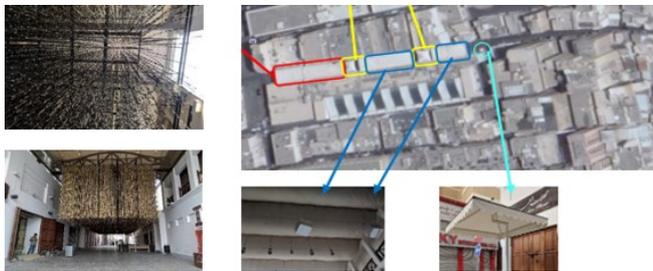


Figure 13. Shading (lightweight structure) as environmental treatment (Researcher).



Figure 14. Street sidewalks and barriers (Researcher).

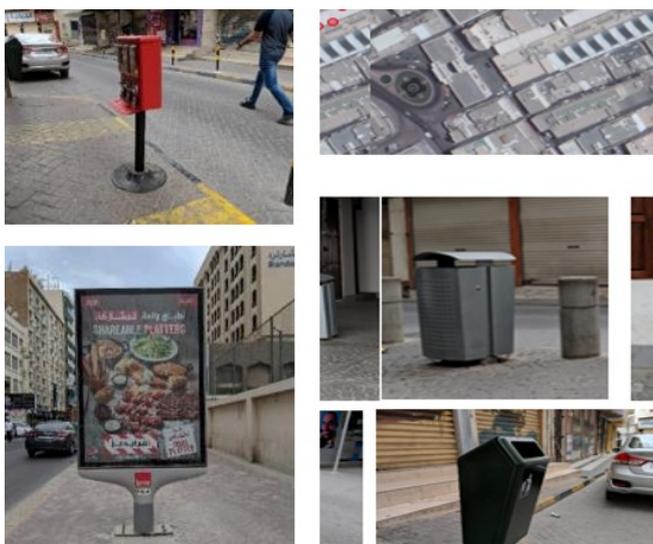


Figure 15. Signs and trash boxes (Researcher).

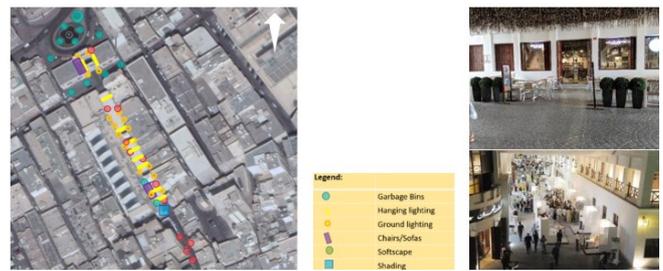


Figure 16. Services distributions according to users' needs (Researcher).

6.6 Softscape

Softscape scattered (figure 17:19) in low number and small areas as well. It reflects the miss consideration of the value of the greenery in the new renovation projects.



Figure 17. Softscape in low level within the area in front of Bab Al Bahrain building

Date Palm: tree type of palm family, cultivated for its edible sweet fruit, which has many benefits. Can reach up to about 21–23 m height.	Plumeria alba: A 2-8m evergreen shrub that has narrow elongated leaves, with large and strongly perfumed white flowers with a yellow centre.	Sphagneticola trilobata: An ornamental ground cover spreading, mat-forming perennial herb up to 30 cm in height.	Bougainvillea: A thorny ornamental vines, bushes, and trees with flower-like spring leaves near its flowers. It is a pest-free plant that can grow anywhere from 1 to 12 m.	Grass	Shrubs

Figure 18. species of the plants that are in Bab Al Bahrain Avenue.

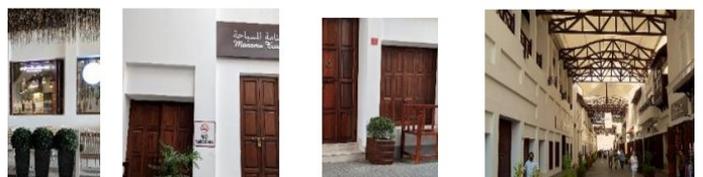


Figure 19. Softscape in low level within the area.

Green was used as a concept while designing open spaces in old time. Many types and forms in term of palms and species of shrubs were used. as main elements.

7. Findings

In Bab Al Bahrain as one of the important historic urban areas, there is a wonder of the deteriorating of the sense of Bahraini belonging and identity for users of these areas, it was found that:

- a. While screening the urban quality of the historical areas in old Manama, it was found a sort of deterioration for understanding the heritage concept for the users in that area in general. The primary indicators showed that most of the users have minor concern about the heritage values of the area. Moreover, landscape architecture elements in general and street furniture, in particular, have minor emphasis towards showing the heritage values of this area. Most of the users cannot understand the significance of this area in term of heritage value.
- b. Most of the hardscape elements following no identity to the place. Moreover, the softscape elements were weak in designing and locations in the avenue. The reasons came from the absence of identity and the belongings in street furniture design in term of concept and inspiration, which regularly comes from using elements inspired by Heritage, History, Culture and the use of landmarks. In addition, were strongly provided but most of them have weak design and lack of unity.
- c. Moreover, the identity is missing to the whole areas and small elements were found but in random distributions. While some elements were perfectly designed and enhance the user experience of the place but not following the historic characteristics of the spaces.
- d. There is a low level of understanding the know-how of dealing with the identity in streets designs (furniture) as well as controlling the impacts of the current mixed-use of lands and the disturbing activities. Consequently, the sense of belonging disappeared for residences (infection of carelessness). Moreover, the identity of Bahrain in these areas are low as well.



Figure 20. Low level of understanding of the know-how of dealing with identity (Researcher).

7 Conclusion

After studying the identity subject in the case of Bab Al Bahrain historical urban areas, it is noticed that the old design has been replaced with a modern one. Unfortunately, while designing the

street furniture, the use of the landscape architecture elements does not show the Bahraini identity or reflect the local heritage.

Therefore, the characteristics of the Antiquities and the Heritage in Bahrain should be guided, considered, employed and clarified in using the landscape architecture elements that respect the preserving of the heritage to show the identity in the area

The use of street furniture is one of the significant branches to transfer the feeling of belonging in their daily lives within heritage intimate spaces while practising the daily activities.

Landscape architecture elements contribute to the development of the country's cultural data. In addition to what the identity adds to the simplicity and significant meanings of the people who live in Bahrain. Therefore, the output of the research recommends adding elements that highlight the identity of the street furniture in Bab Al Bahrain. Moreover, the use of local plants capable of carrying the natural atmosphere and soil

Consequently, the recommended way to revive the sense of identity will occur by considering the following aspects in designing the streets and selecting its furniture elements:

- a. *physical elements*
- b. *cultural issues*
- c. *socio-economic*
- d. *historical dimension*
- e. *formational factors*
- f. *ideology and coherence*

Since Bab Al Bahrain is busy areas with social and economic activities and having a different type of users, the selection of the street furniture elements should emerge in time and shape by coming from the:

- a. *Environment (topography, climate and vegetation),*
- b. *Society (socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics),*
- c. *Artificial situation (monumental physical landmarks).*

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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