

SURVIVAL OF THE TUNISIAN MEDINA'S TRADITIONAL BAZAARS IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD

YASMINE TIRA ¹

ABSTRACT

In ancient times, bazaars were an included part of the city life; bifurcating from the city structure and reflecting each era's architectural characteristics. They are also the source of communications and trade activities. However, due to the quick changes in the cities' spatial configurations that we are living in and the mutation in the materials and methods of construction, these traditional spaces started to run a risk of possible identity loss and a risk of cultural memory alteration. However, despite the disturbing contradiction which is affecting the traditional allure of such spaces, they still reflect an undying identity. They still talk about the engraved collective memory through several architectural traits and lived experiences. Tunisian Medina is one such place that had seen its spatial configuration changing slowly affecting the bazaars initial state. The Medina is also a "particular space": it is one cradle of Islamic Arabic trait. Despite the absence of historical documents and official records, the relative conservation of Tunisian urban fabric is enough to permit serious research in the field. It is true that there are a large number of buildings in ruins that made the Medina look different from its old state. However, it is still possible to reconstitute traditional urban structures from contemporary analysis and oral testimony. Its formal configuration has undergone relatively few transformations since ancient times but it still reflect a remarkable typo-morphological continuity spanning over several centuries. What stimulated the exploration of this particular study is the resistive traits noticed in the Medina's bazaars in the modern westernized world. This article explores how the cultural continuity of traditional bazaars can be a stimulus to enhance the resistance against globalization-induced identity loss.

Keywords: Traditional Bazaars, Identity, Collective Memory, Cultural Continuity, Globalization

1. INTRODUCTION

As by the French philosopher *Jean Baudrillard*, our globalized world subjected us to the obligation of consumerism and mass production which he qualified as a violence including architecture: "*the violence of globalization also involves architecture, and hence the violent protest against it also involves the destruction of that architecture*" (Proto, 2006). In fact, being an antagonist to glabalization he points to its destiny of failure. He is seeing that it is by

¹ Graduate Student. Department of Architecture, Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey

looking at the singular, the exceptional, and the extreme that we gain profound insights into our culture. (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002)

According to him looking at what is surrounding the singular objects; objects of a modern cultural system which are carrying 'sign' value as well, can be a way to have an insight into our culture. Architectural spaces are seen as singular objects as well. *Baudrillard*, calls some architectural spaces as absolute; he considers that it is not the sense of these buildings that captivates us but the story that they can translate. For this he gave the example of the *World Trade Center*; according to him it is a location which expresses, signifies and translates the context of a society already experiencing hyperrealism (Proto, 2006). It is true that Baudrillard's concerns are mostly addressing globalization's resultant simulacra which is affecting architectural space's authenticity; simulacra which is "*an appearance that does not refer to any existing reality and which does not pretend to be considered from the reality itself*" (Lionelli, 2007). However, such fallacious appearances are brought to present architectural spaces generally due to technological developments².

Globalization's threats to architecture had been clearly stated by *John Hendrix* too who considers that architecture is on the verge of disappearing in the current global economic production. As he had explained, "*the future of the cultural role of architecture is cautionary, and changes need to be made in order for there to be hope for a future for architecture*" (Emmons et al, 2012). This means globalization is considered as a threat for cultural aspects of architecture. The question in the present research addresses is what can make the Medina of Tunis traditional bazaars be significant and singular so that it is representing a society's culture and context in our 'violent' globalized world? What can be a warranty for those traditional bazaars' cultural continuity?

2. TYPICAL EXMPLE OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY; LIFE AROUND AI-ZAYTOUNA MOSQUE IN MEDINA OF TUNIS

2.1. Urban context of the Tunisian Medina

From the 8th till the 16th century, the Medina of Tunis owed a structure of an Arabic city. In fact, its history dates from the establishment of Al-Zaytouna Mosque in 695 AD by the first coming Arabs who could force out the last Byzantines. However, it had been reclaimed that the Medina existed even before those dates but was destroyed (Santelli, 1992).

From 711 until 909 with the Aghlabids, the Medina of Tunis lived several noticeable evolutions like the reconstruction of the city walls and the redefinition of the center and principle *souks* around 'Al-Zaytouna' mosque (Santelli, 1995). Around 945, Tunis lived the sever interlude of Kharidjits with Abu Yazid, "The man with donkey", who destroyed all the mosque's surrounding bazaars. However, after 949 a Saint man named Sidi Mehrez, built again the Medina's walls and *souks* joining to them the Jewish district, 'El Hara'. Around 1147 under Almohads regency, the Medina's structure again lived changes. Thereby, there were attempts to reflect their own identity in architecture. One of the remaining buildings is 'Al-Kasbah' which was defined as the center of military and political power (Santelli, 1995). After 1228 the Hafsids regency started and lasted three and a half century. Their regency is considered as a corner stone in the urban fabric, economic and social sectors' development (Daoulati, 2009). In the middle of the 11th century, the Medina had five main gates opening during the day and closing at night: Bab-Dzira opening to the Medina's south towards the old capital Kairouan,

² As by Mostafa Eldemry, the relation between globalization and architecture has two opposing aims one implies the excessive use of new materials techniques. This idea will be explained in detail in p 8.

Bab-Behar in its east from the sea side, Bab-Carthagena from the north, Bab-Es-Sakkaine in the north too and finally Bab-Arta in the west. Connection axes between gates were according to cardinal directions and leading in their intersections to the center which is the *Zaytouna* mosque and its surrounding bazaars. However, originally the Medina has fifteen different gates (figure 1) (Santelli, 1995).

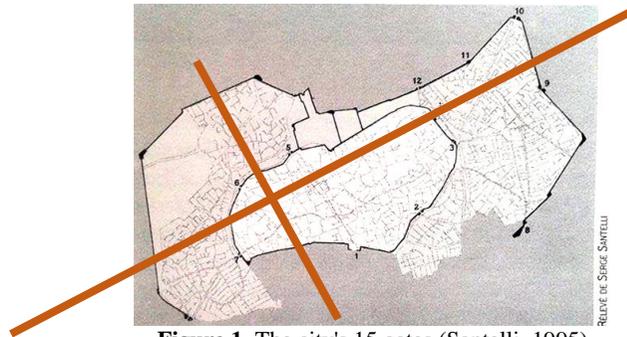


Figure 1. The city's 15 gates (Santelli, 1995)

Presently, some of them still exist and some were destroyed in favour of new urban configuration of the capital. However, city walls are not existing and the current Medina's principle gate is '*Bab-Behar*'. In fact '*Bab-Behar*' means the see gate, an emphatic term meaning, the lakeside zone. This gate is also called "Porte de France", France gate since it gives a direct access to the European new city which still exists but in its transformed shape. This monument had been an enclave in the middle of several constructions which were neighbouring its left and right sides until half of the whole gate's height as it can be seen in figure (2).



Figure 2. (a) "Porte de France", the main gate of the central Medina³ 6th of April 1909, (b) 'Bab-Behar' gate presently (Ben Abdallah, 2014)

However, after the Second World War and during the French colonization, authorities enforced a perforation in this area to make the access from the old center till the "Ville Nouvelle" easier (Moulhi, 2014). By 1931 this gate's neighbouring constructions had been removed as seen in figure 2 (a) and (b). The central Medina where some bazaars still exist, even in their transformed state, can be found in an aureole formed area surrounding the seven first gates of the old city as it can be seen in figure (3).

³ Taken from the Medina's Librarians, first library in 'Sidi Ben Arous' avenue.

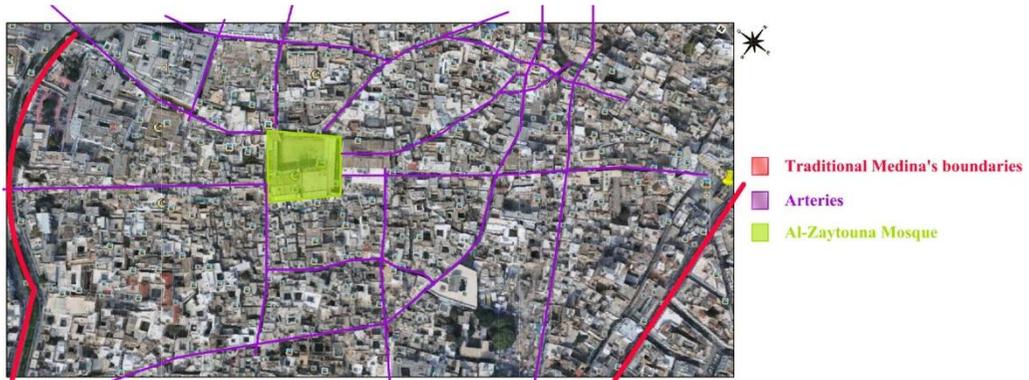


Figure 3. Immediate urban context of the chosen area, Provided by author

2.2. Functional organization and spatial configuration of the Medina's bazaars

The most important area of the Medina is its center arranged around 'Al-Zaytouna' mosque; the *souks* area. The term '*souk*' owes its origin to an Arabic term meaning 'drive' or 'go ahead'. According to Arthur Pellegrin, 37 different souk were existing in the 8th century. Their names were referring to the different existing commercial activities (Pellegrin 1952).

Most of those *souks* were established in the 13th century and as reported by Arthur Pellegrin, some craftsmen existed from the Hafside Empire (Pellegrin 1952).

The whole spatial configuration of the central Medina was in a spider form of several interconnected functions; it was common to find graves in the middle of the city centre. To say it in another way, religious functions were an integral part from the city life. Subsidiary or vital functions were all arranged around the great Al-Zaytouna mosque.

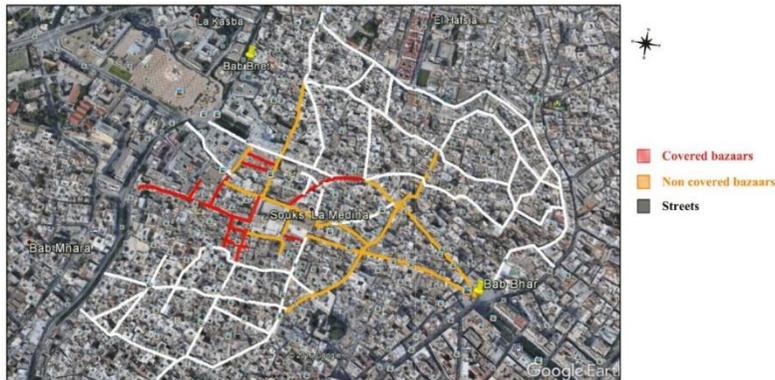


Figure 4. Spatial configuration of the central Median, provided by author after Google earth

As it can be noticed from the figure (4) most of the covered bazaars are concentrated in the center around the *Zaytouna* mosque.

The spatial configuration of the Medina's bazaars hasn't changed but the functional organization has undergone some changes. In fact, the noblest products are piled in immediate vicinity of the great mosque while less noble souks were located farther. As reported by Serge Santelli, two types of souks exist in central Medina: *'I have already distinguished between two types of souks: those which result from a spontaneous, progressive accumulation of shops along the principal thoroughfares of the Medina, and those designed and built as identical units. In the first type, shops of widely built dimensions are built along the main thoroughfares,*

occupying the urban fabric irregularity. In the second type, all the shops are of the same breadth and depth, and are built in regular fashion along the street.’ (Santelli 1992, p96)



Figure 5. (a) Librarians bazaar (Al-Kotbia Souk) in 1903, (b) Librarians bazaar (Al-Kotbia Souk) presently (a) , (b) by author on 15th of August 2016



Figure 6. (a) Al-Chachia bazaar in 1906, (b) Al-Chachia bazaar presently (a) , (b) by author on 20th of July 2016

From progressively accumulated spontaneous shops the example of Al-Kotbia souk (Librarians bazaar, figure 5) can be given. As designed and built units from the souks the examples of ‘Al-Chachia’ souk (figure 6).

2.3. The ‘Beylik’ area

The ‘Beylik’ area is located in the 1/3 part of the axe passing from “Al-Kasbah” and reaching “Bab-Bhar”, around “Al-Zaytouna” mosque and where most of the covered streets are concentrated. It has been named ‘Beylik’ referring to the Turkish meaning of governance. The area’s location is considered as a sensitive place since it is joined to the current prime ministry’s building, “Dar-Al bey”. This last has kept its function from the time of its establishment by the first Mouradit Beys in the 16th century (Abdelkafi, 1989) and its border is known as “AL-Kasbah” which was established by Almohads from the middle of the 12th century. This regency palace was considered as a separate small city because of its important size; 1/14th from the whole Medina’s area at that time (Pellgrin, 1952).

The ‘Beylik’ area had been mostly defined under Yusuf Dey’s regency, between 1610 and 1637. In fact, one of the most important changes in the Medina under Yusuf Dey’s power is that he tried to use Andalusians’ knowledge in crafts and urbanism. They brought ornamented ceramics and excelled in plaster decorations too. Many of them still exist till nowadays especially in Yusuf Dey’s mosque which developed the urban organization of all its surrounding area. Thereby, it is around this monument that bazaars existing presently were established. In fact, it is during this period that the Medina of Tunis saw the establishment of its first slaves’ bazaar, ‘Al-Berka’, which is still existing until presently but in a changed function; it became the most important area of the Medina’s bazaars (MEDNETA, 2014) subjected to goldsmithing and auction sales.

This *souk* is close to ‘Souk El-Nse’ (women bazaar) which reflects the culture of privacy and forbiddance of women’s going out. Those thoughts started to change just after ‘Al Hara’ the Jewish district establishment. Established after 1610, under Yusuf Dey, ‘Al-Berka’ bazaar is situated in the the Medina’s heart.

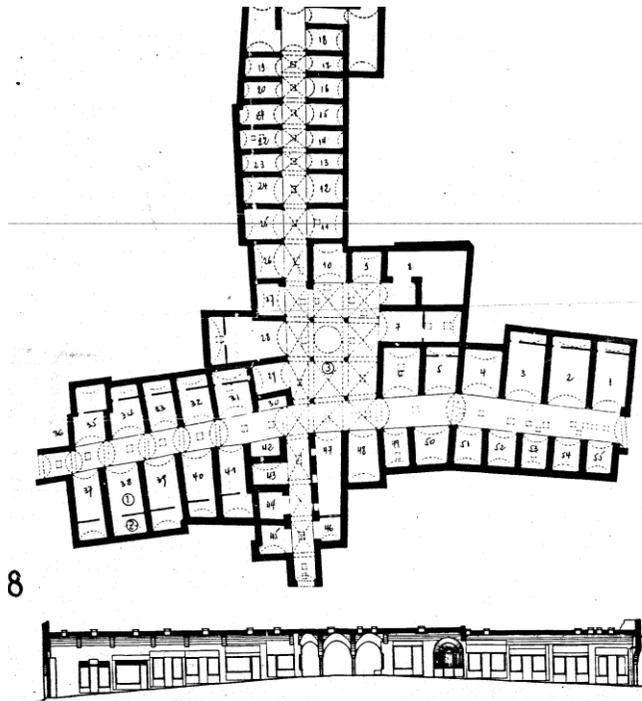


Figure 7. (a) “Al-Berka” bazaar in the end of the 19th century, (b) “Al-Berka” bazaar presently (a) <http://www.delcampe.net/>, (b) provided by 1st author 16th of July 2016

The bazaar still exists but in its transformed function. In fact, by 1846, a decree about the slavery abolition had been announced by Ahmed Bey the first. After that time, ‘Al-Berka’ was transformed to a jewelry market and an auction place. Its spatial configuration remained the same until presently; only its eastern entrance opening to the ‘Kasbah’ had been renovated by ‘ASM’ after 2000 (Moulhi, 2012).

This *souk* is a crossroads of four streets. Intersection between them forms an area divided by three pathways marked by two rows of columns. Those columns are supporting the vaults covering the whole space (figure 8).

As said by Ahmed Saadaoui, “*the bazaar of such commerce is always ornamented with human products since unsatisfied owners of niggers decide to resell them easily*” (Saadaoui, 2010). It was an active bazaar where commerce was developed. Although it was on a time when 10% from the Medina’s population were Jewish and Christians (Abdelkafi, 1989), they were not allowed to own slaves. Owning slaves was allowed to Muslims only.



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Figure 8. Plan and section of “Al-Berka” bazaar established in 1987
Provided by ASM (Association of safeguarding of the Medina)

3. THE MEDINA’S DISAPPEARED FUNCTIONS: SYMBOLS OF ENGRAVED CULTURAL MEMORY

Despite the architectural diversity of its surroundings, the Medina of Tunis could keep its architectural multicultural reality swaying between Andalusian, Roman, Arab and Ottoman architectural traits. And what is more alluring in the Tunisian Bazaar’s case is that architectural traces, people’s testimony and their lived memory are both reflecting an undying collective memory; significant for Tunisian people and appealing for foreigner visitors.

3.1. Globalization’s effects on the traditional bazaars changes

Ibrahim Mostafa Eldemery, reclaimed that globalization implies the presence of two main forces; one force encourages safeguarding and focuses on establishing indigenous traditions, forms, and technologies. A form which advocates historical continuity, cultural diversity and preservation of identity. The other force promotes invention and dissemination of new forms using new technologies and materials in response to changing functional needs and responsibilities.

Globalization’s threats to traditional bazaars’ cultural continuity can be highlighted through several traits; the most important in the present case is the immigration from bazaars to shopping malls and commercial companies and the heavy traffic in old city centers. This point had been reclaimed by Marzieh Azadarmaki:

‘The invasion and succession in cities is a phenomenon that affects the functions of the bazaar. Heavy traffic in downtown areas, air pollution in cities, the transformation of the structure of economic activities, the flow of immigrants on the market, the transfer of certain functions of

the bazaar to commercial companies and etc all this has created problems for the bazaar' (Marzieh Azadarmaki 2012, p, 1).

The shift from a culture of bazaars to a culture of modern shopping malls should not be neglected. It is true that the appearance of shopping malls passed through several evolutions of trading from antiquity until presently, however this cannot deny the fact that globalization can be sometimes seen as a pulse to sustain traditional bazaar's culture. As explained by Francesco Siravo: "*While we proclaim the obsolescence of the past and the need for change, we continue to recognize the ever-shrinking and increasingly besieged old centers as the only truly presentable parts of our cities*" (Siravo, 2009).

3.2. The Medina of Tunis between social remembering and cultural continuity

As said by Ibrahim Mostafa Eldemery "*place exists not only physically but also in peoples' minds as memories. The identity becomes interesting when it brings about a certain experience, evoking associations or memories*" (Eldemery 2009, p, 5).

The history of creating a shared heritage and thinking about memory dates from antiquity with Plato and Aristotle; studies conducted around cultural memory takes their origins from Maurice Halbwachs's sociological studies on *mémoire collective* and Aby Warburg's art-historical interest in European memory of images. (Astrid Erll, 2011) Then by 1980's 'new cultural memory studies' emerged with Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* and Aleida and Jan Assman with their idea of 'cultural memory' (Erll, 2011). Astrid Erll, reported that Maurice Halbwachs theory of collective memory implies that the most personal memory is considered as a collective phenomenon dependent on social structures.

And as described by Pierre Nora, social remembering is an included part from sites of memory; it is a memory of buildings and monuments; an intergenerational memory reflective of a society's heritage (Erll, 2011). This memory based on recall's actions means that there is a remembering act. And as by Astrid Erll, "*A central function of remembering the past within the framework of collective memory is identity formation*" (Erll, 2011). This means that the act of remembering within the framework of urban space corresponds to self-image and interests of the group to which we take part. In other words, a particular type of connection is existing between identity and architectural cultural heritage.

The Medina of Tunis is one such space that had seen its memory engraved in Tunisians' minds. Several habits and small trading activities existed behind the Medina's city walls only; it is at the same time through people's testimony and some architectural traces that collective memory traits could be detected.

One of the most detailed descriptions of traditional disappeared habits and small trading activities is the Tunisian poet's, Chadly Ben Abdallah, notes (Ben Abdallah, 1977). According to his descriptions several authentic habits existed in old times like 'Al-Guerbeji' (figure 9 (a)) who is a water seller who used to hang around the Medina's streets calling habitants. His name is taken from 'Guerba' which is the container of water that used to be transported from one home to another. Beside this function that totally disappeared in the presently modern world, Chadly Ben Abdallah talked about the 'black gold' seller; the petrol seller who was distinguished by his typical outfit 'Al-Kadroum' (figure 9(b)).



Figure 9. (a) Al-Guerbeji, water seller (Ben Abdallah, 1977, p.17), (b) Petroleum seller and his 'Kadroum' (Ben Abdallah, 1977, p.20)

The Medina's authentic traditionalism is still resisting; it is still reflected upon through recall actions which are according to Astrid Erl, 'an identity formation process' (Erl, 2011). As claimed by Ibrahim Mostafa Eldemery; place exists spiritually in peoples' minds as memories. He also thinks that identity becomes interesting when it is related to experience and evoking memories (Eldemery 2009).

However, such architectural traces also be found in 'Al-Berka' souk too. In fact in 1846, slavery abolition had been announced under Ahmed the first. Thus, the bazaar was transformed to goldsmith trade place. Even themarks of ropes with which they used to tie up slaves still exist in the columns. The culture of enclosure and privacy in goldsmith bazaars is also still existing; 'Al-Berka' in the only *souk* having four main gates that close at night and open during the day.



Figure 10. (a) Left: Central area of the covered bazaar, (b) right: Ropes' marks in columns, provided by 1st author on 20th of July 2016

The memory of the slave market Al-Berka, is a memory of an anchor point in Tunisians' history; the slavery's abolition. No conflict existed between presently shopkeepers, current

users of the city and slaves. But keeping slavery traits in the bazaar's space is a kind of continuous celebration of a community's freedom. It can be opined that those kept traces witness a compassion with the slaves' lived memory. The Medina of Tunis bazaars embrace two different remembering stimuli; the first are remembered experiences which disappeared and had been shared through people's testimony, like the water and petroleum sellers. The second remembering stimuli is existing in architectural traces of Al-Berka (the slave market previously). It is true that two remembering shapes are stimulating different collective thoughts; one is fostering a nostalgia feeling, the other is nourishing compassion and celebration of a turning point in the Tunisians' history.

The changes to which the Medina of Tunis was subjected to during the French protectorate had been of a great influence on the mentioned engraved memory too. (Abdelkafi, 1989). They subjected the new city to a French way of life. This fact enhanced the Tunisians' attachment to their religion, national and cultural identity. In short, the central Medina became the symbol of the resistance against colonial attempt.

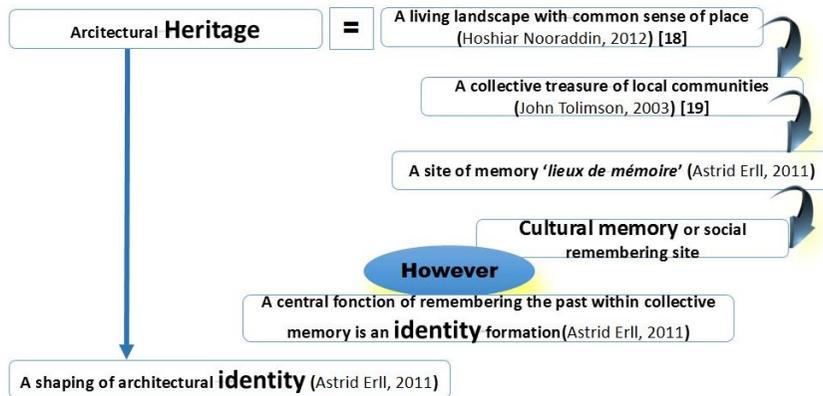


Figure 11. The tripartite relation heritage, identity, cultural memory's conceptual framing
 Provided by author

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is true that the Medina of Tunis is running a risk of mutation which could affect the bazaars' identity. However, bazaars are still reflecting upon resistive traits against globalization. This fact is resulting from the Medina's being a site of memory or like Pierre Nora calls it, a significant 'lieux de mémoire'. It is a site of social remembering, as Astrid Erll qualifies it, a site of 'intergenerational memory' reflective of a society's heritage (Erll, 2011).

The medina's history looks like a mirror of collective memory; it is there where the Ottoman Empire started to build a new urbanity following a mixture between Hafsid architectural principles and Ottoman ones. It is also there where the influential French colonization started and finished.

Despite the threats, several bazaars like 'Al-Berka' and several surrounding streets still represent a collective treasure of local Tunisian community; an engraved social memory framing the bazaars' identity, an identity vasilating between nostalgia and compassion.

Survival of the Medina's bazaars in the globalized world can be translated through the tripartite relation heritage, identity and collective memory. As it's summerized in the (figure 10), social remembering of architectural heritage represents a shaping of architectural identity. This

implies that lived experience of the bazaar's space is an architectural identity shaping. What can be deduced is that although it is living risks of identity change resulting from globalization, just the social remembering act of the Medina's hub of *souks* represents a shaping of such spaces' architectural identity.

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