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The Emergence of Modern Design Discourse in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR)

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Abstract | This study will offer an overview of applied discourses of design in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), including Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. These countries have been known for their pioneering statuses, creative engagements, and influence on shaping, resourcing, and sustaining the emergent project of modernity in the region since the 1940s. Studies of the contemporary discourse of design for these countries are acknowledged as underdeveloped, with extremely limited studies addressing its context and practices. This study will survey identical phases throughout the contemporary history of these countries, observing major stages that transformed the societies within them into sovereign territories and national states after World War II. The study will explore and critically review key historical themes in the regional socio-political rhetoric since the 1950s, specifically those associated with and involved in shaping the emergence of design as a modern discourse in the region.

KEYWORDS | DESIGN IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, EMERGING DESIGN, MODERNITY, DEVELOPMENT, INDUSTRIALISATION

1. Introduction

Studies in the socio-politics of development culminated in design discourse as a process at the micro-level to enhance technology transformation and industrialisation to achieve economic growth. This context emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean region after World War II, when development was promoted as a process targeted at fulfilling basic human needs. The United States clearly articulated these principles through a program President Harry S. Truman presented in his inaugural speech on the 20th of January 1949:

“Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”¹

Based on the United States' extensive engagement with industrialisation, this program attempted to promote society's economic growth over the previous European colonisation era (Dorrestijn, 2013). According to Mignolo (2011), this era was shaped “*not by appropriating land, but by managing finances and natural resources through the project of development and modernization*” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 32).

The politics of modernity and development directed the political rhetoric of developing countries such as the EMR during the vibrant era of the 1960s-80s and was reflected in the design context progressing and linking with development strategies. It endorsed the vital need for developing countries to apply design knowledge and practices in their strategic development plans. This is presented as a unique attempt in the design history of the developing countries, and the region, which was acknowledged at the end of the 1970s when the Ahmedabad Declaration was articulated as a framework of interlinked design discourses and socio-political practices for the benefit of developing countries (Author, 2013). The postcolonial regimes in the region embedded ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ as synonymous terms in the political, economic and social rhetoric from the 1960s. A number of resolutions since then guided and demonstrated the context and pedagogy of design education applied models in the region. These can be classified into three different models:

1. Applied Arts Designers (AAD) sustains the Art and Craft and the Bauhaus methods and practices in design pedagogy. AAD dominates education programmes at the higher education institutions and the local professionally accredited institutions in Egypt specifically.²
2. Design as a discipline in the institutions of Fine Arts, seen predominantly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. This model continues to amalgamate design knowledge based on aesthetics and local traditional context and practices. This context applied also on the design professional practices in these countries.

¹ http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/truman.asp (Retrieved 30th Nov. 2019)

² Applied Arts Designers Syndicate represent the professional organisation of graduated from applied arts higher institutions in Egypt <http://www.eds.org.eg/portal/> (the website in Arabic)

3. A model of design programs established within schools of architecture since the 2000s, responding to marketing demands to link design as a profession with the architecture. Such demands promoted by the private higher institutions spread rapidly in Jordan, Lebanon, and other regional countries. It is similar to model (2) concerning pedagogy and the practice of treating design as a fine arts discipline.

The dominant geopolitical instability and broader conflicts from external as well as internal powers, seen extensively in the current chaos overtaking regional societies such as Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, can be seen in numerous cultural manifestations. Those conflicts holding design disciplines moving outside the dominant ‘early modernity’ emerged context and practices, as can be seen in other cultural creative practices such as literature, poetry, fiction, theatre, cinema, art, architecture, sport, media, and communication. This study will explore and critically review key historical themes associated with the emergence of design as a modern discourse in the region since the 1950s.

2. Design as a Manifestation of Modernity

A sense of hope was revived in the region to liberate people from the long-term Ottoman hegemony when, at the turn of 20th Century, Western modernity emerged in the region with the introduction of Western progressions in science, technology, art, and social systems. The slow emergence of direct and indirect communication channels between Arabs – the regional majority – and Europe extended the number of European books, periodicals, and newspapers available to Arabic readers. Moreover, new opportunities were available for regional students to continue their studies at European Institutions. As a result, many waves of migrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine departed their lands and went to the ‘new world.’ The expansion of communication with Europe and America supported efforts by regional writers to engage in writing and to *“express in Arabic their consciousness of themselves and their place in the modern world”* (Hourani, 2005, p. 503). Despite this, religion continued to fuel reactions against practices rooted in Western modernity, and movements in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq *“acquire[d] the strength to confront Europe and become part of the modern world”* (Hourani, 2005, p. 503). A challenging debate developed between traditional Islamic thinkers and the newly-educated social leaders with regard to the alignment of modernity with Islamic principles in education, socio-cultural practices, and economics, based on the fact that *“modernity is Western, and imperial powers have imposed the Western ways of thought associated with it on the Middle East”* (Helfont, 2015).

Simultaneously, this era addressed the rise of nationalist political beliefs that guided civil leaders to seek European support in their attempts to detach from the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire. (Mackintosh-S, 2019) Moreover, geopolitical and economic factors led the European colonial powers that controlled parts of the regional territories after the end of WWI to arbitrarily draw borders, dividing the region into new states. These borders represent the *“colonial power seeks to design a world that accords with its desire for power”*

and control." (Kiem 2017, p. 2) Also, those boarders have remained a major source of conflict and instability in the region in present times. European attitudes promoted the self-determination of national entities and created a new Arabic political identity that justified their mandate agreements with the local social groups. The colonial mandates were formally granted in 1922, when the League of Nations gave Britain sovereignty over Iraq and Palestine, and France sovereignty over Syria and Lebanon (Jackson, 2017) (Mackintosh-S, 2019). Support for the modernisation of these new territories and transforming their isolation into part of the new world was one of the major arguments justified and legalised Western domination in the region (Kingston, 2002).

European mandate powers supported the formation of states in the region and shaped their socio-political order. Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon then further provided consultation, finance, and technical expertise covering broader aspects relating to forming governments, managing the social system services, and planning for infrastructure projects targeting the major cities of Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Amman. Urbanising projects based on modern architecture was introduced in those cities and first seen in government administration buildings and transportation networks and stations. These buildings were prioritised to support the creation and expansion of modern social system services relating to health, education, housing, and social security. The era culminated with the introduction of early modern material objects in parts of those regional capitals such as railway stations (Figure 1), hospitals, schools, higher education institutions. These buildings demonstrated early attempts to introduce modern architecture in addition to their furnishing and accessories. While many of these early examples were designed by European architects or imported from Europe, they were promoted as modern lifestyle objects to enhance people's interaction with them. Examples of other modern lifestyle objects introduced at this time include domestic furniture, home appliances, transportation vehicles, and electric appliances.

These buildings and objects served as inspirational elements for many handcraft practitioners to develop their products, style, materials, and production techniques. These modern material objects are reflected later in many socio-cultural manifestations and supported the regional transformation toward the modern European lifestyle. This was seen not only in private houses, but also a wave of modern social spaces such as cafés, social clubs, cinemas, public libraries, art galleries, museums, theatres, and public services offices. Access to these services gradually expanded outside the elite social groups and into the newly flourishing middle-class consisting primarily of public service workers. In fact, this vibrant social group supported the expansion of design and production processes to fulfil their demands for modern housing, domestic furniture, entertainment, publications, and many other modern lifestyle services.



Figure 1. Baghdad Central Station is the main train station in Baghdad which links the Iraqi domestic railway network. The station was designed by J M Wilson and built by the British in 1948. <http://ruyafoundation.org>

The relatively stable socio-political order in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan at that time contributed to socio-cultural progression beyond the basic human necessities. For example, the Iraqi government created the Iraqi Development Board (IDB) in the late 1940s, aiming to utilise the expansion revenue from the oil export industry to finance extensive infrastructure and urban planning projects. This covered the entire country and presents a unique example of enhanced progression toward modernising the country. Baghdad also emerged as a modern capital city during the 1950s. The IDB commissioned elite European and American architecture, in addition to pioneering Iraqi architects to design modern architecture for

public buildings, university campuses, national theatres, sports stadiums, and many other buildings (figure 2).³



Figure 2. Louis McMillen, Umberto Varnini, Walter Gropius, and Hisham Munir (an Iraqi architect) 1967, The University of Baghdad campus. Source: Harkness, John C. The Walter Gropius Archive..., P237). In <http://postwarcampus.wordpress.ncsu.edu>

Since World War II, the EMR has been considered a pioneer in the successful implementation of modernity through applied strategies and programs of development, considering that,

“post-colonial societies... are said to be strong, in that people rely on social networks rather than the state to meet their needs... they rely on tribes or villages notables. As

³ The Iraqi Development Board (IDB) commissioned Le Corbusier to build a mammoth sports stadium, Walter Gropius from the Architects Collaborative to design Baghdad University, Alvar Aalto to design a civic center, and Frank Lloyd Wright to design an opera house. Additionally, the pioneer Iraqi architects Mohamed Makiya, Kahtan Awni, and Rifat Chadirji were offered the opportunity to design many public buildings.

a result, it has been difficult for these states to carry out their policies and they have often had to resort to violence (Helfton, 2015).

That era of political stability ended dramatically, fuelled by military coups initiated in the early 1950s in Egypt and then Syria, and in the late 1950s in Iraq. These coups introduced political instability driven by age-old problems, both internal and external, leading to the dynamic and meta-complex problems seen in the region today. When the project of modernity was framed by these problems—empowered by a collective identity—the situation again fostered religious contradictions and political fundamentalism began to flourish. Intellectual modernity as a structure and concept progressed under complicated circumstances that were widespread in the region. According to Tagharobi (2016),

"there were three waves that demonstrated transformation toward modernity in the Middle Eastern region: Modern literary forms were primarily seen as a way of supporting social and political reform... Emphasis on domestic sources of thoughts and development under leftist influences, when the will to change was manifesting through nativism... The last wave of intellectuals see the path toward change in analysing their own societies through modern critical disciplines and by adopting historical perspectives towards their contemporary issues." (Tagharobi, 2016).

Historically, design knowledge was applied to promote the production of handcrafts, which was treated as an important sector for its ability to support regional economic growth.⁴ At the same time, design practices were applied as a secondary layer to the production of quality crafts ready for export to international markets, specifically in Europe. In this context, the design discourse promoted the *"organic relationship that the crafts-person had with his works, and with his culture"* (Author, 2005, p. 106). Overall, attempts to introduce modern design discourse in the region, as well as in many other developing countries, reflected the specific contexts and practices of design in these countries. Craft-oriented societies and social practices dominated the making process in countries like Egypt and Syria, for example, (Farroqhi, 2012) which exemplified the design context following art and craft movements. The stagnation and disempowerment of the modern design discourse in the region represents a resolution from the long-standing promotion of traditional contexts of design and its association with artistic and artesian practices. These practices dominated and continue to be the guiding context and practices behind design education in the majority of design education institutions established in the region since 1950s.⁵

⁴ In Jordan, the US 'Point Four' program focused on technically and financially supporting local craftsmen through design consultation, grants, and services, with a local community development foundation established for this purpose. The Walter Dorwin Teague Association in America studied the Jordanian handicrafts industry in the 1950s, and the study later led to a strategic plan to develop a number of NGOs to support craft sector production, training, and marketing in Jordan. (Author, 2005)

⁵ For example, the Faculty of Applied Arts in Egypt, established as a vocational school in 1839. In 1909 the school-initiated craft and art as a new discipline. In 1932, the School of Vocational Education changed its name to the School of Arts. In 1942 it was referred to as the Higher School of Applied Arts.

3. Politicisation Modernity

The socio-political order has undergone dramatic transformations since the 1950s, seen in the military coups over monarchies in Egypt in 1952 and in Iraq in 1958, while Syria has faced many military coups since its liberation from the French in the late 1940s. The rhetoric of modernisation and development has been extensively promoted by the new regional post-colonial military regimes since the 1960s, using "*the military and their methods of discipline and indoctrination*" (Mitchell, 1988, p. XI). The socialist political discourse in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq utilised "*development... led by an alliance of the military and the working class*" (Kadri, 2016, p. 12) to achieve modernisation, which was defined by Mignolo (2011) as

"a want to have a comfortable, middle-class existence with all the amenities and attributes that go along with it—clean water, indoor plumbing, electricity, telecommunications, infrastructure, personal safety, rule of law, stable politics and a good education system." (Mignolo, 2011, p. 52)

This was further inspired by political debate that the developing countries initiated against colonialism or neo-colonialism, articulated through the principles of the 'non-aligned' political movement established after the Bandung Conference in 1955 in Indonesia, where new independent Asian, African, and Latin American countries agreed to cooperate economically and culturally to oppose neo-colonialism. The movement's first meeting was later in 1961, where developing countries "*made visible the hidden face of modernity, that is, coloniality*" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 47). The instability of international political discourse during the 1960s, affected by Cold War tensions, empowered developing countries to search for alternative solutions to strengthen their development strategies (Trentin, 2009).

Industrialisation was endorsed by many of those countries as the fundamental objective in their progression to achieve modernisation and development. Industrialisation was considered the path to transforming economic growth from agricultural-led into industrial-led, to fulfil the modern lifestyle of materialisation while at the same time responding to the politics of self-efficiency.

In this political context, design discourses were promoted in association with their social context,

"beginning with the arts and crafts movement in Britain in the 19th century... social engagement was a main driver of design theory from the time of the emergence of the profession of designer in the context of industrialization" (Dorrestijn, 2013, p. 47),

and utilised as essential creative practices serving industrial manufacturing production. Furthermore, this aligned with previous local and international attempts seen in design theory, design education, and professional design practices during the 1960s–70s that stimulated design discourses' core function in social and economic growth through

In 1975 the school partnered with the University of Helwan (a state-funded university) to become the Faculty of Applied Arts. It is now known as the mother of all Applied Arts faculties in Egypt.

industrialisation (Gwendolyn, 2017) (Papanek, 2018). Debates concerning the modern role of design practices have continued in the political rhetoric in developing countries since the 1970s, responding to the expanding demands for materialisation and its signifying characteristics in the empowerment of social groups. According to Bonsiepe (2006) “*the excluded, the discriminated, and economically less favoured groups as they are called in economist jargon... [amount] to the majority of the population of this planet.*” (Bonsiepe 2006, p. 30) This is applicable to the scale and types of technological knowledge transforming developing countries, supporting the need for design practices to engage and effectively utilise these new technologies. However, new technologies are divided into hardware and software; that is, “*technology implies hardware and software—and software implies the notion of design as a facet of technology that cannot be dispensed with*” (Bonsiepe, 2006, p. 32). This definition supports the role of design in industrialisation, as well as its role in socio-political capacities to create a path toward the democratisation of society and to “*provide for a broad sector of the population to have access to the world of products and services in the different areas of everyday life: health, housing, education, sports, transport, work, to mention only a few*” (Bonsiepe, 2006, p. 32).

Responding to late 1970s political debate, the ‘*Design for Development*’ movement was introduced politically when the ‘*Ahmedabad Declaration*’ was issued in India in 1979. The declaration resulted from joint efforts between the United Nation Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), and the Indian National Institute of Design (NID) (Figure 3). The document explicitly proposed the engagement of design with development as the right way to approach design in developing countries. Additionally, the document marked the “*first time that industrial design had been suggested as worthy of inclusion in national development plans*” (Coward, 2005, p. 545). The declaration’s major principles presented the following points regarding design:

- Design is “*a powerful force capable of improving the quality of life of developing countries’ populations.*
- *Designers should understand and recognize the values of their societies and reflect them in their designs.*
- *Designers should utilize both local, traditional resources and modern science and technology.*
- *Designers should collaborate with one another to ensure that collective identities are preserved and the priorities of these collective identities are met”* (Ahmedabad Declaration, 1979).

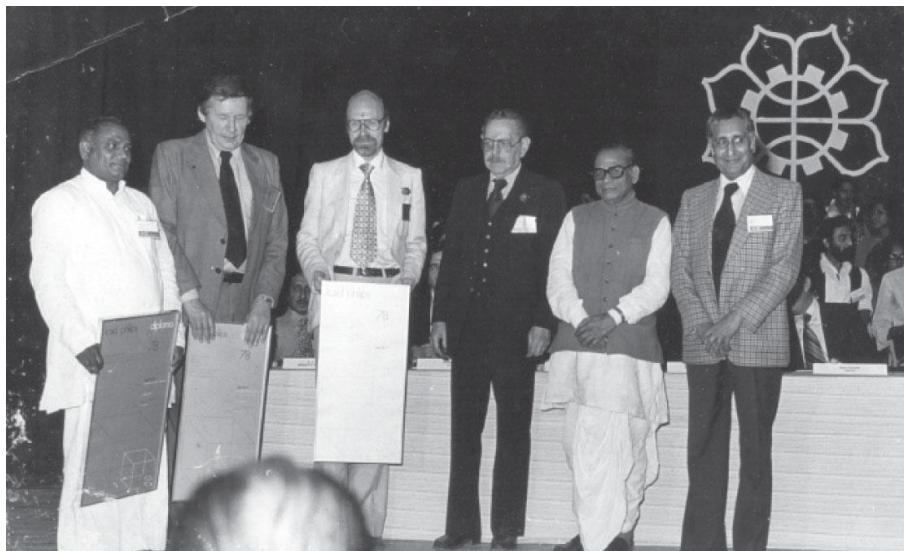


Figure 3. Signing the Ahmedabad Declaration at the NID, India.

India was characterised as one of the 'non-aligned' movement's founders and leadership countries, as was Egypt at that time, and this fact was addressed as the political ideology that supported the establishment of the 'Ahmedabad Declaration.' As Margolin (2006) argued, "*it was in the spirit of an aggressive call by the developing countries to restructure the world economy that the Ahmedabad conference was held and the declaration was produced*" (Margolin, 2006). However, the 'Ahmedabad Declaration' continues to maintain its position as the only official document at the international level that articulates the strategic role of design discourse and practices in supporting the development of developing countries. Additionally, the document articulates the spirit of modernity in the political context by shifting design from its local and traditional context toward enhancements in the modern context. Iraq was the only EMR country to sign this document and embedded its principles throughout design education and professional design practices specifically in the discipline of industrial design. This addressed the Iraqi political demands toward industrialisation.⁶ As Parsons (2016) writes:

"What the Modernists sought, therefore, was not to turn design into 'fine art' or tradition-based craft, but to blend the best elements of traditional craftsmanship,

⁶ Responding to the declaration principles the Iraqi government, with technical support from the United National Industrial Development Organization-UNIDO, established a centre to support local industrial manufacturing corporations through research and development. The Specialized Institute for Engineering Industries-SIEI was established in the late 1970s with objectives to utilise industrial design knowledge and practices in the process of developing Iraqi manufactured products

modem mass production and fine art into a new way of producing material goods that made sense in the social context of contemporary life" (Parsons, 2016, p. 46).

This context enforced the nature of interdisciplinary knowledge and practice that culminated in the design process in terms of innovation, visualisation, production, promotion, and marketing. These practices identified design as a micro-element within industrialisation and production processes; however, the nature of design practices overwhelmingly shows that design plays a macro role in efforts to achieve human development goals, especially in developing countries. Such arguments support the value many governments placed on addressing and elevating design as a strategic factor in their development planning. New waves of policies—the 'design policy' or 'design and innovation policy'—utilised design discourse as a core for strategies toward implementing and promoting the country. Additionally, the power of design has been identified in relation to national economic growth. Accordingly, further new waves of design policies have been issued in countries such as Estonia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and many more. The transformation of design discourse emergent in developing countries can be visualised as seen in Figure 4.

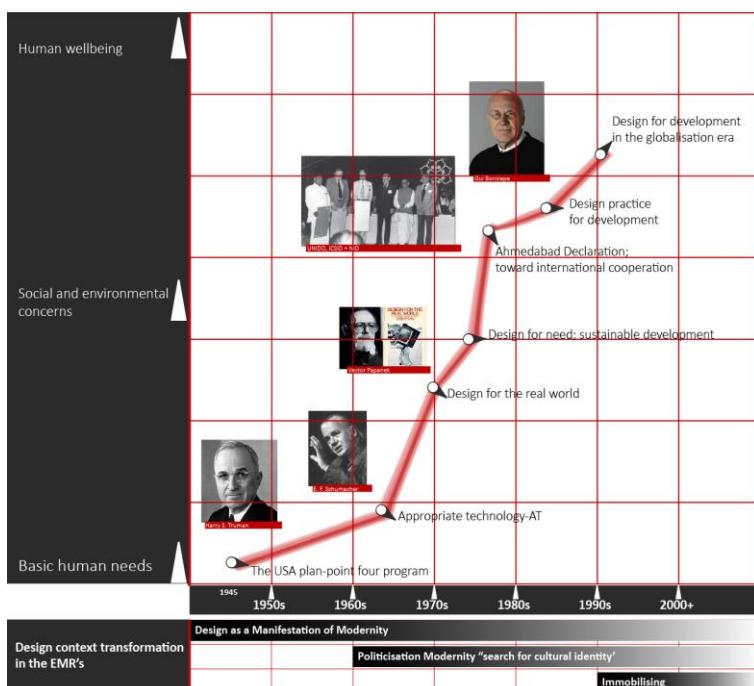


Figure 4. Mapping design discourse emergence and transformation in developing countries and the EMR's

4. Conclusion

Since the 1950s, revitalising capital and other major cities in the EMR has been demonstrated through modern infrastructure, urban planning, architecture, and broader expansion of available materialisations to provide a better quality of life for the region. Design practices and services have been creatively utilised to enhance regional societies' transformation and achieve development. This process was initially guided by the mandate system and later by the postcolonial national governments. The process influenced the emerging design context to enhance economic growth and development; as seen in strategic infrastructure planning by both the development board in Iraq (IDB) and later in Jordan (JDB) initiated during the 1950s-60s and also by sustained industrial manufacturing capabilities in Egypt and Syria, also promoted Lebanon as the regional destination for finance and tourism. The process benefited from the relatively stable socio-political systems until the 1950s. The state-supported postgraduate scholarships of that period must be strongly acknowledged for the ways they allowed local architects, artists, and applied artists to study abroad, who after graduation became the pioneering figures of foundation programs in architecture, art, and design at the higher education institutions. These programs then expanded to broader disciplines in architecture, communication, ornamentation, fine arts, etc. in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq and the establishment of associations to support and promote local handcrafts sectors in Jordan.

The principles of modernisation and development have been re-contextualised since the 1960s by developing countries and articulated through the political principles of the non-allied movement, which later promoted self-efficiency policies. These factors imposed new nationalisation military orders in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, actioned to face the hegemony of neo-colonialism over the region's natural resources. The 1970s-80s experienced extensive promotion of economic growth based on industrialisation, which was represented as the core principle to achieve modernisation and development. The milieu offered the emerging design context and practices new scope, aimed at developing local visual aesthetics and reflecting creative adaptation between modern aesthetics and the regional heritage visual culture, articulated by Akkach (2014) "*The main preoccupation of this trend has been the idea of difference. The search for cultural identity in all spheres of thought and practice has been essentially a search for difference*" (Akkach 2014, p. 61). Creative application of this adaptation can be seen in architecture, communication media, and many other creative works (Figure 5). Moreover, the design studies progression toward utilising design practices to achieve innovation through strategic national policies⁷ inspired the creation of the 'Ahmedabad Declaration' of 'Design for Development,' which transformed the role of design

⁷ Examples of the historical discourse surrounding this development can be found in Britain, through events such as the conference of 'Design Policy' organised by the Department of Design Research-Royal College of Art, the Design Council, and the Design Research Society in 1982

into a strategic core element of development planning. This was specifically enforced through design education in Iraq for example. (Author, 2019).



Figure 5. Rifat Chadirji, Iraq; Regionalized International Architecture 1952-1978
<http://alchetron.com/Rifat-Chadirji#->

Derived from international experiences around the significance of design knowledge and practices in branding, new events continue to emerge in the regional capital cities that target the strategic role of design to support local innovation and creativity. Examples include ‘Design Weeks’ in Beirut, Amman, and Cairo.⁸ Unfortunately, outside these new events, the design discourses in the region continue to suffer from deep immobilisation since 1980s due to socio-political instability, and the dominant conflict limits expansion in the region.

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Author 1 add an author bio that describes research interests and main achievements in a maximum of 40 words. [LEAVE BLANK UNTIL FINAL ACCEPTANCE] [_DCs Author Bio and Acknowledgements]