The Role of Third Place in Revitalizing the Interior Spaces of the Academic Libraries through the Concept of Identity.

دور الفضاء الثالث في أحياء الفضاءات الداخلية للمكتبات الأكاديمية عبر توظيف مفهوم الهوية.

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A B S T R A C T

With the rapid prevailing of electronic information resources and services, the traditional academic libraries are being declined and gradually deserted. Recent studies highlighted this issue as one of the challenges of the digital era. Responding to this issue, this paper introduces the idea of revitalizing academic libraries through the concept of "Third place" based on the possibility of providing traditional libraries with new interior spaces wherein students, scholars, and faculty can learn and socialize as well as cooperate, without stress. Based on the literature reviewed, there are several factors through which it is possible to enhance the interior spaces to attract more users to traditional academic libraries and make them more vital. This paper discusses the possibility of revitalizing traditional libraries by activating the role of the "Third Place" identity in their interior design. To activate the concept of "Third Place" in local academic libraries that lack such active spaces, this work focuses, in particular, on the academic library of the University of Technology as a major case study, three student proposals are included in this paper. Indeed, the identities and design approaches adopted by students were highly context-dependent. The findings that identity achieved through proposals indicate revitalize spaces with a variety of design approaches and the absence of sameness or monotonous atmosphere in the "third place" of Uot's library.

الملخص

بدأت المكتبات الأكاديمية التقليدية ومع توفر موارد وخدمات المعلومات الإلكترونية بالتدهور واصبحت مهجورة تدريجياً في العصر الرقمي الجديد. استجابة لهذه المشكلة تقدم الورقة فكرة تجديد المكتبات الأكاديمية التقليدية من خلال مفهوم فضاءات "المكان الثالث". بناءً على هذه الفكرة من الممكن تزويد المكتبات التقليدية بمساحات داخلية جديدة للطلاب والباحثين وأعضاء هيئة التدريس للتعلم والتواصل الاجتماعي بالإضافة إلى التعاون دون توتر وإجهاد. برز وفقا للدراسات السابقة العديد من العوامل التي يمكن من خلالها تحسين الفضاءات الداخلية لجذب المزيد من المستخدمين إلى المكتبات الأكاديمية التقليدية وجعلها مساحات أكثر حيوية ، تناقش هذه الورقة إمكانية تجديد المكتبات التقليدية عن طريق تفعيل دور هوية "المكان الثالث" في تصميمها الداخلي . يركز البحث بشكل خاص على المكتبة الأكاديمية بالجامعة التكنولوجية كحالة دراسية من أجل تفعيل فكرة "المكان الثالث" في المكتبات الأكاديمية المحلية ، تم دراسة الحالة وتقديم ثلاث مقترحات للطلاب المشاركين بعملية تصميم الفضاء الداخلي للمكتبة كمحاولة لتطبيق فكرة استخدام الهوية لتفعيل مفهوم المكان الثالث في المكتبات الأكاديمية المحلية اعتمادا على السياق. تشير النتائج إلى أن المقترحات المقدمة اظهرت مجموعة متنوعة من الفضاءات المجددة بحلول تصميمية منوعة ومؤشرة غياب أجواء التشابه والرتابة.

1.0 Introduction

The academic library had been described as the" heart" of the learning community, providing a place where students and faculty can study, cooperate, and relax within their schedules without stress.

This paper provides a look at the importance of the academic library nowadays, particularly the concept ''third place'' by itself. Paper explained why the library should be seen as a suitable third place for students, also how this physical space should be handled and design to gain students' empathy.

Paper introduced this knowledge by adopting the analytical descriptive methodology to a set of specialized studies; the research found that the existence of Iraqi libraries lacks experience in adopting the concept of third place at their interior spaces. We aimed to apply the concept of "third place" for local academic libraries, by investing the concept of identity in rehabilitation a sample of selected local contemporary academic library projects at the University of Technology in Baghdad.

1.1 Justification

Today, students and staff go to libraries less than before, and this puts libraries at risk. So why not redesign their physical space, and create a good place where students and staff would love to go and spend time, even if they do not want to read books or another source of information?

More and more libraries have already created such space, based on the concept of "Third Place". In short, a "third place" is an innovative architecture that provides "a seamless network of services, information gathering, study spaces, social spaces, cafes, and even leisure activities.

The study addresses the concept of visual identity, especially for the library's third place. Usually, the interior visual identity is studied utilizing plans, the formal composition of the space, furniture, and atmosphere, etc, which address the important aspects of the perceived image.

1.2 Hypothesis

Previous studies assumed the impact of the intended identity for attracting more users' empathy and making them more satisfied where the changes of symbolic significances of space features and meanings of the elements of space are emphasized. Also, previous studies promote the concept of "third place" at new academic libraries as a hybrid space that offers a place for students to work, study, and even have leisure. Within this framework, the library of the University of Technology was studied as a case study, trying to propose designs that employ appropriate identity elements and features to renovate the existing traditional library through the concept of "third place".

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review provided the foregrounding to begin answering all of the research questions, by introducing contemporary approaches of academic libraries, the concept of third place, and the concept of visual identity. The interior design of the library forms part of the institution's visual identity and communication strategy, where interior design elements create character & identity in a facility.

2.1 The contemporary approach of academic library

An academic library is a library that is attached to a higher education institution and serves two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. (Curzon, 2013, pp11-22)

Academic libraries have transformed in the 21st century to focus less on physical collection development and more on information access and digital resources[1]. Today, academic libraries also offer space for students to work and study, in groups or individually within what known as Learning Commons[2]. (ACRL, 2019)

Libraries design focuses increasingly on client experiences in the library, the creation of flexible spaces for current and future use and providing a welcoming and exciting environment. Today they are learning and inspirational spaces. In any institution whose prime purpose relates to teaching and learning, the library should be a central point and facilitate learning, be easily recognizable and clear to use. It should invoke a sense of quality and value. Some universities are moving away from the term library instead; they are calling these buildings "Learning Resource Centers". (McDonald, 2000, pp51-79)

2.2 The concept of "Third place"

Sociologist (Ray Oldenburg) coined the term "third place" in his book, The Great Good Place. He explained that the first place is our home where we live. The second place is where we work. And the third place is a public setting for informal gatherings and relaxation. He explained the differences between the three places in our lives and made the case for the importance of the third, whose characteristics range from stimulating conversation to a playful mood.

Daily life, to be relaxed and fulfilling, must find its balance in three realms of experience. One is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it. (Oldenburg, 1999, p14)

Third spaces, as Oldenburg (1999) asserts, are the anchors of community life and means of facilitating broader and more creative interaction among the members. These are level and unpretentious places where one feels equal and welcome, there is a lively conversation, the mood is cheerful, there are regulars who frame a community, it is easy to get to and the hours are convenient and, finally it has a relatively low profile so that no one would hesitate to enter. (Ibid., 1999, pp17-19)

2.3 The academic library as a third place

While the Internet can be a successful space to form learning communities where scholars and students virtually connect, do students also benefit from an informal physical space in which to interact with their fellow scholars? Do they depend upon the intimacy of face-to-face connections and can the academic library provide a forum for such interactions? Many studies maintain that the library can be such a forum and propose that one way to create a successful environment for scholars is to consider Oldenburg's ideas when designing library spaces. In this research, we call a student's "first space"— home, where informal and non-formal learning happens in the domestic setting. Formal institutions like universities and colleges constitute "the second space". The library is the case of third place, defined as a place of sociability and encounter rather than area precisely for book reading and learning. These libraries introduce additional uses not directly connected to knowledge, including public services, coworking spaces, and even leisure activities … Like the Mériadek Library in Bordeaux or Lezoux media library (Fig.1, 2).

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[1]... Throughout the eighties, nineties and even into the new century, there has been much comment and forecasting surrounding the death of the academic library (Carlson, 2001). The pervasive nature of technology and the ready access to information over the Internet led to a conclusion by many people that a library would no longer be needed. ... [Carlson,2001,pp34-39]

[2]Learning commons LC, also known as scholars' commons, information commons or digital commons, are learning spaces, similar to libraries and classrooms that share space for information technology, remote or online education, tutoring, collaboration, content creation, meetings, socialization, and studying. [ALISON,2016,p8]
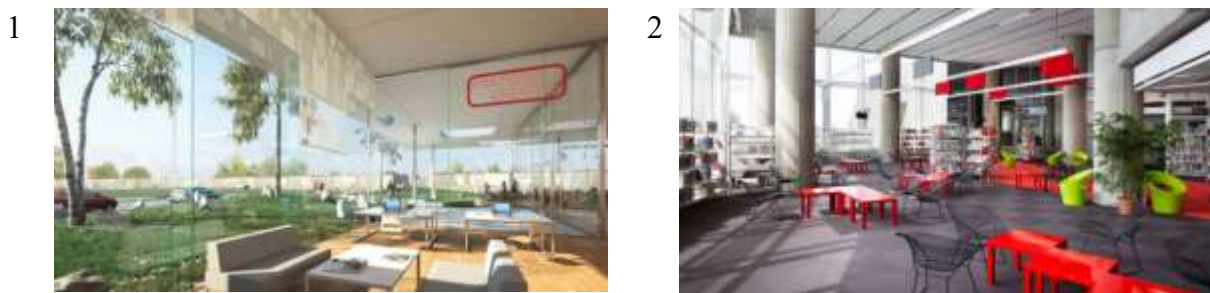
Fig.1-Lezoux media library (http://serero.com/en/projet/mediatheque-de-lezoux)
Fig.2-Mériadek Library in Bordeaux Portal (https://mediatheques.bordeaux-metropole.fr/bibliotheque/bibliotheque-meriadeck-bordeaux）

Third place libraries are centered on users, to serve a place to work alone or in a group, to learn, read, surf, eat and drink, relax, or even do nothing. Yet, a place connected to the world, to others, to the Internet and social networks, a resourceful place, with access to documents, hard- and software, assistance, help, and advice. A "third place" compliant with Ray Oldenburg's description: welcoming and comfortable, highly accessible, free or inexpensive, with food and drink, and with regulars such as staff.

Previous studies bordered the emergence of a new category – the cultural third place. They define them as hybrid and open spaces of knowledge and culture sharing, where the user (a visitor, reader, student, spectator…), finds his or her place at the heart of the learning, production and dissemination processes of cultures and knowledge. Cultural third places promote a culture of experimentation, staging, and co-production of knowledge and cultures. (Besson, 2018, p8)

Oldenburg discussed several characteristics that he believes create an atmosphere that brings people together and provides them with a third place. One of these characteristics is creating a place where joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation, as having a significant personal effect in delighting and sustaining individuals and creating a better mood in the place. (Margit,2007,p2)

Librarians encourage collaboration with staff and see student achievement reach greater heights when students are allowed to have input on what makes a space comfortable and important in a middle academic library. "Students and lecturers no longer need a library simply for access. Instead, they require a place that encourages participatory learning and allows for the co-construction of understanding from a variety of sources. In other words, instead of being an archive, libraries are becoming a learning commons". A learning commons can be quite similar to a "third place" environment. The "third place" in a library invites students to spend time there in addition to their places of home and work. A learning commons can mimic the "third place" and encourage the learning and construction of ideas for all involved with this space. LC is often a term used by librarians to define the space in their library that functions with "third place" characteristics such as flexible seating, accommodating resources that meet users' needs, and equal access for all who enter the commons area. A learning commons in a library differs from the "third place" in a library in that it may not contain all of the characteristics of Oldenburg's theory. Some librarians will add more computer labs or reading spaces, even new furniture, and call it a learning commons because students will gather in the common space to socialize. However, a LC should contain imaginative ideas on furniture and playfulness of décor, equal access to resources, and a sense of warmth to fit as a "third place" setting. (Pennington,2016,p10-15)

3.0 Identity

Identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity or upbringing. (Moha,2005,p19-23)

The study addresses the concept of space identity, especially when spaces, which aim at diverse symbolic impacts, are concerned; need to be studied through a comprehensive framework. Usually, space identity is studied utilizing plans, formal composition, internal facades, furniture, etc, which address the important aspects of the image. Historical, cultural and social significances of the social context of the building users had been proposed in this study.

Another relationship that may affect formulating the identity is the one between the architect and the user. The user may be an actor in the design stage, with whom the architect may or may not have direct communication but as (Lewis) also mentions they are the real clients to the architect. The user is the ultimate consumer of architecture, and the communities of people, who will finally see, touch, occupy, live in and move through the finished product. Thus, the architect must give the same importance and attention to the prospective users as his clients. (Akşehir,2003,p39)

Designers need to think about interior design from the users' perspective. The user's context is their holistic experience composed of their knowledge, experience, belief, ideology, expectation, and culture to where they belong.[3] (Yongsun,2012,p42)

3.1 Identity and retail strategy

The library as a third place has been analyzed by many authors. The institution undeniably makes a public space available which is safe, welcoming, open and accessible, where visitors can pass time with friends, recharge the mobile while surfing the Web using the Wi-Fi, or just take a break from work or study.

The marketing strategy to sell a product at the retail level (or to lend a book, in the case of the library) is based on a studied process of drawing the customer closer to the product. (In the first place, creating an interest to enter the space); in second place direct interaction with the product). If the library is to be the intermediary between user and book it must attract the attention, and it must do so through strategies before the encounter with the book, strategies such as visual identity and interior design.

The interior design of the library forms part of the institution's visual identity and communication strategy and ensures users association with certain values, ideas or feelings within each of the interior spaces and products on display. The conscious use of this strategy when designing the different spaces allows the user's perception to fall in line with being communicated by the segmentation of both universes: users and the institution.

The design of the space had to base on the consideration that the facility's image, or "physical interface", should promote user loyalty. A brand strategy that included a visual identity should define. At the same time, elements, characters, and sets of values that the building had to transmit should be outlined, considering the idea that architecture should be at the service of the institution, rather than the inverse. (Bonet,2017,p38)

3.2 Interior design elements create character & identity in a facility

Many interior design elements are compelling design elements that establish character and identity by developing a story unique to each facility. Whether architect designing a new facility from the ground up or looking to renovate or update an existing one, attention to interior details of his facility will help ensure success.

Customizing spaces through the use of color and interpretive imagery specific to the location establishes a connection between users and the facility. Not only do these elements create a visual connection, but they evoke particular feelings and emotions, establishing an intuitive connection as well.

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[3]The empathy is defined by Oxford Dictionary as "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another" (oxforddictionaries.com, 2012)

When patrons feel a connection to the building, they will choose to come back. Following are six elements can be used to define and enhance the design of the facility:

-Number 1: Iconic Elements

In almost every facility location, there are easily recognizable and identifiable natural or cultural elements. This kind of connection is important because it bolsters the idea of a facility belonging to a particular location and creates a place in which the community comes together to socialize and recreate.

-Number 2: Historical Elements

Incorporating a community's history is a simple and direct way to link the past and the present by highlighting locations, events and people that have shaped them. These elements can be informative, educational, emotional and decorative.

-Number 3: Activity Graphics

Recreation Centers are hubs of activity and the actions and movements created as a result make perfect design features within a facility. Using large images of related elements enhance the interiors of the institution.

-Number 4: Photographic Image

The use of large format digital prints is another method to add color and graphic imagery to facility spaces. This design concept can be used by adding large images on the wall for the spaces and the lobby of the institution.

-Number 5: Themes

Theming in a facility - give a particular setting or ambience to (a venue or activity) - is a method for successfully engaging different age groups.

-Number 6: Color

Color shapes environments and creates specific feelings or attitudes. Highly-saturated and brilliant colors are successfully applied in the high-energy. The graphic application of color on large wall areas is a striking and economical way to visually enliven and energize large-volume spaces and expansive walls. Color is also a communication device. The brightly-colored walls can serve as an effective way finding tool, guiding people through the building by marking circulation and identifying destinations. (Marcia,2015)

4.0 Methodology

The research process was based on descriptive analytical methodology, related literature is carefully examined, and a set of properties were derived. Then they were applied to a sample of the proposed projects. Describing the setting in which the study took place displayed, followed by a description of the participants in the study. Finally, the procedures used for the research plan and how the researchers analyzed the data of the study discussed.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the possibility of renovating traditional libraries by activating the role of the "Third Place" identity in their interior design.

The setting of this study was in the middle of University of Technology (UoT) library in Baghdad. Third grade Student participants submitted design proposals of the library interior space, during the second semester of 2019.

Indicating whether attendance will increase in the library after the changes will implement and whether the third place will be useful to raise collaboration between users was out of research limits.

4.1 Formulation of the "third place" in Students projects through activating the role of identity in their interior design

Architectural Students at the interior course were asked to renovate the UoT library, and have been recommended to create interior spaces that reflect the identity for the "Third Place" as the general concept within the framework of the (academic society) or indicate belonging to a larger social entity/identity associated with motherland (Iraq).

4.2 Procedure

Within this framework, the UoT Library studied as a case study, which allowed exploring the proposed framework by viewing the characteristics of interior space as to their effects on the appearance of the library.

There is a kind of sadness about the current traditional multi-storied-library, it is simply divided into four floors, and each floor is more or less boring, dell organizing interior space. The study suggested to create a" third place" experience, the intention is to give students experience which is interesting and in line with the identity values of the contemporary library.

Projects theme and purpose: The direction was guiding Students to design projects that provide the university library with real designs inspired by the identity values of being youthful students studying at UoT in Iraq by using one of three main themes (historical style, Industrial style, or Maverick style), and this was achieved by third-year students of the academic year 2019 at the faculty of Architecture - the University of Technology under the supervision of Asst. Dr. Shamael Al dabbagh[4].

A-History metaphor style

Interior architecture aims to create places that distinguish their identity with clarity among the recipients of space. Identity is the general concept of defining something within the context of a society or a country and is described as belonging to a larger social entity such as the nation or region. To achieve cultural affiliation, The formal vocabulary in the internal space, with its symbolic contents, can confirm a state of belonging to a particular civilization, as some forms are associated with design relationships through which the recipient draws the spirit of belonging to a civilization (Islamic, Greek, Assyrian ,or else). (Fig.3) (Abdulrahman,2009,pp149-168) .

B-Industrial style

Industrial style refers to simplicity and minimal design that take inspiration from the lofty look of factories, warehouses, and other industrial structures. Industrial style decor comprises of stripped-back architectural details including the use of bare bricks, metals, and wood, as well as restored and recycled materials. Industrial style furnishings are usually hardwearing, that have simple design wild solid upholstery in natural textures and neutral colors.[5] (Fig.4) (Decoist,2014,p9)

C-Maverick style

Maverick Design's primary practice is an imagination and creativity expression. This contemporary and trendy style provides people with unusual looks and different expressive designs, no sense of unity in everything and no sense of balance. It is part of modern style; this approach is very young, explosive, and

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[4]Dr. Shamael M.W Al dabbagh(Assistant Professor of Interior Architecture & Environmental Psychology, Faculty of Architecture/ University of Technology)

[5] This style has been proposed as being in line with the objectives of the University of Technology identified by the need for engineering technologists, to work in the industrial sector.

inventive. The structure can be obtained by joining pieces, overlapping volumes and randomly chosen colors even for the same space by a blend of warm and cool tones, both contrasting against each other. This artistic style is all about fun and independence what makes junior designers believe this style looks suitable to represent youthful students at their springtime of life 6.(Fig.5) (Millner,2019,p10-15)

Fig (3) Lello & Irmão library – Lisbon (https://www.discoverwalks.com/blog/top-3-most-enchanting-libraries-near-lisbon)

Fig (4) 3d Render of Beautiful Industrial Style dreamstime.com, Fig (5) Maverick style, a colorful library enhancing the mood of reading (https://www.tfod.in/photos-design-structure/educational/p/3)

4.2.1 Instrument: images for the interior design of the library proposals

No.1 Proposal inspired by Ashurbanipal historical library and by the shapes patterns of Cuneiform lettering. Fig (6)

No.2 Proposal inspired by the symbol of interlocked gears (geared of progress) indicates positive action, coordinated – interlocked – precise application of efforts to secure the desired result. Fig (7)

No.3 Proposal inspired by the creative think system concept, through the digital mesh for a smart brain (futuristic interact neural network grid connect). It was illustrated with integrated circles and thin line icons, contrasting vivid colors against each other were chosen to reveal youth spirit. Fig (8)
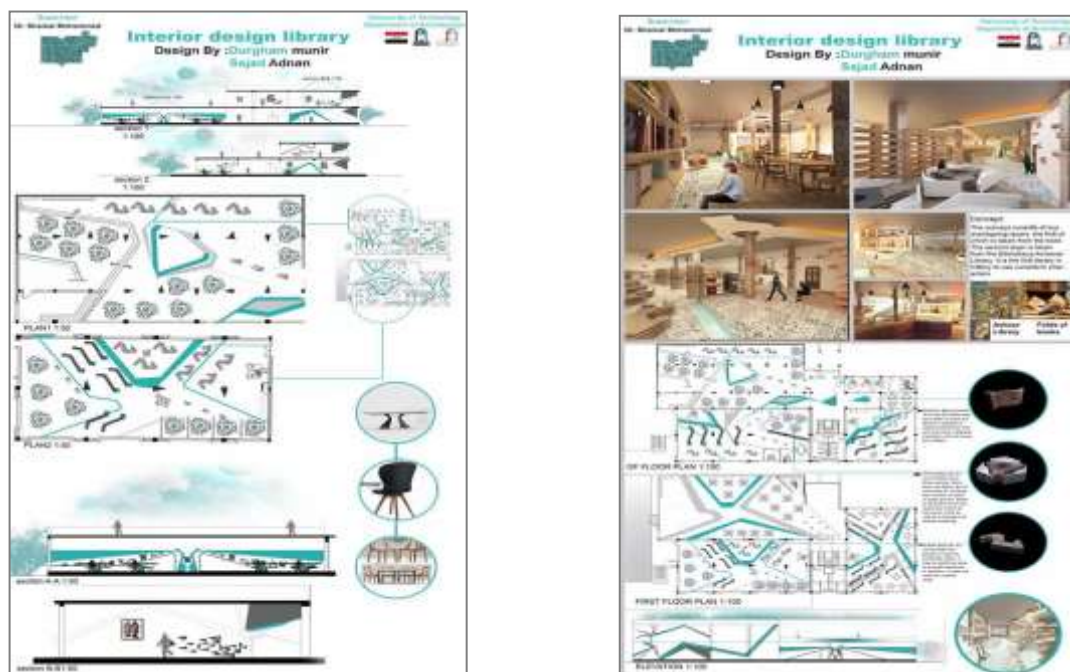

Fig (6). Project-1: The student design a project inspired by Ashurbanipal historical library and shapes patterns of Cuneiform lettering, (Source: Interior design digital archive of students Projects)

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6 Recent developments in office interior design and architecture include the emergence of a distinct branch of interior design, characterized by extensive use of highly visual, eye-catching design such as bright colors, leisurely settings and non-work artifacts .Labeled as playful office design by the architects, interior design communities and corporations that use it, this type of office interior design is promoted as one facet of the attempt to integrate play with work to exploit into the creativity, and intrinsic motivation. [Thompson,2015]

Fig (7) proposal No.2 inspired by the symbol of interlocked gears (geared of progress) indicates positive action, coordinated – interlocked – precise application of efforts to secure the desired result. (Source: Interior design digital archive of students Projects)
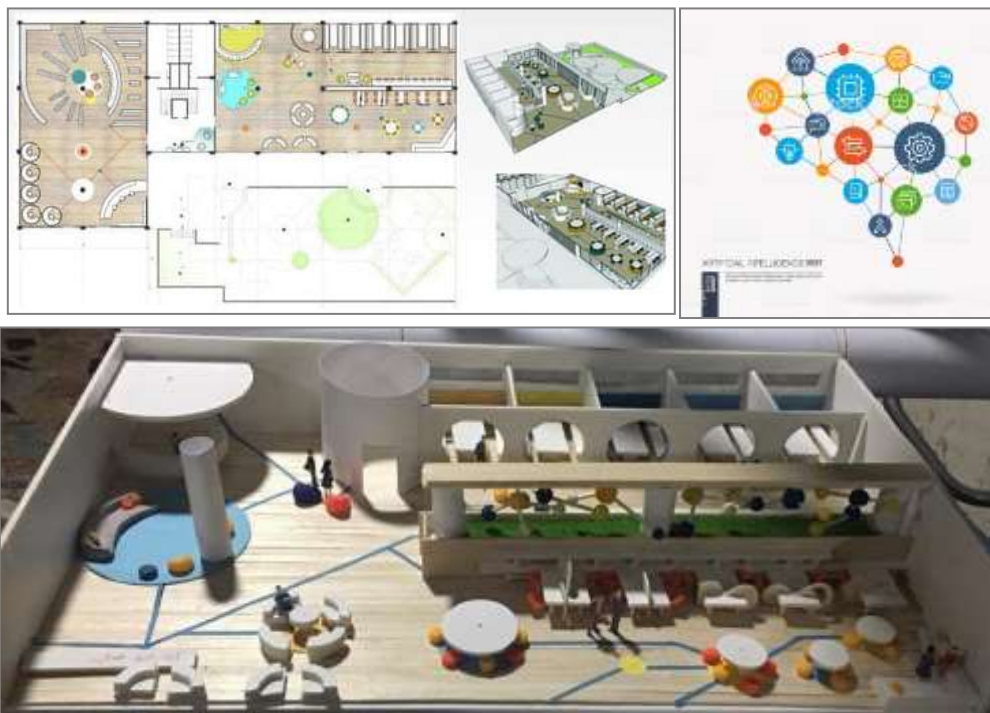

Fig (8) proposal No.3 inspired by the creative think system concept, through the digital mesh for a smart brain, (Source: Interior design digital archive of students Projects)

5.0 Findings and conclusions

Young interior architects were challenged to achieve identities through their proposals. Achieved identity explains a sense of belonging. However, attempts and methods for revitalizing were highly context-dependent. Finally, the third space atmosphere of the library seems to belong to the users.

Interior architects should keep morals, traditions and values inherited, as well as the accumulation of knowledge in his areas of specialization within the main axis of the design process. It all leads to the formulation of the final output of the interior environment to those variables, but it does not mean ignoring the identity of the user, the laws of social determinants, and other historical and cultural ideologies associated with that community.

The participatory design aims to establish a creative space for users and designers. The research tried to create low-fidelity prototypes through participatory design workshops with users (students), Of course, a complete consensus is not realistic by including many stakeholders in any type of project and, carrying risks, but it was just an attempt to develop a shared vision with users and increase their advocacy.

6.0 Further Applications and Future Research prospects

Future study can detect student participants' feelings included in the" third place", if they were able to build relationships with other students and teachers in this space, whether the" third place' felt warm, if the décor was approachable and not pretentious.

Participatory design based on the principle that people have the right to influence their own universe. This approach to co-creation can bring about better services and experiences for users through a process of mutual learning. The UoT Library project presents a model for building inclusive spaces where students' voices can be heard and heeded in the design of an academic library. Through a critical practice of participatory designing the" third place", we can build a sample for a library that listens to and responds to students' identities.

While the participatory design has great potential as a methodology for creating better user experiences and a more matching space with their identities, there are real and significant challenges that limit the work like organizational resources and values. The ability to practice participatory design depends in large part on the resources available to the practitioner and participants in the form of time and money. We hope that this paper and its references can help guide librarians to respect the identity of their users and trying to fit with it through implementing participatory design initiatives at their organizations.

Future study can look at how beginning a "third place" setting increase student usage of the library and academic collaboration between students and teachers, and determine whether a third place is successful to adopt in academic Iraqi libraries.

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