

## **AN ANALYSIS OF “FREE SPACE” BETWEEN RE-PRESENTATION AND EXPERIMENTATION IN VENICE BIENNALE**

M. M. EL-HUSSEINY<sup>1</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

The bi-annual architectural event of Venice Biennale has been regarded as an international melting pot for various international visions and concepts. The current year's theme for the Biennale, “FREESPACE” curated by Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara raises several questions related to the necessity of re-presenting “space”, how the different national pavilions reacted to the chosen theme, and how the pavilions of the Middle East specifically represented the issue of space. Thus, the paper will discuss the history of inauguration of the Architecture Biennale in Venice based on a literature review to reflect on the importance of the event. Following that, the theme of the cycle in 2018 will be analyzed based on two-fold streams, first is the main discussion introduced by the curators and second is the re-presentation of a selected number of national pavilions. A second discussion of literature will be presented to discuss the main concepts and philosophical debates, for instance: the quality of space, the generosity of architecture, humanity and architecture, celebrations of nature. Finally, analysis will be conducted on the work displayed in pavilions of Middle Eastern countries in order to re-question the position of our local definition of cultural production and the re-presentation of space.

**KEYWORDS:** Venice Binnale, FREESPACE, Architecture of Display, Futuristic Architecture, Re-Presentation.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The bi-annual architectural event of the Venice Biennale has been regarded as an international melting pot for various international visions and concepts displayed in accordance with a general theme. With the consecutive cycles, the Biennale has become more than just an exhibition for display; it transferred into an experimentation arena for global contemporary architectural culture. Alike the world expositions,

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Architecture Engineering Department, Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, mennatallahelhusseiny@gmail.com.

which recalls Mies Van De Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion rehearsing an understanding of the "International Style", the Biennale in Venice became a live record of architecture display as a tool to represent architecture as a cultural product of nations and help in collecting the different futuristic visions for many nations. The current year's theme for the Biennale, "FREESPACE" curated by Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara raises several questions related to the necessity of re-presenting "space", how the different national pavilions reacted to the chosen theme, and how the pavilions of the Middle East specifically represented the issue of space in its selected display. This study is also specifically important in order to regard the position of the re-production and celebration of space between international visions and the local vision displayed for the Egyptian national pavilion. In accordance with the previous introduction, the paper will briefly discuss the history of inauguration of the Architecture Biennale in Venice based on a literature review depending on the work of theorists and scholars to reflect on the importance of the event to the architectural community. Following that, the theme of the current cycle in 2018 will be analyzed based on two-fold streams, first is the main discussion introduced by the curators and second is the re-presentation of a selected number of national pavilions to the theme. Based on this analysis, a second discussion of literature will be presented to discuss the main concepts and philosophical debates raised by various architects contributing, for instance: the quality of space, the generosity of architecture, humanity and architecture, celebrations of nature, and many more manifestos. Finally, an in-depth analysis will be conducted on the work displayed in the national pavilions of Middle Eastern countries in order to re-question the position of our local definition of cultural production and the re-presentation of space conducted in our local culture nowadays. The paper concludes with a discussion summarizing the current additions to the understanding of "free-space" extracted from the contributions of the biennale, and the relation between the discussions raised and the current state of architecture in the local Egyptian context in specific, see Fig. 1. This study will help in defining the global visions associated with re-interpreting "space" and how this can help in re-defining our vision for "space" in the futuristic architecture in Egypt.

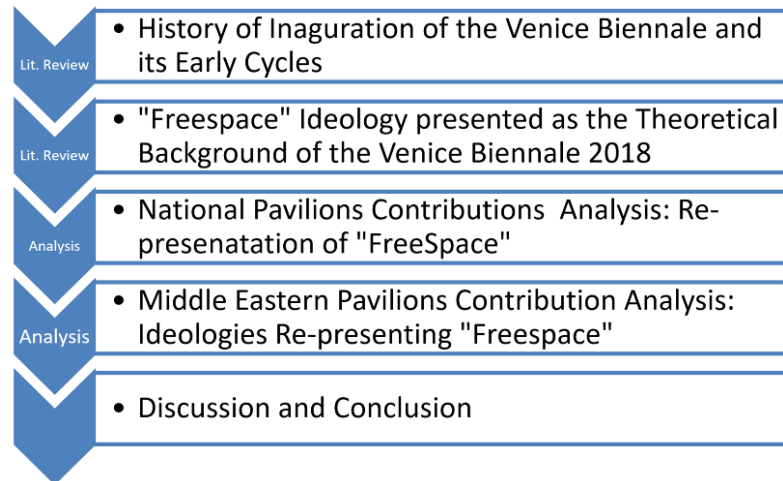


Fig. 1. Research Methodology.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE VENICE BIENNALE AND ITS EARLY CYCLES

The importance of studying and understanding the display of international architects in the bi-annual event of the Biennale in Venice has been re-visited but few in the modern literature on architecture. The scope of academic study on the topic has been very limited, although the international event provides an arena for display and architecture brainstorming noteworthy to be critically analyzed. Since its initiation the biennale has, in spite of its international visibility and attracting hundreds of architects, remained one of the least accessible sites for archival documentation. As soon as the event is over, the experimental dispositions presented in Venice recedes into memory, [1].

In spite of considered being the most prestigious forums for architecture, the Venice Biennale history remains relatively unknown [1]. This is relevant to its very point of origin, as well as its integration with economic tourism and nation-state representation with the inauguration of the national pavilions.

According to Steele, the biennale's importance lies in its vital dual presence "as both register and infrastructure, recording the impulses that guide architecture" [2]. Moreover, the biennale has itself become a kind of record of architecture's own contemporary struggle as a form of cultural production.

In this section, the paper will expose and reflect on the history of some selected cycles based on the manifestos offered by their curators. This will aid in setting the historical background upon which the current cycle is to be discussed and analysed. This stems from the fact that many of modern architecture's key battles were fought long before the Venice architecture biennale, on sites such as world expositions, recalling Mies Van D'Rohe's Barcelona pavilion and many other international exhibitions among which 'International Style' proclaimed nearly a century ago.

The first manifesto to be exposed is that of Paolo Portoghesi, who directed the first and second architecture exhibitions at the Venice Biennale. The first exhibition was entitled, "The Presence of the Past", in 1980. The exhibition encompassed displays about twentieth century architectural masters; the "Strada Novissima" installation, which staged a lively debate around postmodern approaches to architecture. Also Aldo Rossi contributed by a display of "Teatro del Mondo", see Fig. 2.



Fig. 2. Teatro del Mondo by Aldo Rossi in Venice 1980.

The second exhibition was entitled, "Architecture in Islamic Countries" in 1982. In this cycle, the exhibition explored the influence of Islamic architectural culture in modernity and the role of architecture in providing a meeting point between western and eastern cultures.

The main idea behind his display was not to show images of architecture, but rather to expose real architecture [3]. His idea was to make something close to reality that accommodated the various interpretations of symbolic architecture set out by the

architects. He further manifested that “Architecture is not for architects – it’s for the public”. He believed that modern architecture has lost the capacity to speak to the common people and thus, the display addressed this issue.

Francesco Dal Co directed the fifth architecture exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 1991 which was an exhibition on the role of education in architecture. As Dal Co regarded that one of the priorities of the architectural biennale should be to create exhibitions that would have a different relationship to the spaces themselves, and provide new opportunities to do things [4]. He further explains that he had a very low budget for his main exhibition display, so it was decided to adopt the idea of inviting schools of architecture from all over the world to participate, and it turned out to be a success. Dal Co wanted to offer an opportunity for students to understand how an architect becomes an architect. For the first time, he showed and worked with kids from China, New Zealand, Australia and so on, which have very lively, healthy cultures. The other aspect that was important to this project was that the students lived in Venice for one month. Dal Co further asserts that it was a great experience and some of them now are famous architects [4].

Moving forward to the year 2000, Massimiliano Fuksas directed “Less Aesthetics, More Ethics”, the seventh architecture exhibition at the Venice Biennale. The exhibition, explored ethical approaches to contemporary architecture, acknowledging that architecture is no longer simply an aesthetic practice. Fuksas explains that when architects are given the opportunity to do a biennale, it has to change something [5]. The first idea in this respect concerned his title, “Less Aesthetics, More Ethics”. The exhibition addressed the worldwide major problems of water shortages, deforestation, fire and earthquakes. He organised a way to simultaneously use 36 projectors, to enable the public to see migrations, war, the problems in Rwanda, disasters and tornadoes. Fuksas further implies that he chose all the scenarios, from shopping centres to the biggest cities in the world, from Cairo to Tokyo, Mexico City to São Paulo. The exhibition was approached as if it were a project, as if a building. There were many kinds of visuality and architecture in it,

ranging from those of Holland to those of Africa. And it is noteworthy to mention that the exhibition was entirely composed of videos and cinematic projections [5].

Following that, Deyan Sudjic directed “Next”, the eighth architecture exhibition at the Venice Biennale. The exhibition explored future architecture, with a particular concentration on new developments in urban and skyscraper design. Sudjic exposes that he was influenced by the worldwide traumatic effects of 2001 attacks. In 2002, there had never been more work for architects. There was no one who couldn’t build if they wanted to, so there was no avant-garde. The future was always being built, and it seemed futile to invite busy architects to talk about their work and make installations with limited budgets because they weren’t going to do anything of any interest compared to what they were actually building [6].

In that year specifically, the display was going to open exactly a year after 9/11 and it seemed like a good idea to commission a gesture for people to think about. In the main exhibition, Sudjic asked six people to do a tower, and Alessi ended up supporting it. The towers that we had specially designed and fabricated for the exhibition were the size of the room itself. Future Systems did one, Zaha Hadid did one, Morphosis did one, Chipperfield too, and others. They were 1:100 scale, so they were very tall, and literally reached into the rafters [6]. In addition to that, the American pavilion was full of photographs of 9/11 by Joel Meyerowitz.

Finally, with regards to the scope of interest of this paper, Richard Burdett curated “Cities: Architecture and Society”, the tenth architecture exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2006. The exhibition explored issues of density, mobility and sustainability in global cities such as Mumbai, Tokyo and Bogotá. While in 2010 Kazuyo Sejima curated “People Meet in Architecture”; the twelfth architecture exhibition at the Venice Biennale. The exhibition explored the essential role of architecture and the importance of recognizing relationships between individuals within their social and natural environments.

Thus, it is evidenced by the successive discussed cycles presented above, that the architecture Biennale in Venice represented a form of living impulse to the architectural profession. It was highly affected by the political, cultural and economic

influences taking place worldwide. Unlike the expected debates that the Biennale in Venice represented an elite avant-garde not related to the common grounds, the review reflected its importance in merging different ideologies between the East and West, provide floor for young architects and architecture students, shed light on the current worldwide problems and many other issues and debates. In this regard, the following part will discuss the latest architectural Biennale in 2018, beholding the theme of “FREESPACE” in an attempt to understand the current addition to the architecture field the Biennale possesses.

### **3. “FREESPACE” IDEOLOGY EXPOSED**

In his introduction to the inauguration of the latest Biennale cycles, the President of the Venice Biennale, Paolo Bratta explains that this edition curated by Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara focuses on the question of free space, “the free space that can be generated when a project is inspired by generosity”. The desire to create free space can be a characteristic of individual projects [7]. Free space also becomes a paradigm, in that it reveals the presence or absence in general of architecture. Free space is a sign of a higher civilization of living, an expression of the will to welcome. Accordingly, the exhibition is enriched by two examples of research, one dedicated to a review of the contribution of architects of the past undertaken by architects of the present, and the second to works resulting from collaboration between teachers and young people. This provides a deeper understanding of the current role of the Biennale, not merely to explore the latest, yet, to reflect upon the past heritage of architecture and to provide space for the architects of the future to experiment.

According to the curators, Farrell and McNamara, “FREESPACE describes a generosity of spirit and a sense of humanity at the core of architecture’s agenda, focusing on the quality of space itself”. The theme selected this year focuses on architecture’s ability to provide free and additional spatial attributes to those who use it and on its ability to address the unspoken wishes of strangers to the space. The aim is to celebrate “architecture’s capacity to find additional and unexpected generosity in

each project - even within the most private, defensive, exclusive or commercially restricted conditions” [8].

As to the curators, the selection of the theme provides the opportunity to emphasize nature’s free gifts of light, sunlight and moonlight, air, gravity, materials as well as natural and man-made resources. FREESPACE encourages reviewing ways of thinking, new ways of seeing the world, of inventing solutions where architecture provides for the well-being and dignity of each citizen of this fragile planet. FREESPACE can be a space for opportunity, a democratic space, un-programmed and free for uses not yet conceived. FREESPACE encompasses freedom to imagine the free space of time and memory, binding past, present and future together, building on inherited cultural layers, weaving the archaic with the contemporary [8], see Fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Part of FREESPACE Exhibition Directed by Farrell and McNamara showing Different Apartments inside Social Housing customized by users.

Moore adds that the importance of space is celebrated in McNamara and Farrell’s exhibition of global design, which resulted in contributions in the national pavilions ranging from a Japanese nursery school to a repurposed Catalan social club [9]. And between those two extremes, several interpretations based on the previous introduction by the curators were offered, all proposing the meaning of “FREESPACE” in different methods by the international architecture community as analyzed in the upcoming part.

#### **4. ANALYSIS OF NOTABLE CONTRIBUTION IN “FREESPACE” 2018**

The theme selected for the latest Architecture Biennale in Venice proposed a very controversial topic to represent. Stemming from seeing architecture as a cultural



product, the theme encouraged even more the diversity by its exploration to the physical attributes of space, the metaphysical relation with nature, the question of space as living organism from one side, and the question of the actual role of free space in a living community. Moreover, this cycle enabled architects from various cultures to introduce their cultural visions for the definition of “FREESPACE”. Based on this, this part explores the contributions of the national pavilions in the Biennale in 2018, grouped by how “free space” was defined by different cultural groups.

One of the strongest interpretations of “FREESPACE” was addressing “walls” that create segregation [10]. As a reaction to the excessive political debates lasting for four years, “walls” were exhibited twice in the national pavilions in 2018. The new border wall between Mexico and the USA and the related segregator policies were exhibited in the United States Pavilion, see Fig. 4.



Fig. 4. Part of The United States of America Exhibition showing the Effect of the Territorial Wall between the States and Mexico.

Issues related to the territorial impacts are addressed based on urban planning maps of both countries. From another, the “wall” is exhibited in a different way in the German pavilion. Since this year marks an important milestone for the Berlin Wall, which has now been down for longer that it stood, the German pavilion embodied “Unbuilding Walls”, see Fig. 5. The implications of border walls have been investigated where the curators looked at the results of division. The exhibition

responds to the current debates on nations, protectionism and division. The interpretation of “FREESPACE” provides the opportunity to explore the effects of division and the process of healing as a dynamic spatial phenomenon.



Fig. 5. Part of The German Exhibition: Un-building Walls.

Another strong presence of the interpretation of “FREESPACE” in the representation of several national pavilions was the ideology of “Construction Sites”. This was relevant in the national pavilions of France and Britain, who adopted the theme in a very direct way; both tackling the ideas of “space” and freedom in space. Caruso St John Architects and Marcus Taylor's, the curators of the British pavilion, given the name “Island”, aimed to address “Brexit”, by leaving the entire pavilion vacant entirely left to be experienced as space and providing metal staircases to the roof, resembling an under-construction building site. On top of the roof, the view to

Venice’s lagoon and the whole Giardini complex can be experienced in the vacant terrace as shown in Fig. 6.



Fig. 6. Part of The British Exhibition: The Island, The Under-construction Site Stairs and View from Terrace.

As Moore explain, “the plainest expression of the “Freespace” theme comes with the British pavilion,...., a spatial musing on the nature of island life in which the galleries of the neoclassical building are left empty, while a new platform is created on scaffolding above it” [9]. The installation embraces, according to its curators, “themes including abandonment and reconstruction, sanctuary and isolation, colonialism, climate change and our current political situation”. The curators further explain that architects should “make as much nothing as possible”. While the empty space provides the opportunity for reflection, discussion and open interpretation, Island offers a platform for a new and optimistic beginning. It is forward-looking while acknowledging the past, whether good or bad, as the curators’ further claim.

From another side, still addressing spaces “under-construction”, the display of the French Pavilion, named “Infinite Places”, attracts the visitors from the entry point by yellow under-construction labels, introducing them to the idea of re-using everyday abandoned spaces. Infinite places are introduced as pioneering places that explore and

experiment with collective processes for dwelling in the world and for building community. These are open, possible, un-finished places that establish free spaces and the search for alternatives. They are difficult to define because their principal characteristic is to be open and unexpected, to endlessly build for future possibilities as shown in Fig. 7. Those concepts are presented by video display for the re-use of old railway stations, abandoned parking spaces ,..., etc for performing arts students. Models of the spaces are also presented, along with several picks from French everyday use utilities in homes hanged from the ceiling. The statements delivered are various, notably, all targeting the ideas of freedom and the free use of space.



Fig. 7. Part of The French Exhibition: “Infinite Space”.

Another dominant ideology which was exposed based on the main theme was the inter-relation between “Anthropology” and architecture. Primarily, this was evident in the pavilion awarded the “Golden Lion”, which is the Swiss pavilion. The architect curating the exhibition chose to present simply a “House Tour”. However, inside this tour the visitor is struck by fluctuating scales inside the modern flat the architect created inside the pavilion, see Fig. 8. The main idea the architect aimed to present was the idea of the “home”, inside which, the timeless architecture act of building evolves according to time. Thus, from just a simple tour inside a modern flat, different scales of doors, counters, windows and door handles can be experienced to reflect upon the basic attribute to architecture which is the appreciation of the standardized human scale.





Fig. 8. Part of The Swiss Exhibition: “House Tour” showing the effect of the various scales.

Another more direct translation to linking the ideology of “FREESPACE” to “Anthropology” is represented in the Japanese pavilion, entitled “Architectural Ethnography”. The exhibition is an extension of the project which Momoyo Kaijima, the Japanese architect and theorist, has been working on since the late 1990s. Through field work and observations, Kaijima has been compiling people’s life and the reality of cities in a form of guidebook using architectural drawings as a reference. Capturing the realness of cities with keen and humorous point of view, the project questioned the nature of architecture from the perspective of its users and received a strong response in and outside of the country. Since then, in the last twenty years when the society made a remarkable change with the advance of informationization and globalization, similar projects that followed her approach arose spontaneously around the world [11].

In the exhibition display, Kaijima notably manifests that “Life obviously exceeds architecture”. By collecting, showcasing works and architectural drawings around the world, whether influenced by her project or naturally occurred, and looking over them as “Architectural Ethnography”, the exhibition aims to develop and deepen the discussion about life and architecture, the role of architecture: society in the future, see Fig. 9.



Fig. 9. Part of The Japanese Exhibition.

Several questions are aroused by Kaijima; what does this mean for architecture? How can the myriad situations that both feed into and result from the design of a building be effectively mapped? How does one address architectural drawings, not just simple notional systems but as instruments to document, discuss and evaluate architecture? How can they work to explore people's usages, needs and aspirations, and moreover to give shape to individualized life forms in today's globalized society? [11]. The exhibition in the Japan Pavilion showcases a collection of forty-two projects

from all over the world from the last twenty years, ranging from design specifications and spatial- activity charts, to maps of urban hybrids and large studies of rural farming and fishing villages following natural disasters, originating from university design studios, architectural offices, or artistic practices. They all reflect the search for a new approach in drawing-of, for, among and around-society, which we term “Architectural Ethnography”.

Another humanitarian rather than architectural oriented contribution to the Biennale was that of Czech Republic, named “UNES-CO”. The pavilion resembled a more human oriented company of the UNESCO, yet, targeting and aiming simply for “normal life”, as shown in Fig. 10. The activities the jobs are offered for are selected by UNES-CO for their uniqueness and included on its list of endangered activities. The list includes activities linked to life in town centers that are gradually disappearing, such as those relating to family life, child care, employment, cleaning, rest, play and other activities carried out by residents in both private and public areas. Thus, this contribution calls for the re-use of any freespace, in any means, however, under the umbrella of humanitarian activity.



Fig. 10. The Czech Exhibition calling for “Normal Life” in Public Spaces.

From another side, many more concepts were exhibited under the very wide umbrella of freespace, including the state power, as embodied in Russia’s pavilion, entitled “Railway station”, which documents the life of different persons using the railway since it marks a central hub, see Fig. 11. Also the pavilion exhibited the

history of the expansion of the railway maps, and the architectural models and drawings of major railway stations. Also, in a case to show off the state power, Korea exhibited “Spectres of the State Avant-Garde”, which explores the complex relationship between modern architecture and the state, see Fig. 12. This was exhibited in a neatly fabricated 3-dimensional model showing the dense streets of the capital, and the IT networks floating within, showing that even the “FREESPACE” is covered and already dense.

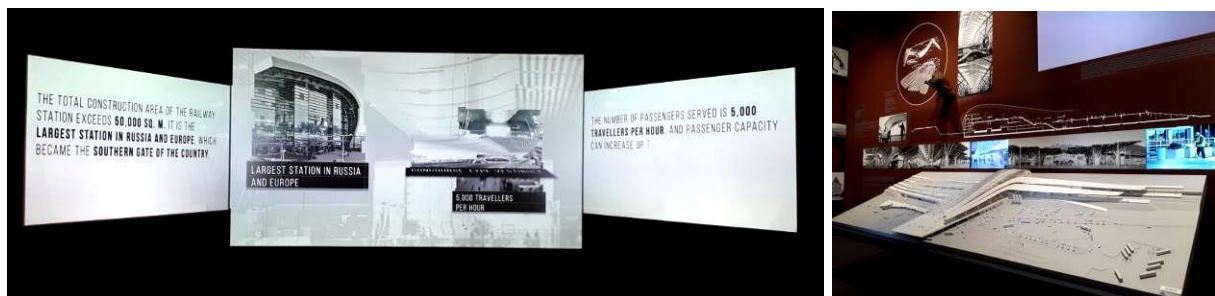


Fig. 11. Part of The Russian Exhibition.



Fig. 12. Part of The Korean Exhibition, Author, 2018.

Finally, one of the most popular and successful interpretations of “FREESPACE” was offered by Romania, whose curator sincerely provided the essence of a free space inside the pavilion, not by merely leaving it empty, yet by



creating “playful experiences” inside the pavilion using very simple techniques, like those used anywhere in any country, in any popular left over space in the urban setting, see Fig. 13. With no complicated devices, the pavilion space was left unattended, only territoriality given to different zones of play, from a soccer goal, to a ping-pong table, to a turn-about to a swing. And merely a note was hanged by the curators for the users to enjoy their time in the free-space inside the pavilion. Amid this highly philosophical theme, architects still found a way to imitate the freedom architecture should provide to its users, to enjoy the everyday lively experiences and create cities and neighbourhoods for a positive living experience.

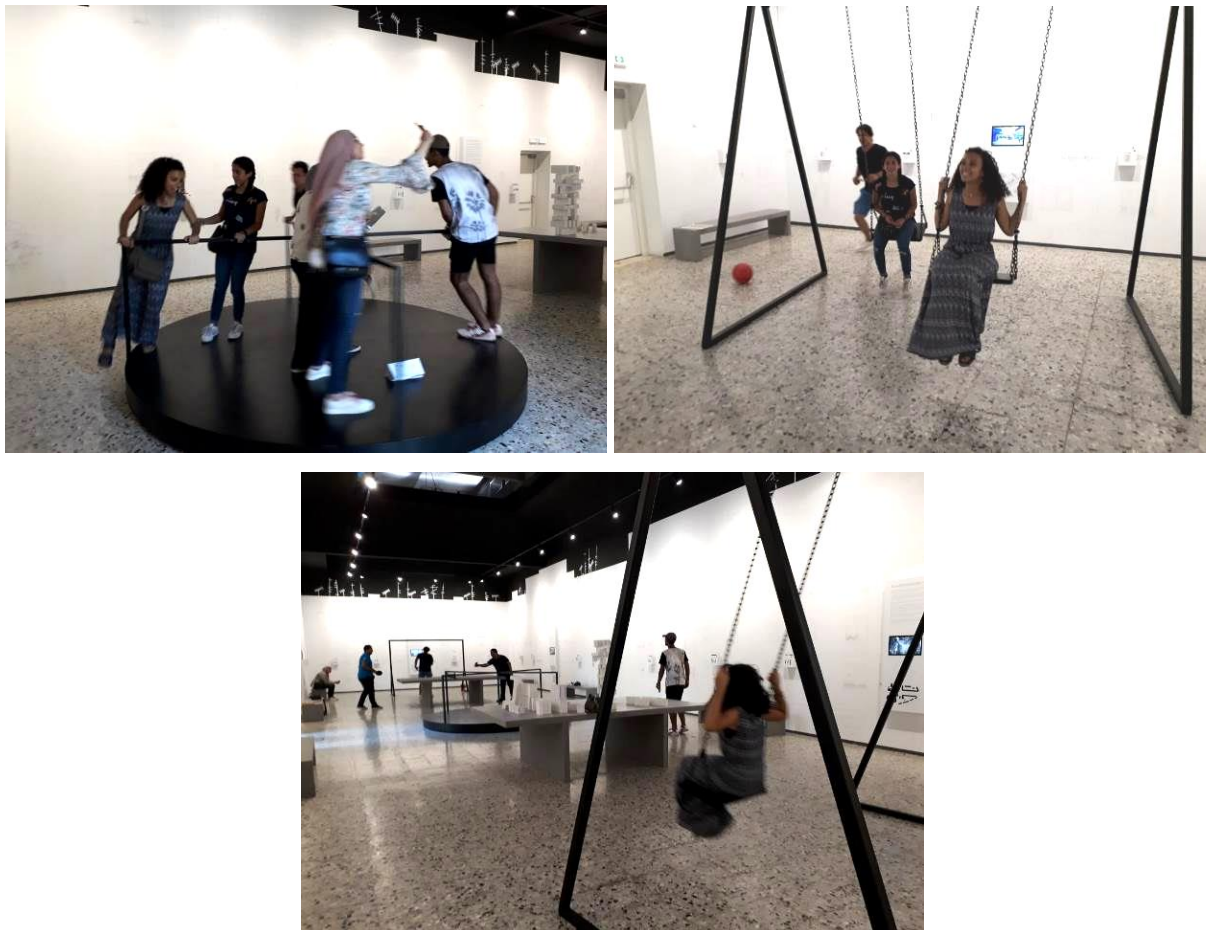


Fig. 13. Part of The Romanian Exhibition.

Stemming from the previous analysis of the most notable ideas stemming from the general theme which were exhibited inside the national pavilions, it can be concluded that architecture as a cultural product by specific nations represents diversity in understandings, in aspirations and in tools to deliver the various messages. This will be re-addressed in the discussion, which will summarize the outcomes of the analysis of the major national pavilions exhibiting in the Giardini. The next part will address the two countries exhibiting in the Giardini from the middle East, Egypt and Israel. The two countries although geographically adjacent, yet, behold strategic differences on the national scales. Thus, the aim of the next part is to understand the ideologies adopted to comprehend “FREESPACE”, the tools used, and the national Vs the international statement addressed in the contemporary architectural re-presentation.

## **5. MIDDLE EASTERN REPRESENTING “FREESPACE”**

This part of the paper is concerned with analyzing descriptively the entries of Middle Eastern countries exhibiting in the national pavilions in the Giardini in Venice. This analysis is important primarily because it sheds light on the national Egyptian contribution in the 2018 Biennale, from one side, and from another side it reflects how the Egyptian curators responded to the previously explained and analyzed theme “free space”. This analytical part is also important to shed light upon the contribution presented by Israel, and what tool the curators utilized to respond to “FREESPACE”.

The Egyptian pavilion displayed an exhibition entitled “*Robabekya*”, the Egyptian word for Antiques, yet, without even being translated. The exhibition displayed three main topics, without explaining the inter-relation between them. First, a display of a selected group of antiques, hanged randomly from the ceiling, see Fig. 31, claimed by the curators to shed light on the essence of the “belle-epoque” in old Egypt. The second stream was for the third time to be displayed in the Biennale in 3 consecutive cycles; was the issue of informalities in Greater Cairo, see Fig. 14. This was displayed using maps plotting survey studies related to the spread of informalities. This was accompanied by critique of the governments’ plans to re-settle the informal sectors in new satellite cities. In addition to that, a confused statement was provided

about the social sustainability and local essence of the condensed zones, yet, at the same time, warnings from using the streets due to the risk of harassment. The third stream represented a video display documenting the street life in Cairo, most notably that of informal markets. This last stream was the most relevant idea to the general theme of “FREESPACE” since it embodied a real representation of the essence of public space in some areas in Cairo.



Fig. 14. Part of The Egyptian Exhibition.

However, the quality of the overall exhibition, especially with the broad representations possible to be addressed in relevance to the theme, lacks the professionalism and the depth of idea which was quite lacking, especially in comparison to the rest of displays in other national pavilions. From another side, the statements seemed distracted, not targeting the international audience, but rather

addressing the locality in Egypt. This raises several questions, related to the presence of any sort of research debates that help enrich the international statements regarding Egypt when given the chance to be displayed. In addition to this, does the Egyptian local practice lack any new ideas to be displayed and discussed in an international arena such as the Biennale, or are the sole debates regarding practice are limited to the informalities. Finally, ideas related to new streams of thought can be extracted from linking pedagogical attempts, which can create a new channel for ideas that aim to target the international audience worldwide, see Fig. 15.



Fig. 15. Part of The Egyptian Exhibition exhibiting the Informal Sector studies of Maspero triangle.

The second Middle Eastern country which is included in the scope of study of the paper is Israel. Similar to Egypt, the exhibition targeted a concept repetitively in the last three cycles, yet, the main difference lies in that the means of presenting the concept was different and tackling different aspects of the topic each time. The main idea was the expansion plans from an architectural point of view, and how those plans are affected by political instability and territorial problems with Palestine. The exhibition was named “In Statu Quo”, which focused on transmitting a religious statement regarding the “free space” adjacent to territories of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

According to the curators of the exhibition, the display represents structures of negotiation that explores the "fragile system of co-existence" across five holy sites, laid claim to by both Israel and Palestine. The curators hope to show how architecture can be used as a tool for negotiating different identities. They further present that in the geopolitical context of the Holy Land, the combination of historical events, myths and traditions has fostered the creation of a multiplicity of places that are sacred to competing religions, communities and affiliations. Because of their supreme importance, many of these places have become arenas of bitter struggle, yet, they continue to operate through a delicate web of ongoing political negotiations and arrangements. This was addressed by displaying a model of the demolished Moroccan neighborhood which was adjacent to the borders of the sacred Plaza. Following that, all the different proposals to fill the “FREESPACE” were on display, using high quality 3-dimensinal models and the full package of designs for different utilities presented as shown in Fig. 16. The proposals included recreational spaces, political spaces, and religious spaces, some of which date back to 1968. However, according to the curators, the proposals were abandoned as un-attended designs due to the political unrests. If this exhibition delivers a message, then most notably it shows how architecture is a mirror to the diverse political or cultural or even religious status of the society it stems from. Another important issue is how architecture at the same time can be used as a strong tool to promote for different nations aspirations.



Fig. 16. Part of The “In Statu Quo” Exhibition, Author, 2018.



## 6. DISCUSSION

Based on the previous literature review and analysis, it is explicit that the bi-annual architectural event of the Biennale in Venice beholds more than merely an architectural forum for the enhancement of the theory and profession. It has become also an important forum for political debates and its inter-relation with the architectural profession, in addition to a forum for the presentation of the national identities via architecture. Although the theme of the current cycle was a broad one, a theme which recalls to a great extent as previously discussed by the directors a metaphysical call; different sub-themes were presented by different curators, embodying the strategic causes of the era, as presented in Fig. 17. The main ideological debates represented by the different national pavilions under the broad umbrella of “FREESPACE” can be sub-categorized into, anthropological representations, re-defining public space uses, re-phrasing under construction spaces, and embodying the different political and religious influences the countries face nowadays in the current era. The dominant ideas prevailing currently as exposed before; although not possible to be quantified; are the calls for a more “humanistic” understanding for architecture. Those calls were tackling the latent problems created by over-urbanization, segregations, the death of public uses in city spaces, and many more issues discussed before. This leaves us with a new understanding of the international movements nowadays, which redeem the draw-backs of some of our current development plans. From another side, the contributions shed light on the effort and professionalism architecture owns in almost all contributing national pavilions, as a mirror to the state of architecture in the society. Stemming from that, more care could be offered to the national Egyptian pavilion nevertheless in the shadows of the current development plans, in order to export a better and more professional presentation to the state of local driven architectural attempts.

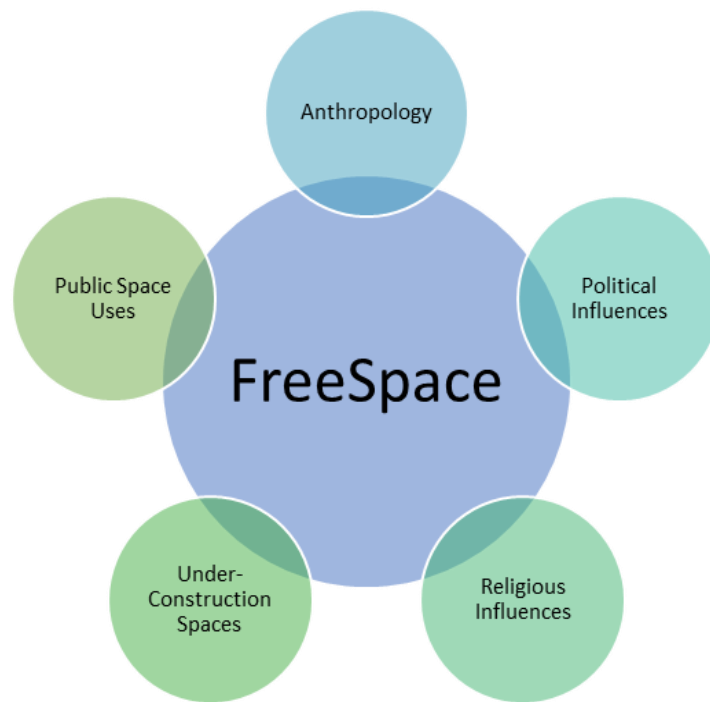


Fig. 17. Sub-themes raised from “FREESPACE”, Biennale Theme 2018.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The paper presented a brief over-view of the importance of the international event of the Venice Biennale in regards to its history and its current role as a forum for national pavilions to represent the contemporary architectural visions of contributing countries. Based on the literature review, although limited for the topic, and a detailed visit to the current year’s event, the paper presented the main ideas aimed to be presented by the directors of the cycle, and how different nations re-presented the ideologies to fit inside the broader theme of “FREESPACE”. The paper concluded with shedding light on the importance of the event, the importance of explicitly presenting the nations’ architectural sources of pride, as well as the sophistication vs. the simplicity of the creative ideas represented in reaction to the general theme. The final recommendation the paper aims to conclude with is the importance of research-based design forums in our Egyptian local case. This can be made by the collaboration of the architectural educational sector and the professional sector in order to enhance both pedagogy and practice based on contemporary modes, instead of duplication of statements through the successive cycles of international events. This will aid to a

great extent in enhancing the architectural research arenas in Egypt as well as provide a deeper contribution to the architecture professional field.

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## ما بين العرض والتجريب للفراع الحر: تحليل لإعادة إدراك الفراغ فى بينالى فينيسا الدولى للعمارة

يهدف البحث إلى عرض قراءة أدبية مختصرة توضح تاريخ البينالى و ما يمثله من إضافة فكرية إلى توجيه الفكر الفلسفى المعمارى منذ سطوعه إستنادا إلى كتابات المنظرين والباحثين ويتبع ذلك عرض مفصلا وتحليلا للسياق العام بالدورة الأخيرة للبينالى فى عام 2018، من خلال ما قدمته المنسقتان فى المعرض الرئيسى، بالإضافة إلى ما تم تقديمه فى الأجنحة الوطنية كرد فعل للسياق الأشمل للبينالى ويلي ذلك مناقشة للتوجهات والأفكار المختلفة والتوجهات الجديدة والمتقاربة التى عرضت بأساليب معمارية مختلفة، مثل الجودة للفراغ وإحتفاليات الطبيعة والإنثربولوجيا الفراغية، بالإضافة إلى المانيفستو الذى قدمته الأجنحة الوطنية المشاركة ويتناول كذلك المحتوى المطروح من دول الشرق الأوسط لقراءة وتحليل الأبعاد المختلفة وما قدمته تلك الدول من رؤية للفراغ بناء على الثقافة المعمارية الخاصة بها ويخلص البحث إلى تقديم ما يمثله المفهوم المعاصر للفراغ بكل ما أثير حوله و طريقة تناوله فكريا فى البينالى.