

The Impact of Globalization on the Local Identity of Multifunctional Centers: Shopping Malls

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Abstract The article examines the architectural and spatial characteristics of multifunctional retail centers (malls) in Georgia and abroad, along with the factors influencing their development. It compares multifunctional centers in the Middle East, Europe, the United States and Georgia, considering their architectural, aesthetic and other relevant aspects. The study identifies the underlying causes of their similarities and differences and traces stages of their evolution from regional and historic perspectives. It highlights challenges associated with globalization, which in the case of Georgian malls are reflected in standardized architecture and lack of local identity. As shopping malls in Georgia remain in a transitional phase of development, they should, in parallel with adopting contemporary forms and commercial functions, strive to establish a local identity, thereby becoming an integral part of urban life.

Keywords: trade, multifunctional retail center, mall, experience

Introduction

Historically, trade has had a significant impact on urban lives and development of cities. Over the centuries, commercial spaces have undergone constant transformation and change, ultimately becoming one of the most important elements of the city. Much like earlier periods, they function as centers of gravity, defining the rhythm and character of the city.

Despite the increased demand for customer-oriented malls with local identity, the influence

of globalization is still noticeable in modern multifunctional centers, which is reflected in their standardized design. This fact is most evident in Georgia's case. The architecture of the shopping malls here tends to follow standardized models, lacking both dynamism and individualism.

Multifunctional Retail Center (Mall): Creation and Development

In the XX century a new typology of commercial spaces has emerged that combined commercial, recreational and public areas. Unlike traditional bazaars, the priority here was to create a comfortable, climate-controlled environment where customers could get a variety of services in one space. A multifunctional retail center – **mall** – was created as a result of this transformation. It represents a complex architectural and spatial system that plays a significant role in the functional and social life of the city. The process of creating this new type of architectural form was largely influenced by social, economic and cultural characteristics of certain regions. Regional factors explain the variation in mall characteristics: while they share many similarities (such as multifunctionality, controlled environment, and customer-oriented spaces), they also exhibit significant differences. For example, the architectural and spatial configuration of the mall is mostly determined by regional conditions (climate, social, cultural, economic, and urban factors).

The emergence of multifunctional centers is a direct result of the evolution of traditional commercial spaces in Middle Eastern countries, as the traditional eastern bazaars

represent the first examples of a commercial space with a centralized structure (e.g. Al-Hamidiyah Souq). The bazaar functioned as an open urban space within the city where people could trade and engage in social interaction. The bazaar was relatively small to better accommodate customers, as opposed to the modern retail centers of the same region, e.g. malls in Doha or Dubai, so called "city within a city". As a result of economic growth they have transformed into grand scale multifunctional centers with climate controlled environments [1]. The diverse recreational



Figure 1. "Villaggio Mall" Doha, Qatar

zones create a comfortable atmosphere for visitors, making the mall the primary hub for social interactions, particularly given the local hot climate. In this type of mall, priority is given to luxury detailing, striking interior, visual effects and numerous spaces for the visitors to relax and enjoy their time (Figure 1-2). Mall design in this region prioritizes a distinctive visual identity, themed spaces and the enhancement of the overall visitor experience. However, recent years have shown a growing tendency to recreate the atmosphere of traditional bazaars [2].



Figure 2. "ALHAZM" Doha, Qatar

Characteristics of Multifunctional Centers in Europe and North America

European multifunctional centers tend to have more modest architectural design incorporating elements of historical context. Unlike those in Asian cities, European malls are more successfully integrated into the surrounding environment and more adapted to

local public spaces. The interior maintains strong connection to the surroundings thereby minimizing any sense of enclosure or isolation. In addition, they offer a more flexible and diverse interior layout (Figure 3-4). In European mall design, the focus shifts away from scale toward environmental sustainability and preservation of the local identity [3].



Figure 3. "MyZeil" Shopping Mall, Frankfurt, Germany

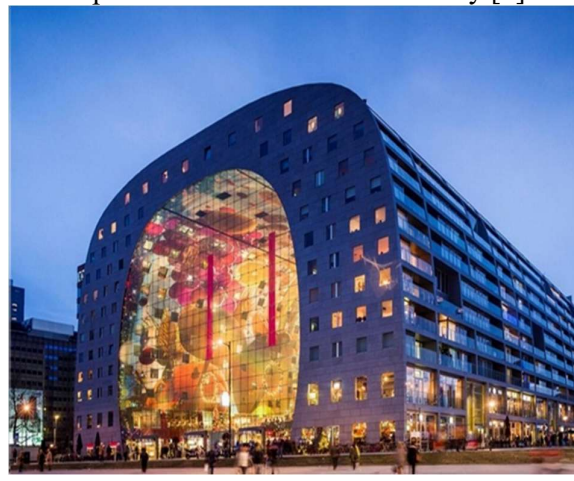


Figure 4. "Markthal Rotterdam"

The American, so-called "classic" mall model is a good example for comparing malls within the regions. The American model refers to a large-scale commercial structure located outside the city with vehicle-oriented planning (Figures 5–6). American malls were known for their multifunctionality from the very

beginning, however, in recent years, the traditional enclosed mall model tends to be replaced by more open and flexible design. Alongside the retail functions, these newer developments incorporate residential, office and social components



Figure 5. Mall of America, Minnesota



Figure 6. Mall of America, recreation space

The Evolution of Trade in Georgia: from Traditional Bazaars to the Present

Trade has been a significant part of life in Georgia owing to the country's geographic location [4]. Diverse and bustling traditional bazaars and street markets were integral parts of the city (Figure 7). In the beginning of the XIX century there were several bazaars that were vital for the city's economy as well as

cultural identity [5]. It is relevant to note Tbilisi caravanserais, that were known for their multifunctionality (incorporating hotel rooms, small shops, various workshops). People visited bazaars and caravanserais not only for trade but also to exchange local and foreign news and to spend their leisure time [6].



Figure 7. Old Tbilisi, Georgia

Later, in the Soviet period the process of industrialization and urban expansion, combined with restrictions on private trade (despite the fact that bazaars still existed) and



Figure 8. "Tbilisi Mall", Tbilisi, Georgia

centralized economy led to the development of state retail network such as department stores and specialized shops (e.g. "Univermag Tbilisi"). In the XX century, shifting toward a

market economy once again resulted in a radical transformation of commercial space typologies. Nowadays multifunctional retail centers in Georgia generally reflect contemporary demands and trends, although there is still a significant distinction between historical and modern commercial spaces. Whereas traditional bazaars were an integral part of urban life, modern malls in Tbilisi function as relatively independent, often isolated entities. Their architectural and spatial configurations are based on global models and show little to no expression of local identity (Figure 8).

Despite a nationwide development trend manifested in the growing number and scale of new malls, as well as the renovation and expansion of older ones ("Tbilisi Mall", "Home Mart", "City Mall", "East Point"), a lack of dynamism and individuality remains evident in both exterior and interior design thereby affecting their architectural and functional quality.

Comparative Analysis (Foreign Analogues – Local Commercial Spaces)

In well-known multifunctional spaces abroad, one often encounters thematic parks, aquariums, large entertainment and recreational zones, as well as residential and office functions integrated within malls. In contrast, the functional diversity of Georgian malls is considerably more limited, typically consisting of retail, food courts, and small-scale entertainment facilities. Spatial planning is mostly based on a corridor system with clearly defined zoning. In Georgia, large malls are mainly located outside the city and therefore are designed primarily for vehicle access. As a result, they lack connection to pedestrian flows leading to a disconnection from everyday urban life. This sense of enclosure is less obvious in the commercial spaces of coastal cities (e.g., "Grand Mall" in Batumi) which shows potential for further development in this direction.

Conclusion

Despite development within a global typology, a comparative analysis suggests that

architectural and spatial formation of malls largely depends on local conditions. Malls in Eastern countries are focused on visitor's experience, as reflected in large-scale atriums, visual effects and themed environments where the mall often functions as a primary public center of the city. In the United States priority is given to the commercial factor and the integration of entertainment facilities. The European model, however, differs significantly from those described above. European malls are organically integrated into the historical environment and function as extensions of the city often referred to as "hybrid spaces".

Against the backdrop of global practice, multifunctional retail spaces in Georgia remain in a formative, transitional stage. As such, they require more comprehensive architectural approach aimed at strengthening integration with the urban environment and emphasizing local identity. Attention to contemporary trends and best practices will support their evolution into integral components of the city's social and cultural life.

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