

**The College of Graduate Studies and the College of
Engineering Cordially Invite You to a**

PhD Dissertation Defense

Entitled

***EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF HISTORIC SITE
INTERPRETATION CENTERS TO MEANING MAKING: THE CASE OF
BAHRAIN***

by

May Jalal Al Saffar

Faculty Advisor

**Professor Kheira Anissa Tabet Aoul, Department of Architectural
Engineering
College of Engineering**

Date & Venue

6:00 Pm

Thursday, 24 September 2020

Online

Abstract: This dissertation explores the role and contribution of the Historic Site Interpretation Centers in the process of meaning-making from the historic site to the visitors, as well as their visiting experience and attendance at the same settings. The Historic Site Interpretation Centers exhibit a unique museum typology dedicated to sites of historical significance, offering a dual mode of interpretation, labeled as 'in situ' and 'in context'. The objective was to evaluate the physical attributes and applied display strategies in conveying meaning from historic sites to visitors and, to explore the resulting stakeholders' (i.e. service providers and visitors) perception and emotional experience in these dual settings. Hence, a convergent mixed method of multiple case-study analysis was used to evaluate the given settings' physical attributes, and multi-ethnographic tools inclusive of archival documents, online survey, semi-structured open-ended interviews, and non-obtrusive observation were used to explore the stakeholders' perceptions. Four historical sites in Bahrain were selected: Qal'at Al Bahrain, Shaikh Salman bin Ahmed Al Fateh Fort, Bu Maher Fort and Al Khamis Mosque. The findings suggest that visitation interest and meaning-making are primarily affected by first, a range of different contextual relationships between the Historic Site Interpretation Centers and their historic sites, building physical attributes and display strategies. Second, visitors' interests and expectations are the main trigger for visitation, while their cultural background and collective memory are recognized as influential factors in the process of meaning-making. The interference with meaning-making may reside in the de-contextualization of objects and in the architectural design of the interpretive center that may conflict with the context, due to appearance or location, as well as the presentation strategies, as their characteristics are based on a context inclusive of climate and people's identity and culture, which calls for a Critical Regionalism approach. Finally, a new classification of museums is suggested on the basis of contextual relationships to the historic site and the involvement of dual modes of interpretation, 'in situ' and 'in context', in order to overcome the existing conflict of the contribution and role of such museums. In addition, this study may provide some design and curatorship directions for architects and museographers in Bahrain and beyond.

Keywords: historic site interpretation centers, historic site, Bahrain, meaning-making, visitor experience, ethnographic mixed method, critical regionalism