

# UNFOLDING ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS: WHAT MAKES THEM SO DISTINGUISHED?

**HADEEL MILYANI, SARA MOFARHI**

Hadeel Milyani, Miss, Effat University,

Sara Mofarhi, Miss, Effat University.

Supervised by Wael ElSayed, Prof, Effat University.

## ABSTRACT

In any region of the world, there is usually that one unique element that portrays the culture and identity of the region. Most of the time, architecture is the tool used to create this form of representation. Landmarks are buildings or elements that can be easily recognized through their unique features and strong expression of cultural momentum. So, what makes an outstanding building. Craftsmanship, Beauty and Grace all play an important role. Nevertheless, the world's greatest buildings ultimately are the ones that distinguish themselves from their surroundings. The objective of this research is to identify the correlation between an architectural landmark and what makes people recognize it. The research will examine these factors through different approaches of social and cultural aspects. The critical questions investigated are: what makes a building a landmark. As well as, understanding how a landmark affects the economy of a region. Which will be followed by exploring what are the functions that help this landmark become a tourist attraction. In the research, an examination of new and old case studies of architectural landmarks was done to fully understand the topic. The two case studies chosen are; The Eiffel Tower in Paris and Burj Khalifa in Dubai. A survey was also conducted to further analyze the topic according to the Saudi Arabian community.

## Literature Review

Buildings are the background of everyday life, people don't usually raise their eyes and examine buildings when walking or driving around the city. Good architecture however, grabs your attention. It makes you more aware of your surroundings. But how does good architecture start. Consider context and situation as an example, it's about integrating familiar elements that strongly provoke your inner thoughts and memories. Thus, resulting in giving buildings an identity, which is relatable to its context. Contrastingly, some buildings entice people's imagination through the sheer simplicity of their outstanding difference. Regardless of which road any building takes, there are a few key features that, when grouped together result in creating a manifestation of iconic architecture that creates a long standing presence in the mind of the viewer. Thus, cementing itself as a prominent element to be pointed out, a landmark.

In order to understand what these key features are, along with their impacts on their surroundings, thorough studies were done on two principal landmarks, Burj Khalifa in Dubai and The Eiffel Tower in France.

Whenever someone mentions Dubai the first thing that comes to mind is the world's tallest freestanding structure, Burj Khalifa. Which represents our first case study. When the construction of the tower was done in 2010 it instantly became a strong tourist attraction that everyone wanted to see and visit. People wanted to experience and explore the world from the highest point possible on earth. By breaking the world's tallest building record as well as many more, it quickly became a wonder. In the course of a year it started to represent a city that is over 180 years old. There are a few reasons that explain how a new building such as this can quickly become the image of a city. The most obvious reason is the amazing construction technology implemented in the tower. But also functions like, the world's highest observation deck and the sky restaurant, which made it more, appealing to the tourists. On the other hand, the local citizens showcase the tower with a strong sense of pride and joy that their country has achieved what was once known to be impossible. It became a source of inspiration that showcases the possible achievement of all their dreams. Burj Khalifa holds a strategic location in the heart of Dubai next to world's largest shopping mall and overlooking the world's largest dancing fountain. It is the sole destination of up to 1.8 million people a year.

*"A vision, an object, a symbol, the Tower is anything that Man wants it to be, and this is infinite. A sight that is looked at and which looks back, a structure that is useless and yet irreplaceable, a familiar world and a heroic symbol, the witness to a century passing by and a monument that is always new, an inimitable and yet incessantly imitated object..."* (Translation of Roland Barthes, La tour Eiffel, Ed. Delpirre 1964).

The Eiffel Tower is a strong embodiment of power, creativity and uniqueness. It has stood as the tallest man-made building in the world for forty-one consecutive years until it was dethroned by the Chrysler Building years

ago. Regardless, it still stands today as the most known building in the world where even its silhouette is internationally recognized by anyone, anywhere.

Many have pondered about the reasons that make The Tower so famous. There have been countless debates regarding its beauty, shape and aesthetic being too ugly or plain and distorted. It has caused a riot amongst the famous artists and engineers of that time, accusing it of disrespecting the structural standards and limitations as well as cultural separation. Yet, it still poses as the most significant standpoint of not only Paris, but the whole country of France as well.

To answer this ancient old question of why The Eiffel tower is so famous, we need to look at a few features that distinguish it from other buildings and structures. To begin with, we need to understand the reasons behind its construction. Inspired by the Lattig Observatory, it was built as a celebration for the Exposition Universelle, which is known to be a World's Fair to mark the celebration of the Italian Revolution being inaugurated. Similarly, The Tower was meant to only be a temporary feature for the celebration. Initially it was surrounded by several artistic elements. However, they were all demolished and only the Eiffel Tower remained. This was due to it gaining the popularity of the people from its new and unprecedented design and structure. Furthermore, this monument was and still is a strong representation of the Industrial Revolution. Especially considering the time period it was built in where metal construction was newly discovered and all the focus was shifted on the industrial boom. Freestanding at the height of 324m with its antenna, the structure is well designed to resist wind and thermal expansion to such a degree that it represents a wide technological advancement during that time frame. Finally, the most obvious reason for its popularity is its daring design, since it was constructed to be temporary it was built without following standards and requirements. This allowed the designers to have something unorthodox, which sparked conversations and debates enticing the minds of the people.

In conclusion, architectural buildings represent strongly the country it is located in. Not only does it become a strong focal point and definition of the region, but it also becomes a strong cultural icon effortlessly marketing itself to the world. The more outrageous the design is and the more structurally challenging it is, the more famous it will be. Similarly, the more controversial it is and the more incorporation of technology it withholds, the more eminence it will exhibit. Architectural landmarks do not transpire through what is already here, but eventuate through challenging the norms and distorting the reality that people thought was once impossible.

### **Methodology**

#### **Data Collection Procedures:**

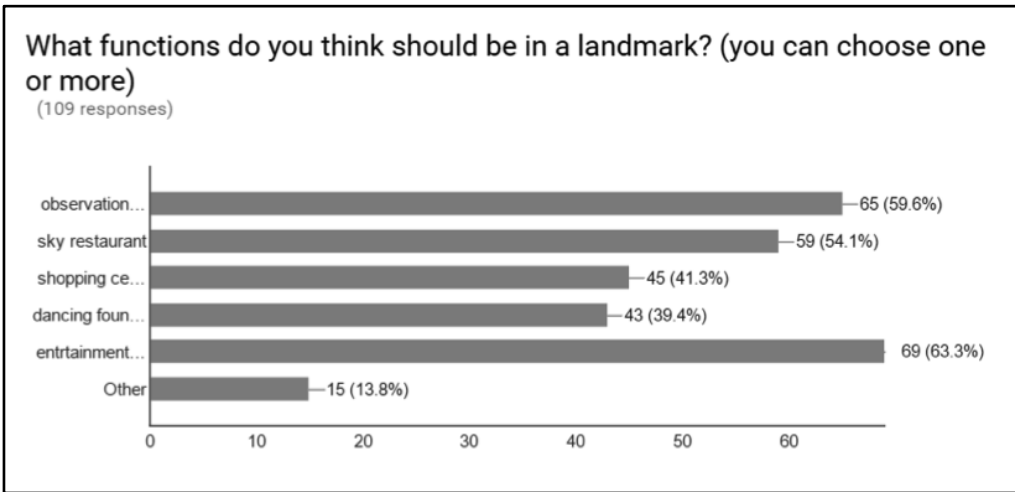
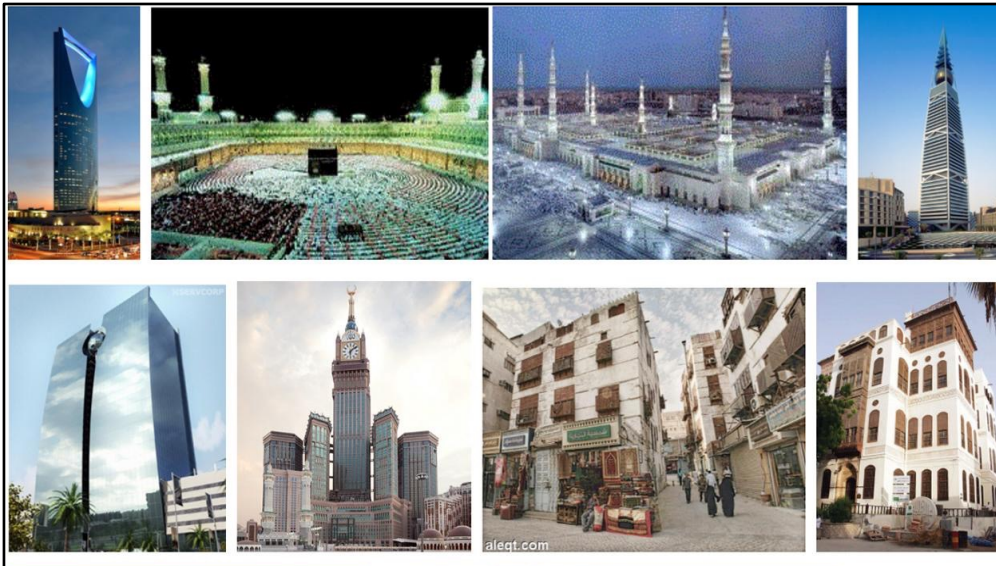
In order to further delve into the scope of what determines the generation of an architectural monument through the eyes of the public, a survey was conducted. This analysis targeted a random open selection of the students and faculty of the Architecture Department in Effat University. A total of 109 volunteers filled out this survey. The questions were sent out through the university e-mail system and answered online. The participants filled out the samples voluntarily after obtaining their consent. In order to protect their identity, all the surveys were filled anonymously.

#### **The Survey:**

The survey is included in the annexure at the end of this research. A total of nine questions were asked to keep the survey short and less time consuming. The survey was constructed using simple and conscious language to ensure clarity to the reader. The participants were asked questions about what they consider to be a local landmark and explain reasons as to why they believe so or not. Whether the landmark has to be a tower or in specific location. And finally what function should be added to make an iconic building.

### **Results**

In order to fully understand the synthesis of a landmark, an investigation was done. A survey was made available to the students and faculty of Effat University, KSA. Based on their responses the outcomes are displayed below. (Figure 1. Local landmarks in Saudi Arabia; Figure 2. Some mentioned Local Landmarks )



The first component examined the existing background knowledge of the participants regarding the local buildings that they considered to be landmarks in Saudi Arabia. A total of 25% selected the Kingdom Tower, followed by 23.39% who collectively wrote different buildings. The next building selected was the Religious buildings category which includes; The Holy Mosque in Makkah and Al- Haram Al Nabawi in Madinah respectively. This came in at 14.52%. However, the remaining participants selected different buildings located throughout the Kingdom with a minority recognizing, Masmak Fort, Naseef House and Al- Wadaa at 1.61% to 3.23%. The Clock Tower, King Road Tower and Al-Balad received an equal amount of votes, which equals to 5.65%. Under the Other category, the buildings that were mentioned are: IDB Building, Mall Of Arabia, Al Rajhi Bank, Bank Towers, Abraj Albadriya, Al-Farsi Towers, Emaar Towers, Madaen Saleh, Jeddah Water Tank, Tujjar Jeddah, Anani Mosque, Damac Tower, Anqawi House, Le Mall, Hilton Hotel, Farsi Towers, Al-Shatee, Al-Sreya, King Abdullah Tower, KAEC, Aisha Mosque and Abraj al Beit.

The second component followed the previous question by the inquisition the knowledge of the participants about what components they considered when choosing the buildings mentioned above. Seventy respondents believe that the height of the building is the most feature they consider to be a representation of a landmark. While a range of 57 to 61 respondents closely selected between the aesthetics, location and history as important features of landmarks. (Figure 3. Factors in choosing Landmarks)

(Figure 4. Functions in landmarks)

An important feature that is usually found corresponding with successful designs is the integration of new, unique or public highly favored functions. The elements mentioned include the following: An Observation Deck, A Sky Restaurant, A Shopping Center, A Dancing Fountain and An Entertainment Space. They were also given the option to select Other and define what they usually resonate with a focal design. The answers include the following statements which have been shortened or rephrased for clarity: Surrounding Open Spaces, Touristic Center, Urban Spaces and Centers, Historical Areas, Offices, Advertisement Centers, None of the Options and finally one participant believes that there doesn't need to be a specific function to highlight a building from any other. When answering this, the survey gave the participants the freedom to select more than one option. The results are displayed above.

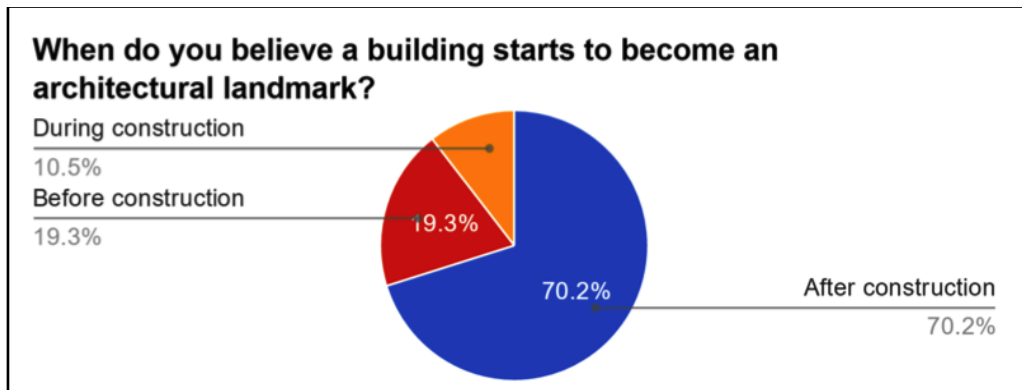
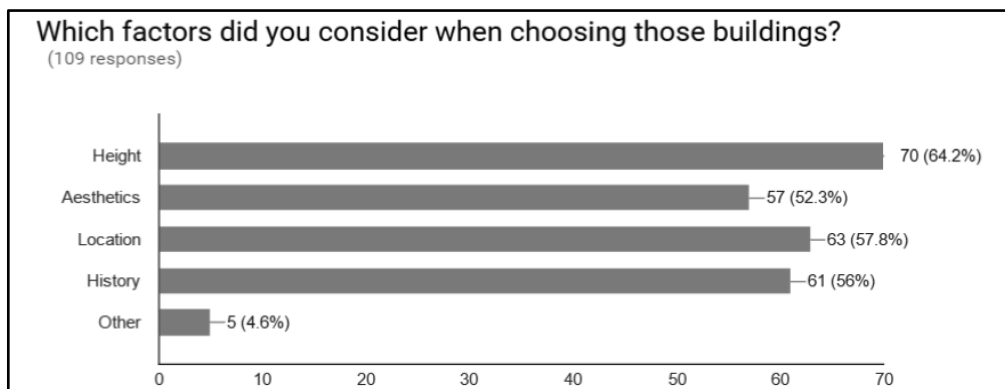


Figure 5.

Landmarks Timeline Statistics

Successively, to fully understand the time frame of when the public believes a landmark turns into a cultural icon, the following questions have been asked. The first was selected to directly determine when it the building starts to become a landmark. They were given three factors to select from. The majority of the participants agreed that buildings became more famous after they have been constructed. While, on the other hand, 20% of the respondents said that it happens before construction and finally only 10 % selected during construction.



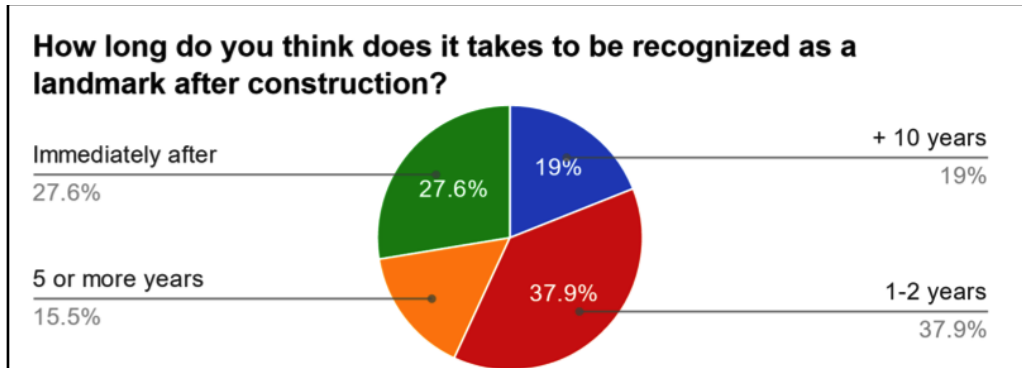


Figure 6. Landmarks In-depth Timeline Statistics

Subsequently, this was asked to follow up with the question presented before it. This focuses on the period after its construction compared to its predecessor, which targeted the general time frame. From the results it is clear that there is a small difference between all of the choices. The highest percentage at 37.9% for 1-2 years. While, on the contrary, the lowest percentage was of 5 or more years at 15%.

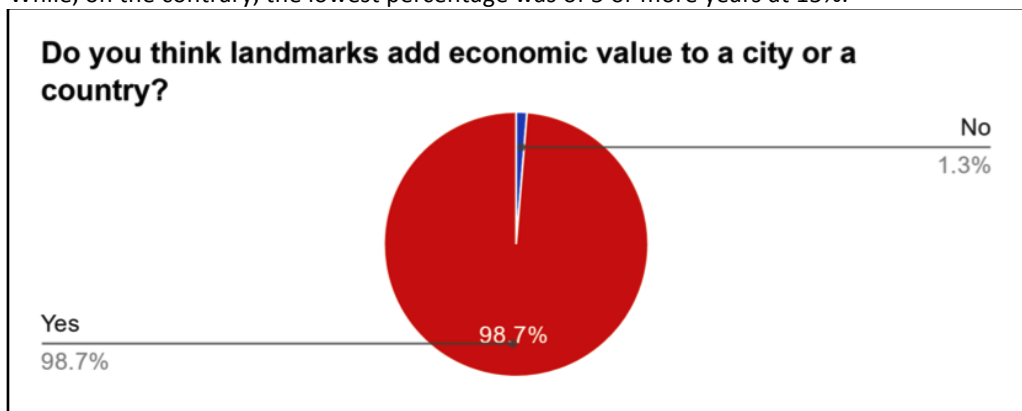


Figure 7. Landmarks economic value

As the pie chart clearly displays at the top, the dominant answer is, Yes, which was selected by 98.7% of the participants. This indicates that most of the respondents agreed that landmarks add a significant amount of economic value with the exception of two volunteers.

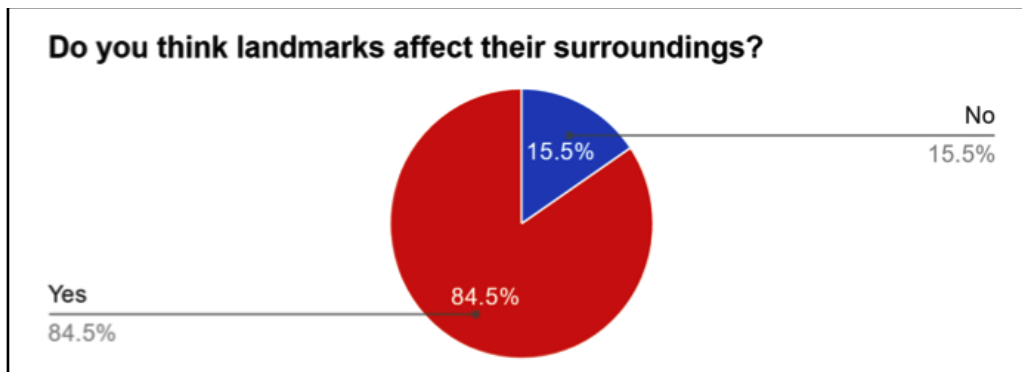


Figure 8. Landmarks and surroundings

To fully comprehend how the participants felt about the presence of such an important feature in their region. They were asked about whether or not they believed a building such as this had any consequence on the place it was erected in. A total of 84% think that there is a form of consequence to the surrounding environment. Contradicting, out of the 109 responses, 15% think otherwise.

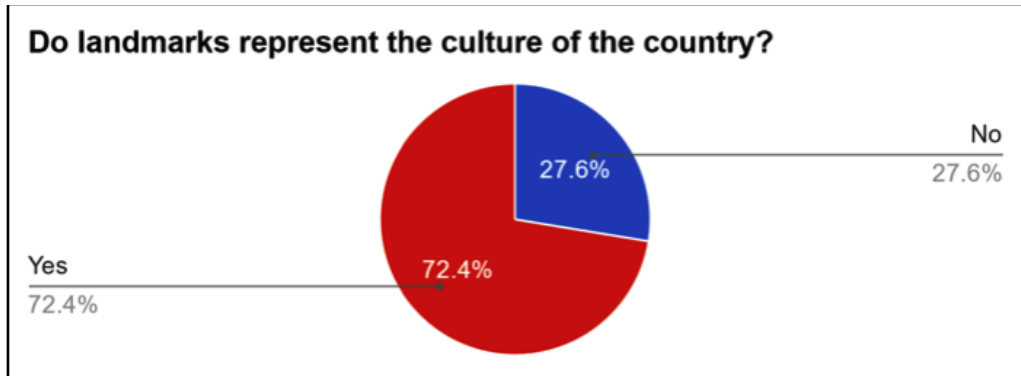


Figure 9. Landmarks and culture

The following components requested specific points to further explore the subject. Namely, on whether or not the applicants conceive any existing relationship between landmarks and the culture of the country in which they were built in. The participants were asked if landmarks represent the culture of the country. The majority with 72% believes that the statement is true. However, a gross of 27% do not agree with the idea that their culture is being appropriated through any of the existing architectural monuments.

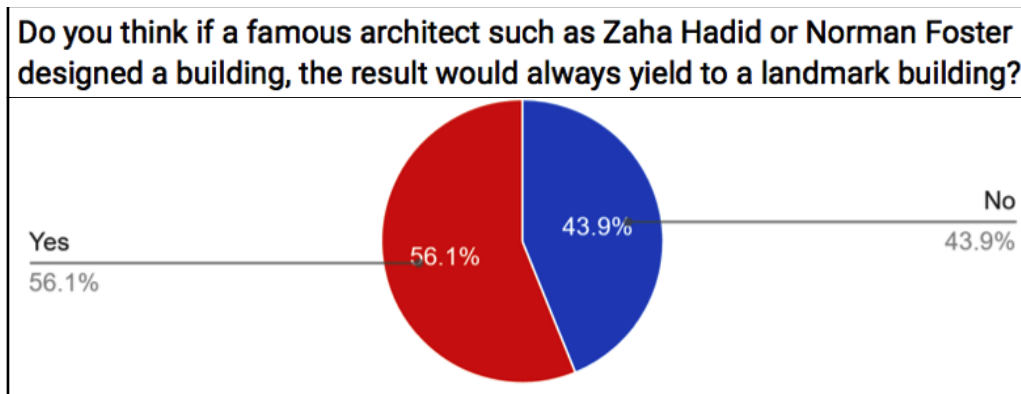


Figure 10. Landmarks relating to Famous Architects

Finally, with the objective of pursuing more information in relation to the topic. The applicants were questioned regarding the importance of the influence of a famous architect on the design and construction of the building. This was asked in such a way to enable us to interpret if these types of buildings do always result in the creation of a landmark simply due to its affiliation with a brand name. The results garnered an insignificant difference between one another. With a sum of 56.1% agreeing with the aforementioned statement and 43.9% diverging the allegation.

**Contradicting Results:**

When ruling out the people who answered no to whether or not Landmark affect their surroundings we found out that only 20% of the participants did say no. The answers were contradicting to the majority of the participants (refer to figure 10) for example in the first question where we asked about when do building start to become a landlord unlike mentioned above they believe that it happens before Construction. Those participants also believe that if a building became a landmark after construction it either happens right away or it take a longer time for it to become an important building. Finally they also think that landmarks don't necessarily represent the culture of they place they're built in.

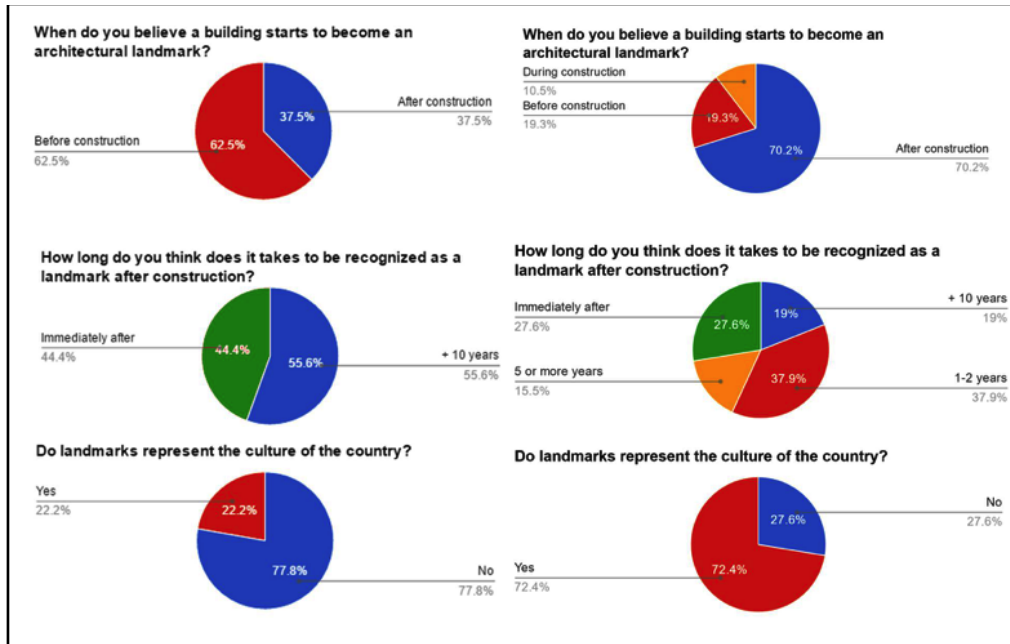


Figure 11. Results of a special group (selecting that landmarks did not affect surroundings)

In conclusion, the results displayed showcase a diverse opinion regarding the topic. It is a reflection of the mindset of Effat University students and faculty, limited to the Architecture department. However, it is very rich in background since the participants range from having different nationalities, environments and cultures. Thus, enabling us to receive varied feedback.

**Discussion**

The primary purpose of this research is to first understand the reasons behind what features constitute a landmark. To explore the correlation between the infamy of the building and the reasons behind people's recognition to it. Finally, to discuss the different functions that garners it as a touristic attraction. From the results we can deduce the following.

Based on the first questions' results the research found that some of the mentioned buildings contradicted what was expected to be answered. Al Balad along with The Clock Tower and King Road Tower were expected to rank higher than just 5.65% respectively. This is due to the fact that Al Balad has been long known for its traditional and unique architecture that is constantly mentioned by everyone. Specifically, Naseef House, a traditional Hejaz designed building, and Anqawi House, traditional mashrabyya style, were only mentioned by 4 to nil respondents. Similarly, Al- Rajhi Bank was expected to be one of the average yielding results due to it's history of being the first building of it's kind in the region that broke the traditional design of having square structures and set the trends for the buildings that came after it. Religious buildings which include Al Haram Al Makki and Al Masjid Al Nabwe garnered less attention than what was expected to be received by the participants. Due to the religious importance of the two mosques, it was expected that this would get the highest score over all the other options. Another widely popular mosque, Masjid Al- Rahma that is situated at a strategic location that is constantly being visited by people was not mentioned once by any of the participants. From this we can conclude, that buildings that follow traditional and religious themes are not largely considered as landmarks by the public. This is perhaps due to it's forgotten importance, or very orthodox approach that everyone is used to witnessing. Other buildings that are considered as landmarks in the region such as Al Wada'a, Jeddah Water Tank and Masmak Fort received nil to low results which in turn relays to us the possibility that people do not always tend to lean towards buildings with odd or uncharacteristic shapes which is the common integer between all three. The Clock Tower, which was advertised greatly, received a lower score than what was expected, with 7 votes out of the 109 that were answered. This again may be perhaps due to its affiliation with a religious building and the exemption of designing the tower in a new and modern way, thus confirming the deduced statement mentioned above. Finally, the highest scored landmark in the region is, The Kingdom Tower, or as it may also be known as, The Jeddah Tower, with a total of 25% of the votes. Relating this to the other answers received from the other questions, this may be due to the following factors. The first being the height, which was the most, voted for factor that distinguishes a normal building from a landmark. The Kingdom Tower is targeted to be the tallest building in the world after its completion.

The second factor is its location, being constructed in the most touristic city in the country. Furthermore, located at the hub of social life, the Corniche, or seaside. The third point being, the function this tower provides is the highest sky deck or observatory in the world. This function has collected the second highest, 59.6% of the voting.

After thorough examination from the case studies done in the literature review, the research deduced four main factors that help define landmarks. These factors are: highlighting height, aesthetics, location and history. Through the analysis of the results, the most important factor is the element of height. This value was anticipated due to the fact that countries from all around the world are competing for the construction of the tallest record-breaking tower to garner as much attention they possibly could. People are usually fascinated by the technique of construction behind those buildings due to its innovation, which also assists in making them very famous. It is also clear that the remaining three factors are as equally as important. Since it was believed that the highest scoring category would be history. This is due to the fact that historic buildings often represent the culture and identity of the country.

Moreover, in the following question, the functions that are typically offered in famous buildings are: An Observation Deck, A Sky Restaurant, A Shopping Center, A Dancing Fountain and An Entertainment Space. This was done based on the case studies that were examined. From the results we can presume that, landmarks tend to have entertainment centers and observation decks.

There are three main periods in which a building gets recognized as a landmark; before construction, during and after Construction. It mainly depends on the purpose of the building for example in the case of Burj Khalifa, everyone anticipated long before it was constructed that it was going to become a landmark for Dubai. This was due to the aim of having it built to become the world's tallest structure. On the other hand, the Eiffel Tower was not even meant to stay but after some time, it became meaningful and got recognized as a landmark. We believe that most of the time buildings don't become landmarks until after they are constructed which according to the results we received; participants seemed to agree with as well. Additionally, they were asked the length they believe it took for a building to be recognized as a landmark but only after construction. The results were distributed almost equally between the four options.

Most landmarks around the world end up becoming a tourist attraction in the city they are built. People tend to travel around the world to visit these landmarks, That's why we believe that landmarks add a huge economic value to their surroundings. This is clearly supported by the examples of Burj Khalifa and the Eiffel Tower; people all around the world want to go and visit these two Landmarks take pictures with them and explore the areas around them. From the survey we could tell that people believe that landmarks affect the surroundings.

Referring back to the literature review where the Eiffel Tower represented the culture of France while Burj Khalifa is more of an international landmark. We wanted to investigate if the participants believed all landmarks should represent culture. As expected the majority of the people believe that it does represent the culture of the country. However, some might say it takes time for a building to become part of the culture and be a representative of the country it is built in. This can be seen in the case of the Eiffel Tower, which was shunned at first, but later grew to become the exact image of France.

When investigating the different architectural landmarks around the world we found out that they were mostly designed by famous architect, which lead to us questioning if that is an important factor for a monument. Although, based on research, what was expected to be answered would be majorly a yes. The actual results lead to a tie. From this it can be easily concluded that most people do not look into the designer of the building but they focus on the other factors mentioned above.

## **CONCLUSION**

Landmarks are iconic elements in countries. They display strength, power and radiate a sense of affirmation. It is clear that there are specific features that are required to be there for this monument to rise above everything else. Height, Modernity, Innovation, Location and Function. Landmarks are buildings that break the norms and display at ease what once was not attainable. They must tower over their surroundings to showcase their precise design and approach. Landmarks must provide an insight to its users regarding the view it reaches. Admittedly, people tend to deviate away from traditional approaches, which clarifies why some buildings become harmonized with its surroundings and others cut through them and become known. Further research can be done to further analyze the reasons behind people's choices. As well as, tackling the idea behind the existence of a relationship between famous architects and their creations.



**REFERENCES**

- Ducouret, F. (2016). *Why is the Eiffel Tower so well known? What is it famous for?* - Quora. [online] Quora.com. Available at: <https://www.quora.com/Why-is-the-Eiffel-Tower-so-well-known-What-is-it-famous-for> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2016].
- Goldberger, P. (2016). *ARCHITECTURE VIEW; What Does It Take To Make a Landmark?*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/02/arts/architecture-view-what-does-it-take-to-make-a-landmark.html?pagewanted=all> [Accessed 23 Apr. 2016].
- Gvshp.org. (2016). *Historic Preservation 101: What is a Landmark?*. [online] Available at: <http://gvshp.org/blog/2011/07/11/historic-preservation-101-what-is-a-landmark/> [Accessed 8 Mar. 2016].
- Irving, M. and StJohn, P. (2007). *1001 buildings you must see before you die*. New York: Universe.
- knoll. (2016). *modernism at risk: modern solutions for saving modern landmarks*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ncmodernist.org/ModernismatRisk.pdf> [Accessed 11 Mar. 2016].
- Parisparisfrance.blogspot.ae. (2011). *paris blog: paris accommodation and things to do: why is the eiffel tower so special?*. [online] Available at: <http://parisparisfrance.blogspot.ae/2011/05/why-is-eiffel-tower-so-special.html> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2016].
- Tou Eiffel.paris. (2016). *The Eiffel Tower as a World Monument – Discover the monument – Tou Eiffel.paris*. [online] Available at: <http://www.tou Eiffel.paris/en/everything-about-the-tower/the-eiffel-tower-in-the-world.html> [Accessed 8 Mar. 2016].
- Wikipedia. (2016). *Eiffel Tower*. [online] Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eiffel\\_Tower#Origin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eiffel_Tower#Origin) [Accessed 28 Mar. 2016].
- keholder analysis. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.