

Enriching Public Spaces in Iran – Challenges and Opportunities

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1 ABSTRACT

Today the urban spaces and attendance of people in public spaces are very problematic and urban planners discuss about it very much.

At a glance if we review the history of urban planning, we can see that after industrial revolution and rapid growth of cities and after some solutions that urban planner thought about it, the appearance of cities changed. During these changes the attendance of citizens was changed too. By the theory of zoning that modernist urban planners suggested as “Aten charter” in 1933, the city was divided to three zones for working, recreation and living and circulation. So the importance of human spaces and urban spaces was reduced and increasing of automobiles became other factor for making urban spaces more unsuitable for people.

2 HISTORY OF URBAN PLANNING IN THE WORLD AND IRAN

2.1 Theories of urban planners after nineteenth centuries

In developing countries that most of urban planning decisions followed from the European theoreticians, their cities changed as well. Urban spaces became to some ugly and dangerous spaces for attending pedestrian and citizens and this situation have been trying till now.

In Europe and other developed countries after facing with these negative affects in their cities, some activities were launched to solve this problem in urban spaces. Some urban spaces were altered or designed to attract people and to have the ability of attendance of citizens in them.

One of the theoreticians that had noticeable theories was “Kamillo sitte”, he pointed to the importance of attendace of people in city and urban spaces should be seen as “a place of social interaction” and he mentioned why new urbanism couldn’t create attractive and memorable spaces and cities.

There were some other theoreticians such as “Pugin”, “Ruskin”, “Moris” who also recommended to review the history and returning to aesthetics of the past and there were also some body like Jean Jacobs who emphesized the attendance of people in public spaces and enriching social relationships.¹

2.2 Principals of traditional urban spaces in Iran

In historical urban planning of Iran, there were some valuable principles which haven’t been continued by our contemporary urban planning and these urban spaces have been changed to some unvalued spaces which were just allocated to automobile.

Our traditional urban spaces had some principles which include:

(1) The priciple of juncture of urban elements and houses:

In the old cities of Iran residential units have been jointed to each other with central courtyard and create a united complex. The arrangement and the orientation of all of the elements of houses were obeyed from “modularity” and “order”, so there was harmony in city.

(2) The priciple of contrast spaces:

Contrast spaces are some spaces which have different width and length and height. The worth of contrarst spaces is that it can mitigate the monotony of the space.

(3) The priciple of encompassing the space:

Encompassing the space is the first principle of traditional spaces in Iran. This principle is common in all old cities. In Iran, traditional urban spaces are surrounded by arcades and colonnades to create a symmetrical and balanced space.

¹ CHOAY, Francoise

(4) Inner space and outer spaces:

Traditional urban designing was involved with “outer” spaces which include public spaces such as squares and streets and “inner” spaces that include inner courtyards within the houses.

The concept of both inner and outer space is equal except in their scales.

Inner courtyards in houses are surrounded by rooms and outer spaces are encompassed by mosque, public bath, houses and some other buildings.

(5) The principle of perception of spaces:

A traditional urban designer had a good perception of the meaning of “space” and “mass”. He believed that the city is a combination of “mass” and “space”.

(6) The principle of composition:

In a traditional city, we had a harmonized composition so that it created a unity of forms.

In old cities we can find a composition by integrating different elements, and this composition showed a strong identity.

(7) The principle of territory:

We can identify three different spaces in traditional cities: 1- private space such as courtyards 2- semi-private or semi-public space such as a deadend street or a “Hashti”². 3- public spaces like streets and squares.

(8) The principle of proportion and scale:

Proportion means the ratio of dimensions of a space. If we use correct and human proportion in space, it will create a sense of relaxation in people.

Scale is the relation between the sizes of a space with other spaces and Human scale is good relation between the sizes of a space with the size of human beings.

In traditional urban spaces we could find a good proportion and human scale in their spaces. In Iran in the regions with hot and dry climate, there are some narrow streets that get shade most of the time, but in spite of its small width people can feel comfort because of the color of walls which are covered by thatch.



The roofscape of Yazd city

streets which covers with thatch



Naghsh jahan square

Ganjali khan square

² Hashti was a semi-private space that was located in the entrance of traditional houses for rapid and informal meeting.

As it was mentioned, most of the traditional urban spaces of Iran except few of them were destroyed during the renovation of streets and erecting highways and new regions.

Of course few spaces which have been remained from the past show the magnificence and power of traditional urban planning such as Naghsh Jahan square and Ganjalikhan square.

2.3 Tekiyeh and Hoseyniyeh and Moharam ceremony

One type of spaces which were very important in our traditional urban spaces was Tekiyeh or Hoseyniyeh. These spaces have reserved their importance till now. Tekiyeh or Hoseyniyeh were used mostly for howling ceremony in the month of “Moharam”. People howl for their third martyred leader (Imam Hossein) by holding special ceremony, they cry and beat on their chest.



Howling in Moharam - Ashoora

The ceremony of these days is one of the most important ceremonies between Shiite Muslims that people try to hold this ceremony in the best way.



Shah Vali Hoseyniyeh in Taft city

In the past the space for holding this ceremony was identified clearly in traditional cities and now we can't see these spaces in contemporary cities of Iran like past time. Nowadays just some streets and squares are allocated to this ceremony and they are not suitable for it.



Intrupting the traffic of vehicles with parade of howlers

Of course some Tekiyehs have been remained from the past that are still so magnificent and can envelop this social activity such as Amir Chaghmag square in Yazd city and Shah Vali Tekiyeh in Taft city.³

³ BOZORGMEHRY , Zohreh

2.4 Some recommends for designing Hoseyniyehs and Tekiyehs

In designing the surrounded spaces we should respect two aspects:

(1) The principle of juncture and relation between urban spaces in the centre of district should be concerned in the other word designed space should be one of the compotent of exist spatial organization in city.

(2) Each urban space should be formed by needs and activities of its citizens. However in general we can mention some recommends for Tekiyeh and Hoseyniyeh as follows:

- In designing Tekiyeh and Hoseyniyeh we should notice the aspect of spatial relation of this element wih other urban elements.
- In designing Tekiyeh and Hoseyniyeh spaces should be surrounded simply and proportionately.
- It should be avoided to convert Tekiyeh and Hoseyniyeh to vehicle access squares.
- Every intrupt in old and historical spaces such as Tekiyeh and Hoseyniyeh should be under surveillance of authorities and axperts.⁴

3 RECENT SITUATION OF URBAN SPACES IN IRAN

Urban spaces of Iran have lost their property as a social space. Our urban spaces such as streets and squares don't present any attraction to attract pedestrian. If some body is seen in this space, it is because of an obligation not for their wish. Most of our streets and square are full of automobile without suitable furniture or attractive function to absorb people and so cities don't have enough civic vitality and most of times they seem ugly, unusable and bore.



Toopkhaneh square in Tehran without any attraction for attendance of people

3.1 Some renovation activities to enrich urban spaces in Iran

Actually pedestrianization and respecting principles in designing historical urban spaces have been launched in Iran but there is still a long distance to ideal situation. Some activities have been done in several cities in Iran during recent years.

For example in centre of Tehran (capital of Iran) some commercial streets were allocated to pedestrian and it caused to increase safty and value in these streets.



Pedestrianization in centre of Tehran (Bazar region)

⁴ TAVASOLI, Mahmood

4 CONCLUSION :HOPES AND CHALLENGES

By some alteration in urban planning of Iran and suitable execution, we can lead cities to a more human manner that other countries recommend to do it too. We should convert our contemporary city to an attractive and memorable city which shows a strong identity.

It is clear that these changes in cities of Iran need a lot of cost and time but at first we should start it with proper legislation in urban designing and giving priority to the attendance of people than automobile. In this case we should emphasize on some legislation that are related to this case and persuade to execute these laws until we could make a prosperous and vivid city.

For example for Moharam ceremony we need some suitable spaces that like past time people can hold their ceremony in the best manner.

We should revive our Tekiyehs and Hoseyniyehs to be adaptable for this important social activity.

Indeed by restoring these spaces we will enrich one of our important cultural elements to be presented in the world.

At the end I repeat that in designing urban spaces especially in historical districts we should define the principles of their combinations, proportions, scales and forms of buildings and issue some codes about them. Following these codes will lead us to a richer space with a strong identity that of course could be more adaptable with social activities and humanity.



Amir Chakhmag Hoseyniyeh in Yazd city

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