DEMOCRACY, SUSTAINABILITY AND URBAN DESIGN IN IRAN

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Abstract: Most people in the world now call cities home but many urban landscapes convey the message that the city is beyond the control of ordinary citizens. Urban landscapes also appear to leave no place for nature and do not provide inhabitants with opportunities to create the sustainable future that we are told must be a key aspiration of our time. As such, our urban landscapes are often disempowering, sometimes induce despair, and generally represent a missed opportunity for people to play an active role in enhancing urban sustainability. This research focuses on identifying the characteristics of urban landscapes inthe history of Iran that invite people to interact with them in positive ways and translating these characteristics into urban design principles. The goal is to create opportunities for diverse groups of people to enhance their environments and become stewards of the ecosystem services on which the sustainable city will depend. It posits that the experience of visibly transforming the places where we live will create a virtuous circle of empowerment and creation of quality (empowering) places, which coupled with the community building that usually accompanies hands-on collective efforts, will contribute substantially to sustainability and well-being. This can be vividly informative when the traditional teachings of Islamic and Iranian architecture are considered in which the comfort and peace were the priorities of urban design. A global scan of indicative examples of community initiatives will lead to development of a typology of inviting/interactive landscapes and translation of their characteristics into draft design principles that can be tested in the big cities which are devoid of humanistic attitude. On the other hand, a new characteristic has been added to the urban design which can be summarised in necessity to freedom. The democracy concept, the signature of modern and technological societies, implies the obligation of listening to popular will and applying it if possible. Due to this fact, the call for social participation in decision-making for all public is one of the strategies of modern humanities to create city based on the capacity of citizenry which is influenced by culture and ideology. In the meantime, the debate on public participation is extremely important, among other reasons because we know that planning is in favour of in- power party or the behind the counter party. Is public participation a familiar concept to the different actors involved in urban planning? People alienation from the current debate suggests that our cities do not reflect the aspirations of all citizens, so the city is not for all. The history of urbanization in Iran shows that political parties imposed their views on formation of the cities to drive the social development as they could exploit the outcomes in their own goals. The growth of Iranian cities around some central notions such as Bazar could be based on the concept of power and ruling. The governors tried to make the cities grow only in urbanization and through design and not real progress of education and human resource. The continuation of life and urbanism in these cities could be seen in economic activities and these cities became deserted as the trade and commerce changed their direction. Sustainability in this approach relied on economic participation of the city as a whole in supplying the neighbourhoods, which showed to be a precarious one in practice.

Keywords: Democracy, Freedom, Iran, Sustainability, Urban design

INTRODUCTION

The interaction between architecture and planning is at the nexus of public decision-making which is affected by the nature and extent of the pressures exerted by interested parties and by the objective realities of the urban condition.

There is no art form that is as completely intertwined with a particular society as its architectural expression: for it is art that is physically rooted in the geographic location of that society. For the members of that society and this is to no way deny that the society may be far from an integrated entity it reflects both their aspirations, their artistic sensibility, and their economic wealth; the level of advancement of their technology; the elements of climate and topography, and the structure of their social organisation. Not only does the architecture of any people physically express all this, being the net result of all the contradictions that society embodies, but it also helps shape the vision of the society of itself. It is both a mirror of that society's activities and an instrument shaping its identity.One of the most important duties of architecture can be considered to create a space of living as it deserves the human being's needs and expectations. Most scientists believe that, in contrast with the popular belief that architecture is the outcome of the time, new architecture has turned in to a device to change the culture and life style. Moving a head of the time and social restrictions can be the manifestations of modern architecture which is being imposed on the traditional cities. The most outstanding feature which can be endowed to built- environment through architectural thought is freedom which can be summarized in three issues tourism, women and human settlements. Every architectural creation is a deliberate act to change the environment and human being`s spatial behavior. Therefore, any building has a physical context within which it can be seen, understood, and evaluated. Topography, climate, materials, structure, proportions and surrounding physical environment, both natural and man-made, are one set of dimensions developed to evaluate the "architectural quality" of a building above and beyond its ability to solve the utilitarian needs of a particular problem, essential as that dimension remains. Hillier and Hanson   Believe that Architectural criticism has, however, gone beyond this level of appreciation to take account of the building's resonance with a collective societal heritage of artistic and aesthetic expression.Methods of spatial syntax analysis, first developed by Hillier and Hanson, represent an attempt to reveal a deep social structuring of architectural space[1,2]. From this view, buildings operate to constitute social organizations as spatial dispositions; architecture mediates social reproduction through spatial "genotypes." These are not formal types orarchetypes but clusters of spatial segments structured in certain formations with syntactic rules of sequence and adjacency. Genotypes are seen as institutionally and epistemologically embedded. The forms of schools, offices and houses are reproduced from a limited number of spatial genotypes. Each of these is linked to specific social institutions (school, corporation, family) embodying forms of knowledge, production, and reproduction. The work of Hillierand Hanson is widely perceived within the field of architecture as positivist and reductionist.The main commitment of governments,moreover, has been to expand the urban space for people to play more roles in social activities and participation.The pursuit of cultural continuity by maintaining the fragile links with society's past has taken on several manifestations. Most direct of these is the preservation of historical vestiges, the protection of the architectural and urban heritage of the people. More subtle, but as direct, has been the attempt to protect the character of certain districts, that convey a sense of place, from encroachments upon that character even when such encroachmentsdo not threaten a specific area.

Furthermore, in a rapidly shrinking world, communications have made us all subject to the influence of international currents of thought, perception and conduct. The creative architectural act is thus also assessed by its positioning amid these currents, as well as its contribution to the evolution of these currents. In other words, its international as well as its national or regional context is involved.In this context, a more subtle and elevated form of architecture trend is required. It is a trendthat functions on many levels: (a) The urbanism qua urbanism: the simplest, most direct appreciation of the building's functional response and aesthetic qualities: Volume, space, movement and so on; the entire lexicon of studied architectural trend is brought to bear on the urbanism, taking it apart and putting it together again both in physical and experiential terms; (b) The urbanismin its physical context: harmony or discord, intentional or unintentional, can be either positive or negative. Its relation to its people can enhance or diminish the stature of the achievement; (c) The urbanism in its cultural context: its "fit" and appropriateness in the context of a cultural heritage expressed through a legacy of built forms that society's genius has produced through its history; (d) The urbanism in its own local/regional intellectual milieu: to what extent does it make a statement on the immediate level of the debate that presses upon the intelligentsia of the region? The local/regional intellectual milieu is much more concerned with issues of freedom that are circumscribed geographically, even though they may have universal overtones. This last level diverges from the more commonly accepted views of architectural criticism and deserves further elucidation.
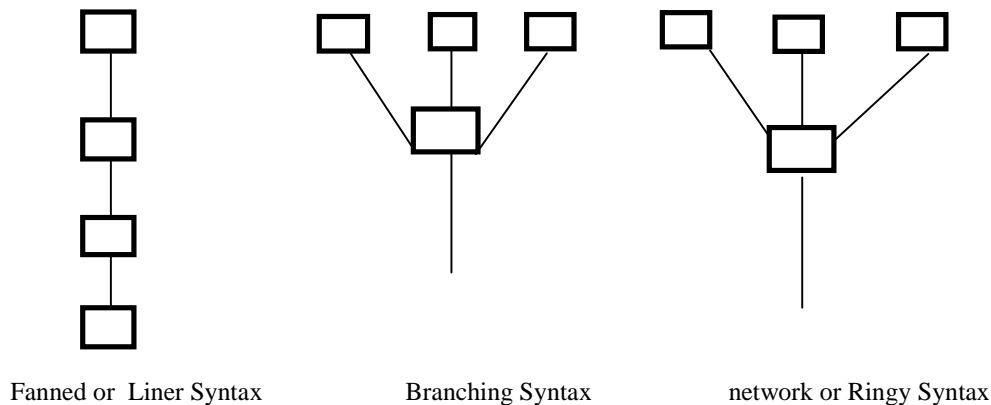
Fanned or Liner Syntax   Branching Syntax   network or Ringy Syntax

Figure 1: Change of plan in markets

Because Iran is a country with both a diverse regionalism and a unifying identity, it is one where local/region issues can be, and are, overlain on the broader issues of the relationship of the Muslim identity vis-à-vis a rapidly modernized world. To varying degrees, the intellectuals and architects of Iran confront the same issues: striking an appropriate balance between the demands of modernity and the requisites of tradition; reading their legacy and heritage through contemporary eyes; dealing with the tension between the integrative and disintegrative forces in society; accommodating and enabling the accession of the masses to the formation of, and identification with the total ethos of the societal cultural output and the allocation of priorities in their developmental efforts to spread the equal opportunities of life for all.It must be mentioned that almost all Muslim countries have somehow similar situation. The debate in each society, has accrued shorthand labels and interpretations of positions that load a particular creative artistic act, be it literary, sculptural, architectural or other type of artistic expression, with connotations unique to this particular intellectual milieu that are often obscured from the uninitiated outsider.

For the case in Iran,two important factors have dominated the presence of different classes and layers of society.The first one is various invasions by other nations to Iran and their totalitarian government and the other Islamic ideology.What was considered favorite for women to act in society was little presence,and little movement so that they were protected against the foreigners` eyes.Over the time the stability of Iranian governments and the formation of the elite out of government control

paved the way for more social participation by women.This explosive reality requires a special understanding of how traditional contexts have degenerated in to modernity and accordingly in "an intellectual commitment to re-symbolise the culture of today."The manifestations of this cultural situation also include another significant front: the advancing insertion of a modern, rapidly changing technology into everyday lives traditionally governed by other concerns. The suitability of the technology, its adaptation to the needs of the population, and the societal context is only one part of the issue. For both social constructas a process and social construct as a product, the technology issue has invariably been addressed in terms of suitability and adaptation. In more sophisticated analyses, the intrusion of technology into aesthetic precepts and norms has also been addressed.The greatest part of this duty was undertaken by a few elite and architects to make a strong foundation for women to transfer their neglected identity to an overt personality.Clearly, this type of interpretation of the creative acts of contemporary architects in Iran entails a change in perceptions of many architects,and authorities.This broadened domain, which would undoubtedly enhance the quality of the intellectual discourse around issues relevant to the architectural profession (broadly defined), cannot be divorced from the content and practice of education in architecture and related disciplines. Many of the new buildings in the new era of Iran reflect the contradictory preferences that exist in Islamiccountries which are in a process of transformation or transition. The tendency of decision-makers to modernize the cities is based on forming the space dynamic for women.Changing the system of buying commodities in traditional cities of

Iran is the most important achievement of urban designers' .While women used to pave specified and predetermined paths every day to buy their necessary goods,the new urbanism made some provisions for women to have a variety of choices to find more freedom.Shopping malls with the possibilities of horizontal and vertical movement have had two important impacts on women`s participation in social activities.First,they are relieved of repetitive actions of visiting the same sellers every day and second, they have broken the borders of restrictions in choosing their needs. Transferring the linear plan of traditional markets in Iran to branching or ringy plan of shopping malls could affect the rate of movement and brought about more freedom for people to act in the role of buyer or seller.

The best case study for shopping system change in Iran is related to Isfahan with two different life styles of old and new.The historical changes implemented in the urban planning of Isfahan, Iran, suggest there are two different spatial cultures co-existing in the district that is affected by different influences (to-movement and through-movement) and that the proximity to density of plots has influences on the distribution of movement. The old square that in the center of large urban area is attributed a religious character and the new square which symbolizes the modernity and new urban planning. Place syntax, which connects spatial configuration and spatial distribution of densities, would allow us to compare, in areas with heterogeneous distribution of density, the degree of freedom in these two areas.While the degree of freedom is 90% for the new square, it is only about 60% for the old one the greatest part of which is attributed to tourists visiting the historical monuments. Establishing bazaar and squares in the city changed the directions and degree of movement among the people.

The main bazaar, between the old and new squares, has remained as the most important part of the urban structure,

The old square remains as an important part of the city spine and retains its significance as a focal urban space in the north of the city,

The new square gains a considerable importance at the southern end of the city spine and acts as the second focal point of the city in the south,

The new square is not over-emphasised in the plan of the city and does not overshadow the whole structure,but it plays a role as the symbol of modernization.

Human Settlements, Rehabilitation and Improvement

Human Settlement

The quality of architecture derives from its skillful and easy adaptation to modernist principles and industrial vocabulary. Spatial segregation and a lack of 'intelligibility' (indexed by the correlation between local and global configurational variables) in inner city housing estates has been found to be related to the degree of separation between adult and child/teenager space use patterns. This was most outstanding for women who had linear movement between kitchens and the back room to be protected from strangers. The presence of women`s areas in the houses where the women were free to move out of the men`s eyes was the turning point of old architecture in Iran. Instead, the area of the house now is designed equally for both men and women. This design has particular originality and quality, derived from significance if slight variations within a conventional vocabulary and fromthe absence of any ideological bombast in its expression. There has been a deliberate attempt to generate diverse forms of social encounter in the building: "seeking potential overlap between the functions and encouraging exchange between the users of its diverse functions, whilst allowing a pragmatic and nearly autonomous use of individual space to all.It is undeniable that taste of the government and elite is likely to dominate the pattern of buildings that give an area its easily identifiable character and that serve as landmarks and as exemplars of what the state's dominant elite promotes.The form of the cities in Iran is defined by the middle class. This is not to say that artistic expression is totally constrained by societal reality.The changes in their mood have brought about opportunities for architects to form new spaces for greater movements and social exploration. They have to contend with clients and financing, and they have to contend with the need for their creations to function properly and to meet a rigorous set of codes and restrictions. They interact with society much more than other artists and they cannot function in isolation. Hence, architecture is by far the most closely linked of the arts to the reality of society in its multiplicity of dimensions, be they economic, social, cultural, political, institutional or religious.Only if this task can be done will the secondary effects of this new indigenous alternative reality be achieved;namely, that the architectural expression of the whole society will be gradually affected. The lower middle classes aspire to have residences and to work inplaces that are comparable to those of the upper middle classes, and the upper middle classes to have residences and to work in places that are comparable to those of the prevailing elite. By changing the architecture of the elite, architects can

indeed change the perception of large segments of society as to what is desirable as an expression of modernity and of social status.It is unlikely that architects will be able to do this alone. A wide variety of disciplines have to interact in order to ensure that the visionary efforts of imaginative, sensitive architects are not left in isolation, but that the intellectual underpinnings that deal with abstractions and ideas , as well as with the social, economic and institutional realities of any societal system, are coherent and pull in the same direction. Without that, inherent tension is likely to continue and ruptures of a cultural and intellectual kind, at the very least, are bound to continue. Architecture and urban planning will suffer in their inability to fulfill their assigned and noble mission of being the agents of progress rather than the servants of elite.Traditional societies are today struggling to create a cultural environment that provides them with a viable sense of self-identity and which is suitable to regional and national conditions. Authenticity for this demand may differ from country to country. Yet there is this fine thread of commonality of the nature of the search with variability of the conditions under which it is undertaken. This is part of the creative genius of the Iranian culture, whose hallmarks have always been unity with diversity. This truism must be restated frequently in the face of a strong current that seeks refuge in perpetuating the myth that woman act as the second hand citizens.The needs to change the underlying grounds of restrictions in Iranian societies, there have appeared some cultural centers in the neighbourhoods which play the role of traditional mosques.These centers have let women find some specific places to create social network and increase their social awareness and public knowledge.Even in some cases,these cultural centers help women to get specific knowledge to be a base for academic education.Religious content, national form" is being replaced by "features of times, nationality, participation". At the same time, womenare liberated from their long mental oppression, and their creative energies are unleashed. Like bamboo shoots after a spring rain, numerous cultural centers in a variety of styles shot up in traditional guise but with modern style which could attract different strata of society.Equal distribution of people between mosque as a worship place and cultural center as a modern education place fit for very taste has brought about a bipolar neighborhood in plan and design in Iranian societies.

CONCLUSION

The strength of modern architecture is that it blends buildings into various settings so that there is a natural harmony between climate, architecture and people.In countries such as Iran, there have evolved urban planning and spaces which not onlydemonstrate this harmony and unity between people and their environment but alsooffer a combination of social democracy and architecture which has an aesthetic quality.The degree of freedom or coercion in society affects the ability to build buildings and to create architecture of distinction.While modern democratic societies have reduced classic property rights, and thus reduced an owner or developer's ability to build as he judges best for his own needs or his customers, there have appeared some grounds for women to be influenced by new architecture and modern technology to escape from the long lasting prisons of tradition and false beliefs.In essence, they have achieved the freedomsof place for the purpose of living out their desires and doing things they have dreamt doing for a long time.

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