An Analysis to Challenges of Urban Management in Historic Center of Cities in Iran

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Abstract. Cities are increasingly demanding that planning and design must take history, culture and meaning into account and given the projected continued growth of urbanization in the world and increasing demand for modern and technologic life, pressure on cities and their historic centers will continue to mount. There is no doubt that the historic texture of a city cannot be merely seen as an accumulation of significant monuments but rather needs to be considered as a living organism and vital living space for its inhabitants making it necessary to speculate on how to integrate modern life into traditional structure of historic cities. This paper is an attempt to analyze diverse challenges and contradictions in urban management regarding integration of contemporary urban life to historic center of city in Iran.

Keywords: city, historic center, urban management

1. Introduction

Cities can be seen as expressions of mankind's cultural, economic and social evolution, and at the same time they are the stage on which people develop their own futures and in this process, urban life will exert pressure to evolve physically by expansion outwards, upwards, downwards or in increased density [1]. Cities of the great early civilizations which developed by incremental growth from a historic nucleus adopted common spatial or physical features with orientation to the path of sun and prevailing wind as well as encircling fortifications. Hierarchy, geomancy and cosmology were among the most influential planning and design concepts that were seen in almost all ancient civilizations. Besides, since the earliest of times, political, religious and other vested interests have been glorified in cities and, often, physically raised [2].

On contrary, our modern cityscapes show little awareness or any indication of their historical or cultural past. New architectural structures, urban squares, highways and interchanges are not only integrated with the existing historical and cultural context, but also create a sense of strangeness. Thus, any attempt regarding restoration and revitalization of history, culture and identity in historic center of cities will face two contradictory yet interwoven challenges; on one hand, the old city with its unique and irreplaceable monuments, history, culture and identity and on the other hand, contemporary urban life with its technological requirements. But, how to fulfill this intention is still another disputable issue making urban management programs regarding restoration and revitalization like any other urban development and management program of interdisciplinary nature. In Iran, due to old rooted and unique traditions of urban life and unplanned accept of modernity and its consequent changes, the challenges are much more problematic.

2. Regulation and Management Framework for Historic Center of City in Iran

2.1. Definition and Regulation

The 'historic center' of city encompasses architectural, social, urban, environmental expressions which are recognized as relevant and which express the social and cultural life of a community. From an urban point of view, historic center or district is the oldest nucleus of a city which has evolved in centuries and contains best examples of most precious monuments of the city. Ministries of Culture across the world and Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism in Iran have been the pioneers to establish and

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monitor the norms, regulations, strategies and actions regarding identification, registration, conservation and restoration of historic buildings and quarters. In Iran, historic centre of 90 cities with a total area of 16000 hectares have been identified and registered by the organization of cultural heritage, handicrafts and tourism revitalization projects with diverse characters and frameworks have been planned and implemented in these areas which are in different stages due to historical, cultural and political priorities. Table 1 illustrates a comparative summary of data on historic centers of some significant cities in Iran.

TABLE I   Registered Historic Center of Cities in Iran

City	Area of Registered Historic Center (hectare)	Percentage to Total Area of the City
Ahvaz	95	5 %
Brujerd	280	6.5 %
Bushehr	350	2.5 %
Dezfool	500	7.5 %
Ghazvin	100	2.5 %
Isfahan	1200	9.2 %
Kashan	600	35 %
Mashah	1500	7.5 %
Rafsanjan	21	2 %
Sanandaj	90	2.5 %
Shiraz	375	3 %
Tabriz	421	3.5 %
Urmieh	417	3 %
Yazd	730	15 %
Zanjan	83	1 %
Zavareh	6	12 %

2.2. Preservation Policy in Urban Management System

In Iran, like some other countries, preservation planning policies have been among the most significant policies formulated for preservation of historic centre of cities. Preservation planning is the integration of historic preservation principles, for example, documentation of historic structures and legislative action to protect historic locations, into urban planning including new constructions and adopting a public focused approach to planning and use of resources like tourism and historic structures to stimulate economic development.

2.3. Historic Zoning Policy

The purpose of historic zoning is to preserve and protect the historical and/or architectural value and cultural heritage of buildings, landmarks and historic districts; to regulate exterior design, arrangement, texture and materials proposed for new constructions to be used within the historic district to ensure compatibility; to create an aesthetic appearance which complements the historic buildings or other structures; to stabilize and improve property values; to strengthen the local economy; to promote the use of local historic districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of present and future citizens; to promote neighbourhood pride in and awareness of the beauty and significant accomplishments of the past; to protect and enhance the city's attraction to residents, tourists and visitors and serve as a support and stimulus to business and industry; to foster and encourage preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of structures, areas and neighbourhoods, thereby preventing future urban blight and preserving existing housing stock; to prevent intrusions of newly-developed structures into the district that would be incompatible with the established character of the neighbourhood or district. This program has been formulated and implemented as a pilot project in cities of Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, Kerman and Hamadan and in order to ensure full implementation of the policy, a separate municipality has been designated for the district. The project, if fully implemented, will be generalized to other historic cities of Iran.

3. Characterization of Historic Centre of City in Iran

'Characterization' provides a means of understanding the diverse range of factors which combine to create 'distinctiveness' and 'sense of place'. It involves the creation of a comprehensive knowledge based on the historic environment. This includes what is known of a city's historic development and urban topography, that is, the basic components which have contributed to the physical shaping of the historic city, together with an overview of the surviving historic fabric, distinctive architectural forms, materials and treatments and the significant elements of town and streetscapes. Characterization is also a means whereby the historic environment can itself provide an inspirational matrix for revitalization. It emphasizes the historic continuum which provides the context for current change and into which the revitalization measures of the present must fit if the distinctive and special qualities of each historic town are to be maintained and enhanced. It both

highlights the 'tears in the urban fabric' wrought by a lack of care in the past and offer an indication of appropriate approaches to their repair [4]. Central urban districts, basically, are the nuclei of the city and they all share some characteristics irrespective of climate, culture, or age. Central urban districts, basically, are the nuclei of the city and they all share some characteristics irrespective of climate, culture, or age.

Like other old civilizations around the world, in each city of Iran, history, culture and geographical location have created a unique townscape with a strong, locally distinctive character. Understanding the specific characters and qualities of these urban environments and spaces with respect for the urban hierarchy they represent is vital in any attempt aiming at revitalization of a historic city. To be fully successful, any new project, whether or not dealing directly with the historic environment, should take full account of these elements. Some of significant characters and qualities of historic cities of Iran are introduced in this section of paper which is vital for success of urban management system.

3.1. Existence of Cultural Heritage

Historic district of each city possesses the best examples of cultural, historical, urban and architectural heritage of the city. From this perspective urban heritage exposes itself mainly as a collection of monuments and landmarks: honourable relicts of the past, symbolizing our history, giving meaning to our cultural identity and embellishing our lives. In most cities of Iran, most precious examples of mosques, tombs, palaces, public bathes, urban squares and Bazaars, symbolizing historical, cultural and architectural identity of the city are located in the historical centre of each city. These monuments along with some visual and/or verbal documents about past can provide us with enough information enabling simulation of ancient urban characters. Besides, the built heritage of each city creates the best opportunities for tourist attraction leading to economic benefits to the area.

In Iran, more than 27000 monuments located in historical center of cities have been registered as national heritage by organization of cultural heritage, handicrafts and tourism. Most of these monuments are symbols of old architectural and urban design styles and are considered to be major sources of urban tourist attraction. Existence of these monuments which are always located in inflection points of urban texture, make any intervention a challenging one. Since these monuments can not be replaced or displaced, the geometry of new interventions and urban projects, especially streets and intersections need to be aligned with the location of monuments which in some case makes almost impossible to reach and acceptable level of intervention. In most case, location of a monument in historic district has made new intervention incapable of providing suitable vehicular access into the area.

3.2. A source for Continuity of Culture

Historic urban environments and spaces sustain social structures of human societies and ensure their continuity. Environment plays a significant role in socialization: from the very babyhood, individuals experience an impact of the native settings. Specific environmental characteristics – geomorphologic features, spatial structures, scale, rhythms, textures, light, colors and similar – are gradually imprinted in human mind, creating a sense of sympathy with the native environment, as well as preferences for specific spatial and other physical patterns. This way environment transfers culture of an ethnic, a nation, a class, or a similar social group from generation to generation. Sometimes 'a silent language' of environment is more suggestive than words, because it is less intrusive and does not moralize, as it sometimes happens with verbal socialization. Thus, historic urban environment plays a significant part in cultural development – it acts as a carrier, a sustainer, and a transferor of traditions. Factually, this is the main role of historic environment, and local people understand this perfectly well – intensifying grass-roots movements or spontaneous resistance of local population against a new development – are clear evidences of this phenomenon. It is always very hard to disconnect a community from its cultural identity.

3.3. Pedestrian Spaces and Environments

In the ancient city, pedestrian circulation was the dominant mode of circulation and therefore, dimensions of all public spaces were adjusted for pedestrian movement. The human dimensions and scale of these spaces led to sense of safety and comfort for pedestrians creating opportunities for pedestrian activities [5]. On the other hand, a major layer of urban structure that has developed in the recent decades can be defined as the network of motorways and other high speed traffic routes. The development of this layer has had a clear impact on both the global structure of the city and on the local urban systems. The new structural layer, emphasizing on car based global movement, has not improved overlapping and interconnection of the local urban areas. The continuity of the older urban texture has been further interrupted, resulting in a vulnerable global urban structure characterized by very low integration and intensive dependence on limited

links of a network of highways. In this process the self-contained housing estates developed in the previous periods have become more segregated in the global spatial system of the city [6]. In cases with no urban intervention, due to dimensions of open spaces, lack of enough space for vehicular circulation and parking has created lots of problems and inconvenience for residents.

3.4. Climatically Responsive Spaces and Environments

In traditional cities of Iran, like other old civilizations, overall configuration of city was organized depending upon orientation, sun light and prevailing winds of each area and the effects of urban morphology on the urban microclimate and, therefore, on energy consumption can not be ignored. The physical parameters that could affect the urban microclimate were size of city, density of built-up area, land coverage, building height, orientation and width of streets, and building-specific design details affecting the outdoor conditions [7]. There exist enough documents indicating that designers and builders of ancient cities in Iran were well aware of strong correlations between urban street configuration and wind flow and sunlight direction, therefore, pollution dispersion and human comfort. This direction was called *Roon*. Besides, there was a subtle knowledge in street design which aimed to maximize ventilation, dispersion of pollutants and solar access, while not compromising shelter and urban warmth. They were based on relationships between these factors and urban geometry towards finding a 'zone of compatibility' for all inhabitants. Uniform structures of contemporary city regardless of local climate and natural ecosystems of each city have disrupted the traditional and organic harmony of natural and built environment leading to a sense of discomfort for occupants of new buildings.

3.5. Distribution of Public Spaces

The public space in the historic city was considered as a total socio-cultural phenomenon, with exchange as its founding principle. They were home to institutionalized forms of interaction as well as to free relationships between citizens [8]. Distribution of public spaces was a key component in the historical identity of cities, and allowed for their projection into the future. Now in contemporary city, boulevards and squares with vehicular scale have shaped the stage for modernity in urban life. These spaces are distributed due to requirements of urban zoning and vehicular circulation leading to inhumane spaces further discouraging human presence.

3.6. Visual Integrity

The intimate and cohesive quality of the urban spaces in old city depended on homogeneous building materials and on the uniform proportions and heights of the buildings. These elements come together in a subtle interplay between the occasional landmarks and the simple and uniform residential structures, the walled and covered alleyways (called Sabat) and well-organized open public spaces (called Arsan), and the striking climatic features integrated into built elements, for example *Badgir* (wind catcher) in central regions of Iran creating a delicate balance, and one that can be easily thrown off [9]. In historic center of most cities in Iran, many traditional buildings, particularly along the main routes have maintained their architectural features and details. Many others, however, were shelled and have been left in a state of ruin, or hastily and poorly reconstructed, or radically transformed during the immediate aftermath of the deterioration. Lack of visual relationships between old buildings and new constructions has disrupted the integrity. New building design, height and bulk relationship of facade parts, scale and massing of large buildings an urban projects, size and massing of new additions, cornice heights, roof shapes, reconstruction of building components, prevailing setbacks, building widths and spacing, stoops and porches, garages and driveways al have led to a visual chaos in most historic cities of Iran. New buildings need to be designed to strengthen the unity of the existing streetscape, and should follow the design principles of historic architecture. But in some cases, these buildings which merely imitate the forms and materials of historical buildings dilute the quality of existing historic structures.

4. Conclusion

Problems faced in historic cities of each country are often worse than those encountered in the contemporary urban structure of cities in the world because of unique character of historic center in each city. The physical, social, historical as well as cultural conditions of a historic city, in the midst of what is called modern life, and the socio-spatial characteristics of urban spaces and environments in historic center of cities in Iran have led to both positive and negative consequences revealing strengths and weaknesses and creating new opportunities and also serious threats for urban life of the area.

TABLE II   Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of Historic Center in Cities of Iran

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Existence of cultural, historical, urban and architectural monuments Pedestrian-friendly spaces and environments High visual integrity of masses, proportions and scale of traditional buildings Strong social relations with traditional attitudes Climatically responsive spaces and environments Existence of significant religious buildings	Insufficient vehicular access due to organic geometry and dimensions of passageways Lack of infrastructures necessary for modern urban life Lack of visual integrity between new constructions and the old ones Lack of motivation for residence in old buildings Deterioration of old buildings due to their age and inappropriate maintenance	High potential for tourist attraction due to existence of cultural, historical, urban and architectural monuments High potential for leisure and recreational activities due to pedestrian character of spaces and environments High visual integrity of massing, height, proportions and scale High tendency of residents towards socio-cultural and religious activities	Insufficient vehicular access and parking space Lack of infrastructures necessary for residents and accommodation and catering of tourists Lack of regulatory and administrative framework for new constructions Structural and functional deficiencies of old buildings incapable of accommodating new functions and activities

In the case of urban management dealing with historic centers of cities in Iran, it has been recognized over the last decades that these areas are not constituted only by material and physical heritage – buildings, streets, squares, fountains, arches, and sculptures – but also include the natural landscape, and above all, its residents, customs, activities, economic and social relations, religious ceremonies, beliefs, and urban rituals all of which must be considered in any restoration or revitalization project. Due to high complexity of revitalization in historic centers it is necessary to compile comprehensive strategies covering diverse aspects of the task. Therefore, existing management processes and methods applied to heritage cities, while helpful, are insufficient to meet contemporary and emerging needs. In response to these needs the following strategies can provide the basis for a comprehensive approach.

1) Improving the conditions of pedestrian access with the least intervention with vehicular circulation by provision of suitable street network, intersections, parking lots and public transportation facilities.
2) Improving and rehabilitating old residential buildings and motivating residents to live there while improving and upgrading basic infrastructure and municipal service.
3) Promoting and selecting a variety of economic and commercial activities that are compatible with the historic context and can meet part of the maintenance and development costs of new projects and conservation of historic monuments, the cultural and urban heritage, making, if necessary, adaptive re-uses for adequate maintenance and economic gains.
4) Modifying and easing the regulatory, administrative frameworks for land use and use of open spaces for new constructions and projects while respecting old architectural and urban texture of the area.
5) Planning and executing tourism attraction policies and visitation to reinforce sustainable and human development by enhancing and protecting monuments and archaeological sites.

5. Acknowledgements

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