A Morphological Approach to Characterization of Urban Space in Historical Structure of Cities in Iran

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ABSTRACT

New developments within the traditional settings in the city centers have transformed the identity of constructed places leading to a gap between the characters of urban space and its users. The reason lies in the fact that the core of every urban space in traditional historic city was based on many years of history and human-environment interaction. On contrary, modern patterns of cityscapes show little awareness or any indication of awareness about their historical or cultural past. In other words, new architectural and urban designs and constructions, and even historic preservation programs and projects are not only integrated with the existing texture, but also create a sense of disconnection and strangeness.

Therefore, it is necessary to study characteristics of urban space in historic urban cores on the basis of characterization of the past patterns of the urban life with intention to transfer the historic legacy to next generations. This paper is an attempt to reveal main characteristics of urban spaces in historic core of Iranian cities with intention to help the urban planners and designers searching for causes of destruction of urban core in traditional cities of Iran.

KEYWORDS: City, Morphology, Urban Space, Iran.

INTRODUCTION

Cities are always an arena for changes in human civilization. These changes would affect the different aspects of cities such as physical and nonphysical components and the interrelationship between them (ICOMOS, 2002; Sarvarzadeh et.al, 2012). It has also been mentioned that the footprint of time always remains on the face of the city (Stovel, 2002; Sarvarzadeh et.al, 2012). But, the modern cityscapes show little awareness or any indication of their historical or cultural past. New architectural structures, urban squares, highway interchanges, and even historic preservation projects are not only integrated with the existing texture, but also create a sense of strangeness. Moreover, historical centers of cities are dangerous to live in; they had to be completely removed or reduced to museum pieces. Our physically and socially fragmented urban spaces and environments suffer from what sociologist Richard Sennett called “a surfeit of sameness,” which has deterred individuals and groups from engaging their urban spaces and environments as unique communities and precipitated the decline of public or even humane realm. As a result, the new or so-called modern urbanism has reached a point in which recognition of urban culture and history with an emphasis on creating human-environment interaction, encouraging public engagement in civic affairs, and improving the public realm seems inevitable. It represents a convergence of evolving ideas in historic preservation, culture, identity, environmental psychology, public space design and management, and economic development (Moosavi, 2011; 2012). In contemporary cities, the weakening of identity is facilitated by the uniform concepts of planning and development together with the commodification of places which have led to the loss of local identity (Mohamad, 1998; Ujang, 2012).

It is obvious that the core of every urban space in traditional historic city has a life based on many years of history and human-environment interaction. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on characteristics of urban space in historic urban core on the basis of study and characterization of the past urban pattern of the city with intention to transfer the historic legacy to next generation. This paper is an attempt to introduce and analyze main characteristics of urban spaces in historic core of Iranian cities with intention of helping the urban planners and designers searching for causes of destruction of urban core in traditional cities of Iran.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Most part of contemporary urban design research has focused on the quality of the physical elements of the space but fall short in understanding the social and cultural aspects of the space and place. This study tries to examine general characteristics of urban spaces and places and the relationship between social and cultural factors influencing the perception of the physical attributes and activities that strongly define the identity of the urban space. In this research, systematic observation of urban spaces in historic center of some ancient cities of...
Iran revealed common socio-spatial characteristics which can be classified by complementary information obtained from scientific sources. These observed characteristics are discussed along with their causes and consequences. Most part of the scientific information used in this paper was obtained from scientific sources by documentary method.

**Urban Space; Definition and Meaning**

Urban space is the main place of events and incidents that organize a creative role for the linkage between today and tomorrow. Urban space is the place of commuting between past, present and future. This space includes four main elements of residents, pedestrians, human-made elements, and time (Habibi and Maghsoudi, 2003; Tayyebi and Danesh, 2012). In general, the quality of urban outdoor spaces found in outdoor space in between buildings can be differentiated into two main physical characteristics: positive space and negative space. The discussion is on the quality of void space in between solidity of buildings blocks. Alexander, C. (1997) defined an outdoor space is considered as positive space when it has a distinct and definite shape as the shape of a room. Its distinct shape plays as important as the shapes of the buildings which surround it. Outdoor space is considered as a negative space if it is shapeless and valueless. The two kinds of spaces have entirely different plan geometries, which may be most easily distinguished by their figure-ground or character of its plinth of those spaces as viewed on-plan. The physical characteristic influences by tangible and intangible factors in urban spaces provide an effect towards human perception to those spaces. Less attention and provision on the surrounding heritage buildings leads to natural deterioration. Therefore, this paper shares analysis on the visual observation in assisting the revival strategy of heritage streets (Samadi et.al, 2012).

Urban spaces are one of important parts of urban spatial structure forms and components. Especially in developed countries urban spaces indicates urban life qualities. There are many papers about urban space, pattern and form, open spaces, people’s life in the cities and their interaction with environment (Krier, 1975; Lynch, 1981; Broadbent, 1990; Madanipour, 1996; Woolly, 2003; Tafahomi et.al, 2007). Urban spaces and places are constructed by the physical form, activity and meaning (Montgomery, 1998; Ujang, 2012). Since the affective perception is generated from the psychological process (meanings and attachments) rooted in setting, the identity of place is determined not only by the physical components but also the meaning and association developed between people and places. Simultaneously, cultural characteristics meld with the individual’s affective perceptions and functional needs and influence place identity (Bott, 2003; Ujang, 2012).

Although streets and squares recognized as urban spaces and “if we wish to clarify the concept of urban space without imposing aesthetics criteria, we are compelled to designate all type of space between building in town and other localities as urban space” (Krier, 1997; Tafahomi et.al, 2007), but there are other complementally components in cities that have specific role to establish an urban space. In urban space studies mentioned many important aspects for identifying urban spaces in the cities such as; socio-spatial, geometries of urban space, natural space, created space, urban form and historical processes, the city as a work of art, the city as an embodiment of function, ecology of urban structure, the internal structure of the city, urban morphology, political economy of urban structure (Madanipour, 1996; Tafahomi et.al, 2007).

During the last century, unprecedented development of the urban environment has strongly influenced urban transformation. Rapid urban expansion, densification (or, conversely, decline and abandonment), inappropriate modern interventions, gentrification, and changes in uses are occurring worldwide, directly affecting the preservation of historic urban environments. It is now completely clear that all cities all around the world are in a state of continuous transition and transformation. This process of continual transition and transformation occur partly in response to the political, industrial, economic, and social changes and some believe that cities experience inflection points of growth and decline, both of which lead to transformation of urban space (Moosavi, 2012).

**Historic Background and Evolution of Urban space in Iran**

In developing countries like Iran, urban fabrics in most cities are currently faced with similar issues. On one hand, they are experiencing a rapid population growth, intense development pressure, rising area of historic districts and destruction of cultural heritage, while on the other hand, they do not pay attention to the importance of citizen’s participation as the most significant factor to resolve issues that may arise in the decision-making process (Yung et al, 2011; Sarvarzadeh et.al, 2012). Moreover, (because of the long period of Iran), it can be an appropriate case in between developing countries to investigating the role of the public in the process of urban heritage conservation. Studying of literature review provides (can be hit some) evidences that they admit to increasing the role of community in the policy making process (Taylor, 2007; Sarvarzadeh et.al, 2012). According to studies urban spatial structures of cities in Iran show a spatial interruption in their configuration (Saidnya, 1993; Tafahomi et.al, 2007). In historical process of Iran had been some experiences that show incision in stages of evolution. More and probably all these occurrences had been happened by a strong power that, which cut all process of sociality. Invade of Arab, Mongolians, Timurid Dynasties, resulted destruction of many cities in Iran. Also internal wars between Dynasties had made slow this process. Since 15th century begun
a new movement in urban space Revitalization. But, process of evolution urban spaces discontinued after entrance of modernism in 1900 in Iran. Entering new components such as roundabout and junction to urban spatial structure resulted separation of people and urban spaces. Process of modernism in Iran was accompanied with a wave of destruction and changing. This process was in contrast with development natural process. These kinds of actions changed the face of cities and modified districts structure. Modernism, main streets pass from center of districts and old roads and squares confronted with a new configuration. Structures of districts, streets and squares had a specify hierarchy before modernism. Indeed, in the traditional structure, role and function of spaces changed with moving from city center to center of districts. But in contemporary time and especially after modernism were destroyed urban structures by non-norm method (Tafahomi et.al, 2007).

Following the modernism’s increasing tendency, extensive physical transformation was carried out at the beginning of Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). The new political power targeted organic growth for dealing with the manifestations of the old power such as monuments. This movement seriously hurt the traditional urban pattern by creating modern road networks into historic core. The significance of the historic core decreased by the expansion of the other urban areas and subsequently increased the population in the late 1960s and the 1970s rapidly. Following these changes, historic area became an extremely small part of urban sprawl, which has suffered deterioration and lack of an appropriate conservation programs (Hanachi and Moradi Mashi, 2001; Sarvarzadeh et.al, 2012). Extreme tendencies towards modernism have taken out many particularities in the vitality and vibrancy in the historic core of cities. These issues are often complex and worse at the historic cities than the other ones. However, it cannot be denied that the physical, socio-economic, cultural conditions of a historic city against current modern life led to both negative and positive outcomes. It can be noted that identifying strengths and weaknesses points will be able to reduce negative consequences. On the other hand, creating new opportunities and confronting with serious threats will improve urban heritage conservation approaches (Sarvarzadeh et.al, 2012). Historical texture of Iran include many spaces such as roads, squares, gates, entrances spaces architectural and metropolitan building, spaces neighboring bridges and rivers in the cities (Soltanzadeh, 1994), and also streets, squares, roundabouts, pedestrians, stairs, entrances of building (Pakzad, 2003; Tafahomi et.al, 2007).

In historic centers of cities in Iran, development of new urban structures and spaces according to contemporary or so-called modern life standards and lack of attention and maintenance to older spaces and buildings, their characteristics and values, as well as their incompatibility with new trends, expectations and needs led to their deterioration. The contemporary or so-called modern city in Iran with its streets, squares and large-scale and inhuman open spaces and also new methods of construction of new buildings has all led to severe damages to historic center of city. The whole structure of historic cities in Iran changed due to introduction of modern urbanism during Pahlavi era. This change also led to creation of new urban spaces with new dimensions, characteristics, forms and functions. Besides, the historic center of ancient cities with a diverse set of precious and cultural heritage became influenced by the mentioned changes. This influence became much more obvious due to deep differences between old and new urban spaces and its consequences led to new obstacles in revitalization of old and historic district and texture of the city (Moosavi, 2012).

**CLASSIFICATION OF URBAN SPACES IN IRAN**

The subject and building of urban space have experienced a long history. Its background can be estimated to ancient era. The study of urban space history shows that this subject has been regarded as an aesthetic-functional product. In that era, there was not any difference between the form of function, culture, and nature. The following dual issues are the outcomes of, late 18th century, early 19th, and industrialization era and the afterwards, including form–function, object-subject and human–nature. This separation reflects the discreetness in the history of sciences, arts, and philosophy. The Discreteness in concept of public life is a result of inconsistencies among entities in society and advancements of economic entities compared others. Patrick Geddes logically considered this separation originated from some stages of humans’ life in which, an effective and active life has not been fulfilled yet; the life that its main elements are wisdom, art, politics, presentation, movement and life consistency refers to the beginning of human and so on. According to his opinion, the urban space is created when the above elements are created in it (Parsi, 2002; Tayyebi and Danesh, 2012).

There were a few studies about urban spaces in Iran, except some reviews and consideration until recently (Soltanzadeh, 1993; Tavasoli, 1991; Pakzad, 2002; Tafahomi et.al, 2007). These studies have explained more about a specific urban space in a city. About transition of urban spaces are fewer references in Iran (Soltanzadeh, 1993). Nevertheless, remnant traces in heritage area of cities show specific hierarchy and classification of urban spaces. Although technique-logy drawing, saving, conservation and documentation was primitive and unimportant in Iran, these problems have made a situation of document shortage in Iran urban space agenda (Tafahomi et.al, 2007). A generally accepted classification of urban spaces in historic cities of Iran includes Bazaar, mosque, square, passageway and neighborhood center which are discussed below.
Bazaar

Bazaar, one of the largest achievements of the Islamic civilization period, has a specific place in Islamic countries, especially in Iran. Bazaar is a symbol of traditional architecture, and Islamic art is best visible in bazaar architecture. However, the economic, religious, social and cultural elements; communicational and protective elements; the relationships between the elements, their roles and the existence of inseparable link between architectural, functional and geographical qualities have had a lot of importance (Ahour, 2011). In Iranian architecture, bazaars are formed either organic or planned, and usually located at the centre of the cities, the layouts are usually linear in shape, positioning the public and socio-cultural spaces through this linear form (Kermani, 2010; Pourjafar et.al, 2012). They were usually constructed during the periods of great economical growth and welfare. Moreover, bazaars have always defined the major street of urban fabric, connecting two major entrances of the city (Moosavi, 2005; Pourjafar et.al, 2012).

What comes to mind from bazaar concept, include two rows of stores across each other that often are connected via a roof and creates a special structure that buildings such as inn, Timche, Darband, Charsough, mosque, school, water storage and like that are as its supplements (Tehrani et.al, 2012). There have been three types of bazaar in the cities of ancient Iran: Periodic bazaar, urban bazaar and Local bazaar. Urban bazaar was popular for accommodating commercial activities as well as social and cultural activities of people. Architecturally speaking, urban bazaar is a covered public passageway which is surrounded by shops and stores in two sides. It was, therefore, a place for shopping, walking, social dialogue, and cultural interaction of people. It has acted as the most important and influential public space in ancient cities and towns of Iran (Pirnia, 2001; Assari et.al, 2012).

Mosque

Everywhere at the side of the road, bazaar, or small squares of the city were constructed. Generally, in old fabric number and location of mosques were such that voice of “muezzin” could be heard around the community. Thus mosques themselves determined specific domain. Many doors in the courtyard of the mosque changed the mosque into a public urban space for citizens. Large mosques had entrance to square, small squares or local centers and main paths and existence of public drinking places or related applications such as selling candles, signet and beads or book – sellers shop in the vicinity introduced closeness to religious space boundary. In old fabrics, mosques, “Hosseinieh”, and “Takaya” especially in local scales were very valuable in social relations especially for women and gathering spaces. This in addition to establishing religious relation most local affairs and disputes between people were resolved. Dome and minaret of mosque which are visible from side and main paths would help more clarity of space and distinguish local domain orientation and create diversity (Habib, 2012).
Square

There are many historical indications to Iranian squares in the written manuscripts of historians and geographers after Islam. The remained instances of these types of squares have made it possible to study their design and performance. The definition of space, the method of construction and architectural components of the square has been in relation with continuity of the method of production, and traditional social and political structure in Iranian cities. It has been survived with few changes until the advent of modernity. This sort of squares is called traditional, due to continuous and uninterrupted presence in the Iranian city. This traditional square has protected its specific functions and special pattern. These cases have mostly the same specifications that are mentioned about traditional squares around the world. A traditional filed has been a place, to perform military ceremonies, and saber rattling of the incumbent regimes. Therefore, it has had a similar function as modern squares. In other words, besides entertaining the monarch and residents of city, it has been a reminder to public regarding the power and authority of governors. Governmental buildings like palaces or Dar-ol-Emareh (King House), or religious buildings like mosques and Tekiehs were positioned in one or some edges of traditional squares. In addition, due to urban importance of the existence of religious buildings, shrines, or temples, squares were built beside them. Hence, it was converted to a square with special local identity and in this way, a square acquired considerable spatial importance (Ibrahim, 2009; Tayyebi and Danesh, 2012).

Square as urban space has some specifications that among them, objective-oriented activities are dominant and there are some transitional activities and with some skeletal proportions in a specific period. In addition to these special specifications, general notable specifications can be mentioned as its extensiveness compared to proportions of other passes, an intersection of several passes and acquisition of specific functions permanently or periodically as well as the possibilities of having physical objects in its centre. In the Iranian culture and civilization, ‘extensive open spaces, that had a restricted or relatively a specified area, positioned beside roads or in their intersections, and they had communicational, social, commercial, sport, military functions or a combination of two or some of them, were called filed (Soltanzadeh, 2006; Tayyebi and Danesh, 2012).

A Wide open space that has the enclosure or semi defined limitation and is located across the main roads or junctions. The function of square is connecting, social, commercial, sport, governmental army or mixed of some of them with each other (Soltanzadeh, 1991; Vadiati and Kashkooli, 2012). Squares have a bold image in citizens’ minds and are one of the important elements for legibility and identification of cities. Based on viewpoint of many researchers, square alongside street forms one of the two conceptual and logical fundamental elements of the city. Square is a location and symbol of silence, population gathering, magnitude, and destination (Tayyebi and Danesh, 2012).

Passageway

In historical centers of urban space in Iran street is a symbol of movement, population transfer and the artery of human flows in the city. In centre of most cities, both pedestrians and cyclists are confronted to serious dangers. Besides the risks of accidents, noises and smoke are also unfavorable for people and could result in long-term health problems (Tayyebi and Danesh, 2012). The bazaar develops as the vital backbone of the city and the pedestrian streets leading into the city’s body proper insert themselves as ribs. Within this structure the vital organs of the city i.e. bathhouses, schools, caravanserais, bakeries, water cisterns, tea houses and numerous merchants and craft stores evolve and flourish (Arjomand Kermani, 2010). Passageways were in fact branches of the linear Bazaar which connected the city centre to neighborhood centre (Karimi, 1997; Ramezani and Hamidi, 2010). Traditional organic fabric specifies accurate and logical Hierarchy which connected most private paths to most common one of them with elegantly introduced thresholds. Hierarchy of paths was: private (Bonbast), semi-private (Gozar), semi-public (Raste), side-public, main-public paths or in other words major paths (Habib, 2012).
Neighborhood Centre

Specifications and major compounds of traditional urban structure were mahalle and neighborhood units with specific boundaries and sometimes they were totally closed. Configuration of Mahalle on the basis of ethnic, local, religious, union, specifications, and cohesion of districts were in some cases based on their religious identity, but there has never been separation between the rich and poor social class. Some districts had gates and fortifications which specified the boundaries. Mahalle was a set of houses and network of pass ways and had a center which contained facilities for residents that is, public services like educational, health, business and religious spaces which had been created for the districts self-sufficiency, and it is even certain Mahalle had their own special cemeteries. Gates served as thresholds which separated the city from villages around (Habib, 2012). Neighborhood centre was an urban public space in neighborhood scale and consisted of Mosque, water reservoir, public bath and a flexible open space which was used for religious ceremonies as well as daily social interactions (Soltanzadeh, 1998, Ramezani and Hamidi, 2010). This centre was shared by the people residing in the nearby houses and indeed it was acting as a semi-public space and there were a number of gates through which the traffic of aliens was controlled by the residents in certain cases such as quarrel among different neighborhoods. Neighborhood centre was leading to a semi-private open space, which belonged to a few number of households, through secondary passageways. The most rate of social interaction among neighbors especially housewives took place in this space and residents had a sense of belonging and attachment towards it. This semi-private space was connected to houses by means of narrow passageways. In fact, the Iranian traditional urban form followed a sequence (Ramezani and Hamidi, 2010).

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN SPACE IN HISTORIC CITIES OF IRAN

Before modernism in Iran, urban spaces were a place for stop, integrate and watch. But modernism increased the speed in all parts of cities with cars and vehicles movements, and eliminated opportunities for attendance and interaction. This problem not includes only in main streets and squares but also urban space of districts found problems. Process of accessibility in modernism conveyed urban space to high speed paths and traffic role in cites. So in these conditions security and safety reduced and tendency to attend decreased in urban spaces (Tafahomi et.al, 2007).

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 (Sultanzadeh, 2005; Moosavi, 2012). 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 (Azimzadeh et.al, 2007) and introduction of vehicular transport has aided extensive urbanization and discouraged the walking city structure that was hitherto the dominant preoccupation all over. Suffice to say that the walking city has the preindustrial compact urban morphology (Olumuyiwa et.al, 2007; Moosavi, 2012).

Spatial Forms in the urban spaces in the beginning of the Islamic government was simple and without decoration. Urban texture according to technology of build environment was simple and mosque was important building to that age was Spatial Folder of urban spaces. Fabric and material urban spaces were subordinator of urban fabric. Structure of districts adapted with simple spatial form and had a direct interaction the same
decorative and ornamental spaces that have urban function. Relation of sample and urban spaces had more experiences to districts and decorative and ornamental spaces. Also between simple and decorative space have relation and possibility to convert to each other. The same relation between districts spaces and urban spaces, they could convert and replaces to other position (Tafahomi et al., 2007). Sense of privacy and Social interaction which are perceived to have a relation in the theories of architecture and urban design were well respected in traditional urbanism in Iran. The juxtaposition of these two criteria, associated with the culture and characteristics of Iranians, in traditional towns was achieved through provision of transitional spaces which allowed the residents to control their desired rate of privacy as well as social contact with their neighbors through a sensitive separation of private and public realm. This is while residents of contemporary cities in Iran suffer lack of privacy and social interaction especially in the newly designed residential areas (Ramezani and Hamidi, 2010).

TABLE 1, An Analytical Classification of Characterization of the Historical Urban Space in Iran

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Space</th>
<th>Spatial Hierarchy and Components</th>
<th>Social Character</th>
<th>Physical Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential Units</td>
<td>Kuie Barzan</td>
<td>Semi Public</td>
<td>Organic</td>
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<td>Mahalle</td>
<td>Entrance</td>
<td>Semi Public</td>
<td>Organic</td>
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<td>Neighborhood Center</td>
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<td>Abanbar</td>
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<td>Path Network</td>
<td>Bombast Gozar</td>
<td>Semi Public</td>
<td>Linear</td>
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<td>Gozar</td>
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<td>Bazaar</td>
<td>Gheisariyeh</td>
<td>Public - Semi public</td>
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<td>Squares</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Rectangular - Square</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passageway</td>
<td>Main Gozar</td>
<td>Public - Semi Public</td>
<td>Linear</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gozar</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

Urban spaces in Iran, in addition to general characteristics, have some unique characteristics originated from some principles like spatial continuity, integration of residential units and urban elements, spatial eclosure, scale and proportion, heterogeneous spaces, hierarchy, territory and combination of functions. These principles, along with interaction of human with environment that constituted Iranian architectural principles, determines the method of building urban spaces and the relationship between the components of these spaces with themselves and other urban spaces.

Different interpretations about characteristics of urban spaces include both differences and also fundamental similarities, but, the central concept in all these concepts and interpretations is ‘social identity of space’ that provides the possibility for social activities and interactions in outdoor spaces of the city and is regarded as the major contrast with indoor space and architecture. In fact, with respect to its semantics, social identity of space is one of the most important concepts related to urban spaces in historic cities of Iran. In this regard, urban spaces with their specific physical and geometric characteristics are those open spaces that are initially a place for activities, events, interactions and dialogue, culture, and are also effective on these processes and human products.

It is neither possible to duplicate the traditional urban form nor is it desired to ignore new styles of urbanization and urban life, but it is both desired and possible to consider nonphysical characteristics and capabilities of urban spaces and its juxtaposition with sociality in the way the transitional spaces especially in the neighborhoods’ allowed for satisfying both cultural needs and the new lifestyle of people. By this approach, we would be able to come up with alternative solutions for contemporary urbanism along with achievement of a socially sustainable environment capable of providing an enduring balance between tradition and innovation.

Acknowledgment

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