

How Citizens' Perception is Influenced by the Sense of Belonging and Identity to Urban Deteriorated Texture (Case Study: Sarshoor District in Mashad)

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Abstract—Cognition of places will lead to self-recognition, and it will give identity to people. A place that has an identity, has specific features which will manifest in its residents. Sense of place lead to mental perception of people about the place they are present in. Therefore, the concept of sense of place and factors affecting it are considered in this article as well as the effect of these factors on citizens' perception of the Sarshoor deteriorated texture has been investigated. For this purpose, a combination of library and field studies including questionnaire, structured observation, and roaming in the district has been used, and data have been analysed through Crosstabs quantitative method. Selection of the preferable scenario from among suggested scenarios has been done by AHP method. Findings indicate that due to the elimination of memorable elements and also socioeconomic conditions which are dominant on the deteriorated texture of Sarshoor district, most of the old residents of this district have moved to some other living places. Therefore, sense of place can be induced to people by offering a suitable design and inserting memorable elements; also we can create a sense of identity and belonging in residents, and prevent them from leaving.

Keywords—Deteriorated Texture; Identity; Perception; Place; Sense of Belonging.

I. INTRODUCTION

PLACE is somewhere in which we have a full perception of our own existence and being. Humans have various imaginations about different places. Their feelings can influence their perception of the environment and the formation of their imagination about a place. It is the very imagination of humans that gives identity to a place. In addition to physical structure of a place, people's memories affect giving identity to places. Crisis of place i.e. crisis of social meaning of space and time, is one of the most obvious problems of modern urbanization – a crisis that is reflected in creation of urban spaces which have no identity, no history, no relation [Rana Sadat Habibi, 2008]. Development of human societies and the change of life styles and residency of people have attracted the attention of architects, designers, and planners to the quality of constructed places and environments. Moreover, the role of designing as an

instrument for shaping the living environment as well as responding to humans' needs and expectations have gained more significance, and many studies have been conducted on how environment or constructed places interact with humans' mentality and behaviour. Previous studies show that in addition to physical elements, environment has messages, meanings, and codes that are decoded, perceived, and judged by people according to their roles, expectations, motivations, and other factors. This general sense which is formed in people after they perceive and judge about a particular place is called sense of place, which is an important factor for coordination between individual environment, better exploitation from the environment, consumers' consent, individuals' sense of belonging to that place, and their continuous presence in there [Mohammad Sadegh Falahat, 2006]. This sense not only applies to residents, but also to passengers. A person who passes a place is suddenly attracted by a memorable element – an element which has been carved

in his/her mind, which he/she has experienced in the past, and is long-established in his/her mind. This element will cause him/her to contemplate and stop in that place. It is the same for residents; if they feel the sense of belonging to their district, specially a worn-out one, they will never wish to leave. Therefore, in plans and designs, a context for the sense of belonging to places should be provided and people should be prevented from leaving.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1. Perception

The word perception means perceiving intangible objects, comprehension, intellection, understanding, considering, arriving at, and maturing. To explain its lexical meaning more, we can refer to: observing, recognizing, maturation of a child to puberty, and ripening of fruits [Naghizade & Mohammad, 2007]. In sum, the complicated process of becoming aware of sensual information and understanding them is called perception. Moreover, perception is a process by which people adjust, interpret, and give meaning to their assumptions and thoughts about environment [Parsayian & A'rabi, 2007].

Unlike emotions which are totally function of a stimulus, perception depends on many factors including age, gender, excitations, previous knowledge, expectations, motivational states, different emotional states, decision making, and individual's will [Mahmood Irvani & Mohammad Karim Khodapanahi, 2002].

2.2. Place and Sense of Place

Makan (an Arabic term meaning place) is a noun of place which is derived from the verb Kown (an Arabic term) meaning "being" and absolute notion of "place"; and "being" itself means "existence" and "being existed". It also means to "live" and spend life. Another meaning of "existing" is to "occur" and "befall". Therefore, it can be interpreted that place means somewhere for events to occur and to live in; and as long as life is related to existence, it also brings into existence [Rana Sadat Habibi, 2008]. In phenomenological perspective, place is something beyond an abstract location; place is something general which is made up of real objects and has materials, substance, shape, texture, and colour. All these elements define environmental character of a place [Bahram Sarmast & Mohammad Mehdi Motevaseli, 2010].

In addition to physical elements, environment has messages, meanings, and codes that are decoded, perceived, and judged by people according to their roles, expectations, motivations, and other factors. This general sense which is formed in people after they perceive and judge about a particular place is called sense of place, which is an important factor for coordination between individuals' environment, better exploitation from the environment, consumers' consent, individuals' sense of belonging to that place, and their continuous presence in there [Bahram Sarmast & Mohammad Mehdi Motevaseli, 2010].

First, there is a deep familiarity with a place that will occur when the person is present in that place and experiences it unconsciously. In this case, the individual integrates with that place. The next level is an ordinary familiarity with a place which occurs unconsciously and it is collective and cultural rather than subjective; it is a strong and unthoughtful involvement in symbols of a place. This involvement appears when experiencing familiar and sacred places. In superficial familiarity, individual's experience is sensitive yet unfamiliar with a place, which comes after thinking that what shape and meaning does this place have for its residents. In this level, sense of place is conscious and involvement in sense of place occurs without accepting social conventions [Mohammad Sadegh Falahat, 2006]. Sense of belonging which is created based on sense of place, is beyond being aware of settling in a place. This sense leads to a connection between an individual and the place, in which the individual sees himself/herself as part of that place. According to his/her experience with clues, meanings, performances, and personality, he/she assigns a role for that place in his/her mind, and that place will be respectable for him/her [Bahram Sarmast & Mohammad Mehdi Motevaseli, 2010].

2.3. Identity

In Dekhoda dictionary, identity is defined as individuation, and this is the meaning that is popular among prolocutors and wise men [Aliakbar Dekhoda, 1955]. In philosophy, identity is defined as partial reality, i.e. it is called identity when nature is validated through individuation. Identity means existing in external world, and the aim is to recognize. Identity is, in some cases, inherent, and is per accidens in others [Mohamad Moeen, 1922]. Sometimes identity refers to existence in external world, and sometimes to nature with individuation which included partial reality [Mostafa Behzadfar, cited from Dekhoda, 2008].

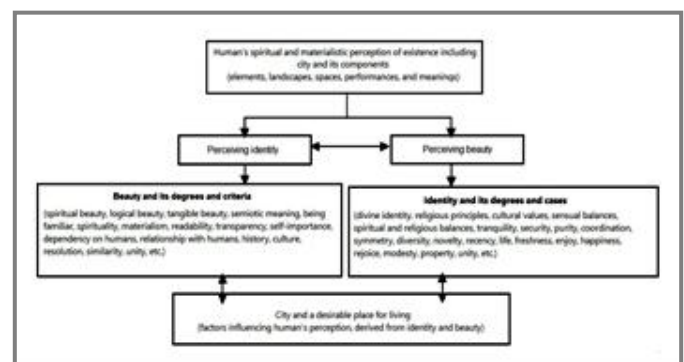


Figure 1: Identity process [Naghizade & Mohammad, 2007]

Place identity is defined as part of individual identity, and grows based on directly experiencing the physical environment. Therefore, it reflects social and cultural aspects of a place. There is an interaction between humans and a place, because humans' action and willing gives meaning to a space. Place is one of the essential components of individual identity [Proshansky et al., 1983; Lalli, 1992; Wester-Herber, 2004].

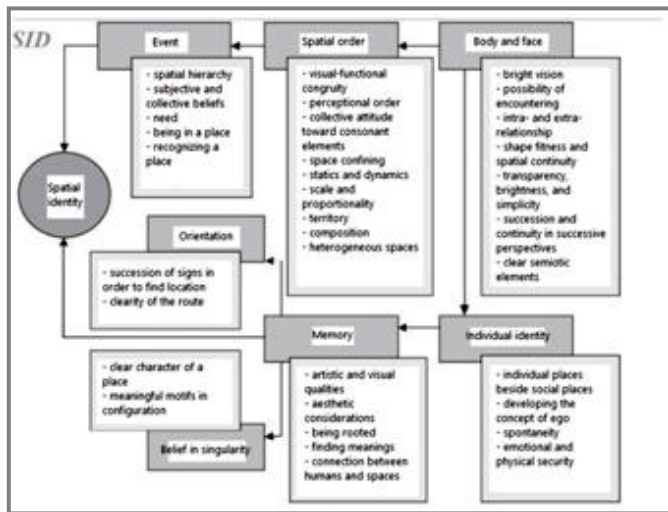


Figure 2: Conceptual Model for factors forming Place identity in Historical Backgrounds [Pourjafar et al., 2001]

Place identity can be defined as a process in which people feel the sense of belonging to a particular place through having interaction with that place [Stedman, 2002]. Neighbourhood and society are among factors that affect creation of place identity and the sense of belonging to a place [Hummon, 1992; Woldoff, 2002]. Sense of belonging and attachment influences identity in a way that attachment is a process that forms individual and social identity [Chawla, 1992; Brown et al., 2003].

2.4. Deteriorated Texture

Wearing-out is defined as deformation of physical components of a city and gradual movement towards physico-functional destruction of that city [Zebardast, 2002]. A process during which framework and activity and in sum, the urban space undergoes a kind of transformation, disorganization, imbalance, disproportion, and deformation, and finally all social memories are destroyed and urban life recedes, is called wearing-out of the urban texture [Aminzadeh, 2007]. In order to specify urban deteriorated texture, the following criteria are concerned: 1- blocks which 50% of their building is instable and worn-out; 2- blocks which more than 50% of its passages is less than 6 meters; and 3- blocks which more than 50% of their building is less than 200 square meters [Arab Ahmadi, 2007].

Different deteriorated textures include textures having urban heritage (having cultural and national values registered in the list of cultural heritages or national monuments), urban textures lacking cultural heritage (they are in the legal borders of the city and are legally owned, but they lack safety, stability, and public services), and marginal textures (unofficial settlements) [Habibi et al., 2007].

III. METHODS

The method of conducting this research has been combined of two methods of library and field studies. For collecting the data, concept and descriptions related to sense of belonging and related criteria, we have got use of library method as well

as books and articles related to the subject; also for evaluating the effects of these criteria practically we had field studies in vicinity of Sarshoor district of Mashhad. Due to the fact that the subject of the research is an absolute conceptual topic, we have had studies about different methods of data collection as well as determining advantages and disadvantages of each method; the questionnaire and observational methods were regarded more agreeable and they were selected for airing required information of the studied region. After owning required data through methods mentioned above, analyzing them was initiated. In analyzing acquired data crosstabs method was also used. For scoring the scenarios and selecting better option, AHP method was utilized.

Sarshoor deteriorated texture which has 74 hectares of expansion and its population is nearly 9000 people was selected as the case study. This market place owns registered national landmarks such as the house of Saheb Elm (related to the first Pahlavi era) and the house of Abasian Hosseini (which dates back to the time of Qajar period).

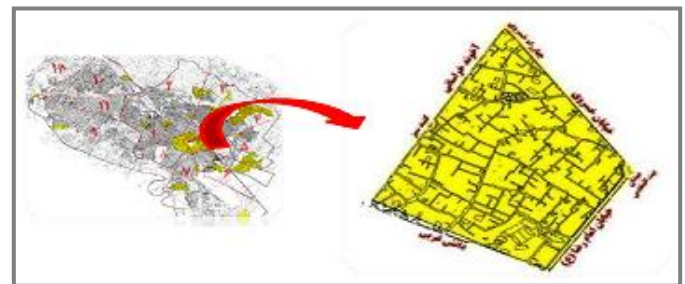


Figure 3: Deteriorated Textures of Mashhad and the Position of Sarshoor District

IV. RESULTS

Due to the adjacency of Sarshoor market place to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, in especial times of the year this place becomes full of pilgrims and its population would remarkably increase. This issue has had deep effects on social structure of the neighborhood during recent years. A large number of pilgrims and neighbors feel the sense of belonging to Sarshoor market place and regard an identity for this place. Generally, the overall condition of the neighborhood can be indicated as the following:

- The neighbors have had a long residence in the neighborhood and they are mostly from the middle economic class of the society
- Many of the neighbors and shop keepers have economic dependency on commercial and residential activities

The low-income pilgrims reside in non-suitable multipurpose houses or even in workshops.

4.1. Binary Relation

According to the studies of the questionnaire and binary relation acquired from crosstabs method, the following results have been achieved:

The younger the age is, the more different expectations exist from the neighborhood and the image in mind is less obvious.

- The elders inform younger of the more appropriate religious and residential role in the past.
- Due to the fact that the youth are more educated and have a different thought toward modern constructions, they believe that reconstruction must be conducted in deteriorated textures, but without forcing any changes to the natural appearance of the place (in order not to vanish memories of individuals), the old, are against with any modernization because of having memories in the place; this is while the middle age individuals are not old enough to have deep memories and old dependencies to prevent modernization.
- The park is mostly used by the youth and middle aged people of the neighborhood.
- Among immigrants of different cities, there are different expectations and this is logical. Those who have not been born in Mashhad, but reside in the neighborhood have more memories registered in their mind comparing with those who are not living there anymore.
- Only the residents of the neighborhood have the mentioned interactions. This shows that there is no pause for the passengers of the neighborhood so as to create interactions.
- People get use of the place according to their age and their education in different times (day or night).
- People of Mashhad who have lived more in the neighborhood and have a deeper sense of belonging to it have complained more than the passengers – who expect more suitable and convenient availability- to expansion of the passages.
- All the people of the neighborhood including all ages, all jobs, different educations, either resident or passenger, declared that Hoseinie Esfahaniha is known as the best known place of the neighborhood.
- Due to the fact that 24-hour jobs of the neighborhood are placed at the beginning of the market place, the passengers are more aware of them than the residents.

4.2. Scenarios (Suggestions)

According to the process of the research, three scenarios – including minimum, moderate and maximum – have been suggested as the following:

4.2.1. The Minimum Scenario

In this scenario it has been attempted to improve the situation of the neighborhood through having minimum interference and the least possible costs. These activities are as follows:

- Establishing public restrooms in the neighborhood
- Paying more attention to cleanliness of the neighborhood
- Having more security by having better illumination

- Placing police stations in the neighborhood for increasing security
- Paying more attention to the parks of the neighborhood so as to be attractive for all ages
- Introducing historical and national monuments existed in the neighborhood through billboards

4.2.2. The Moderate Scenario

In this scenario, it has been attempted to look logically at the process of designing, and by spending some costs and interference improve the current condition of the texture. These activities – except those which were already mentioned in the minimum scenario – include the following:

- Establishing a hospital in the neighborhood
- Designing some elements and monuments which can depict the memories of the past
- Paying especial attention to the needs of the women of the neighborhood
- Improvement and rehabilitation of the two national monuments of the neighborhood
- Using these two national monuments for attracting people and for evoking old memories and the sense of belonging of the people especially residents of the neighborhood

4.2.3. The Maximum Scenario

This scenario looks at the process of designing in an ideal way and by spending maximum costs and by considering no obstacle conducts the most interference in the texture. Such activities – except those which have been mentioned in the last scenarios – are as follows:

- Increasing 24-hour activities in the neighborhood
- Changing the park of the neighborhood to an urban space
- Expanding the width of the passages in order to facilitate contacts into the texture according to request of most residents
- Preventing construction of modern buildings in the deteriorated texture of the neighborhood, and reconstruction of the houses with the same old appearance which have harmony with the other buildings
- Reconstruction of every building which the people of the neighborhood believe are known as famous places
- Giving variety to usages of the Sarshoor market place

4.2.4. Evaluation of Scenarios

According to the merits achieved by AHP method and considering physico-functional, social, economic, accessibility-dynamic, environmental, realization criteria, and sub-criteria including perception, intellectual image, symbol and sign, phenomenon and activities for evaluation, the maximum scenario has been selected as a suitable plan among the others.

V. CONCLUSION

Due to being adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, Sarshoor worn-out district is crowded by pilgrims in some particular days of the year and its population increases significantly. Despite these potentials, lack of security and lack of the sense of tranquillity in people as well as lack of fundamental infrastructures including public restrooms, clinics, and parking lots, and also destruction of old memorable elements such as a place in the past in which mourners used to wash their heads after hitting their heads by cutlass (a kind of religious ritual), will fade away the local colour and the role of the district. Moreover, no concern about historical and national monuments in that texture and not enough cleaning are factors which cause lack of sense of belonging and attachment to this district in its residents; these have caused them to move to other places. Therefore, some actions should be taken when designing these cities so that the trend that is moving deteriorated texture of Sarshoor to a state of lack of identity, is stopped and residents do not leave that place. Implementing what has been obtained from the maximum scenario which has got the highest score in an evaluation by AHP method, can pave the way to realize the objectives of this paper.

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