

Learning from the past: Public space as an inclusive medium

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Abstract

The definition of public space is complex and can involve factors such as culture, interest, scale, and type of activity. Every culture has a unique practice of public space and every city has its own network of public spaces that support social life and roots people in place and time. Having read public space such as Bazaars, mosques and neighbourhood centres in the Islamic traditional fabrics, public space, at its either neighbourhood or urban level, was as meaningful object as integral parts of our socio-cultural existence; not only be treated as physical entities *per se* but also as objects affecting the quality of our social relations and feeling towards our locality and culture. However, in the fragmented layouts of contemporary settlements, public spaces often has the appearance of mono-functional leftover no man's land not only depriving citizens from socialisation but also provoking different confrontations.

This paper presents the findings of a broader research into the public space of traditional and modern urban areas with Esfahan region as case study. The paper presents current practices of public space, along with principal changes that have occurred in public spaces of modern fabrics and tensions that characterize public life. The paper concludes by highlighting the inclusive (socio-spatial-symbolic) basis of public space practices through which the new respect for traditions can be extended to the design and development of public spaces in the future of the urban developments.

Key words: Public space, Bazaar, neighbourhood centres, socio-spatial-symbolic approach

1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide an analysis of socio-spatial-symbolic characteristics of the urban public spaces as the products in Iranian traditional and modern cities. It will be shown in this paper, how the functions, character, and morphology of the public space have changed from meeting places to traffic circles, from well-defined urban court yards associated with cultural institutions to parking lots and abundant lost spaces. Industrialisation and modernisation of Iran, which took place during the Pahlavi period (1921-1979) brought rapid expansion, in both size and population, to Iranian cities. Western planning models and patterns based on the idea of functionalism, and zoning of the cities were applied. This issue is deeper and more problematic in the case of Iran's new urban developments (Abbaszadegan, 1999; Golkar, 2001; Poordeihimi, 2003). These areas were forcefully implemented through the development of Master Plans based on Western concepts. An analysis of the modern and the traditional public spaces presented in this paper provides a clear distinction and difference in the socio-spatial-symbolic qualities of both kinds of public spaces in response to the people's culture.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Constraints on public space in modern city

Many analysts, drawing widely from European and American urban environments, argue that the modern city offers an increasingly inhospitable environment for the widespread enjoyment and use of public space. Çelik (1994) argues that in some parts of the world streets no longer seem to be a viable social and cultural space. Ford (2000) states that new transport and communication technologies have also constrained urban public spaces. In most traditional cities before common use of vehicles, the street was an extension of the buildings that faced it. People sat in chairs in front of their homes, and businesses displayed goods on rugs and tables in the street. With the rise of horse-drawn and then motorized vehicles, the street became less a part of the community and more of a place for transient strangers, and people passing through (Ford, 2000). Similarly Sennett (2002) argues 'public spaces become a function of motion, it loses any independent experiential meaning of its own'. Nowadays, public spaces have often become residual spaces, used for parking cars, or at best associated with particular limited functions, such as tourism and retail (Madanipour, 2003; Celik, 1994).

Sharper criticism of the modern movement can be found in the relevant literature, e.g., Trancik (1986) who named Modern space as 'anti-space' and respectively as 'lost space'. According to Trancik, the lost spaces are the spaces that do not contribute positively to the surroundings or uses. Trancik lists the characteristics of these spaces as: "They are ill-defined, without measurable boundaries and fail to connect elements in a coherent way". According to Abbaszadegan (1999), although Trancik mentioned examples of lost spaces in North America it should be admitted that this phenomenon is not exclusive to North American cities, as it is a well known problem in European cities as well as Iranian new developments, though its scale is different. Trancik introduced five factors that contribute to the formation of the lost spaces. These factors are: automobiles, modern movement in design, zoning and renewal, privatisation of public spaces and changing land use (Trancik, 1986). Among these factors automobile and modern movement in design have been more effective in the appearance of lost spaces in Iranian fabrics (Abbaszadegan, 1999).

2.2. An integrated approach towards public space

From the sixties Kevin Lynch (1990) argued about the need of an integrated approach for the understanding of public space. He argued that in order to design successful public space it should be understood in an inclusive way in which the idiosyncrasies of form, setting, function, climate, social pattern and cultural aspirations could be taken into account. Desirable, even possible choices of activity will vary from one class to another; a stimulating challenge to one person may be a terrifying danger to another; experiments in social role are permissible here and impermissible there (Lynch, 1990). At the design level, Lynch initiated an integrated socio-spatial-symbolic understanding towards successful public space design which Madanipour later develops at the research level as discussed below. Benn and Gaus (1983) proposed an alternative understanding of public space, seeing it as the setting for social relations but making a distinction between its private and public dimensions through the criteria of access, agency (the nature of the actions of the agents dealing with public space) and interest (whether these actions are private or public in nature). Madanipour (2003) feels this approach is too instrumental, and omits emotional and meaningful ties that allow for public spaces to be an integral part of our social and psychological existence. There is also the spatial and functional framework of how a place is organised and used, the symbolic framework of meaning and value, and how it has changed over time (Madanipour, 2003). This socio-spatial-symbolic framework is the prominent theoretical underpinning of this study about public space design in traditional and newly established settlements in Iran.

3. Methodology

Methodologically speaking, in studying the people-environment relationship, researchers usually employ a quantitative and cross-sectional or qualitative and ethnographic method (Lang, 1987). The present study used the latter approach to explore the characteristics of and experiences in Iranian traditional and modern settlements, their aspects of significance and problematic dimensions within the framework of socio-spatial-symbolic

approach. In doing so, the research will look at the public space in a number of traditional districts in the old city of Esfahan and two new residential schemes in a new town in the Esfahan region, Pooladshahr.

4. Case study 1 background: traditional city; Esfahan

Esfahan is a central city of Iran originally formed in the pre-Islamic era. Some people argue that it even pre-dates Alexander, the Macedonian conqueror. Rafiei-Mehrabadi, (1974) argues that Alexander rebuilt the city of Jey, where present day Esfahan stands. In 1052 A.D. it is reported that all the bazaars, streets and quarters of Esfahan has strong bars and gates (Lambton, 1980). In the sixteenth century the Safavid King Tahmasb II decided to transfer Iran's capital city from Qazvin to Esfahan. The infrastructure of the new capital city, including main roads, Char-bagh (boulevards), Meidan (the square), Bazaars (markets), Masjid-e Jame' (Friday mosque), palaces, Daroughe (police station), Diwan (administrative buildings), Maridh-khaneh (hospital) and Mahallat (districts, neighbourhoods) were constructed before the capital was officially transferred to Esfahan in the 1580s AD (Ardalan, 1980)-(figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Map of Iran and the location of Esfahan
Source: www.iranmap.com

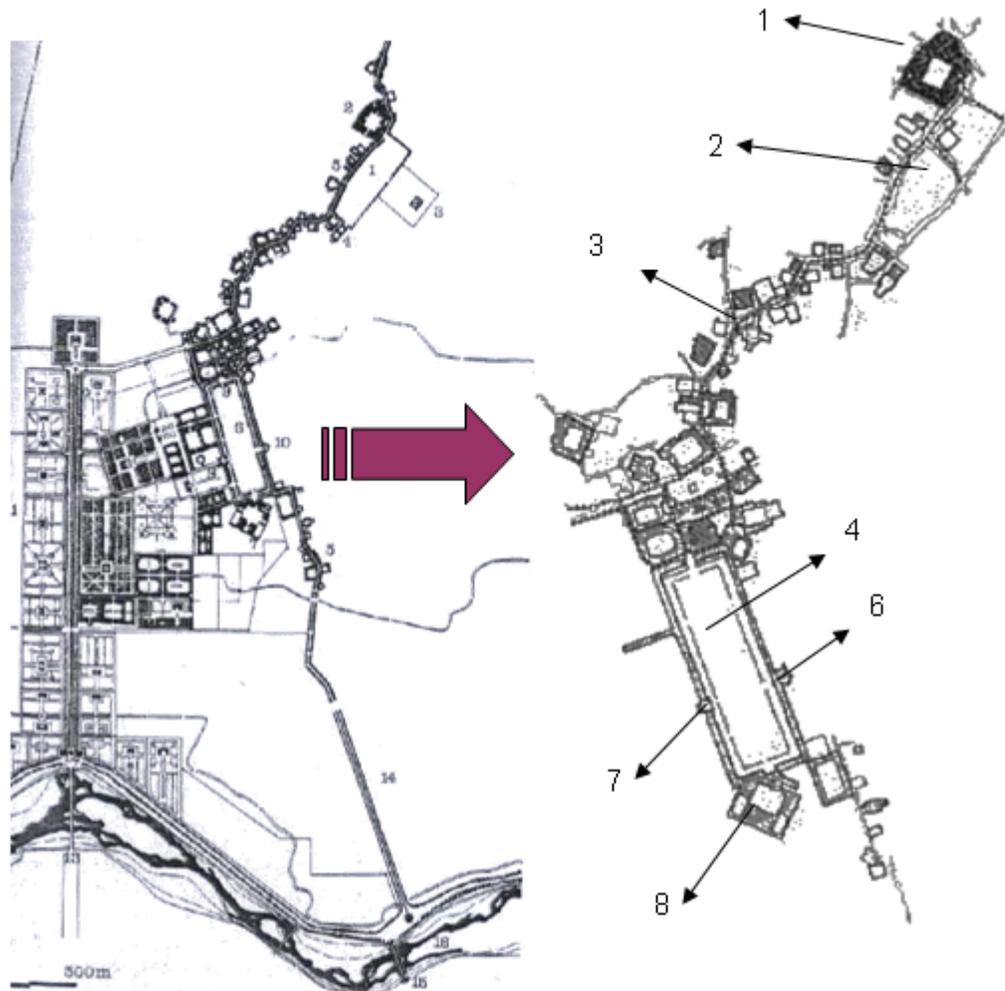


Figure 2: (Left) Plan of Esfahan showing the essential features of the pre-Safavid city and the Safavid development. (Ardalan, 1980)

(Right) Plan of Esfahan, showing the central complex of the city with its commercial line from Meydaan-e Kohneh to Meydaan-e Naqsh-e Jahan.

(After Pirnia, 1990: 297)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1- The Friday (Jaam-e) Mosque | 5- Qeysariyyeh |
| 2- Meydaan-e Kohneh | 6- The Shaikh-Lutfullah Mosque |
| 3- The Bazaar | 7- The Aliqapou palace |
| 4- Meydaan-e Naqsh-e Jahan | 8- The Shah (Imam) Mosque |

4.1. Characteristics of Iranian traditional settlements; Esfahan as a point of reference

The evolution of the architectural forms and spaces comes as an intelligent response to changing conditions (be they climatic, social or economic). Although similarities in urban forms, structures and spaces are often found where there are different cultural backgrounds, this does not necessarily mean that cultural values have changed, nor does it mean they all share similar cultural values or use urban spaces in the same way. Moreover, climate and culture have also influenced Iranian cities: climate helps determine their location, street patterns and housing forms while culture affects the form, spatial structure and use of urban space. Traditionally, the streets, residential quarters, working spaces, religious buildings and public services located around the city geographical centre or

along its main axis form the main elements of a typical Iranian city, with its formal, spatial, and structural organisation responding to contextual conditions. Some of its characteristics were common to most other cities in the Muslim world. The citadel, the Friday mosque and the bazaar, as the centres of political, spiritual, symbolic, social and economic power, constituted the focal points of the city.

4.1.1. Friday mosque

The Friday mosque, the spiritual core of the town, would act as the centre of gravity of the city, with a large courtyard acting as a gathering place. Roads and access ways would lead to the mosque from different directions. In the Friday mosque the towns people gathered in the Friday prayer that was political as well as religious. The mosque, and its associated madrasas, in which Ulama assembled to discuss and teach, was also an educational centre of the town (von Grunebaum, 1981). In many cities, the courtyard of the Friday mosque was the main public open space. In this way, the mosque and its open space become a meeting point for religious, political and social purposes. However, it was still a predominantly religious space, where trading was not allowed and certain kinds of behaviour were expected (Madanipour, 1994). From symbolic point of view, mosque is an example of the implication of the holistic interpretation for the built environment in Islamic society. Although believing God is everywhere, the prayer hall of the mosque is symbolically the place where God and Mankind meet and can converse. The natural symbol for this is the universe, which expresses the infinite creativity of God while enclosing mankind in a protective space. The mosque is built for the purpose of providing a calm and peaceful place for daily prayers with the intention of directing the central focus of the prayers' attention to the creator of the world, Allah. To achieve that purpose the architecture of the mosque is designed in a way to detach the prayers' minds from earth (as a symbol of this mortal world) and guide it towards the sky (as a symbol of eternity). Amongst the innumerable ways of concretising the universe, the architects developed the concept of a dome (figure 3). Choosing the shape of the dome, which ends in a point, for covering the main praying hall in the mosque has proved to serve the above mentioned purpose well. The dome is thus a shape of great symbolic importance which must be replicated through the properties of matter.

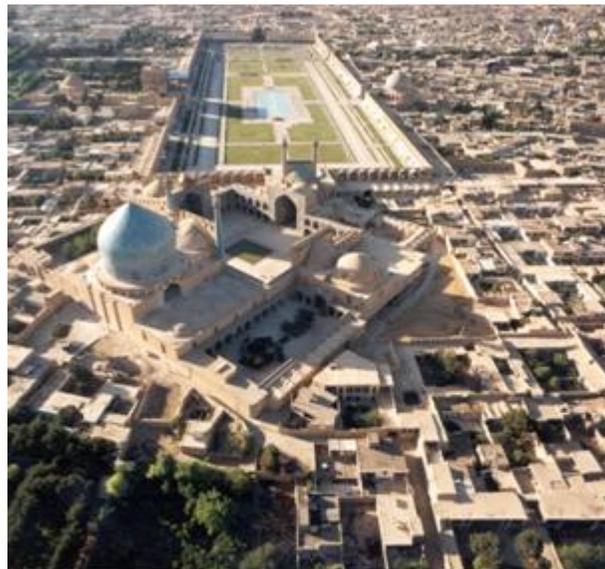


Figure 3: A bird's eye view of Naqsh-e-Jahan Square and Shah Mosque in Esfahan-Safavid Dynasty. Source: Ghazbanpour, 2000

4.1.2. Bazaar

In traditional city, the covered main street, bazaar, flanked by shops plays the role of the commercial and social spine of the traditional city, functioned also as a communication channel connecting various public facilities such

as public baths, water storages and educational centres. This space was the meeting place of the town people with each other, with the political, religious and economic hierarchies. Member of each craft and trade tended to be grouped together in one of the market branches (figure 4). The main bazaar was a linear urban element of the city, crossing through different neighbourhoods, and connecting the heart of the city to its suburbs. The neighbourhoods, which were far away from the bazaar, had their own small bazaar known as “bazaarcheh”, which was usually close to the neighbourhood centre.



Figure 4: Example of traditional covered Bazaar. There is a covered dome where the access network meets. Jouybareh, Esfahan.

4.1.3. Mahallah's (neighbourhoods)

Residential areas of traditional cities such as Esfahan consisted of a number of residential districts known as Mahallah's (neighbourhoods). Each mahallah was further subdivided into smaller residential quarters known as Kouy (sub-neighbourhood) which was formed of a number of Barzans (clusters of houses). “They were geographical entities as well as homogeneous communities that were closely knit, forming the basic unit of society. The solidarity between the small group of people living in every quarter was based on family, clientage, common village origin, ethnic or sectarian identity and in some case common occupation. There was no evidence to show the homogeneity of social classes as a base of solidarity since they were communities of both rich and power” (Madanipour, 1994:439). The main elements of each Mahallah included at least a neighbourhood mosque, a Hammam (Public bath), a Madrasa (school) and an Ab-anbar (water-reservoir). Smaller scale provisions - such as a local mosque, a local bathhouse, a few local shops, and a Maktab (teaching house) were provided at sub-neighbourhood level. The same structure was, by and large, applied in all Safavid cities such as Esfahan (Rafiei-Mehrabadi, 1974) and still exists in the traditional residential quarters of old Iranian cities. Along with the central space of the quarters, there were small, incidental squares and the street corners, used as the meeting points by the residents of the neighbourhood. A sequence of controlled access routes creates a hierarchical spatial order and there is a sharp division between the public and private domains. Main thoroughfares (public domain) surround large blocks of residential districts (Mahallahs - neighbourhoods). No house normally opened onto them, and access to houses was through the narrower alleyways (semi-public domain), ramified from the main thoroughfares

and serving smaller residential areas (Kouys; sub-neighbourhoods). Finally from those irregular and twisting alleyways, at varying lengths (e.g Kouy-ches; horter alleyways), dead-end alleyways (Bunbasts; cul-de-sacs) provided access to clusters of houses, which were normally of the same height to help preserve privacy. The principal feature of these alleyways, normally dead-ends, was to ensure restricted access, substantially reducing the possibility of strangers passing by. The only opening onto the alleyway in the blank outer wall of the house was the entrance door; these did not dominate or face each other directly, ensuring privacy and restring access.

5. Case study 2: modern city; Pooladshahr New Town

5.1. Study area location

Pooladshahr (one of the three new towns in the Esfahan region) was selected as another case as a modern pattern of development to study in detail for this paper.

5.2. Setting and background of Pooladshahr New Town

The new town of Pooladshahr (formerly Aryashahr), the second major contemporary company town of Iran after Abadan, was established in 1968 (PNTDC, 1993). The new town of Pooladshahr was first founded for the housing of Esfahan Steel Mill factory employees and workers. After the confirmation of a comprehensive plan for the Esfahan region in 1985, the new town of Pooladshahr, with some basic changes in its construction and function, became an independent city. From 1986, the city expansion management was entrusted to its developer company (PNTDC), which was related to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. The town is located 25 kms south-west of Esfahan and has a rectangular shape extending from the south-west to the north western region at an angle of 45 degrees (figure 5). This site is bounded to the Matbakh-Yellow Mountains, Esfahan-Shahre-kord highway and the lands of Felavarjan, Lenjan and some neighbouring villages, which in the Esfahan comprehensive plan part of a protected area.

The planning and design of the town was developed in two stages; firstly, at the time of its foundation as a company town, and secondly, at the time of its designation under a new state policy as a new town. At the first planning stage, Pooladshahr was designed by Iranian architects with the help of the former Soviet Union for a population of 300,000, and with an area measuring about 7,000 hectares in 1968 (Honar wa Memari, 1977).

The general street pattern of the town is shaped by two networks, one in the form of a radius and the other in a straight form, with both being integrated in a geometric order at the community level.

The population of Pooladshahr had grown to about 40,000 at the time of its second planning and development stage. The city's plan was revised in 1989 under the new development policy, with the goal of converting the company town to a self-sufficient and dynamic city within the Esfahan region. To implement the new policy, the project for development and expansion of the Pooladshahr new town envisaged the incorporation of a population exceeding half a million (PNTDC, 1993). Although the new policy has affected the town's role and function, it has not changed the general plan of the town except for its population density. Indeed, 200,000 more people have been accommodated within the primary site of the town in approximately the same area and design structure (PNTDC, 1993).

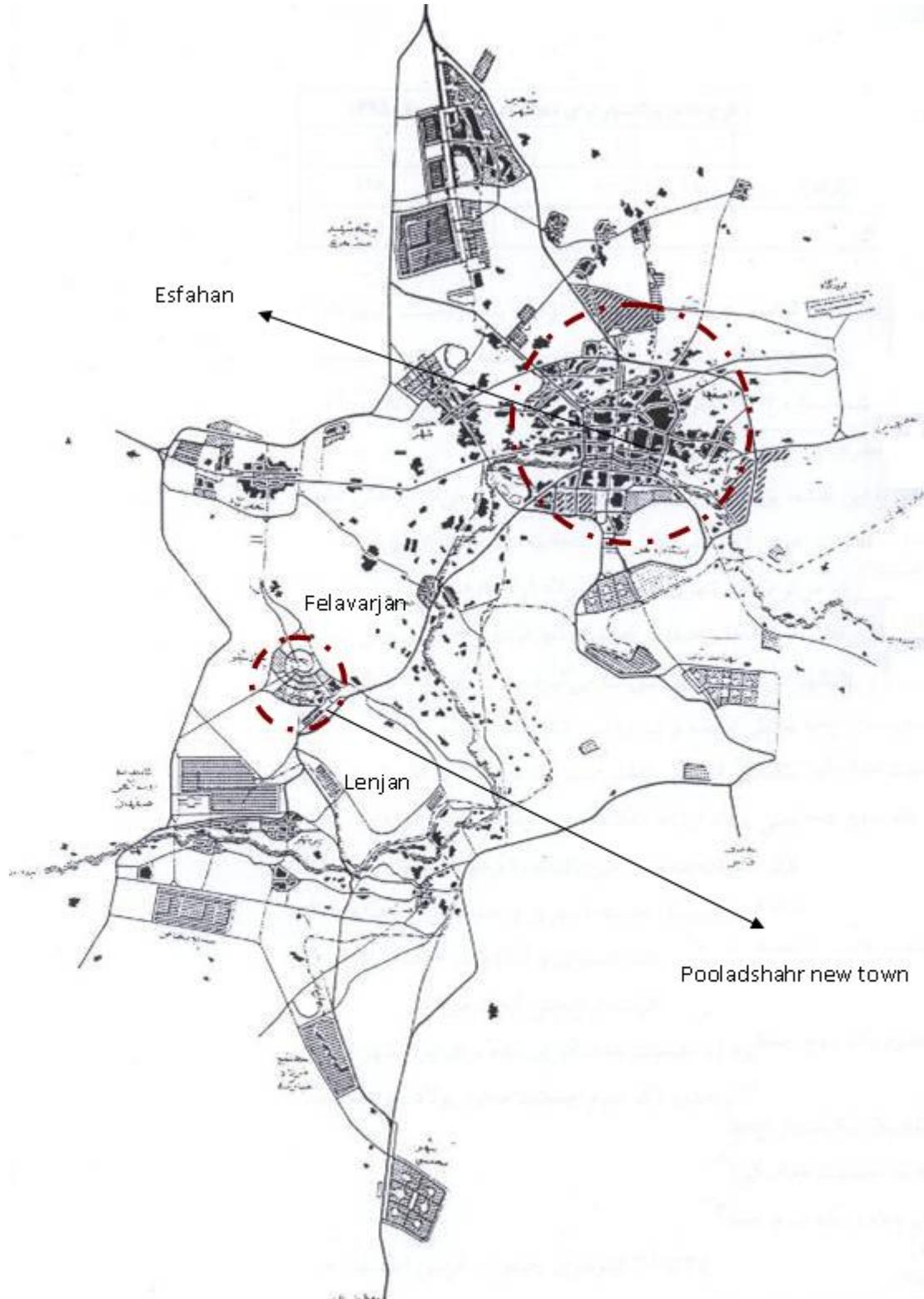


Figure 5: Location of Pooladshahr in the Esfahan region. Source: MHUD, 2000

5.3. Overall view of urban context

The structure of the town is based on residential neighbourhoods and a set of blocks. Generally, the town is divided into two northern zones with a chequered construction and a southern zone with a spiral construction (figure 6).

Each zone includes several districts and each district (Barzan) includes several quarters (Mahalle/neighborhood); nine districts and fifty-five quarters were anticipated. In response to the new towns' city division ministry, the smallest city units in residential areas will be populated by 5,000 persons and their daily and general needs will be provided through the quarters' centres. By composing several quarters together, residential districts will exist in the city, each of which has a centre to provide for residents' substantive needs. In the comprehensive plan of Pooladshahr, in addition to the quarters and districts' servicing centres, the city's major servicing centre, besides providing the main services inside the city, will also gain services beyond the districts. The new town of Pooladshahr now includes 13 quarters with 18,000 residential units and a population of over 70,000 people (Talachyan, 2005). At the time of this research, 70% of the above quarters had been implemented. Each quarter comprises numerous sets of buildings and subdivision blocks which manifest the physical appearance of sub-neighbourhoods through the height of buildings. On the neighbourhood scale, more emphasis has been placed on the design and development of mixed dwelling types and density, the construction management of residential complexes, residential units and public facilities, as well as the construction of a street network. The residential streets are core elements used to connect, shape and harmonise the physical elements of residential neighbourhoods in design plans, whether on the scale of a small low density block or in the whole neighbourhood (PNTDC, 1993).

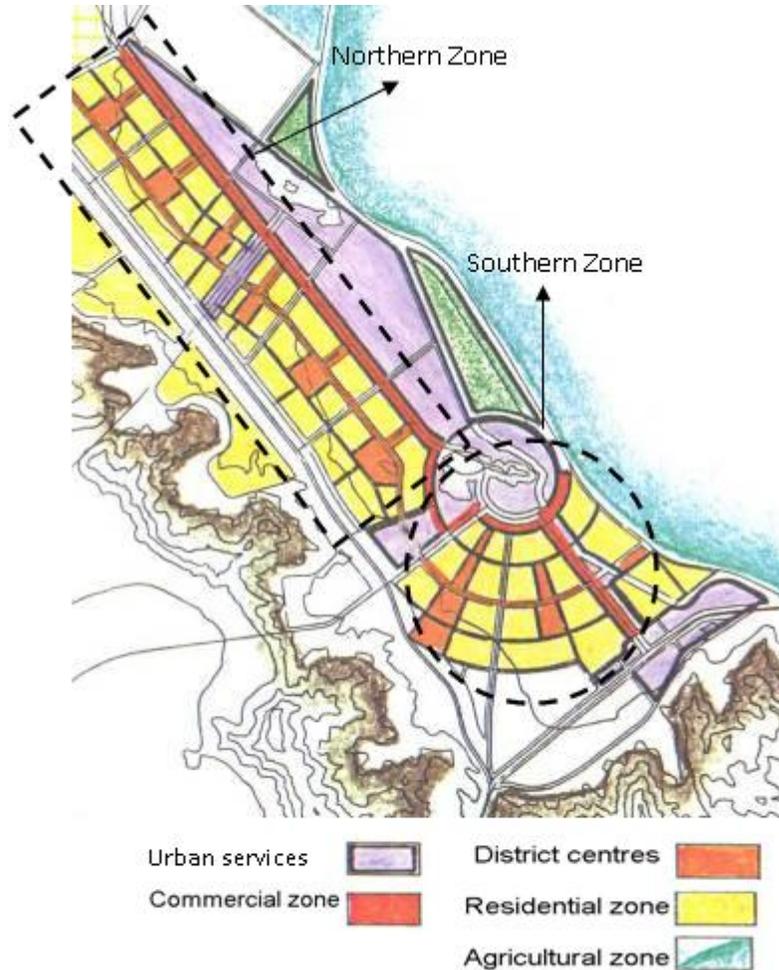


Figure 6: Master Plan of Pooladshahr. Source of plan: Archive of PNTDC, 2004.

5.4. Case study areas: A6 and B6 estates

Having explored Pooladshahr's overall context, the neighbourhoods which were the focus of the empirical research and identified. The public spaces from where the empirical part unfolds are located in A6 and B6 neighbourhoods. The main characteristics of these neighbourhoods will now be described.

5.4.1. Case study area 1: A6 neighbourhood

This neighbourhood was developed in the second stage of Pooladshahr development. The neighbourhood unit of A6 (Sheikh-Bahaii) was designed as a centre with a traditional pattern. However, visual observation revealed limited social interaction within its public open spaces (figure 7). Strategically, the overall size of the neighbourhood was dictated by the maximum walking distance for the elderly or a child from the neighbourhood centre to their house (PNTDC, 1990). In the Master Plan, special attention was paid to the dwelling house and its density, the school and its distance, the neighbourhood centre and its functional centrality. There is a mixture of housing types, including two to four storey housing. There is also a mosque, restaurant and library in the centre which works at the neighbourhood scale.

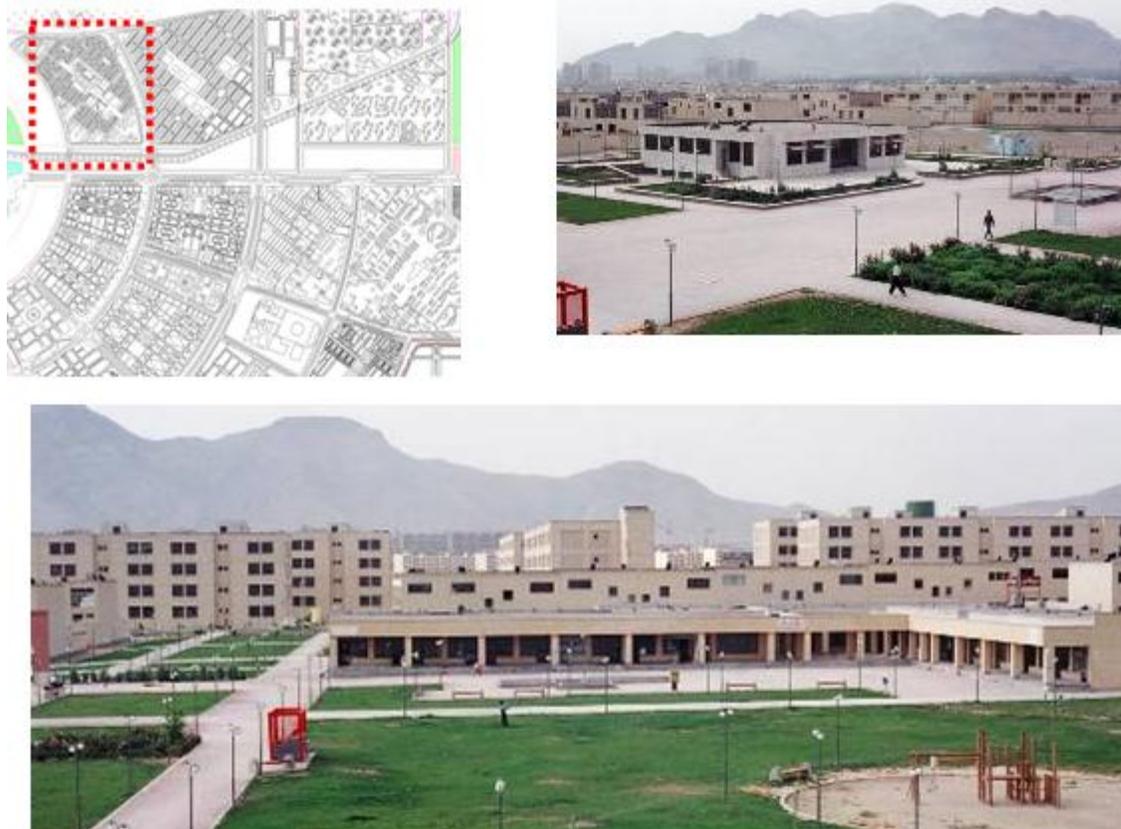
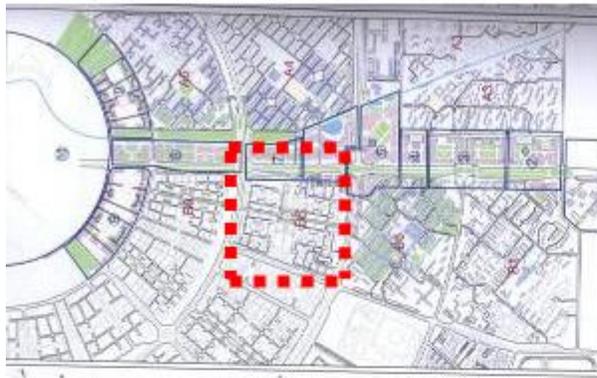


Figure 7: Plan and views of neighbourhood centre in A6. Source: Archive of PNTDC, 2004.

5.4.2. Case study area 2: B6 neighbourhood

B6 neighbourhood was established in 1996 to meet the housing needs of low-income residents in the southern zone of Pooladshahr. Therefore, its design was mainly concerned with the arrangement of individual dwelling blocks separated by arterial streets. This neighbourhood includes 47 apartment blocks, including 196 apartment units accommodating about 740 individuals. The physical structure of the neighbourhood is based on the rectangular blocks separated by streets or green spaces (figure 8).



B6 Neighbourhood

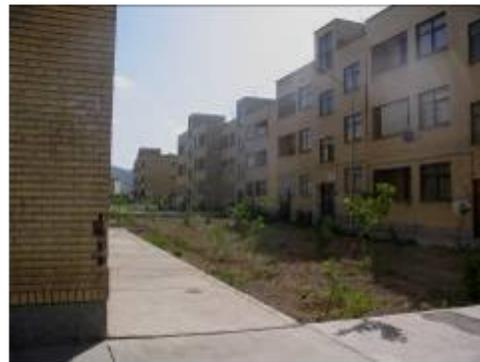


Figure 8: Plan and views of B6. Source: Archive of PNTDC. 2004

5.5. Analysis and results

5.5.1. Physical form analysis of residential public open spaces

Here we analyse the residential public open spaces in the selected neighbourhoods representing different types of residential housing estates including high density flats and villa houses in Pooladshahr.

5.5.2. Open space typology

The open spaces at neighbourhood scale include the courts and streets between dwellings and the neighbourhood centres. In the A6 neighbourhood, public open spaces are mostly shaped in the form of square-type public gathering areas surrounded by residential blocks, and connected to the open-ended gridiron street networks. In the neighbourhood centre of A6, however, access is provided to education, recreation, religious and cultural and commercial services; even substantial green spaces are provided through the established servicing centre. This shapes a special typology of public space in this neighbourhood.

In B6, due to the separated free standing blocks, open space areas are simply left between fragmented blocks. However, an effort has been made to separate car and pedestrian routes by greenery or changes in level.

5.5.2.1. Residential streets

As stated, Pooladshahr's design started in the mid 1960s, and because of the length of time its development took, changes occurred to the design characteristics due to fiscal contingencies. Although in the study of design plans Pooladshahr is shown to have a very well-connected layout in practice, the problematic phasing of the

implementation process, together with inappropriate ideas that were imposed on the existing situation, led to fragmented layouts. After the revolution, with the change in political system and new policies of the government, the construction of Pooladshahr was no longer based on its initial plan. During the Iran-Iraq war many immigrants from war areas came to live in this town. This accelerated the development of the town, which was again based on new ideas, giving home to many different income groups coming from various parts of the country. In the second phase of its development, the A6 neighbourhood was based on subdivided rectangular plots separated by streets which were not compatible and inter-connected with the surrounding curvilinear arterial routes remaining from the first phase. Monotonous and standardised streetscape design and a low quality implementation process have confined the sociability of street spaces as the sole neighbourhood public open spaces of this neighbourhood. In B6 there is also a poor quality community and neighbourhood-scale design; the importance of the public realm was not considered in its design process. This fact is evident through the physical observation of the environmental quality of the exterior space. The objective of building more affordable residential flats led to the design of four-storey walk-up flats in brick blocks which not only resulted in the ugliness and environmental unresponsiveness of exterior public spaces, but also the misuse of interior public spaces. For example, because of the lack of adequate space for each flat, residents use the staircase area as a semi-private living area.

5.5.2.2. Building appearances

The appearance of buildings contributes negatively to the townscape quality of neighbourhoods in the housing estates of Pooladshahr. This in particular is visible in the case of estates including mismatched medium rise and low rise buildings. The building appearance and street spaces show the neglect of liveability in the public environment, resulting in a non-responsive environment. Furthermore, the lifeless and repetitive form and construction materials of exterior spaces and building appearance may undoubtedly reduce the desire of residents for social interaction.

5.5.3. Circulation and street network

The traffic network in Pooladshahr is ordered generally by curvilinear and linear patterns. The main carriageway surrounds the neighbourhoods and works as a loop in the neighbourhood. Within neighbourhoods, another traffic network gives access to the dwelling and local facilities. This network is not well connected to the main carriageways and this fact has isolated the open space from the main network, negatively affecting the liveability of the public spaces. Local observation showed that the pedestrian routes are commonly used by vehicles in the estates, a fact which is evidenced by the use of metal or concrete obstacles; this shows how such a use of pedestrian routes is not accepted. This, however, negatively impinges on the streetscape of the neighbourhood.

5.5.4. The functional performance of public open spaces

A first glance at the design studies shows that Pooladshahr seems to be of very high quality design. However, visual observation reveals limited social interaction within its public open spaces. Nevertheless, the long-term design procedure from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s created some effective physical congruities in the public realm, either in the form of streets or other open spaces.

As stated, the idea of square-type open space, such as that in A6, shapes a special typology of public space in this neighbourhood. However, in A6 with respect to this pattern of open spaces, the presence of population in the public spaces is notably less than what was expected in the plan and design. This is partly because the planning for pedestrian paths has been based upon the whole population, but only the men are the prominent users of public space. It is worth mentioning that other parameters such as common social strata are also important in using these public centres. Furthermore, public spaces at urban district (Barzan) and quarter (Mahalle) scale are not well interconnected and most of the facilities are located in a linear structure. For this reason, the quarters are understood as isolated realms due to this disconnectivity with other public realms at other scales.

In B6, due to the separated free standing blocks, open spaces are left between blocks; however, effort has been made to separate the car and pedestrian routes by greenery or changes in ground level.

Another conflict observed in apartment units concerns the streetscapes. It seems that the apartment units are not occupied by the size of family unit they have been designed for. As a result of the large population in the units, the residents have changed the function of the balconies to make it part of their indoor space, which has a very negative impact on the facades of the block and consequently on the streetscape observed from the public realm.

5.5.5. Summary of initial observational findings in Pooladshahr

The results of the observation regarding environmental quality of the residential estates and related public spaces can be summarised as follows:

The more frequently observed physical-spatial features and characteristic problems related to mass housing schemes concerning - directly or indirectly- qualitative aspects of the external built environment have been identified (i.e. confusing legibility of layout, uniformity, isolation from urban context, badly maintained semi-public and semi-private outdoor spaces, monotony, anonymity, and also being alien to users' culture and values).

The repercussion of the number of standardized projects with similar problems, in its urban context, looked as damaging to neighbourhood residents and to the town as a whole. Uniformity and homogeneity among the blocks, and identical visual aspect have been reported as affecting orientation in the scheme, making it sometimes difficult for visitors not familiar with the area.

5.5.6. Conflicts in public spaces

A kind of conflict exists between the useability of street spaces as determined by their layout and construction configurations, and their actual use as stated by residents. Walkability is the first area of conflict in the areas in which the actual physical context was not suitable for such use. The widths and construction quality, particularly in the verges of local streets and in most of the pedestrian routes, were the main elements which caused this conflict.

The second type of conflict is in the land use and zoning characteristics of residential street blocks. The majority of residents desire to obtain their daily needs from places very near to their homes, particularly in the immediate local streets, and therefore do not like to go to the main community facility and recreation centres to satisfy these needs. Residents, neighbourhood and association members, demanded a combined use of micro-scale residential areas and local street sides. As supported by the literature, the types of land use and zoning in most of the traditional neighbourhoods of Iranian cities, particularly those built on a historical or traditional fabric confirm the mixed pattern at the neighbourhood level for the daily life and liveability of neighbourhoods (e.g. Naqsh-e Jahan Pars, 1991).

6. Conclusion

In traditional cities of Iran, one of which was exemplified in this paper, not only physical and social relationships between people and the environment but also their emotional and symbolic ties with the environment were taken into account. In this context, public space including Mosques, Bazaars and neighbourhood centres was a site for communication and reproduction of these relations, though within the predominantly patriarchal social relations. The modern urban planning as was explained and demonstrated in this paper, however, has been organised in an instrumental unsympathetic basis with very little care for the non-physical dimensions (socio-symbolic dimensions) of public places that were present in the traditional space. Such an urban design, i.e. urban design of placelessness, through spreading monotonous, standardised and soulless urban spaces in the new developments, has led to the emergence of environmentally and socio-culturally unresponsive environments in the newly developed areas. For the 'modernist' planners, the town and its districts have been a set of geometric 'spaces' rather than meaningful 'places' as experienced by the residents, and the failure of master plans can be partially explained based on this tendency in Iranian new towns.

Throughout this research, in attempt to achieve an inclusive approach towards public space, the importance and necessity of an integrated approach in the housing environment design in the case of Iranian new towns was

underlined. Such an approach is inherent in the traditional housing design although designers of new housing environment seem to ignore it.

Obviously, turning back the clock is impossible. However, modernity has affected different aspects of the residents' lifestyle. For example, the use of a new system of transportation such as cars needs a new road system particularly in terms of their width. Nevertheless, lessons can still be learnt from the traditional design system and from the residents' experience with it. How we maintain Islamic traditions, values and the local culture, in conjunction with allowing new technologies to prosper in our context, is an important issue to be addressed. The need to conserve and enhance the visual, functional and socio-spatial aspects of all social provision should be a key objective in the design and planning of outdoor open spaces within the Islamic context taking into account its close linkage to ongoing economic and political processes.

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