

Symbols Recognition in the Neighborhood Architecture

The Historical Neighborhood of Rahim Khan – Isfahan – Iran

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Abstract:

The most important mission by the neighborhood architecture is to upgrade the citizens' tangible understanding concerning the environment and creation of social connection between people through this procedure. In the light of this mission, various factors exist, of which symbols are the most important. Through these symbols, a person may find a deep and radical connection between himself and the neighborhood. Individuals' social presence in the residential environment has faded away due to the excess in contemporary architecture. In order to create new intimate spaces and renew this implication many architects and humanistic planners try to do research on the issue in psychological point of view in a symbolic or realistic way.

The present article aims to recall the architecture stability factors in neighborhood and to examine the role of symbols in the past architecture continuity. In addition, our goal is to provide semiological senses in civil spaces design via considering implications as like symbols in a neighborhood scale, environmental understanding psychology, recognizing the signs in neighborhood, etc as well as to provide principles taken from field studies.

Keywords: Local symbol; neighborhood; tangible understanding; Rahim Khan Neighborhood; Rahim Khan Mosque

Introduction:

Easiness of finding locations in a neighborhood arises from accurate clear image in people's minds. Reaching such image is not that feasible in nowadays civil structures, but getting lost in these structures is not difficult. Therefore, clarity is an important factor citizens engaged with. "Clarity means to recognize urban components and to connect them in mind in a continuous form." (Lynch, 1971).

The present article, providing a case study of Rahim Khan Neighborhood in Isfahan, examines the neighborhood, relevant symbols, and their recognition and clarity. To proceed ahead with the above discussion, definitions and opinions are provided in this respect. These definitions are conformed to the tangible witness (Rahim Khan Neighborhood) and finally the outline for submission of neighborhood designs will be provided, taking into account the citizens' answers to research questions.

"Symbols" etymology:

Symbol or indication is something that expresses the existence or presence of reality, quality or mode. Symbol – 1 (n.) mark, token, target, aim, something that you place somewhere for shooting (Hassan Amid, 2000).

This is a natural or artificial element, different with the surrounding concerning form and function, which optimizes the subjective image of the society about environment and consequently promotes urban clarity.

Symbol types:

"Meaningful symbols, formed with subjective backings, originate from the society and cultural basis. In most cases, symbols are considered to be the reference point in civil spaces. Outstanding schools, mosques ... are some instances. The major diversity factors in those symbols being converted into a civil reference point include identity, history and the city background, and even different urban spaces.

Attitudes:

Wilber Linski points out in his Culturalism standpoint: "many of the scientific publications in America have little income due to lack of attractions in people's minds. However, there are a lot of magazines and books even with amateur attractions that fascinate people due to the existence of symbols and personal creativity." "This shows the importance of symbols in both our public and artistic areas."

"In fact, symbol is a cultural instrument amongst people. The main purpose of each symbol is to transfer messages to the public. In the urban space, symbols are considered to be the organizing symbols for people and their living environment. Therefore, clarity of

these symbols is necessary to meet these targets. Some factors as like printing techniques, contrast, symbols, place, visitor's movement speed, and the distances are influential for the purpose of designing such symbols" (Wilber Linski). Catherine Howett, the sight historian explains.

Symbology is the submission of a structural and analytic framework for a reality, which provides us with a thoughtful and sentimental meaning, while the applied symbols provide the public with particular meaning about symbols and addresses the place identity.

The word "symbol" has a direct meaning and the relevant importance in urban space refers to those symbols used for finding the locations and topology. Symbols are also being used to localize the environment for the users in complicated surrounding. James Jacobs shows that symbols are the key factors for eye movements, which specify the quantity of symbols presentation in the neighborhoods.

Venturi, in his value standpoint concerning places, stated that studying daily symbols distribution in the existing environments as well as reaching insight regarding the distribution procedure in designs is required in order to simplify the environment. Nowadays, most people dominate on the city map through relying on the symbols.

The essential condition to realize and use these symbols is to be displayed more effective and remarkable by the observer: Exclusive factors that leave a good memory in our minds. The symbols can be recognized through various factors: (1) symbols must have clear forms; (2) they have to be contrary to their backgrounds; (3) and the location must be dominant on the surrounding. Therefore, the picture, image, or form that is differentiated with its background is the most effective factor in creating a symbol.

The factors that add to the power of symbols influence and recognition include: (1) the symbol is located in the intersection of several paths; (2) historical oldness or other relevant meanings; (3) powerful contrast with the surrounding; and (4) the symbols visible from a far or the outstanding points, viewing of which is possible via different points.

Use of those symbols being ordered next to each other may force the observer to step towards a particular direction. This is considered to be an ordinary method for people's social intercourse. As the pedestrian wants to change his direction, he applies the "symbols" infinite series. In case he is passing by those symbols available in his mind, he will become sure he has not made any mistakes in the direction. Consequently, symbols continuity will facilitate recognition and memorizing the manifestations. In order to define the symbols in the neighborhood, the first step is to provide a clear definition, existing elements, and their relations.

Definition:

Neighborhood: the neighborhood values and norms form the initial tangible contacts with people and the cultural identity and they often reinforce the social attachment sense through face-to-face connections. Neighborhoods have been the residential place of

ethnic, racial, religious groups and various professions (Nafisi Persian Dictionary: 18-1938/ p. 3181); Neighborhood, district, alley, quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$ of something or anything divided into 4 parts) (Ghaffari Persian Dictionary); Administrative definition of "neighborhood": a set of residential and servicing buildings in which the residents believe themselves as the dwellers and this has a specific boundary.

In the past, neighborhoods boundaries were distinguished by religious norms and the like. Nowadays, these norms have nearly disappeared due to the evolution in classification of social and economical respects in the cities. As such, cities are divided into various districts for the purpose of facilitating the services (Muhammad Taghi Rahnamaie: 1990/ p. 50).

Neighborhood specifications:

- 1- Having historical background
- 2- Having public spaces and bazaar to reveal and display cultural and social creativities
- 3- Neighborhood has it is special symbols and infrastructures
- 4- Neighborhood has a lawful or value-based society
- 5- Dwellers feel ownership in the neighborhood
- 6- Social attachment is evident
- 7- Particular norms dominate the neighborhood ...

The most important factors forming the urban neighborhoods identity:

- 1- Humanistic interactions
- 2- Historical memory (memento)
- 3- Behaviors and norms
- 4- Culture
- 5- Art and taste

It is necessary to provide a definition on "recognition".

Recognition and how to identify it:

Recognition means to be able to distinguish a phenomenon from other different groups and insert it into a defined classification based on earlier experiences and knowledge.

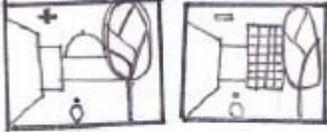
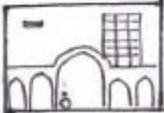
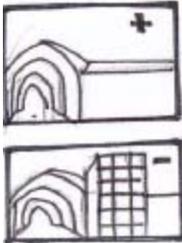
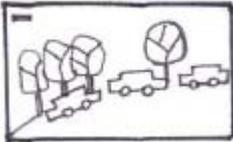
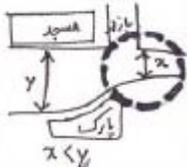
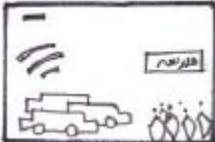
Recognition process is being formed according to the intra-group similarities and inter-group differences. These similarities and differences include the whole superficial, functional, and semantic features of a phenomenon. In other words, recognition doe not only mean to identify the objects, but the experience of its implication and meaning (Norberg Schwartz 2000-2001/ 155).

As an example, in case we remove clarity and complexity from a neighborhood, its being neighborhood will be destroyed since conformity to the subjective image will be lost

without recognition factors such that it will not be able to meet the very first expectations. Continuity of meeting the subjective expectations means providing the possibility of its recognitions. Most of the realizations by human being are possible through the five senses. Hence the role of symbols in environment recognition is very important.

These visual understandings are processed in human's mind. In this respect, our minds require principles and figures to gain information structures and put these together in a meaningful order. As an individual does not have the living experience in a neighborhood, he cannot put his understandings together in a particular order. Based on this, encounter with the environment is absolutely affected by our minds. Therefore, a person's mental image is under the influence of his understanding power, recognition skills, values, and cultures. In the Safavid Era in Isfahan, traditional neighborhoods had allocated around 1833 acres (13.5% of the whole city) to themselves. These neighborhoods have been formed round the bazaar and derivative pathways and in fact they organize servicing centers in the area. One of the examples is Rahim Khan Neighborhood (Mahalle No).

Rahim Khan consists of residential houses, alleys, blind alleys, and public utilities including Rahim Khan Mosque, public water drinking place, Seyyed Modarres Cemetery, Rahim Khan Bazaar, and the surroundings (Sirus Shafaghi, 2002/ p. 381).

Elements of Rahim Khan Neighborhood	Existing condition		Abnormality	Strategy	Policy
	Potential	Weakness			
Rahim Khan Mosque	*			Possibility to distinguish the direction	Possibility to estimate the directions with regard to the streets and adjacent neighborhoods Existence of distinguish hierarchy between passages and their connections
				Possibility to find locations	Marking for the observer inside the neighborhood The most important knot in the neighborhood Possibility to find the observer's relative location
Rahim Khan Bazaar	*			Possibility to guess the activities, taking into account the skeleton base	Specific boundaries for private and public activities Establish the applications near urban spaces proportionate to their roles Use of understandable rhythm in the existing knot
Rahim Khan Park	*			Possibility to identify the neighborhood	Reinforce the neighborhood center for the environment clarity Create a neighborhood parking for the environment clarity
		*		Unclear existing knot for some hours	Reinforce the pedestrian path along with widening the riding path

Conclusion:

Rahim Khan Neighborhood signs are the reflections of the current culture in this area. Therefore, taking into account the religious inhabitants and their serious believes to Rahim Khan Mosque, this mosque is considered to be the most important sign in the neighborhood clarity.

In addition to the mosque, two important elements are the Bazaar and the Park. These three elements beside the inhabitants are the main factors that will help the designers to design and control the neighborhood spaces. Alteration of any of the elements (pathways, applications ...) as well as expansions must be made in the light of reinforcing these elements and the environment clarity.

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