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Urban Transformation and Identity in The Globalization Era Case Study: Tehran-Iran



Naimeh. Rezaei: Ph.d Student in Urban Planning-University of Sorbonne,paris1 (nrezaee76@yahoo.com)
MohamadReza.Torkaman :Young Researchers Club Malayer Branch (mrt7866@gmail.com)

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Name of the Presenter: Naimeh. Rezaei

Abstract

"Globalization" is a topic that has entered two decades ago in the urban. Globalization is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which involves urban planners, sociologists, economists and other specialists.

Cities are increasingly exposed to the impact and influence of globalization and this phenomenon can influence cities from different aspects: urban development; employment; activities; urban economy; accommodation; urban transportation; culture; urban identity; etc. Globalization has broken borders between countries and has affected many different nations in different ways, depending on their degree of development.

By appearance of globalization and the formation of different activities especially in the new regions and with the appearance of multi-function centers, the historical centers which were the active economic, political, social and cultural parts of the cities, have been obsolesce. New city developments and inattention to the old part of city, is the main reason to horizontal growth of cities and daily city expanding. Affected by globalization, the cities in the world are going to become more and more alike. Under these circumstances, what will be the national identity situation in the developing countries? What are the threats and opportunities of globalization for the developing countries?

Although our cities and urban spaces already had their own character and identity, today, we almost lost cities with special identities. But it does not mean that we cannot give identity to them once again. In this paper, all effort done to review the effects of globalization on urban identity in developing countries, then to provide solutions for preservation and development the identity of cities in the age of globalization, while enjoying the benefits of globalization.

Key words: Globalization, Urban transformation, urban Identity.

1. Introduction

Today, the proliferation of globalization includes all the earth. The serious concern of current world politicians is that a lot of cultural beliefs, which are totally foreign with national

identity, interred into nation homes through technology. And these beliefs affect all life areas such as work, recreation, sports, social activities, way of life and social interactions, skeletal texture, etc.

In sociology view, national identity is a sense of emotional dependent to the societies with distinct materials, cultural and psychological aspects which cause the national unity and solidarity and make differences between communities as well.

In the present era, globalization pervades widely in different political, social, cultural and national fields and it served as evolution reality that makes time and place close to each other. Under these circumstances, what will be the national identity situation in developing country? Therefore, this article is trying to study the opportunities and threats of globalization and to answer the following questions:

- What challenges and new cultural situations does the phenomenon of globalization create in the cities?
- What kind of relation is there between cultural identity and globalization in developing countries?

2. GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is a term for the process by which local, regional or national phenomena become integrated on a global scale.

"Globalization is often used to refer to economic globalization: the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology "(Jagdish, 2004) ". This process is usually recognized as being driven by a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural, political and biological factors "(Croucher, 2004). The term can also refer to the transnational dissemination of ideas, languages, or popular culture.

Is globalization a process, which started just in recent years, and how far back do its roots reach? To some it began with the Turks taking control of the silk road, to others it began by passing through the seas of the

" Cape of Good Hope and with the discovery of America, whereby world trade expanded and natural resources from different parts of the world were transported to Europe; still others believe it began towards the end of 19th century with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, which brought on the development of production and transportation means.

However, these developments really first began being referred to as "globalization" with the fall of the Eastern Bloc countries and with the advancement in communication technology, including news media and the widespread use of the internet, causing an increase in communication between people. These last two components are important factors, which have direct influence on the cultural dimensional aspect of globalization" (Örnek, 2003).

3. GLOBALIZATION AND CITIES

Cities are increasingly exposed to the impact and influence of globalization. As above mentioned, globalization affects the cities from different aspects. In this paper two important factors that are in relation to urban design will be studied. "Urban Identity" and "Urban Structure" are two factors that have been changed by the appearance of globalization.

3-1- GLOBALIZATIO AND URBAN IDENTITY

Urban identity concerns the meaning and significance of cities for their inhabitants and users.

When we talk about urban identity, we are not talking about the cities' shape. There is a significant difference between urban identity and urban shape. Beautiful cities may be found without any identity factors. When we talk about city identity, we talk about something inside city without any affair with the outside shape.

"Urban identity is probably made up of a combination of things such as types of buildings in the area, vegetation around the area, what's the actual lifestyle of the area as well the social structure of the people living there" (Dovey & Woodcock, 2007).

Urban identity has become a significant issue in the last 25 years in urban planning and design. Related to the worldwide movement to protect places with heritage significance, concerns have arisen about the loss of individuality and distinctiveness between different places as an effect of cultural globalization.

A dominated theory about globalization and culture and identity in Europe is that the universal culture in the globalization era should be like Europe culture. In this way all people around the world will have one culture, one language, and the same kind of taste of clothes and food.

It cannot be hidden that globalization is the result of few past centuries changes in the West because globalization was created and developed in the West. According to cultural studies that have taken place within cities, the question of identity and culture has become a central paradigm.

"Globalization, so the story goes, has swept like a flood tide through the world's diverse cultures, destroying stable localities, displacing peoples, bringing a market-driven, 'branded' homogenization of cultural experience, thus obliterating the differences between locality-defined cultures which had constituted our identities. Though globalization has been judged as involving a general process of loss of cultural diversity, some of course did better, some worse out of this process. Cultural identity is at risk everywhere with the depredations of globalization, but the developing world is particularly at risk. The cultural trade of goods and services between countries is conducted within the framework of a global economic system" (Örnek, 2003).

Today we can see the signs of globalization in the whole people's lifestyle, from food and clothes to architecture and ways of thinking. Iranian cities are not exceptional in this regard and have experienced too many changes during the recent years.

Before talking about how to avoid nonidentity we should answer this question: "why urban identity is necessary?", "Why non-identity is a negative phenomenon?"

"Identity is one of the essential goals for the future of a good environment. People should feel that some part of the environment belongs to them, individually and collectively, some part for which they care and are responsible, whether they own it or not. At the urban level, the environment should be such that it encourages people to express themselves and to become involved" (Oktay, 2002).

Citizens need to be in touch with their history. In this way, with freshness and lively sense, they can make their future better than their past because when the nation forget their past, they have to experience it again. Therefore, the identity in the urban environment has become serious discussion in the current era.

I the other hand traditional aesthetic is a result of coordination between historical, geographic, and city functional aspects and it was appearing not only in public spaces but also in private spaces like characteristics and ethics and actions of people.

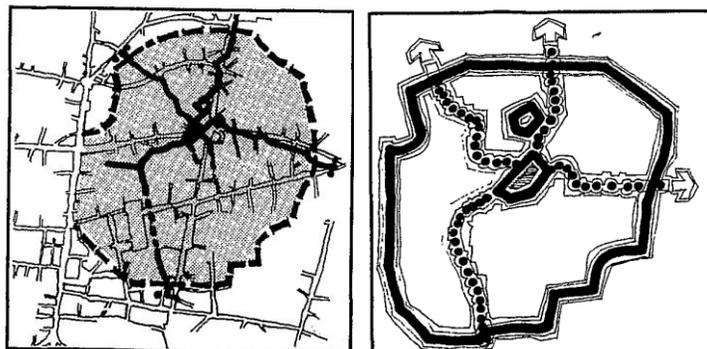
3-2- GLOBAIZATION AND URBAN STRUCTURE

The form of cities has witnessed a large shift as a result of globalization. The cities are changing rapidly without any coordination with their socio-cultural, geographic and historic context and also their old structure. If this process continues, the cities will not be identifiable.

Tehran has been studied as an example of Iranian cities that are under the impact of globalization. This city is still far from being globalized, because it still lacks the necessary infrastructures. Nevertheless, is highly influenced by the west and globalization process.

To understand the changes that took place in Tehran, first a portrait will be drawn from the original culture and urban form of the traditional city of Tehran that today can be called “Historic Center”.

Tehran’s city center was the core of urban development and the pole of all urban functions, such as commercial function (the bazaar and different crafts), religious function (the mosque), public functions (hammams qahve-Khan, etc.), administrative and governmental centers, academic centers (schools and seminaries) and residential zone.



Figs 1: The role of the center in urban structure

At that era the urban form of the city was a reflection of the inhabitant’s socio-cultural, economic and religious characteristics. Tehran as most Iranian cities was characterized by its homogeneous form. The street pattern was a manifestation of three main elements, climate, social structure and political organization.

By the appearance of globalization and the formation of different activities especially in the new regions and with the formation of new functional zones, the historic center which was the active economic, political, social and cultural part of the city and also the indicant of “urban identity”, has lost its impress and importance.

Some impacts of globalization that have resulted in the historic center degradation can be mentioned as below:

- Formation of Modern Shopping Malls
- Formation of New Administrative and Governmental Zones
- Development of new residential zones
- Formation of Characteristic Elements in New Urban District



The old bazaar of Tehran



New shopping malls



Major governmental buildings in new urban zones (1998)



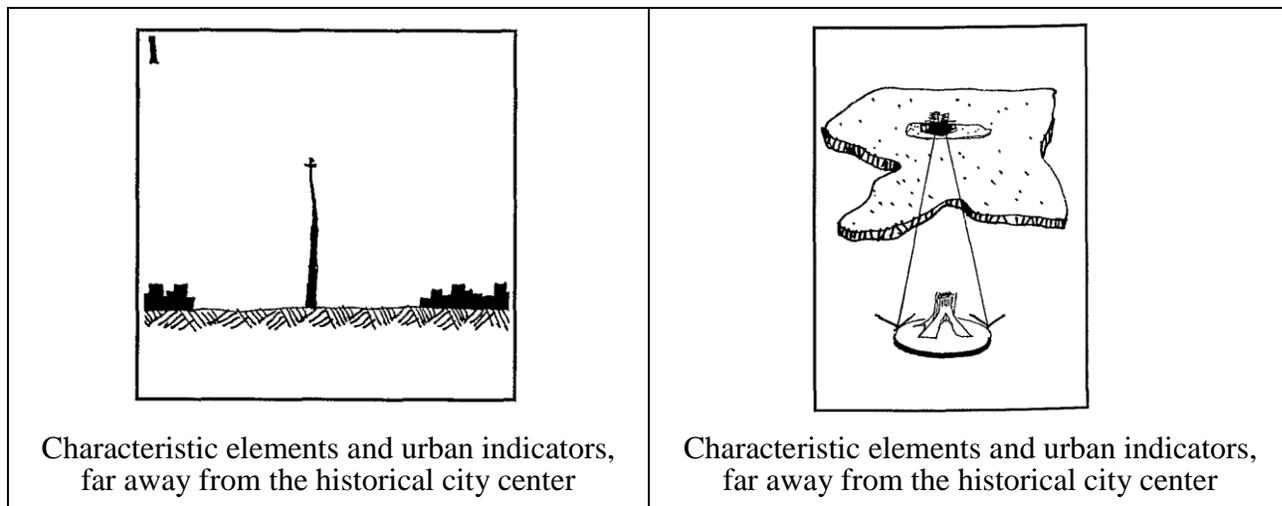
Major governmental buildings in Tehran city center (1952)



New residential districts



The current state of downtown residential districts



Figs 2: Urban transformation and the estate of historic center

4- STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN CITY ORIGINAL STRUCTURE AND URBAN IDENTITY

We almost lost this kind of cities but this does not mean that we cannot achieve our cities once again. Of course old traditional sources can help us on this path and we should also pay attention to this fact that today's city must be global city because even the most underdeveloped city cannot be separate from the global system.

In the globalization process, economy and culture of countries will be influenced and changed. Also urban character will change. In fact, the signs of globalization are appearing in urban transformation more than other things. Thus urban Planning can be a powerful tool for maintaining urban identity, preserving and promoting national culture, strengthen the economy, while enjoying the benefits of globalization.

Perhaps Iran is one of the richest territories that have very noble cultural heritage which can be recognized worldwide via the special urban planning and architecture. Iranian cities have much historical background, but over time and the events, the form of cities has been changed strongly and the cities lost their originality.

Basically, considering the multifaceted of city identity, having a comprehensive system which including all aspects, is necessary.

Generally, four basic aspects that represent the form of the city and urban identity are as follows:

- Environment - ecological aspect
- Social- cultural aspect
- Economic aspect
- Physical - Spatial aspect

In the urban development actions, to maintain urban identity, having some principle in all of maintaining aspects is essential. These principles are as follows:

Environmental and ecological aspect:

- Recognition the cities' environmental - ecological potential.
- Formulation specific rules to protect the cities' natural environment.
- Designing based on specific sites environmental characteristics.

- Using cities' environmental potentials to attract national and international tourists.

Social and cultural aspect:

- Recognition the social and Cultural Cities' structure.
- Using the identifier elements in urban design and architecture.
- Recognition cultural, ethnic and religious traditions.
- Using the special cities' customs to attract tourists and introduce the national culture to the world
- Revival ceremonies, rituals and particular cultural, religious, ethnic traditions through creating appropriate spaces for them

Economic aspect:

- Recognition the existing potential for economic development.
- Using of environmental, ecological, physical, cultural, social capacity in order to cities' economic development, especially attracting tourists
- Creating or strengthen specific business centers for international tourists to introduce cities' products and to develop the economic. (Such as traditional markets)

Physical and Spatial aspect:

- Recognition old cities' structure
- Recognition the basic elements of the old cities' structure (particularly the passages and squares) and preserving them in the new developments
- Recognition the traditional architecture elements and using them a new architecture style.
- Maintaining, strengthening, improving and renewal cities' historic centers and developing their tourism potential
- Creating suitable facilities for tourists (such as hotels, restaurants, shopping, transport)
- Changing the function of any monuments to other functions like international hotel. Now Tehran most major international hotels have been located in the new area and outside the historic center of town.
- Determine architecture and urban patterns for residential and public places through historic studies.
- Review and reform existing rules and establish new rules to accelerate the repairing, restoration, retrofitting and reconstruction of historical and cultural buildings.
- Developing public transportation, especially Metro, which is one of the most important standards for global cities.

CONCLUSION

Today, globalization has encompassed all the earth and has influence on all areas of human life such as work, entertainment, sports, social activities, lifestyle, social interactions and physical environment. Globalization is multi aspects process and it includes political, economical and cultural aspects. All cities are exposed to globalization. One of the most important issues and challenges of developing countries in the globalization process is identity.

Today, we almost lost cities with ancient identity. But it does not mean that we cannot give identity to them once again. Of course in this process, old and traditional sources can help us. We should consider that today's city must be global city because even most undeveloped

cities cannot be separate from the global system.

Since the impacts of globalization are more visible in city transformation and urban form, so urbanism can be a powerful tool for maintaining urban identity, maintain and promoting national culture, strengthen the economy, using the strengths points of cities and impart the benefits of globalization.

In urban design process, in order to maintain urban identity and original urban structure, some principles in the different aspects (socio-cultural, economic, environmental, physical, etc.) should be considered. By paying attention to these principles, and use them in urban development, we can hope that in the globalization process, in addition to enjoying the globalization benefits, city's identity will be preserved.

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