Representing Iranian-Islamic Identity in Iranian Contemporary Cities Structure

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A B S T R A C T

Urban identity could be considered as the result of interaction between social identity system and urbanism system. The term "Islamic City" is defined only by considering the physics of the city and reducing the concept of city to physical elements. Current researches are carried out without considering the relationships between elements and parts of Islamic city. The main objective in this research, is to focus on the principles governing Islamic city which have their roots in Iranian identity and govern aspects of urban life, such as social, political, economic and physical space of the city.

Studying concepts of center, periphery and communications as the main elements of urban identity and matching each of the physical elements in aforementioned arenas could help with understanding the Islamic city structure and its organization and relations governing it. The significance of religious, social, and economic elements in Islamic city match the Contemporary urbanism identity in Iran and the concept of center-periphery theory.

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1. Introduction

Urban identity is one of the complex concepts in urbanism. It is a multidimensional phenomenon which presents various fundamentals and meanings from various aspects. In a general view, urban identity could be considered as a result of organized interaction of social, cultural, economic, religious systems and urbanism system; an approach which has focused on identity along with alterity and as a result, emphasizes the unit of analysis of itself and others in the field of identity. However, when urban identity is mentioned, the relationship between identity and complex concepts such as culture and nationality, a complex concept is emerged which confronts urban identity with various theoretical approaches. This meaning is of a considerable significance in Iranian urbanism, for any source of Iranian-Islamic urban identity has impacted the urban identity structure in each era and in a certain way and formed the urban cultural identity. The Iranian-

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Islamic urban identity has always been evolving and Maalaa has categorized it in a triangle of identity sources of Iranian, Islamic andurbanism system.

The focus on urbanism system in studying urban identity in Iran indicates that it has been based on dividing city into three certain concepts since the ancient times; Center, surroundings and communication. The surrounding part in Iranian-Islamic city which includes the main element of neighborhood with its specific structure, not only does not have privileges in various parts of the city, but also along with including ethnic diversity, it includes the poor and the rich. And concepts of north, south, up and down were not common as they are considered today. Also, each of the neighborhoods, due to being located in directions which had the best and nearest paths with the villages of the same tribe, in addition to preserving and improving their collective identity, would affect the family relationship which are considered important by Islam.

Physical system of the establishment of the outer shell of cities is affected and representation of the social and cultural system of the society. The rich Islamic culture was mixed with the Iranian social ideology after entering Iran and it was presented in new physical elements by explaining the current concept and defined the new overview of Iranian-Islamic human towards city and urban communities. Studying and restoring the smart system governing the traditional structure of Iranian-Islamic cities is a proper solution in understanding the principles of success in these cities in the expression of Iranian-Islamic urban identity. Due to immortality and comprehensiveness and universality of Islam, Islamic principles are constant principles which are interpreted in certain ways in various locations and times considering the intellectual and objective resources, while its results is emerged as a unity in diversity in the Islamic geography in Iranian culture.

2. Statement of the Problem

Iran includes cities with a great cultural-historical significance and full of unique fields with physical and social representations that provide a context for Iranian-Islamic identity. These field are generally ignored by the researchers or the researches have lacked a comprehensive view of their Iranian identity values. However, by reviving, studying and analyzing an identity based approach, these values and concepts could be preserved and improved.

The term "Islamic city" was first coined in the nineteenth century by the orientalists, and later expanded by them. (Naqizade (b), 2010; Falahat, 2011) The approach orientalists have undertaken in regards to Islamic cities in Iran is a one-sided view ad related to the Islamic approach as the only basis for the analysis. However, based on methodology, this type of analysis is generally a descriptive analysis of the physical representation of the city without analyzing the construction process and the principles governing them. (Hakim, 2002; cited by Danesh, 2010) The majority of these studies tried to compare what is called Islamic cities in isolation from the Iranian social and cultural context through a comparative method with a negative attitude. Such descriptions are based on presupposed criteria which have their roots in social culture and their western approach; this leads to presupposing principles as the criteria of ideal city and roll-calling these criteria in their studied cities. (Falahat, 2011).

3. Research Question

Considering the improper copying in historical analyses of Islamic urbanism in Iran, studying Iranian-Islamic identity in studying Islamic cities is neglected. In order to reach research data, the content is arranged in the main question so that the question is led the main answer through this. How has the role of Iranian-Islamic identity represented in the culture of Islamic urbanism in Iranian geography period?

4. The Theoretical Framework of Understanding

Iranian-Islamic City

In analyzing the Iranian urban elements, elements are divided into categories such as space, time, economics, power, culture, sign and expression. (Fakuhi, 2010) After the entrance of Islam into Iran, an interpretation of individual and society is provided and its instances are implemented in urban space with the current physique. The Islamic-Iranian culture led to dynamicity of the civil society and people in the society with the mottos such as equality, brotherhood and horizontal and vertical movements, so that there was a close relationship between the concept of city and Islamic-Iranian culture, initially. (Ziyari, 2003) that is, after the entrance of Islam, the concept of city in Iran reaches a certain organization which is based on the physical format of the city in the Sassanid with a new representation. The Sassanid urbanism system has found a regular shape based on urban crowd control. The mechanism for Sassanid cities is designed in order to fulfill the hidden objectives of government policies in Sassanid cities and in accordance with social stratification institution of Sassanid era which is completely in line with Sassanid urban crowd control. (Khaza'i, 2015) During the Islamic era, these cities served as a

basis for social justice school of thought in Islamic city and flourishes by the residence and social life in Iranian-Islamic cities.

What is being discussed here as the Islamic identity of Iranian-Islamic city is not limited to any special physical structure, since in order to identify and introduce the Islamic background of a phenomenon (city, art, clothing, food, etc.), a certain physical shape, or a unique physical pattern for all times and location, for it is in conflict with the universality of Islamic principles. (Naqizade, 2010)

Islamic city is a constant nature which has its own physical representation in any special environment and time; that is, Islamic city is a potential nature which has its own special exemplification considering the culture and identity of each region, technology and available material under the light of the era's sciences and art (that are not in conflict with Islamic principles and values). (Naqizade, 2010)

Through this view a new analysis could be presented and with an identity-oriented approach, a proper structure could be reached for Iranian-Islamic city.

Any principle and concept (mental and spiritual) in the core of the city retains a physical tone. Physical elements which are produced in this process will have two dimensions like humans; one is the physical dimension and the other is the spiritual aspect which is the nature and spirit of these elements. Considering these, this question arises that whether the physical arrangement of the elements or the spirit governing these structures and spatial system which leads to Iranian unity and identity in Islamic city. The other question is whether by understanding this identity, an innovative form of physical structure could be reached which is compatible with time, or the same forms have to be maintained. Some believe that the Islamic city concept does not have a special format; that is, a city could not be Islamized through presenting a shape. By considering humans as the most important members of traditional Islamic cities, they express that the physical shape of Islamic cities is not reached through Muslim people. The derived shape is unique and it could not be replicated in other spaces and times. (AhamdiDisfani and 'Ali Abadi, 2011)

On the other hand, some, such as the orientalists, try to prepare a constant physical model for Islamic-Iranian city, the majority of the descriptions of the Islamic city is limited to a handful of elements. For instance, elements such as mosque, bazaar, the shape of the routes, neighborhoods, etc. These elements stay in one conceptual level; a level which is rather

physical and has a little tendency towards conceptual analysis. The designs prepared by German geographers clearly presents this attitude. Among their designs, Dettman schematic design, which was prepared in 1969, presents an Islamic-Iranian city.
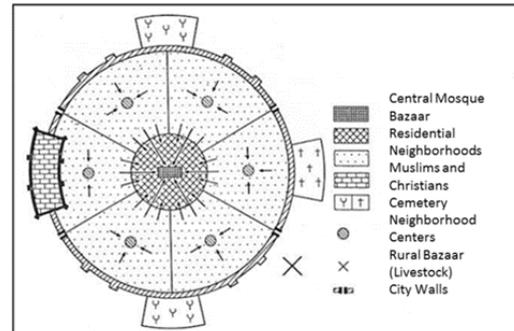

Figure 1.Islamic City Model (Source: Dettmann 1969, Cited by Shafaqi 2008).

There is another model of Islamic cities designed by another German Geographer, Wirth, which is similar to one of Dettmansn's. Wirth not only considers bazaar as the core of the city, but also he considers it as the differentiating factor of Islamic-Iranian cities, from other cities of cultural properties. It is in fact considered as the main index of these cities. In Wirth's model, bazaars are developed radially from the downtown and the main routes are developed from downtown and along with the bazaar centers towards the gates. These routes are called "Gozar", and had a considerable width which included neighborhood centers.
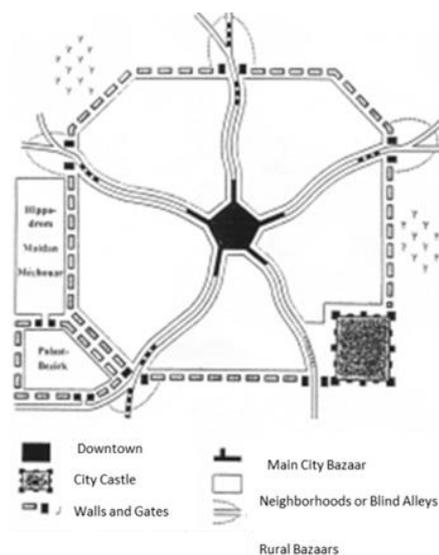

Figure 2.Islamic City Model (Source: Wirth 2000, Cited by Shafaqi 2008).

The third design for Islamic-Iranian cities is from another German geographer, Ehlers, who was a professor at Bonn University in 1991. In comparing the Ehlers model with the

aforementioned designs, two new properties are stumbled upon:

1. Newly constructed streets which cut the old urban texture in bazaar part and disturb the integrity of the bazaar.

2. The new outer belt of the city which is formed by the checkered order and in accordance with the surroundings, out of the city walls. (Shafaqi, 2008)
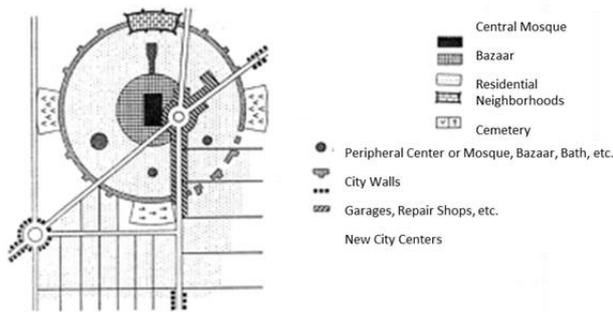

Figure 3. Islamic City Model (Source: Ehlers 1991, Cited by Shafaqi 2008).

Through comparing these three designs, it is concluded that some of common physical elements include mosque, bazaar, neighborhood, cemetery, castle, and city walls and there is a common organization among them. The castle is connected to the city walls in all of them and bazaar has surrounded the downtown which mosque and the neighborhoods with their peripheral centers build the later layers. These designs and the majority of similar designs and descriptions belong to the early centuries of the entrance of Islam and generally to the certain regions Islamic geography including the Middle East and Iran (Falahat, 2011) which have some cultural, climatic and geographic commonalities. What is concluded from studying the three designs above is that they share the same organization which is observed in representation of Islamic city and cities before entrance of Islam to Iran. The designs overview aside, the details, especially the descriptions which are provided for neighborhoods and neighborhood relationships (Morteza, 2006), the required integrity for such schemas could not be reached and some violations could be provided by extensive study of them.

5.Research Findings; Concepts in Contemporary Iranian-Islamic City Structure

Although the components of a city are formed based on materialistic and spiritual needs of the city residents, some of these components are necessary for the residents of all cities; such as buildings, roads and bazaar. Experts express that some of these elements are specific to Islamic cities and attribute the impact of Islamic culture in emergence of city and the method of its organization to these elements:

The central mosque, bazaar, neighborhood mosques, schools, monasteries, shrines, religious site, sect type, endowments (waqf), encouraging people to construct buildings and facilities. Four elements of mosque, bazaar, neighborhood and school are common among the majority of experts. (Ziyari, 2003; Rabbani, 2008; Ayazi, 2008) Iranian identity of sacred spaces in Iranian-Islamic city is presented in the center of the city. This component – sacred space – was in the form of temples or fire temples in the center of the city.

Considering these elements present themselves in objective views is presented in widespread reductions happening in Islamic city definition. They have summarized the city in a limited set of elements or limited set of form properties and this issue has led to emergence of schematic defections of "Islamic city" (without considering their Iranian identity; definitions which are solely derived from its shape without considering its background and informal structures of the cities). (Falahat, 2011) Apart from the physical issues, other effective factors in forming Iranian-Islamic cities and the factors governing it could be listed as below:

1. Religious factors 2. Climatic Factors 3. Economic Factors 4. Communication Factors 5. Governmental Factors 6. Health Factors 7. Waqf Factors (Islamic and Sassanid) (Shekui, 1994) On the other hand, the effective factors in the architecture of Iranian-Islamic cities elements are four main determining factors: Climate, local materials, traditional forms, and Islamic and social lifestyles and values. (Zarabi, Qolami Bimorq and Hajbande Ofusi, 2008) The physical shape of Iranian-Islamic cities change in accordance with nature and under the impact of any of the abovementioned factors, while the spirit of the city goes through its developmental processes. (Ahmadi Disfani and 'Aliabadi, 2011) Apart from the categorizations which are presented for Islamic cities so far, three general parts in Iranian city could be distinguished which are compatible with its Iranian identity. The main components of each set could be expressed as the parts of center, surrounding, and the relationship between these two and other elements of the set. In the city, which could be considered as a set of relations, elements and activities, these three could be distinguished. The properties of these three fields are explained in the following.

5.1 Center

Some orientalists, who studied Islamic cities based on the theories of Max Weber, believe that there is no such entity as city in Islamic world, but Islamic cities are generally a set of peripheral and separate communities and not united communities. Without independent urban associations and syndicates (similar to the ones in the cities in the Middle Ages), cities would be divided into neighborhoods or parts and each part had its own homogenous communities and bazaars. (Turner 1976, cited by Danesh, 2010)

Regardless of Weber's theories, which are mostly exaggerated and neglected the identity merged with current backgrounds such as Iranian-Islamic identity in their categorization, the presence of neighborhoods based on ethnic and tribal divisions could be interpreted closely related to preservation of Iranian culture identity and independence in Islam. (Morteza, 2006) The fluid and variable aspect of Iranian identity, which includes various levels of personal identity as the properties, characteristics and thoughts of a person and the collective identity which included various social, economic, cultural, ethnic, and even political groups, any of the personal and collective identities is required for preserving the formation of person's personality and in higher levels the personality of the society. In such an ideology, emergence of a phenomenon called neighborhood with its own characteristicsand propertiesis completely in accordance with the teachings of this religion and also human nature. However, the resulted diversity is dissolved in a space called center and urban society reunion place, and this proves the unity and constructs urban identity in higher levels of ethnicity and a link between various tribes.

However, elements which are related to the Iranian-Islamic city center, either the center of the city or more peripheral centers, include certain elements called public benefit functions such as mosque, bath, cistern, etc.

5.1.1 Religious Sites (Mosque)

Mosque functions as the main element of Muslim cities and the center of all activities of the citizens. Many of the educational, judicial, and political activities of the society which would be carried out in mosque initially, are placed adjacent to the mosque, even after development and expansion and emergence of various professions which would the separation from the environment of mosque, and they have preserved their relationship with mosque and its spiritual space. (Naqizade, 2010 a)

Since religious beliefs are the core of the Iranian cultural identity, temple or mosque had a significant role in institutional and local arrangements, due to the various functions they could have, such as holding religious rituals, and it is placed in a focal point so that the public access is provided. Naqizade considers submission of city center as a religious elements and material adaptation and control of life as one of the properties of Iranian-Islamic cities.

The function of mosque in early Islam was not limited to religious function, but it was a center for political, ethical, educational and social discussions. During early Islam, regulation of Islamic government affairs with other governments, negotiation with foreign panels, addressing the people, declaring the legitimacy of the caliph, discussing the military and political affairs, distribution of public funds, etc., were carried out in the mosque. (Amini and Montazerolqa'em, 2008).

5.1.2 School

During early Islam, religious sciences were taught in mosques. Hence, the early mosques were in fact the first center of Islamic taught which was quite common in Iran and other Islamic countries. Gradually, by the development of Islamic sciences (Kiyani, 2000) and from the third century AH, schools with educational functions of teaching religious sciences, and guiding people, managing the religious affairs and interpreting jurisprudence, were constructed. Generally, subsequent to construction of schools, waqf would be dedicated to them which would be spent on the accommodation of students and teachers. In various Islamic books, the subject of science and its uses and benefits among Muslims are addressed and the status ofscholars is emphasized. Measures undertaken to accommodate religious scholars and scientists would provide sacredness for a city; that is, these scholars would guarantee the perpetuation and propagation of rationality and religiosity among the citizens. (Ayazi, 2008)

Before Islam, educational centers were located near castles, governmental centers or fire templesand spots far from trace centers. In ancient communities, administrative, religious, and commercial institutions were among the most important educational environments. Hence, educational centers would educate their staff along with administrative, religious, and commercial institutions. (Kiyani, 2000)

After Islam, the spaces dedicated to education would stay in the center and emerge in religious spaces. Gradually, along with expansion and improvement of religious sciences and

elongation of education period and necessity for accommodation of the students, the grounds for emergence of schools were provided. The location of these school was generally around central mosques, bazaars, residential neighborhoods and sometimes squares. (Soltanzade, 1985) Presence of schools in the center of neighborhoods and bazaar which were considered as the foundation of Iranian cities, shows the significance of education Islamic teachings. (Gudarzi, Sorushm Aminzade, Goharrizi and Naqizade, 2012) Through preserving the relationship of educational centers with governmental and religious centers, the scheme of Iranian-Islamic culture identity is continued.

5.2 Surroundings

In Iranian-Islamic cities, surroundings are not considered as inferior, margin or even hierarchy, but it has a new meaning. Surroundings is a center among various parts, among villages of the same race and city. It is a unity factor among the contrast of city and village. In comparison, the emergence of the concept of neighborhood and the alternative concept of surroundings in Iranian-Islamic cities as mentioned before, crystalizes the spatial justice in its true concept in city. Sassanid city is consisted in the physical system in Iranian-Islamic city. The physiques of Sassanid city which was designed to protect the city enforcements. However, here in Iranian-Islamic city, the physiques would be presented without the need for excessive enforcement in the city and also the lack of the need for controlling the citizens (on comparison with the control power considered in Sassanid government). The current city became an element of spatial justice in Islamic city due to its physical properties and considering this type of physiques being borrowed from Sassanid city, which could be said that in Iranian-Islamic city the north and south does not have any meaning, the concept of up and down did not have any meaning either. Neighborhoods had their own specifications and facilities and they were independent. Some general details on neighborhood are mentioned in the following.

5.2.1 Neighborhood

The residential district of the city is usually located in the outer belt of bazaar and any social-economical group creates a special neighborhood for itself, which is created based on religions, jobs, race, language, ethnicity and even social groups. (Shafaqi, 2008)

Establishment of public elements such as cistern, bath, small markets (at the center of neighborhoods), small squares, and sometimes religious sites would create a complex which could function as the identity factor of the neighborhood and the city, along with fulfilling the neighborhood needs as the center of the neighborhood or center of the city. (Naqizade, 2010 a) The components of the neighborhood included residential buildings, blind alleys, alleys and public facilities of the neighborhood center such as mosques, temples, small markets, baths, cisterns and sometime coffeehouses. (Naqizade, 2010 a)

5.3 Communications

Presence of main roads in the neighborhood and their relation with the center of the city which had the city-sized services, was a reason for access of all neighborhood to the city privileges. The principle of justice, as one of the principles of Islam, is present in all its aspects. Hence, the observance of this principle could be cleared observed in the accesses. Accessing public centers and urban and neighborhood services, the access type inside the neighborhoods to fulfill security, the proportions of roads in order to observe the climatic issues is one of the access of the roads which would branch from the bazaar and would continue to the core of the neighborhoods.

5.3.1 Bazaar

The second main factor in formation of Iranian-Islamic cities is the bazaar (Ziyari, 2003) which is the economic heart and the backbone of the city and not only a place for trading goods, but a place for various professions. (Shafaqi, 2008) In most Islamic cities, bazaar is in the form of the core of the traditional and old texture and it is located as the reviving component in the urban area.

Commercial, production and workshop activities which were organized in the bazaar and various passages, would surround the mosque and would smooth its partialism with the presence of mosque. (Naqizade, 2010 a) Along with this commercial complex, there are other public places such as baths, schools, religious sites, Saqqakhanehs, coffeehouses and in Iran and some Shi'ite countries shrines, gymnasium, etc. and they have created a texture all together and they could meet the needs of the people in relating various parts of life and economic, social, political, and religious activities. (Biglari, 1976) In fact, bazaar was initially formed for producing and trading good, but subsequently, it found other cultural and social functions. (Kiyani, 2000) This social function of bazaar let it to be the center of the city for the ease of access for the people. (Sarai, 2010)

It should be considered that the significance of bazaar is not the main element of Islamic era in Iran, but the element of bazaar was around since the Achaemenid era and it has transformed in shape during time. However, what is considered as important in bazaars of the Islamic era are two major points. During this time: 1. Bazaar is categorized no based on class, but based on professions, and 2. The passages of the new bazaars are formed by the professions which are new and were not available at the time. (Sarai, 2010).

6. Conclusions

Urban identity is a multidimensional phenomenon which is based on the distinction between self and others and it includes a rage from culture to various levels of urbanism system; hence, based on the interaction of the conceptual system, the social and cultural system of the surroundings is formed which is always changing and developing; that is, in a descriptive approach, Iranian-Islamic urban identity has found its identity among the three corners of Islamic, ancient or ethnic and urbanism system identity sources during the historical development of the city in the proportion which it has created among historical and Islamic cities. It should be considered that Iranian urbanism has had a physical system during history due to its geographic situation that is located among various ethnicities and nationalities, that could have a social control. Urban order is a subjective and inferential issue which indicates the relation type between elements.

What is inferred from studying Islamic city in retrieving Iranian-Islamic identity is a common organization which appears in presentation of Islamic city and cities before it. The structure of center, surroundings and the relationship between the components, are considered as three main elements of Iranian-Islamic city spatial system and their identification is carried out beyond the shape properties of Islamic city. The general physical design of Islamic city is formed based on the materialistic and spiritual needs of people's culture.Hence, the components of Islamic city were designed based on the spatial system of Sassanid era city which was mainly designed to protect the city enforcements. Yet, it is emerged in Iranian-Islamic city without the need for social control (on comparison with the control power considered in Sassanid government). The current city became an element of spatial justice in Islamic city due to its physical properties and considering this type of physiques being borrowed from Sassanid city, which could be said that in Iranian-Islamic city the north and south does not have any meaning, the concept of up and down did not have any meaning either. Neighborhoods had their own specifications and facilities and they were independent. This system is considered as a set of semi-independent components whoseelements transform the complex to a united whole in a goal-oriented order.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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