

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DISCORD IN BUILDING
DISTINCTIVNESS ON THE PERCEPTION OF TEHRAN'S CITY
IDENTITY

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This is for
my mother
with love and appreciation

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the concept of city's image and identity in the capital city of Iran, Tehran. In this research, identity was defined as the qualities of a place that is recognized or recalled as being distinct by the individuals. Identity is a critical issue in Tehran. The overall image of the city, which includes similar forms, has no identity. The new developments in Tehran have no distinctive character. The first objective of this research was to find out the distinctive city's elements. The second objective of this research was to discover the qualities associated with those distinctive elements. The third objective of this research was to ascertain the variation between different respondents and their identification of distinctive city's elements. Finally, the last objective is to find out residents' evaluation and feelings regarding the city. The research adopted mixed methodology using both the quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection and analysis. The quantitative approach adopted a survey using a questionnaire on a sample of the Tehran's residents. A total of 204 residents from different parts of the city were involved in the sample survey. The qualitative approach used three techniques; interview, free sketch task, and visual survey. A total of thirty professional residents were involved in the interview. The data were collected and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Statistic Package for the Social Sciences for cross analysis and content analysis for convergence of both quantitative and qualitative data. Eighteen buildings were identified as the imageable buildings of Tehran. The results indicated that the physical features and the appearance of the distinctive buildings were the most important factors in the process of recalling the distinctive buildings. Meanings and activities attached to those buildings were also important. It was found that residents' age and their period of residency in the city have important effect on the identification of distinctive elements of the city. The study suggests that the buildings in Tehran have been important elements in people's mental cognition. The study found that the characteristics of distinctive physical elements are influenced by the physical appearance of the buildings more than non-physical attributes. Singularity has the most effect on the imageability. It is hoped that these findings would reveal some knowledge of the elements of identity characteristics and inspire city planners and designers and community leaders to improve the image of the city.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji konsep imej dan identiti bandar di ibu kota Iran, Tehran. Dalam penyelidikan ini, identiti telah ditakrifkan sebagai ciri-ciri tempat yang diiktiraf atau kenalpasti sebagai berbeza oleh individu-individu. Identiti adalah satu isu kritikal di Tehran. Imej keseluruhan bandar, yang termasuk bentuk yang sama, tidak mempunyai identiti. Perkembangan terbaru menunjukkan Tehran tidak mempunyai ciri-ciri identiti yang tersendiri. Tujuan pertama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti elemen bandar yang tersendiri. Objektif kedua kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui ciri-ciri yang berkaitan dengan unsur-unsur yang tersendiri. Objektif ketiga kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui variasi antara responden yang berlainan dalam mengenalpasti elemen bandar tersendiri. Objektif akhir kajian ini adalah untuk mencari penilaian penduduk dan perasaan mereka mengenai bandar. Penyelidikan telah menerima pakai kaedah campuran dengan menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif dalam pengumpulan data dan analisis. Pendekatan kuantitatif mengguna pakai satu tinjauan yang menggunakan soal selidik terhadap sampel penduduk Tehran. Sebanyak 204 penduduk dari pelbagai bahagian bandar terlibat dalam sampel kajiselidik. Pendekatan kualitatif menggunakan tiga teknik; temubual, lakaran bebas, dan tinjauan visual. Sebanyak tiga puluh penduduk golongan profesional telah terlibat dalam sesi temu bual. Data dikumpul dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan Microsoft Excel dan Pakej Statistik Sains Sosial untuk analisis kaitan dan analisis kandungan untuk penumpuan kedua-dua data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Lapanbelas buah bangunan yang telah dikenalpasti sebagai bangunan berimejkan Tehran. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahawa ciri-ciri fizikal dan rupa bangunan yang tersendiri adalah faktor yang paling penting dalam proses mengenalpasti bangunan yang tersendiri. Makna dan aktiviti yang dikaitkan bersama bangunan adalah juga penting. Adalah didapati bahawa umur penduduk dan tempoh mastautin di bandar mempunyai kesan penting dalam mengenal pasti unsur-unsur tersendiri bandar tersebut. Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa bangunan di bandar telah menjadi elemen penting dalam kognisi mental penduduk. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa ciri-ciri elemen tersendiri fizikal telah dipengaruhi oleh rupa fizikal bangunan lebih daripada sifat-sifat bukan fizikal. Ketunggalan mempunyai kesan paling atas imejan. Adalah diharapkan bahawa hasil penyelidikan ini akan menonjolkan sebahagian ilmu tentang unsur-unsur ciri-ciri identiti dan memberi inspirasi kepada perancang bandar dan pereka dan pemimpin masyarakat untuk meningkatkan imej bandar.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study has focused on the concept of identity and city image of Tehran, the capital city of Iran. The reputation of Tehran for its visual qualities and memorable images is lost during the last years and has made them the subject of criticism. Madanipour in his study (1999) about Tehran transformation criticized the displacement of traditional architecture by contemporary modern architecture and urbanism and finds it as a problem. However the problem is not peculiar to Tehran, but is widespread in all cities in Iran.

This research examines the concept of identity and imageability in Tehran. Identity, according to Lynch (1984), is “*the extent which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places as having a vivid or unique or at least a particular character of its own*” (Lynch, 1984: 131). The fundamental mechanism, which helps people to observe the surrounding environment, is the perception. In other words, perception binds the man-environment relationship by a complex process. In this perceiving process, the physical reality of people’s surrounding environment attracts people mentally.

According to Lynch (1960), an environmental image has three main components, which, in reality, always appear together. These components are identity, structure, and meaning. An effective image first must have its distinctiveness from other things; also it should be recognized as a distinguishable entity. This is called identity. Second, the image must include an object's pattern relation to the observer and other objects. Finally, this object must have some practical or emotional meanings for the observer.

The identity is stressed in this research, because of its significance in the context of Tehran as a capital city and the seat of the Iranian government. As a consequence of several issues which were endemic throughout history, Tehran's present built form appears to be a city with no identity. As mentioned by Mogherri (2002) and Mohseni (2004), the rapid modernization in Iran led to some crucial problems. The policy of Tehran master plan is to continue replacing historical valuable city features with modern elements, which are not related to identity characteristics of Iranian city. This causes irreparable loss of identity in the city image.

This research examines the distinctive elements of the city. These elements have the most important role in forming the city's image and people associated them with identity in the city. The research also examines the specific characteristics of the high imageable elements and elements associated with city's identity. To do so, this research investigates the Tehran residents' perception of their surrounding physical environment by measuring urban imageability and other form-making qualities (both physical and non-physical).

At present, studies related to the distinctive elements and qualities, which are perceived by people of their urban environment, are lacking in Iran. This problem is addressed in this research by contributing to the existing body of knowledge on the elements and qualities that residents of Tehran associate with its identity.

This chapter presents the overall structure and the framework of the whole research in eight major sections. The research problems are presented in the first section. The second section outlines the research aims and objectives followed by the research questions. The fourth section of this research presents the research design and methodology. The fifth and sixth sections establish the scope and significance of the research. The final section presents the overall structure of the thesis.

1.1 Research Problem and Issues

The problem of identity in Iranian cities manifests itself in the second half of the twentieth century. In some modern cities, it was not very intense, and the traditional urban morphology was in fact, a part of ordinary urban life, but in large historic cities with traditional and modern areas, this confusion became more apparent.

Identity is a critical issue in the modern city (Mumford, 1961). The overall image of the contemporary cities, which include similar forms, has no identity (Daneshpour, 2000). The aspect of identity in designing modern environment becomes an important aspect of urban planning. Experience of spiritless living environments and repetition of cities in terms of form and structure have changed the idea of environment from a process to an architectural product.

Architecture is influenced by its surrounding environment condition and also the architectural shape is affected by the economic, social, climatic, human needs and demands. In Iran, the new urbanism caused overall changes and impinged on the traditional architecture which became useless in the new urban spaces.

From the time that Tehran became the capital city of Iran; 1785, various large-scale plans have been produced by both Iranian and foreign companies. However the intensity of speculative development; especially since the Second World War, and the speed of events seem to have left the city managers and residents alike feeling trapped in turmoil, lagging behind the events, and unable to manage change (Madanipour, 2003; Mashhoudi, 2007). A deputy mayor of the city in 1962 commented that *“The buildings and settlements in Tehran have been developed by whoever has wanted in whatever way and wherever they have wanted”* (Nafisi, 1964: 426).

Several studies on the master plans of Tehran revealed that what actually occurred, in reality, hardly ever corresponded to the original objectives of the plans. Mashhoudi (2007: 3) concludes that: *“It seems that the city itself evades all instructions and planning, and reaches a point of defiance where anything that “should not be”, imposes itself on those that “should be”. The city apparently uses its own creativity to go anyway except the one planned for it”*

Zista Consultants (1994) reported that the failure of the master plans cannot be blamed on lack or inadequacy of data, nor can planners be blamed for their lack of expertise, nor can the authorities be blamed for their inability in implementing the plans. Zista Consultants (1994) concluded that the roots of the failures lay in the following reasons:

- (a) Impossibility of precise prediction of economic and social changes
- (b) Ignorance of the changes in citizen needs during the planning implementation period and their role in actively participating in making decisions
- (c) Ignorance of the change in physical potentials of the environment

None of the laws and urban policies that have been imposed by Tehran’s comprehensive plans helped to control the above mentioned changes. These serious weakness of the comprehensive plans of Tehran resulted in the imitation and reputation

of building's design style which make Tehran's image similar to other cities' in the world. This causes the disharmony in building's views in Tehran.

Furthermore, according to Afshar-Naderi (2003), Moazzami (2007), and Hadi-Moghaddam (2007), other factors contribute to the overall changes in Tehran. The most important factor is the lack of comprehensive traditional patterns in the current urban development and also lack of attention to the potential traditional fabrics and features in the contemporary architecture. Additionally, in architecture schools in Iran, scientific comprehending of world's past and contemporary architecture was not covered in the curriculum, and foreign architecture magazines are available for students, who have no necessary background information. The result of these will be visual imitation from the western architecture.

Furthermore, weak management and supervision system in the field of architecture and urbanism is another problem which leads to the current situation. The ministry of Housing and Urban Policy, as the main office responsible for the architecture and urbanism policy, was overwhelmed with its own problems due to providing houses for the every day's growing population. Municipality also, because of its serious issues, and high level of work, does not give much attention to image and identity as a primary factor.

Many researchers have argued that residents are in favor of having a sense of identity (Homayouni, 1995; Bahrainy, 1989). However, the new residential developments in Tehran have no distinctive character. Tehran has experienced the destruction of its past visual order and harmony by new and modern developments during the last century (Hourcade and Adle, 1997). This caused the city to lose its pre-modern characteristics without offering a new integral identity for the whole city (Figure 1. 1).

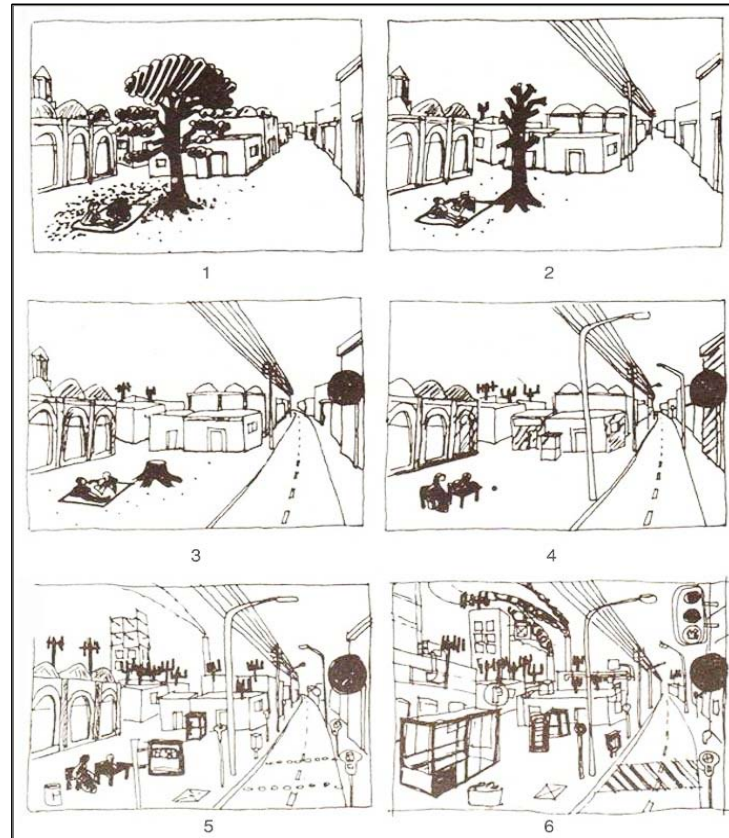


Figure 1. 1 A caricature illustrating changes to street vistas in Tehran during the 20th century

Reference: Hourcade and Adle, 1997: 251

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

Physical and non-physical characteristics in the city create city's image. Since this image contributes to city's identity, so determination of elements and qualities that create the city's image and identity is the main aim of this study.

With the range of issues described earlier, the principal objectives of this research are:

- (a) To determine the elements that people associate with Tehran's identity.
- (b) To identify the qualities of elements associated with Tehran's identity.
- (c) To examine the variation in perception of the elements and qualities associated with Tehran identity amongst Tehran's residents.
- (d) To find out people's values and meanings in certain aspects of the built environment.

1.3 Research Questions

Five questions are explored to achieve the research principal aims and objectives. They are as follows:

- (a) Which city's elements are associated with Tehran's identity?
- (b) What qualities of those elements give identity to the city?
- (c) How do respondents' characteristics affect the choice of elements and qualities associated with Tehran's identity?
- (d) What are the public's values or meanings with regard to certain aspects of the urban environment?

1.4 Research Design and Methodology

This research investigates the physical and non-physical aspects of the urban environment that contribute towards city's image and identity. Similar to urban studies, a description of current urban environment establishes an initial part of the research methodology. Furthermore, this research involves the explanation the existing theories about image and identity. As mentioned in the earlier part, the research aims are to explore the subject of urban imagery and built form identity, so the research type is descriptive and exploratory.

The research methodology is based on two important considerations, i.e., the common methods used in the previous related researches, and the presented research questions. Like previous urban environment research done by different researchers; (Lynch, 1976; Salim, 1992; Suhana, 1997; Dolbani, 2000; Hasanuddin, 2003; Ujang, 2008; Al-Shwani, 2011), this research is approached by using mixed methods. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been adopted to examine the urban imagery, built form identity and the perception of Tehran's residents. The rationale for adopting a mixed approach is been argued by Bryman (2006) who noted that no research method is without bias and that qualitative work should be seen as a 'facilitator of quantitative work' and quantitative work as a 'facilitator of qualitative work'. He also believes that "*Bringing quantitative and qualitative finding together has the potential to offer insights that could not otherwise be gleaned*" (Bryman, 2007). Therefore, this research operates using a combination of questionnaires survey, visual survey and in-depth interview.

The variety of data is collected and analyzed using software such as Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for cross analysis and content analysis for convergence of both quantitative and qualitative data. The techniques for data collection are as follows:

1.4.1 Literature Review

A literature review of previous studies on the perception of the environment by the people provided the theoretical framework for this research. Theory about, perception, imageability, identity and qualities associates with city's identity will be reviewed. These theories formed an important premise of the research.

1.4.2 Quantitative Method

As mentioned before, quantitative and qualitative methods are used to inquire the people's perception about their surrounding environment. The quantitative method is used to identify the people's perception of identity in the existing built forms. Since identity is commonly developed with the growth of a city through its residents (Suhana, 1997; Al-Naim, 2006) then, the perception of identity should be investigated by the people who live in the study area. So in this research the respondents have been chosen randomly from Tehran's residents.

Since this research is being supported by other techniques that include, in-depth interviews, sketching task, it is not necessary to have a higher precision level for sampling. Therefore, an error of 7% can be valid for this research. Quantitative survey of respondents; in accordance to (Mai, 2008), 204 respondents at 93% confidence level was conducted, taking into account their age, length of residence and educational background.

The results of this research define and clarify people's perception; which is classified into the percentage or frequencies of responses to special elements and qualities of their surroundings environment.

1.4.3 Qualitative Method

In order to obtain people's perception, qualitative methods are also implemented. This is achieved through in-depth interview and sketching test with 30 selected individuals. The number of in-depth interview sample size in this research is chosen based on Charmez's (2006) and Mai's (2008) selecting of 30 individual for interviews. Also, according to Walker (1985), if qualitative studies are undertaken in conjunction with questionnaire survey, the interview sample size should be 20 to 40.

In the present study, verbal recall and sketching task were used together to find out respondents' opinion on the most imageable buildings or structure in the city. The sketching test technique was conducted in order to enhance the research validity. The sketching test was conducted with 30 selected professional respondents as well as 204 public respondents. The in-depth interview was accomplished by asking the architects and urban designers about the most distinguish building in Tehran and their point of view about current city's image and the way that can apply to preserve Tehran's identity. As Bashri (2000) argues, the purpose of interviewing people is to allow the interviewer to enter into the interviewee's perspective, so for this research, the open-ended questions were used for the interview structure. To strengthen the validity of the analysis, the data obtained from this method is cross-examined with the data from quantitative method.

1.4.4 Visual Survey

Visual survey and field observation of current urban form of the case study were conducted by the researcher. According to Spreiregen (1981) a visual survey in urban design is an examination of the form, appearance, and composition of a city. A detailed description and visual analysis of current urban form is a product of this survey. This survey involves identification, evaluation, and charting of certain physical elements that play a significant part in understanding the city pattern. Detailed explanation of the research methodology and procedure is provided in chapter four.

1.5 Scope of the Research

Identity is considered as an important component of imageability then it has been emphasized. For better understanding of the environmental image, this research

discusses the concept of imageability to find out the distinctive buildings of Tehran. These buildings are considered to be associated with city's identity.

In order to identify the current perception of Tehran's image, the perception of Tehran's local residents was taken into consideration. The perception of people living in Tehran's suburbs was not considered in this research.

1.6 Significance of the Research

The nature of this research is exploratory and descriptive, and it highlights the importance of physical and non-physical attribute in the urban environment which contributes to the creation city's image and identity. This research attempts to increase the awareness of urban planners, designers and decision makers on the importance of forming imageable environment with specific identity in the city environment.

This research makes an effort to enhance the need of implementation comprehensive urban design criteria at citywide level and also to appreciate the concept of image and identity in the contemporary city development. Formation of a more imageable and identifiable environment, which has the essential urban design criteria, is a final output of this research.

1.7 Organization of the Research

The research is divided into six main sections; each section addresses the following matters:

1.7.1 Establishment of Research Framework

Chapter one presents the overall structure of the research that starts with a brief introduction to the subject matters followed by a review of the current situation and issues, research objectives and questions, scope and limitation of the research, as well as the methodology adopted. This chapter also highlights the significance of the research.

1.7.2 Literature Review

Chapter two largely concerns with theory and concepts, and it develops the theoretical framework of this research. This chapter presents the review of the literature relevant to the subject matter under investigation by covering the important theories and concepts, which are considered vital to this research.

Imageability and identity are the main concern of this research, and this chapter covers the current theories on them and other related concepts in order to clarify the scope of the research.

1.7.3 Research Design and Methodology

Chapter three details up methodology and explains different methods used in related studies. It establishes the choice and rationale of the methodology adopted in the research. It deals with data collection strategy.

1.7.4 Study Area

Chapter four analyses the current built environment of the case study, also presents an investigation into resident's perception of Tehran's city image and identity.

1.7.5 Analysis, Findings, Discussions, and Conclusions

Chapter five presents an analysis on findings from the survey

Chapter six discusses the results and presents the findings of the survey.

Chapter seven presents the conclusion derived from research findings.

1.7.6 Appendices

Additional information to some of main chapters and questionnaires used for data collection in this study has been attached in this section.

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