ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Revival of historical civic Esfanjan quarter in Semnan

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ABSTRACT

Historical civic quarters contain a substantial significant sense of place and have particular features which come from their history, architecture and urban vistas. To eliminate any potential threat such as massive clearance and disappearance at large scale or desolation and gradual destruction, all unofficial groups of people should do their utmost to raise the public awareness and preserve these places in the best way they can. The main objective of this paper is to study the revival trend of such places, their preservation and restoration of a durable and practical productivity and efficiency preferably through new functions- significant historic character and sense of place. This makes the historic quarter again as an attractive and desirable place to live in, invest, and have fun. This Project focuses on the design and re-organization of a part of Esfenjan quarter in Semnan, near Imamzadeh Yahya/shrine

Key words: Old historical texture, Revival or rehabilitation, Improvement.

Introduction

Developments of modern time have massively changed the historical context and therefore the quarters in the neighborhood, their centers, and the surroundings too. Uncontrollably rapid arrival of new technology as well as the changing lifestyle, ruling values and wrong policy-making on the part of the government are among the main factors playing important roles in destruction of the old quarters. If we can create new spaces in line with the needs and behaviors of the dwellers in those areas, then we would be able to pave the way for social interactions and achieve other objectives as well (Shieh, E., 2002). To do so, we have selected the historical part of Esfenjan quarter in Semnan as our case study. This very quarter has been somehow able to keep its identity and at the same time, one can feel and trace back the old centers therein. This place, therefore, seems to be an appropriate place to study for our purpose. Supposing that preserving the physical, social and cultural rights and values of identity are possible, the authors have focused on the two following issues to achieve their goals: 1 - the study of Esfenjan quarter 2 - architectural design in the main body of the quarter

Methodology:

This section contains identification of all restrictive factors including the physical characteristics of the work (visual, architectural and urbanism), economic, and social features and is based on statistics and field research. The significance of such a study is due to its scientific nature especially when it comes to adopting effective design policies and strategies, and recognizing the various values existing in the quarter

Geographical domain of the quarter:

Semnan, is one of the most ancient cities of Iran in the edge of desert. The city, as the capital of Semnan province, situated in the north east of the country and Esfenjan is also located in the old historical part of the city, neat to the old bazaar and Yahya shrine. (pic. 1). The historical context of Iranian cities before the Islamic era included three parts called Kohandezh (military, administrative), Sharestan (commercial, religious, cultural) and Rebz (green and residential). The author of the book from Shar to Shahr believes that following arrival of Islam to Iranian cities, due to the...
ideological change, Kohandezhes lost their popularity and consequently after establishing Jameh mosques and main bazaars, Sharestans became more popular (Habibi, M., 1997). Once Islam was established, both jameh mosque and main bazaar in Semnan were built at the heart of Esfenjan district, therefore we can assume that Esfenjan must have been located in Sharestan part of the tradition city, Semnan. In the contemporary era, the development projects of Yahya shrine, Grand Hosseinieh or Mourning Hall, the new arcade or shopping area and construction of a passage running through the residential areas which connects Imam Street to Abuzar, are among the latest big changes. (pic. 2).

Study of Quarters’ Status quo [3]:

Physical Functional Characteristics:

From viewpoint of domain and area spread, one can divide Esfenjan into two parts: Predominantly residential districts in the south, and religious commercial concentration at regional and urban scale in the north which indicates of penetration of cross-activities in the old context. (Map No:1) Also from standpoint of quality, the desolated or deserted and barren and dilapidated constitute 19 percent, old constructions 52/1, average 21/6, and newly-built 7/3 respectively. The constructions without preservation value, are mainly those religious, spacious architecturally important buildings (Tekyeh hemat abad - religious place, Yahya Shrine, Grans Mosque, Hosseinieh or Mourning Hall,...) which are now being reconstructed and renovated. The commercial districts in the north include Bazaar and the commercial center. Besides those constructions, there are some
other places including the passages/pathways, indoor spaces (representing the historical identity of Semnan) which donot have preservation value. (Map No:2).

![Map 1: Legend locations: extant of function.](image1)

![Map 2: Value place.](image2)

**Features of Spatial Organization:**

In order to scrutinize the bulk and skeleton of the quarter, five different systems of physicality, activity, access, objective and subjective perspectives were examined. How the interrelationship between general and specific elements in Esfenjan quarter worked together, bears witness to the fact that there is a inconsistency or lack of harmony among mind, physical and activity systems. Studies indicate that expanding streets would disintegrate the quarter and make it dysfunctional in its spatial organization. Lack of clear-cut and well-established definition for the spaces has led to the following problems:

- Unauthorized use of space, constant tension and struggle over seizing a parking lot(Parkings) (pic. 3).
- Feeling of insecurity and discomfort as well as denial of use of space for space users. (Ruins – movements without the control of cars ...) (pic. 4).

![Picture 3:](image3)

![Picture 4:](image4)

Visual and environmental pollution. (Unfavorable views and icons, broken places ...)
- Promotion of unlawful and non-healthy activities such as illegal drug abuse, crime and violence especially in the ruins.

As it is clear, the old context isn’t just an issue of physical matter but includes economic, cultural and social aspects as well. Thus, before anything, we have to take care of the potentials and difficulties of social, economic and cultural issues.

**Features of Urban Perspectives:**

**Communication Networks and Public Spaces:**

Communication network system and public spaces in Esfanjan are among the most stable components structures since they have strong historical background and include Bazaar, Quarter center, Organic passages, Takaya, and semi-public spaces as well. (pic. 5).
Visions and Landscape/Perspectives:

Despite all these problems in public pathways, Esfanjan, enjoying organic passages, perspectives and artificial views, is among the fewest places with particular values. From one side, the view of green trees in neighboring mosques and houses is a major public and natural scene. (pic. 6).

Goals setting and Intervention method:

Important aspects and dimensions of upgrading and renovating this historical place are as follows:
- Cultural and religious aspects
- Social aspects
- Economic aspects
- Aspects of Urban Landscape

Cultural and religious aspects:

- Promotion of cultural quarters through the creation of cultural spaces to familiarize the new generation with the history and culture.
- Maintain and preserve buildings with architectural elements and values in the neighborhood and provide spaces and peripheral facilitative applications as well as the reinforcing cultural elements such as restaurants, tea houses, handicraft shops, handicraft workshops, theaters and ...

Social aspects:

- Restoration of the quarter in partnership with its local residents and promote the social power
- Encourage private sector investment in the historical context
- Stabilize the population concentration and prevent their migration.

Economic aspects:

- Promoting local economic development by attracting domestic and foreign tourists.
- Actualizing the potential economic power of spaces through their shift of functions and applications. Physical dimensions and urban landscape
- Reinforcing and emphasizing the subjective and objective perspective of the neighborhood
- Creation of urban open spaces overlooking the good old structures.
- Maintaining the privacy and space quality of the historic features.
- Effectiveness and influencing of old spaces characteristics on physical and semantic features of new spaces.

Policies and Strategies:

1. Cleaning up/clearance of the neighborhoods and making everything appropriate
- through removal of dilapidated and abandoned and unacceptable buildings
- Making the flooring and urban decoration appropriate.
- Emphasizing and reinforcing the visual symbols and important historical elements in the neighborhood.

2. Use of existing models.
- Cultural - social: redefining past sociocultural concepts of residence.
- Physical: The use of concepts consistent with the past patterns of architecture and construction.

3. Coordination in combining new and old contexts.

4. Facilitating Traffic in the neighborhood.
- Giving priority and preference to pedestrians’ mobility and slower to moving vehicles
- Increasing open spaces
- With the preservation and restoration of existing gardens in the area
- Create an urban environment in empty spaces and ruins

**Picture 7, 8:** Maket of project.

**Conclusion:**

Decisions on new suggested applications and functions based on the above-said explanations and existing inhabitable areas are made as follows:( Map No: 3,pic7&8)
1. Traditional handicrafts complex includes a traditional artistic workshop, exhibition, along with peripheral spaces.
2. Parks and green spaces which include children's play area, and areas for resting, sitting and walking around and sidewalk....
3. Touristic complex including an accommodation for pilgrims, restaurant, tea house, and exhibition venue.
4. Local-cultural complex such as center for NGOs, conference hall, exhibition, library, multipurpose square.
References