

## The Role of Culture in Promoting Architectural Identity

Sheida Ettehad<sup>1\*</sup>, Amir Reza Karimi Azeri<sup>2</sup>, Ghazaleh Kari<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Architecture Department, Islamic Azad University, Ajabshir branch, Ajabshir, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Architecture and art faculty, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran

\*E-mail: [sh.ettehad@yahoo.com](mailto:sh.ettehad@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

The culture of each society is identified through its manifestations such as language, art, and architecture, and analysis in the field of culture is related to the study of cultural manifestations. Architecture as a matter of human life reflects the culture in every society interacting closely with structural, historical, political, economic and social features of society. People in every country try to follow their norms and maintain their values in making of architecture by applying the material things. Changing the cultural and social attitudes in communities has the greatest impact on the architecture. Therefore, the role of culture in promoting architectural identity seems essential. This descriptive article with the assumption that architectural is a complete symbol of human culture tries to study the role of culture in promoting architectural identity based on the documents and library studies. Therefore, after relooking the definitions of culture, identity, architecture and their interaction with each other, some Iranian historic buildings in different periods (as the case studies) were studied. The result is that the culture of each community defines the identity of the community and architecture as a social phenomenon was originated from the culture and its effects. Art and architecture are of the most important symptoms and characteristics of each nation and every historical period that indicate the environment human's lives at any time. So, if architectural identity gets described in culture and tradition, the architecture based on today's not past culture and traditions is the architecture with identity that is and will always be with us.

**Keywords:** culture, architecture, identity, Iran.

### Introduction

Contemporary historic break from the architecture evolution of elders' achievements, led to the production of illegible space. This illegibility has gone so far that we can not establish a logical relationship with the last architecture. It seems that Persian architectural masterpieces are identified somewhere else or founded by foreign individuals that are so alien and opposite with our contemporary architecture (Mahdavejad, 2004). Architecture is the portray of a nation's culture integrated with all aspects of human life and has a profound impact on it. Architecture is the results of the culture of the society (Parvizi, 2009). Architecture is formed in order to develop the values in itself. Iranian art is the art full of Iranian traditional genius and the group creating such art should have instinct and ingenuity, and their arts can not be only a combination of elements from other cultures. This implies that architecture is assigned to keep the ancient values of culture in itself and accordingly it is considered as the identity element in the cultural sector, so the homogeneity of culture and architecture can be seen in the world of architecture (Bemania, Gholamiroostam, Rahmtapnah, 2010). But the question "what is the position of culture in promoting the architecture identity?" is proposed. This descriptive article with the assumption that architectural is a complete symbol of human culture tries to study the role of culture in promoting architectural identity based on the documents and library studies. Therefore, after relooking the definitions of culture, identity, architecture and their interaction with each other, some Iranian historic buildings in different periods (as the case studies) were studied.

### ***Culture***

Culture is a set of beliefs, knowledge, education, customs and values that society has developed them based on their own beliefs and in the process, it aims to achieve a development defined and explained to him by its worldlook (Naghizadeh, 2000). The impact of culture in different areas of life, including art, architecture and urban planning and development, and ways of life is undeniable (Madadpoor, 2000).

### ***Architecture***

Architecture is scientific- artistic activities to create space and organize it; crystallization of the culture of a community over time; and clear mirror of the society in different periods. Architecture is apart from a building or building, but also how to build it and not related to construction materials, However, it is related to the way a house or city is built in order to meet non-material human needs. Architecture is both formed and has continued to the present time since the old time when building and trimming were popular, and its variety has been created (Parhizgar, 2003). The model of the relationship between culture and architecture can be expressed based on four different definitions as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The model of the relationship between culture and architecture (Shayan, 2011)**

Architecture and culture	Architecture	Scope of culture
Functional	As a result of social components interaction	Sociology
Conceptual	As an artistic product that includes an end elevation of the mind	Aesthetics
Functional Conceptual	As a matter of human's life and includes and effective on actions	Anthropology
Perceptual	As a result of mental attitude to the surrounding built environment	Psychology

### ***Identity***

Identity is an issue that is important in all areas including architecture. Questions like " where do we belong? Who are we? Where are we going? ", can be come up in various forms, and related to cultures, religions or nations and countries. The notion that architecture is a reflection of a culture is a strong idea and will continue to be discussed. It is a perspective that is a source of inspiration and also the preventive source of the best architects returning to their roots. Human identity is manifested in art as well as in architecture. Human has always showed his dedication to his roots in his arts. So, it can be said that Every civilization or ethnic groups offers specific architecture in accordance with their culture at different times (Shayan, 2011). Identity literally means character, essence, and the existence attributed to Hu. In Moein Dictionary, identity can be expressed as follows: Supreme being, essence, existence; and What causes a person to be identified which means what differentiate an individual from the others. Hence, identity is not expressed in the vacuum. Identity is defined as who and what an individual is in Oxford Dictionary (Mahdavineja, Bemanian, Khaksar, 2010).

### **An overlook of Iranian architecture and culture in different historical periods**

#### ***Before Islamic Revolution***

By the early of Qajar dynasty, Iranian architecture had root continuity and progression. However, at any time due to circumstances, such as the development of manufacturing techniques, use of new materials, changing and expanding demands of employers change in the design, it showed different shapes and patterns, but was strengthened based on indivisible principles and

properties. Architectural continuity resulted in the cultural continuity in all areas of Iranians' lives. Continuity of life and architectural structures led to architectural standardization and coordination as well. By this time, Iranian culture and architecture have gradually passed a process of transformation through a continuous and endogenous process and cultural exchange with the surrounding lands. At this time, the architecture immediately resulted in the culture, and no distinction was seen between these two areas there.

### ***Qajar dynasty***

With the advent of Qajar, the continuity of the components of individual and social life of the people were gradually changed due to some reasons such as international changes and some internal turmoil. Political, social and economic problems and failures in the period led the intellectuals, educated and even some government officials to believe that the only way to develop the country was to follow the adoption the West in social, technical and cultural areas. The effect of this approach on the architecture caused the imitation look. The most significant architectural and cultural characteristics were certain perceptions particularly in the form and decorations. But, the architectural structures were still based on traditional architecture and cultural continuity was still evident in the principles and hidden layers of architecture.

### ***First Pahlavi's dynasty***

In this period, the architectural and cultural looks were turned into the " modern historical revival of patriotic feelings with modern stating through avoiding to continue the tradition of Qajar architecture as well as synchronization with the evolution of modern architecture. The presence of culture in this period was based on the three issues: firstly, continuation of traditional styles in the design and construction of residential units and buildings of faith, especially in medium and small cities. Secondly, the integration and composition level of European or Russian neoclassical styles with the elements of Iranian architecture such as wishbone arches, Mogharnas and Iranian architectural and traditional materials such as tiles and bricks. Thirdly, considering the elements of the historical period of pre-Islamic era in the architecture and combining them with today's applications (Soltanzadeh, 2006).

### ***Second Pahlavi's dynasty***

The cultural look towards the architecture was still based on the tradition. Ancient -oriented look to the tradition was replaced with a more traditional look referring most to the post-Islamic architecture. Although this look was early dominated by the modernism and the international style, it led to the formation and development of indigenous tendencies and return to themselves in the field of architecture in the early 1950s, along with the development of modernist critical thinking. In this period, the concept-oriented look to the traditional architecture, in addition to applying indigenous materials and symbolic forms indicates the architect's interests in the indigenous culture. During this period, an effective relationship also happened among architecture, sciences, arts and architecture of that time and architecture was more intertwined with various aspects of people's lives in this way.

### ***After Islamic Revolution***

The movement of the quest for identity that emerged in the late 1961s in the architecture retrieved new life by the occurrence of Islamic Revolution and the intellectual atmosphere of that time which was full of righteous demands such as the desire to rule over the country's political and economic destiny had profound impact on all parts of the society and consequently on the architecture. The quest for identity tendencies were directed towards the religious quest for identity and tried to revive the concept of Islamic Architecture and urbanization (Ansari, 2006).

### **Some factors affecting the formation of architecture spaces**

There are some factors that can influence the formation of architecture spaces:

- Material factors: material, building science and technology, economy;
- Environmental factors: climate, natural environment, artificial environment;
- Functional factors: behavioral patterns and spatial features of activities, technology, and biology tools;
- Cultural factors: culture and sustainable patterns, beauty, fashion and taste, innovation and creativity.

Historical, time, environmental, and cultural factors play an important role among the above factors and studying cultural factors, and their relationship to architecture issue is significant (Diba, 1999).

### ***Relationship between culture and architecture***

To understand the relationship between culture and architecture, the relationship between space and culture should be first mentioned. Space, as well as culture, has a social construction formed in the process of shaping people's perception of themselves. Space has an important role in strengthening cultural change, because the expected behavior patterns within a particular space reflects the specific cultural values. This definition implies the construction of a mental space. Influence of mental space, ranging from concrete and physical space gets understandable. Organizing the operation of subjective and objective space in the mixed continuous form is called architecture. Proposing the relationship between culture and architecture, especially in the field of psychology, clarifies the need to caring the relationship between human and their artificial environment. With this attitude, culture is the factor or way of human's relation with an artificial environment and implies on two categories:

- a) Standardized behaviors, thoughts, and feelings;
- b) Products that are the result or a continuation of the behavior and thinking of people in a given society (Shayan, 2011);

### ***Architecture as a symbol of the culture***

Every society with a system being managed, and any ideology governing it has its own goals and aspirations. The main role of culture is to present the mental ideas by introducing the concrete forms. Architecture plays a key role in the process of this transformation. According to Herman Moutsios, architecture was and is the true measure of a nation's culture. When a nation can make beautiful furniture and lustres but the worst buildings are built every day implies dark abnormal situation of the society in which irregularities and lack of power to organize the nation are generally proved (Geroter, 2007). Groter in his book "aesthetics in architecture" looks at any buildings as a part of the architectural culture assigned to fulfill a mental opinion through its outward form so it would be an index to measure the culture. In the following, he referred to Hans Hollein's definition from architecture which is defined as Spiritual discipline embodied in the buildings, so that every building is a cultural witness whether the good or the bad concept of it.

### **Cultural factors affecting the formation of architectural spaces**

Culture can affect on the formation of architectural spaces through two following ways:

1. Through the creation of behavioral laws and rules that leads to functional organizing and spatial hierarchy.
2. Through the creation of memories, beliefs and physical symptoms in the form of symbols, archetypes and metaphors that lead to creating meaning in the architectural space (Shayan, 2011).

### **The reflects of culture in the architectural spaces**

There are several factors affecting the artworks and architectural spaces that are subsets of culture. This effect is sometimes obvious and sometimes subtle and non-obvious, such as the effect of the cross in churches clearly and hierarchically between different spaces such as the elements of the input space Iranian Jameh Mosque and the concept of cultural content in the early stages of visitor's look remains hidden. Some features of culture do not have the same impact on architecture, some are easy, and some are difficult to identify. One of the effects of arts on culture is that some numbers and shapes become important. One of the reasons that numbers are more considered is due to human's perception of the world order in the past understood in the most tangible form, the numerical order. Many of the shapes and numbers were particularly utilized in ceremonies, arts, schools of thought, etc. The application of each number or shapes in any activities or arts were dependent on the one hand, on the numerical and visual features of the activity and on the other hand, on the the features and properties of the shape or number. Therefore, the shapes and numbers consistent with characteristics of mathematics, geometry, and less tangible art and culture of this land were used and considered in the architectural arts like number four, square and circle characteristics, common features of circle and square, cube, sphere-shaped volumes and four arches, etc (Diba, 1999).

### **The role of culture in promoting architectural identity**

What was described as a culture (rules, values, etc.) were only parts of the culture of any community. Culture has another aspect called material aspect indicating to the buildings, factories, etc. In fact, these things are considered as a part of the culture of a society. Because it is rooted in the values, beliefs, etc. and from here the link between culture and architecture can be seen. Buildings are like a book covered with dust which should really go and read them. In this way, the culture of people and the society in which they were built are identified (Parhizgar, 2003). The most important factors for the emergence of different architectural schools are the turning points in the culture direction and creativity. Each culture and civilization starts from a point in which the old ones stopped faced with a crisis. However, its direction is to follow and develop old and historical directions and at some points rebuilds its structures. Due to direct effect of culture on architecture, it is natural that cultural changes cause transformation in effective concepts and theories in the appearance of the architecture and consequently, different ideas of architecture comes into existence That determine the interaction between theoretical concepts and methods of culture in general and specifically the theoretical concepts and architecture (Diba, 1999). Every society has its own culture, upon which its foundation of architecture was established, and its architecture is the objective image of its culture. In fact, architecture was and is a true measure of a nation's culture. The culture of the community is responsible for the ways spaces get formed.

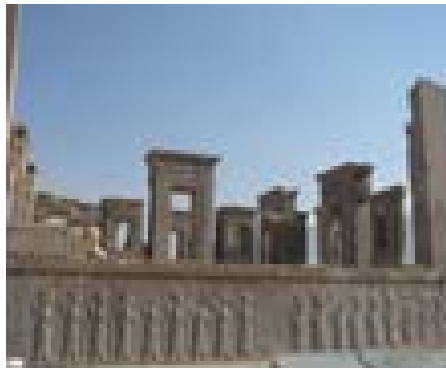
### **Foundations of Iranian culture and its influence on architecture**

Cultures have various manifestations. Despite the apparent differences, manifestations of each culture have undeniable similarities. For example, the similarity among Japanese literature, architecture, dressing and customs of the seventeenth century is evident. The similarities resulted in each cultural manifestation being fed by common principles in the culture. In Persian literature, vocabularies do not have the capacity of long and deep meanings, so poets and writers were utilizing metaphors, ambiguities, ironies and other literary industry to convey their ideas and meanings. The words of a poem have material nature concept imposed for immaterial concepts. Therefore, there are profound meanings in other manifestations of the culture and architecture has inner meaning in the culture. In particular, there are many subcultures in Iran and people inherited diverse and various historical heritage which have common inner contents organizing them under a general collection.

There are inner content and concept that lie behind each form. In this view, human is seen as critical stakeholders turns to external bodies, shapes in order to express their inner content and apply them to show his inner thoughts and ideas. These concepts are not affected by fleeting evolutions but each civilization in every time and place introduces a new policy along with the goals and fundamental perspectives of the society to reform and develop their views (Geroter, 2008).

### **Comparison of cultural indices in different periods and architecture in Iran Persepolis**

The construction of the complex was started in the sixth century BC by Darius, Achaemenid king. It is located in Marvdasht, a town near Shiraz and surrounded by Mount Mercy from one side and Marvdasht from the other side.



**Figure 1. Persepolis**

**Cultural indices:** Founding Persian power based on religious and national principles; strong military and advanced rules; existence of the potential for large-scale planning and practical management; systematic departments mint; paying attention to the religion and divine inspiration.

**Architectural indices:** Establishing a religious center which was more glorious than political Achaemenid palaces at Susa; creating great and glorious architecture so that the height of the columns is unique and openings; applying wood in the roof ; placing the architecture on the platform and separating it from the ground; Manufacturing Achaemenid Hall with columns based on Urartuish architecture.

### **Throne of Solomon**

The complex of the Throne of Solomon is located in the north of Takab City and southeastern o Urumia Lake in Western Azerbaijan province. It is on a platform and natural rock to a height of twenty feet above the plain, which is generally composed of layers of sediments of the lake.



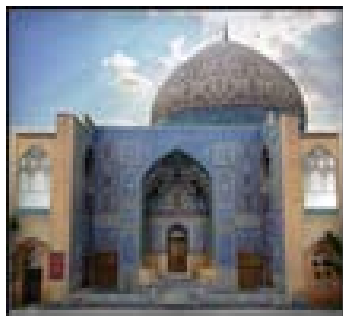
**Figure 2. Throne of Solomon**

Cultural indices: Formalizing religion of Zoroaster (power was established based on religion); Presence and influence of Christianity and Neoplatonic thought and Roman culture; Historical - literary tradition or Iranian chivalry; considering sun , water and fire as holy things;

Architectural indices: Establishing liturgical and religious centers in magnificent scale; the architecture of this period used Roman styles in decorations and tessellation and Roman architecture used Sassanid style in arches and domes; large-scale with strong forms; development of important forms of party, especially in in arches, constructing the complex on the podium.

### **Isfahan Jameh Mosque**

The first building of this mosque was built in chamber plan by order of the governor of Isfahan in 156 AH. Much of this mosque was built after the fourth century and in Razi plan, so that the building is known as Razi style. The building of the mosque remained is the four –Ivan.

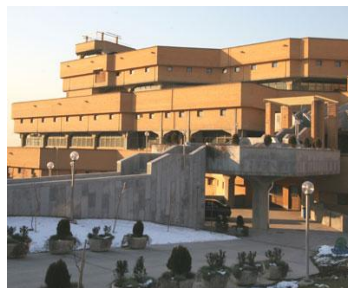


**Figure 3. Isfahan Jameh Mosque**

Cultural indices: Iranian government in this period; the continuity of Iranian tradition; following the old architecture reasonably; repeating Islamic unity; popularity of applying bricks in the building instead of old material like canvas; increasing international communication and contiguity of the East and West; starting the use of Islamic decoration in the architecture after Islam; applying mathematics and geometry.

Architectural indices: Dome - structure is based on the style before Islam; applying bricks as the main material in constructing a building; Creating a corridor above the bedchamber; domes of the mosque built during the Seljuk has precious decorations coated with plaster; creating Mogharnas dome in the mosque which belongs to the Seljuk artworks.

### **National Library building**



**Figure 4. National Library building**

The building was opened in 1383 in the hills of Abbas Abad, Tehran. Consulting Engineers expressed the important factors in shaping the project in the following way:

The most important criterion is to make the spaces functional; becoming economical during construction and operation , the environment became interesting and relaxing; fellowship with the

environment and using the environmental factors; each floor gets its light from the top floor which is one of the reasons for the span shape of the building; the building facade which reminds us of the buildings such as, apertures castles and castle , which are not a lot due to pressed texture of the cities; the building pyramidal composition is reminiscent of foothills gardens.

Cultural indices: Establishing the government based on national and religious culture; independence from other powers; construction without following appropriate models; radical eclecticism; now, Iranian holidays consists of more religious holidays than national and occasionally Western holidays or festivals.

Architectural indices: In the building, the considered elements in the exterior facade to make it a national construction are not seen by the visitors without the explanation from designer; in the internal design, these elements are scattered and lack of unity is evident; It has been tried to be eclectically inspired from various Iranian monuments; the exterior of the building is reminiscent of the 60s and 70s buildings in Europe; designer referred to different Iranian buildings and postmodernism style.

### **Conclusion**

By studying the above cases, it can be concluded that cultural indices of the society formed the architectural body and in fact, people living with the national culture could produce architecture with identity. The previous studies indicate that the old architecture with identity was due to the reflection of the human values in architecture. But do not consider the reconstructing of the sites in the form of traditional architecture the same as architectural buildings with identity. Because, the traditional architecture was in accordance with the requirements of the old time and reconstructing them in the present time will not be coordinated with the requirements of modern time. The culture of the community defines its identity and architecture as a social phenomenon originated from the culture and influenced it. The art of architecture is one of the most important symptoms and characteristics of each nation and historical period and represents human's environments anytime. Each new style of architecture is based on the principles , methods and traditions of earlier styles and this is the reason that there was strong relationship among different styles of architecture in the past so it seems difficult to consider boundaries among them. This similarity in principles and methods in different styles originated from the culture, customs and behavioral patterns of the individuals in the society which caused to create architectural styles new with slight changes in new ways of life and culture that is rooted in time to meet the new requirements. Time is always passing, and the nation is successful who understand the architecture needs of the community and know the time and place of their community. Architecture has always been accompanied with the time, and this is the time makes or alters traditions and behavioral patterns according to the nature of their cultures. Perhaps the architecture is based on tradition, but it does not belong to it anymore. Dogmatic tradition is the result of an ongoing and imitative review abrogated today. So if we describe architectural identity in culture and tradition, the architecture based on today's needs, culture and traditions not of the past is an architecture with identity and this identity is and will be with us forever.

### **References**

- Ansari, H. (2006). Pluralism in Iranian contemporary architecture. *Journal of architecture and urbanism*, 84.
- Bemaniai, M., Gholamiroostam, N., & Rahmtapnah, J. (2010). identity maker elements in the traditional architecture of Iranian houses. *Journal of slamic Art Studies*,13.



- Diba, D. (1999). Inspiration and interpretation from basic concepts of Iranian architecture. *Journal of culture and architecture*,1.
- Geroter, Y. (2007). *Aesthetics in architecture* , third edition, translated by Pakzad, J. and Homayun, A. Tehran: Martyr Beheshti University Press.
- Madadpoor, M. (2000). *Wisdom and spiritual aspects of arts*. Tehran: The Office of the Arts and Religious Studies.
- Mahdavinejad, M. (2004). *Wisdom of Islamic architecture , searching the structure of intellectual Islamic architecture deeply*. *Fine Arts*, 19.
- Mahdavinejad, M., Bemanian, M., & Khaksar, N. (2012). *Architectural identity , clarifying the meaning of identity in the pre-modern, modern and post- modern era*. *Journal of urban identity*,7.
- Naghizadeh, M. (2000). *The relationship ( tradition of Iranian architecture ) between identity and modernism and modernity*. *Journal of fine arts* , 7.
- Parhizgar, G.H. (2003). *Culture, architecture , and traditions*. *Journal of Life Story*,11.
- Parvizi, E. (2009). *National architecture from the perspective of cultural identity* , *Journal of national studies*, 3.
- Shayan, H. (2011). *Criteria for defining architectural identity*. *Journal of the village*, 70.
- Soltanzadeh, H. (2006). *Reflection of tradition in Iranian contemporary architecture*. *Journal of architecture and urbanism*, 84.