

Reviewing the Role of Culture on Formation of Vernacular Architecture

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Abstract

Architecture and culture are two fine and subtle concepts that represent the identification of the society. The grandeur of architecture can define any civilization and introduce itself as an iconic and cultural concept for recognizing the cultural values of the society. Unfortunately, focusing just on technology and formalistic point of view produces unfamiliar buildings that are known as architecture but it is important to know these buildings because they can damage the cultural identification of the society and cannot establish a proper base for forming the architecture related to social and cultural values of each society based on these values. People can improve themselves and help architecture play its essential role for building the society. Undoubtedly, the lack of culture in Iran's modern architecture in a long term can threaten the treasure of Iranian architecture. Therefore, architects are obliged to consider the cultural features of Iran's architecture and combine it with vernacular architecture in order to revive the hidden characteristics in Persian architecture and meanwhile they have to remember the indefinable role of culture in making the connection between people and architecture.

Keywords: Vernacular, Culture, Climatic architecture, Sustainability

Introduction

In the contemporary time, according to replacement of materialistic culture, the framework of vernacular architecture collapsed and ignored deliberately by builders, investors and architects. Architecture encompasses the life, meaning that each aspect of our life can be influenced by architecture. Some believe that architecture and human's manner have a mutual relationship and they are closely effect on each other. According to this theory, many architects and sociologist claim that architecture can change peoples' behavior and move along with culture. In term of cultural effect of architecture, function and form play a role when cultural, social and even economic points are wisely considered. In other words, architecture can shape the life style and mutual communication among users and it displays the historical and revolutionary role of culture in combining these factors together. Architecture can create the identification and help the expression of the dominant cultural value in the society, those values that the society aims to achieve them and the cultural factors that form the identification.

The culture etymology in Persian

The ancient form of Farhang (Culture) in remaining texts of Avista, the Pahlavi form is Frahang that comes from the ancient root, thang, meaning to pull. Thang in Persian culture means intention and verbs such as Ahikhtan and Ahekhtan with adding Far mean to educate.

The definition of Culture

Culture is an interlocking concept including science, religion, art, ethnic, customs and any kind of capability. To some scholars, the social life means to live together in the cultural atmosphere. Living in the most primitive tribe or the technological society has the equal conditions as living, which is influenced by human conditions although each cultural aspect is different from others in form and content.

Creating the sustainable culture requires reviving the social sense, communication and combination with natural world. In sustainable architecture, the opportunities should be given to people and achieve the remarkable sense of understanding related to other people and revive their relationship with past and future. In order to achieve this goal, vernacular architecture seems to be a good alternative because they are responding the regional culture and climate as well. Additionally, it can help designers enhance their sense of place and knowing anyone living in that atmosphere with his needs, a very close touching between human and nature help man know closely the capability of the nature and utilize the hidden potential in the nature in such a way that, after centuries their renovation and creativity remains significant.




Reviving the cultural and vernacular identification

Some architectural features do not impact on spaces equally and some of them simply and others hardly can be identified. One of these features is the importance of numbers and shapes, as everything around can be understood by numbers. Therefore, geometry and math have become important characteristics of activities, rituals, arts and school of thoughts. The function of each number or shape depends on the visual characteristics of designated form. Therefore, shapes and numbers in art and architecture are paid more attention to become compatible with math, geometry and art. For instance, number four and its role in square or the common features of circle and square in shaping the religious buildings have a close relationship with nature. Moreover, many natural shapes and phenomena can be analyzed and justified by them. Of course, when these numbers enter the world of architecture, they turn into shapes and forms, therefore, geometrical shapes are represented themselves as numbers already existing.

Architecture for people is shaped based on people’s need and in spite of some common thoughts, it does not mean primitive or commonplace or they are offered just to adjust with their surroundings but they have been chosen intellectually in order to cope with unexpected natural disaster and more importantly maintain their cultural and ritual values of the society. To add more, this type of architecture helps local people to find the sense of place and to devote themselves to their territory (figure 1).

Vernacular architecture is advanced form architecture for people and is associated with climate, weather culture and local material. Using local material and given solution by the nature are the priority of vernacular architecture. Interestingly, this architecture dates back thousand years ago and through centuries remains intact (figure 2).

Opportunist architecture is the consequence of new civilization and takes advantage of the improper situations and prefers materialistic benefits rather than logical solutions (figure 3)

		
<p>Figure 1: The mosque at New Gorna by Hassan Fathy</p>	<p>Figure 2: An example of 'movable architecture'</p>	<p>Figure 3: The Fang Yuan Building, China</p>

But, the most important kind of architecture includes social culture and reflects the vernacular culture of people living in that area.

According to some scholars, vernacular architecture is a type of architecture which is growing in the societies and gradually becomes compatible with social, climatic and technological conditions, to summarize, vernacular architecture is people's architecture and architecture by people and not for people (Nour Mohammadi, 2009, 19)

In aforementioned definition, the participation of people in building vernacular architecture and consideration to value and compatibility with nature are essential factors that all can lead up to a satisfactory point meaning architecture for and by people. Rappaport believes that vernacular architecture is presenting the changing values, the picture of the house, ideology and the life style and finally the combination of these situations. He also claims that vernacular architecture instead of dominating the nature is going to be compatible with that and it is the most positive point in this style. According to Pietro Belluschi, vernacular art is not made by specialist and based on plans because it is in the continuation of old tradition which is inherited to us.

Other researchers such as Rudofsky mentions that architects and creators of this type of architecture are illiterate and had special talent in making their houses and buildings compatible with nature and instead of conquering and attacking the nature, respect the variety of climates and topographies and other factors that may effect on architecture (Rudofsky 1964).

Hassan Fathi in his book "Architecture for people" expresses that each nation establishes its own architecture and represents its favorite lines, forms into habits, traditions and customs. He also emphasizes on dependency and compatibility of forms deriving from context: Before dethronement of cultural borders in 19 century, forms and elements of vernacular architecture were along with environment. As it was already mentioned, man is making an effort to cope and resolve the environmental problems arisen in the nature and architecture is based on vernacular architecture, science and culture. Therefore, it is going to prepare itself to fit in the nature.

The characteristics of vernacular architecture

Adriano Alpaio Novello expresses that the local accents help us distinguish a man's ethnic and there are so many common items among these accents evolving in centuries. As a result, one of the main characteristics of vernacular architecture is helping people form their characters. He also mentions that the builders in vernacular architecture are anonymous and these buildings have not the exact date. Knowing the name of builder cannot help us perceive the value of the building and usually it misleads the viewers.

The vernacular architecture, all buildings, spaces and houses are made for man and no matter whether they are built by the owners or society, they depend on environmental factors and resources and benefit from traditional technologies. All architectural and vernacular forms are to respond the certain needs determined quality of habitation and life styles; As a result, architecture has to follow any kind of cultural or social changes and rapidly adjust itself with it (Bemanian, 2000).

The vernacular structure is created in confrontation of dwellers with climatic situations but the simplicity of the relation can explain the familiarization and adherence of vernacular structure. The present culture is resulted by confrontation of man with nature in the process of time. Any event can influence on culture and after a while reappears as a language, poem, metaphor and proverb in literature and on other side color, line in painting and shapes and volumes in sculpture and architecture and even invention and science in space can participate in forming cultural items in such a way that is impossible to distinguish them. This interlocking relationship is the main characteristics of vernacular architecture.

In term of defining the characteristics of authentic architecture, regardless of the geographical situation of each climate and the features of dwellers, it seems impossible and the relationship between environment and nature is the key to learn their relationship (Beheshti 1999).

The vernacular architecture can evolve in such a way that includes all parts of aesthetic and it can utilize related matters such as rhythm, symmetry, harmony and contrast.

Vernacular architecture can create the proportional ideas in dividing faces and volumes and measure the amount of lightings in order to change the essence of the atmosphere and give new characteristics and attribution to the space (figure 4).

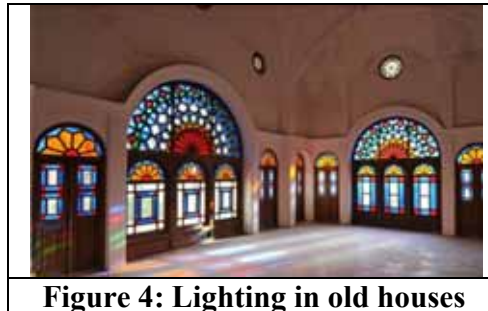


Figure 4: Lighting in old houses

Vernacular architecture is fulfilled without paying attention to expertise and specialty and take responsibility to answer all materialistic and spiritual needs because their participation stems from their communal life and inspired by their daily life. In addition, vernacular architecture do not boat and keep its improvising features, which is the main reason that no cycle can be found in it.

The influence of culture on vernacular architecture

It is required to know that culture has materialistic dimension as well and they are the buildings and monuments that create nostalgic feelings and more importantly, derives from beliefs and values. In fact, architecture can make the connection between culture and society and considers as a part of people's cultural identifications. Not only does architecture respond the basic need of users, meaning a shelter, but it also tightly related to culture.

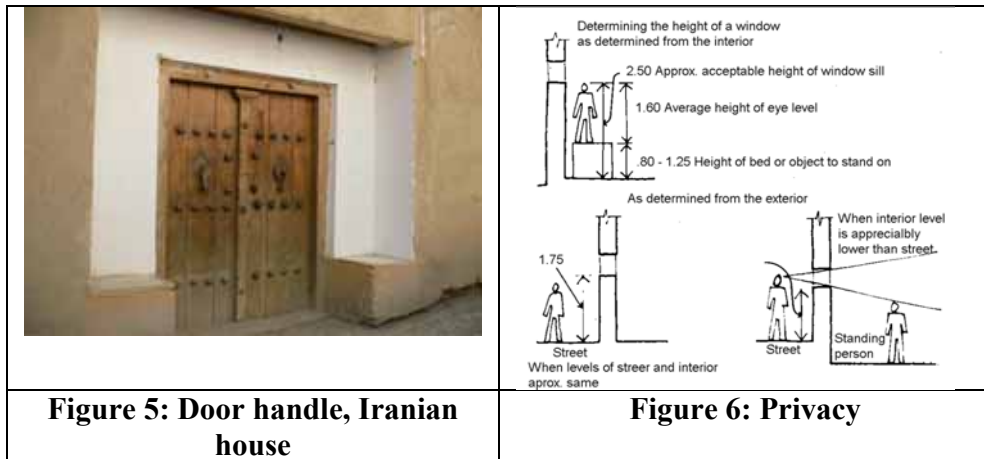
Architecture as a cultural phenomenon derives from culture and impacts on it and of course, it can represent the human's thoughts. Some researchers find architecture as a turning point in the path of culture and creativity. Each civilization and culture starts from a point that previous civilization could not cope with or find itself in a chaotic situation but with a small and subtle difference: the new civilization recovers the previous structure. Therefore, regarding the direct influence of culture in the architecture, it is natural that changes in culture can make fundamental changes in basis of influential concepts and help creating different thoughts which determine the mutual understanding between theory and culture.

The rapid upcoming changes in new century produce some changes in life and culture. The process of vernacular architecture stopped and could not adapt itself with culture. However, in some European countries, these changes took place gradually and they replace the changes easily. It is clear that reviving the culture and architecture are two important elements that can help the society make a big progress. Architecture does not consist of styles and school of thoughts and even is not distinguished by social and economic circumstances while it is a combination of all these features. In fact, architecture is not focused on the strength of cement and metal but it needs the cultural needs of people. In order to know the architectural features incorporated in Persian architecture, some of them are explained below:

Privacy

Beliefs and attitudes are vital factors that impacts on forming different spaces. One of these characteristics is to respect people's private life. In Persian houses, the interior spaces is separated by a wall from exterior space and there is only a projected part named narthex. This part has two

platforms in two sides and it was used for guest who was waiting till the owner opens a door. Engraving and installing almost big platforms was not an easy job but due to hospitality, Iranian was encouraged to build these platforms. This example is the influence of culture on housing (figures 5 and 6).



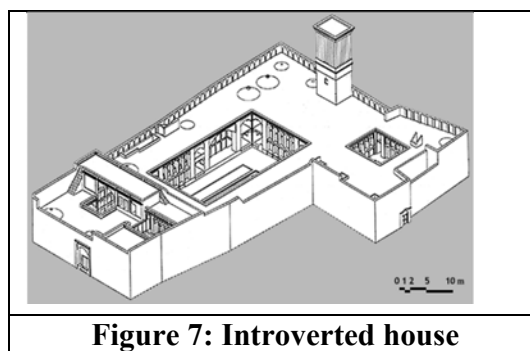
Door opener was two metal handles: one ring shaped and another hammer-like. If a person was a female uses a ring shaped and if a male the hammer-like handle was used, therefore the owners easily realized who is referring to them.

This strategy was used to respect the privacy of males and females and could protect them in their social relationship and avoid unnecessary commuting because a male usually indented to meet a man and obviously a female was going to see a female. To learn more the necessity of the strategy, the size of yard should be considered.

After the entrance, there was a corridor that although it was a part of house, it has been separated from the main atmosphere. One of the functions of corridor was preparation to enter the main area of house and at the same time, the house members also were prepared for the guest. One of the functions of these corridors or small halls in front of the building was to create calmness and protecting the house members' privacy.

Introversion

The introversion has a deep root in philosophical and social concepts because in culture and architecture, the main value is attributed to the essence and inner core (figure 7)



Introversion is in search of maintaining the environmental privacy that is supported by thoughts, and beliefs in order to help man evolve and reach perfectionism. Paying attention to internal issues according to culture, life style and customs can clarify the meaning of culture.

Centralization

This feature is parallel with introversion, the process of moving from diversity in unity and vice versa is a common idea in Islamic art; the central space is distributing all activities (Falamaki,2005)

Reflection

In all Persian architectural spaces, the main scene is formed by physical elements which is visual and its parts set a framework that evolves shapes and forms.

The relationship of architecture and nature

In Iran Persian's vernacular architecture, there is a friendly coexistence among man, architecture and nature. In the Muslims' holy book, many references about plants, lightings and natural part and metaphor of paradise produce the scene of nature in Persian's culture and spaces beside each other based on a special hierarchy prove that nature has a sacred position.

Social activities, culture and religious commands are in harmony and adjacent with nature and due to this feature, nature is involved with architecture in different forms and users benefit from this relationship.

Geometry

The language of architecture is geometry and through it, the relationship is appeared. In Islamic art and architecture, geometry plays an important role and describes the divine and logical thoughts. In Geometry, science and math and complicated combination are always go with intuition and other words sense and intelligence cannot be detached. Persian Geometry does not comply the materialistic and ecological functions and is implying other connotations as well (figure 8).



Figure 8: Geometry

Transparency and continuity

Transparency and continuity are in contradiction with confined spaces because the path of man's movement is in continuation in such a way that spatial opening in vertical and horizontal can create transparency. The concept of hierarchy and continuity are important matters in explaining the Iran's architecture. Continuity is not related to the size of space and using the diverse geometry that includes faced and points the spatial continuation maintain its bond with gravity (figure 9)



Figure 9: Transparency

Mystery

The sense of spiritual grandeur in simplicity and purification are fundamental principles in building but in order to perceive the building, spirituality and none materialistic world of builders should be considered (Montazaeran,L (2013)

The harmonic stability

In architecture, there is a harmonic stability between building and natural environment, sense and deep nature help the physical elements fit in their right place and their functions can respond the environment. There are so many factors effecting on artifact and architectural spaces. This effect sometimes is not apparent and hidden such as the influence on cross pattern on designing historical churches or the hierarchy in Persian architecture that may be ignored by visitors.

Conclusion

Custom and traditions make an influence on the region and with maintaining the fundamental, cultural and artistic factors in the building, a very simple building without spirit turn into a perfect building. More importantly, the function of the building can evolve the expression of the architect and it is simultaneous with emergence of the message of architecture, cities and areas. Following the pattern and diverse culture have created a varied architecture and vernacular language.

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