

(*Review Article)

Preservation Strategies and Issues for Tehran City Identity in a Rapidly Changing Urban Landscape

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Abstract

The presented article discusses the issues of Tehran city identity preservation in a rapidly changing urban landscape, taking into account that city preservation encompasses strategies to maintain and enhance the historical, cultural, and architectural integrity of urban environments. Being a vibrant capital city of Iran, Tehran is considered a city steeped in history, culture, and rapid urban development.

As it transforms into a modern metropolis, the challenges of preserving its unique identity while implementing sustainable architectural planning become more important. Therefore, it is of high importance to examine how traditional Persian architecture and modern urban challenges intersect. These circumstances may be critical not only for preserving the cultural heritage of Tehran but also for ensuring a livable environment for its residents. The number of conducted studies reveals the importance of integrating local heritage with contemporary urban needs, demonstrating that effective city preservation between the past and the present may be realized through cultural identity at the same time as promoting social cohesion, economic vitality, and civil education. As the city identity preservation refers to the efforts made to preserve and protect the unique character, historical image, and cultural heritage of a city, therefore it can involve a combination of architectural conservation and sustainable development practices. These efforts will contribute to promoting a sense of belonging and pride among residents while attracting visitors who appreciate the distinctive identity of this Eastern-type city. Currently the historical texture of Tehran is an attractive mix of historic and modern architecture, reflecting its rich cultural legacy and rapid urbanization.

Keywords: Tehran, city identity, preservation strategies and issues, urban landscape.

Introduction

At present, in a rapidly urbanizing world, city identity preservation is essential for balanced growth that honors both tradition and innovation, especially in the cases of historical cities or historically formed city cores. Actually, the city identity refers to the distinctive character, unique culture and old-century history, and sense of place that distinguish a city from others; therefore, it assumes a well-organized preservation. This should take into account a few elements such as local traditions and community values, unique architecture and formed public spaces, as well as the dynamics in the social-economic atmosphere. The preservation of the city identity in the modern urbanization is important from the perspective of a few reasons: the cultural heritage of historical cities, the development of tourism and the economy, which could contribute to the growth of local businesses, the social cohesion that can strengthen community bonds and promote the integration of diverse residents, as well as the quality of life, because a strong city identity adds to the overall living experience by providing a vibrant and captivating environment that reflects the aspirations and values of its inhabi-

tants. And finally, the sustainable development, taking into account that the preservation of the local character may lead to informed urban planning that respects historical contexts and environmental sustainability. Currently, various historical cities around the world are facing the issue of preserving their identity, including Tehran, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The issues of preserving identity in the modern urban landscape of Tehran, particularly the city historical center, have risen to high resonance and relevance in recent decades, attracting the attention of specialists in the field, researchers, city authorities, and community circles.

It is known that the formation of Tehran city is mentioned since the IX century; it was initially a small settlement (with the name of Ray) that began to grow gradually. Thus, the stages of city historical development, urban culture, and unique architectural formation in the last 200 years mainly include the dynastic periods of Safavid (1501-1736), Zandi (1750-1790), Qajar (1779-1925), and Pahlavi (1925-1979) rule in Iran, as well as the post-revolutionary (1979-1980) and modern eras of the city's history. So, during the XX-XXI centuries, the city suffered a wide range of changes. Tehran was enlarged and modernized with Western-style buildings during the Pahlavi rule. The 1979 Islamic Revolution, in its turn, brought changes to the architectural image, which led to a blend of traditional and modern influences. Today, Tehran is a mix of historical sites and contemporary architecture, reflecting its rich and diverse history. In those conditions, the city identity preservation issues have emerged and become more actual than ever.

At present, in this globalized world, architects face the challenge of balancing local identity with international trends and influences, which drives them to develop measures to preserve historical and cultural heritage. (Proshansky, 1983) Therefore, the city of Tehran is no exception in this regard. Essentially, the identity of this or that city refers to its unique characteristics, special cultural and historical background, and the elements that define a city, setting it apart from others. Therefore, every city has its own identity that makes it unique, distinctive, and recognizable. In fact, preserving a city's identity includes preserving its unique cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and local traditions. One way to achieve this is through urban planning, which takes into account the city's architectural style and historical significance. Unfortunately, in modern times, identity preservation in historic cities is not easy due to the pressures of urbanization and development, phenomena that are also obvious in present-day Tehran.

It is obvious that during recent decades, the cities have evolved into complex systems, and in these conditions, the urban planner has transformed from a dictator into a continuous researcher of the city, analyzing the elements that comprise the city. On the other hand, the cities are always undergoing transformations, which have caused many urban problems, social, physical, and economic, and have also led to the emergence of both uncontrolled environments devoid of technical infrastructure, as well as viable spaces and meaningful places. Currently, the identity of the city in general and in old historical areas in particular is under threat; it is experiencing physical decline, being damaged, or even destroyed under the influence of globalization. Thus, changing trends and developments in the field of technology have a negative socio-economic impact on historical districts of the cities. In this regard, preserving the identity of historical parts of Tehran is extremely important in terms of preserving its cultural heritage, historical significance, and sense of community pride. By preserving its rich history and architectural beauty, as well as its many historical landmarks, the city can please Iranians in general and foreign visitors, boost the local economy through tourism, and develop a sense of belonging among its own residents. In addition, preserving traditional and historical districts helps preserve Tehran's authentic charm and allows future generations to appreciate the city's historical and cultural roots and significance. Preserving identity in Tehran is essential to valuing the city's past, shaping the present, and ensuring a vibrant future.

Another circumstance is that in relation to the discussed topic, urban planners and architects should, on various occasions, particularly emphasize the positive role of the identity of the old city, which should be followed by an analysis of the important and main indicators of the city's identity. There is no doubt that the creation and continuity of the expected urban identity is impossible and inaccessible without providing the necessary basis. In fact, the identity of the city is an indicator of the quality of civilization and the social spirit of each nation, thus the result of people's decisions and reflections on the latter.

The importance of the topic under consideration is particularly necessary, as the study of architectural issues related to the preservation of identity in urban landscapes becomes increasingly important in the current context of rapid globalization and urbanization. The city of Tehran, especially the central historical districts, faces unprecedented challenges as modernity clashes with historical and cultural identities. Currently, it is undergoing profound transformations due to population growth and socio-economic issues, and, on the other hand, due to the invasion of modern architectural styles, which especially affects historically shaped districts. Those trends and their influences are evident everywhere, marked by high-rise building developments and infrastructure projects that often overshadow traditional buildings and public spaces of the city. Such urban developments can lead to a weakening of the sense of place and identity, raising concerns among residents as well as architectural designers or urban planners. Naturally, the ongoing transformations threaten not only the physical structures but also the collective memory and identity associated with them. (Rossy, 1984) The primary challenge, therefore, is to balance the demands of modern urban life with the need to preserve historical integrity.

Therefore, it is important to examine the architectural design issues that are actual in this context, including the conflicts and disagreements between designers, urban planners, architects, policymakers, and community stakeholders. In these conditions, effective architectural strategies need to be developed in order to harmonize new buildings with the existing historical context. Here it is important to keep in mind that identity is a fundamental aspect of community cohesion, and a changing landscape may lead to a disconnection between residents and their surrounding environment. Therefore, it is important to understand local residents' perceptions of their neighborhood identity and how urban policy can integrate these perceptions into the design process, especially in the context of sustainable development and its policies. Another important point is the issue of sustainability in the case of Tehran as well; being of high importance, it also relates to environmental and a number of other issues, so it is imperative today to incorporate sustainable design practices that take into account and improve the existing urban texture.

Thus, the study and analysis of the issues and strategies of the city identity preservation is a great necessity and highly relevant in the context of urban transformations that are happening today. The gained results could promote understanding of what it means to preserve identity in a rapidly changing world, offering a framework for understanding and resolving the problematic circumstances between modern developments and cultural heritage. Those results may shed light on future architectural practices and urban policy issues, seeking for a balanced urban identity that values the rich and distinctive historical character of Tehran while meeting contemporary needs. It is undeniable that urban identity is a complex concept that reflects the distinct physical, social, and cultural characteristics of a city or urban area. The built-up environment, economic structures, cultural activities, and social interactions all play a role in its formation.

Thus, firstly, we have studied the identity preservation issues in the modern urban development of Tehran (i.e., theoretical framework), observing the concept and nature of identity and its determining factors in the urban landscape. In the current changing world, the preservation issue of

the city's identity and having a sustainable urban landscape is unquestionably considered in discussions of modern urban planning and architecture issues. In the current world, it is obvious that the identity of a city is gradually shaped by the difficult interplay of cultural, historical, and technological factors. Smart technologies, sustainable design, and community-focused urban development processes enhance identity by promoting a sense of place among residents in terms of emotional and psychological attachment. In addition, the influence of art, local traditions, and social movements further enriches urban identity, making cities dynamic entities. Finally, urban identity today is a fusion of tradition and innovation, where the past informs the present, enabling urban areas to evolve while preserving their distinctive character in an ever-changing world.

In essence, the city identity concerns its distinctive characteristics, century-old cultural and historical values that define a city and distinguish it from others. It also includes elements such as local traditions, architecture, demography, and community involvement, showing how residents and visitors perceive and experience the city. The city identity is formed with multiple layers during the time. And naturally, each layer should build on each other, enriching and complementing the previous one, not undermining, eliminating, or erasing it. In fact, a city is a cumulative reality in space and time. Understanding these layers and their interrelationships is an important factor in understanding the city and experiencing its identity. The problems occur when, in the spatial structure of the city, something goes wrong that may cause a distorted situation. Indeed, it may bring the loss of the city characteristics and negatively affect its identity and finally, lead to its loss.

In the concept of city identity, various elements and factors are settled that shape it over time, at the core of which are the concepts of collective identity and national identity. The city continues to exist, bearing the traces of each period, the culture of a changing society, and, in essence, it is a manifestation of historical accumulation. (Ghotbi, 2008, p. 56-58) Therefore, the loss of identity may have a detrimental impact on cities and their users. By recognizing the value of place as a fundamental component of settlement, identity serves as a guide to both the aspirations of society and the maintenance and construction of a sustainable urban image. On the other hand, the quality of the design of cities and their spaces can have a profound impact on the quality of life of a society, reflecting their perceptions. Therefore, identity is not only a complex topic but also a key factor in achieving urban sustainability. Physical identity can influence people's attachment to, comfort with, and interest in a place and can also be useful in creating relationships with other places. In fact, an individual's identity is linked to the identity of the place, which creates a unique set of patterns that can be applied to the future. Studies show that physical and environmental characteristics influence people's types of activities and their mental perception of the environment. Therefore, the importance of place attachment and the role of physical and social structures in creating a sense of belonging are undeniable. (Feldman, 1990) In the context of the relationship between culture, architecture, and urban planning, cultural values, forms, and relationships impose spatial organization and principles that should guide designers and programmers when designing a certain environment to provide environmental coordinates such as shape, color, proportions, relationships between space and elements, degree of identity, how to reproduce and copy, etc. That is why the unmistakable copying of foreign forms is one of the most sensitive circumstances that can lead to a crisis of community identity or, in other words, the search for an identity separated from the national culture. Thus, identity is clearly visible in architectural buildings and in the urban landscape.

The studies on the contemporary architecture let us define the city identity, which involves creating such structures that reflect the cultural, historical, and social context of a city while meeting contemporary needs. It should emphasize the integration of local materials, design aesthetics, and community involvement, promoting a sense of place and belonging. In other words, contemporary

architecture should attempt to balance innovation with tradition, creating environments that respond to the identity of the urban landscape and its inhabitants. Of course, urban distortions are also visible in this context, among which two factors can be mentioned, which are due to the lack of identity in the urban landscape and, consequently, in its architecture, which are evident, for example, in the Iranian cities: a) The structural incompatibility of the modern architectural example next to other architectural structures present in the urban landscape, b) The impact of comprehensive and comparative project standards on the urban landscape of Iran. So, in some cases, the visual clarity or perception was neglected in the current urban landscape. Therefore, the identity is currently considered a missing link in the current urban planning initiatives, and only time can shape it. And the moment will come when we will search for our identity in the context of the semantic depths of our past.

At present, modern Iranian urban development is between traditional beliefs and imported perspectives, which is more obvious in architecture. So, the attention to the type and style of architecture in each part of the city, as well as the design of each urban context, which was created in a certain era, should be in harmony with a certain style of new buildings with a new external appearance, while due to the crisis caused by the economic factor, currently it is impossible to define the clear picture of modern Iranian architecture. (Arefian, Iradj Moeini, 2016) Thus, by understanding city identity, we should realize that, however, rapid urbanization threatens identity, often leading to the demolition of older structures in favor of modern developments that lack cultural resonance.

Researchers conducted the examination of the impact of the physical environment on human activities and perceptions; it shows that physical environmental characteristics are of key importance in a city to promote a specific spirit and identity in the city by creating semantic and spatial perceptions. The historical context of a city is an integral part of its cultural characteristics; thus, the inhabitants of Tehran consider it as a traditional, historical, and cultural city, located in the most arid lands of the northern central plain of Iran. During the last 200 years it was shaped through many innovative ideas and creative approaches, the evidence of which are the buildings and public spaces that emerged in its historical districts, i.e., historical center. (Fazlpour, 2019) In fact, the city center is one of the main components of the city structure, which is especially noteworthy in the case of Iranian cities. When we say urban center, we mentally recall the Greek agoras and Roman forums that took shape in ancient times, and in pre-Islamic Iran, the location of the royal palace or fortress. Later, the city center was considered to be the active and dynamic place where three important elements were located: the mosque, the market, and the Dar-al-Amara, which took shape in urban centers since the establishment of Islam. Meanwhile, the urban centers of modern times are densely populated centers with high-income residents, shaped by socio-economic and emotional influences of the current times. Under the current circumstances, the issue of preserving the identity of a city or city center becomes more complicated.

The studies showed that the issue of preserving identity in modern cities, including Tehran, is not easy. The lack of identity in the external image of the city, in other words, in the urban landscape and its architecture, is particularly noted due to two factors: the incompatibility of modern architectural examples with other architectural examples of the urban landscape and the lack of the influence of comprehensive and comparative standards on the Iranian urban landscape. Circumstances that are ignored and lacking today.

When considering the issue of identity in architecture, we must consider the following main factors:

a) cultural and historical context, b) geography and climate, c) building materials and craftsmanship, d) technological advances, e) urban planning and socio-economic factors, f) global

influences, g) normative regulations, h) community and identity.(Chris, 2017) In essence, the architectural and urban identity is one of the most important dimensions of identity in society, as its continuity supports collective identity.

It is also worthy to note that the transmission, continuity and stability of identity in architecture and the physical structure of the city are important issues that are considered together with other issues, such as the lack of identity and the identity crisis in modern life. Of course, the components of the city's identity also shape human identity. One of the defining elements of a person is memory. Without memory, a city has no identity. There are two main functions for identity. The first helps to understand and predict the environment, and the second is the emotional function of the identity of the environment. It can be noted that the environment also has an impact on the person. In fact, identity is both stable and dynamic in terms of time. Therefore, like human identity, architectural identity has had both stable and dynamic aspects, undergoing changes in each historical era. Thus, factors that can influence the process of creating architectural identity include spatiality and structural form, composition, function, architectural art and materials, climatic and geographical circumstances, the role of symbols, culture and religious beliefs.

It should be stated that the concept of sustainability in urban environment has received considerable attention in recent years due to global challenges such as climate change, rapid urbanization and social inequalities. For vibrant urban ecosystems, especially in the context of rich cultural traditions, it is important to combine modern sustainability indicators with the intrinsic values and characteristics of local identities. This interaction is especially evident in the Iranian urban context, which is proud of its rich historical and cultural heritage. (Bautista-Puig, et al, 2022) Therefore, it is important to outline indicators of sustainable urban environment and compare them with the criteria that characterize Iranian traditional urban identity, thus also developing an analytical method to assess these frameworks. The indicators of a sustainable urban environment can be classified into several dimensions: Ecological sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, governance and participation (Community involvement in planning and residents' involvement in urban development decisions, transparency and accountability, i.e. open governance practices in urban management, alignment of policies with sustainability objectives, integration of sustainability principles into local legislation). In fact, sustainability should meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", a concept that extends to the urban environment. Indeed, the integration of sustainable practices into architecture can contribute to the preservation of a city's identity by adapting traditional construction methods and materials to contemporary uses. As various researchers have rightly noted in their works, sustainability in architecture emphasizes the need to create ecologically healthy, economically viable, and socially just built environments. (Coben, 2014)

Regarding the traditional criteria of Iranian urban identity, it is worth noting that Iranian traditional urban environments have unique characteristics that reflect their historical, social, and cultural contexts. The following criteria define their urban identity: cultural heritage, spatial organization, environmental integration, and community cohesion. Those should be considered while doing any interference.

Generally, to systematically assess the coherence between sustainable urban indicators and traditional Iranian urban identity criteria, an analytical method may be applied: framework development, data collection using quantitative methods (e.g., surveys), assessment metrics by creating a scoring system, spatial analysis by assessing the spatial relationships between sustainable practices and traditional identity features using mapping tools, stakeholder participation by engaging community members, urban planners, and cultural experts, which will facilitate discussions to jointly eva-

luate the findings and propose interventions that respect both sustainability and cultural identity. (Malkwi, 2020) Finally, policy recommendations can be put forward, developing a set of actionable recommendations based on the analytical findings, which should be aimed at strengthening both the sustainability of the urban environment and the preservation of its traditional identity. The proposed analytical method may represent a way to understand and expand the interaction between contemporary sustainability practices and centuries-old cultural values. Therefore, by using such a framework, urban planners can create environments that are not only ecologically thriving but also respond to the cultural histories of their communities.

Thus, the city identity is one of the complex concepts of urbanism. It is a multiple phenomenon that can be considered as the result of the organized interaction of social, cultural, economic, and religious systems, architecture, and the urban system. In fact, architecture is considered one of the main characteristics of identity and the product of the collective memory of local residents. So, identity is not just about aesthetics but is intertwined with the collective memory, values, and aspirations of local residents. (Malkwi, 2020) In fact, it is a key component of urban identity, including the essence of the city and its residents by bridging the past and the present, promoting community interaction, and reflecting cultural aspirations. Thus, by evaluating the role of architecture, we can understand how city identity is constructed and experienced, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful design that may respond to the values and needs of the community. As cities continue to develop and change, the architectural landscape will remain a critical element to define and understand city identity.

The above-mentioned indeed concerns the city of Tehran, where the main problem in modern architecture is the continuous deterioration of the urban environment due to the integration of modern architecture in the old urban texture. The role of architecture in the formation of the city identity of Tehran, by reflecting the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of the city, should simultaneously respond to contemporary challenges as well. (Fazlpour, 2019) As the city continues to develop, its architectural landscape will remain a key factor in how residents and visitors perceive Tehran not only as a capital but as the embodiment of Iranian culture and identity.

Regarding the impact of urban development on Tehran's identity, it is important to reveal a chain of conflicts and challenges between heritage and development processes. As Iran continues to evolve in a global context, tensions have arisen between the desire to progress and the imperative to preserve cultural and historical sites. At the heart of this conflict is Tehran's historical fabric, intertwined with centuries of cultural evolution. Existing studies on the challenges of urbanization confirm that Tehran has indeed experienced unprecedented growth, which has led to significant challenges related to urban sprawl, pollution, and social fragmentation. The speedy development frequently caused the degradation of historic districts and cultural landmarks. (Arefian, Iradj Moeini, 2016) This is a result of the urban planning of Tehran, which frequently puts economic growth and development ahead of heritage preservation. During recent decades, skyscrapers and modern complexes emerged, sometimes at the expense of historic sites, which led to a tangible sense of loss for local communities. Of course, these rapid transformations cause a dilemma: whether Tehran is able to accept modernization while preserving its identity, rooted in its rich historical past. The answer is multilayered and requires a careful consideration of both the social and cultural dimensions of urban development.

Moreover, public opinion also plays a significant role in this ongoing discourse. A number of residents of Tehran have a deep and strong link to the heritage of their hometown. Therefore, social movements have formed that demand the preservation of these spaces and require from the policymakers to take into account the long-term impact of development on community identity. Such pub-

lic activity emphasizes the growing awareness of the citizens that the distinctive character of their city is not only shaped by its skyline but also by memories, stories, interactions, etc., that are set in the streets and structures of Tehran. Indeed, the challenges generated by Tehran's urban development also extend to environmental issues, since the city's sustainability has been threatened by pollution and urban sprawl brought on by its quick growth. The conflict between ecological sustainability and urban growth adds another layer of complexity in the struggle for a unified city identity. The solution of those environmental issues is frequently combined with city heritage preservation, since many historic sites include important green spaces that contribute to the urban ecosystem.

Finally, the future of identity preservation of the city Tehran depends on a reasonable balance between preserving its historical past and accepting the inevitability of urban development. Formation and promotion of a dialogue among stakeholders, from government officials to local citizens, Tehran can design a path that respects its heritage while also taking into account progress and innovation. Such strategy can provide that as the city is developing, to operate in a way that reflects its cultural identity, enabling both history and the modern to coexist harmoniously.

However, it is seen that modern Iranian architecture coexists with newly emerging architectural manifestations in the modern urban environment, bringing about a diversity of styles in urban areas. This shows the risk of cultural identity loss in the modern landscape. If previously in Iran there was a harmonious connection of the Iranian city with the climate and natural environment, which led to the use of environmentally friendly materials, then in the modern landscape everything has been sacrificed to modernity. As Ghotbi rightly points out, identity is the ability to distinguish one element from another. (Ghotbi, 2008) These elements can be physical features such as shape, size, volume, decoration, constructive style, etc., which can find their expression in certain environmental actions or practices, such as the urban context. And regarding the impact of urban planning on Tehran's identity, it illustrates a broader picture that is also observed in different cities around the world, where tensions between heritage and progress continue. Recognizing the complexity of these conflicts is vital to building a sustainable future that honors the past while looking forward and ensures that Tehran and other similar cities remain a vibrant expression of their historical heritage and contemporary aspirations.

Therefore, while conducting urban and architectural projects in Tehran, the identity preservation tools should be taken into account in order to make it possible to preserve the distinctive character and cultural heritage of this city. These tools may include the investment of adaptive reuse (i.e., to repurpose historic building into new functional space at the same time preserving its original architectural features), façade restoration (i.e., to use traditional materials and techniques to preserve the visual identity of the area), (Bullen, 2011) cultural heritage interpretation (i.e., to install signs, digital displays, or organize tours, to aware visitors and residents about the historical significance of the city architecture and urban environment), zoning regulations (i.e., to implement laws and building codes to protect historic structures from demolition or uncontrolled development, which may provide that new construction will be in harmonization with the existing architectural context), the design of the public space design (i.e., to expand public spaces in historic districts with elements that reflect cultural identity of Tehran, such as traditional fountains and colorful decorative gardens, mosaic patterns) and etc. By investing in the above-mentioned identity-preserving tools, urban planners and architects can value the rich history and heritage of Tehran while at the same time promoting sustainable urban development.

Thus, preserving the city identity of present-day Tehran and pursuing sustainable architectural practices are interrelated goals that require a comprehensive strategy. A holistic approach that includes historic preservation, community engagement, and sustainable design principles can contri-

bute to the creation of a resilient urban environment. Future research and policy recommendations should focus on combining these dimensions to develop a sense of place that values Tehran's rich cultural heritage while addressing contemporary environmental and other challenges. As Tehran moves along its path of modernization, urgent priority must be given to architecture that embodies its identity and can preserve the city's ecological and cultural integrity for future generations.

Conclusion

In summary, we can say that the importance of the concept of identity and its impact on the design of modern cities show that it is an important and integral factor in the structure of the city. Ignoring identity in the design and built environment of modern cities causes great damage to the structure of the city. However, there are successful examples of city identity preservation all over the world, which are precedent-setting. On the other hand, the preservation of the city identity of Tehran, from the perspective of sustainable architecture, is a multisided challenge that demands a collaborative approach. So, by integrating traditional elements with modern sustainability practices, the capital city of Iran may become a city that values and respects its past and, at the same time, accepts the future. The success of such an initiative will not only benefit the city residents but also generate a model for other cities worldwide that face similar dilemmas. (Sandercock, 2003) In essence, embracing both heritage and innovation can forge a vibrant, sustainable urban future for Tehran. As the present-day cities that have adopted a new way of thinking are now facing challenges. And they are constantly searching for their identity, which connects them to their past while meeting the demands of the present and the future.

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