

Designing Ahwaz Center of Architectural Studies with Context-Oriented Approach

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Abstract

In this paper, it has been attempted to consider the relationship between culture, architecture, and the effect of cultural factors in shaping architectural spaces and the necessity of attention to cultural architectural spaces. Next, by analyzing this relationship, it investigates the importance of attention to context-oriented architecture with a considerable contemplation that it establishes with the environment, and tries to consider the quality of constructions and practical approaches for designing cultural spaces and the center of architectural studies, paying attention to the native architecture of the city of Ahwaz and familiarity with native architectural terminology in order to promote culture, preserve regional values, and resuscitate national and regional culture and customs of this country. Specialized conditions of the district of Khuzestan, especially the city of Ahwaz, occurrence of the big river of Karun, hot climate, occurrence of dust and foggy weather, semi-desert climate, and intense air moisture at sultry times distinguish the climate of this region countrywide as particular and quite special. Conformity and coexistence of the people of this region with climate conditions can be a pattern for contemporary architects of Ahwaz. However, this architecture has undergone malformations like other regions of Iran. Unfortunately, employing construction patterns are changing in Ahwaz like in other Iranian regions. Therefore, to find original Ahwaz patterns, a tour was taken to this region and native rural construction methods with environmental conditions of the district's traditional architecture were investigated and eventually, appropriate approaches have been provided for devising durable architectural principles based on context-oriented architecture and incorporating how architecture affects the design of cultural spaces.

Keywords: context-oriented architecture, center of studies, native architecture, culture, architectural collection

Introduction

Architecture is a mirror of human thinking in relation with space, aesthetics, and culture. This is the reason why architecture style of each era is a reflection of the culture and art of that era, which is proportionate to variations taking place in other fields of life and art, and each novel architecture style is based on principles, methods, and traditions of early style. Because of this, a robust relationship exists between various styles of architecture and marking boundaries between them seems difficult. Turning point in the route of culture and innovation is among major factors of advent of different architectural schools.

Each civilization and culture starts from the point when previous civilization and culture has faced a deadlock or a crisis, but its route is in the continuity and development of its earlier historic route and merely in certain sections, it rehabilitates its own structure. Thus, given the direct effect of culture in architecture, it is natural that cultural changes lead to variation in fundamentals and concepts affecting the advent of architecture, and subsequently, different architectural thoughts are born that determine ways of interaction between theoretical concepts and especially architecture (Beheshti, 2009, 59).

Cultural characteristics of each era can be recognized in its architecture because when architecture is born under the influence of an era's different conditions, e.g. political, social, economic, cultural, etc. and once born, it can become independent and alive and acquire specific properties for itself. When impacts creating an architectural work are destroyed, architecture might continue to live. Now, if the causer factors are in accordance with cultural demands, that architecture will acquire a profound root and if they are stable, the architecture will lose life and new factors will sweep it away.

Developments of the current century led to variation and changes in some lifestyles as well as culture of society. Movement and trends of traditional architecture stopped which was partly due to rapid developments occurring in European countries and they greatly replaced the changes easily. Now, if for reclamation of the culture and architecture of our country those basic factors are recognized and resuscitated, they will continue to live.

Statement of the problem

The goal followed in the present study is increased vicinity of people alongside their ancient native cultures and values and spaces that represent civilization and sanctity of national and regional traditions. Especially, that still in mental background and public opinions, values and cultures and some beliefs are existent and have color, deserves much contemplation. Thus, the conditions for space identity can be summarized in two main axes:

Recognition and diagnosis

Recognition means to distinguish a phenomenon based on previous experiences and knowledge from that type of phenomenon from other fellow phenomena and place it in one definite group. Diagnosis means to discern a phenomenon from other similar and fellow phenomena; phenomena based on their subjectivity and mental image. Using these two tools, a phenomenon can be qualified for identity" (Qasemi, 2004:44). In fact, for a space to be identified, two groups of expectations have to be fulfilled (Qasemi, 2004).

Topical expectations: there is a group of expectations that the phenomenon under identity-measurement and fellow phenomena are expected to be accountable for.

Local expectations: there are certain expectations from the phenomenon itself that the phenomenon should, merely by itself, fulfill.

"Local expectations fulfillment in each time sector is the factor used for recognizing the phenomenon and the complement of the route of authentication and establishment of identity" (Ghasemi, 2004: 100).

To respond to this need, devising and identification of the mentioned problems are the first step of a topical planning for solving the issues. Qualitative understanding and objective knowledge of problems such as lack of identity and architectural confusion, forgetting the fruitful past of patterns and tribal diminishment are the source for primary mentality of this report for resuscitating national and native culture and context-oriented architecture.

Undoubtedly, architecture is by itself a culture theme. Therefore, appearance and content of cultural places cannot be alien to concepts related to Iranian culture and art. This requires us to pay attention to cultural, artistic, social, and geographical backgrounds of the region in which intended centers are designed and built (Hadidi, 2012, 107).

Objectives of the study and Research questions

The main goal for this study is to achieve practical solutions for designing cultural spaces to reinforce native and context-oriented architecture. It generally involves attention to background and bed of design for cultural and spiritual rehabilitation of society members. Attention and preservation

of cultural and native values and creating appropriate bed to promote regional native culture symbolically is another goal that can be followed in this study. This study tries, by focusing on culture and native Ahwaz customs and architecture, to lead to creation of appropriate places to address cultural activities and studies in architectural fields. Thus, in this route, the following questions are provided:

What is the role of context-oriented architecture in promoting culture and cultural heritages and regional identity and protecting it?

How can a set design can be achieved that introduces architectural values of culture, people's customs, and culture of Ahwaz by paying attention to the rich culture and architecture in the region?

This paper is a descriptive and field research in terms of method, and data collection has been carried out by referring to evidences and documents as well as sample observation.

An introduction to study area

The city of Ahwaz as the official-political center of Khuzestan Province and the regional center of the country's southwest, with an approximate population of one million (1,096,494) has a particular political and economic position. With 8 urban regions, this city contains about one fourth of the population of Khuzestan's urban points. Geographically, the city of Ahwaz is located at the latitude of $31^{\circ} 20' N$ and longitude of $48^{\circ} 40' E$. With an area of 220 km², this city is the widest city of Iran after Tehran (Armed Forces Geographical Organization, 2005:3).



Figure 1. Karun River

The role of the Karun River in defining identity structure of the city of Ahwaz

The city of Ahwaz can be considered in two historical sectors. The first sector that is actually the hidden history of the city has no record except in historical texts and some special skeletal symbols (such as Karun Hills, residues of ancient centuries, etc.) and includes the city's developments and life since the Sassanid era to sixth Hijri century. The second sector to which today's skeleton of Ahwaz is indebted and therefore can also be referred to as the history of creation of the city, has begun from the middle of Qajar Period (about 120 years ago) (Namavar, Mojtahedzadeh, 2006: 231). In this paper, formation of the city's structure in relation with river in the second sector is intended.

The first footstone of modern Ahwaz was founded in 1306 Hijri for commercial Iran-Europe transactions. This city was founded at Nasereddin Shah's era with geometric and almost checkered network scheme alongside the Karun River with the name of Bandar Naseri. Oil discovery and proceedings of the Oil Company played significant roles in formation of Ahwaz's appearance. With construction of Siah-O-Sefid Bridge between 1935 and 1936 for development, the new city of Ahwaz assumed a new form. Construction of new residential towns are also considered a type of the city's trend of growth and played a considerable role.

History of Ahwaz

Cities are the most important indications of civilization for every nation. They are symbols whose antiquity and splendor originate from nobility and stability of their owners and main residents. That said, as cities and human residences become older, they get more valuable. Therefore, people consider antiquity of an urban place or arenas as an evidence for their own identity. With a little attention to human cultural heritages around the world, it could be inferred that great and renowned tribes of history have left great cities and works. Among them, historical textures are considered one of the most valuable cultural works that attest to a splendid and honorific civilization. It is necessary to preserve monuments in the best shape possible along with conscious interferences and designs and provide them to prospective generations.

Ahwaz can, in historical vision, be divided into two eras of historical Ahwaz and new Ahwaz. Historical Ahwaz was a city with a river deriving from Karun, parting the city into two divisions. One was the residence of typical people and marketers. Another part was for the grandee. After the fracture of the joints built over Karun, the city was destroyed and rendered evacuated. This continued until Qajar era and reign of Nasereddin Shah. With the order of Nasereddin Shah, Ahwaz was resuscitated with the name of Bandar Naseri. Before that, it was only known as Penthouse tomb of Ali Ibn Mahziar. Ahwaz is today a city without social organization and it suffers from disorder of organizations and urban structures. The scope of these turbulences reaches even local structures.

Necessity of using context-oriented architecture in designing cultural spaces

Always, developments carried out in human cultures and society variations will show the most noticeable and most important images of itself as city appearances and urban buildings. In different historical eras, best human culture parades in all aspects are quite reflected in architectural visage of each region. Therefore, the mission for architecture in this respect as expressive language of arts, is that with nobility and identity hidden in its soul, in addition to paying attention to performance and technical issues, as well as psychology, nobility, and identity of this land and common heritages joining them, it should have a different look (Qasri, 2003: 69).

To create an architectural work conforming to culture, therefore, the designer must know the background of effect and then start the design. With this look for achieving nobility and cultural identity under discussion a space has to be designed that has solidified this trait in itself, and context-oriented culture well displays this trait. Using context-oriented and region-oriented patterns help us in achieving this aim. By the preceding analyses the necessity of using regional patterns is justified and therefore, this study considers it appropriate to return to context-oriented methodologies.

A look at context-oriented architecture and its principles

In general, accurate time of starting context-oriented and tradition-oriented movements is not determinable. It is certain that these movements have emerged following modernist problems. Modern architecture proceeded with disregard toward traditions and environmental properties and indifference toward people's tastes and interests, and these movements formed gradually in response to modern approaches (Bahraini, 2013:145).

Bahraini et al have assumed two principal properties for these movements including criticizing modernity, and relying upon tradition

One of the main psychological inclinations in region-oriented architecture is architecture with people or architecture without architect. In the book "House, Form & Culture", Rapoport uses the terms people's architecture, preliminary and native architecture for this type of architecture. He believes that monuments belong to "splendid architectural traditions" and they have formed to be a visage of the authority of the noble in the eyes of public or to stimulate the respect of elite architects

and evaluators regarding the architect's art and the delicate taste of builder. However, an architecture belonging to people's tradition, is a direct interpretations of needs, values, tendencies, and instincts of a tribe in the language of that nation's material culture (Rapoport, 2009, 67). Many postmodernist orientations also have an eye on context-oriented and region-oriented architecture. Context-oriented architecture such as postmodern architecture is critic of modern trends. However, a major difference dominates between postmodernism and context-orientalism. Postmodernist thought and alongside it, postmodernist architecture, are logical and natural results and a necessity of modern thought.

One of the orientations of postmodernist architecture entitled "critic region-orientation" has been recognized. Frampton believes that criticizing region-orientation must de-structure universal global culture that is necessarily inherited (Ellin, 1996).

This group prioritizes location to space and tend to provide small-scale schemes. Orwell Buhigas Ricardo Buhigas, Tadao Ando and Mario Bo are among architects that are positioned in this category. Douglas Kelbaugh has suggested five principles for criticizing region-orientation:

- Sense of place: criticizing region-orientation starts with interest in place. In this view, attention to local climate, topography, vegetation, construction materials, and construction methods are on agenda.
- Sense of nature: since nature is qualified for preliminary principles of vividness, beauty and durability, it can be used as an appropriate pattern in design.
- Sense of history: deep study of history with the aim of achieving design principles and not only for copying elements and shapes, is one of the principles of criticizing region-orientation.
- Sense of handcrafts: in this principle, reducing the quality of structures for achieving maximum efficiency and spending the lowest cost that was one of the principles of modern architecture have been criticized. Contrarily, avoiding bulk constructions and trending toward building structures with special and unique properties, has been provided as a solution.
- Sense of boundaries: this sense has been codified regarding human need for physical and tangible territories with the aim of enforcing limitations on places and human activities. Using this principle, human scale is regarded in spaces and skeletal territories form (Douglas, 2002).

It should be noted in the following sections that context-oriented architecture offers a depository of possessions that although rejected by modern architects by special international styles, it is used by context-oriented, tradition-oriented, region-oriented, and postmodern trends in different respects.

Khuzestan's architecture and comments thereof

Numerous studies have been carried out regarding the architecture of Khuzestan and especially Ahwaz, with the major ones being placed in 3 categories. Part of these studies are theoretical and include patterns as well as semantic, cultural, and social concepts. The second category are empirical and practical proceedings such as rural heritage museums or buildings designed by architects with region-oriented tendencies, they have the capability of being recognized. The third category is civil and social proceedings that has mainly been carried out by journalists, intellectuals, and the lettered of Ahwaz. Generally, points that can be derived from these studies involve the following:

- Cities and urban spaces symbolize thoughts, customs, and people's relations and interactions over many years.
- In the city of Ahwaz, after the Islamic revolution until the end of Iran-Iraq war, historical context were not only forgotten due to special economic and political conditions, but also due to the inhabitation of war victims and immigrants they faced serious social, cultural, and skeletal crises.
- Attention to the historical background of Ahwaz that includes two eras of first era that is in fact the hidden history of the city, and it has no records except in historical texts and some special skeletal symbols (such as Karun Hills, remainders of old dams, etc.) and spans over Sassanid Era to the sixth Hijri century, and the second era that is today's skeleton of the city of Ahwaz, which is indebted to the evolutions of this era that started from the middle Qajar era (about 120 years ago) and continues until today.
- Accurate study on historical passages and homes in terms of history, architecture, etc. and also accurate recording of these monuments in the list of Khuzestan's cultural heritages
- Like other items consistent with original patterns in historical contexts and following the past (but not merely imitating), buildings should be designed based on requirements of contemporary life.

Architectural building design characteristics according to context-oriented architecture

It seems that the relationship between environment and natural human environment is key to understanding context-oriented architecture. Architecture, which is realized away from specialties is accountable for fulfilling a society's needs in relation to natural factors or spiritual demands of humans, because their participation is born in solution and in practice and gets inspired by their daily life and, away from showing off, it gets stabilized. This is the reason why context-oriented architecture has preserved its evidence-constructed characteristic without cycle and away from certain form and model. In the following section, a couple of important principles will be mentioned according to context-oriented architecture.

- Definition of architectural space, relationships and building's usages that are a function of user needs, become a common identical response to all requirements and architectural components acquire a durable shape and definition.
- As definitions and relationships of architectural space become stable, their quality improves and architectural parts and elements get close to optimal stable (balanced) dimensions and sizes.
- As shape, relationships and dimensions of architectural spaces and elements become determined, establishment and durability methods of buildings also evolve and building construction proceeds by accumulating materials toward proper, optimal, timely, and legitimate use of materials.
- Following skeletal, conceptual, and structural evolution, arrays enter the field of architecture as complements, excellence aspect, and recognition aspect, thus leading to quality improvement and artistic value of construction and journey from accomplishment to beauty.
- Based upon intricacies that occur in concept and understanding of space and building construction as well as specialization in construction and related techniques, the need for presence of a wise skilled individual-architect- in the field of design and construction is felt.
- Despite identity and consistency, architectural construction must denote variety and diversity. This diversity and variety is the result of different shape and location of a building, economic state, and social category, profession and society needs, and taste of the architect.

- Architectural innovation is innovation in devising stable principles, development and adding to artifacts of the past and offering new applications for old concepts and durable norms (Hojjat, 2012: 58).

Conclusion

Finally, in response to the study's questions, it could be stated that a building can be related to culture-development according to its cultural identity and be a suitable place for addressing cultural activities organized according to native architecture, and thus, by introducing native and regional culture to the public and attempting to promote it, that becomes closer to its identity and defines context-oriented architecture in Ahwaz in addition to its originality and identity of this region.

Ahwaz's architecture has the potential of being used in four parts of patterns, form inspirations, ornamental details and constructions. Thus proper attention to the way of dealing with this topic is highly important. In this regard, attention to the height of built constructs adjacent to historical buildings, modern buildings' adherence to materials used in valuable works within the context, attention to skyline of a district, etc. can exhibit beginning of architectural resuscitation of Ahwaz in contemporary and prospective eras.

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