

Architecture from the Perspective of Sustainability of Cultural Identity and its Impact on Mental Health: A case study among Iranian houses

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Abstract

Nowadays mental health is one of the noteworthy dimensions by the people and also one of the main goals of the World Health Organization. The decrease in the mental health has occurred based on multiple reasons as one of the arisen problems in this century. Although, the World Health Organization is figuring on the solving this issue, the main part of this issue still requires more debate and analysis. On the other hand, this issue is less addressed in the researches and also there is not enough attention toward increasing mental health and stabilizing it. In most of the essays there are some sorts of solutions which are referring to a cure after happening this mental damage while, it is possible to figure out a solution for preventing this important modern issue which is preventable. Therefore, a sort of architecture which is connected to the life of people and also is a part of this life would have an undeniable effect on stabilizing the mental health. The cultural identity of the society could be considered as an important factor for the mental health of each person. This study aims to investigate the role of architecture from the perspective of cultural sustainability of community in improving and creating mental health of each person and preventing mental damages and focuses on designing based on cultural needs of the society. In this study it is tried to present sustainable houses as a solution to prevent mental damages by induction of culture. This study is based on library studies with applied research method and analytical -descriptive approach. This study evaluates the reasons for the impact of culture on people's daily life in order to maintain mental health. Also, the role of sustainability in attaining this goal will be studied. At the end, the cultural principles and patterns will be provided to improve the mental health of Iranian houses. The study results show that traditional Iranian-Islamic architecture which shows itself in the culture has a sort of special characteristics which is called sustainability.

Keywords: sustainability, traditional house, mental health, sustainable culture, Iranian architecture

Introduction

By passing time the mental health of the society is getting more importance each day so that, the world health Organization has discussed this issue to find ways and solutions to increase the mental health by analyzing it. Nowadays, mental disorders and depression are increasing in the society due to different factors and the importance of mental health has been neglected. One of the main causes of mental disorders is the cultural crisis in the society. This crisis is the result of misunderstanding the original meaning of the culture. Thus, the mental health and culture both could be considered as two important facts. UNESCO defines culture in this way: "a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group that in addition to art and literature encompasses lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs." but not a set of pure pretensions. Therefore, the culture is a part of the people and the lack of that is felt like a lost value by the people which results in the social disorders and depression. It can be concluded that culture is a sort of existence that is tangled by human life and is a part of life and the lack of it has shaken the existence of human being. Culture is also one of the requirements

for the growth and evolution of human beings (Eames, 2006). One way to prevent depression is a sustainable operation to attain the identity and culture which are familiar to people. This sustainable operation could be found in the discussion of the sustainability. In fact, sustainability is for meeting the basic needs in order to spread the opportunities for attaining a better life. Sustainability is presented by the world from three important dimensions and social sustainability could be considered as the most important dimension for human being. Social sustainability can open a path to induce the culture and preserve this value.

On the other hand, a sort of tiresome tedium has infected the civil architecture. Thus, humans feel more depressed and tired instead of feeling secure and serene (Poormokhtar cited in Makinejad, 2014:34). This research will study the effect of culture on the house to create relaxation and serenity for the people. It will also study the role of sustainable architecture in providing mental health based on cultural needs of the society. In addition, this essay will try to find answers to the following items:

- Role of culture in providing mental health and serenity for the people.
- The impact of sustainable architecture on mental comfort of the people.
- The effect of the social sustainable architecture on preserving and inducing noble social culture.
- Studying noble culture patterns in the architecture of Iranian traditional houses to create cultural sustainability.

Culture in line with mental health

Mental health means to have a healthy feeling to deal with the daily stresses which could be influenced by financial, work-related, domestic and environmental anxieties which happen in the daily life. Researchers have defined 12 important subcategories for mental health which include sense of value, sense of control, beliefs, romantic feelings, problem solving, creativity, sense of humor, nutrition, sports, self-care, stress management and finally cultural identity (Myers and Sweeny, 2000). These 12 factors are considered as needs of people to attain serenity and cultural identity is involved in this category.

On the other hand, in 1995 UNESCO defined the cultural dimension for development of the society as a collection of materialistic, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions which gives identity to the societies (UNESCO, 1995) and culture includes mode of life, human basic rights, traditions, and beliefs. Also, these factors are considered as the strong stands for cultural identity. In fact, these values, beliefs and identity are related to the culture and the mental health (New Zealand ministry of culture, 2002). The both individualistic and collective welfare of people are connected to the values from cultural and national identity (New Zealand ministry of culture statistics, 2005). National identity is a sort of a sense of commitment and people belongs to a collection of national ties (culture) of the society which cause unity and solidarity (Amir Maleki, 2009:160)

Using traditional experiences for developing might be necessary for each person of the society and it could lead to physical, intellectual, social and mental development. This practice not only could be affective for the present time but also it could have a worthy role for the required characteristics in the future (UNESCO, 2008:111). In fact, the culture of each society defines the approach of that society to the future and that is what humans are willing to transfer to the future generations (Duxbury and colleagues, 2007) and it is the best tool for attaining mental balance.

Culture in line with social sustainability

Building a sustainable culture requires reviving social sense and relation and combination with natural environment (Sayadi and Madahi, 2011:74). Therefore, it is possible to get closer to the sustainability of the society. Sustainable societies create an environment which is exhilarating,

inspiring and persistent. These societies also create a sense of attachment and belonging within the people because they respect the history and the past (Beatley and Manning, 1997). In order to consider a society sustainable, all the dimensions of sustainability (economical, environmental and social) which are in the center of attention by the world should be improved in the society. For this reason, Newman and Kenworthy believe that sustainability is a process not a final product (Newman & Kenworthy, 1999). From the other side, culture has an important effect on these three dimensions which are observable in figure 1.

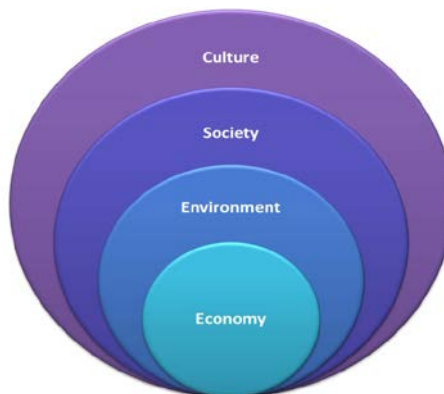


Figure 1. Relationship between culture and three principles of sustainability (UNESCO, 2008:95)

As it seems in figure 1, culture is effective in three dimensions of society, environment and economy. But the highest influence of culture could be related to the society. In 1999 a person called Bourn defined the sustainability as the requirements of survival for "identifying cultures" of different tribes and considered the relationship between social sustainability and culture as an important relationship. Also, culture was defined as a factor for sustainability of the society (Bourn, 1999). For this reason, the societies with social sustainability were considered as empowered societies in facing changes and adaptation with different situations (Haghi & Zabihi, 2012:3). Thus, designing based on preserving and maintaining the culture could be advantageous in future and social sustainability leads to a sustainable life. Researchers have studied that those societies which attain social sustainability will obtain:

- Individual health including physical, mental and physiological
- The possibility to express the sense of identity via cultural heritage, art and culture.
- Enjoyment of the sense of belonging
- The opportunities to express creativity and enjoying the free time to meet mental needs
- Creating sense of security, freedom, etc. (Roseland, 2005)

From the other side, sustainable societies will cause:

- Life quality improvement, a sense of serene and mental health.
- Improvement in physical environment like parks and restoration of monuments.
- Building healthy societies for the people (Duxberry and colleagues, 2007:3)

According to this definition, culture slowly is emerged out of the territories of social sustainability. Due to the importance of this factor, figure 1 indicates taking effect from culture in three principles of sustainability. It was officially recognized a separate, distinct and an undeniable role for it in sustainable development (Duxberry and colleagues, 2007).

Four dimensions of sustainability

Mr. John Hawkes (2001) defined four dimensions of sustainability in this way (figure 2) in which all dimension are affecting each other.

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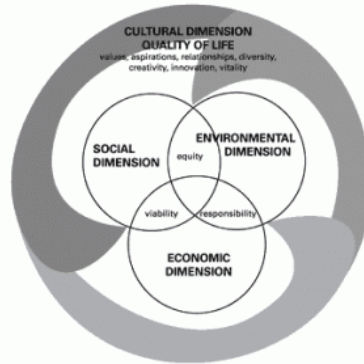


Figure 2. Four dimensions of sustainability (Hawkes, 2001)

He argues that government should create a framework to evaluate culture in environment, economy, society and operative programs in the cities (Hawkes, 2001). His model explains that culture has an important role in the buildings of cities which people are willing to live, work, and travel there. It will also lead to economic and social health

Developing the sustainability and mental health

Culture has an important role in sustainable development of the society, also a mean for people to adapt with the environment and create the needed security for the survival (Schusky & Cullbert, 1973:45). Sustainable development is looking for health development in different dimensions. The New Zealand ministry of culture believes that the government is bounded to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural health of the societies in present time and future. For this reason a model named health model is created that culture is one of its dimensions.



Figure 3. Four dimensions of health in sustainable communities (New Zealand ministry of culture, 2006:5)

This figure points that four factors of health and well-being should be created in the society for sustainable development. Based on figure 3, this result could be made that culture is one of the important dimensions of the mental health with other three dimensions and also by focusing on the relationship between culture and environment.

Recognizing the environment based on science and information that human obtains toward shapes, space, performance and the internal and external meaning of them is one of the first results of connection between human and environment. This cognition causes human to make different steps of connection including sense of identity, cheerfulness, sadness, pride, paltriness, alienation and so many other senses and mental connection with the environment that each of these senses is the result of relationship that principle and cultural value of human makes with the hidden or manifested values in the environment (Taghi Zadeh, 2002:66). Sense of identity or the unification of human with space and environment is one of the affecting methods on human (Pakzad, 1996). In a way that human seeks his identity in the identity of environment and considers the identity of the

nature as his own identity (Taghi Zadeh, 2002:67). Culture includes heritage and art and this could include community, language, ethnic, sports, diversity, place and space (like a created environment or a perspective) (New Zealand ministry of culture, 1995). In fact, architecture could be as an art which emerges its own culture in itself, so that by putting sustainable architecture and culture together, mental serenity in each person and also a sense of belonging to place and space would be provided thus, a long step in the relationship between men and environment would be taken. In other words, architecture is a skeleton that society, culture and nature (environment) are gathered as a whole unit in it and it is one of the main axes that meets human needs to have a shelter and artificial environment. Architecture will also make a close relation to the culture at the same time and as a social phenomenon it rises from the society and also affecting on it. In fact, architecture works as a mirror which reflects human thoughts regarding to space, aesthetic and culture (Nowruzi & Shayesteh, 2013:4). Also, we should know that architecture is a mission unit to honor ancient cultural values. Therefore, culture is counted as an identifier element in cultural structure. Also, it seems as assimilation between architecture and culture (Habib and colleagues, 2007:15). This designing in line with principles and cultural values has sustainability within itself and also it will be considered as a part of sustainability and by cultural support it will consider past as a part of present and the future (Duxberry and colleagues, 2007:7). Blankenship believes that in order to lead a design by the principles of the sustainability one should:

- Be aware of society and people's culture.
- Value the traditions and folklore and also consider its affection on modern designing.
- Give an image from the future to the other generations (Blankenship, 2005:25)

In the sustainable architecture people should be given an opportunity to fully express their abilities and in relationship with other people they attain the highest cognition of humanity, so that they could find their roots in the past and their connection to the future (Sayahi & Madahi, 1995). Architecture of sustainability which joins culture will be never forgotten and as an everlasting process it will last in the life of people and like traditional architecture it will preserve its durability. Because culture is the known idea in the mind of the people and also durable, traditional buildings attain sustainability due to this cultural principle. According to contemporary sustainable architecture, utilizing traditional design methods is desirable because historical experience has shown that traditional architecture in this area has been more successful to contemporary architecture. In addition, the presence of important cultural elements of traditional architecture in the environment as a part of local human memory creates a sense of belonging to space and serenity. In addition, the architecture of the past is significant for its close link with the body and human mind and also it is the manifestation of the ontology of that period of time and creates a space corresponding to the earthen-celestial human (Eftekhari Zadeh, 2004:6). Noticing and restoration of the traditional architecture is one of the necessities of contemporary architecture because the life, civilization and the culture of their life have emerged in it and also in order to attain a serene life it is necessary to get back to the values of meaningful life of the past and also update the architecture with the valuable Iranian traditional identity (Akrami & Zare, 2013:55).

From the other side, culture of the society is dealing with the life style, customs and beliefs of the people who live within it (Haghi & Zabihi, 2012:31). Thus, it can be emerged in the houses of each individual. Amos Rapoport, the author of the book of House, Form & Culture, considers socio-cultural factors as one of the most influential factors in the way of life formation and developing in the housing (Rapoport, 1969:2). On the other hand, the sustainability could be created by designing houses via creating noble culture. Doctor Chin argues that the first concern on the path of sustainable housing is to meet the needs of the people for the housing not to keep the environment.

However, sustainable housing should not be only to meet the primary needs but also to improve livability in the environment both indoors and outdoors.

Unfortunately, despite the brilliant and glorious history in architecture, we observe some sort of abnormal buildings in the recent years. Maki Nejad considers the today's chaotic architecture as the result of intellectual and cultural chaos. Talking about the past does not necessarily mean to repeat the past, but we mean to have the correct and new understanding approach of the past along with maintaining the identity and authenticity of Islamic art and architecture (Poormokhtar, 2014:33).

Iranian traditional houses

Coomaraswamy believes that tradition is bounded with anything with a divine origin, also includes all emanations crystallized in human form (Akrami, 2004:129). In the Islamic civilization, houses are formed based on serenity and stability and Allah has made for you a place of rest from your homes (Noble Quran, An-Nahl, verse 80). The first aim of building a house is to provide a place for the serenity and relaxation of human. Nowadays, some changes have happened in the concept of house and habituation because of a twist in lifestyle. Therefore, the concept of house as a semi-natural product to meet material and spiritual needs gave its place to the concept of housing unit as a non-natural mechanical product. In a way that habitation with the concept of serenity has been replaced with habitation with the concept of residence (Nasr, 2008:37). Thus, house architecture is getting far away each day from the culture and human values and today's housing is out of values. For this purpose, people should try to understand the meaning of habitation as relaxation and they should also recognize their needs from the cultural and natural point of view so that, they could meet them. Consequently, by bringing Iranian traditional houses into focus it is possible to regain the concept of housing once again and use it in today's design. In order to make houses relaxing, traditional architect employed multiple measures (Farzan Tabar, 1993:36). Therefore, they brought a mixture of aesthetic including the contexture of the house (bricks), form (simple geometry) and tradition together (Haghi & Zabihi, 2012:34).

Culture in Iranian traditional housing

Some of the common characteristics of Iranian traditional housing are presented in Table 1. In fact, these characteristics shape the roots of Iranian culture and they are also unchangeable fundamentals of culture. On the other side, culture is formed by the religion and religious beliefs, climate, national norms, etc. which are coming below. Diba believes that "we should know that without learning the traditional roots in the monuments and the professional science of the today's world it is not possible to produce a good work. Therefore, a framework is needed and the most important part of this framework is a bed from which the framework attains its cultural characteristics. Diba also believes that those who turn their backs to their noble culture and look toward Iranian culture from the modernism point of view they are totally wrong. A human who lost his cultural and spiritual roots, will be wandering in the world (Diba, 1994:22)

Diba believes that Iran's traditional and Islamic architecture is a reflection of a persistent idea of an archetype that connects the past, present and future through a constant image with an essence beyond the time. In fact, past architecture is considerable for its relation with body and mind of the human, it is also an emergence of ontology in that period of time which corresponds with the earthen-celestial human (Eftekhari Zadeh, 5). Since sustainability has all the universal characteristics in meeting both mental and environmental needs of human, it is possible to attain a sort of design including the public desire and also with the high lightened presence of culture in every dimension of it.

Table 1. Sustainable principles of Iranian culture in Iranian traditional house building

Unchangeable principles of Iranian culture in traditional homemaking			
Cause	Advantage	Application	
<p>Lighting :Reducing light and gradual increase in it in the different steps of entrance to the yard(attracting people to inside)</p> <p>Corridor:</p> <p>Preparing the visitor to visit the residents</p> <p>Serenity of residents and keeping the privacy</p> <p>Indirect sight from the entrance to the inner space</p> <p>Yard:</p> <p>Keeping passers look away from the inner space</p> <p>gardens and pools to resemble heaven</p> <p>Facade and entrance: retreatment of the facade from the alley(non-rights abuses)</p> <p>Indirect connection with outside</p> <p>Decorated by lotus tree (symbol of life)</p> <p>Vestibule</p> <p>A platform for rest</p> <p>A ceiling for coverage human height</p> <p>Induction of unity to multiplicity: the corridor and vestibule</p> <p>There is value in the backend (environmental factors And geographically) central courtyard induction center</p> <p>Respect for private life and privacy</p> <p>Cultural role</p> <p>Breathing and lighting performance -</p> <p>Connecting home spaces</p> <p>Family interactions</p> <p>Proximity to nature</p> <p>Keeping the problems out of house</p> <p>Mental security</p>	<p>-Security</p> <p>-Serenity</p> <p>-Privacy</p>	<p>-Separating inner space of the house from the outer</p>	privacy
<p>Creating sustainability in traditional architecture</p> <p>Respecting divine gifts</p> <p>Pointing to the existing spirituality in Iranian culture</p>	<p>-Mental comfort</p> <p>-Holiness in Quran</p>	<p>-Plants and trees in the garden</p>	Linking with nature
<p>Emergence of divine and intellectual thoughts</p> <p>Symbol of integral of art and wisdom</p>	<p>-Disciplining spaces</p> <p>-Suitability</p>	<p>-Geometrical spaces in the house</p>	Geometry
<p>Creating open space</p> <p>Instilling a sense of continuity in humans (inside and outside space in horizontal infinite)</p>	<p>- No limits in space</p> <p>- Survival</p>	<p>Continuity of inner and outer space of the house</p>	Transpare ncy and sustainabi lity
<p>Creating a sense of spiritual greatness in man</p> <p>The combination of simplicity and purity of home decorations</p>	<p>-Encouraging to understand inner world</p>	<p>- Decoration and design elements at home</p>	Mystery and ambiguity

Returning to inside for more understanding	-Creating curiosity		
Uniqueness and centrality of god Dealing with chaos and confusion Moderate and thoughtful look of the Muslims (who try to maintain a balance between different weights in the range of the visual appearance of the house.) Visual comfort Visual strength: the size of a brick surfaces to windows Creating a harmony, order and rhythm from divisions	-Visual comfort - A sense of moderation -Inducing discipline -Symbol of unity -Suitability -General acceptance of symmetry	- In view of the house -3door, 5 door and 7-door -Proportionality of the porter surface with the windows	Symmetry
Creating different spaces such as halls, rooms deflector, alcove Making balance between meeting residents needs	-Balancing -Meeting human need -Meeting climate need	- Harmonious balance between the built and natural environment - Creating different functions responsive to climate and human need	Balance
Instilling religious concepts (struggle of light and darkness as a result of the reflection of light in space) Creating a spiritual space through the reflection of the sky in water Instilling the image of Eden gardens in the water	-Beauty -Lighting for space -Inner peace	-Reflection of the sky and the trees in the pool -Reflecting light to the mirrors via the pool	Reflection
Making diversity Preventing tiresome	-Sense of cheerfulness -sense of diversity --meeting needs -serenity	-Different usage of the rooms	Different performances

From Ahmadi's point of view, Iranian traditional architecture due to creating rich and noble Iranian sustainable culture has a valuable background to be used in designing modern homes. Also, Iranian culture could be the potential of vesting proposed sustainable architecture concepts. By maintaining main factors and basics of culture, a soulless house could be transformed to a dynamic architecture.

Conclusion

So, it can be concluded that if we notice the nature and the essence of traditional architecture, we could see the potentials to meet peoples need in it. In this study we figure out the influence of deep culture on mental health to create sustainable architecture and also home as the most important place for a human to live can influence mental health of individual and could help them in meeting their needs. According to the mentioned characteristics of noble culture in Iranian traditional homes, it can be understood that architecture has been trying to help humans to attain perfection in the presence of mental comfort. Therefore, architecture should try to reach to sustainable housing by inducing the culture so that, a big step in reaching the sustainable society would be taken by

designing with a sustainable approach and using cultural patterns which could provide mental comfort for the people and in addition to health and well fare it will lead to the sustainability of the society and returning to Iranian identity.

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