

Urban Public Spaces: Needs and Obstacles

Case Study: Vali-ye Asr Crossroad intersection in Tehran

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Abstract | As a social being, humans gain many of their abilities from society and the public. In the sense that public spaces in the city are the field of acquiring skills, training, and practicing social behaviors for human beings. Meanwhile, education plays an important role in the development of human beings in the process of socialization. The process of socialization begins in childhood and accompanies the man throughout his life. Of course, it should be noted that the society must be prepared to socialize and internalize values towards a person's desire for socialization.

Vali-ye Asr intersection, the intersection of the two main streets of Vali-ye Asr and Enghelab, is the centerpiece of the city of Tehran. Given its unique location, this place has been one of the most significant, acceptable and lively public spaces in Tehran, but with all its potentials today, this place has not been able to appear in its main role. So what obstacles prevent this unique point to act as a modern urban center?

While addressing the process of human socialization, this article, explores its role in the public spaces of the city. In the next section, it studies the Vali-ye-Asr intersection as an area with a high potential for becoming a communal space and in the end, the deterrent factors against the transformation of the Vali-ye-Asr cross-section into an active and high-quality urban community space.

Keywords | Social space, public space, Vali-ye-Asr crossroad intersection, socialization process.

Humans and the process of socialization

Human being is a social creature. The deep meaning of this proposition is that without any social relationships human beings would not be the same as we know today. The process of socializing a person is a very important and contemplative issue. Today, this process is not called "human conformance to the society", because this interpretation of socialization is formal, compulsory, and mechanical, and hence denied (Coen, 2003). Human beings are affected by education from

the very beginning of their lives, and much of this training is done in the area of the individual's communication network with others in the "society" where human growth and development can be established. This phenomenon is called the process of "socialization". Therefore, the individual character or human identification is formed in the process of active and positive exchanges with the community and its realities (Sotoudeh, 2008). Socialization is part of the process of social education that ultimately leads to the development of human beings in the form of social relations. Social education can be divided into two broad categories: "formal education", program-based, compulsory and based on specific goals,

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and "informal learning", optional, non-planned, and based on general goals. Typically, training that is optional is more effective and lasting. Informal social education provides the basis for understanding the values of the community, the favorable social conditions, as well as the norms and rules of the society and also the social roles. This proves that people how to occupy certain bases in the community and play an effective role within them. Such as gender, age, occupation and group roles. Social education is usually accomplished through a complex network of relationships and its various elements through trial and error using the systematic method of punishing or rewarding, paying attention to the model and dealing actively with others, creating expectation structures, social comparing trends, and etc (La Belle, 1982). The result of this process can be the internalization and institutionalization of personality, norms and social values, as well as acceptable rules and norms, through the processes of socialization, learning and playing different roles.

"Emile Durkheim" believes that society is prior to the individual as an individual life is in fact, the product of mutual activities that are shaped in the society. That is why, if we keep the human child away from the community (as seen in the case of two Indian children who lived in the forest and with animals for ages), there would be no similarities between them and others. The socialization process makes it possible for the individual to be integrated with the body of the society through education, learning and practicing to be law-abiding, discipline, programming, respecting communal rights, and creating a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the environment and the society. This process leads to social order and stability. But, at the same time, it creates the logical and positive changes in social conditions. In this way, continuous, conscious and optional interactions between the individual and the community makes the of the stagnation and dynamism process of the society possible at the same time.

Exposing individuals to positive and constructive social interactions makes it possible to predict and make pre-assumptions and hypothesis for the individual. Making pre-assumptions and hypothesis is important and crucial in life, because on this basis, one can guess the consequences of a particular behavior or speech in the community, and with this awareness it plays its role well and has a successful interaction with the society and the environment. In such a way that it can take the most advantage and spend the lowest cost. This, of course, implies that the individual has found himself qualified to accept rewards or punishments as well as to tolerate the responsibilities of accepting the value system, norms and social constraints in an internalized way. Thus, the constructive interaction of the individual with the community provides a background in which social life is formed as best as possible, while it organizes, deploys and institutionalizes the necessary changes in a timely manner (NezhadEbrahimi & Farshchian,2014).

Through the internalization of the system and the behavioral, value, and normative pattern, and with the knowledge gained through this process, the people of the community will be able to refer to this system and cognitive pattern, when facing social phenomena, even new phenomena. By reacting to the normative internal model and matching the specific phenomenon with it, as well as using their rationality and logic, people can make the right reaction. However, people learn the control of emotional intelligence, and timely utilization of reason and logic largely from the environment and society in which they live in. One even learns the majority of his/her imaginations of other people, the community, and the universe from the society. Certainly, the power and courage of questioning and criticizing, decision making, creativity, and discovery can also be considered as part of the social teachings. Therefore, it can be said that man can realize his/her human, social and cultural life through a systemic confrontation with fellow-creatures in the society, while at the same time benefiting from the opportunities that society provides for personality self-actualization and life skills. The process of socialization begins at childhood, but it develops through the whole period of life. The most basic socialization part occurs during childhood, in which a child learns reading and interpreting events, language and using it, discourse, social skills, accepting and applying values and norms, interaction, emotional experience, imagination of the individual of him/herself and the community and etc. In this way, a person learns personal and social life, building his/her character and the ability to play a role in the society (Mansouri & Gharehbaglou, 2011).

In addition to these propositions, one should mention another important point, which is that, in contrast to the intrinsic tendency of man to socialize, it is necessary for the environment and society to also tend to the socialization and internalization of values and norms, otherwise there will be a contradiction that society itself will become a barrier and obstacle against the process of socialization. The result of such a situation will be the formation of great dilemmas for the individual and the community. Urban public spaces play a decisive role in this regard.

The process of socialization and the role of urban public spaces in it

So far we have found the importance of the socialization process of the individual and its consequences. Socialization occurs in an environment that includes the home and the entire world. Urban public spaces are one of the most important environments where a person can immerse him/herself in it, while being free from formal trammels, and place itself among the caravan of human life. David Harvey believes that cities are reproduced in public spaces, and human beings re-define their social "self" continuously in these spaces.

After the emergence of the Pahlavi regime in Iran and the regime's attempt to make radical changes in social and cul-

tural structures, urban areas started to break apart and by relying on the essentials of modern life, it was decided to replace it with the city in its modern sense and to form a new phenomenon called citizen. Something that never happened (Bemanian, 2006).

Urban public spaces provide the context for the reproduction of space, language, culture, and transformation (Articles about the world of language / culture). The city is the manifestation of social communications and the platform for the realization of the majority of social interaction. It is always said that the city is alive and there is a continuous and multicultural discourse between the city and its inhabitants. The city being alive in itself creates a context in which the perception of urban space is realized by its inhabitants through the formation of experiences, and cultural and social accumulation (Khastoo & SaeediRezvani, 2010). On the other hand, citizens simultaneously plays an actor and as a spectator and it is these public urban spaces that create the background for the formation and experience of social interactions and social and civil life for the people. However, apparently, urban public spaces are environments for leisure, pleasure, fun, and joy. An interesting feature of the urban public spaces is that the citizen center them according to their interests, beliefs, expectations, roles, situations, believed norms, and values. Factors that are based on variables such as, economic, social, ethnic, religious, educational, class, race, and family education position (Qanbaran & Jafari, 2014). The presence of this diverse and varied range of people together in public spaces is an important and effective phenomenon.

Because of the nature of urban spaces and as they are open to all groups and classes of any sex, race, religion, range of political tendencies, social and economic class, education, and so on public spaces create a kind of democratized environment. In this way, the urban public space becomes a common ground in the social life of all citizens and flourishing of social and collective life. Therefore, the more an urban space is able to absorb different ranges and classes of people, the more complete and efficient it is. On the other hand, the discovery or creation of such spaces in the urban environment will be one of the most important achievements of urbanism, both in the planning and the design field.

"Christopher Alexander" believes that people living in cities will reach the social contacts they need anyway. Because one cannot easily prevent the social instinct of people from seeing others and also being seen by the others in urban public spaces (Behzadfar & Tahmasebi, 2013). This matter is important because the acquisition of knowledge and social maturity, as well as the attainment of high levels of culture and civility, are dependent on the exchange and interaction of knowledge, information and experiences of life with others. It is therefore seen that this interaction is shaped according to the existing situations and conditions, in a variety of public spaces (formal, semi-informal, informal); (Ibid).

Tehran's Vali-ye-Asr intersection and its position as a public urban space

Tehran, with the population of more than 8 million, is the largest city in Iran and one of the largest cities in the world. Before Qajar era public urban spaces weren't built with purpose of interaction and exchange of information and general knowledge on various aspects of collective life. The narrow streets in old textures did not provide much space and opportunity for a broad-based social relationship. The traditional city was divided into semi-self-sufficient sections called the neighborhood, rather than a general tendency to the overall urban space and, accordingly, social interactions were shaped at the same level. Inhabitants of cities in Iran, are "Mahal-e-vand" (neighborhood inhabitants) rather than citizens. Admittedly, the well-defined and institutionalized definition of this trend realized the level and limit of collective actions. However, spaces such as mosques, public baths, markets, caravansaries, cafes, zurkhan-e (a place for traditional wrestling), etc. could have somewhat filled the gap due to the lack of public spaces in the city. The balance and equilibrium that was achieved, helped the continuation of the collective life (Pourahmad & Pourahmad, 2014).

The Vali-ye-Asr intersection of Tehran is formed from the junction between the two main streets of Tehran, that are the Enghelab and Vali-ye-Asr streets (Fig. 1).

The location of these two streets in Tehran's street network is strategic. Both streets are unique due to their length and the land uses deployed therein, as well as the historical incidents and events which occurred in them. Enghelab street is actually a corridor that connects the west to the east and Vali-ye-Asr street somehow connects the old town of Ray to the northern region of Tehran, Shemiran (Mansouri & Atashinbar, 2014).

In addition to the historic and geometric location of Vali-ye-Asr and Enghelab streets in the general area of Tehran, several studies have shown that Vali-ye-Asr intersection is the centerpiece of Tehran's spatial center by connecting the East-West and the north-south regions of Tehran. Geometrically, this point is close to the center of Tehran's map. The city's public transportation network is also linked to one of the two main streets in different locations.

Vali-ye-Asr intersection has its own special history. According to Abdullah Mostofi's writings, Reza Khan built the Pahlavi or Vali-ye-Asr street to link the Sa'ad Abad Marble Palace. Pahlavi Street turned to its present form during the years 1953 to 1976. Making shops and restaurants, and cafes that were shaped like western ones, turned this street into a recreational space. Renaming this street from Pahlavi to Mosaddegh and from Mosaddegh to Vali-ye-Asr over the years and political developments in Iran is the evidence of the importance of this street to urban management (Ibid). The Vali-ye-Asr intersection; the intersection of the two main streets in Tehran, by the names of Vali-ye-Asr and Enghelab, is a prominent urban node in this city.

The Vali-ye-Asr intersection can potentially be one of the most



Fig. 1: The location of Valiasr intersection. Source: Authors, based on googleearth.com.

important, engaging, vibrant, attractive, efficient and effective public space in the whole city of Tehran, due to its geographical, historical, spatial, functional, social, political and psychological status.

Obstacles against the formation of a modern urban space at Vali-ye-Asr intersection in Tehran

Although potentially the Vali-ye-Asr crossing, has all of the facilities and amenities for becoming a powerful and effective public urban space, but at the moment, such a role has not been assigned to it. In many countries around the world, we can see similar things which in exceptional situations such as this one, urban managers and planners benefit from the invisible opportunity and hidden treasure towards shaping a very efficient, lively and unique urban environment. Among the similar spaces in the world that have been successful, the Rotterdam Theater Square (Habibi & NoormohammadBeig, 2012) and Potsdamer-Platz in Berlin can be mentioned.



Fig. 2: A crossing pedestrian after the construction of underpass. Source: www.media.isna.ir.

In this way, the opportunity to form a vibrant and attractive urban space in the Vali-ye-Asr intersection, has been taken from it. The main reasons for such an incident can be summarized as follows:

1. Lack of citizenship morale in residents of Tehran and the permanent encounter of the morale and culture that are not adapted with the modern urban culture. As a result, there is no specific demands for the formation of semi-formal and informal urban public spaces. This morale still continues despite the recent measures taken by the municipality to close the intersection on pedestrians in the area (Fig. 2).
- 2) Disagreement between inhabitants and management of Tehran city in the definition of the Vali-ye-Asr intersections a rich and valuable public urban space (The explanation is that, despite many attempts in the past years, urban management has never been able to impose a necessary order on the situation dominant on this intersection.



Fig. 3: Chaotic moves of riders and pedestrians despite separating by municipality. Source: www.media.isna.ir.

This space has always been full of chaotic and unplanned moves that have caused heavy traffic in this area (Figs. 2 & 3).

3 - The security perspective in Tehran's city management, which became more prominent after events in the 2009 elections, tried to occupy and deploy the use of these spaces to minimize the presence of residents or turn it into a controlled presence instead of expanding and promoting urban public spaces and passing them on to the people.

4. The lack of required knowledge about urban public spaces and their necessity for a civilized, lively and informed urban community, and a creative and healthy urban identity among planning and design authorities and experts, as well as urban managers.

Conclusion

The community is a place for education and the formation of human social behaviors. Human beings grow in the society from their birth and learn how to interact with the others gradually. The informal education of society determines the role of each individual through the complex network of relationships between individuals and their various elements. These teachings lead to the internalization of personality and social norms through socialization and playing different roles. Urban public spaces are one of the most important environments in which the "socialization process" is taught freely

and without subordination. Public spaces create a democratic environment that is always open to the public, regardless of religion, race, attitude, social classes, etc. and transforms into the common point of life in all citizens, in which social maturity is achieved through the exchange of knowledge, information, social skills, and interaction with others.

Vali-ye-Asr intersection, is the intersection of two major streets of Tehran, by the names of Enghelab-e Eslami and Vali-ye-Asr, and one of the places that has been considered as one of the city's turning points throughout the history of Tehran and following the construction of these two streets and a place with a great potential for becoming a public and communal space. But factors such as the lack of the citizenship morale and modern urban culture among residents of Tehran, lack of mutual understanding among residents and urban managers in defining the efficiency of Vali-ye-Asr intersection, the security perspective of urban managers regarding this area and efforts to eliminate the physical presence of people in exchange for giving priority to cars in the city, and ultimately lack of adequate knowledge and literacy regarding urban and public spaces, characteristics and requirements of their existence for having a transcendental community among designers and managers, and despite the high space capability of this intersection, for becoming an example of the urban public space, it did not get the chance to actualize its abilities.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Barati, N. & Khademi, Sh. (2018). Public Spaces: Needs and Obstacles. *Journal of MANZAR*, 10 (44): 18-23.

DOI: 10.22034/manzar.2018.76860

URL:http://www.manzar-sj.com/article_76860_en.html

