

# Joining the Open Spaces of State Buildings to the Public Spaces in the City

**Abstract** | The urban landscape is the main influential factor in the citizens' mindset about a city. Communal spaces are the most significant subsidiaries of the urban landscape as a basis for the formation of citizens' collective memories, and almost all the criteria which qualify the urban life are visible in these spaces.

In this paper, the lack of public and collective spaces in the dense areas of Tehran's center has been emphasized. Then according to the principles of infill development, the suitable land use for endogenous development will be discussed. In the end, the area of administrative offices placed in the central contexture of Tehran is examined as an option based on endogenous development for infill development projects and shifting to semi-public space. Ownership, incompatibility in the usage of contiguous lands, and management practices in semi-public space are explored as three outstanding issues. In this research, descriptive and analytic methods and also library studies have been used.

**Keywords** | Urban landscape, Urban open space, Communal space, Semi-public space, Infill development.

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**Introduction** | The dense context of central Tehran is faced with drastic lack of communal and public spaces. Therefore, this dense contexture is gradually falling apart from its true concept as a city which consists of social life and the main purpose of its development is to supply human's personal and social needs. How a city defines the purpose of life, especially the forms of social and communal life, plays an important role in defining the human's logical needs and providing facilities to achieve it (Mansouri, 2007a: 50). A profound look on the city can lead us to percept the cultural and intellectual depth and concept of the city and to draw accurate plans for urban life.

To achieve the social targets in the city we need urban spaces in which the social life can take place. Although this space does not guarantee the formation of proper social interaction, but its absence may lead to weakening and inactiveness of social life of the city and thus the city's social capital will be lost gradually.

In fact, the social capital consists of the same norms and networks in a civil society which facilitates the cooperation and measures between citizens and institutions (Madanipour, 2003: 250). Therefore, it is essential to forecast the spaces which facilitate and promote such behaviors in a city, and such an important space cannot be easily removed from the city. Because gaining the opportunities to meet other people is a prerequisite for promoting informal and unforeseen social interaction (Lang, 1987: 179). Unfortunately, the lack of such spaces is strongly felt in the historical and dense contexture of Tehran's center. Therefore, paying particular attention to design and planning of communal and public spaces is essential and removing such spaces due to lack of land or limited economic means is not acceptable.

**Hypothesis** | Regarding to the shortage of land for designing public spaces in central Tehran and the principles of infill design for optimal use of urban spaces, and also considering the conditions of land ownership, the open spaces of governmental

administrative buildings have the potential to be developed as semi-public spaces in center of Tehran.

### Defining the Issue

Looking at Tehran, we find that the contexture of the city center has become very dense after the development of the city and the formation of uncontrolled changes; and most of the interior gardens and open spaces have been turned into intensive architectural buildings and the lack of public spaces is obvious.

One of the most important challenges for land use planning in dense contexture areas in Tehran is the shortage of land for developing the city and fulfilling the needs in modern urban life. In such areas, it is not possible to simply change the performance and land use. In contrast, the new requirements of society and the inefficiency of the present spaces make the need for new development in the city inevitable. Therefore, it is necessary to seek for unused lands for development in filled textures of the city. Endogenous development is an approach to fulfill this requirement. Infill development which perhaps is the simplest interpretation of endogenous development is trying to develop on this lands by considering undeveloped and abandoned lands in the city (Sharifian, 2010: 47). Infill development, in order to fulfill the new needs with a minimum damage to the present active spaces, should seek for those spaces considered as inefficient.

In fact, inefficient contexture is a part of the city such as abandoned and undeveloped lands which are not used or are allocated to inefficient and improper activities. For endogenous development, those areas of the city are proposed which have one or more following characteristics:

- Unused lands or lands with a low level of use;
- Built environments at the risk of decline;
- Areas with limited economic opportunities (Barakpour & Bahrami, 2011: 2).

In Tehran, there are many office areas with governmental ownership which have limited users. These areas are often turned to circulation spaces

for employees and clients of the offices. Therefore, when surrounding urban texture is strongly faced with the shortage of public open space, the potential of these spaces is not sufficiently utilized. Thus, the nonresidential areas in intensive contexture of the city can be accounted as such areas and shifting the use of them to semi-public space can be suggested as a good solution for the lack of public space in this region. Using these courtyards as public spaces provides us communal spaces at the heart of existing contextures in relation to adjacent parcels, and this kind of locating and situating is much more efficient than turning separated urban blocks to local parks. The main obstacles in the way of researching this project are changing the ownership of the courtyards and other inconsistency with contiguous land use and also the method of utilizing these lands and management of semi-public places which will be discussed here.

#### Public and Governmental Ownership

The existence of sufficient and suitable lands is prerequisites for the success of all projects urban development. Ownership of urban land consists of three groups: private, public and government. To carry out urban design and creation of public spaces in the city, municipalities need public lands. Due to the economic problems related to providing suitable lands, many urban development projects cannot be implemented.

As mentioned before, there are large areas of unused lands in central Tehran which surround the administrative buildings and make borders between the buildings and public spaces. Shifting their ownership from administrative to the public does not impose a large financial burden to the municipality, but yet, there are some legal and managerial complexities. In the following lines, how to use the public land will be discussed.

According to the municipality constitution, responsibility and authority of operation of public properties but not government properties is allocated to municipalities. Based on the concept

of government, as a legal entity for administration of justice and providing public services (Bagherian, 2007: 10), the government's assets actually belong to the public, but yet there are some differences between public and governmental ownership.

In the public domain, the government has the right of tenure but is not known as the owner of the property, rather is known as the representative of people who are the owners. Thus, the government does not have the right of handling the property because the property belongs to people. In fact, the government may only occupy the property as the representative of people.

Another difference between governmental ownership and public ownership is that government can spend its own properties however it considers expedient, but public properties must be used only for public benefit. In the other hand, the government cannot use it for a particular group (Livari, 2011: 42).

But the common point between public, government and municipality ownership is that the ownership is not a private and full ownership, in fact, is a kind of administrative ownership (Kamyar, 2010: 114).

Due to the differences between raised public and government ownership, in the cases which urban planning interfere the government's authority and ownership, it is necessary to determine the municipality position than other government organizations. Legally, the position of the municipality is between the public and private domains and is known as an independent authority in the government body. Such an approach has made a correlating and integrator role for municipalities in maintaining the balance of public and private interests consistently (Bagherian, 2007: 11).

Therefore, when approved urban planning is matched with administrative activities, the administration is obliged to take action in accordance with purchasing and seizing the land and property located in the plan (Kamyar, 2010: 193) and the administration is obliged to use the nationalized or public land if possible (Ibid: 191). Although the municipality and the government are two separate legal entities, but

as they both act upon public interest there is an appropriate interaction between them; and the land, as a means for urban development, is transferred to municipalities by the government.

Thus, public utilization of the open spaces of administrative buildings in central parts of Tehran does not impose a significant financial load on the municipality and is legally practicable if it does not interfere with the administrative activities in the site.

### Adjacent Incompatible Land Uses

What managers and government are concerned about in relation to integrating government departments to public space is the incompatibility of land use in two adjacent lands. Noise and irregularity caused by the presence of people at the entrance of offices may disrupt administrative activities. Thus the nature of this space and how to manage and control it is very important. In fact, these courtyards should be seen as border spaces between the public space and the private space (office use).

### Semi-Public Open Spaces

Open spaces within the urban texture have different functions, but the important point in open spaces is the capacity of public access to it. Thus, depending

on the degree of being public or private, open spaces can be divided into public open space, semi-public open space, and private open space (Mozaffar et al., 2013: 97). Government offices area can have a semi-public entity in the dense contexture of Tehran. Semi-public entity makes a sense of ownership for both employees and citizens (Lang, 1987: 171) to present freely in the location and work. Yet, having semi-open space entity leads to the controlled and regular presence of people and prevents any disturbance to the neighbor administrative activities. Both structural design and management of space utilization are essential in creating and define a semi-public space.

If the passage from the public space to the private sector is smooth and gradual, there a flexible border space will form between the two sectors which will define the semi-public space.

Flexible borders in the form of passing and transition, which are not completely private nor public, act as linking and integrator elements and facilitate the movement of users and activities between private and public sectors and between inside and outside (Gehl, 1987: 107).

Border-like and semi-public spaces have been formed in the terms of open and semi-open spaces



Pic 1: 60 Wall Street atrium administrative and commercial tower. An example of semi-public space in New York. Source: <http://apops.mas.org/pops/146>.





Pic 2: IBM atrium office building, New York. Border-like landscape of the atrium building has shaped a semi-public space that enriches life in the city. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/11883565@N02/3370968420>.

in cities all around the world. Plazas, indoor sidewalks, semi-open galleries between two blocks, plazas and atriums in the form of semi-open, which are known as semi-public spaces, make a border-like between the city and the adjacent land use and enrich the urban life. The 60 Wall Street Atrium Administrative and Commercial Tower (Pic. 1) and IBM Atrium Building (Pic. 2) which are both administrative buildings are good samples of semi-public spaces which play the role of the border between administrative space and the city. The

Metro Tech Center area (Pic. 3) is another urban plaza but the ownership and management of this plaza are allocated to the adjacent private sector while the people are able to use this space. In fact, these border-like spaces separate the two fields. Landscape making this space is shaped by both fields. The perspective of boundary defines the perception of distinguishing between public and private sector. The border forms behaviors through barriers, limits, and controls access and manages different groups of society. The interaction between



Pic 3: The area of Metro Tech complex offices. The border between the building and city has been shaped by defining the semi-public space. Source: <https://nyu.freshu.io/dennis-williams/the-mythological-tandon-school-of-engineering>.



Pic 4: the courtyard of the Jameh mosque of Tehran as a sample of semi-public space in Iran's architecture and urbanism. Source: <http://www.mehr.ir/photos/16522>.

two regions forms a civilized space which can enrich social life (Madanipour, 2003: 271).

Therefore the definition of signs of both public and private users, applying a proper landscape planning and a gradual transition between two areas form a flexible border between city and offices and suggesting management techniques and proper use may highlight its semi-public entity.

#### History of Semi-Public Space in Iranian Cities

Urban Landscape is an objective-subjective phenomenon which its dimensions are components of a unified fact which are not independent in the planning and action stages (Mansouri, 2007b: 7). Urban Landscape is not only known as an objective element which consists of natural components, but also is a subjective and cultural element which has been formed in people mindset by history, religious beliefs, myths, location, traditions, and so on (Mansouri, 2005: 73). Thus, planning and determining the space, borders and new urban areas should be proportionate to the mindset and culture of audiences. Exploring and using the historical space system of a city is necessary in defining a space system when expanding the city and redefining the boundaries of the historic in order to make new spaces fulfilling people desire. In fact, developing the

spaces and borders similar to the people's historical and collective memory leads to the development of meaningful boundaries and spaces for people and facilitates the management of these spaces.

To explore the background of Iran's semi-public spaces, a courtyard for mosques, schools, and inns inside the city should be considered.

Adam Metz argues that mosques yards with several entrances are known as urban spaces and particularly emphasizes on Jameh Mosque of Isfahan's yard and passage. Adam Metz points out the door of mosque courtyard which is not closed during the whole day and night and compares the Jameh Mosque with other forums in the city (Hemmati, 2013: 42). Similarly, Tavassoli believes that linking the mosques yards to the surrounding passages and courtyards of mosques is essential to considering the courtyards of the Mosques as urban space in Yazd. In brief, factors such as social interaction, ceremonies, and rituals, a plurality of inputs and connections with the surrounding passages make courtyard of the mosque as an urban space. For example, the courtyard of Grand Mosque of Tehran bazaar (Pic. 4) is like a passageway; or the courtyard of Imam Mosque at the entrance of Tehran bazaar is connected to Bein-Al Haramain and Shoemaker market in Bouzarjomehri Avenue with three entrances (Tavassoli, 1992: 46).





Pic 5: 60 Wall Street atrium administrative and commercial towers Ravagh-e Honar (the porch of art) is actually the courtyard of the academy of arts, a space with government ownership which is designed as a semi-public space and is used by citizens. Source: <http://www.pixeler.ir>.

The courtyard of the Grand Mosque in Semnan, Yazd, Natanz, Isfahan, Ardestan, Delhi, and Engelab courtyard of the shrine of Hazrat Masumeh all have the same feature. Porch Art, the Central Academy of Arts courtyard of the building is actually a semi-public space in the contemporary period is considered successful. Ravagh-e Honar (Porch of Art), located at the Central Academy of Arts courtyard (Pic. 5), is actually a semi-public space which is considered successful in the contemporary period.

Therefore, the presence of semi-public spaces for citizens is important for Iranian and similar spaces in Iran's and Tehran's background and historical memory have been identified.

### The Management of Semi-Public Spaces

Since growing demands is increasing the complexity of urban issues, in order to reduce the effects of urbanization and also to deal with the difficulties of managing cities urban management system is seeking for the ways of facilitating the city affairs. One of these ways is to take the advantage of public participation and neighborhood management, so that people in the formal groups as Neighborhood Council will be able to cooperate in decision making and planning with government at local level, and also monitor and influence on events occurring in

public and semi-public spaces.

Neighborhood management approach is based on the sound urban governance. This approach is one of the most significant approaches to the urban management and calls for interaction between government institutions, civil society and the private sector to improve cities' management. In fact, this is a driven process by the government but progresses in partnership with the private sector and civil society. Participation and effective engagement of three sectors are essential for the achievement of human development. Neighborhood management is a relatively new approach for improving public services. In its simplest form, neighborhood management is a kind of communication between local communities and local service providers at a local level to deal with local problems and improve local services. Local management is formed based on citizen responsibility, without focusing and a sense of belonging. (Meshkini, 2013: 33).

Since the nature of semi-public spaces and particularly government offices area have high diversity due to their links with public and private sector around, and each issue related to these places has its own complexity, taking advantage of a local management model for the operation, planning, and management of such situations is appropriate.

**Conclusion** | One of the problems in the way of urban projects, located in central contexture of Tehran, is the lack of land with public ownership. Since in many cases the land is handling to municipalities by government in Tehran, and also in implementing approved planning, government is obliged to shift the government ownership to public ownership in a practicable low-cost way, the operation of the municipal from the area of government offices as an option based on endogenous development for infill development projects and changing the land to a semi-public space from the ownership perspective as possible.

Since the effective factors in the management and

exploitation of governmental building areas as semi-public spaces are variable in relation to the working conditions and local demands, benefiting from local management methods is considered an ingenious approach. Therefore, adopting various methods to utilize the space appropriate to the circumstances by local managers and administrators involved with the issue, these semi-public areas can be turn to live and evocative places yet compatible with adjacent land use. Also, due to the nature of semi-public space in Tehran in the past, such a space is defined for people; and hence, the design of such spaces in the center of Tehran will have fewer problems in terms of social acceptance.

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