

# Structural Principles and Frameworks of Iranian-Islamic Urbanization by Reviewing its Formation in Different Periods

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## Abstract

This paper aims to investigate and analyze the causes in the creation and development of the Islamic cities and plans to review the structure Iranian-Islamic urbanization and mentions its fundamental principles and formations. The study is based on documentary and analytical method. Several studies conducted in the cities of Islamic territory, but the aspects of these studies are not complementary and not much attention has been paid on the components of Islamic city. An important part of the conducted researches are mainly on describing the physical elements which constitute the Islamic city. In many of these studies only certain sections of history and urban areas has been introduced. On the other hand the framework of conducted researches on Islamic cities is largely influenced by the concepts and social, political, economic laws of western cities. The term Islamic city, shows socio-cultural identity and historical characteristics of its inhabitants. The physical space of most Islamic cities is affected by geographical and territorial characteristics. These cities has their own characteristics and unique patterns that can not be found in other Islamic cities all together. This indicates the existence of a common spirit which has been raised from divine school. Therefore, This article analyzes the causes and factors in development of Islamic cities by reviewing different periods in different centuries in Iran. It is hoped that this research could be a step forward in achieving the principles of the Iranian-Islamic city.

**Key words:** Islamic City, Urbanization, City Principal

## 1. Introduction

Islam is among the religions and schools of thought developed in urban environments, adopting a positive approach to urbanization. On the other hand, it tends to encourage community and gatherings, which cannot be indifferent to the issues related to cities. Moreover, it constitutes the expression of beliefs, ideals and cultural values of people, e.g. features, spaces and elements guiding people throughout their lifestyle, leaving an impact on the culture and behavior. Many researchers believe that Islam is the religion of city. A brief look at the Islamic teachings also stresses the fact that Islam revolves around urbanization. This is so important that Abraham stated after reconstruction of the Kaaba, it is "urbanization" of the place (Mecca) from Allah: "Lord promoted the arid land and turned it into a city" (Javadi, 2002, 147). Islamic city is a controversial term with an interdisciplinary nature examined by many researchers from different scientific disciplines, who made an effort to explain and describe the concept. However, no comprehensive definition of the Islamic city and its features has been provided. Scholars and

experts have failed to present an appropriate definition of this phenomenon (Movahed et al, 2012, 37). Research conducted on the "Islamic City" is essentially based on two approaches, one of which attributes the Islamic city's structure to religious and social factors, while the other seeks to describe the structure of the city by an approach which is more dependent on analysis of structure and physical properties of a city (Neglia, 2008). In a similar classification by Al-Sayyad and Turley (2009), relevant studies were divided into two approaches of art history and sociology. Approach to art history of "Islamic city" analyzes in terms of form through typological and morphological perspectives. The sociological approach concentrates on structural properties of urban areas. In other words, this approach to "Islamic city" aims to understand the forces that shape the Islamic city (Al-Sayyad, 2009).

## 2. The concept of city

The concept of city refers to an environment for expression of identity, values rooted in beliefs, worldview and culture of the inhabitants and their creators. This concept went through a great deal of

evolution during eras and in different lands with a variety of natural and human environments influenced by historical developments. In the meantime, there is no category as comprehensive as Architecture and Urbanism, since they constitute a major portion of human life. Moreover, an unhealthy city can promote people who are consequently infected. In fact, the spread of Islamic countries into Europe and the US have promoted the popularity of new models and features in the field of urbanism and urban architecture, which is dramatically distinct from what cities used to be. At this time, Islamic beliefs are not as prominent as when they were during the pre-colonial period, which is somewhat regarded as the end of urban progress in the Islamic lifetime (Pourahmad and Mousavi, 2010, 4).

### **2.1 Definition of Islamic city**

Islamic city refers to cities developed in lands with culture and beliefs rooted in the religion of Islam (Pourahmad and Mousavi, 2010, 2). Islamic city is a city full of the spirit of brotherhood, equality and healthy living aiming to achieve whatever is possible to provide pure life for mankind (Bemanian and Mahmoudinejad, 2008, 218). Wirth believed that the maze of street network in Islamic cities, dead-end alleys, houses with inner courtyard and independent neighborhood markets are all similar (Cihangir, 2004). The Islamic city represents those areas developed in the Arab world, the Ottoman Empire and Iran, where many cities have grown with an Islamic spirit (UN-Habitat, 2005).

### **3. Elements of Islamic city**

The most important factors contributing to the map of an Islamic city is the influence of local topography. In fact, the previous morphology of the Islamic city reflects the economic, political, social and cultural structures (Saoudi, 2002: 9). However, the Islamic city has the following features:

#### **3.1 Mosque**

At the beginning, an Islamic city required to have a Jameh mosque as the main condition is a city distinguishing it from rural areas. The idea lied in the highly populated residential complex, where a clergy guided the prayers performed by people. In fact, some large cities had numerous mosques in the heyday of Islamic cities along with increasing populations. Thus, the structure of Islamic cities based on mosque in the city center and similarity of mosque duties and mansion built near the mosque besides the market in the vicinity of residential neighborhoods. Al-Nabi Mosque was the first building constructed on the orders of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the center of the city of Medina (Yathrib). This was an urban

movement that led to the early Islamic cities such as Kufa, Basra and Fustat to follow the model used in the city planning at Medina. It should be noted that in addition to Jameh mosque, there were other facilities such as schools, monasteries and other traditional buildings deemed religious. The status of mosque in the city center was continuously regarded as the foundation of urban design. There was a certain point designed in the Islamic city for a mosque where the public traffic formed the market and residential areas based on the urban movement. Because of the placement of mosque in the center of Islamic cities, it assumed certain tasks throughout history. In other words, Jameh Mosque was supposed to be located in the city center due to its specific duties, so as to be adjacent to residential neighborhoods, where prayers could easily attend for Friday prayers (Othman, 1997, 220).

#### **3.2 Market**

Market in traditional cities in eastern Islamic lands had unique characteristics distinguishing them from cities in other cultures. Market in Islamic cities functions as an important economic, social and political heart of the city, deemed more significant than other geography and urban elements. Western architectural influence in recent centuries in the construction of Islamic cities is remarkable, to the extent that authors and scholars of modernism and globalization have mentioned the trend. However, the market in Islamic cities is the only urban area resisting against the cultural invasion, preserving its strength and originality. In economic terms, the market is highly resistant against the Western economic influence, i.e. the traditional economic practices are still prevailing in the market of Islamic cities (Wirth, E, 1982, 198).

#### **3.3 Borough**

It was well known as a symbol of sovereignty. Borough was surrounded by walls, comprising a mosque, gardens and buildings for residents usually in the upper part of the city.

#### **3.4 Residential areas**

It referred to a collection of households whose lives had been based on intimacy. This sense of belonging was manifested in personal attachment, shared interests and moral solidarity. Each of these dense residential areas entailed mosques, schools, bakeries, shops, etc. They each had their own gateways, which were closed usually after the last prayer at night and were opened before the first morning prayers. Residential areas in Algeria and Tunisia are such examples. These areas were ethnically organized. Some Muslims gathered in residential areas and each group had its own cultural beliefs to be implemented and celebrated (Bavandian, 2008).

### **3-5 Neighborhoods**

Neighborhood was a small part of the town or village where the residents had certain common social, economic, political, ethnic, religious or professional objectives (Shafaghi, 2002: 379). Residential part of Islamic cities was composed of neighborhoods with a special structure, where the trace of a true Muslim city with homogeneous areas can be found. The distinction of social classes was the most striking characteristic of the local market where the poor and rich neighborhoods shared one living place (Kheirabadi, 1997, 107). Neighborhood in Islamic cities represented settlement of ethnic, racial, religious and business groups. Neighborhoods in Islamic cities are composed of several major and minor components involving social, economic and cultural factors. The components of neighborhoods were residential buildings, streets and finally dead ends and public facilities such as community centers, mosques, temples, markets and son on (Ashraf, 1965, 24).

### **3-6 Gardens and green spaces**

The design of Iranian garden and architecture and buildings is recognized often as a combination of pre-Islamic architectural styles and later centuries. It entailed the general characteristics of Persian architecture and Islamic architecture, where certain influences from architecture and garden in some other countries have been adopted. Persian gardens have always been one of the best examples of Persian art. All the resources intending to introduce the Iranians cities and biological complexes focused on the gardens and their relation to the environment as an essential subject matter. The enthusiasm of Iranian for building gardens inside or outside the city as well as garden at home originated more than anything from the hot and dry due climate across a large part of Iran. This interest can be found throughout the recorded history of this country, dating back to the Achaemenid era based on documents available (Naghizadeh, 2003, 33).

## **4. Socio-cultural, ethnic-religious stratification in Islam**

In Damascus and Aleppo, Christians, Jews and other religious sects each had their own neighborhoods. Among Muslims, there are various ethnic groups including Arabs, Turkmen and Kurdish, etc. living in their own areas. Similarly among Arab Muslims, the majority of population had various religion and different legal practices which was the basis for shaping neighborhoods. Moreover, they were the foundations of rural, tribal and ethnic neighborhoods forming based on previous religions. Other neighborhoods were on the basis of professions and livelihood, but there is little evidence to prove that wealth or social class

was the basis of social segregation in the neighborhoods. Nevertheless, there were rich and poor neighborhoods. On the whole, all the neighborhoods entailed the rich, the poor, ordinary people together. In Damascus and Aleppo, the social, economic and religious principles never resulted in neighborhoods with a "social segregation" (Hourani, 1970, 196-197). In Hadramaut, social classes (social structure) was beautifully crystallized, representing an example of the structure in the Arabic community in one of the oldest known forms. The basis of neighborhoods in this part of Yemen, however, was not as stable as Sana'a and Aden. Over the centuries, Sana'a went through various social classifications, where two large tribes "Siddha" and "Qaedim" gathered. Moreover, people of different tribes and clans each living in its own specific city could be found in Sana'a (Scrjeant, 1980, 127-133).

## **5. Law and municipal regulations in Islam**

Bassim Salim Hakim stated that the principles of urban planning and legal framework merged during the first three decades of Islam in a favorable way with all the elements of Islam. In fact, the Islamic principles of urban planning prevented the elements inconsistent with Islamic foundations and values (Galantai, 2004, 22). Islamic city was subject to logic of economic, political, social and cultural subordination, which can be among the useful experiences for modern, systematic planning methods. Islamic city can be easily modified so as to be compatible with modern living standards and functionality, and yet preserving its high compatibility with the social, cultural, and religious environment. In this scenario, the Islamic city still seems highly relevant to today's urban requirements (Ghanizadeh, 2007).

## **6. The primary model of Islamic cities**

After the Islamic conquest in the territory of Eastern Roman Empire and the Sassanid state, it was essential for the victors to establish military bases and residential cities. Thus, it can be argued that Madinat al-Nabi's map was designed based on a model for structure of nascent Muslim cities such as Basra, Kufa, Fustat, etc. (Abdullah Abdul Aziz Ibn Idris, 2007, 254).

## **7. The key principles of Islamic urbanism**

The principle of appropriate justice was the first source of Islamic thought (Noghrekar, 2008, 600). Justice in the distribution of services in new cities has been examined so inadequately that the concept has not yet been realized fully. Some of these shortcomings can be inadequate service after

implementation of a design, unawareness of the demands of residents in one part and the inefficiency of services in another part of the city.

### **7.1 The progress from plurality to unity**

“Essentially, it must be acknowledged that unity is not attributed to the components of a system suddenly prevailing over the entire system, but unity is deemed as a whole, rather than part. “The noteworthy point is that there is no true unity achieved through geometry and symmetry and repetition of elements, but “purposeful unity is realized only in the light of a system as a set of exalted systems.” Hence, unity can be achieved through setting out an appropriate goal. According to Nasr (1996), space is independent from forms, where unity is provided through polarization and orientation. In this view, space is independent from forms, where unity is provided through polarization and orientation. In this approach, space is an issue of quality focusing on one axis toward one specific direction, which can be Qibla, the direction of the material world. Thus, form and space are properly oriented toward nature in the universe which harmonized with the essence of God reflected from one epiphany to another (i.e. progress from plurality to unity) (Noghrekar, 2008, 603-617).

### **7.2 The principle of spatial axis**

This principle forms the movement from plurality to unity, illustrated in the following diagram: The harmony of elements and formation of a system comprising a solid spatial system can be expressed as the following: harmony of functions with human needs, coordination of spatial dimensions with psychological and proportions of the humans, harmony of physical parts of the city, proportion in the geometry of the urban landscape, harmony of adjacent functions, harmony of programs with environmental capabilities and harmony between programs (Naghizadeh, 2006, 218).

## **8. The model of Islamic cities in different eras**

The early model of Islamic cities depicts that the previous structure (i.e. Roman and Persian structures) did not entail any socio-economic classifications. In this ideology, there is a new structure where mosque resembles the driving force of the heart, the political and administrative center. Even in some eras, residential places were not counted if they did not have a mosque (Kheirabadi, 1997, 87). Changes in the ideological values led to fading role of mosque in the next eras, which evolved the structure of cities. Accordingly, changes in the structure of Islamic cities, with an emphasis on Iran, can be divided into six different eras: Early Islamic period, Umayyad, Abbasids, period after the fall of the

Safavid and Qajar era until the contemporary period.

### **8-1 Golden era of Islam**

In this period, city was not exclusively privileged as compared to the surrounding area, because it followed the conventional legislation of the Islamic world where there are no exceptional advantages for people. In fact, city in this period was first of all the fortress of faith (ibid. 2004, 41-40). In this fortress, there are faith and unity among religious orders and there are political decisions and power and religion as two integral components (Nazarian, 2004, 23). In fact, mosques during this period linked religion with the government, such as mosques to in the mansions or citadels in Tabriz, which were constructed as Jameh mosque but functioned as an administrative center later on. Sometimes, the same mosques acted as religious and spiritual poles, defending the people against the tyrant rulers (Mashhadizadeh Dehaghani, 1999, 279).

### **8.2 Umayyad period**

During this period, which coincides with the Umayyad regime, the mosque was fully associated with power, even though the mansions functioned as the seat of the government (Habibi, 2004, 43). In this period, there was the first gap occurring between power and religious law. The gap between government and people was also observed (Nazarian, 2004: 23). During the Umayyad era, Damascus was the center of the Islamic world. The Umayyad constructed a large mosque, where the original simplicity faded away. In fact, the mosque drifted away from the primary simple architecture as well as its role in administrative and government (Cuneo, 2005, 118).

### **8.3 Abbasid era**

This period coincided with the Abbasid Caliphate and formation of the Islamic empire in which political and religious power were distinguished. During this period, the mosque traveled away from the mansion, separating from the government. Mosque turned into a popular mass base (Nazarian, 2004, 23). In fact, this period initiated the political-cultural rule in the entire imperial generally and in Iran specifically. The Abbasid caliphs were inclined toward the East under the influence of Iranian bureaucrats (Habibi, 2004, 43). Moreover, the transfer of power and geography of the Arab empire to Asia was contributing (Cuneo, 2005, 54). In this era, Jameh mosque was no longer as simple and unadorned as before, distinguishing itself from the urban landscape and the surrounding area. Then again, there were also cities entailing a Jameh mosque (Ibid, 2005, 45).



#### 8.4. After the fall of the Abbasid until Safavid period

In this period, government and religion were fully distinguished. The shape and distribution of the mosque were substantially transformed. In some cases, they functioned as power tools in the hands of the rulers. In some other cases, it became a haven for scholars who mainly administered religious affairs acting as counter-power against the rulers and kings (Nazarian, 2004: 23). In general, this period can be divided into two sections, the first of which involved the rise of primary Persian states, such as the Sassanid and Buyid. The second section covered non-Iranian governments including the Seljuks, Mongols and Timurid who experienced their rise and fall. Ultimately, this period hosted the majority of decline in urban development and urbanization.

##### 8.4.1. First Period

This period coincided with independent political and religious establishment in Iran. This period due to the relative independence of the Iranian governments can be considered as one of the important periods of urbanism and urbanization. The remnants of pre-Islamic era (Kohandej Sharestan) were completely eliminated in this century (Ibid, 2004, 34).

##### 8.4.2. Second Period

Especially during the Seljuk period, landowners and fief owners through living in the cities, in addition to the vicinity with authorities which they themselves were at the same position, the urban neighborhoods, professions were distributed. In fact, city is a collection of alleys which each of them has a bulwark for itself. These are related to the villages that are close in the case of sectarian, religious and ethnic (Nazarian, 2004, 35). The main body of the city during this period includes the main and large square (often in the middle of town) around which there can be find palace, walls, mosques and sometimes hospital. Each alley is nourished through the main passage which usually its mouth ends with the bazaar and each alley has its own bazaar, baths, mosques and cemetery and the entire city has been placed within the large heavy walls (ibid., 2004, 77).

#### 8.5. Safavid and Qajar

The process of urbanization in post-Islamic period in Iran, reached its peak in Safavid kingdom and the structure of most of the cities of Iran changed and the opening of network, building, institutions and public spaces, distinct from religious environments, changed the previous compact morphology (Mashhadizadeh Dehaghani, 1999, 239).

#### 8.6. Pahlavi Period

The most important physical change of cities in this period was the emergence of streets, new

squares and widening the old streets. This evolution had the most fundamental role in changing the face of city. The common pattern for street construction in this period was to create perpendicular streets, these square-shaped streets, often linked the beginning and end of the city by cutting the organic structures. These two streets were built up on the wall or old ditch of the city or were due to the widening of the old passes (Saidi, 1992, 144).

#### 9. Conclusion

Peaceful life and optimal use of divine blessings and creating a safe space for the preparation and promotion of the human being and reaching supreme perfection is one of the most important objectives of divine religions which Islam as the most perfect divine was not unaware of this important issue and everywhere in laws and principals of religious verses and traditions attention has been paid on the structure of social and material life human being. Among other cities Islamic ones have been influenced by Islamic laws and commands derived from the Quran, Sunnah, Fiqh, jurisprudence and consensus and these laws and commands had a direct impact on decisions about building cities. On the other hand the making decision by the rulers and authorities was also one of the main factors in the urban development and morphology. Islamic city refers to a city that has been taken from the Islamic identity and the Islamic rules are obeyed in it. As was mentioned in this article, Islamic city has its own structural and architectural features, such as: mosques, bazaar, citadel, residential space, neighborhood, landscaping, etc. urban and Islamic urbanization in different periods has been developed or changed by kings and princes that these developments or changes have completed or destructed the Islamic symbols.

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