

IS COLLECTIVE MEMORY IMPRESSED BY URBAN ELEMENTS?

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Abstract

Rapid changes in our cities destructs familiar elements and transforms accustomed environment into a strange one. Collective memory of citizens can prevent or at least slow down these destructions and helps strengthening links between citizens and their environment. Urban elements such as shrines, bridges, towers and even sculptures are symbols of urban identity and daily recognition of them rehabilitates collective memory constantly. This survey aims to investigate the role of urban elements in memorability of urban environment. Some of the urban elements of Babol city were surveyed through 150 questionnaires (by Cochran method) filled by citizens. Questionnaires were analyzed by correlation method with SPSS software. Results show that degree of memorability of urban elements for people are significant and can lead to identification of urban spaces.

Keywords: Urban element, memorability, city identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity and memory are essential to maintain the dynamism and vitality of cities. Without these characteristics citizens act as some guests who have no special feeling to city and show no desire to solve its problems (Mehrijoo and Afaridi 2010). Image of the city, makes the environment meaningful and legible for its residents. It involves general pictures that one's mind receives from the outside world. These pictures are accompanied with the person's immediate feelings and memories of his experiences, at the same time. A combination of pictures, feelings and memories is used to interpret the received information and seeks for responses (Lynch 2006). Symbols and signs of the city strengthen this perception of the citizen. Understanding the image of the city, depends on experiencing city, and this, in turn, leads to diagnosis of multiple layers for its image. City for tourists, who have no experience of its symbols, is nothing but a body. However, symbols that represents events and memories of citizens about the space, expresses the history and significant places of the city for its inhabitants (Mansouri 2010).

Spaces, sites and monuments that are located in public spaces unpretentiously, have an important role in creating a sense of survival, memorability and place making and is important in development of individual and collective behaviors (Rodrigo 2011). Urban elements and sculptures usually represent artistic attitudes, memories of people, events, beliefs, etc., and important components of urban furniture can have a major impact on improving citizens sense of place and identity (Mateus 2006). Reproduction of memories in the city and connecting the past to the present in this way, cause a sense of belonging to the place and frees the people from the alienation from city (Shaftoe 2008). A city that lacks clear memories and brings vague memories to the mind, is expired and finished (Mirmoghtadaei 2009).

1.1. Methodology

The fundamental questions are:

1. How much do the elements of the city evoke memories in the citizens' minds and create a sense of belonging?
2. Does the discussed city (Babol), regarding its long history, apply these elements throughout the city? How far do people have memories with these elements?

In this study, at the first stage the importance of collective aspect of memorability in the city space and its elements was investigated. Descriptive information has gained from library studies, publications and previous researches. Then there was a field study to identify the urban elements of the city (Babol) by utilizing a questionnaire for users of space. Citizens, in three areas of the city, filled 130 questionnaires: Experts filled the inner core, new developments and intermediate area, and 20 other questionnaires. The results were evaluated through correlation analysis and SPSS software.

1.2. Research Background

The literature of urban memory has focused on specialization of memory in the built landscape of the city, and the site of the urban as "palimpsest" for storing memory, "replete with monuments and museums, palaces, public spaces and government buildings" (Huysen 2003). Several literature points out the centrality of space in conceptualizing memory and nostalgia (Boym 2001, Blunt 2003, Legg 2004). However, the term of "collective memory" appeared in a different context in the second half of the nineteenth century. It refers to shared information in the memory of a group of people using the same space (Weinberg 2014).

About the history of the collective memory concept, Farhat shahzad writes : "My first introduction to the concept of collective memory came from Emile Durkheim who discusses briefly the social structure of collective memory without using the term itself. But my interests have actually deepened as a result of one of his students, Halbwachs' work (Shahzad 2011). Halbwachs expands Durkheim' idea and mentions that collective memories"are recalled to

us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned. In reality, we are never alone” (Halbwachs 1980).

He did research on this phenomenon and he was the one that for the first time presented the concept of collective memory. He explained that the collective life stretches through history and is not interrupted and the feeling that exists in the overwhelming majority of the community or society, is called “Collective Memory”. The historical memory has a huge impact on identity and the feeling of belonging for people of cities and urban spaces. Pierr Nora (1998) claims that groups construct collective memory by selecting certain dates, material objects and people to commemorate, while deliberately eliminating others from representation (Nora 1998).

So, the main point is that how we can preserve the collective memory in a way that it keeps living. The point is to establish a balance between collective memory and social identity. You cannot transform all the streets of a city into a museum. Meanwhile, in a city where there is no street with historical ambience, you lose identity feeling. The impact of symbols, elements and single prominent monuments are important in order to become memorable in collective memory and attain the sense of identity in the city (Poorahmad and Shammaei 2006).

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Urban Space

Urban space in a general sense is the spaces between buildings. In other words, building masses create and shape urban space. However, urban space is not a void between buildings. It should have a social life and be open to people or used by them at any time. Ian Gehl names the social life that takes place in urban spaces as “life between buildings” and he attributes three kind of activities to it: Essential activities, optional activities and social activities (Gehl 2011).

Zucker believes that urban space is an organized, neat and orderly structure that is based on human activities and clear and definite rules (Zucker 1959).

It is noteworthy that no space in the city can be considered as urban space, but special visual and dynamic communication in a space with the mentioned characteristics expresses the urban area and otherwise, we will have nothing but a hole between the buildings. The city is a composition and an integration of many spaces reflects the mental realization and continuity. The site of the urban as a ‘palimpsest’ for storing memory are ‘replete with monuments and museums, palaces, public spaces and government buildings’ (Tavassoli 1992).

2.2. Urban Elements

Urban element of the city is a physical composition in which internal characteristics of volumes and geometric shapes, vertical or curved plates, structural elements are used. In general, anything that is decorative and structural

as an integrated whole and a combination of the above issues can be called an urban element. This composition has a geometric system that is stable, beautiful, and flaunty at the level of the city, attracts individuals and impresses their minds. It gets a characteristic to understand the city symbolically in that area for a long time and is considered as an urban element so that mentioning the name of that area; mind unconsciously illustrates that using features and characteristics of the desired element in the area (Mirmoghtadaei 2009). Elements are a kind of urban symbols and signs. Symbols and signs were the oldest, most complex, influential and interesting tools that have been employed to emerge and reveal the hidden issue of the material and spiritual world (Comprehensive plan of Plano city 2005).

They should be designed properly and in a way that can be combined with the environment especially in a visual aspect (Zahedi and Ghadrjani 2011). Building a statue of a historical figure in a square that have a meaningful relation with it strengthens the impact of the statue and induces memories and past events for citizens of that environment (Bahrayni and Ali Taleb 2003). In fact, this is the identity that decrypts the concept of urban element and makes comprehensible (Kazemian and Javidan 2010).

Urban elements have various types including: 1) Theatrical elements 2) Expressive elements 3) Functional elements 4) Combining elements, which can be a combination of two or all three of the existing forms (Mateus 2006).

2.2.1. Theatrical Element (Artistic)

Theatrical elements are purely serve as theatrical, artistic and beauty aspect and they do not have the purpose and mission to convey or induce a message to the viewer. They are abstract combinations of meetings of masses, volumes, structural components and pages (a play with line, volume and page according to the geometry and internal relations) that can communicate with a specific group of people in terms of aesthetic features and visual and artistic balance.

2.2.2. Expressive Element (Monument)

The designer's goal of this work is the expression of a specific topic. In other words, there is certainly a concept lied in it and the work designer has a responsibility in transferring of a specific message. However, this can be a particular event recorded in the desired location or it can inspire the viewer a particular concept according to the name and character of the area.

2.2.3. Functional Element (Monument)

This type of element is somewhat distanced from the above definitions, because the element of function will create limitations for us in terms of rules of the form. In this stage, we will have the space creation using the same arrays and visual elements. Another characteristic of these elements is their greater numbers in the cities.

2.3. *The concept of memory and collective memory*

The memory includes incidents, events and even ordinary course of daily life which is placed in a part of mind and remains there with the passage of time so that at any point in time and according to the needs of the person or involuntarily, it is remembered and comes to life for the individual. Oxford Dictionary (1994), defined memory as follows: “the power to accumulate the information in unconscious mind and the ability to recall them voluntarily, past experiences stored for future use”. The definition of Longman Dictionary (2010) for memory is “Person's ability to remember things, places, experiences, etc.”, and Webster Dictionary (2003) says memory is “the ability or the process to recall or reproduce what has been learned or memorized principally through the mechanisms of the association”. Memory might be collective or individual. Increase in the number of people who are able to recall memory causes the memory to go beyond the scope of individual and enter the collective area.

Collective memory is the memory of events experienced by the individual in a social framework and in a mutual interaction between individuals and groups through remembering people, objects, places and experiences using the mechanism of association. In other words, “collective memory is the shared memories among groups and communities”.

2.4. *Memory and Urban Space*

The meaning of places derives from both physical and experiential attributes. There are two perceptions of urban memory. The former perceives city as a whole image or urban landscape that can be read or interpreted by individually. The latter describes that relationship between the city and the person as a dialectical relationship. The first position is problematic because it determines the image and the memory of the city. The second mode provides a more diverse understanding of the relationship between the city and the person, but dishonors the role of city as a resort for half-consciously truancy (Duindam 2008).

According to Crinson (2005), urban memory is the perception of city as physical face, a set of objects and experiences in the city that can reproduce the past.

City is the place of discovering the past, especially personal past. We appreciate some areas and love them, because these areas have many of our childhood memories and were our childhood pathways (Tajbakhsh 2004). Transformations in the urban body removes the context of the formation of memories. In this process, familiar landscapes change or degrade quickly. Young generations who live in these cities, cannot understand the collective memories through their surroundings (Siew-wailim 2000).

3. COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND ELEMENTS

If the collective memories do not get permanent in physical objects such as monuments, memorials, archives, museums and cemeteries, they will not be maintainable and will not be transferable from one generation to the next. Public memorials are landscapes which make it possible to keep past events alive in the common memory through physical representation in public areas, even painful events like (civil) war, terrorism, genocide, etc. (Rodrigo 2011).

Our relationship with the past is through the physical spaces that can stabilize the memories. Most communities are trying to make and protect memorable spaces at any cost.

Valid and commendable historical moments are the norms that exist in many cultures. Generally, it was stated that memories could be preserved in solid bodies, which aim to show memories, and due to this permanence; they retain their life beyond the purely spiritual existence. Collective memory can emphasize on the social features of the notion of sustainability by consequences such as enhancement of the place attachment among the inhabitants. Most communities are trying to make and maintain memorable spaces at any cost

Therefore, collective memory will become an agent for linking generations through which it is possible to give further importance to the place where the events are unfolded, and the past, present and future mental dimensions of the inhabitants of the historic cities are related (Ibid).

4. CASE STUDY

4.1. Introduction of the study area and history evolution of Babol

Babol is one of the towns of Mazandaran province is located in central part of its plains (Figure 1). General survey attributed the building of the first nucleus of the city of Babol to 418 AH. At that time, Babol was called Mamatir. It



FIGURE 1 - GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF BABOL, SOURCE: (WIKIPEDIA WEBSITE)

seems, during the Mongol invasion, this town was destroyed vastly. At the time of Shah Abbas, and due to economic developments of Safavid era this village was transformed to a market city with wide and cobblestoned streets and big fountains. Bar Foroush(old name of the Babol) was selected as the center of the state during the Zand dynasty in 1132 to 1151 (helical), and in 1306 (helical) Rezakhan of Pahlavi dynasty changed the name of Bar Foroush to Babol. Since the first Pahlavi was from Mazandaran, he paid special attention to the development of towns in this region during his reign in Iran.

4.2.Examples of elements and monuments in the city of Babol

4.2.1. Mohammad Hassan Khan's Bridge

Early in the reign of Karim Khan Zand, Mohammad Hasan Khan Qajar, constructed a great bridge over the river of Babol (Figure 2) which still remains, to appreciate the people of the city. In the past, the bridge was on the way to Amol and the place under the bridge was a place for recreation (Figure2).

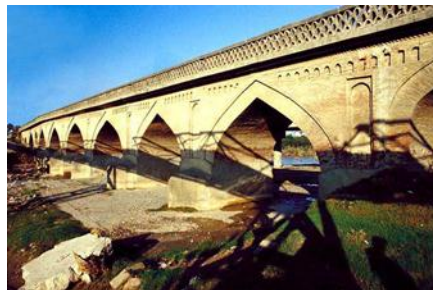


FIGURE 2 - MOHAMMAD HASSAN KHAN'S BRIDGE, SOURCE: AUTHORS

4.2.2. Holy shrine of Emamzadeh Qassem, Babol

This shrine (Figure 3) is one of the oldest monuments of the city of Babol which is located in the neighborhood of Astaneh or Kelaj mosque. Astaneh neighborhood was in the inner core of the city. This shrine with its specific dome is one of the respected urban elements in people's mind due to its functions and sanctity and it is a compound one (theatrical- functional).



FIGURE 3 - HOLY SHRINE OF EMAMZADEH QASSEM. SOURCE: NIAKI, HOSSEINZADEH, 1379 (HELICAL)

4.2.3. Shahpur Palace (watchtower and palace gate)

Shahpur Palace is built in an area of over 70 acres and includes 5 magnificent mansions which are rare in the country. In Nasereddin Shah Era, this palace was the garden of one of the timber traders. This beautiful garden reminds the booming past of the city among the public and is located close to inner core of Babol. Today, two main buildings of the garden are among the urban elements of the city: The gate of the palace (Figure 4) and watchtower of Shahpur Palace (Figure 5). Nowadays the first is located in campus of University of Babol and is placed in one of its squares.



FIGURE 4 - PALACE GATE, SOURCE: AUTHORS



FIGURE 5 - WATCHTOWER, SOURCE: AUTHORS

4.2.4. Statue of Amir Pazevari Square

He is one of the poets of Mazandaran (Figure 6) during the Safavid reign who has written his poems in Mazandarani language.



FIGURE 6 - STATUE OF AMIR PAZEVARI, SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA WEBSITE

4.2.5. Babol Museum

Babol Museum known as Ganjineh (Figure 7), was built as municipal building of Babol and refurbished and restored then in 1996 and became an anthropological museum of Mazandaran.



FIGURE 7 - BABOL MUSEUM

4.2.6. Grand Mosque

This mosque is located near the tomb of Mullah Mohammad Ashrafi and Saeid-ol-Olamay-e Bar Foroushi in the city of Babol that has been registered as one of the national heritages in October 2nd, 2001 with registration number of 4175. Process of repair and renovation of this mosque is undergoing.

4.2.7. Pourang school and the Statue of the saleswoman



FIGURE 8 - POURANG SCHOOL



FIGURE 9 - A SALESWOMAN IN LOCAL COSTUME
(Source of Figures 7,8,9: Wikipedia Website)

4.3. Discussions

In field study, 150 questionnaires were selected by Cochran method. Citizens filled 130 questionnaires and officials, 75% male and 25% female filled 20 questionnaires. Their level of education was as follows: 46 persons had high school educations, 22 persons had associate degree, 31 persons had bachelor and 15 persons graduate education and the others were lower than high school levels.

The questionnaire included 16 questions that the first and last choice were open and the other choices closed. The first question tried to find out which urban elements arouse sense of belonging in people, which provided the following results: Mohammad Hasan Khan's Bridge, Ganjine and Astaneh are ranked respectively from first to third with little differences in total points. Each of them has important memories in people's collective memory.

In the tables derived from the SPSS software, a significant relationship between the effectiveness of urban elements on memories was proved using the chi-square test and correlation coefficient methods.

According to table (1), the relationship between the effects of urban elements on the sense of belonging of the citizens as the independent variables and the other variables as the dependent ones were examined using the Spearman correlation coefficients applicable in qualitative variables. The results of this study suggest that the effect of urban elements on creating a sense of belonging, increasing interest rates to walk along these spaces, the accumulation near the elements, satisfaction of the space, granting identity to the city and keeping the local culture alive, enhancing the development of the city, and the satisfaction of these spaces are undeniable. In addition, the application of the chi-square test confirmed that there is no significant difference among the attitudes of the citizens (the polled ones) regarding the impact of the urban elements of Babol on memorability. All acknowledged the effects of these elements on creating a sense of belonging, satisfaction of the space, granting identity to the city and keeping the local culture alive, enhancing the development of the city, and the satisfaction of these spaces. The last question in the questionnaire asked about the public opinion on the problems, issues, and weaknesses of the elements in terms of creating a sense of identity and memorability. Emphasizing the authorities' continuous neglect in this area, the majority pointed that there is either no or just few of such elements. They believed that apart from the few elements, new works are constructed in the city without adequate study of memorability and they lack identity and historical records with no emotional connection between these elements and the citizens. In their view, these places are not introduced to people based on the cultural, architectural, and design principles to be able to play a role in creating memories and identities for them. They also pointed to the space around the elements and its combination with natural attractions in order to enable people to get closer to these works and make a connection with them. To enhance the knowledge of the urban landscape, it needs to design and define the principles on the one hand and advertise and train citizens in visual literacy on the other hand.

Here are two important things inferred during the study of the discussed topic:

Considering the definitions of element, any specific urban element is included in the literal definition of it. When hearing the word element, people remember specific elements and architecture with theatrical or functional expressive role despite the fact that there are rarely an element with the real definition in cities. It seems that in this area, the knowledge of people about urban landscape is not developed and there is no proper definition due to the lack of this knowledge in cities. On the other hand, with people's dissatisfaction with the current state of these places and elements and lack of them in urban spaces, people severely interact with them and have deep sense of belonging.

Attention and public support for elements create important concepts in spite of the ravages in a city landscape. These elements induce a sense of belonging in a city and remind the memories in the minds of its people that can be considered a strong point of a city landscape in the uniform space of cities today. Most theorists agree on this issue that creating emotional bonds with a place is of the prerequisites of the mental balance, which is necessary to overcome the identity crisis, and it can provide the involvement of people in community activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning, the concept of collective memory and memory making in cities mentioned. By describing the principles of memory and elements in urban space, it was found that these elements are making memory for citizens. Then, with field study in the city of Babol, one of the most historic cities in Mazandaran province, the elements of the city were collected and a questionnaire was designed to evaluate the effects of elements on memorability for people. In this regard, 150 people were selected by Cochran method in which 130 were civilians and 20 were experts.

Most of the people acknowledged that Mohammad Hassan Khan's historical bridge, Ganjineh museum with lion symbols in front, and dome of Astaneh (Emamzadeh Qassem) that its architecture style is available in abundance in the northern cities are the most influential elements of Babol. The relationship between the effects of urban elements on the sense of belonging in citizens as the independent variable and the other variables as the dependent variables was evaluated using the chi-square test and the Spearman correlation coefficients that are applicable in correlation coefficient tests for qualitative variables.

According to the correlation analysis with the SPSS software, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between the elements of the city and their memorability for people. People acknowledged the memorability of these elements in the city and believed that with ongoing proceedings of the authorities and a sufficient study on history and with propaganda and education of citizens to understand better these works, we can use these elements in the city to evoke memories and make identity for our cities.

TABLE 1 - THE EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ELEMENTS IN BABOL ON MEMORABILITY OF THE INHABITANTS USING SPEARMAN'S CORRELATION COEFFICIENT

| Significant Relationship Proof | Significance level | P-Value | Spearman's correlation coefficient | Test Variable |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------|------------------------------------|---|
| * | 99 percent | 0.001 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and your satisfaction of these places |
| * | 98 percent | 0.006 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and accumulation near these phenomena |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and your interest rate of walking near these places |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the amount of your memorability about the elements of the city of Babol |
| * | 99 percent | 0.002 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and consent to pay for the development of these places or assign one day a month to the place |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the affinity of these phenomena (elements) with the originality and identity of Babol |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the effects of these places on the demonstration of the identity of Babol |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the effects of these places on the demonstration of the identity of the city |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the effects of elements in keeping the local culture alive and the preservation of cultural identity of the people of Babol |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the effects of these places in making identity and memory for the people of Babol |
| * | 99 percent | 0.000 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and your feeling about the effect of creating new spaces with memory making capacity, peace, and devotion |
| * | 98 percent | 0.006 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the effects of elements attraction in enhancing the development of Babol |
| * | 97 percent | 0.02 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and the amount of attraction of various attractive places |
| | ns | 0.22 | 1 | The relationship between the effects of urban elements on your sense of belonging and satisfaction with the current state of the elements of Babol |

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