

TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SPACE LEADS TO TRANSFORMATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY A CASE STUDY FOR EVALUATING THE EFFECT OF URBAN SPACE TRANSFORMATION IN TEHRAN ON NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to evaluate the effect of neighborhood public space transformation due to rapid urbanization in Tehran since 1960s, on the formation of neighborhood identity. In order to find the role of public spaces in enhancing neighborhood identities, two middle class neighborhoods with different spatial organizations are compared with each other: Nazi Abad a planned neighborhood and Mehran a typical unplanned neighborhood which developed through rapid urbanization. Next, the effect of neighborhood public spaces on neighborhood inhabitants is evaluated from two perspectives: Perceptual dimension and social dimension. The findings indicate that planned spatial organization and various neighborhood public spaces result in stronger neighborhood identity. It enhances both perceptual dimension of neighborhood identity (place attachment) and its social dimension (sense of community). In contrast unplanned spatial organization which is the typical feature of Tehran neighborhoods leads to weak neighborhood identity.

Key words : Public space, neighborhood, identity, urbanization, Tehran

INTRODUCTION

Before 1920, inside each “Mahalle” (urban neighborhood in Iran) we could find a variety of neighborhood public space. Some spaces were shared between some neighbors while others belonged to all residents of a Mahalle. Therefore, a basis was formed for different levels of social interaction between the inhabitants which consequently caused the neighborhood identity to improve.

After 1960s, Iran led itself to a more rapid rate in its process of urbanization. This transformation occurred because of brisk changes in

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social life, political structure and economic formations. As a result, a high level of rural-urban migration occurred. This process has intensified since 1976 (The IRANIAN revolution and the war between Iran and Iraq) and one can almost say that the city took a more persistent route in its process of mutation.

These rapid changes were the cause of great transformation in the form, function and identity of neighborhoods and their social structures much that they couldn't be called neighborhoods but merely as residential districts. Evident shifts in the spatial organization of residential areas and reduction of public spaces were the most significant signs of this change. Tehran as the capital city of Iran is a good case study of this phenomenon. Due to the mentioned process of mutation, the quality and quantity of neighborhood public spaces have deteriorated and this has caused the fading away of neighborhood identities. There have been exceptions however; among these residential districts some few planned neighborhoods were constructed which hold various pockets of defined public spaces and activities.

This article seeks to explain the transformation of public space in the neighborhoods of Tehran and the role of contemporary public spaces in the identity of a planned neighborhood. This will be achieved through drawing parallels between two neighborhoods sitting within this metropolitan city: A fully planned and spatially organized neighborhood with a series of public spaces; and the other, an unplanned residential district which grew after the 1960s.

"Neighborhood identity" within neighborhood public spaces will be discussed in the context of the two examples as mentioned above by the theme of that of the *planned* and that of the *unplanned*. The two will be compared and analyzed in order to highlight the role of these spatial entities in the formation of identities and the social structures of our living space. The article argues that, despite rapid urbanization and great changes in lifestyles, neighborhood public spaces play a vital role in forming urban neighborhood identities.

Neighborhood identity

Identity is a term used to describe an individual's comprehension of him or herself as a discrete, separate entity. This entity could be an ego or a social group. Sociologists, anthropologists and physiologists have defined two types of Identity: 1: self identity 2: social identity, which of course interrelate each other.

It is often argued that people need a sense of identity, of belonging to a specific territory, and/or a group in order to be able to function within the framework of their society. People used to define themselves through various features such as belonging to a special social or ethnic group, a territory etc. Neighborhood identity is one which belonging to a particular territory (Residential neighborhood in a city) is its main factor.

Relph (1976) mentioned that: it is not just the identity of a place that is important, but also the identity that a person or group has with that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider. Ardrey (1967) suggested that "the concept of inside/ outside is most easily understood in terms of territoriality, people's definition and defense of themselves - physically and psychologically- by the creation of a

bounded often exclusive domain". Knox and Pinch also echoed the importance of the notion of a territory: "Suggesting that people structure groups and define each other by distinguishing between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' territoriality is frequently the basis for the development of distinctive social milieus, that moulds the attitudes and shapes the behavior of their inhabitants." (Carmona, 2003, p:98)

Neighborhood identity as a sense of belonging to a particular territory, includes belonging to a community (people who live in one neighborhood) and to the territory as a place simultaneously. Two concepts of "community attachment" and "place attachment" are often used for defining these two aspects. Also it should be mentioned that these two aspects are not completely separable from each other.

Hummon (1992) argued that community attachment appears to be the most strongly rooted involvement in local social relations, however he also acknowledged (admitted) that the built environment might also contribute to such emotional ties if perceived in favorable terms" (Brehm, et al, 2006)

The above mentioned are different factors in examination of attachments to neighborhoods. Emotional factors, spatial perception factors and social factors are all used to examine levels of attachment to neighborhoods. Length of residence, localized social relationships, liking or disliking the neighborhood, tendencies to leave the neighborhood, having clear image of the boundaries of the territory are the factors which are being examined in various studies.

In the course of this research we have used these factors in order to compare the level of community attachments in two different neighborhoods in Tehran.

The role of neighborhood public space in neighborhood identities

It has long been acknowledged that different housing neighborhoods acquire different social identities (Roberts, 1971; Harvey, 1973, 1992). (Douglas Robertson, et al). The creation of place or neighborhood identities is a complex and dynamic socio-cultural process. Various factors affect how housing neighborhoods gain a certain identity and let their inhabitants define themselves through it, like it and make their social relations within it. Length of residence, homogeneity/heterogeneity of residence, built environment, stigmas related to a neighborhood in common sense of a city etc. may affect the sense of attachment of people to their neighborhoods. These factors include social aspects and environmental (physical) features simultaneously.

According to Kasard and Janowitz model (1974), "long - term residence emerging as a strong indicator of increased sentimental ties to a local place. From this approach, community attachment appears to be strongly associated with social integration that develops with time, through interpersonal associations and localized social networks." (Brehm, Joan M et al 2006). However, it is also worth mentioning that neighborhood public spaces are the milieu for social integration which develops with time. Public spaces provide social interactions and so are essential factors for shaping localized social relationships. There are possibilities of repeated interaction in the streets, parks or, if they exist, shops and pubs, helping to build local

social networks. Crang (1998,p.103) suggested that “places provide an anchor of shared experiences between people and continuity over time.”(Carmona, 2003)

Environmental opportunities clearly affect what people can and cannot do. Human behavior is therefore inherently ‘situational’: it is embedded in physical and also in social, cultural and perceptual contexts and settings. Hence, public spaces as environmental opportunities are one of the most effective factors in the shaping of neighborhood identity. Some writers such as Jane Jacobs and William H. believed that : Good streets, sidewalks, park and other public spaces bring out the best in human nature and provide the setting for a civil and courteous society.(carmona,2003, p:109)

Many commentators have discussed how spaces affect people, their feelings and behaviors. (Ralph, Rappoport, Montegmery, Gehl,...)

There are three main categories in their discussions and each conceptualizethese categories in different manners. These 3 main categories are as follows:

1: Physical characteristics of space

2: activities which take place in space

3: meanings of space

Carmona in his book³refers to these 3 categories as morphological dimension, social and functional dimension and perceptual dimension.Relph (1974) argues that physical settings, activities and meanings constitute the three basic elements of the identity of place. According to Relph, the relation between people and place happens through the concept of the existence of a “sense of place”. Sense of place does not, however, fall into the 3 categories mentioned above but lies within layers of human interaction with these elements. Rapoport(1999)defines built environment as 3 organizations. 1: organization of space 2: organization of communication 3: organization of meaning. Lynch, has emphasized perceptual dimension. He mentioned that“we must consider not just the city as a thing in itself but the city being perceived by its inhabitants” (Lynch, 1960:3). His Concept, “imageability”refers to the physical characteristics of space and its effect on people’s perception of it.

Gehl illustrates how the environmental quality of public spaces affects the intensity of people’s use of those spaces. According to Gehl(1971) outdoor activities in public spaces can be divided into three categories: ‘necessary’ activities; ‘optional’ activities and ‘social’ Activities. The crux of Gehl’s argument is that when public spaces are of poor quality, only strictly necessary activities occur. When public spaces are of higher quality, necessary activities take place with approximately the same frequency - although people choose to spend longer doing them - but, more importantly, a wide range of optional (social) activities also tend to occur. (Carmona, 2007)

3 Public places, urban space,(2003)

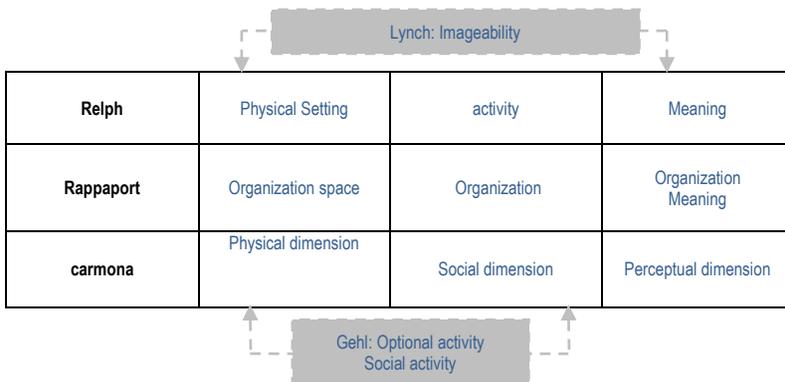


Diagram 1: Main 3 categories in analyzing how spaces affect people
Reference: authors

In order to find and high lightthe role of public spaces in enhancing neighborhood identity, the indicators have been chosen according to these 3 categories. Diagram 2 shows the relationship between public space and neighborhood identity from this article point of view.

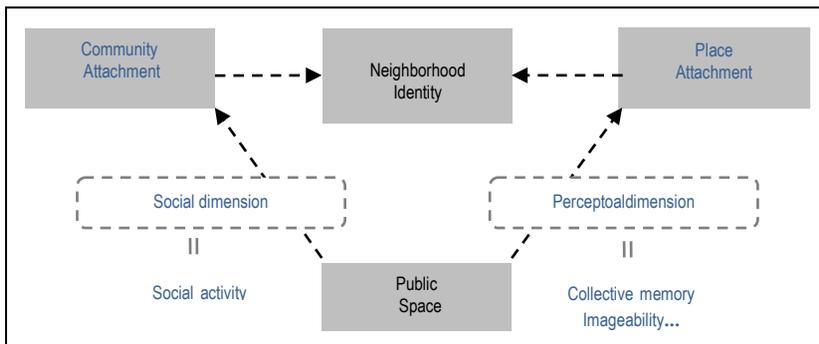


Diagram 2: The relationship between public space and neighborhood identity
Reference: authors

Research Design and Approach

This research focuses on two urban neighborhoods in Tehran: “Nazi abad” in the south west and “ Mehran” in the west of Tehran. These two neighborhoods were selected based on a great difference between their spatial organizations.

Both of them are middle class neighborhoods which have existed for more than 40 years, and at least two generations have lived there through this period.

Study Communities

Nazi abad is a neighborhood, located at the south west of Tehran. The development of this neighborhood began from 1940's (the industrialization period of Tehran). It continued during 2nd Pahlavi dynasty and by 1960 it had become a complete neighborhood. The area was constructed based on an urban development plan; in this plan all the public spaces and cultural/educational centers were considered. Its population is now 42874. Mehran is located at the west of Tehran. The development of this neighborhood began from 1960's. In contrast to Naziabad, "Mehran" wasn't constructed based on urban planning. Its development is the typical pattern of contemporary Tehran neighborhoods which have developed from 1960's till now. Its population is now 24940.

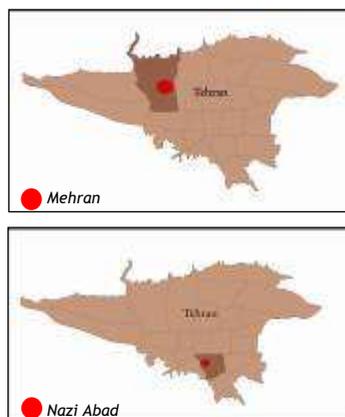


Figure 1: Location of neighborhoods in Tehran

Data collection

Data presented in this report is the result of a survey done in May 2010 in the two neighborhoods. In each neighborhood 100 inhabitants took part in the survey. As people's relations with public spaces differs according to their age and gender, therefore quota-a sampling method was selected for this survey. Samples were chosen based on the age pyramid of Tehran (according to national surveying 2007.)

Variable measurements and analysis Approach

The analysis presented consists of two parts: The first section is focused on comparing the two neighborhoods in terms of neighborhood identity, and the second part evaluates the effect of public spaces on the establishment of different levels of "neighborhood identity" in these two neighborhoods. According to this structure, the questions of the questionnaire were designed in two parts. The section of questionnaire designed to measure neighborhood identity included 6 questions. These questions addressed social and perceptual aspects of neighborhood identity. The main considered variables are:

- 1: length of residence
- 2: tendency to leave the neighborhood
- 3: sense of belonging to community
- 4: localized relationships

Because "length of residence" itself is argued as an important factor in forming a neighborhood's identity, in order to find out the effect of public spaces, the other 3 variables are compared between the part of the sample which had the longest length of residence also. (More than 15 years).

In the second part, in order to find out the role of public spaces 9 questions were asked. This part includes 5 Items:

1: Imageability (conception of the neighborhood as a total visible form)

2: spatial features which respondents knew them as characteristics of their neighborhoods;

In this question people were asked to count the main features of their neighborhood and the number of respondents who mention public spaces and spatial features are compared in the two neighborhoods.

3: Diversity of activities and experiences in public spaces;

In this part respondents were asked to speak about their activities in terms of their neighborhood public spaces. The words they chose to explain their experiences and diversity of activities were the main element sought in their answers.

4: Social relations in public spaces

In this item, respondents were asked if they use neighborhood public spaces for visiting their friends.

5: The role of neighborhood public space in the formation of a neighborhood community's collective memory;

In this item people were asked if they come to neighborhood public spaces in national ceremonies or religious rituals. Iranian national ceremony "4shanbe souri" one of the New Year's (Nourouz) eve celebrations and Ashura the greatest religious ritual were the two main events which were asked about. In order to compare the two neighborhoods, each event is given 1 Weight and the number related to each respondent indicates the number of events that he/she attends in the neighborhood.

In order to fully comprehend how public spaces are playing a positive role in neighborhood identities, the spatial organization of each neighborhood is also analyzed. The spatial organization of each neighborhood, the distribution of public spaces in the spatial organization, their quantity and quality, variety of them according to scale and activity are the main items mentioned in this part.

Results

Neighborhood identity

The analysis of neighborhood identity indicators in two neighborhoods (Nazi abad & Mehran) shows that the neighborhood identity in Nazi Abad is stronger than in Mehran. The all 4 evaluated indicators in Nazi Abad are in higher rank in comparison with Mehran.

The average length of residence in Nazi Abad is 28.6 years .and is 11.2 years. In Mehran. 66% of respondents in Mehran tended to leave the neighborhood and live in another place if it was possible, while 35.5% of respondents in Nazi Abad had such tendency.

Two questions were asked to evaluate the respondents' attachment to the neighborhood's community. At first they were asked if they considered themselves as a member of the neighborhood's community. Then they were questioned about bad stigmas about their neighborhood. In Mehran 63.3% of respondents believed themselves as a member of the community and 32% showed reaction toward the bad stigmas, whereas in Nazi Abad 88.8% of all

respondents identified themselves as a “Nazi Abadi” (a person who belongs to Nazi Abad neighborhood), and 76.6% of them showed reaction toward bad stigmas.50% of the sample society in Mehran has chosen more than half of their friends from their own neighborhood while this indicator is 70% in Nazi abad.(Figure 1)

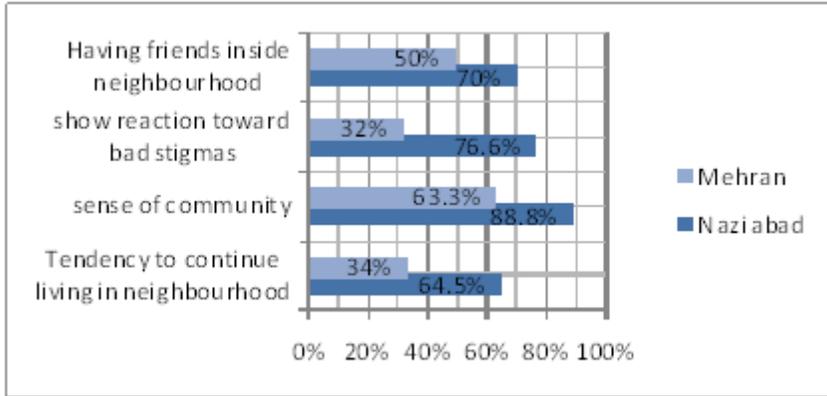


Figure 2: Neighbourhood identity factors

By comparing 4 indicators (tendency to leave the neighborhood, sense of belonging to community, reaction toward bad stigmas, Having friends inside the neighbourhood) among those whom their length of residence in the neighbourhood exceeded 15 years, one can conclude meaningful differences between both case studies (Figure 3). It indicates that, as well as “length of residence”, there are other factors playing a significant role in the establishment of neighborhood identities. Spatial organization and public spaces are factors which will be further analyzed in the next section.

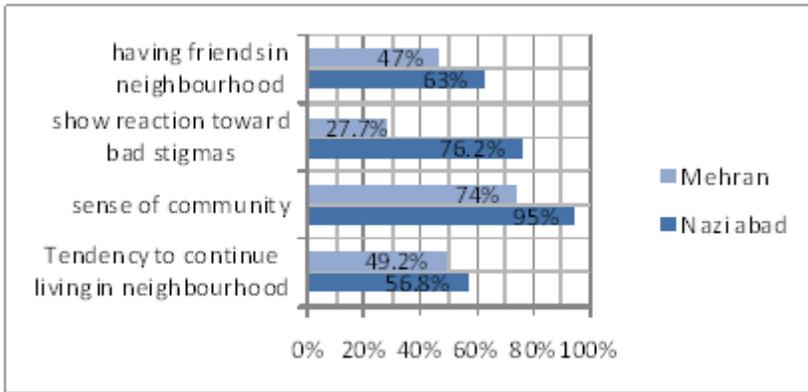


Figure 3: Neighbourhood identity factors among respondents with more than 15 years length of residence

The role of neighborhood public spaces in neighborhood identity

Spatial organization of Nazi Abad

Nazi Abad has been constructed according to an urban development plan. The neighborhood concludes 3 main zones: Residential zone in the south, industrial and cultural zone in the north. Two main streets are the main orthogonal axes of the spatial structure. (Figure 4)

There are two types of housing in Nazi Abad. In the north of the residential zone, there are 3 residential complexes, with wide and green open spaces between 4 storey blocks, Hezar Dastgah, Farhangian & Police. The other part of the residential domain is laid out on the basis of repetition of cellular units. In each unit, houses surround a public square.

This way of spatial organization on the city scale is essentially a redefinition of the open space pattern in traditional Iranian houses whereby the courtyard is the shared space between neighbors.



Figure 4: Spatial organization of Nazi Abad
Referenc: Author



Figure 5 & 6: Nazi Abad Neighborhood public squares shared between neighbors
Reference: Author

Distribution of public spaces in Nazi Abad

There are various layers and types of public spaces in Nazi Abad, examples of which are: parks, public squares, leisure axis, a cultural center and wide and green pedestrian paths.

Public spaces are distributed all over the neighborhood and there are pedestrian accesses to all of them. Wide and green pedestrians, encourage walking in the neighborhood.

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Figure 7: Distribution of public spaces in NaziAbad
Reference: Author



Figure 8: Madae'n pedestrian
Reference: Author



Figure 9: Sketch of madae'en pedestrian
Reference: Author

Spatial organization of Nazi Abad has a powerful centrality in providing a community center for the neighborhood. Like any other neighborhood centre for each 'Mahalle" (Iranian old neighborhood), Nazi Abad's comprises a mosque, a public square and a Bazaar. The Central Public Square in NaziAbad is "Bazaar Dovvom"and "Mada'en" street is aredefined version of Bazaar. Due to successful pedestrianization and a vast range of activities, these spaces have become dynamic and vital locations.

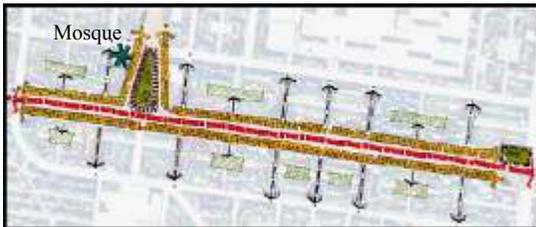


Figure 10: Sketch of Nazi Abad Neighborhood center
Reference: Author



Figure 11: Nazi Abad main public square(Bazar dovcom)
Reference: Author

Spatial organization of Mehran

Mehran neighborhood has an unplanned spatial organization. The area has shaped its form according to street access network and land slope. The open

spaces are not defined and are merely scattered in empty spots of land which were left un-used.

Abuzar Street divides the neighborhood in two separate parts and almost all of the public spaces and activity centers are in the south. Houses follow a terraced (A row of houses that are joined together) pattern.

Distribution of public spaces in Mehran

Mehran neighborhood has two typologies of public spaces: Parks and a cinema. The other outdoor spaces are car oriented and do not form public realms.

In contrast to Nazi Abad, the spatial organization of Mehran has no center.

Access network in Mehran is car oriented and pedestrian traffic is more or less impossible because of the lack of pedestrians.



People's relation with neighborhood public spaces

Figure 14 and 15 & 16: Some space in Mehran neighborhood

Reference: Author

Comparing the results of the survey shows great difference in people's relation with neighborhood public spaces in the two neighborhoods. 5

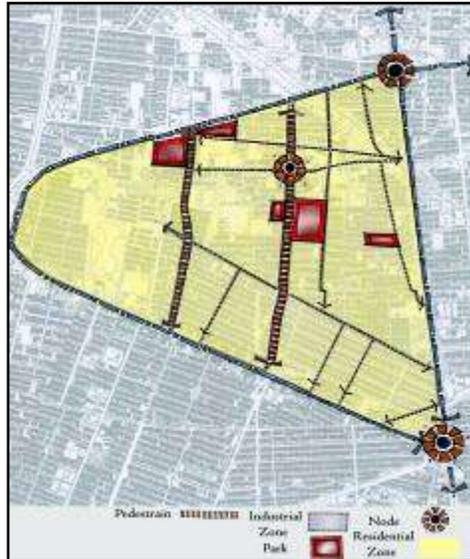


Figure 12: Spatial organization of Mehran
Reference: Author

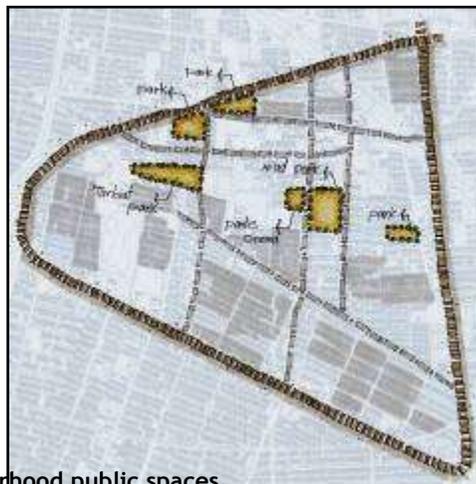


Figure 13: Distribution of public spaces in Mehran
Reference: Author

factors are used for measuring the effect of neighborhood public spaces on inhabitants:

1: Imageability

2: spatial features which respondents knew them as characteristic of their neighborhoods;

3: Diversity of activities and experiences in public spaces;

4: Social relations in public spaces

5: Role of neighborhood public spaces in making neighborhood community collective memory;

Data analysis shows that, there isn't a common image of neighborhood, as a total visible form, among respondents in Mehran, Only 20.6% of them identify one specific zone as their neighborhood. The others have different images of their neighborhood. Some of them refer to the alley, some use the name of a street or highway to define their neighborhoods.

On the other hand, in Nazi Abad, 51.3% of the respondents call their neighborhood "Nazi Abad", as an integral whole, and 48.6% of them besides calling their neighborhoods "Nazi Abad", pair it with smaller spatial identities inside "Nazi Abad". For example they said: Nazi Abad, Atlasi Square.

By referring to smaller spatial identities besides the whole territory, it is evident that the perception of respondents in Nazi Abad from their neighborhoods is more vivid and clear. In comparison with respondents in Mehran who even didn't have a clear perception of their neighborhood as an integral whole?

Poor public spaces in Mehran caused less attention of inhabitants to spatial features of the neighborhood, as only 29.8% of respondents mentioned spatial features as their neighborhood characteristic, whereas in Nazi Abad, successful public spaces encourage intensive use of them, so Nazi Abad's inhabitants have a stronger spatial image of their neighborhoods. More than 50% of respondents mention spatial features for introducing their neighborhood.

The difference between the two case studies is apparent in the intensity of land use and types of activities. In Mehran, 43% of respondents do not use neighborhood public spaces and 57% use them. However, the inhabitants' acquired literature in explaining their experiences demonstrates limited use of the spaces. They only ever mention "walking" and "child play areas" as their optional activities in neighborhood public spaces.

In contrast in Nazi Abad, only 11.8% of respondents don't use neighborhood public spaces while 88.2% do. Narrations of respondents about their experiences in the neighborhood public spaces, include various optional and social activities, such as watching people, self appearance, shopping and window-shopping, night picnics with family, studying, playing etc.

Public spaces are known stages for social interactions and are tools for enhancing them. Comparing results of the question that asked 'if they visit their friends in neighborhood public spaces or not, show the effect of different spatial organizations on inhabitants localized social relations', shows that in "Mehran" 48% of respondents visit their friends in neighborhood public spaces most of whom are old men and women. Many adults and youth visit their friends outside the neighborhood territory. In Nazi Abad 68.40% of respondents have their social relations inside

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neighborhood public spaces. These respondents include the elderly, youth and adults.

The table No1, shows the result of the analysis of respondents answer to this question according to their age.

Table1: Use of neighborhood public space according to Age

Age \ Neighborhood	Nazi abad			Mehran		
	Inside neighborhood	Outside neighborhood	Others	Inside neighborhood	Outside neighborhood	Others
15-19	69%	-	31%	33%	58%	9%
20-29	52%	32%	16%	43%	42%	16%
30-54	80%	6.5%	13.5%	35%	35%	30%
Up 55	91%	9%	-	66%	20%	14%

The last factor is the effect of neighborhood public spaces in creating collective memory for neighborhood community. There is a meaningful difference between the two neighborhoods according to this factor. In “Mehran” 64% of people mention events which develop collective memory for them, while in “Nazi abad” 71% of respondents mention at least 1 event. Therefore differences in quantity and variety of events is also noticeable. Respondents in Nazi Abad mention more various events than Mehran Inhabitants. In order to measure this difference, each mentioned event is given 1 weight. Comparing the total sum of weights in the two neighborhoods show the difference. The total sum of events in Nazi abad is 155 while it remains at 85 in Mehran.

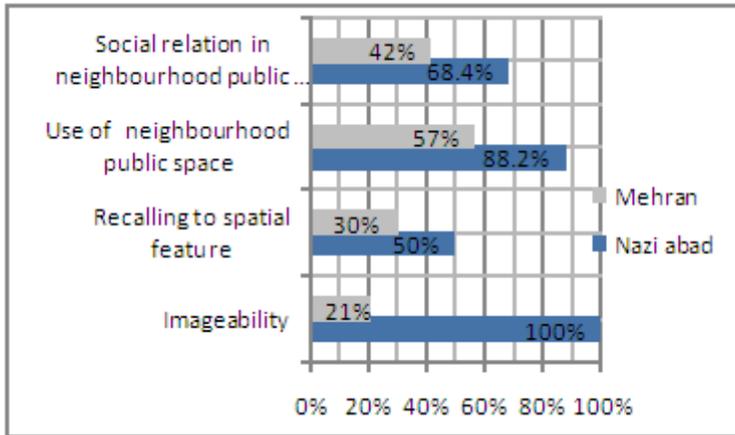


Figure 3: relation with neighborhood public spaces

Conclusion

The rapid rate of urbanization in Tehran (after 1960) has resulted in a decline in the quality of Tehran neighborhoods' identity over time. The article argued that the transformation of spatial organizations of neighborhoods and their public spaces, because of a fast process of urbanization is one of the effective factors in decreasing neighborhood identity.

According to the survey, it appears that planned spatial organization and various neighborhood public spaces result in stronger neighborhood identity in Nazi Abad than in Mehran. Public spaces in these two neighborhoods affect people's relationship with their neighborhoods through both perceptual and social dimensions.

Diversity and appropriate distribution of public spaces in Nazi Abad affect the intensity of use of neighborhood public spaces which results in a more clear image and a sense of neighborhood for its inhabitants. Planned neighborhood identities enhance localized social relationships and support various activities happening in the neighborhood. With a strong center acting as a core, various public events could happen inside neighborhood and these public (usually annual) events create more collective memories for Nazi Abad's inhabitants. These features result in more attachment to the neighborhood and increase a sense of community amongst them.

Finally according to this survey one can say that, neighborhood identity still could be meaningful in a metropolitan city such as Tehran if the role of public spaces is highlighted and given the attention it deserves within the spatial organization of public/residential domains.

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