

Preservation and Transformation of Historic Urban Cores in Iran, the Case of Kerman

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Abstract: Historical urban centers in Iran are significant because of their population density and location, but also because of the major functions of the central buildings that are very often historical monuments and valuable urban ensembles. Historical urban quarters are special places not only because of the cultural heritage they house, but also because of their urban pattern.

The tourist preferred to visit a comfortable city, but of course did so because of its old monuments. Heritage is highly valued, because it allows the traveler to experience historic density differently in each city. It belongs, is at home in the shaping of the identity of the city - for its inhabitants as well as visitors.

The study of urban history reveals that a variety of factors has influenced the development of ancient cities, with one of the most important factors being the economy. In fact, the very survival of a city was highly dependent on its economic power. As the most significant pedestrian network and backbone of a city, the bazaar plays an important role in the development and livability of traditional Iranian cities.

This paper analyzes two examples of where modern construction and the old urban bazaar intersect, and discusses how the old urban texture is being lost.

Keywords: Bazaar, Traditional cities, Modernization, Street, Iran, Cultural heritage, Kerman, Transformation, Neighborhood centers, Preservation.

1. Introduction

Old urban areas are valuable constituents of cities and generally tend to be located in the central area of a city. In Iranian cities, these areas formed the hub of the city before the onset of urban planning, development, and design in the 20th and 21st centuries. Old Bazaars as the main commercial centres and mosques as religious centres are located here.

Cities evolved from concepts that maintained the city walls which defined the cities' positive shape in space and their correspondence with cosmic laws. They preserved the

concept of a center but a center as a single point in space that moves in time and creates the line, or the linear element, of the Bazaar. This orientation towards a moving point introduced a more vital planning concept which, even today, accepts growth and change as natural phenomena of existence. Cities and buildings, analogous to the forms of nature, appear complete and beautiful at every stage of their growth. As vital forms they have within them the heritage of their past and the seeds of their potential future [1].

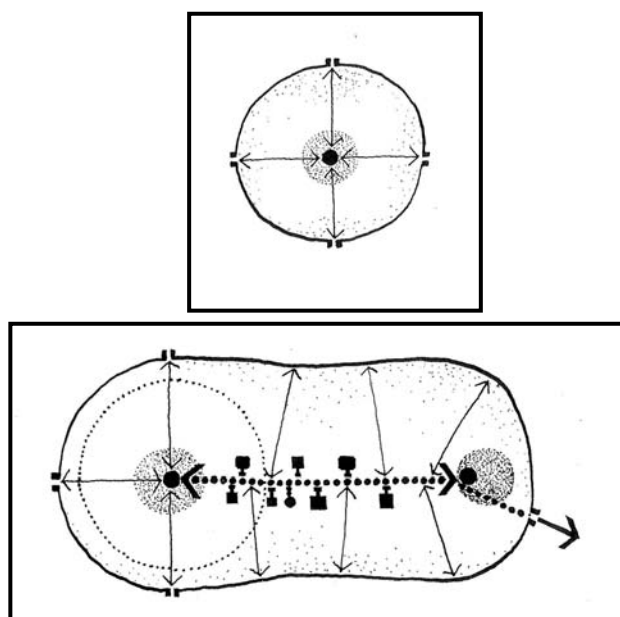


Fig1. The concept of point and line
The center as a single point in space moves in time and creates the line or the linear concept of the bazaar

The problem of old towns and cities is even more acute in developing countries. In societies eager for progress, the modern European cities are regarded as the most desirable urban environment. Urban settlements transformation was very slow before this period but Old urban fabrics experienced a significant structural transformation with commercial, economical, social and cultural changes.

The study of urban history reveals that a variety of factors has influenced the development of ancient cities, with one of the most important factors being the economy. In fact, the very survival of a city was highly dependent on its economic power. The economy also played an important role in the development of Iranian cities, and of the diverse public spaces used for economic and commercial activities, the bazaar is considered to be the most important. The bazaar, a traditional public space in Iranian cities, has always accommodated a wide variety of commercial activities in urban life. The history of the bazaar and urbanization are interrelated and in fact, no Iranian city can be imagined without its bazaar. The word "bazaar" is an old Persian word that is now an integral part

of Iranian culture. The word has a very long history indeed and historical documents indicate that the concept of a bazaar in Iranian towns and cities dates back to 3000B.C. [2]

Urban sociologists, urban planners and designers generally explain the bazaar as the heart of the Iranian city. On the spatial level, the bazaar is seen as the center of the spatial system in Iranian cities. [2] The bazaar is usually linear in shape and public and socio-cultural spaces are positioned through this linear form. In the west, the meaning of the word "bazaar" has changed from it being a place where a wide variety of artifacts and services are to be found and traded, to it being a place of disorder. In truth, the traditional Persian bazaar was a highly organized commercial and financial center and linked to the mosque, the seminary (*Madrasa*), the religious club (*Takiya*), the caravanserai, and the bathhouse (*Hammam*), it was the spiritual and the cultural heart of the Iranian town. This arrangement was not always apparent to the casual visitor. The bazaar is where important political events are celebrated, or where indeed they are deliberately not celebrated in order to depress political disagreement. Moreover, the bazaar is the main urban space where important ritual ceremonies are conducted.

For instance, during Ashura ceremony, the function of large number of commercial spaces is temporary changed for this ritual ceremony [3]. Namely, the bazaar was not only the commercial centre of cities but also the centre of social, cultural, political, and religious activities, as Mansour Falamaki [4] has described the Iranian bazaar as the centre of social representation of city like *piazza* for European cities during the Middle Ages and *hiroba* in Japanese cities. The bazaar traditionally begins at the palace precincts which symbolize the spiritual head of the body, and grows in an apparent natural pattern towards its symbolic heart (Great Mosque)

and then proceeding to the opening of one of the city gates.

The bazaar develops as the vital backbone of the city and the pedestrian streets leading into the city's body proper insert themselves as ribs. Within this structure the vital organs of the city i.e. bathhouses, schools, caravanserais, bakeries, water cisterns, tea houses and numerous merchants and craft stores evolve and flourish. Together, all these 'organs' represent the religious, political, financial, and social integration of the traditional city. The city walls and gates define and protect the mass of the body proper. As the linear system of the bazaar grows and the residential areas spread out from the main spine, the old skin is shed and a new layer is created. The identity and boundaries of man, his city and his universe are once again established [1].

The bazaar complex consists of a large number of buildings, generally referred to as bazaar or when smaller as *bāzārĉa*. Furthermore there are the *sarāys* or caravanserais, and their smaller version, so-called *timĉas*. All these buildings are interconnected with covered market streets (*rāsta*) and passageways (*dālān*). These streets and lanes are not only market streets, but also communication routes for people and goods to enter and exit the bazaar. Goods, previously brought by caravans of loaded camels, donkeys and mules, now arrive by lorries, and after storage are carried on the back of porters to the various workshops and sales points. [5]

In order to create space and light through openings in the dome, domed crossroads or *ĉahārsuq* were built where market streets crossed one another. The bazaar consists of a number of smaller bazaars that make up a multi-functional, multi-layered construction. When the bazaar was expanded over time, the original regular, linear structure slowly and subtly adapted itself to the demands of each historical period.

Life in the bazaar is not always about business. Although the bazaar complex is the commercial heart of Kerman, there are buildings that serve a function other than a commercial one. Today, there are still some *madrasas* in the bazaar where religious youths as well as older males receive advanced religious instruction which may lead to a religious career or to serve one's own edification. One also could find some refuge from the hustle and bustle of the bazaar inside *madrasa*'s courtyard which is often lined with trees and has a large pond in the middle.

Also, there are a number of mosques, characterized by different designs, where the population of bazaar undertake their daily praying and participate in religious ceremonies. Some of these mosques had a special relation with one particular guild that either was its patron and/or had (co)financed its construction.

takiya is a type of building where communal *rawza-kānis* were held, and where during *Moharram* and *Šafar* the Shi'ite passion play (*ta'zia-kāni*) was performed. Another religious function was bathhouse (*hammām*) constructed in the bazaars, where believers regularly came to wash away their impurities so as to be ritually clean and be able to perform their religious duties such as praying.

In addition to the bathhouses where men congregated for relaxation, there were also all kinds of itinerant and shop-based sellers in the bazaar where a large variety of the foods and drinks made up the supplies for social gatherings. There also were itinerant sellers of coffee, tea, water, and smokes as well as coffee-houses (*qahva-kāna*) where the same services were offered.

Moreover, here were popular gathering points to exchange news, gossip, and to listen to poetry and story tellers. The *žarrāb-kāna* (the mint), as its name indicates, was the location where coins were struck by hand until 1877, thus providing the means of exchange for facilitating commercial transactions [6].

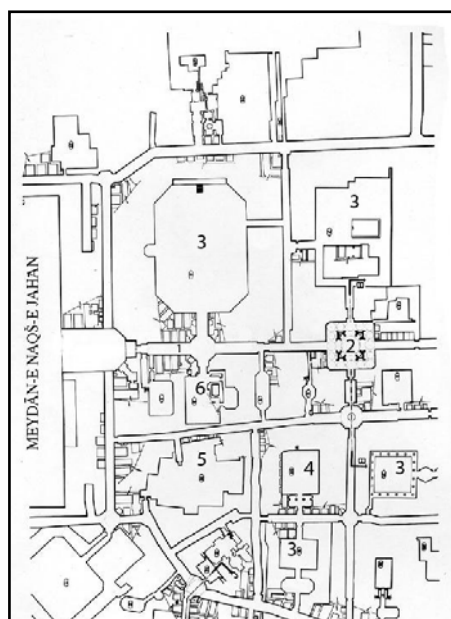


Fig2. Isfahan Bazaar plan,
 1. *rāsta* 2. *čahārsuq* 3. *sarāy* 4. *timča*
 5. bathhouse (*hammām*) 6. mint

The bazaars of different cities were not equally important. Some of the cities which were located alongside trading routes had a greater bazaar, and the others which were far from these routes had a weaker bazaar. Among the oldest and most precious bazaars of Iranian cities, bazaars of the following cities are of greater importance: Tabriz, Kerman, Isfahan, Shiraz, Sabzvar, Hamedan, Kashan and Yazd.

Located along the Silk Road, Kerman, which was once a trading metropolis of international renown has one of the most historical bazaars in Iran. Kerman was chosen for its location and the role its bazaar once played in the formation of the city itself.

Kerman is a city of strategic, historical and political importance. Commercial trading with adjacent cities was easy as Kerman lies on a vast plain. Kerman is the most remote of Iranian cities in the chain of cities that cut through the central plateau in the east of the country. The Kerman bazaar was part of the Silk road, the oldest and most important trading route in eastern civilization. This made it a very international bazaar indeed. Since ancient times, this city has been one of the most important points that connect west to east and north to south.

This particular attribute has had a remarkable influence on the construction and development of the bazaar, in such a way that the commercial zones of the city have expanded to the outskirts. As a result, the commercial axis and city plan have been designed based on the main commercial lines. The south-north and east-west lines link important commercial gates to each other. This kind of plan justifies its important role and makes the architectural plan of the commercial axis a cross-shaped intersection which made the bazaar of Kerman into one of the most beautiful bazaars in Iran.

Moreover, this development made for easy access between the bazaar and the old quarters of the city.

The bazaar of Kerman is one of the best-preserved examples of a large, enclosed, linear and covered Bazaar complex. It includes mosques, caravanserais, shops, Bazaars, and historical neighborhoods.

The bazaar is today still the commercial hub of Kerman, thanks to its location and the fact that it continues to have an essential commercial function. The shops and *sarāys* in the bazaar house numerous trades, crafts and service providers. There are both itinerant retail traders and permanent retail establishments, and private and public services. Wholesalers, agents, export and import businesses, finance and credit services, crafts and trades and all the related brokerage activities are to be found here.

One major positive development is that the bazaar has acquired a new commercial function as a tourist destination, visited for its sights and sounds as well as for its goods and services. This has resulted in the proliferation of shops that specifically cater for tourists by making, buying and selling traditional craft products, some of which only survive because the main clients are tourists.

2. Problem Formulation

As described above, the bazaar played a significant role in the social life of the city, and many activities found here made it an exciting, bustling place, in fact the most lively place in the city. Widening the streets from the mid twentieth century onwards resulted in morphological and functional disruption to the historical urban structure. These wide streets affording free traffic access to different parts of the city were eminently suitable for shops and commercial spaces. This created numerous problems for the old bazaar because both consumers and shopkeepers prefer to have shops near streets rather than shops in a covered bazaar with no automobile access.

It was at this time that a comprehensive program of external city expansion was started. The old urban districts fell into decay and rapidly became slums.

Population movements in recent decades speeded up this process. The prosperous classes moved to the newer parts of the city, and a flood of rural migrants in need of cheap accommodation and jobs in the 'informal sector' of the economy found their way to these areas.

This influx of people led to overcrowding, often with several families living in one house, and sometimes in a single room. Used in this way historic buildings soon fall into ruin. The result has been social and economic segregation: high class and educated people only live, work, shop in modern parts of cities. The historical parts are used only by immigrants that have gone there to work and save money for their families. Many inhabitants of old quarters have little interest in conservation, and even less in restoring the buildings in which they live because they cannot afford to do so. Moreover, these residents reach a point where they no longer appreciate the heritage surrounding them and are willing to forsake it at the first

opportunity for some more modern type of housing. In addition to the old residential centers going to rack and ruin, old public buildings such as bath houses, caravanserai and so on remained unused because more modern service centers were developed and put to use.

Building modern shopping centers next to modern streets, places business -the most important function of the bazaar- in jeopardy. The fate of many old bazaars in Iran over the past few decades has been that they have been abandoned and left derelict. Large areas of most old urban centers are becoming desolate wastelands of empty stores and buildings hostile to life.

With their often thousands of years of history, old towns are living witnesses to the process of civilization. They give their inhabitants identity and facilitate social and cultural cohesion. If old, historical urban districts are destroyed by ruthless modernization, urban identity is lost.

The conflict between old and new is the most intense in city centers. When cities grow, they usually expand around an initial urban nucleus and consequently the bigger the city becomes the more internal its old center. Old centers are therefore usually located in the most strategic part of the city, conveying a significant part of every society's urban identity. At the same time, old cores are not capable of accommodating the requirements of contemporary life in a modern city center since they were generated by social and environmental circumstances that are different from those that prevail today.

The history of architecture and urbanism indicates that in any new period there are inventions and creations but the size and the ways these innovations associate with old components are manifold. In some periods the major principles of the old

urbanism remain almost intact but the interpretation and materialization of these concepts evolve. In other periods even some principles of urbanism transform, leading to more fundamental changes in the characteristics of the city. In the earlier periods of urban transformation, the change were more gradual and more restricted in size because the forces that created those changes were limited but the dimensions and speed of this changing process have not been intensified in the more recent periods of transformation.

The modernization of Iran was stemmed from on political changes in the 1930s and it caused a change in socio-cultural and economical levels as well as in the spatial configuration of Iranian cities, through the creation of several new streets within the existing historical areas of cities.

3. Pattern Analysis

Today, the role of the bazaar has declined because the considerable and rapid changes Iranian society has undergone have diminished its importance as a public space. Retaining the bazaar's importance and its heritage would require substantial revitalization strategies in traditional cities in Iran, it is the bazaar, as the most important and life giving part of the city, that should be given precedence as the main artery that carries life (or damage) to other parts of the city. The modernization policies led to the rapid growth of the urban population. The establishment of modern factories displaced the numerous artisan workshops. Numerous parts of old bazaars were destroyed to create wide streets. Merchants were encouraged to locate retail shops along these new streets rather than in the old bazaar. Many of the stores that opened to meet the increased demand for commerce and services from the rapidly expanding urban population are in the new streets.

This paper analyzes the structural and spatial changes that have taken place over the past few decades in the central district

of Kerman. This analysis looks at the impact building roads has had on the old bazaar and at what in fact been done where new urban constructions and the old fabrics and the bazaar intersect. Two aspects of Kerman city are taken as examples and examined in this paper. The first aspect explores the impact of modern streets on neighborhood centers and their components and the second aspect discusses the intersection of the modern street with the most important pedestrian network of the old city, the main bazaar.

3.1 First case study: the impact of new streets on old neighborhood centers

Neighborhood centers play an important role in the social and cultural life of a city, and in the past each neighborhood had its own shopping and service center which made the district dynamic and lively for local residents.

Apart from its role in the district itself, the neighborhood centers were shaped around a *bāzārĉa*, or small Bazaar, a branch of the main bazaar and it connected nearby districts to the main bazaar. These neighborhood passages were like arteries distributing lifeblood to all parts of the body, carrying the life and dynamism of the main bazaar, as the main commercial and social element and the structural backbone of the city to other districts even those quite far away.



Fig3. Aerial photo, Kerman 1956
1. *takiya* 2. wrestling center 3. mosque
4. bathhouse 5. bazaar

These pathways in Iranian cities are of secondary importance to the main bazaar, and render residential

quarters accessible through a system of paths peripheral to each walled quarter. Normally four to five meters wide, these pathways lead through the encircling walls through gateways. Constantly kept in the shade by the surrounding high walls, these paths are today cool channels for pedestrian circulation even in the hottest of summers.

The photograph above shows a small bazaar that was built in conjunction with the main bazaar and it also acts as a passageway to link nearby neighborhoods with each other and so to the main bazaar. Apart from a few shopping areas and service centers such as the mosque as the religious center, a bathhouse, wrestling center and *Takiya* with its open public space at the front were also built along the passage which made it a bustling hive of activity.



Fig4. Aerial photo, Kerman 1979

1. takiya, 2. wrestling center 3. mosque
4. bathhouse 5. bazaar

In 1979, a street was built in the middle of this passage and as a result nearby neighborhoods no longer have pedestrian access to the main bazaar. Furthermore, the service centers along this passage also encounter a number of problems: the bathhouse and mosque continued to operate because they were connected to the main bazaar, but the wrestling center experienced difficulties because it is located right next to the newly built street and was isolated from the neighborhood and residential areas. Somehow *takiya* did continue to be active, but because it was no longer

connected to the mosque, the main religious centre of the bazaar, it could not perform its duty as it should.

The photograph in figure 5 was taken in 1994. The intersection of the street and the passageway has not changed and no special design changes have been made. As a result of structural and social change, nothing of the neighborhood center remains. The bathhouse has been abandoned without there being any plan to restore and renovate it. The buildings cause numerous problems for local residents because it is no longer structurally safe and many drug dealers and thieves also perpetrate their crimes there.



Fig5. Aerial photo, Kerman 1994

1. takiya 2. wrestling center 3. mosque
4. bathhouse 5. bazaar

The mosque and *takiya* are still active because of their religious function and thanks to the financial aid they receive from the government. The wrestling centre is being restored, it is still considered to be a fine example of traditional wrestling centres but again, because it is isolated from the main bazaar, it is not visited by tourists who are attracted to the main bazaar every day. The map below shows the impact of the new street: numerous shops are located along this modern street, and the shopping centres around the old passageways no longer operate, the new street interrupts the pedestrian network and we see that no restoration work has been done at the intersection.



Fig6. Land use map of the area, 1994

3.2 Second case: the impact of the new street on the southern part of the main bazaar

The Kerman bazaar has been and still is the liveliest location in the city, and it continues to exert considerable influence on the cultural, economic and social life of the town.

In this case study the influence of a new street on the main bazaar will be demonstrated and analyzed comprehensively and its impact on the network of pathways in the city is discussed.



Fig7. Aerial photo, Kerman 1956
1. bazaar, 2. open public space, 3. open space of the takya, 4. mosque

Figure 7 shows the southern part of the main bazaar in Kerman in 1956. The main Bazaar was the most important thoroughfare through the city and in some parts open public spaces were created along the covered bazaar. This open space was generally located where the main bazaar and the minor pathways meet. (number2).

There are also other public spaces where the main bazaar intersects with a secondary pathway; in this photo we can see a mosque and a *takiya* with its open space that were located at the intersection point.

Once the wide street has been built near the previous secondary passage, the continuity of the main Bazaar was lost and the main thoroughfare in this area is no longer the bazaar. (Figure 8)

The main bazaar broke up into two parts and unfortunately these two parts were no longer connected to each other because some parts were demolished when the street was being widened. The open public space now had no purpose. The original idea for an open space alongside became meaningless because its concept was an open space along covered Bazaar but now the street is much wider than this old square and also there isn't any continues covered Bazaar anymore.

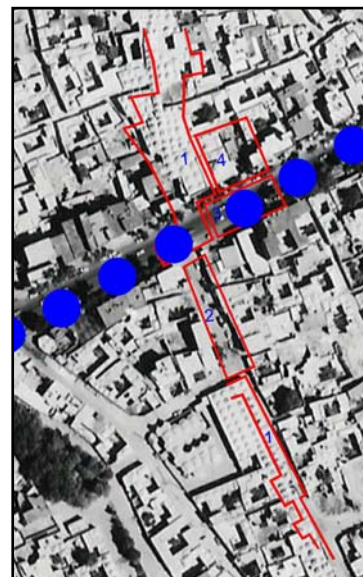


Fig8. Aerial photo, Kerman 1979
1. bazaar, 2. open public space, 3. open space of the takya, 4. mosque

The last photo, taken in 1994, shows that the previous problems still exist and no specific design changes have been made at the intersection point. Many shopping centers are located along the new street and as can be seen in the photograph, many parts of the residential quarter behind the main bazaar are falling into disrepair and apart from the buildings right next to the street, the other areas of the quarter are structurally desolate.



Fig9. Aerial photo, Kerman 1994
1. bazaar, 2. open public space, 3. open space of the takya, 4. mosque

4. Conclusion:

Cities, like any other man made creature, change and develop as time passes, this transformation is a continuous and dynamic process during which the physical environment and spatial spaces increase in number and change in quality. If this process occurs rapidly and without a plan or program, we will face spatial and structural problems in urban areas. As an illustrative case for other traditional Iranian cities, Kerman has encountered serious problems during this transformation process.

The bazaar in the old city of Kerman was the main thoroughfare which also linked the main city gates to each

other and many public centers were located around the main bazaar.

Building modern streets in the old city of Kerman was somehow inevitable, but what is vital for the structure of historical quarters is where and how the New and the Old intersect.

Widening streets to facilitate automobile access to the historical fabric of the city has had a deleterious impact on the network of paths through the city, and has caused the spatial coherence of the ancient fabric to fracture.

In previous case studies the most destructive factor of the modernization process occurred at the intersection points, new constructions were designed and built without any attention being given to the spatial and functional components of the old. There was no restoration or spatial design, and the old quarters lie abandoned and dilapidated. Unfortunately, modernization trends in Iranian cities only attempt to find space for automobiles and no public place or pedestrian pathway are designed or restored in this process. The result is that our cities die on the inside. There is no longer any social or cultural activity in the historical parts of the city, and only a few important monuments function as museums for visitors – they do not play a role in the social life of local residents.

A sustainable and developed city is the city that, during its growth and expansion and the building of new urban spaces, makes an attempt to find a logical connection between the old and the new.

The most important step to develop strategies to restore the historical parts of Iranian cities is to analyze how modernization affects those places where the new converges with the old urban backbone and find ways to diminish its destructive impact.

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