

The First Modern Square in Tehran City
(Historical and Spatial Evolution of Old Tehran Squares until Modern Age)

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

While forms of cities in Iran have been transformed from traditional structure into modern one, in the same line, the urban elements including squares changed and appeared in a totally new characteristic.

Traditional squares in Iran have normally been vast open spaces enclosed with public traditional uses such as public baths, cisterns, mosques, bazars, palaces and governmental buildings. All of these squares have coherently been articulated with the city fabric for people.

Since the first Pahlavi, urban fabric of Tehran, and accordingly its squares, has changed specifically for using cars or applying new modern infrastructures. Thus, from this time on in Tehran, two types of development overlays each other: The traditional layer consisting of organic and narrow roads and the modern layer with orthogonal and grid roads. To some extent, the same prototype has been followed in other big or small cities and settlements.

The roundabouts or so-called modern squares emerged at the intersection of road networks across the cities. Therefore, the main usage and scale of these squares was defined for vehicular transportation. Around this new urban element at the crossroads some modern functions were emerged: municipality, post and telegraph office, hotels, banks, national police office, county authorities and province governor buildings which all were, less or more, relevant to the governmental uses. In the middle of the squares itself there was regularly either a statue of the first Pahlavi or any other urban landmark.

It is historically significant to figure out the first modern square in Tehran city. Most

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probably it has been the origin of modern squares and main pattern for the other squares in Tehran and all other Iranian cities. The main objective of this research is to discover the first modern crossing point in the new development layer of Tehran which is imposed to the traditional city. This cross point will demonstrate architecture and urban design issues related to modern and traditional developments in Iran. As Michael Web noted:

“We cannot bring back the past, but we can learn from it. An older square that is an organic part of its community usually serves present needs better than a new space ordained by a planner or developer. Cities are learning to preserve, improve and adopt the squares they have, rather than opening up more. People have always enjoyed coming together, and this survey celebrates the different ways in which that impulse can be fulfilled.” (Web, 1990)

Methodology

This is an explanatory and case study research that focuses on the central city of Tehran within Naseri's Fortification and its proximities. The mode of the research is historical and it explores Tehran city from the origins to the end of Modern period. It investigate almost all the primary squares of the city in that period including Sabze Meydan, Arg, Topkhaneh, Baherstan, Mokhber-al-dole, Rah Ahan and Hassan Abad.

Moving from the more general to specific observation the research explanation has basically got a deductive or top-down approach. The research approach inherently avoids any normative interpretation and deals with positive statements.

In addition to time and location, the spatial characteristic has been another main component for discovering the first modern square of Tehran. Spatial characteristics, in here, include:

- Land uses and functions of the squares and surroundings
- Type of access and the articulation of roads and squares
- Morphology, orientation and the layout of the squares
- Architectural prototypes and physical-visual aspects of the squares

Illustrations and texts dealing with urban space analysis and square evolutions as well as specific studies on architecture and urban design of Tehran have made the main data and materials for this research.

Results and Discussion

Comparing the traditional and modern factors of city squares, the first modern square of Tehran city will be hopefully discovered. Thereby, the research discusses and analyzes the first squares of Tehran city in three periods:

- From establishment of the city to demolishing Tahmasbi's fortification and the city development through Naser-Aldin Shah dynasty.
- From above-mentioned period to the first Pahlavi.
- New development of Tehran central part during the First Pahlavi to 1933.

The transformation of squares in Tehran through the years and toward modernization is

discussed in different aspects: Land use, Access, Morphology and Architecture Style. The discussions indicate that squares are reshaped from irregular to regular shapes and are interlinked to urban vehicular streets at all. Furthermore, diagonal and defined spaces are amongst the main square characteristics in modern period. Locating new and modern land uses and widening the scale of mass and solid spaces around the squares are other distinctive changes of modern city development in Tehran.

Moreover, squares are connecting to one another with regular, diagonal and linear streets while sculptures and water features are vastly added to their landscape. The architecture style in proximity of squares follows more extroverted rather than introverted development and it, in turn, reduces the enclosures of the squares.

Conclusion

The outcome of this research shows that Topkhaneh Square which is made during Qajar period, dynasty of Naserdin Shah, is the first square in Tehran which has acquired modern characteristics of urban spaces.

The location of the square at the focal point of the city from which the city has been developed as well as the spread of modern functions including bank and telegraph offices around the square have made this segment different from all traditional squares in Iran.

Keywords: *Modern, Square, Tehran, Topkhaneh Square, Tradition, Urban Space.*