

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

ورودی شهر، به مثابه عنصری جهت ایجاد هویت مستقل برای منظر شهری  
is also published in this issue of journal.

## City entrance, as an element for creating an independent identity for the city landscape

Yousef Bagheri\*<sup>1</sup>, Seyed Amir Mansouri<sup>2</sup>

1. M. A. in Landscape Architecture.

2. College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.

Received 2017/11/01

revised 2018/01/01

accepted 2018/01/10

available online 2018/05/22


**Abstract: Statement of Problem:** Apart from the structure of the city and arrangement of urban spaces, the evolution of modern cities seems to have become a dead texture of the city, and has been separated from its systematic structure in the old cities. Obviously, the entrance of the contemporary cities cannot imitate the entrance system of the ancient cities, since if the city is defined as a system consisting of various historical, natural, environmental, cultural, economic, etc. layers, it will be found that the entrance of this city cannot be defined apart from its structural layers. The entrance recovers its identity in association with the structural layers of the city in the systematic structure of the current cities. This association requires identification of the entrance capabilities and its effect on urban spaces.

**Objective:** Investigation of the entrance of the contemporary cities is necessary in order to achieve the nature of the entrance as a perspective location, its essence and realization of its identity for redefining its concept in modern urbanization. The entrance of the city as part of a whole needs redefining the entrance position in the city system. In that light, the present study's aim is to attempt to explain the perceived indicative parameters of modern cities.

**Research Methodology:** The present research is a descriptive-analytic study, in which, library has been used as the data collection tool. Believing in the city's layered mechanism, this study has investigated the concept of the city entrance as a perspective location, and has ultimately provided the indicators of the entrance of contemporary cities.

**Conclusion:** The entrance is a window for perception of the city's landscape and is an element to create an independent identity for the city landscape. Entrance perception requires regarding the semantic dimension of presence along the physical side. The city entrance as an indicator, apart from its physical identity, lies more in its semantic identification, as the entrance of the city does not have an identity independent of the city, rather the entrance is an element for creating an independent identity for the city landscape. The entrance is the dense modern perspective of a city, which is the today's statement of the city. With this definition, entrance is not a joint, as the joint is an independent identity regardless of outside and inside. However, the entrance is not an independent identity; rather, it is a combination of identities.

**Keywords:** *Entrance, Perspective location, City layer mechanism.*

 \*. Corresponding author: yousefbagheri788@gmail.com,  
+989199128132

## Introduction

City is a complex system of social, economic, and environmental layers which is realized in a systemic process<sup>3</sup> with the combination of its various layers. The systemic view of the city is created based on an organismic attitude towards phenomena. Atashinbar, quoting from Farshad(2013) shed more light on this through an explanation of an organismic theory. He noted that an organismic theory focuses on new concepts like holism, system, hierarchy, and dynamics of biological phenomena.

From the foregoing, we would be on track when we define a city as a complex system of various layers which can be decomposed into each of these sub-systems, but is a single set of all of them. City entrance is a gate to these layers. Generally, entering a city is performed by three modes of land, sea, and air, in which the city's ground bases are of the oldest forms of entering the city and at present, it has a relative plurality compared to other city entrances. The entrance of contemporary cities, in contrast with their original identity, has been subjected to a functional and semantic rupture and has provided an unexpected space for visitors of the city. A suitable classification of issues causing this chaos can be traced to ignorance of the different layers forming the entrance perspective system<sup>4</sup> in the city development plan. Examples of this disruption include the following (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1. Sciences effective in recognizing the city entrance perspective layers. Source: authors.

- Sociology: marginal settlements, informal settlements, social abnormalities, delinquency, addiction, poverty etc.
- Environment: destruction of urban marginal settlements, ignorance of city landscape ecological issues, natural landscape identity.
- City economy: Marginal and margin-favored economic activities, informal and false economic activities, permanent motivations, changes in the land use, land exchanges, etc.

While a proper acknowledgement of the entrance concept and its position in the hierarchical perception of the city by both the citizens and visitors is vital in investigating the position of entrance in modern cities, various sciences and branches related to the functional areas of the city entrance lay in the trilateral relationship among citizen-nature-economy. These tripartite interactions are strategic in explaining the entrance perspective.

### Research questions

This study, attempts to proffer answers to the following research question: What is the position of the entrance in contemporary urban planning? And what are the indicators of the city entrance perspectives?

## Research methodology

Obtaining and presenting a brief summary from the dominant view of knowledge-professions related to the city landscape will better clarify the position of entrance in contemporary cities. Sociology, environment, urban economics and traffic aside urbanization and architecture are vital aspects of these knowledge-professions. With a thorough search on these knowledge-professions and their relation with the development of contemporary cities, it is evident that there is no definite and comprehensive definition for all cities in relation to the function of their origins. An explanation of the entrance position in the perception of the city and its performance can essentially help to clarify the mechanism of understanding and concept of the city for the comers.

- System attitude to city entrance

The functional limits of and the policy makings on entrances to contemporary cities is predicated on the assessment of the city entrance's efficiency on a regional and city scale. Considering the city entrance as part of a whole requires redefining the entrance position in the city system. "An organismic approach to the city provides the foundation of a systemic worldview<sup>5</sup>". An organism is a whole which receives its essence from its totality. The physical and semantic dimensions are taken into account in this definition and form the totality of an organ through interacting each other. Investigation of the elements and factors involved in recognizing the city's landscape has a major role in recognizing the city system.

In investigating a city, the city as a whole, alongside the layers that makes it up (which create the structure of the city's perspective system through a dynamic interaction with each other) has to be equally considered. The ancient cities had a systemic performance within their own limits due to their organic nature. A research carried out by the French Scientific Center for Transport, Urbanization and Public Construction reveals how difficult it is when a direct approach to a city (in terms of living organisms) is adopted, In this approach, the city is considered as

a complex system (Atashinbar, quoting from Certu: 2007).

Adopting a systemic view entails seeking for several factors or elements that duly recognizes the main structure of each city, including the main access network and major centers of activity. The hierarchical system of entering, browsing and leaving the city leads to the formation of paths in the city which constitute the main configuration of the city. The entrance of the ancient cities was one of the main pillars of the city's systemic system, establishing strong links with the inside and outside of the city, in such a way that one can hardly determine the area of influence of the entrance of the old Iranian cities in a specified limit.

The entrance is a route with the feature of the turning point of the city, in other words: entering contemporary cities requires travelling a path with the significant characteristics in the city making it a turning point in the city. Therefore, in the urban field, the entrance includes features of both a single point and a path. Physically, its structure is similar to the echo of sound (Fig. 2). The echo is intensified as approaching the source (the sign point of entering the city). Clearly, this definition is true for the city exit.



Fig. 2. Interactive structure of city entrance in urban system. Source: authors.

Meanwhile, the physical characteristics of the entrance are strongly affected by the entrance location, however, its interactive feature is the common point in all fields. Hence, the entrance as a subsystem in the main organization of a city includes sensory, perceptual, identity and performance dimensions.

At the initial stages, while the entrance field introduces its interactive features with the city outside, the

entrance perspective is however affected by the natural perspective of the city. As we approach the entrance position, the entrance accentuates its symbolic landscape and becomes an area with symbolic features of the city along with meeting the requirements of the place for the visitors. Therefore, approaching the urban areas, the entrance reveals its interactive features<sup>6</sup> with an urban landscape and prepares the visitor to enter a new city with its unique identity.

**Entrance, the starting point of city perception**

Entrance escreates a sense of presence in the city. Such sense of presence has a hierarchical process which involves moving from a path leading to a point and from a point leading to the center of the city. The unity of these hierarchical stages in turn creates unity in the three phases of visual, mental and physical presence which are exactly what visitors need in the explanation of a city’s presence.to explain a city’s presence. Accordingly, the sense of presence in the city by the audience is taking place in a movement-pause-movement process. Obviously, this is also true for leaving the city.

In the ancient cities of Iran, the arrival to the city was taking place in a logical, mental and physical process, forming the main structures of the entrance system. Factors such as sequencing of the movement and the proper arrangement of uses on the path leading to the physical dimension of the city entrance, addressing the city’s signs, conversion of movement to pause, and reinforcing the collective spirit at the physical entry enhances the presence in the city in the development of perceptual indicators of the city entrance (Fig. 3); as the continuity of the hierarchical presence in urbanization is fully evident in the pillars of the traditional Iranian architecture (Fig. 4).

Generally, entering into a city requires the tripartite presence of the mental, visual and physical. This sense of presence in the place requires strengthening the relationship between the audience and the place during the hierarchy of presence in the city. The main contribution of the city entrance is to create a hierarchy of presence in the city. In the words of Mansouri (2011), “a city is a place resulting from accumulation of humans and the development of the fundamental concepts in their minds”. In addition to the physical elements, the city includes symbols, meanings and mysteries that people understand according to their role, motivation, mental and other internal factors.

Schultz’s viewpoint hinged on the fact that a feeling of space and perception of the environment are ingrained with memories and in that light, he searched

for clarifications of the place in human experiences and mental states. According to him, the place is the same living space; being alive both in special and general senses. A person’s first visualization of a city is formed as the perception of its entrance and as such, the entrance should represent the identity and hidden values of the city. Since the objective perception due to the physical symbols<sup>8</sup> in the entrance provides the possibility of immediate perceptions, taking into account how the city identity is revealed in the objectivity of the city entrance is essential. In fact, the entrance is a place independent of the city, however, with the same identity in coordination with the city and areas of activities different from those of the city; in other words, the semantic and physical identity of the city entrance is in line with the city, but with a different activity.

**A. Entrance as a symbol of the city**

In forming an entrance perception, consideration should be given to the semantic dimension along with the physical dimension. Giving meaning to the landscapes and strengthening the memorable spirit in space at the physical entry point is a factor in strengthening the presence in the city to develop the perception indicators of the city entrance. Intensifying the continuity of hierarchy of presence

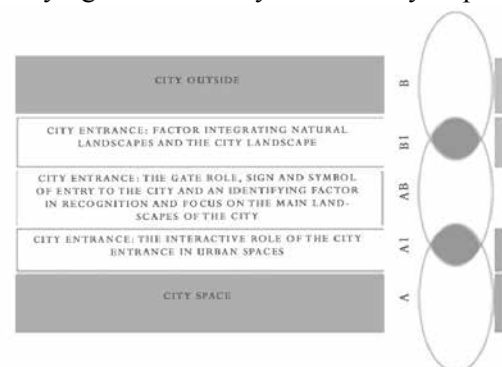


Fig. 3. Hierarchical stages of presence in the city due to the interactive characteristics of the entrance with the outside and inside of the city. The entrance structure is not separate in these stages, and the integrity of the entrance should be considered as a place. Source: authors.



Fig. 4. Hierarchy of presence in ancient cities. Source: authors.

in the city in traditional Iranian urbanization by spatial planning or correct scheduling of the turning points of the landscape in turn inspires the viewer with the mental sense of entering the city. “Reliefs have been stamped on the stone walls of the mountain necks, which are thus the symbolic gates enclosing the regional spaces.

Sometimes, the gates are made at the entrance of the passages and equally provide the traveler with the points of recognition of entering or departure from larger dimensions. Closer to the city, bridges or even roads which follow toward significant indices of the city, consider the depth of location, while flowing flume from the mountains to the cities provides outfit to the lines of trees which guides eye as positive shape of the city like green arrows“ (Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 2002: 13-15). These signs and symbols lead to readability and identity at the entrance and deepen the feeling of presence in the city.

The citizens need readability and identity for a sense of presence in the city. A city is like a complex set of visual signs and identity manifested in a subset of signs. These signs can include various factors to be as an indicator, including color, texture, extent, height, etc. Generally, the space (body + activity) and the mental image that remains of it, are of the most effective factors in forming the identity of the living space and humans” (Habibi, 2009: 47). Symbols and signs are manifested by the distinction between themselves and the context in which they are located. This contradiction and distinction make them more prominent and well-known and, over time, induce sense of belonging to citizens. Signs can contribute to their area of influence at the local, regional, and national levels. A remarkable point of these signs is the continuous identity of the city in forming them, and vice versa. In line with this, Atashinbar (2010) asserts thus: “Identity as one of the most important factors of city perception, has a prominent role in recognizing the citizens of the city”. The rate of prominence of the city entrance in its semantic distinction is more

than its physical distinction. Indeed, the entrance of the city represents a perspective of the city which has not yet been revealed for the visitor. Therefore, the semantic role of entrance in identifying the city landscape is very important and is a factor in consolidating the mental background of the visitors to the city (Fig. 5).

### Conclusion

An index city entrance, regardless of its physical identity, lies more in its semantic identity. Since the city entrance has no identity independent of the city, rather it is as an element to create an independent identity for the city landscape. The entrance of contemporary cities due to the extent of cities in the form structure of the city, always requires strengthening of the symbolic elements for the creation of spatial identity. This identity, in case of being in accordance with the identity symbols of the city, would indicate a special meaning for citizens of the city entrance; this would be a factor to continue the identity of the urban landscape at the entrance to the city. In contemporary cities, due to the wide extent of the city and the presence of

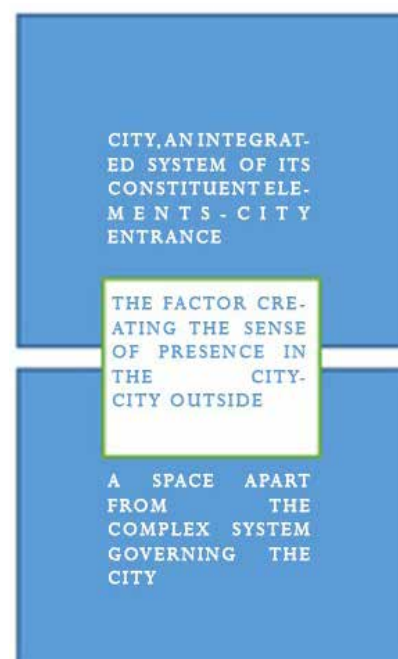


Fig. 5. Interactive role of the entrance. Source: authors.



numerous entrances, the main entrance of the city requires identification and identifying elements. These elements are symbols and signs introducing the city that have no identity independent of the city, and regain their identity in interaction with the urban landscape. This is in line with the consolidation of the independent identity of the city.

### B. Entrance as the mental boundary of the city

In Iranian urbanization, territories of a city and entrance into the city are determined by regular fences, castles and gates. Therefore, the presence of urban signs on different scales in order for focus on the entrance and exit relative to the city area did not start today. This phenomenon (entry and exit) has begun from the gates since a long time. Kimyayi (2011) on his part observed that “The emergence of agricultural farms and the presence of some urban marginal actions were making the comers aware of approaching the city to a large

extent before observation of the gates and fences of the city”.

Generally, the entrance space of ancient Iranian cities, like the buildings, was a flexible space which like a joint, was able to match the characteristics of both spaces linked together. The integrity among urban spaces is due to the suitable relationship of urban spaces and their location. The entrance of Iranian ancient cities is a factor relating the outer space to the urban space which has a systematic structure within itself. The boundary entrance of a city is a mandatory factor due to the location of the entrance in the city and cannot be considered as a feature, however, the penetration of the entrance to the interior of the city and the relationship with the main market as the city’s economic center are the indicators of the entrance of ancient cities” (Fig. 6).

#### Summary

– Philosophical and theoretical dimensions: There has been always a strong two-way relationship between the entrance location and the comers



Fig6. Connecting role of the city entrance in the ancient cities of Iran (map of old Tehran). Source: authors.

(citizens). This connection consists of two physical and semantic dimensions. The perspective is the factor creating this relationship in a subjective and objective way.

– Historical dimensions: The entrance of the ancient cities was part of the city’s system, connecting the inside and outside of the city, and was directing

the city visitors to the market as the economic center and the main square as the social center of the city.

– Semantic and symbolic dimensions: the city entrance was a symbol of the social life of the city, playing the role of the city’s showcase; due to the physical spread of contemporary cities, the importance of entrance of the city leads to the

readability of the entrance, which enhances the independent identity of the city.

– **Functional dimensions:** The effectiveness of the entrance of contemporary cities in the quality of the city to city connection lies in its physical dimension, which has been defined in the structural layers of the city in the level of effective connection of the entrance with the urban spaces located on the edge of the city, although the interaction of the entrance with natural elements outside the city cannot be neglected. The economic, social and natural dimensions of the city entrance should be taken into account in the hierarchy of entering the city.

### C. Entrance as a window to look at nature

#### • Nature

– Entrances have a remarkable natural potential as a result of their location on the edges of a city. Essentially, hierarchy of pristine landscapes outside the city to urban landscapes creates entrance to the city. Ignorance of the natural layers in the areas of entry into the city causes detaching the city with pristine nature, and in addition to environmental problems, leads to the destruction of natural infrastructures in contemporary cities. “Urban green spaces have led to an increase in human’s share of nature outside the city, in addition, high quality green spaces can gift joy and a basket of a healthy life for the citizens” (Tyrv’ainen, L/ Miettinen, A, 2000).

Basically, factors such as natural position, the shape of land and the topographical features like mountains, valleys and rivers determines to a large extent the entrance of old cities. Consequently, these natural factors limit access to the city to specific points. A good example to drive home this point is the building of the Qur’an Gate in Shiraz detailed in the plan for organizing the entrances of Tehran, 1997.

Regardless of its obligatory influence of natural factors on the entrance of ancient cities, the natural landscape has a significant impact on citizens in the

perception of entrance of the city. The relationship between the visitors and the environment is caused by the interconnectedness of the natural landscape and the human-made environment at the city entrance. Richard Jester believes: “If human beings think of their own survival on the biosphere, they must accept the fact that all living things in the city have the same right to live” (Regester, 2006: 12). The man-made elements, including buildings, masses and volumes, urban spaces, open spaces, network of roads, squares and urban facilities are interconnected as a totality. Indeed, the natural environment with the major elements like the natural bed, the ground and its terrains, water streams and vegetation have a decisive role and influence in the way of combination of the elements in the shape of the city.

Finally, the relationships and how their components interact in creating a whole unit and in linking to the surrounding environment, introduces the form of the city as representing the present and the intermediate between the past and the future. Urban edges, due to their remoteness from the city’s compact texture, have a good space to strengthen the natural landscape of the city for residents. These spaces of the city have the potential to attract citizens from urban centers. Therefore, strengthening the natural landscapes on the city edges and defining the proper uses for them, in addition to renewing the natural landscape of the city, will lead to the revival of these places and make these areas attractive for the citizens.

### D. Socio-economic aspects at the entrance to cities

#### – Economy

In the systemic attitude towards the entrance of the city, taking into account the existing urban infrastructure, including highways and access networks etc., the natural and social landscapes have been destroyed in this place, and this is a factor in the destruction of natural habitats and at the same time, the loses in the city vitality. At present, a global focus is on the economic and social role of entrance of the contemporary cities. In

view of this, Al-Hashemi (2017) asserts thus: “the proposed strategies emphasize that infrastructures must change from a phenomenon with a service role into a phenomenon with a role important in the life of human beings”.

Seasonal or permanent markets with low economic benefits for low-income groups and the general urban community is one reason that has led to the reliance of the entrance economy on the city margin economy and the consequent development of local businesses and formation of new economic relations on the margins of cities. “The ultimate goal of the city economic approach has been concentrated on the interests of individuals instead of considering its location and requires a developing policy for the participation of people and institutions” (Edward L. Glaeser, 2007).

In an attempt to revive the entrance of contemporary cities and enhance the economic level of low-income groups of the society, economic developing policies have been enacted that synchronizes with the model of businesses<sup>12</sup>. A good example is the formation of daily markets on the periphery of cities<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, these market attract local tourists and stimulate the economic development of entrances of cities. Given the low cost of land on the city margins, the entrance is inevitably a place for large-volume uses requiring more spaces to be used. However, these applications should be defined in accordance with the social and natural characteristics of entrances of the city, and the intruding uses to be moved to other defined locations on the edges of the city. The industrial use is of these uses which are now considered as an intruding factor at the entrance to most of the cities in Iran (Fig. 7).

#### – Society

Throughout the history, the city entrance as a social place has been the place for gathering of citizens to perform various social and political events etc. The one-dimensional politics of the modern urbanization has led to the ignorance on the link

of entry into urban social centers. At present, with the physical expansion of urban spaces, the social role of the city entrance has been raised and is of importance in local, urban and national parts. In local dimension, the social role of the city entrance leads to the formation of religious and social ceremonies at the local or urban levels.

These urban areas were historically formed by connecting the city entrance to the main squares. But now, the social role of the city entrance is introduced as a recreational space for citizens and tourists. In this case, the city entrance is a factor for purposeful social interactions and creating a small collaborative society. In line with this, Irllys Barreira and Geisa Mattos (2014) “At present, the micro-social view of urban spaces is of great importance”. The role of the city entrance in creating effective social relations is formed regarding social and political targets and leads to the development of new functions in modern urbanization.

#### Summary

The entrance of contemporary cities must be viewed in a systemic approach. Entrance as a subsystem in contemporary urban system has different social, economic and natural layers, the economic and social activities of which are in accordance with its nature and context of formation. These three



Fig7. Natural, social, and economical layers of city entrance.  
Source: authors, 2017.



factors which are inseparable form the nature of the entrance perspective of the contemporary cities in combination with others.

The different layers of the entrance of contemporary cities are in line with with its economic, social and natural characteristics, with priority between the inside and outside of the city. The entrance of the city in its hierarchical system has two main characteristics: interaction with nature and interaction with the urban landscape. The aesthetics of the city entrance is based on a natural aesthetic which is ingrained with the city perspective to guide the visitors to the city and provides a place to define the independent identity of the city (Fig. 8).

**Conclusion**

According to the studies conducted in the present research, the clear definition of the entrance of the city is: a dense perspective view of the city, which has a modern statement of the city. According to this definition, entrance is not a joint, since the joint is an independent identity, apart from the outside and inside. However, the entrance is not an independent identity; rather, it is a combination of identities.

Therefore, the entrance of the city is an intermediary between the inside and outside of the city. In this definition, the criteria for entering the city as a landscape space can be summarized in the three main

factors of the urban landscape assessment, including efficiency, aesthetics and identity based on the interactive entrance characteristics in the context of the design and in accordance with the hierarchy of presence in the city. The entrance connects the city with a more comprehensive society and unlimited nature. This space can represent the character of the city identity. So the entrance of the city in its general structure is a place with an identity defined in three branches of interaction with nature, interaction with society and interaction with the city. If the initial signs of the entrance and the feeling of mental entry into the city are created in the audience, the elements of identity interaction with nature are formed at the entrance. In this case, the natural identity structures of the region are considered as bases. City entrance spaces are artificial elements formed in interaction with the natural landscape of the city in the entrance bed. In addition, the impact of the natural landscape on the structure of the city entrance is very high in the cities formed along the rivers and seas and the cities located in the mountains; and the natural structures of the city are factors creating the location of the city entrance. In this case, in terms of location, the entrance will be governed by natural conditions. In case of the lack of natural limiting elements, the structure and location, in relation to the external (nature) and the internal (city) environments and its constituent elements (society/city/nature), a strong

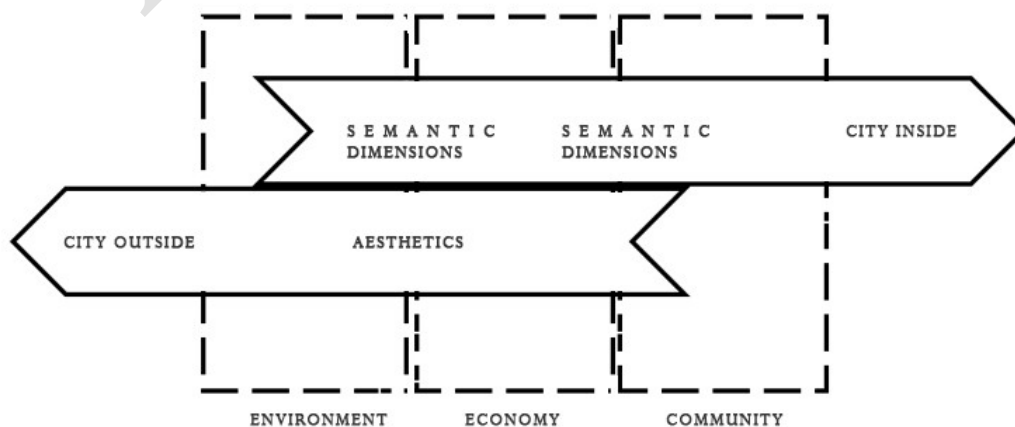


Fig8. Interaction of the city entrance landscapes in the hierarchy of entering the city. Source: authors.

Table 1. City entrance criteria. Source: authors.

Economy		based on economic flow in the context of the plan	
Efficiency	Nature	Natural habitats	Entrance interaction with the city marginal nature based on the preservation and enhancement of the natural bed of the city
		City inside natural habitats	Entrance interaction with nature in urban spaces, in accordance with the habitats of the city
	Human	Social spaces in accordance with the performance of the city edges	The flow of human activity in the entrance, vitality and attraction of the city entrance according to the social relations governing in the entrance of the city
Aesthetics	Aesthetics of the city entrance is in accordance with the effectiveness and identity of the environment and the place. Therefore, the aesthetics of the entrance is not an acquired aesthetic, and is based on the identity and efficiency of the entrance.		
Identity	The entrance is a factor to enhance the independent identity of the urban landscape, the identity of the city entrance is in interaction with the identity of the city landscape, and does not have an independent identity.		

structure is formed between city, society and the city outside. At the stage of physical entry to the city, the interactive role of the entrance is revealed in relation to the audience, in addition, the entrance creates a participatory<sup>14</sup> and perceptual<sup>15</sup> communication between the audience and the environment; in this case, the social role of the city entrance is important in interacting with the economy and the city entrance acts as the showcase of the city. Finally, in the area of physical entry to the city, the entrance represents its interactive role in relation to the city. The communication of the entrance with the commerce (market), the main city center, the security and social spaces represent a vibrant and vital place from which the main structures of the city originate. Nevertheless, the place where people gather is for the national and religious ceremonies, which are the symbols of the social identity of the urban landscape. The entrance of the city is a factor enhancing the independent

identity of the urban landscape. According to the aforementioned issues, the identity, performance, and aesthetics indicators of the city entrance have been summarized and presented in Table 1.

### Endnotes

1. This essay has been extracted from the master's thesis on the "Entrance View of Ardebil City", which is being conducted by Yousef Bagheri under the guidance of Mr. Dr. Seyed Amir Mansouri at Tehran University.
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**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Bagheri, Y. & Mansouri, S. A. (2018). City entrance, as an element for creating an independent identity for the city landscape. *Bagh- e Nazar*, 15 (60):5-16.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2018.60565

URL: [http://www.bagh-sj.com/article\\_60565.html](http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_60565.html)

