

The Analysis of Internal Cohesion of Urban Neighborhoods in Islamic Cities and its Contrast with Urban Renewal Projects (A Case Study of Amel Neighborhood in Mashhad)

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Received: 16 November 2014

Accepted: 15 September 2015

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Spatial cohesion has always been the major concern for urban managers and planners. This concern is, on one hand, due to the relevance of such an issue to the formative style of space, and, on the other hand, is related to the intellectual and ideological foundations of the societies. In the present conditions, due to the growing developments of cities, the huge number of decisions and decision makers, the number of projects and urban development plans as well as the increase in the variety of urban space, spatial cohesion has turned to be one of the most problematic issues.

Accordingly, in an Islamic city, space is an intertwined set including three dimensions, namely physical, mental and spiritual dimensions, and is regarded to play the major role considering the spheres of human existence. This procedure is the governing principle in the creation of the space in an Islamic city. Presently, due to the weakness in theoretical basis, Islamic philosophical concepts are less linked with urban planning theories; therefore, the formation of space follows other principles. This study specifically aims to examine the internal cohesion of neighborhoods with regard to the relationship between mental space and physical space changes in Amel neighborhood, Mashhad. This neighborhood has faced with widespread physical changes brought about by the implementation of Majd projects, whose aim is to modernize the neighborhood context.

2. Research Methodology

This study has made use of a quantitative-qualitative research methodology. Having developed the theoretical framework of the cohesion of neighborhoods in the Islamic city through using various sources, the researchers tried to identify the effective factors in this domain. Due to the extensiveness of Amel neighborhood's internal cohesion, and with regard to the physical changes and their impact on people's minds, internal cohesion was evaluated before and after the changes. Accordingly, after distributing the questionnaires between the residents of the neighborhood, their opinions were then collected before and after the changes. After that, having used intensity and weakness graphs, the occurred changes were determined, and then, the change gaps were analyzed and significance levels were tested by using of Wilcoxon test. Finally, regression test showed what issues were effective in making the residents willing to stay and live in such a neighborhood with regard to the results of the events happening in the neighborhood.

3. Research Findings

The results showed that, from the residents' point of view, the difference in access to educational, commercial and sport facilities before and after the completion of the project is significant. It means the residents' mentality about accessibility to such services has changed. Moreover, according to the average grade obtained on these services, it can be said that residents' mentality about accessibility to educational and sport facilities has become worse, while they have got a more positive perspective on commercial places than before. However, no

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change in residents' opinions about religious and green spaces was found.

Security Features of the Neighborhood

The results obtained from the analysis of the residents' opinions about security before and after the project showed that the changes occurred about variables such as robbery, the presence of addicted people and strangers, and the occurrence of conflicts as well as the land trades were significant. It indicates that residents' opinions have changed about the mentioned indices while it has not been significant in other indices. According to the obtained average score in these factors, an increase in the number of thieves, drug addicts, strangers, accidents, conflicts and land trade was seen while no change was found in the case of harassing women.

Health Conditions of the Neighborhood

Based on the significant levels of the studied indices, some changes were noticed in the residents' opinions about their levels of liveliness and vitality, noise pollution, dust, the presence of disturbing occupations and the prevalence of certain diseases. According to the average scores obtained, the changes occurred are as follows: A decrease in residents' liveliness and vitality and an increase in the amount of noise pollution, dust, disturbing occupations and diseases were reported.

Socio-Cultural Conditions

From the residents' point of view, the changes occurred with regard to the social heterogenic, sense of strangeness in the neighborhood, sense of belonging to the neighborhood, social cohesion and the formation of groups were meaningful. The change in the residents' mentality regarding the above mentioned indices, on one hand, shows an upward trend in social heterogenic and sense of strangeness, and, on the other hand, a downward trend in social cohesion and the formation of local groups.

The results show a reduction in the willingness of residents to stay and live in the neighborhood after the completion of project. In sum, 62.9% of residents were willing to stay in the neighborhood before the project while after the completion of the project, it dropped to 45.5%.

The Analysis of the Influential Factors Affecting Residents' Willingness to Stay in the Neighborhood After the Completion of Majd Project

Ordinal regression used in this study showed that the independent variables determine 83.7% of variations in the dependent variables.

In conclusion, the results of this study showed that in spite of the structural improvement in the neighborhood, the level of the internal cohesion and willingness to stay in the neighborhood dropped due to the lack of compliance in residents' expectations toward social-cultural, security and health features and the new structural transformations.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Nowadays in the current conditions, less attention is paid to both physical, psychological and spiritual aspects and their mutual relationship. This issue is one of the most important factors leading to weakness in theoretical foundations. Although the project in the studied area aimed at improving and renewing the neighborhood, it did not bring about any internal cohesion in the neighborhood due to lack of compliance with residents' expectations. Therefore, some changes in attitudes toward renovation seem essential and ineluctable. In this regard, the first step is to find the connecting rings between Islamic religious-philosophical foundations and the theories of urban planning so that we can provide an urban space appropriate for an Islamic and divine life.

Key Words: Mashhad city; Space; Islamic city; Amel neighborhood.

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How to cite this article:

Amirfakhrian, M., Rahnama, M.R., Pourahmad, A., & Ajza Shokoohi, M. (2014). The analysis of internal cohesion of urban neighborhoods in Islamic cities and its contrast with urban renewal projects (A case study of Amel neighborhood in Mashhad). *Journal of Geography and Urban Space Development*, 2(1), 125-143.

URL <http://jgusd.um.ac.ir/index.php/gud/article/view/41311>

ISSN: 2322-2832