

Participatory Design in Rural Environment

Darabi,H.

Counterpart assist., Department of Environmental Design, Graduate Faculty of Environment,
Tehran University, Tehran-Iran

Received: April 2009

Accepted: Oct. 2009

Extended Abstract

Rural environment is the reflect of the historical practices over the time, mutually feedback of human settle , activities, nature and include aesthetic quality, environmental function, local knowledge, tradition and customs. Nevertheless, rapid growth of consuming economy and the emphases on functional character without linkage to different environmental socio-cultural and economical condition led to model of design that cannot reproduce their valued in landscape. This process result is unsustainably in rural environment. Sustainable literature introduced different aspect of this unsustainably and prevention methods. However, less attention paid to the nature of operational method. Nature of design is base on dialectic linkage between social and natural systems and holism approach. Therefore, sustainable environmental design without paying attention to different factors, social groups, stockholders and their behaviors is impossible. When design will be reach to its optimal condition that happen in social context with applying participatory methods. Participatory methods prepare context to increase sustainable environmental actions. Participation can improve conditions that affect the sustainable environment. Some sample proved that applying participatory methods could improve result of design and shape new approach in local community to apply in different process designs. Applying participatory methods has two face of a coin. It has positive impact but result in negative impacts. Since, this function needs to manage and solve inherent conflicts.

Design shapes a spatial landscape. Based on landscape, convention of Europe can define as an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. Rural environment also as cultural landscape is the result of interact of rural groups in a human-natural distinct context. Rural landscape has two basic aspects:

- 1- External landscape include pattern of houses, agricultural lands, and other physical characteristics,
- 2- Internal systems include organizing social and economical relationship pattern of rural groups. These shapes create an environmental base to find out the complexity of cultural – humanity relationships and spatial characteristics. Productions of these systems are defined as rural texture. Today Iranian rural landscape and rural texture experience changes seriously. Rural traditional structure replaced by modern and urbanized structures, biological and aesthetical degradation. Despite of burgeoning amount of literature and information, the continual accumulation of relevant knowledge in sustainability, rural landscapes, especially in Iran, experience new spatial challenges that indicate unsustainable environment. New and urbanized approach is dominant in rural environmental design with extended indigenous pattern of design, shortcoming of designer in rural domain. Abuse and unused of natural capacity led to rupture and disarray in rural texture. Design without community participation and unnecessary change in settlements pattern, intensity disorder in rural environment and cultural landscape. This situation emphasizes the need of new approach to control impacts of unsuitable interventions and reorientation future rural landscape design. Participatory design provides context and tools to improve rural environment interventions. In the traditional system, the driving force of landscape development was based on natural, socioeconomic factors that led to real participation of local villagers in shaping their organic landscape and satisfaction their needs related to the physical environment. Iranian rural modernization impacts shape a new uniform of landscape that reflect only consuming and urbanism culture without any identity. Rural landscapes are discrete of environment, socio-economic and cultural identity.

Archive OF SID

Applying participatory methods in design adjusts discretion, unwanted and undesired changes in rural textures. However, it should be noticed that participation is a sword with two edges. It can help to improve the rural design or may lead to some disadvantages. Management of applying participation methods is necessity.

Rural environment intervention and design take place in different shapes and names in Iran. Most famous and widespread project named "Tarh e Hadi" or Physical Guide Plan (PGP). PGPs are planned and designed for 18955 villages, implemented in 8742 villages and 2101 project underway. Planning and designing process of PGPs was evaluated. This evaluation was based on general approach. The result of evaluation showed little attention paid to participation and participatory design. This evaluation reflected some aspects of reality that showed the effect of quality of design by participating in right manner. This article is to prove the effects of participation in some aspects of PGPs Planning and design process by using nine variables. These variables showed some reality reflected in evaluation, we use real results to show role of participation.

These indexes are:

Forecast of natural disaster

Investigate historical places in villages

Analysis and design of village pathway network

Direction of villages' Physical development

Design approach

Reality in design

Design criterion

Implantation priority

Implantation management

Results of variables:

-Forecast of natural disaster

Forecast of natural disaster is possible by scientific method. Moreover, based on behavioral psychology, people can presented some useful information about history of disaster. However, this aspect is neglected in PGPs. Collection of real data about disasters history and its results are simply possible by participatory methods.

-Investigate historical places in villages:

Some villages contain historical houses or monument that needs to be identified in process of PGP studies. However, outsider designer and planner, who came to village and spent time, were not successful to identify these valuable places. Local people participated for identifying valuable places and design proper action to protect these places.

-Analysis and design of village pathways

Pathways network shape structure of village's texture. Any analysis of this network is based on reality and people needs. Without understanding of people requirements, design would lead to differentiations between existence and proposal condition; therefore, the final proposed plan will not be accepted by local community. Participation helped injecting facts, reality, and local needs in analyses and thus design resulted to integrated texture design, satisfaction of needs that will be more acceptable.

-Physical development direction of villages:

In addition, design oriented physical development of villages for further development. Different factor affected on this direction, but most important one is local people approach. Without people participation, conflicts arise between people and operational organization. By increasing participation, these orientations adjust more with local people opinion.

-Design approach

Design is complex and its results must be reflection of different sounds and aspects. Unfortunately, research showed physical and technical approach dominant in PGP design. About 70.6 percent of samples uphold these conditions. Neglecting the economical aspects, social bases and cultural forces led to conflicted in new

and existence textures. Participation tools were the best context for interrelationship between design and socio-cultural forces.

-Design criterion:

PGPs should guide future development for any village by present basic design criterion. It is clear that design criterion should deduction from real facts of the nature of rural environment, community present and future needs. Nevertheless, research explains that design criterions were based on urban standards with any references to local identity. Participation design helped to define design criterion deduction from real world. Applying participatory methods and tools simply changed criterion defines methods and results.

-Implantation priority

PGPs like all projects will be translated to some actions with priorities. Origin of priority is based on the need of community, potential of change and actions roles in development and so on. Because most of projects must, satisfaction of community needs thus key role will be play by people. Recognition of needs and ranking need base on people opinion can happen by participatory methods. Without participation, this process faces with serious challenges. Research show that 50 percent of samples faced with this problem and 50 percent did not ranking projects.

Implantation management-

Project implementations need to local management. When participation takes place, community can provide proper local organization for implementation. These methods empower community to control changes in village environment and obtain new experiment. Nevertheless, non-participatory design and planning in PGPs resulted to suggestion of new organization with emphasis on outsiders. Outsider instantiations are dominating and less attention pay to local community.

Finally, researches proved that:

-First rural people willing to participation in PGPs and;

-Second, even weak participation in planning and design improves the quality of PGP seriously. Participation in different process of planning and design of PGPs resulted to reflect community needs, socio-economic and cultural facts, adjust changes with reality, prevent of conflicts between people and organization and best satisfaction of community needs. Moreover, it empowers locale people to manage community and make a sense of identity in rural environment design. All these factors led to design sustainable rural landscape.

Key words

Participation, Participatory design, rural environment, Rural landscape, Cultural landscape