

IMPACT OF URBAN CONSERVATION POLICIES ON TRANSFORMATION OF IRANIAN HISTORIC CITY CENTERS: YAZD CITY

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ABSTRACT: Developing a unified approach to deal with the conservation of historic city centers has been a great challenge in many countries. Iran, the cradle of ancient civilizations has been the center of debate regarding conservation of historic rudiments and forceful technology-driven modernization. This paper presents different policies and approaches towards urban conservation in Iran and their impact on city transformation with particular reference to Yazd city. This research employs an in-depth case study method due to its qualitative and exploratory nature. Two areas within Yazd city representing the conservation-led regeneration and physically-redevelopment approaches have been chosen. The paper analyzes the formulation process of different approaches and identifies their impact on city transformation. The paper concluded that reinforcement of institutional and administrative framework, integration of policies, reducing the role of central government and decentralization of responsibilities created a more successful path towards urban revitalization. It was recommended that the latest trend of adopting and developing an integrated approach to the conservation of historic environments can be further strengthened through the involvement of local leadership and communities of historic city centers.

Keywords: Urban transformation, urban conservation, Historic city centers, Regeneration, Modernization, Iran, Yazd.

INTRODUCTION

During the past few decades the increased attention to the improvement of historic urban areas has made an evolution in the field of conservation. The emphasis had not only been on the conservation of individual historic buildings and monuments but also on preservation of specific historic sites and their interrelated contexts. The new concept of conservation has a paradigm shift from an initial concern of protection and preservation of individual buildings and monuments to a broader vehicle for urban regeneration and economic development (Tiesdell et al, 1996). By the 1990s there was a general consensus that the historic areas were not only striking features of many towns and cities but also assets for their economic and social Renaissance (Worthington, 1998). The evolution of conservation policies has provided a basis for the emergence of an integrated approach toward protection of historic urban areas. The conservation-led regeneration or 'regeneration through conservation' agenda represented the convergence of urban regeneration and conservation whereas the physical redevelopment approach toward historic areas represented more radical and single dimension reconstruction (Izadi, 2008).

In Iran, during the course of institutional and structural transformation and reforms in urban

conservation, series of locally-based regeneration projects were initiated during 1990s. Number of such projects still are going on in the country. Shiraz, Isfahan and Yazd were the major cities which hosted those initiations and marked the beginning of a new period for urban conservation in Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research aimed to provide a better understanding of transformation of historic city centers with particular focus on Yazd city in Iran. To understand transformation, it was necessary to look at the following questions:

- 1-What are the major policies and approaches that shaped transformation of historic city centers in Iran?
- 2-What is the impact of transformation on identity and quality of urban spaces?

In order to address the above questions, information gathered through primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources included; documents of Iran Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, research thesis done by different scholars on the city of Yazd, statistical reports published by Organization of Budget and Program and reports prepared by various consulting firms. The field surveys were designed to collect primary data. The survey of selected residents was

conducted by using questionnaires and interviews with different stakeholders. Project consultants, academicians, government officials and experts in the field of urban conservation were consulted through interview guides in order to get deeper understanding of issues. Moreover, personal observations were also made to ascertain the validity of collected data.

Transformation of city centers in Iran: The historic cores of Iranian cities were transformed in a continuous process of change. However, the progression of urban transformation changed radically from the late 19th century. Contrary to the conventional modifications; which were slow and gradual, the contemporary changes had been swift, large scaled and critical. By the end of the century and before the re-establishment of a centralized and authoritarian state at the beginning of the twentieth century; the government was rarely involved in the development of the urban environment. During this period, despite the differences in mechanisms and structures of the state interventions, the changes were based on a clear relationship with the existing elements. Every act of development had to be carefully set against the context and the result was usually respectful and adaptable to the context.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, a move towards centralization started which lasted till the present time to expand the authority of the government throughout the country at various spheres of life. The major development programs were carried out by the largest and most powerful development agency; the central government. The government strongly relied on the planning and implementation of large-scale urban development or re-development projects which had major impact on the transformation of the cities and their historic cores.

During the last decades however, the attempts to revitalize the historic environment in Iran gained a new impetus. The development and reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacities, integrating policies, establishing legal and regulatory frameworks, decentralizing responsibilities and enhancing the role of professionals opened a new path to city center revitalization. These changes were based on a new wave of reform commenced in 1997, following the political victory of reformers in the presidential election. Despite the emphasis on economic development strategies through economic restructuring policies, this new wave of reform attempted to provide a reasonable relationship between socio-cultural policies, political development and economic reform. The establishment of elected local councils and the introduction of NGOs together with other originations of civil society were probably the greatest achievements of the reformists in this period to help popularize the idea of democracy. In the process of urban development in general and city center

regeneration in particular, the existence of a wide range of agencies involved in the revitalization and development projects each with their own agendas, priorities and work programs, resulted in the emergence of a variety of approaches. These approaches were ranging from those still relying on a development-oriented, market-based autocratic approach to those incorporating collaborative management, locally-based, sensitive ones. The continuing existence of a number of large-scale redevelopment projects led by informal powers, and in contrast, the emergence of a series of locally-driven, conservation-led regeneration projects managed by the newly empowered local authorities were the consequent outcomes and clear manifestations of this situation.

Transformation of city center in Yazd: The city of Yazd, known as “The pearl of the desert”, is a valuable example for having several architectural and urban significant features. It is situated in the central part of Iran and on the boundary of Grand Desert (Figure-1). The estimated population of the city in 2012 was around 548,167 persons and it spreads over an area of 99.5 square Kilometers¹. The old city is located on the North-East part of the city. It covers an area of 700 hectares making Yazd as one the historical cities in Iran with the largest integrated historic urban fabric.



Figure 1: Location of the Province & City of Yazd in Iran. Source: [http:// geology.com/ world/ iran-satellite-image.shtml](http://geology.com/world/iran-satellite-image.shtml)

Spatial growth of the city: The physical growth of Yazd City can be divided into three main historical periods:
1-The development within the walled city up to the late 14th century (historical city) (Figure 2 & 3)

¹ *Sazman-i Barnamah Va Budjih-i Ustan-i Yazd, Muavinat-i Amar Va Ittilaat, Yazd, Iran, (2012).*

2-The development outside the wall until the early 20th century (city center) (Figure-4)

3- The recent developments from 1920s to-date (modern development) (Figure-5)

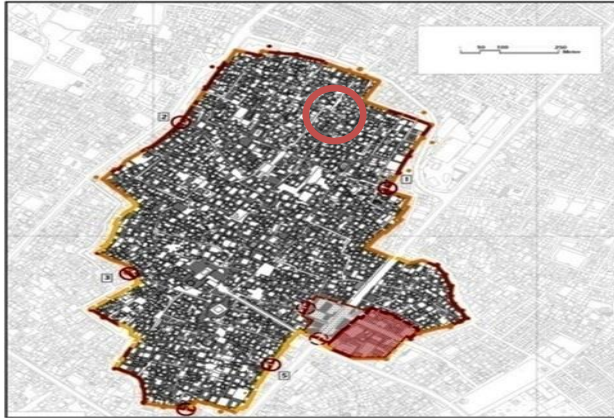


Figure 2: Yazd city during 11th century in the form of a walled city. Source: Shamsheh Consultant Architects & Engineers, Yazd, 2010.

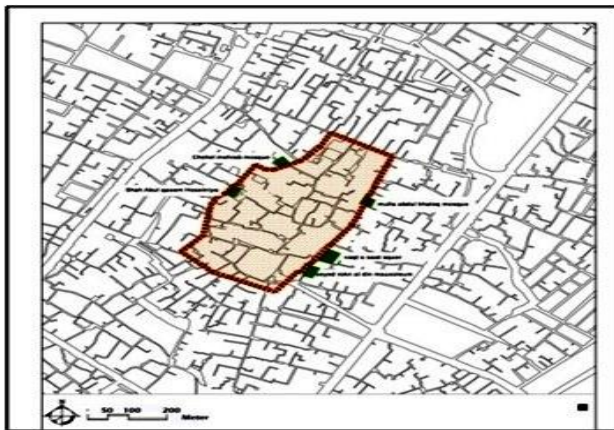


Figure 3: Yazd city during 14th century in the form of a walled city with seven gates. Source: Shamsheh Consultant Architects & Engineers, Yazd, 2010.

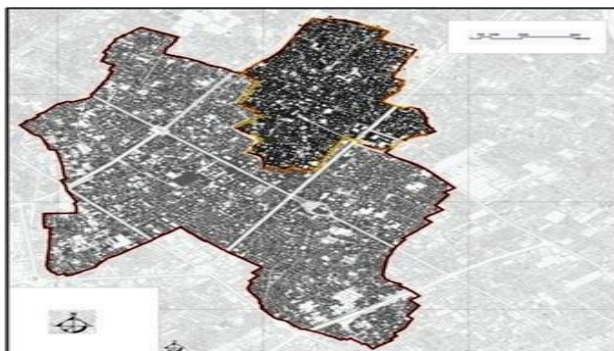


Figure 4: Yazd city growth during 18th century. Source: Shamsheh Consultant Architects & Engineers, Yazd, 2010.



Figure 5: Current situation of Yazd city and the location of old city of Yaz. Source: Arseh Consultant Architects & Engineers, Tehran, 2007.



Figure 6: Situation of Amirchaqmaq and Shahtahmasb Meidan before 1920s. Source: Tavassoli, 1982.

The old city and its transformation: By the start of 20th century, Yazd city was expanded but sustained to exhibit the traditional fabric of an integrated city, adhering to traditional kinds of social and spatial organization. Due to authoritarian modernization of Reza Shah (1925-41), this contextualism, however, could not live on (Izadi, 2008). The government rose to become the only dominant force and the city became the symbol of political and socioeconomic transformation (Madanipour, 1998; Ehlers and Floor, 1993). The representation of modernism was the destruction of the historic urban fabric: Reza Shah attacked the cities and towns in order to make them architecturally modern. The large scale program for urbanization and modernization involved mainly superimposing new urban layout and street patterns on the traditional tree cores, the expansion of older cities and construction of new structures to accommodate new institutions (Ehlers, 1992; Marefat, 2004). The representation of modernization in the case of Yazd city was driving a major network of long, wide and straight

streets through the heart of the old city of Yazd which paid little regard to social and economic situation and caused spatial and morphological disruption in the old city.

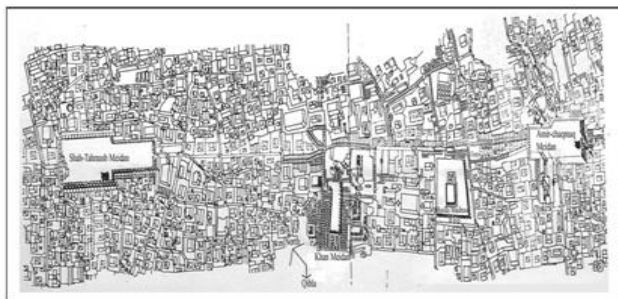


Figure 7: Map showing the transformation of Yazd after 1920s. Source: Arseh Consultant Architects & Engineers, Tehran, 2007.



Figure 8: An example of transformation in the old city. A new street cut through the old fabric in 1920s. The present situation of Amirchaqmaq square is in evidence. Source: Arial photographs prepared by Iran Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, 2010.

The first sign of this radical transformation was the establishment of two streets of Ghiam and Imam (Shah and Pahlavi). They cut the old fabric of the city which was considered to be an integrated area (Figures 6 & 7). Ghiam Street divided the bazaar which was the backbone of the commercial life of the city into two parts. The new streets became the main channels of transportation and with some other new cross-cutting streets formed a grid super-imposed over the whole city. In addition to several new traffic round-about (squares) which were constructed in the city, two old public open spaces, Amirchaqmaq and Shahtahmasb Meidans were also changed into traffic circles (Figure 8). This change in contrast to their historical function was accommodating public activities and pedestrian movements. Later other streets, mostly parallel to these streets were constructed and the city was developed to the south and south-east. By construction of new streets shopkeepers were encouraged to move to the new streets' façades and gradually abandoned the old bazaar which was not accessible by car.

After the first period of modernization (1925-1941) dramatic changes occurred in the urban fabric of Yazd and the new development became radically

different from its traditional pattern (Noghsan Mohammadi, 2001). Like most other Iranian cities, modern-shaped grids and linear extensions grew rapidly around the old city and the social, economic and spatial focus of urban life moved to the modern parts of the city or to the edges of new streets. Spatial changes in the old city have been accompanied by a breakdown in social organization and the emergence of new social patterns which have performed a multiple effect on the changes in the old city. Wealthy upper and middle-class families were among the first to leave the old city in order to take up residence in the modern suburbs. In this way, during the 20th century the city of Yazd expanded very fast and faced a process of comparatively rapid transformation.

Current situation of Yazd city: Modern developments in the early twentieth century changed the traditional pattern, adaptive system and continuous, dynamic and evolutionary process of urban growth. The historic urban quarters were regarded as obsolete and subject of proposal for clearance and comprehensiveness redevelopment. This pressure for modernization symbolized by the destruction of the historic urban fabric was justified as an attempt for the improvement of the conditions and the adaptation of historic areas to contemporary requirements.

A sense of radical break with the past, which was evident in the large scale redevelopment and the total physical transformation, dominated twentieth century attitudes towards the historic environments. The planning and implementation of large scale redevelopment projects have continued and grown over the last few decades. They have had major impacts on the transformation of the historic core of the city. This dominant approach, mainly employed by the central government, the largest and the most powerful development agency, has failed to solve the problems of historic areas (Izadi, 2008). Indeed the interventions carried out within the framework of this approach have exacerbated existing problems and accelerated the deteriorations of these areas. While attempts have been launched to confront this situation, they were not integrated as a tangible force confronting the power of the large-scale interventions.

During the last two decades, however, several interrelated factors have contributed to the shift in role and strategies of the development agencies which alleviated this situation. Although redevelopment and physical regeneration is still the dominant approach (albeit more limited, on a smaller scale and in a different framework), the reforms have provided a basis for the emergence of a different approach to city center revitalization.

During the course of institutional and structural reforms in urban regeneration, series of locally-based regeneration projects were initiated across the country mostly from late 1990s. Yazd city was among the major

cities which hosted such initiations and marked the beginning of a new period for city center regeneration in Iran. Among all the efforts to revitalize the old core of Yazd city there are examples of both approaches from those physical redevelopment projects till the later initiations which were considered as more integrated approach. It is mostly believed by professionals that the first approach (Physical regeneration) caused more radical transformation of the city and at the same time it was less successful in the case of resolving the problems of historic areas and their inhabitants where as the later one was considered as more integrated, sensible and successful approach. Followings are the examples of each approach in the case of Yazd city. They have been initiations to revitalize the old core of Yazd although with different initial concerns, institutional frameworks and design implementations. Therefore they had different impacts on transformation of the city as well as different socio-spatial outcomes.

Physical-Redevelopment Approach: Tal District: This project which was implemented in 1991 aimed to utilize the old and obsolete fabric of Tal district for creating an east-west transportation access for the city. Based on this objective an axial access crossed the old and historical fabric of several other districts other than Tal also (Figure9).



Figure 9: Location of Basij Boulevard crossing several historical districts in order to provide vehicular access. Source: Authors own construct.

This access which was established in the form of a boulevard caused the demolition and deterioration of

number of historical houses and other buildings. Other than demolition of historical buildings, this project had several socio-spatial impacts on the surrounding context which was a part of historical and old part of Yazd city. This project was planed and implemented directly by central government bodies, Yazd governor house and municipality.

Conservation-led Regeneration Approach: Fahadan District: This project was initiated during late 1990s and after institutional reforms by several governmental and semi-governmental sectors in national and local level such as Governor House, Yazd Municipality, Iran Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), Urban Development and Revitalization Company (UDRC) along with some other private sectors.

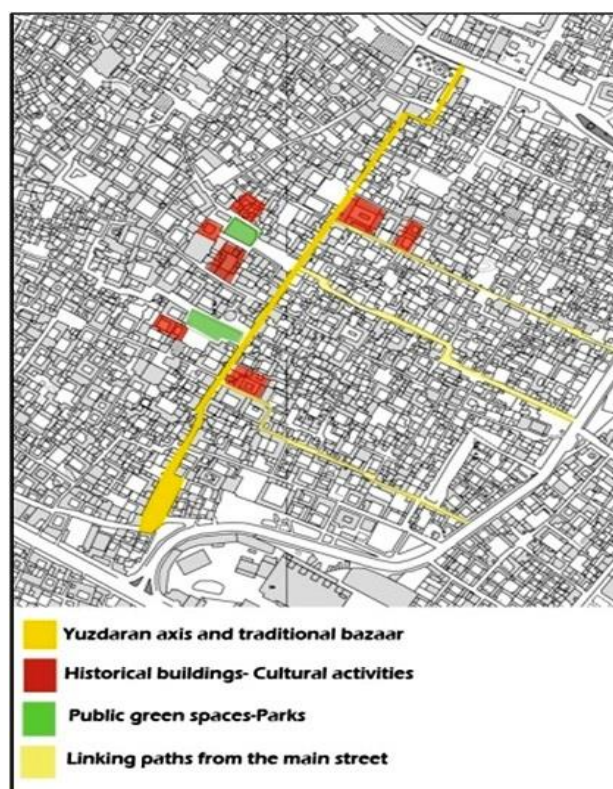


Figure 10: Map showing the major axis of Yuzdaran in Fahadan district. Location of new land uses after initiations is in evidence. Source: Authors own construct.

It aimed to revitalize the core of Fahadan district for tourism attraction and economic regeneration. In order to achieve this aim a cluster of historical buildings were conserved for the purpose of adaptive-reuse. Variety of cultural, commercial and official functions were given to the buildings (Figure 10 & 11). Meanwhile it was tried to conserve and upgrade public spaces and facilities such as network of historical alleys, green areas, public gathering spaces and providing car parking.

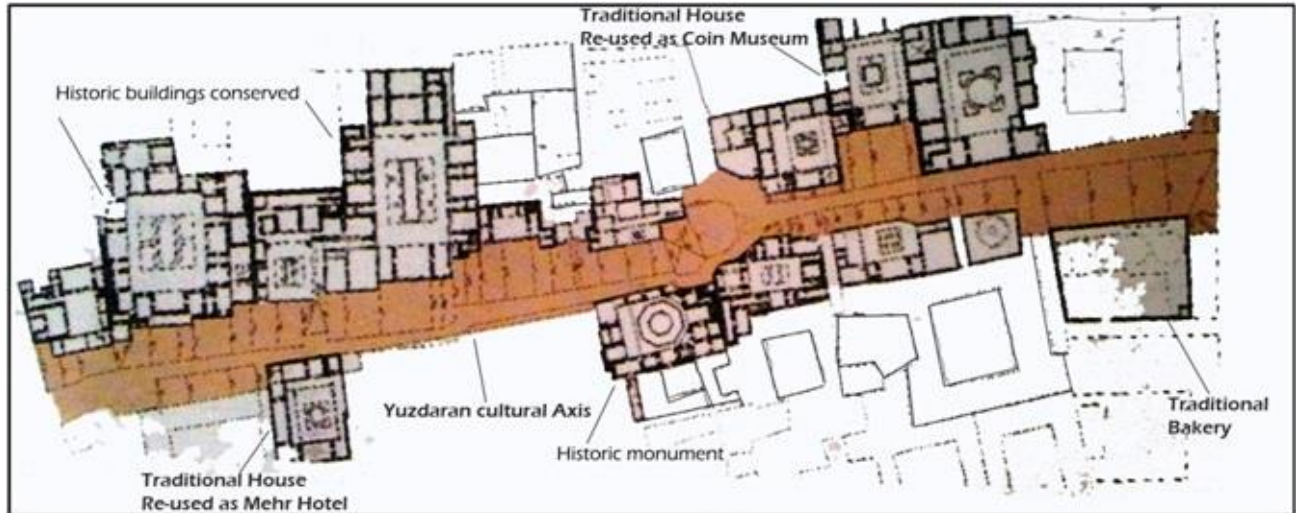


Figure 11: Revitalization of Yuzdaran cultural axis in Fahadan district. An example of a more integrated approach to revitalize historic districts. Cluster of historical buildings and monuments were conserved and re-used for tourists' attraction and economical thrive of local residents. Source: Hanachi, et. al., 2009.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Different approaches to revitalize the historic core of Yazd city discussed earlier have different impacts on city transformation. In order to identify the optimum approach for future practices it is important to look critically at the institutional framework as well as spatial, social and economical impacts on their context.

Institutional Framework: One of the main themes that came through was the relationship between the central government and the local authorities, the role they played and their strategies and interests. The results of the investigation on the case of Tal district revealed that the central government has been directly involved in this process through both direct intervention and regulations. Instead of being a regulatory body, advisory agency and planning authority, the central government has acted as a speculative developer and a profit-oriented producer. By neglecting the role of the local development agencies and civil institutions and marginalizing their interests, the central government has imposed its political and economic will on others.

Unlike the case of Tal district, the regeneration scheme for the historic quarter of Fahadan was the result of a locally-based, multi-agency partnership approach. The different role and strategy of the central government in this regeneration program provided a basis for the formation of a new path to the regeneration of the historic environment. In response to the decentralization policy of the Third National Development Plan, the central

government started to reduce its direct interventions and maintained and developed its regulatory role².

In the case of Tal districts it was evident that the primary concern was to accommodate the vehicular access to the old part of the city which was considered as a solution for the problems of the old urban fabric. To achieve this aim the strategy of redevelopment was adopted which caused the demolition of historical buildings and establishment of a vehicular access in the form of a boulevard in the heart of historic quarters. Although there were some advantages and relative success in some certain aspects but on the other hand a huge loss of historical heritage as well as a radical transformation of old urban fabric occurred. Nevertheless, in the case of Fahadan districts the major aim was to revitalize the old core of the city via economical regeneration and tourism development. To achieve this purpose it was required to conserve and restore the historical spaces such as historical buildings and public spaces and re-use them according to the new objective. In addition, the local residents of Fahadan were encouraged to take part in the process of regeneration and they were directly and indirectly involved during the course of revitalization.

Spatial Aspects: The most tangible outcome of such initiations was their impact on the spatial structure of the context. In the case of Tal district establishment of Basij

² Urban Development and Revitalization Company, Interview with Administrator UDRC (Held in July 16, 2012), Tehran, (2012).

Boulevard in order to accommodate vehicular access caused demolition of number of historical buildings and spaces. Moreover, many of remaining historical spaces and buildings lost their architectural values and identities due to establishment of boulevard as they were half-ruined or they got apart from each other (Figure 12). Furthermore, superimposing the function of traffic on the residential sector regardless of the nature of context disturbed the identity and integrity of public and private spaces.

Nevertheless, in the case of Fahadan district the attempt was to maintain the spatial integrity and architectural values of the context. This aim fulfilled via conservation of variety of historical buildings, public spaces and relics in their original form (Figure-13).



Figure 12. The remaining of demolished historical buildings and monuments on the façade of Basij Boulevard. Source: Authors own construct.

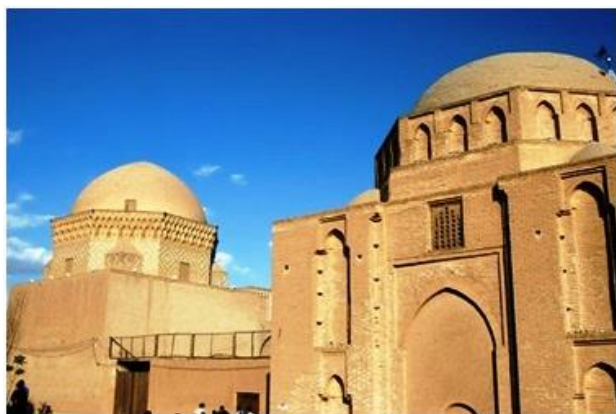


Figure 13: Alexander Prison & 12Imam mausoleum are samples of conserved historical monuments and buildings in Fahadan district. Source: Authors own construct.

Social Aspects: Basij Boulevard crossed a part of the old fabric which was Zoroastrians’ district for many centuries. Therefore, the social integrity of Zoroastrians’ community was highly disturbed when their district was cut into different pieces. The Zoroastrian residents of this district believed that different parts of this historical quarter which were apart from each other due to superimposing the boulevard could never carry on their social interaction and it caused the death of their social network.

In the case of Fahadan district it seems the social cohesion of the historic core has been more maintained as well as it has been tried to upgrade the social statues of district by encouraging the upper class residents to live in Fahadan and also involving them in the process of regeneration. Although according to majority of local residents’ opinion their sense of security has been disturbed due to the stranger users who were mostly tourists.

Economical Aspects: Economical thrive was one of the considerable advantages of initiations in Tal district which occurred due to adjacency of many of historical buildings and sites with Basij Boulevard as one of the major traffic arteries of the city. Increment in land price and commercial competition among private sectors in order to capture and establish new business centers on the façade of boulevard caused flourishing economy (Table-1). Although this prosperity was limited to the façade only and it remained in the level of real estate business and not much of actual construction occurred. Moreover, the real estate business even rarely penetrated to the core of old district. Comparatively, in Fahadan too, economic prosperity was considerable due to encouragement of tourism industry. Though, some experts and professionals believe economical growth in Fahadan has happened in a lower rate but gradual and more sustainable.

Table-1: Comparison of land price between Tal and Fahadan districts before and after initiations (Source: Field surveys, 2013).

Year	Tal District (In Tomans ³ per sq-meter)	Fahadan District (In Tomans per sq-meter)
1985	5000	4500-5000
1995	50,000	10,000
2005	150,000	35,000
2013	450,000	150,000-200,000

Summary of analysis pertaining to two distinct areas of Yazd is presented in table-2.

³ Iranian Currency

Table- 2: Comparison between two different approaches to the revitalization of historic city centers.

Project	Aims & Objectives (Primary concerns)	Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
Tal District	Regeneration of the old urban fabric	-Connecting the old urban fabric to the city traffic arteries - Accommodation of vehicular access within the historic quarters	-Ease of accessibility from and to the core of old urban fabric - Increasing possibility of vehicular access to the inner part of historic quarter -Increment in land price due to establishment of boulevard -Relative economic growth on the façade of the main boulevard due to ease of access and increased land price	-Demolition of historical buildings and spaces as a part of cultural heritage -Cutting the integrated old urban fabric and superimposing traffic access on the context -Breakdown in social structure of Muhalla by cutting it into two parts -Loss of identity and architectural values of public spaces remaining on the façade or leading to the boulevard
Fahadan District	Sustainable Revitalization of old urban fabric and Unification of components of historic quarter	-Creating an attractive socio-cultural complex for tourists by conserving the historical buildings and public spaces and adaptive-reuse -Creating limited vehicular access to the complex and collective car parking -Involving local public in the process -Improvement of infrastructure	-Tourism attraction and economic thrive -upgrading the income of local residents by involving them in economical activities -improving the social structure of Muhalla by attracting tourists and upper class residents - Conservation and restoration of cultural heritage -Maintaining the identity of historic spaces, architectural values and spatial integrity	-Partial limitation of vehicular access to the historic complex -Entrance of non-residents users and disturbing the social security of residents

Conclusions and Recommendations: The major development approaches to historic city centers in the guise of modernization employed large scale interventions by the authorities in Iran. It is revealed that all the attempts of modernization of the existing urban structure of the historic centers through redevelopment and radical transformation of urban environment were short-lived in achieving their objectives. The unrestricted power, access to the financial resources and the concentration of the decision-making process in the hands of the state or powerful agencies undermined the implementation of such large-scale physical transformation programs. However, the interventions have exacerbated existing problems and accelerated the deterioration of historical city centers.

During the last two decades a series of political, economic, administrative and fiscal reforms to urban

development have changed the previous trends. The development and reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacities, integration of policies, establishment of regulatory framework, decentralization of responsibilities and enhancement in the role of professionals, created a new path for urban revitalization in Iran.

The outcomes of the investigation in the case of Yazd revealed that the revitalization practices in Fahadan district have been comparatively more successful in achieving the desired goals. This achievement was based on reducing the central government's involvement, expanding the authority and responsibility of the local agencies, and streamlining administrative operations on both central and local level which resulted in creative and unique solutions to the local specific problems of Fahadan district. It created a productive decision-making

environment and an efficient work method. It is recommended that the new trend of adopting and developing an integrated approach (conservation-led regeneration) should be further strengthened through an involvement of the local leadership and communities of historical city centers.

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