

Integration of Islamic Principles in the Planning and Designing of Urban Public Spaces

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Abstract

The traditional Islamic cities were the combination of multi-level experiences ranging from the microcosm of Home to the macro-level aspiration of the community, living in that particular region. The urban planning and designing in most of the contemporary Islamic cities is predominantly secular following the imported principles of urban planning being followed in the western countries. This review paper is composed of the critical appraisal of urban planning and design principles adopted for the traditional Islamic cities throughout history in general and their implication in contemporary cities in particular. (Which were basis of Islamic principles of adopting designing and planning that differentiate the worth and values of sustainable societies and settlements for overcoming the social issues and to bring a factor of sustainability in the societies and settlement of a sustainable urban life). The results formulated after this inductive research from the historical perspective, are in the form of recommendations for the contemporary architects, and urban design professionals needed to be adopted to re-establish the Contemporary Islamic Cities. And for the common masses it's the identification of essence that needed to be understood which can be used to satisfy the needs of the users.

Keywords: Islamic cities, human centered design, traditional Streets, public spaces, Future cities

Introduction:

Public spaces are the spaces present in the urban area accommodating the various important components of collective memory. These spaces are more emphasized upon from the earliest time of human settlements like the Greek agora and roman forum times. These spaces were of great importance in the urban life of humans. The liveliness of these spaces can be termed as the vitality of the urban open spaces. History has shifted for these spaces with the advent of more consideration from human activities to the needs of the vehicular concerns. Where vehicular access and connection became more important than the human-based space. But more recently

the urban open spaces are a point of concern not only for the urban designers but the sociologists, geographers, and political scientists, to heal the diminished character of the urban public life.

The character of vitality is more important to be present in the urban open spaces, as it is characterized by the presence of physical elements that can enhance to performance of various more social activities in urban open spaces. The spaces having the vitality can be termed as successful spaces in terms of place-making in urban realms¹.

In traditional Muslim cities, there is present a specific character depicting their specific thinking and approach towards life. Islamic principles have offered a very broad vision of integration of economic, religious freedom for the enactment of diversity and prosperity. The key qualities accentuated by the Islamic cities are coherence; a quality that encourages the combination of systems, plans, and ambitions of the city. The Islamic city is a socially functional unit. It is a blend of ethical, social, and communal phenomenon².

Studying the sources of guidance specified in the Islamic religion there are established institutions for it. In Qur'an, the highest Guidance instrument for Muslims, as prescriptive, suggests behavioral guidelines for living, and these general guidelines are used for the shaping of the environment. Hadith is the second most important source of guidance for Muslims. It elaborated those general principles guided by Qur'an in detail for living the individual and communal life. If we study those guidelines, we can have a very strong urban imprint by tracing it back to the legislations formulated for the community in the city of Madina, KSA. The third source Sunnah in Islam refers to the happening in the life of the Prophet (SAW), is the established model for appropriate behavior. We can conclude that the Qur'an, Hadith, and Sunnah are the basis for Islamic Urbanism³.

Islamic city is not only the physical setting but it is a way of life-based on ethical, communal, and social principles contained in the Qur'an. While physically it is evident in the decentralization of power, and self-autonomy of communities adhered with strict observance of ethics and fulfillment of responsibilities. This behavioral model is the resultant of moral unity, social relations, and ethical responsibility.

In recent developments and layouts, the cities are losing their identity and character by the incorporation of more uniform layouts and vehicular-based designing which have a focus only the connection and networking rather than the social life consideration and urban identity⁴. Which results in the limitation of the urban meaning fullness of the character, place making, and diversity. This character can be termed as placelessness. While in contrast, the term urban resilience can be used in the cities where the settings perform sustainably in terms of its visual identity, social character, and catering for the historical continuation of the traditional cities⁵.

The Islamic character is lost with the passage of time and the present Islamic cities are bearing no conformity with it. Rose concludes that contemporary Islamic cities are almost in opposition to the Islamic characters. The main reason behind this

opposition is not that the Muslims have changed their minds, but the point is that they have been cut off from their predecessors and lack of connection of the past to their present. In contemporary cities, the streets being an important public social space, being neglected in the urban design process. It was used just as a container for the connection and networking purposes in the city planning with the movement of users across it. But due to increasing trends in various cities to investigate, re-advise the phenomenon of urban design, the planners and designers are making efforts to study, examine and devise the parameters necessary to maintain the socio-cultural variables intact algorithm the functional criteria of connection and networking⁶.

Evolution of Islamic City and its historical interpretation

Various scholars have studied the incorporation of Islamic principles in urban regions and used various instruments for it. But Khalidi was the first one that paid excessive attention to the development of the city in the historical and social problem and negating the theoretical construct. It laid the foundation for the establishment of a moral & ethical framework for the Islamic point of view for urbanism⁷.

Islamic cities from Qur'an, Hadith, and Sunnah

According to Böwering⁸ the word meaning village (qaryah) is used 57 times, the word city (Madinah) is repeated 17 times. All the word cities are used in Meccan revelations while some of them are early Meccan and some are late Meccan ones. The society of Mecca was highly commercialized and urban while most of the population include the merchants. The main traits of the population include social degeneration, oppression, moral disunity, and malpractice in merchandise. These are the similar elements of the earlier civilization that is rejected by Allah (SWT) and this kind of urbanism is rejected. The word used to describe the destruction of cities of such kind is "ahlaka" and it is repeated 7 times. Clearly stating that these cities will be destroyed and the others will be safeguarded having the character vice versa of it. If we study there is a clear concept of Islamic cities are the principles of morality, emphasizing upon living a certain specific way of life and code of conduct and behavior.

If we observe the hijrah (migration) of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to Madinah in terms of urban design, one can see the distinction of the two urban traditions (Mecca to Madinah) which describes the moral & ethical superiority. Qur'an simply rejects the amoral and un-ethical existence. In Meccan revelations, the warning is given to such societies while in Medinion revelations, the emphasis is given on the community responsibilities, solidarity with each other, and the Islamic institutions' establishments.

Hadith did not have recorded any preference made by the Holy Prophet (SAW), to a particular environment, i.e. urban or rural. However, He has clearly instructed his followers to inhabit any space with appropriate behavior. He guided us on how to

shape the space and how to interact with it. We can conclude this discussion with it that Qur'an is the origin point while the Prophetic commandments, and actions are the way to shape and act as a nurturing force for it.

Various Approaches adopted for defining the Islamic Cities

Haider, an architect has emphasized that there is a need to incorporate the Islamic principles of Faith (Eman), Law (Sharia), Responsibility (Khilafat), and Community (Ummah). The city must be conceptualized on Community (Dār al-Imān), Qur'anic (Dār al Qur'an), and prophetic model (Dār al-Sunnah)⁹.

Sardar believes that urban form should not be of prime concern in the Islamic cities, emphasis should be on the establishment of values and social units of family, the mosque, and neighborhood¹⁰.

Ateshin, an architect by profession, described the Islamic perspective in terms of the purpose of human life on earth. He thinks that the urban setting, having the man and environment interaction, should be of the reflection of moral and ethical constraints having prime glimpses of human responsibility¹¹.

Serageldin compiled a set of various principles that cater to care, responsibility, and justice. He emphasized that human interaction should be treated as a basis for the physical environment¹².

Urban Public spaces

Public spaces had been defined by various authors and researchers in different approaches. It can be defined as the spaces within an area or context available to everyone without any discrimination race, age, gender, or ability. Space where all the physical and spatial elements comprising it are public. Where one is always available to share experiences with relatives, strangers, friends, and co-workers or colleagues. These spaces are provided for the public and managed by the public agency.

In Muslim cities, the two types of public spaces are more important. The first one the maidans, which appeared in the urban fabric mostly in the front of mosques and madrassas. The second type is identified as the thoroughfares and alleys. The second type is the circulation spaces present in the urban areas.

The public spaces in the Islamic cities served several important functions. It served as a place to unite the community. It served as an open space being occupied by the Muslims during the Friday congregational prayers. Its function was to distribute the masses entering and going out from major buildings. Spatially accommodating the monumental buildings and their visual appreciation is the second important purpose set out for the maidans. The open spaces are also used as a spatial container to house the informal commercial activities at festivals and recreational activities of the traditional cities.

Mental image and how it develops

The urban open spaces are used by the people of the area or any visitor or tourist. The way they can use, behave and attach their emotions to this space are very important factors to be considered. The image formed in any one mind of any space is very subjective in terms of its formation process; is based totally on psychology and perception. This mental image is termed as the identity of any place. The absence of this continuity of any social-cultural settings along with the urban physical elements results in the diminishing of the self-identity of any place.

Resilient open spaces

The overall cities are a complex mixture of the various physical, socio-cultural and spatial elements. All these elements are compulsory for the successful operation of these systems. According to Ray¹³, resilient public spaces are the combination of natural systems and human-made structures along with the spaces formed for the human communities within these human-made structures. The human-made structures can broadly be categorized into two classes i.e. Traditional and Contemporary. The traditional phenomenon in Muslim cities in particular, which is time-dependent and evolved throughout Islamic history by incorporating the user behavior and locally available resources for the physical manifestations. The second unit is more than the traditional wisdom and can be termed as post-industrial developments. These can be termed as more industry-centric developments, basing on all the products of the industries, bureaucratic controls, and vested interest of entrepreneurs. But on the comparison, one could be able to conclude that the traditional settings of the urban centers are more climate-responsive, socially responsive, and serving culturally diversified communities. Those set of criteria based on the human behavior model and following the Islamic urban principles shall be a viable option to design resilient Islamic cities.

Street as a public open space:

The second important part of the Muslim public spaces is the circulation spaces i.e. thoroughfares and alleys. The streets of the cities can be taken as an important part of urban public life. People's most of the social life is being spent in the streets. The pedestrian activities needed to be catered while planning the layouts of the streets in the new development. The term "lost space" was coined by Trancik (1986) as cited by Jalaladdini describing the character of the cities designed for the vehicular flow and not based on human behavior and social interaction. In modern urban design, the efficiency of the streets is measured by the ease of the movement of masses and vehicles. But in Muslim cities, such as Islamic Cairo, efficiency is not the basis. If we are going to evaluate the streets just as a container for movement, then the traditional streets would not be able to prove their efficiency as they are provided with irregular patterns. The efficiency in Islamic cities is based on

compartmentalization of the various parts of cities and establishing control over the different districts is the basis of Islamic Cairo.

The following elements can be considered fundamental in the urban social streets;

The vitality of urban streets:

Vitality is the term used to describe the successfulness of the urban open spaces including the streets in catering for the inclusion of the natural elements, built structures, and human activities. Simply we can understand this attribute by noting the presence of user i.e. people in the streets at various timings of day and night, their social activities like lingering, waiting, seating, interacting with the other users and building settings, accommodating the various festivities, and celebrations, all these are the elements of dynamic street life. Vitality can be termed as the manifestation of the visual quality and presence of various sustained happenings. The urban spaces needed to afford the variety of the user (individuals or friends groups or family groups).

The factor of safety in Urban Streets:

The element of safety in the street is the most essential part of urban street design. The users feeling safe and not having any chance of criminal activity, will always be there to use and experience the streets not even in the daytime but also in the nighttime. Safety feelings can be enforced by adding physical elements such as the variety of activities hosted by the street at one time. Also, the various activities hosting buildings acting as a magnet for the users to attract at various timings.

Amenities:

The other important factor to be considered while designing the social urban streets includes the level of construction and presence of other amenities within the streets including the street furniture and fixtures such as the benches, relaxing points, street lights, maintenance, effective drainage, and sewerage system, efficient side-walks, and car parking areas.

Place attachment of urban streets:

The attachment of places means the establishment of active and effective linkage of the users and places using the cultural, social, emotional, and religious values. The attachment of the users and places can be evident from their interdependency and relationship showing the latter is capable of satisfying the needs of the first one. The image and meaning are directly related to the place attachment and imageability of the streets. The place-attachment of a street is dependent upon its physical, social, and psychological elements. The uniqueness of any street also plays a vital role in the place-attachment emotions inducement in the minds of the users. Besides the physical and psychological factors, environmental comfortability is also the attribute responsible for the place attachment.

The architecture of the buildings lining the street:

If we talk about resilient cities, the traditional architectural style uses the locally available materials and method of construction for the establishment of the new housing for the communities. It is observed that while taking into consideration the local traditional wisdom, the traditional housing is designed in such a way that it caters to the conservation of the natural environment, preservation of the flora and fauna, and available resources for the construction. In the process, the architecture gets the form which is predominantly local in culture and belongs to the inhabitants and user of the area. As it incorporated users' own historically evolved methodology, it forms the identity of that specific context. While we are talking about the streets, so the social spaces are being developed in between traditional functional units, take the shape of the continuum local behavioral spaces, and functionally satisfying the needs of the users.

While there is a need to bring a balance between the traditional architectural styles to the modern building architecture. As both are having their limitations, one needs to incorporate various variety in these styles to bring energy and dynamism to the urban open streets.

Transitional active edges formation of streets:

The other important factor that contributes to the livability of the streets includes the active edges of the street¹⁴. The edges of the street needed to be capable of accommodating and sustaining socially diverse experiences. The enclosure typology of the street edges must include the balanced combination of the enclosure types of both rigid and random variation for its success. Secondly, the edges must need to incorporate the creative mix of ambiguity and clarity to achieve the socially active interfaces.

Conclusions:

An understanding of the "Islamic City" has not remained static but has been the subject of evolution and periodic change. In our study of the Islamic city, we seem to have progressed from a preoccupation with physical elements and structure. Firstly, toward secular social interpretations and later toward a more Islamic defined existence as directed by the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet (S.A.W).

The city manifest gives way to the "institutions" that define it. The search for these institutions leads up to the principles that lay the structural framework for their creation, which in this case is the Islamic way of life. In other words, we look past "zahir", the overt, to experience and understand the "batin", or the hidden. Public spaces are the most important spaces in the life of urban dwellers. These spaces are available in a variety of sizes and placement within the urban fabric. The most important and easily accessible, ready to experience anytime is the urban streets. The streets need to be given due weightage by the urban designers and planners

while conceptualizing the newer development or expansions to the already present urban centers. The streets are not merely the corridors to witness the movement of persons and goods, rather it is a basic component that plays a vital role in the establishment of an identity of a city. The streets need to be designed on a micro-level accommodating the basic functional requirements of the connectivity and communication while at the same time capable of having socio-cultural and experiential activities and opportunities for the users, both the visitors and inhabitants alike.

Recommendations:

The overall theoretical discussion about the origin, development, and analysis of the contemporary urban planning and Islamic point of view presented by various scholars, one can conclude;

- The traditional Islamic cities needed to be studied in detail and the underlying principles for its development should be evaluated based on Islamic values and the way of life of the inhabitants and not on the standards of the urban design formulated by the western urban planners.
- There is a dire need to work upon the legislation for urban planning in the Islamic cities that could accommodate open-heartedly accommodate the Muslim urban systems and integrate the contemporary needs of the society not only depending upon the alien standards devised by the western urban planners.
- The urban open public spaces either streets or open squares needed to be studied, analyzed and incorporated into the entire socio-cultural systems. Then the resultant criteria will be following the real needs of the Muslim people.
- The future cities/towns needed to be Planned/designed by using the Islamic Principles of Planning and designing for urban public spaces which will rebirth the revival of Islamic planning and design principles in the society and understand their identity and social Islamic life.
- The urban planners and architects need to redesign the bylaws and policies for the new urban design projects which are according to the Islamic principles of planning and designing.
- The use of sustainable materials protects the environment from further destruction and disasters.
- The consideration of privacy is a more important factor that need to be adopted in the new urban settlements which will protect/mitigate/overcome the facing challenges in the existing societies that destroying our societies day by day due to western and American culture adopted in the urban settlements.

Adopting the Islamic principles of designing and planning will overcome the social issues in the Muslim urban settlements that are influenced and affected by borrowed culture of Westerns and other non-Muslims countries.

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