

Original Research Article

The Conceptual Role of the City Center in Urban Tourism Through the Lens of Travelogues

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Abstract | Urban tourism is now one of the most significant categories of the tourism industry. It refers to a type of tourism that is planned and managed based on cultural, recreational, economic concepts, of the city. Available studies in tourism have identified urban tourism as one of the largest and most important forms of tourism. It is also one of the most complex types of tourism in terms of management. Regardless of this complexity, the number of cities seeking to attract tourists is on the rise. In this tourism, the city center is one of the various destinations for urban tourism. Knowledge about the concept of the center in this domain has often been limited to one of the multiple centers of the city. This center is known for its memorial and historical meaning and guides tourists to visit specific works.

But the type of management and planning of tourists called urban tourists in the center shows a lack of accurate knowledge of this important urban organ. Where is the city center and who are the urban tourists?

The city center reflects the integrity of the city and manifests the culture, community, events, and identity –giving elements of the city. Urban tourism policies identify the lack of understanding of the concept and importance of the city center as a content gap in urban tourism management. Therefore, understanding the concept of the city center and its values is essential to manage the urban tourism industry consciously and plan tourism infrastructure, and to identify real tourists of the city in this domain.

Keywords | *City Center, Urban Tourism, Citizens, Urban Tourism.*

Introduction | Social values and their behavioral manifestations in urban society raise people's awareness and create thoughts. As the values are objectively exchanged, they promote the sustainable participation of individuals in the production of culture and emphasize the importance of symbolic communication, that is, urban symbols and events in a single context. The most important objective-subjective manifestation of this communication action is the city center which serves as the heart of the city. The city center first serves as the cornerstone and the first sign of the city and then acts as the center of gravity. It plays a mediating role in the perception of the city as a whole and inculcates the citizens with the existence and identity of the city. As a common element of the city and society, it increases the awareness of people about the city and social solidarity. This urban organ, the heart of the city

and the city, is a general and integrated phenomenon whose concept is derived from its functions in the response to social interactions and the need for the comprehensiveness of values. The narratives and social phenomena of the city are formed during social communication and are updated over time. Therefore, understanding the interpretation of the concepts of "center" in which society and urban tourism live, is important because it contributes to the conceptual construal of the city, the management, and the promotion of urban tourism.

The main objective of this paper is to examine how tourism as a strategic location can promote urban tourism and to identify the citizen's role as the main tourist city.

Methodology

The data for this study were analyzed using the content analysis method. To narrate the events of the city center, travel documents as a historical source were referred to.

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The reason is that travelogues are historical sources and direct media can be used in perceiving the social, political, cultural, and economic events of the city and revoke the perceptions at the scene of the events. Among the sources, historical ones are the most important direct and mass media that deal with the objective-subjective narration of the city. They also highlight the key position and importance of the place during the life of the event.

Using the available information and analyzing the relationship between objective and subjective events in the city, we showed the importance of the center in urban tourism.

Methodology

Over the last two decades of the twentieth century, the industry transition from mass production to the service sector has brought changes in the economy of cities and especially the labor market, abandoned industrial spaces, urban centers, and in general the spatial structure of cities. In 60 AD, the revitalization movement in the city centers emerged. In this movement, the run-down historical centers were put on the agenda. Developing rehabilitation policies based on tourism and an economy-oriented model is the main concern of urban tourism. Urban tourism is one of the policies used for revitalizing the city center. Today, this type of tourism is a growing tradition in the world and cities are important cultural destinations in this economy-oriented industry. Its dominant approach, the emphasis is first on the physical aspect of the city. What it seeks from culture, it is found in the historical-physical context of any city and generally with places such as museums and reconstructed historical buildings, and is flourished with the presence of tourism.

City center and urban tourism

Based on this view, tourism can generate revenue for the city, and in this industry, the city is the basis for tourism development. The creation and development of a suitable urban space, the reconstruction of seemingly abandoned spaces to revive the ancient aspects of society are among the effects of this approach. The “city center” has also been selected as one of the historical sites and it is the most important destination that has influenced the world tourism trends over the past decades. This new policy aims to give life to the city center, attract tourists, and ultimately boost the economic prosperity of the city. But a few points require more attention. Today, the place called the city center is the historical part of the city, which is not necessarily the center. The tourist who is invited to the city

is the heritage or historical tourist, not the urban tourist. The reason is that in this process, tourism does not take place in a space called the city. But who is an urban tourist in the city center and with what features would make the space more attractive to him?

Physical and semantic position of the city center

The center is the core around which the city and the conceptual and multifunctional aspects (historical, economic, social, traffic, administrative-political and physical-spatial) are formed. It includes the main important and superior functions of the city. For this reason, compared to other parts of the city, the center plays a more important and bigger role in the meaning and function. Establishing a set of important and superior activities in the center of each city attracts people from different places to it.

After the Industrial Revolution, with the growth of technology and the spread of machine life, cities expanded. Changes were made to the city model and they had consequences such as population growth, economic, social, and cultural transformation. New theories were proposed based on the concept of decentralization, regulation with a new narrative of the city, and emphasis on the audience. In different definitions, the city center has been mentioned as “the most active neighborhood of any city” and a combination of administrative, commercial, artistic, and cultural centers of the whole country and the social manifestation of all people. The city is the center of power, culture, and socio-political relations and in fact, it is the manifestation of human civilization that flows in the center of the city in a real and dynamic way. This aspect now has been used to revitalize the city center based on a policy called “tourism”.

In these developments, the center, as one of the important parts of the city and the main destination of tourism, has changed in terms of economic, social, access, and urban planning policies. The centers of new cities were formed by separating the semantic and functional layers and defining different economic, social, historical, administrative centers, etc. Old centers have lost their identity role in shaping urban semantics and concepts, and the concept of centrality has been replaced by new functional domains and activity centralism in modern cities.

The concept of the city center has been fading and its removal from the city structure and depopulation as the result of the new approach to modern urban planning, has

taken place in many major cities around the world and the concept of urban tourism and its methods have changed for people and tourists significantly. The modernization of past uses and their new location have changed the semantic layers of the center and the current social activities in it to change and now the center as a set of activity layers is just a historical center with a bunch of memories. As a result, part of the layers as subsets, either reflect the historical concept and narrate the past events and in the direction of economic policy or have become a center with a single function or under the influence, the economic dimension has turned into the centers of the stock market in the city.

People's perception of the city center

From the citizens' point of view, which layer of the city is the center? Is it the historical layer? Economic? Social?, political ?, cultural ?, tourism, or what?

Is the city center perceived as a place where there are a lot of historical monuments? Or is it a place where most government buildings such as the ministry, parliament, central bank, municipality, stock exchange office, etc. have been located? Could it be a place where people go to evoke their memories and see the city? Do different urban events take place there? Or is it a place where tourists often go to see the city?

A reflection on media (e.g. news), an archive of old city photographs, the novels, and stories narrated in the heart of the city shows that a center is a place whose events reflect the events across the city, and its news evoke the emotions of all citizens including worry, happiness, anxiety, feelings of pride, etc. It is a place where all the people follow its news on media. It is a place where unusual behavior becomes the subject of the media and triggers the reaction of the people. We may have seen the same thing

many times in different parts of the city but have carelessly passed by it.

The center is the reputation of the city and its strategic and gravity point. (Figs. 1 and 2).

The soul and heart of the city is a place where all social, political, cultural currents, etc end or begin. It is also a permanent and chosen destination in people's daily lives. When the gravity of the city disappears, the city becomes a broken and meaningless phenomenon that is no longer perceived as a city. The gravity brings the different regions together and this is called the city. Citizens' perception of the city is limited to their area of residence, and the tourist's perception of visiting the city is a collage of historical and modern monuments in its scattered areas. In this new context, both citizen and the tourist experience a city which is often found in a catalog with tons of journalistic photographs. In such a context, the city's social behaviors and identity play a minimal role. Cities in which special architectural works (e.g. the Milad Tower) in some parts of the city are the criteria for the recognition of the city and people's sense of belonging, give a minimal role to the society in creating this sense. The reason is that this sense is defensible in the competitive, economic, and managerial policies of the symbols of the new city. Symbols have the role of an image and are not identity giving elements and the sense of belonging to them are created through frequent visits, not the interaction of the concept.

Tourism in the city center through the lens of the travelogue

In most urban planning sources, there is much emphasis on the importance and functional position of the city center. However, mainly the physical and quantitative features have been investigated. Everything starts from



Fig.1. The legitimacy of social behavior in the center. The media coverage of the arrival of livestock in the center of Tehran in the early Pahlavi period. Source: Center for Contemporary Architectural Studies of Iran.



Fig. 2. The city center has a strategic and conceptual position that makes it suitable for political actions and social events. Military ceremony in Tehran Toopkhaneh (In English artillery) Square in the Qajar period. Source: Center for Contemporary Architectural Studies of Iran.

the city where various events are shaped through the interactions among the political, social, and economic layers. In this center, memory and identity depend on its physical condition. The city center is the result of the interplay between the objective and subjective aspects of the city. Its objective concept is crystallized in the physical and activity layer and its subjective concept is crystallized in the perceptual, semantic, collective memory, creation of place, and identity of the city. The identity of the city emerges in its center and is perceived by residents as the most important part of the city.

In the traditional city, semantic and functional events organically coincided in one place because the cities were small and had a neighborhood structure, there was not much opportunity to separate the layers of the city. The historical and geographical center of the city corresponded with its social, political, and activity center.

With the conceptual and physical developments of today's cities, one of the authoritative references that can be used to explain the role of the center and its importance in the city are travelogues and historical sources. These references explain the components of each city, socio-political, cultural events, activities, and its tourists and present their narrative of the city and its life in its inseparable element or its context.

In most travelogues, in a physical context, a cultural, social, and political narrative of the city is presented. All of these aspects form the identity and concept of the city. In various travelogues, the centrality of Iranian cities has been defined through an interconnected set of neighboring uses. Mosque, different markets, schools, baths, citadels, etc. are the constituent elements of the center that in different cities of Iran have found a structure appropriate to the culture of the environment. In other cases, the square, as the main physical and semantic element, has formed the city center and host social events. As "Chardin" and "Tavernier" have named Tabriz and Isfahan squares as the center of the city with a dominant socio-political approach. (Fig. 3).

Highlighting the square as one of the important and main elements of the center of Tehran, "Orsolle" describes Toopkhane (artillery in English) square and the importance of its location in the city, and Hardouin has compared it with the main and central squares of important cities such as Paris in terms of space and current activity (Orsolle, 2003; Hardouin, 1945). "Curzon" also describes this square as a place to identify Tehran in the Qajar era, its visitors, culture, and people's beliefs about its key elements - pearl ball - (Curzon, 1970)

"Almost in the center of the city, there is a large rectangular square between the outer wall of the citadel and Qorkhaneh, called Topkhaneh Square to which the six main streets of the city with many



Fig. 3. The square is one of the important elements in the city center, the tourist destination of citizens, and the place for socio-political events and the place for power display in the city. Reza Shah's carriage is passing through Toopkhane Square in Tehran. Source: Center for Contemporary Architectural Studies of Iran.

infantry checkpoints lead. In this city, wherever a person wants to go, Toopkhaneh is a direct point of departure and it is quite appropriate" (Orsolle, 2003).

"In the Bazar, Mirzas spread the latest jokes and taunts of the day from shop to shop, and row to row. Women walk two by two, four by four, the narrators tell the stories of the princes and princesses of thousand and one nights, and the musicians recite the conquests of Rostam or Farrokhzad with music. Sometimes a dervish finds a listener and narrates stories from the saints of the people" (Ibid, 239).

Hardouin considers Tehran Bazaar a lively place and the main destination of people and travelers. This place serves as a scene for interesting play and a manifestation of the strange customs of the people (Hardouin, 1945, 252). "Serena" also mentions that the bazaar - in the role of the city center - is a tourist destination during the day and a place for cultural and political events (Serena, 1983). (Figs. 4 & 5). "It is located in the northern part of the new city, but somewhere outside the old wall, the main square or public center of Tehran. It is known as Toopkhaneh Square [...] numerous different historians have written different and contradictory descriptions about this big [pearl ball] [...] "An artillery guard has been placed next to it, and the infertile women go there for blessing and pass under the cannon so that they may become pregnant and their wish come true" (Curzon, 1970, 409-410).

"Bazar is a place for meetings and public contracts. There, people discuss their personal and business issues and interests, they also confer public issues and administrative matters. In short, Bazar has replaced the "stock market" and the "parliament". Still, the definition of Bazar is not complete. News, rumors, slanders, lies, controversies, and revelations of secrets all originate from Bazar and are spread by word of mouth in the Bazar, and as usual, people tell tales about each other. It is a place for repeating funny

stories and jokes and making and popularizing subtle points and even singing and murmuring new songs is not common anywhere except in Bazar. There are various stories and legends entertaining ordinary people very much. Nowhere is it more crowded than Bazar. Also, there is no other place like the bazaar, an interesting gathering place in which mixing of all walks of life are all trying hard to find a place and open a way for themselves, along the long covered corridors” (Serena, 1983, 64) The different narratives of travelogues from the city center are important from a different perspective such as studying various social, cultural, ritual, political, and economic aspects of current life and its integration with people’s daily tourism. In most travelogues, the vivacity and dynamics of the cities are described and the physical and semantic features of the city center are explained. In the descriptions, a city center is a place where the culture, customs, and traditions, social memories of a nation are formed. It has been a place of power and government. The center is the only place in the city that is the destination of any goal. It is the place in which different cultures of the city are displayed and the identity of the city has been formed and maintained through a consensus of view about the concepts and the unity of places.

Tourism in the city center- Elements of the center in the narratives of travelogues-Bazar, Square, Mosque, Schools, Bath-Social, political, economical, cultural, religious, ritual- The approach of the center based on the narratives of travelogues (Fig. 6)

Conclusion

The physical structure and concept of the city play an equal role in the formation of the center. Therefore, the city center is an objective-subjective concept. It is an interpretation of the concept that takes place through material elements. Neither can these elements be called the center nor its concepts and abstract associates. The center represents the lifestyle of citizens and their interpretation and throughout history, it has provided a relatively consistent answer to the frequent questions and addressed the needs of urban life in terms of what should be seen and understood. It is the center of various criteria that have the capacity and dynamism and the ability to move and adapt to the conditions and needs of the day.

A city center is a decision-making place aligned with many concepts through which the city is best represented. It can be identified using the following features:

- Capacity of human and financial resources development



Figs. 4 & 5. Socio-cultural life corresponds to the process of urban tourism in the city center. The bazaar, as an important organ in the city center, has been a manifestation of cultural and social events and people’s leisure time. Tehran Bazaar in the Qajar era. Source: <http://kvinnonet.org/misc/azIran/amin/OldPics/index.html>.

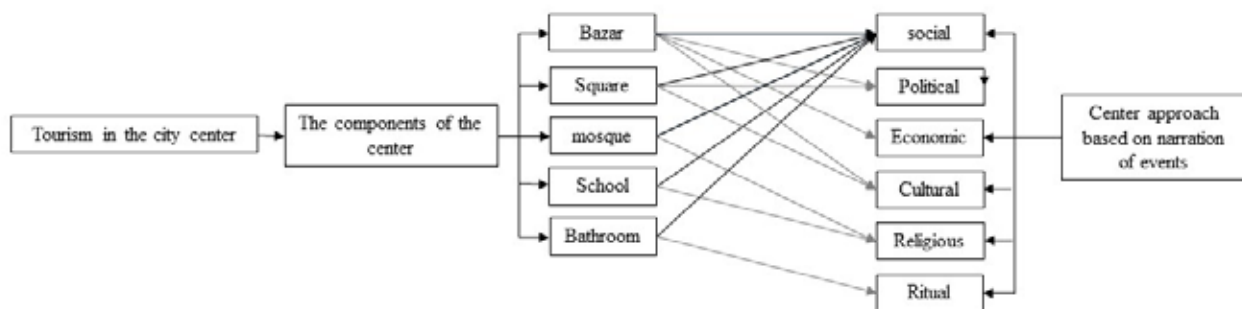


Fig.6. Based on the narrative of travelogues, the conceptual dominance and approach of current events in the defining place of the city center is its social dimension. Citizens play a most important role in defining concepts and events in the center and the identity of the city and they are its main tourists. Source: Author, 2020.

- The dominant population of the city in terms of diversity of behavior and tourism goals with the same destination
- Destination and origin of socio-political events in the city
- Production capacity, meeting the needs of the day and innovation
- A pivotal point of urban transport infrastructure
- A pivotal point of folk arts with a socio-political theme
- Historian of the city

Behavioral order while there are multiple tourism goals. The center is the center of various and dynamic criteria. In this place, the tourist's perceptions of all its objective-subjective concepts are shaped. The perceptions are in contrast to what is seen in the zoning and hangouts of today's cities. Areas that are each planned and managed with a specific purpose and criteria and have a unity of concept and multiplicity of places in the city. If the dominant conceptual layer is defective, the chances of the whole area to be abandoned are very high.

The role of the city center clearly shows how different elements are dependent on it. It is a unique feature and a meaningful brand for urban life. The city center is a destination whose survival depends on a "socio-political" dimension while a "historical-economic" dimension is a sufficient not necessary condition though.

In the postmodern era, cultural, spatial, and social

structures play an undeniable role in the development of tourism and the reputation of various places. Accordingly, the city center has an important potential in attracting tourists, giving a special character to cities, creating a mental landscape for people, and making a reputation for the city. In this place, the concepts are perceived by tourists without intermediaries and mixed with the current social life in the city. This scenic place is now considered by urban experts as an urban landmark and a physical-historical site. Concerted efforts are needed to stabilize the urban landscape in line with the expectations of citizens. Nowadays is offered to tourists under the name of tourism, not citizens. It must be acknowledged that the "citizens", the constant, permanent, and main tourists of the city, the factor of vitality and life of the city center can reinvigorate the economy and promote tourism. The diversity of the behavior of various tourists with different goals has resulted in the emergence of the multiple concepts of the city and its full perception. The body of the center unifies these concepts and makes the concept of the city legible when it is considered a single unit. Therefore, it can be said that the center is the essence of the whole city, which has a fixed identity but a unique and changing place, and the "citizens" are its main tourists and identifiers.

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