

The Dispute between Physicalism and Culture: Cultural Implications in Tehran's Comprehensive Development Plan Vision

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Abstract

The present study was conducted with the aim of elaborating on the cultural implications of Tehran's comprehensive development plan vision based on a content analysis method. The study seeks an answer to the question as to how much Tehran's development plan vision caters for the cultural issues in the metropolitan area. The scope of this research is the entire provisions of the second five-year development plan of Tehran's municipality (2014-2018). The explicit and implicit themes indicating the culture-related issues were separated and, considering their interrelationships, the explicit themes were explored. The data collection tool was the content analysis checklist and its reliability was confirmed by external auditors based on convergence coefficient in the course of coding. The results indicated that a considerable part of Tehran's development plan is directed at modern morphological and structural elements, urban requirements, civil development and urban control and supervision policies and a lower deal of attention has been paid to the cultural, hypothetical and soft topics. These findings show that Tehran is still trapped in physicalism development and culture decline.

Keywords: religion, modern society, metropolis-dwelling, physicalism, cultural decline

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Introduction:

In today's metropolitan community, individuals are faced with challenges such as selection from amongst many alternatives; the recognition of routine life and its implications enables the perception of the concrete entities and prediction of the routine preferences and tendencies in the metropolitan ecosystem. The different formations of a metropolitan man's activism as an indicator of a sort of increasing tension in society have capable and diverse resources for narrating the lifestyles in the arena of disputes on the one hand; and encourage intellectual institutions, governance and society towards making their specific discourse dominant in the society, on the other hand. The discussions during the past several years on Iran's cultural policy show that the governance system is still expecting cultural resources to narrate lifestyles, especially in the modern urban physical aspect. From another perspective, the increase in the influence coefficient, and level and geographic reach of communication, leads to a change in the demand level, expectations and cultural awareness regarding various lifestyles. This issue drives the contrast of the important parts of life in Iranian pseudo-modern society with "non-native" narrations towards confrontation with the life based on governance style. Government institutions' full-scale defense of the cultural aspects inevitably portrays the image in the mind that an increasing attention will be paid to spatial and physical metropolitan development of cultural arrays, signs and symbols. This is not in an advertising form but in the physical aspect of the city's spatial architecture, as a means of engineering daily life. Although such an assumption seems to be evident, its exploration in the high-level documents can show the difference between the dominant discourses in the area of the city's spatial development based on macro-level governance policies. The issue is that urban physicalism and cultural decline in the urban development discourse pave the way for the corroboration of the engineering and hardware aspects and downgrading of the cultural issues; the fundamental configuration is the main problem of this study. Tehran's develop-

ment plan has been designed and implemented based on a vision plan as an example of movement on the path of the governance of culture with physicalism discourse. This incongruent narration would lead to the hardware prevalence and dismissal of the cultural methods in the physical and spiritual aspects of life in the metropolitan community. To explore this issue, the proposal of theoretical foundations and contemplation about the metropolitan development plan of cultural approach, would reflect the life cultural signs and styles in these documents and demonstrate the study hypothesis based on the prevalence of urban physicalism over the culture.

In urban physicalism, human, historical and social factors have been largely eliminated or insufficiently taking into account from contemporary Iran's urban development planning. The difference in the readings of culture as an anthropological issue and culture as a political issue causes the creation of cultural decline. Therefore, the things built in a city would lack the human spirit that is guided within the framework of urban development policies. Accordingly, the supra-structural development of the urban structures would lead to merely physical development. The dispute between culture as a lifestyle of the urban human being and extreme physicalism in modern urban constructions navigates the nature of the urban structures towards urban functions and not the representation of the Iranian personal prestige. Such diversity in the urban system is not indicative of its cultural and ethnic variety; rather it is reflective of the economic class's interventions and urban development policies based on pure formalism. However, the question is, why has such a method been placed atop the governance body's agenda? If culture means human values and Iranian individuals' lived experiences, why it has not been shown in the urban identity?

Manifestation of Physicalism and Cultural Decline in the Urban Planning System:

The issue of culture in Iran's urban planning system refers to the "knowledge system" in the urban development planning in contemporary Iran. The knowledge system is a collection of research methods,

knowledge forms and epistemological approaches as well as methods of application of knowledge in the urban planning system. Due to the dominance of a sort of “pseudo-positivism” over the knowledge system in Iran’s urban planning, an ideology called “physicalism” or “physical-orientation” seriously and effectively prevents paying of attention to the human being and culture in urban development planning. The planning system and the knowledge system in Iran’s urban planning has been such that attention was only paid during the past hundred years to the expansion of cities’ and spaces’ physical aspects and this has naturally resulted in nothing beyond physicalism or physical-orientation. Physicalism and knowledge system is associated with power and manifests itself well in the urban development plans; it means that they are correlated and interwoven with the material and political economy relations of the city and material forces in the city. It is at this time that culture reduction can be perceived in the city (Fazeli, 2014).

As a manmade product, the city generates cultural aspects. Thus, the city is the reflection of the human values, signs and symbols and a mirror of the human mind (Harvey, 1996; Mitchell, 2003). Such manifestation is increased in metropolitan life in which the human’s contribution in the reconstruction of cultural environments is high; thus, urban engineering and planning are commissioned to something more than cultural representation of their own artifacts in regard of the idea that they construct a cultural city. In this sense, not solely the work’s artistic meaning but the cultural unity and congruence that preserve the association of the elements of the culture are inevitable necessities; paying lesser attention to this aspect of culture would be followed by decline in culture. Stewart Hall explains that these configurations have not been historically brought about at a single instant of time and simultaneously in the western world. Cultural configuration is the last arrangement (Thompson and Bocoock, 1992, introduction). Before that, social configuration mattered with political configuration preceding it and economic configuration being

the first. The notable point is that the matured form of the contemporary urban society is the form coordinating the economic, social and political configurations and this situation is what is termed as culture, to wit cultural configuration; however, contemporary culture cannot be formed as far as these configurations are separate and not blended and culture can be envisioned as something under the dominance of physicalism (Fazeli, 2016).

One of the special tasks of physicalism that results in culture’s decline in the urban development system is its attractiveness to the institutions of the governing power that can offer a sort of displaying discourse for showcasing the governments’ vigor and effectiveness in urban development. Such a show of power is not envisaged as the power of urban governance and political system but as a means of reproducing social agreeability. The prerequisite to the formation of the government in the contemporary world is the justification of the government and governance’s effectiveness in the society of the people; since the government and its governance cannot last long if it falls short of producing theoptics of effectiveness; as such physicalism can help the governments and states display a showy discourse of their effectiveness (Fazeli, 2012).

Young (2008) shows that a sort of “cultural turn” has occurred in these theories during the recent decades and he has made a successful effort to come up with a sort of “culturalized” pattern through making use of the advances occurred in the area of urban and regional planning. Young (2008) bases his reasoning on the perspective by Harvey (2009) to believe that the largest riddle of architecture is the unclear stance of culture in development programs. As opined by Throsby (2010), the “social continuation capability” or the “social sustainability” is actualized when the city and its human beings have a good and high-quality life and this necessitates paying attention to the sustainable ethical and human values in the planning of urban development; the actualization of such an issue entails paying a great deal of attention to culture during planning and remaining loyal to the

“cultural ecosystem”.

Although there is closeness between culture and urban engineering and interaction between culture and city’s physical aspect can be envisioned beyond the interpretive significations (Habib, 2009), these as independent entities do not spontaneously constitute culturalization but constitute knowledge instances, the existence and blending of which in planning can transform a plan into a cultural one. In fact, cultural era would be inevitably incorporating a somewhat negative concept of culture indicating the sole commercialized look at it and it is the reality of the cultural era during which culturalization of the planning can be contributive (Young, 2008).

Study Methodology:

The present study has been conducted through analyzing the contents of high-level documents in urban planning and policy-making. The five-year development plan of Tehran has been considered as the study scope during two periods from 2014 to 2018 and

from 2019 to 2023. For data analysis, use has been made of the approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) proposing implicit themes in the text that have been distinguished herein based on the researcher’s goal. To increase the validity of the extracted data, external auditors as well as coding consistency have been employed.

Study Findings:

Analyzing the second five-year plan of Tehran’s Municipality (2014-2018):

Tehran Municipality’s second five-year plan has been prepared in various mission areas like transportation and traffic, environment and urban services, security and crisis management, city-building and architecture, cultural and social as well as urban management and economy. Tehran municipality’s second five-year plan can be distinguished within three formats, namely vision, strategy and executive policy. Table (1) presents the vision, strategy and executive policy of Tehran municipality’s second five-year plan and its cultural implications.

Vision	Number of strategies	Executive policy	Implicit cultural implications	Explicit cultural implications	Non-cultural implications
Tehran is a city with Iranian-Islamic identity and originality (a city that has been organized for the growth and sublimity of human beings and a clean life)	3	13	2	11	-
Tehran is a knowledge-based and smart universal city	3	13	5	-	8
Tehran is a green and beautiful as well as a happy and cheerful city with pleasant and vast public spaces	3	18	1	-	17
Tehran is a safe and enduring city against various kinds of harms and resistance to risks and accidents	4	16	4	-	12
Tehran is a sustainable and coherent city with a proper structure for residence, activity and leisure	3	14	7	-	7
Tehran is a fluid city with public welfare and proper infrastructure along with moderation of inequalities	7	17	1	-	16
Tehran is a metropolis with national and global performances and with a modern economy and centrality of cultural-research and political affairs on the national level	4	11	3	-	8
Sum	27	102	23	11	68

Table (4-5): Vision, strategy and executive policy of Tehran municipality’s second five-year development plan and its cultural implications

In Tehran Municipality's second five-year development plan (2014-2018), the total ratio of the explicit implications in the executive policies for cultural considerations is 1% which is indicative of the dominance of the engineering mindset in the policies of the governing second five-year policies. Paying attention to such factors as promotion of Islamic-Iranian culture through the enhancement of cultural and social capital, development of participation culture as well as facilitation and promotion of renovation culture, development of the public areas and cultural spaces reflects the preservation, protection, development and support of cultural issues, seem to be less prevalent in contrast to the other economic, political, social and urban management structures.

Analyzing the third five-year development plan of Tehran's Municipality (2019-2023):

In the content of Tehran municipality's third five-year development plan that has been codified in ninety-five articles, policies, essential strategies, priorities and key issues, requirements, properties and approaches to the codification of the plan and strategic and operational program of Tehran's municipality have been taken into account and dominance of the engineering reasoning over the cultural aspects still exists. At the top of the programs for this period (2019-2023), two out of the seven key issues and priorities of Tehran explicitly and implicitly indicate cultural considerations and five subjects are non-cultural. Moreover, amongst the priorities and key issues of Tehran's municipality, no priority has been explicitly given to the cultural matters. Although the use of such themes as cultural diversity's capacities, cultural events, urban tourism with sister cities (article 4), infrastructures and cities' competitiveness based on the development of the cultural economy, the comprehensive document of economic and cultural booming (article 24), the comprehensive document of Tehran's historical, cultural and natural buildings and textures management and conservation (article 46), strengthening of the public and monuments (article 48), organizing and improving the physical status of the mortuaries with heritage and cultural values (article 59), social

and cultural revitalization of night life in metropolitan Tehran (article 66), sublimation of the family foundation and support of the sustainable family (article 73), enhancement of the cultural-religious capital of citizens in line with the improvement of the Islamic-Iranian lifestyle with an emphasis on the Quranic culture's teachings and elevation of social happiness (article 77), bringing about prosperity in festivals and national, ritual and universal ceremonies (article 78), preservation and fortification of the cultural diversity and multiplicity, production and reproduction of cultural resources (article 78) and development of the cultural and artistic settings' per capita with the objective of supporting and contributing to the formation of the cultural clusters and series (article 78) are all pertinent to cultural matters but the majority of the city's priorities pertain to the smartification and exploitation of technological systems. The analysis of the programs belonging to this period is expressive of the idea that a considerable volume of the programs tend towards the physical development of the city.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The results of the present study indicate that the perspective of physical development and reconstruction discourse dominates, and results in cultural decline and downgrading of cultural issues to cliché matters. The area of culture goes beyond its decline to the issues that eventually serve legitimization of power more than benefiting the culture. The urban government in Tehran is still giving priority in both of the studied terms to masculine and quantifiable spirits to the detriment of the feminine and cultural aspects of the city's development. This means that the urban management system, disregarding all its evaluations of the qualities and quantities, has focused on the technological and hardware development of the city more than paying attention to culture as the spirit of development in the society which causes the cultural decline and downgrading in the planning system and accordingly the urban level.

The noteworthy point in these programs is that a considerable part of this program has also been exist-

ent in the previous period; the aforementioned programs are viewed as casted clichés of the image of cultural development in the physical aspect of urban development. However, culture, in its anthropological sense, has been less frequently seen in the urban development setting and its technical image is highlighted more than the other factors. Urban planning's tendency to the cliché reproduction of culture is reflective of the idea that the culture is condemned in the physicalism structures to a non-anthropological elucidation and a power-stricken domain.

In its human sense, culture is not observed in the city's physical aspect with regard to the idea that the volition focused on awareness power and norm breaking does not reflect human knowledge and awareness; thus, the discourse of civil development is a play of the urban governance's authority that cannot be criticized and/or expected anything beyond the awareness imposed by physicalism. Therefore, physical development is not only the simplest and least costly way for reproduction of power in the layers of the urban system but it also prevents the occurrence of the informative discourses that lead to the multiplication of the notions and diverse thoughts in the society. Such a belief in the area of the urban reproduction would create cities lacking in human spirit.

The city with regard to what it has been termed city, will be developed and will get larger and it is a place for living; but, culture means a unified entity with ethical and human values system which will gradually lose its value in the context of engineering structures. Therefore, it seems that the interpretation of cultural concepts has offered an evolved manifestation of culture's narration in the anthropological realm within the cast of physical aspects. The power-stricken culture is trapped under the dominance of a framework of engineering and pseudo-positivist system and has generalized its meaning to the affairs that had gained credibility in the other areas like religion, society, politics and even economy. Thus, before being cultural, culture is political, religious, economic and social. Such a stripping of the originality from cultural issues also influences the

concrete entity of culture, following which the non-anthropological narrations of culture take its place. Subjects like apartment-living culture, traffic culture and other issues of the like gradually take the place of culture's human aspects and this would result in the dominance of the physicalism and urban governance's power over culture's territory.

Although vast activities are performed in the city and highways and buildings and a massive volume of culture is forming, they are not organized, profitable and participation-enticing. Cultural decline does not mean that the society lacks culture, rather it means that the organic and functional relationship of the system with the planning body and people's lifeworld has been disrupted. That is because no relationship is established between the institutions that should bring together the lifeworld and system and form the social discourse; sounds are not voiced and the voiced sounds are not heard; awareness is not generated and any produced awareness is not effective.

The more the cities get larger in terms of design and view, the less they are in accordance with the "collective mind's unconscious". Such disintegration has caused a sort of psychosis in today's cities; this trend is formed not only in the physical architecture and designing of the city but also in the social relations, institutions and foundations. The cities in Iran have been hastily expanded in their qualities and quantities but the "urban archiving" has not been formed. It means that the city does not act as a live memory. The signs and elements that have been existent historically in the form of being a Muslim (Shiite or Sunni), Azeri ethnicity or Azeri-speaking people, Baluch or all of the other cultural diversities forming the historical urban collective memory have become gradually depleted.

The experience of the cities' cultural policy during the recent years indicates that the creation of multi-purpose public spaces, multi-functional centers along with stores, offices and various kinds of recreational facilities, including the museums and galleries, can be effective policies in the area of the urban renovation. During the recent years, the cultural policy

and culture have contributed to the revitalization of declining cities. This trend has been brought about through the construction of museums and holding of certain ceremonies and rituals.

The urban management system is not aligned with the creation and corroboration of the required infrastructures for the development of participation-seeking and constructive civil institutions. So, the urban management system in Iran distances away from the people's lifeworld and their wants and wishes as time goes on. The social values, i.e. the people's social preferences and priorities, diverge from the systems. Physicalism's ideology in this system of urban development is a sort of third-world pseudo-positivism. This knowledge system does not provide for the observation and understanding of subjects like social justice and urban inequalities, urban identities' poorness in urban countenance and design, gender discriminations in urban spaces and other topics of the like and people are limited to the methods and techniques of statistical data collection and mapping technical skills. The anthropological techniques and methods, various qualitative data like historical and linguistic information, lived experience and other similar topics have all waned in urban studies. This is the issue that prevents and bars the generative approaches of the local and native theories regarding the contemporary Iranian city. One of the attributes of pseudo-positivism is that it converts the conflicts and paradoxes existent in the social, political and cultural structure to quantitative contradictions as the quantified conflicts that are resolvable. This same issue causes the decline of "social matters" to "quantifiable matters" and sets the ground for the emergence of political materials. Pseudo-positivism produces a sort of suppressive radical standardization and intellectualization. So, a city would be generated in this pseudo-positivist Iranian framework in which the ethnic, cultural and religious diversities have been eliminated.

Such a type of disintegration and such gaps and separations between the system and the lifeworld result in the transformation of city to an arena of resistance

and the management would become more costly and management economy would be in need of spending more money. Cultural resistance, social resistance, political resistance and all such types of resistances become interwoven.

Physicalism ideology benefits certain beneficiaries and causes the occurrence of popular befooling of the majority at least for a short time by the opium of the people in the light of dramatic discourse; in fact, it means that the general public experiences a formative structure of stupidity in the light of populism and feels being soothed and civilized. The thing that is seen in the physicalism of the developed cities in a way or another shows itself in a more acute form in the urban physicalism of the developing countries. In fact, the "death of culture" or cultural decline in the physical domain of the modern cities' construction is more exacerbated in developing countries.

Creation of critical self-awareness in respect to the disintegrations can be a fillip to the historical insight of the urban community. Furthermore, the creation of political will for the enhancement of the position of culture is the second way that can reveal the urban disintegrations and cultural decline. This can be obtained via expanding the cultural knowledge and enhancing the political will and recrystallizing the national capacity and capabilities.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

N. Fazeli , S. Sharifi. (2019). *The Dispute between Physicalism and Culture: Cultural Implications in Tehran's Comprehensive Development Plan Vision*, 3(6): 1-8

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.22034/SOC.2019.93871>

URL: http://soc.gpmsh.ac.ir/article_93871.html

