

## IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS IN THE LANDSCAPE OF HISTORICAL DISTRICTS

*(Typical sample: Oudlaajaan neighborhood-Tehran)*

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**ABSTRACT:** The historical context of a city is part of its cultural property, reflecting its identity and visual values through forming the inhabitants' collective memory and showing the lifestyle of their ancestors. One of the most important questions has always been: what are the factors that guarantee the permanence of the landscape of a historical context? Finding these factors and classifying them into a hierarchy, depending on their amount of effectiveness, will clarify how much change needs to be applied to each one of them; it will also make way for urban management authorities to start planning the changes.

For this purpose, 'Oudlaajaan - one of Tehran's residential neighborhoods built in Safavid Dynasty - was chosen. This district has been registered by Tehran's Cultural Heritage Organization for its historical value. But unfortunately, due to the wrong policies applied by the urban management during different eras, it has lost all its physical values.

Our interpretation of a city's landscape is in the first place visual, and is formed by moving inside the structure of the city and an association of ideas. There, we can experience the environment in the form of a series of visual intakes. The mind, then, establishes a connection between the past experiences and the new environment. On this basis, we divided the district into several survey blocks and chose some people of each block randomly to fill out our questionnaires, asking them about their visual experience of the district.

Based on the results of both theoretical studies and the surveys, we could identify the dimension and shape of the pathways, signs and turning points, activities, architectural characteristics of the buildings and vegetation, serving as the most important landmarks of the district, a comprehensive understanding of which can lead to an explicit plan for applying changes to the context.

**Keywords:** Urban Landscape, Elements of Landscape, Identity, Intervention, Historical Districts, Structure,

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### a. *Urban Landscape Definition*

The landscape of the city is like multidimensional picture through which a viewer sees different scenes, fabric, pictures, its color combinations, predominant elements, and the combination of shapes. Also he sees different forms used in it such as: those of materials, the rhythm, the music, the sequence, the elements, the sizes of the spaces, the openings, and its other faces. Noticing these is the result of a search in the scenes in the city.

Urban landscape is the index for the quality of civilization and the social spirit of each nation and is the result of the decisions and thoughts of the people in it. It is the outcome of an intentional attempt and not an accident or out of the laws and regulation out of human's comprehension.

Nowadays, urban landscape is considered as a mirror reflecting the culture and the history of a city which also has cultural-social and aesthetic dimensions. Lize thinks that urban landscape is a history full of tales, "When examining the urban landscape, actually it is its relations and transformations which are analyzed. On the same basis, urban landscape is known as the image reflecting the human relationships and his environment from past up to the present time. It is a plate on which its reflections have been, somehow deeply and precisely, carved. Therefore, urban landscape is a history to be narrated. It is an interactive phenomenon which has formed as a result of human's interactions with the environment. It has a physical and mental nature. Therefore, it has content in addition to physical features. It also is a relative phenomenon as it depends on the viewer's culture, history and point of view.

The importance of the urban landscape is because of beautifying, granting identity, and facilitating the flow of life in the city. The cities today, due to various reasons which are often economic, are deprived of a visual-historical identity.

#### **b. *The Urban Identity and Historical Fabrics' Landscapes***

A city is a place for human settlement. And its content is a target for human to address his technical, biological needs and also social interactions.

Hence, a city is described as civil only when it has the capability to contain the needed facilities for life at different times. This need for transformation along with the need for identity creates a dual phenomenon. Different comments in this area suggest that a city enjoying an urban identity is a city where there is no time break in the links from its past to its present and from its present to its future. So that it has a legible scenario from different periods and different historical layers. Texture, relations, and strains along with this union make the urban incidents in the city comprehensible would bring about a city full of activities, memories and with a group memory with a better identity than a city full of everyday monotonous activities which lacks group memory .

*Jack Nasar* in his book, *The Evaluative Image of The City*, declares that all the spaces which have been popular among the people have played an important role in giving a better identity to the city. There are several factors from the following factors: 1) The Nature 2) Open Spaces 3) Historical Elements 4) Sense for the Place 5) The Memories and Group Incidents

According to different definitions nowadays, urban landscape is a live and active phenomenon which is affected by the human beings and their way of living on one side, and from another point it affects the human civilization, culture and the way human beings to live by its form and reminding the memories which have taken place in the course of time. Urban landscape is not known only a physical element with natural details but it also is a mental and cultural element whose formation in people's mind has been with the interventions of history, religious and mythological beliefs, environment, traditions and etc. Consequently, urban landscape is stage for the urban scenario.

Since the historical fabrics of the city play an important role in this scenario and as they generally form the first societies in the city and the central core in the city of, their role is highlighted in granting the city its identity. They have an invaluable part in maintaining the urban landscape due to containing the physical elements on the one hand and preserving the group memories on the other.

Having one dimensional view of the urban landscape has resulted in the limitation of the elements forming it and the ignorance of its second aspect. As *Lynch* in his books names the elements such as path, sign, node, edge and district and ignores non-physical elements. Following this view and having a museum like view in regards to the historical fabrics, *Tehran Cultural Heritage* believes it can preserve the urban landscape of the city with freezing the fabric and with preserving the whole physical body of the fabrics. This has caused the life to diminish in the fabrics. Not defining a new role in the city and emphasizing on the fixed role of the whole fabrics has caused the fabrics gradually to part from the city and has lead to destruction. This article is seeking to discover the elements and details of the historical fabric with a two-dimensional view. Knowing them and determining their importance can define the intervention limits in the historical fabrics in such a way that preserves their landscape and values and with reconsidering the limits and regulations can revive their lost lives so that the fabric becomes a place to live and to be in, not just a sightseeing place.

Hence, with implementing library and field studies and preparing questionnaires and distributing them among the residents of one of the historical districts of Tehran, called Odlajan, it was attempted to find out different parts forming its landscape.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 The Evaluation and Recognition of the Parts of the Landscape

The process of evaluating the landscape enhances one's understanding in finding out what highlights the urban landscape and what data in this is more important.

In EIA method (Environmental Impact Appraisal) the parts of the landscape is evaluated on the basis of its different aspects. Different aspects in it are defined as follow:

- 1- Elements, factors, individual features including the dominant features both manmade and natural. These parts are generally measurable and can easily be described.
- 2- Features, factors, or the combination of the factors play a role in the formation of the arena (including the empirical features such as mental peace)
- 3- Nature/Identity. Identity is a highlighted recognizable pattern of features that occur in a special kind of landscape and the manner of comprehending the pattern occurs through the people. This pattern, in reality, reflects special features of geology, topology, plants, the function of the land, and residential areas. Nature creates a special kind of feeling regarding the landscape arenas.

Evaluation in EIA includes a combination of mental and visual judgments and therefore it is important to use an organized and fixed approach. It is necessary to differentiate between the judgments which have some rates of visual beliefs (such as the assessment of the value of the landscape) and those judgments which are visual and quantifiable (such as determining the size).

Different details of EIA can be shown as follow:

Assessing the features		
Assessing the quality	Visual	Measurable Effects (Quantifiable)
Personal Judgments		
Group Tastes (the general public)	Mental	Assessing the beauty of the

Understanding the landscape, as natural or manmade space or picture or a combination of both, is a result of what is sensed which a more prominent and tangible aspect than other mental aspects. Although cultural, historical and functional aspects are the goals of the landscape, their intervention in the process of designing and judging comes later and can be achieved through the system of signs and the interpretation of the space.

Leo Pold believes that: our ability to understand the quality of nature, like art, begins with beautiful details, and then moves from what is conceived beautiful to the values which have not been expressed verbally so far.

The theory might be accepted that states judging a landscape or item does not take place on the basis of what is known and in a cultural and historical framework but it all depends on how this item is seen, what kind of sound it makes and what kind of feelings it evokes. In this case our understanding of the landscape stops at the level at which the initial judgments about beauty are determined. After the initial judgment about beauty, non-cognitive factors and the intellectual factors interfere separately. In this point history, culture, experience etc. can appreciate and understand the landscape better.

On the basis of the three mentioned aspects and the above mentioned facts the forming parts of Odlajan landscape are analyzed in three layers because the combination of all these parts form the landscape. So separating these layers cannot be done easily and a clear line cannot be drawn between them.

## **2.2 The History of Oudlaajaan**

Oudlaajaan, a neighborhood in the west of Tehran, was built during Safavid Dynasty (1553-1563) and is now, due to wrong policies applied by urban management authorities during different eras, worn in many aspects. With the inhabitants not feeling to belong in the place and the presence of functions which do not match the physical body, the area has completely lost its visual values. In spite of all the existing disharmony and disorganization, Oudlaajaan neighborhood is a well-established settlement where people have been born, lived and died for generations and have communicated with its physical and environmental elements. Hence, it seems apt to focus on some aspects of the landscape features of the context in the urban design process. The fabric has a great value regarding the architectural style and method used in it, the life in a specific period, consisting of historical elements

and having group memories. The Cultural Heritage of Tehran Province recording with the aim of preserving this district and putting restrictions on construction lead it to deterioration.

### 2.3 Parts of Oudlaajaan Landscape

#### a. *The visual and physical parts which can be described immediately after entering the fabric*

1) Features and signs are the first elements which affect the viewers' perception as they have a strong visual effect. Due to their location and their special shape is the first element to effect the brain. In the questionnaire distributed among the residents, a majority of the residents used the features and signs as the first tool to identify different locations. They even used signs and other features to define their behavioral bases.

Considering the results gotten from the questionnaires and other observations it can be said that signs play a role in the formation of the visual and mental landscape of the districts.

- 1- Their special shape and forms
- 2- Their locations and the angle in which they are seen. The elements located at the end of the viewing corridors
- 3- Their functions or the activities taking place in them.

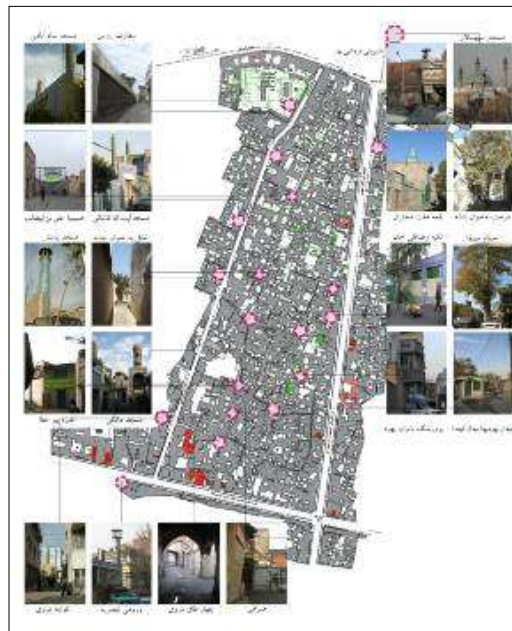


Fig1. Elements and Signs of Oudlaajaan

II) Understanding the environment and the landscape includes consecutive viewing which means consecutive viewing. In consecutive viewing and with the use of the environmental stimuli a mental eye forms from the place. This is a three-dimensional organized picture from the environment which puts it in every moment in the general background. This picture in the mind with the help of past experiences and pictures expected to be seen later forms a picture from the complex place. The sequence of views and the pictures seen mainly depends on the form of the passages. The viewing corridors, angles and turns, all are affected by this factor. Since the picture formed from the district is a result of passing through the passages, the limit of this effect would show itself in the formation of the initial picture of the district.

One of the features of Odlajan, which is highly related to the form, shape and structure of the district (centers and passages), is the sequence of lost views and landscapes which appear at each sudden turn in the passages. Preserving this sequence as one of the features of the fabric must be considered in designing.

The organic form of the passages is one of the points that the residents know as one of the features of their districts. This issue is obvious in the presented maps.



Fig2. (a) The role of signs in the inhabitant's memory, (b) The organic form of the passages as the main feature of landscape in the inhabitant's memory

#### **b. The Parts and Elements Which Convey the Feeling of Place of the District**

The place of the mental structure is a spatial and time experience which an individual gets through understanding the environment and relating the meanings of

the scenes to it. Place includes what is perceived and the meanings which form through the mental reflections related to it. Place is a combination of the background, (physique) previous experiences and mental states (feelings). This is a phenomenon based on the reciprocal relationships between the related features and is understood through *Gestalt*.

Places having a strong feeling can be remembered after a long time. The inability of a scene to form live pictures and major changes of feeling in the course of time is called lack of place.

**- The factors creating the place:**

I) Physique (Physical Forms and Features, Physical Appearance)

Features of the site such as the topology of the land, fabric, color, water and plants, features of the urban structure, form, the relation between the scales, the conditions of the built environment such as fences, the features of the material surface (above and on the ground), texture and color and architectural features such as the form of the building, the height, style, (the feature of the appearance, the proportion, rhythm, porosity) In other words, it can be said that a view consists of several main parts which being put together; each possesses the descriptive feature of it. The senses of a place or the feelings stirred by the view are related to the features of the view and are the qualities that a viewer sees. The majority of the residents of the districts have mentioned what they have seen in the district as narrow historical brick passages.

Therefore, the proportions, architectural features and materials used in the walls are the most important and effective factors on the appearance of the district.

Picture (the opening in the space, the proportion, and the narrowness of the passage, color, and the texture of the material)



*Fig3. The narrowness of the passages, colors, Architectural style, and materials*



## II) The function or an activity which takes place in the space

The functions and the activity in a space have an important effect on the formation of the mentality of an individual of an environment.

Christopher Alexander defines this quality in the buildings and spaces as: the job must begin by understanding the fact that the identity of each space is the result of the repetition of the special pattern of events that take place in it. The identity of each city is mainly affected by the events, states, strikes, the death of fish, the flow of water, lovers' breaking up and similar other events. So from his point of view, it is the result of the events that take place in it.

Places find special spirits depending on what happens in them. The activities taking place in business districts, because of providing the possibility of human presence (as the changing elements of the view), have a great effect on creating a sense of place. The majority of the residents in the northern parts have a greater sense of belonging to the district mention the southern parts as undesirable places. Considering their explanations about the southern parts it is the activities in that area that makes people dislike it.



*Fig4. The effect of function on the spirit of inhabited spaces*

### **c. The Parts and the Elements Constructing the Identity of District**

An individual's identity is the set of elements in one's personality which gives them their position among the other people in the world.

Identity is in fact a passive issue. Noticing one's self gets its meaning while seeing an individual among the others.

Also in sociology the defined concept such as group identity is based on various factors from family and relatives to the abstract issues such as religion, nationality and political views.

To clarify the relationship between the identity and city on the base of what was discuss about identity, it is needed to clarify an aspect of a city related to the point.

It seems that in many of the viewpoints on the urban identity, cities are looked as set of visual signs. In other words, in many cases our judgment on urban identity is the result of the relationships between the visual signs. The architecture, buildings bodies, sizes, proportions, colors, shapes, surface decorations, continuity and rhythm, the variety of the materials along with other signs and symbols make the visual contact with the body of the city possible. With this visual relation not only the urban elements can be judged aesthetically but also with the connection created with each of these signs and the their specific cultural background about the judgment will pass on their being native, local, belonging to the same culture or belonging to specific cultural background.

Identity is, in fact, what discriminates things and makes them recognizable.

Odlajan was a combination of the residential organic and narrow alleys with brick ochre houses and trees along the passages and squares which were full of life.

Therefore, what creates most of the memories about Odlajan, as the sentences above suggest is the result of the forms and the proportions of passages, colors, architectural features, materials, activities and plants.

### **3. CONCLUSION:**

The importance of the urban landscape in maintaining the city identity is inevitable. And for this purpose the historical fabrics, due to their roles, are very invalid. Therefore, intervention in these fabrics necessitates knowing thoroughly the parts and the elements which give the city its identity. These can be analyzed in the study of urban landscape. Preserving the factors that can maintain the urban landscape and the identity of the historical fabrics has always been the focus of attention. To find an answer to this question, the elements of Odlajan's urban landscape were analyzed in three layers. Two methods of field studies and providing questionnaires were used to conduct this study and the results have been presented in charts no. 1 and 2. The outcome of comparing these two charts (chart no. 3) indicates the importance of each of the elements of urban landscape in giving the historical districts their identity. This provides a new method of intervening in the historical fabrics. The findings of the study have the following results:

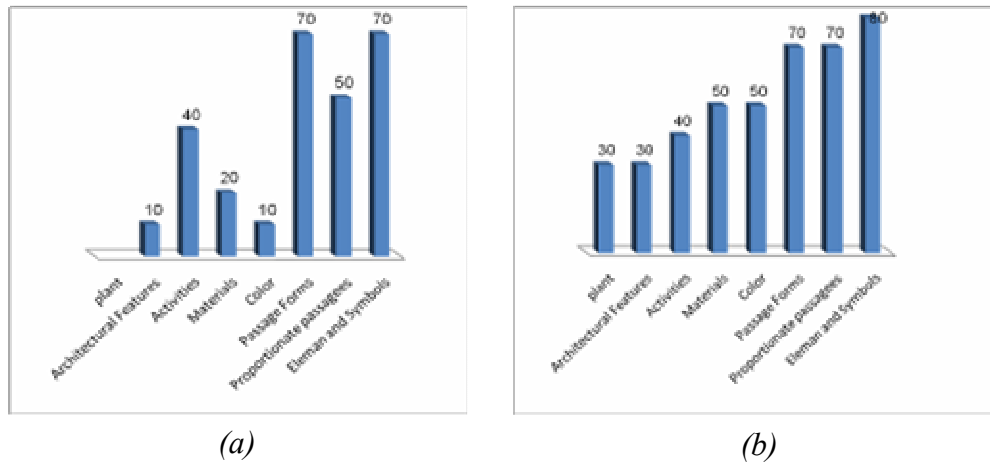


Chart 1. (a) Assessing and valuing the landscape views on the basis of the questionnaires, (b) Assessing and valuing the landscape views on the basis of library work and field studies.

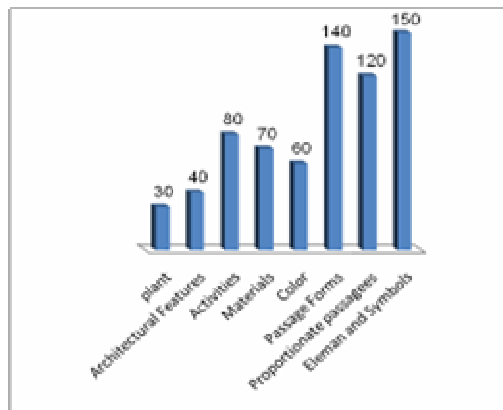


Chart1. The result of the charts comparing and valuing the landscape elements

- 1- Using a two dimensional perspective, it can be said that the urban landscape does not only consist of the path, knot, edge, sign, and district but our finding in Odlajan prove the fact that activities along with the plant are important to form the urban landscape. The activities in Odlajan along with the factors such as walls, centers, architecture of the building are important to form the urban landscape identity of Odlajan.
- 2- among the identified elements and symbols, the passages' forms, the proportionate passages, activities, materials, colors, architectural features and plants are the most important elements affecting the urban landscape of the

district. Hence, any intervention with the district must be made considering the role and importance of these parts and as a result the amount of intervention in each area must be determined.

- 3- Signs and elements have the most important role in giving the city its identity and should be taken into consideration when intervening in the valuable fabrics of the city.
- 4- Any intervention targeting the preservation of the historical districts should take the above priorities into account.

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