

Original Research Article

Destructive Development: Bayn al-Haramayn Project in Shiraz

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Abstract

Shahcheragh Shiraz, an urban space with a variety of functions such as religious, social, political, and economic in the traditional city of Shiraz, used to be the central religious-social nucleus a hundred years ago. It was a daily or weekly meeting place for people with different beliefs and convictions. With the expansion of the city of Shiraz and the changes in the physical borders of the city, the historical context around the shrine has been the target of development and conservation from the approved programs of the administrators since 1951. After the destruction of a large part of the historical context of Shiraz under the pretext of the revitalization plan, 57 hectares of textures near the Holy Shrine of Seyyed Alauddin Hossein were about to be destroyed in 2021. This plan has not been implemented until now despite the efforts of experts and knowledgeable people. Owing to people's awareness of the performance of Astana and Shahcheragh, and their sanctity, the question is the destruction of the boundaries of the two shrines and their connection can be done at what purpose and at what cost, by the city managers who are the trusted representatives of the people? In the belief of Muslims, religious spaces and the sanctum of religious spaces for the purification of the soul and experiencing the predominance of the spiritual atmosphere of the space. Can a place of pilgrimage be called Bayn al-Haramayn while commercial use is not in line with religious and historical context? Can officials prevent the pilgrims from soul purification and encourage them to pay attention to material things. In such an atmosphere, the audience does not seem to be a pilgrims, but a tourist buying necessities and souvenirs.

Keywords: *Shiraz, Bayn al-Haramayn, Destruction, Conservation.*

Introduction and Statement of the problem

The development of the city of Shiraz after the modernization of Reza Shahi formed a concept called the old texture and the new texture of the city. Regardless of the historical value of the traditional texture of the city, development-oriented and hasty measures were taken in the old texture and the residents migrated to the cores around the city under the name of the new texture. The purpose of such measurement was to adapt the old texture to the new urban life. However, the measurements were not based on predetermined macro plans. Currently, the residents have different cultural and social structures compared to traditional Shiraz, and the city of Shiraz with its historical core (the entire area of the city during 1300 years) has a new cultural-social structure. This

area is considered a problematic urban context from the social and physical point of view and has no affinity with the social and cultural structure of its past.

On the other hand, during the last 50 years, with the historical and cultural importance of the traditional texture of the city as a heritage from the past, the physical scope of the traditional texture has been the focus of experts, managers, and the general public. The conflict between preservation due to the historical importance of the texture and development due to the problematic urban texture has so far led to the adoption of decisions and plans for the historical texture of Shiraz city. Shahcheragh area of Shiraz is an urban space with a variety of functions such as religious, social, political, and economic. This area is traditional and placed in the geographical areas representing the historical context of current Shiraz, and

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currently, the area of its influence is known as Bayn al-Haramay project. The project, one of the development-oriented projects, has resulted in the destruction of a large part of the historical context. Due to the conflict between development (problematic urban context) and preservation (urban historical context), and the current situation of the historical context of Shiraz, the question is if the destruction of the physical-historical context can serve as the solution to save the social situation of the context?

Structure of Criticism

• Development of the historical context (between the 1st and 2nd Shrine)

From the beginning of the Pahlavi II, with the increase in the city's population on the one hand and the facilitation of pilgrimage and tourism, Shahcharagh, was no longer a single architectural building. The focus was not on repairing the dome but on pilgrimage and tourism with wider dimensions. The destruction and development began with the construction of streets around the shrine in 1951 and continued until around 1956. In 1969, the second stream of development under the name of the two shrines: Developing the courtyard and connecting it to the two sacred shrines of Mir Ahmad and Mir Mohammad, and removing the market and destroying the residential structure between the two shrines under the pretext of the unfavorable situation and the lack of suitable space for the flood of residents and pilgrims. Without relying on context-based planning, it was started by

relying on the Law of Urban Renovation and Development (1968) and the municipality with the cooperation of the Fars Governorate and the administration of the holy Astan Ahmadi; purchased urban properties adjacent to Shahcheragh and in three phases, streets were widened and the square and courtyard of Shahcheragh and Hazrat Seyed Mir Mohammad shrines were developed (Fig. 1). The third stream of development started at the end of the war in 1992. It was based on the construction-development approaches and was in line with the completion of the detailed plan of Shiraz. The development relied on the revitalization plan of the historical and cultural area of Shiraz by Naqsh Jahan-Pars consulting engineers. In this plan, the emphasis was on the backbone of the city (Esfahan Gate to Hazrati Street) on the two complexes of Karimkhani and Shahcheragh. It attempted to revive and develop the bazaar with the development of the citadel, and not much focus was placed on Shahcheragh. The only proposed part of penetrating Shahcheragh's sanctuary was to connect the new mosque and Shahcheragh with a central courtyard. In 1995, the fourth stream of development and the project known Bayn al-Haramayn began when the municipality acquire and demolish the organic passage between the two holy shrines of Shahcheragh. and Seyyed Alauddin Hossein and the functions around the passage. Following that, various plans and programs were proposed for the destruction of the area known as the current Bayn al-Haramayn including the draft plan of architectural and Amoud Urban Planning Consulting Engineers, Naqsh Jahan, etc. In

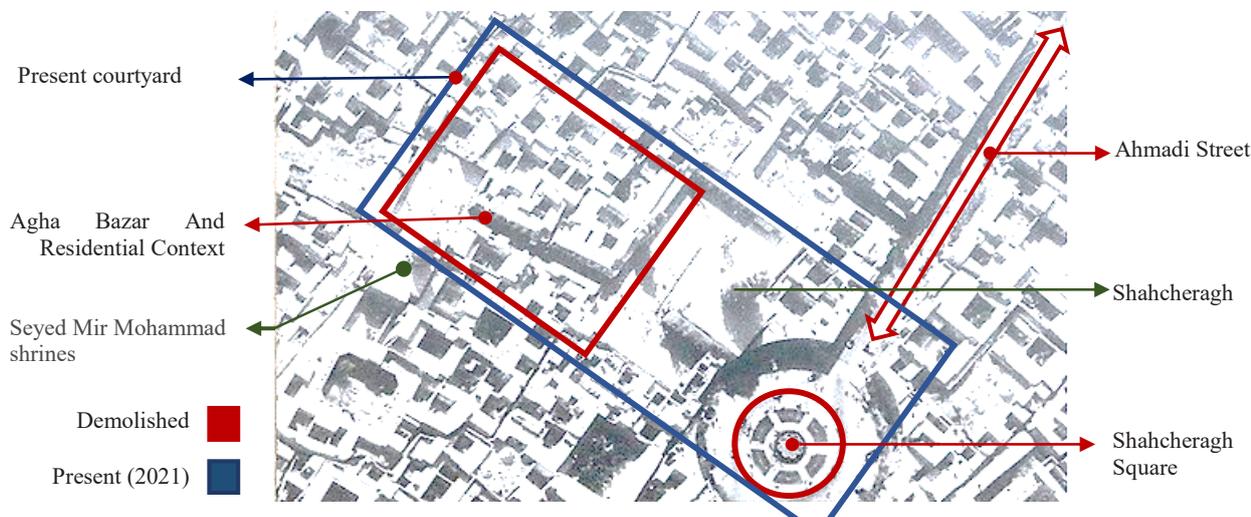


Fig. 1. Shahcheragh area before developing the courtyard and connecting it to the two sacred shrines of Mir Ahmad and Mir Mohammad. Source: Author on old aerial photo.

2005, after 10 years of possession and destruction, the project of Beyn al-Haramayn was launched and the Iranian-Emirati company of communication was the investor in the private sector of the project. According to the municipality, only 15% of this project is related to commercial textures. Despite this, most of the construction has been done for commercial use, which may indicate the importance of the commercial sector for the officials. The plan to destroy 57 hectares of the historical texture of Shiraz under the pretext of the redevelopment of Bayn al-Haramayn in 2021 would be the last form of development from the point of view of city managers, which has not been launched with the pressure of experts and people.

• **Conservation of historical context (major national programs)**

With the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Art in 1964, the importance of the historical part of the city has flourished since the 50s based on the conservation approach where there was an emphasis on single buildings. After the war and with the formation of the Cultural Heritage Organization, there were seminars such as the continuation of life in the old texture of Iranian cities (1998), and the establishment of the “Texture” unit in the Deputy for the Conservation and Revitalization of the Cultural Heritage Organization and emphasis was placed on cultural measures along with physical measures in the field of conservation, policies such as “consolidation in the problematic urban context” were put on the agenda. Among the new documents for the conservation of historical contexts is the single document for the conservation of historical-cultural contexts and general approaches to the conservation and revitalization of historical-cultural areas, which was approved in May 2016 in 13 clauses and seven sections. In clauses 1, 3, 6, 7, and 11 of this document, the promotion, conservation, and protection of the cultural-social structures of these contexts are emphasized from the administrative and academic aspects. In clause 1, the historical-cultural boundaries of cities can be identified according to their shape characteristics (morphology), elements and components, and their “cultural-social structures”! In clause 3, the historical-cultural boundaries of cities are the

cultural heritage of a nation, the main builder of the urban historical landscape expressing “social”, economic, and environmental values. Therefore, attention should be paid to the conservation of “intangible cultural heritage”! And tangible cultural heritage. Historical-natural heritage is essential within the context of these boundaries. In clause 6, the conservation and revitalization of historical-cultural boundaries is a comprehensive, gradual and continuous process of all physical and non-physical measures with emphasis on “cultural-social structures of the texture” has been emphasized. In clause 7, any intervention that distorts its unity and causes the loss of “identity” and evidence of historical, “social, cultural” and physical values should be avoided. Especially if those interventions eliminate the possibility of recognizing its hidden values. In clause 11, due to the pivotal role of the residents in the conservation and revitalization process, the necessity of “plans and programs based on cultural-social structures of the residents should be highlighted to attract their participation. Moreover, accurate knowledge of urban life characteristics should be emphasized (Approval of the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran - notification of the historical boundaries of 168 cities of the country, 2016)

Conclusion

With regards to the developments that have taken place so far and the macro-oriented conservation programs, the leading issue is the importance of pilgrimage and the atmosphere governing the pilgrimage space on the one hand and the dominant socio-cultural structure on the other hand. After the arrival of Islam, urban spaces such as the Shahcharagh of Shiraz, with their religious function next to the Bazaar, were considered the central core of the city, used as the platform for religious, social, economic, and political events by people. During the first Qajar and Pahlavi periods, the courtyard of the New Shrine - adjacent to Shahcheragh - was an urban space and a platform for many daily social events and important historical events. Political events, such as the sit-in of freedom fighters in the courtyard of the new mosque and the sanctuary of Shahcheragh, religious events such as the recitation of the commemoration of the martyrs of Karbala

during the days of Shaban and mourning for Imam Hosseini during the days of Muharram and Safar, holding ceremonies such as Khatm. A place to honor and bury important religious and social figures was built in the courtyard of the new mosque and the sanctuary of Shahcheragh. The old tradition of making vows with the holy shrine of Shahcheragh, blessing the child at forty days, cutting the child's hair for blessing in the shrine, marriage contract, new Year's baby delivery, mourning during Muharram, Eid al-Fitr prayer and turned the courtyard of the shrine into a social space. In terms of development, emphasizing the latest proposed plan, the physical destruction of the 221-year-old texture using bulldozers and turning it into a tourist-commercial space is not the solution to the revival of the texture and the predominance of religious-social use for people. The reason is that the purpose of development is the development of the courtyard to facilitate pilgrimage, but in practice, economic development has been in line with tourism. The commercial complexes built with the destruction of a large part of the physical heritage of Shiraz in the heart of the historical texture under the pretext of connecting the two holy shrines of Shahcheragh and Seyyed Alauddin Hossein the right solution in reviving the historical texture and facilitating the pilgrimage of pilgrims and paying attention to the intangible heritage of the texture? According to the theory of the short-term society of Katoozian: "We Iranians build a new building from time to time, but over time (usually 20 or 30 years), this new building is destroyed as a shabby and old building." (Homayun Katoozian Katoozian, 2011) Evaluation after exploitation is one of the

best solutions that prevent repeated errors in the trial and error in actions without a previous plan. Do we need to repeat a failed project? An old society is a society that, instead of accumulating capital and focusing on what it has, cuts its roots with hasty, self-interested, and short-term decisions without any plan and the evaluation of previous decisions. The second point of view is conservation as paying attention to the historical texture of the city, which has deviations from its structures and definitions. As, for example, in the single document for the conservation of historical-cultural textures, cultural-social structure, and social values, the old texture of Shiraz and the boundaries of Shahcheragh and Astana are not representative of the cultural-social structure and social values of the past of Shiraz. Some of the physical elements of its remaining tangible cultural heritage and the cultural-social structures of the context are currently new and do not express the historical, social, and cultural identity of traditional Shiraz. However, it seems that the revival of the traditional Shiraz socio-cultural structure is not possible by destroying the tangible heritage of the texture and replacing the pilgrimage-social function with new functions. This can only be an excuse for destruction.

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