Monitoring the Character of Place in the Historical Site of Sanandaj, Iran

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Abstract

Historical sites are special places not only due to the cultural heritage that they house, but also due to their natural resources. Many such sites are in a danger of losing their historical character if relevant measures are not put in place to ensure the continuity of this character. This paper is concerned with the character of place in historical site of Sanandaj considering two main factors of physical substance and pattern of material which were recognized as basic aspects contributing to the character of place (Kropf, 1996). The paper also proposes the SWOT analysis as an effective framework for identifying and assessing the qualities of place to derive an appropriate decision-making in conservation plan of historic site. The outcome of the case study is that the historical site of Sanandaj has the potential for natural and cultural resource-management plans, but this has not been explored as of yet.

Keywords: urban character; SWOT analysis; Sanandaj; cultural and natural heritage

1. Introduction

Historical sites are special places not only due to the cultural heritage that they house, but also due to their natural resources. They can be considered as irreplaceable assets representing the investment of centuries of knowledge and lessons which weave the various physical elements and spatial units together in particular contexts. For this reason, such environments are "a treasure house of human experience – of successes and failure" (Rapoport, 1989), good examples of "problem solving a total response to the challenge of climate and topography" and demonstrating an adaptation of man to the ebb and flow of social and political history of particular nations in a long process of trial and error (Ahmad and Malcolm, 2001). Many such sites are in a danger of losing their historical aspects if relevant studies are not put in place to measures those aspects and ensure the continuity of their qualities.

As Rowley et al. (1997) state, "...conventional planning approaches tend to be oriented toward looking at problems based on current understanding, or an inside-out mind set; whereas strategic planning requires an understanding of the nature of the issue, and then of an appropriate response, or an outside-in mind set". "The underlying intension of a strategic approach is to identify what is available in a historic site, qualities that should be protected and enhanced; and along with identifying these, to determine where negative factors could be removed or mitigated and to identify where the opportunities for enhancement lie" (Doratli et al. 1980). In this line, the SWOT model was recognized "the basis for virtually all formalized strategy formulation processes", where it provides the preliminary stage of decision making and possible strategies for intervention (Moughtin et al. 1999, Burton et al. 2002).

This paper is concerned with the character of place in the historical site of Sanandaj considering two leading questions:

1. How was the historic core of Sanandaj formed?
2. What socio-spatial qualities it contained which gave birth to its character?

These has been dealt considering two main factors of physical substance and pattern of material through document analysis, observation of the built form of the city and physical survey of existing built form and its natural context (taking photograph and analytical drawings). Then, the technique of SWOT analysis has been applied as an effective framework for identifying and assessing the qualities of place to derive an appropriate decision-making in conservation plan of historic site.

2. Geophysical Setting

From "the concept of place which implies an inside and an outside character, as integral parts of existence, it is clear that the city in itself is meaningless to be
imagined without the scale of its regional space within which it was given more of its character" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). It means that "the natural elements are the primary components of the given, and the city, the positive shape of space, is defined in its geographical terms" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

The site now occupied by the city of Sanandaj was originally a low laying basin in Zagros Mountain, where the Zâgros folds abut the resistant blocks that form the plain of Hamadân. This setting can be divided into two regional halves. The first comprises a relatively large bowl which contains many hills, positive spaces, and a river (Cham-e Gheshlagh) flowing from north to south. This geo-physical rim can be imagined as two strong curved walls, the western one formed by the Âwear Mountains and the eastern one by the heights of Salawât-âwâ, bisected by the Main River, Fig.1. In this view, several villages are set alongside the river, which is the main regional corridor.

The scale of the second setting shrinks as we approach the city. In this sense, the western rim -- the Âwear Mountains -- of the first setting is still the major natural barrier to the city site from this side. The only interruption is a narrow valley (Doule Haft-âsiaw) between the two Âwears, Bouchek (small) and Gâwrah (big), along which seven mills supplied the city and its surroundings. The eastern edge is defined by two more ranges of hills, lower than those in the first setting, separated by a river (Dara-bayân) leading from the slopes of Âwear Mountains to the main river, Fig.1. These heights can be imagined as natural walls separating the city from the regional corridor. While the city was maintained behind these heights, two passes in gorges overlooking the main corridor served arrivals and departures. These boundaries are such that a visitor or traveller cannot see the city on the first and even second approaches from the corridor. Beside these heights, other small hills limit views of the city even from the summit of the two passes. Although, the city was set back from the main corridor, it maintained another corridor along the Dara-bayân River, Fig.1., to make a connection and a longitudinal axis along which humans could settle.

The realisation of the two levels of boundaries is consistent with Leatherbarrow (1993), who believes that "every location is really defined by physical objects" and that each element of positive space conveys the features of its boundary in order to manifest the character of place (Kite, 2002). This means a "symbolic interaction" between prominent site and built form (Kite, 2002). In justifying this interaction, the two fortified walls of the city (based on the 1850 map of the city), the interior wall around the Qalâ and the exterior one around the quarter of the Khâns or political elites, can be seen as a reflection of two levels of natural edginess that enhance the defensive dimension of the city. In addition, the four gates (Darwâza) of the city wall can be seen as a reflection of the four passes through the city's boundary on the second level. This means that the city was founded, and given a structure and meaning that conformed to the surrounding natural environment.

3. Historical Background

The city of Sanandaj is the capital of Kurdistan, the province which contains a majority of the Kurdish people in Iran. It gained its peculiar character due to its well known location within the Zâgros mountain range -- the mountains which define the western edge of the Iranian plateau -- and to the cultural background of the Kurdish people. The Zâgros Mountains have been recognised as the single physical phenomenon which has had a major influence in shaping Kurdish history, people, traditions, and culture (Idady, 1992). It was a majestic border between two rival empires: on the one side the Ottoman Empire was part of the Hanafite (Sunni tradition) and on the other the Safavid Empire was a part of the Shiite sect, which has had a major role in the formation of castellated city structures, often located on inaccessible places. Within these rival empires, the
The majority of Kurdish Muslims adhered to the Shâfi'ite Sunni rites contrary to both empires to distinguish their identity from the surrounding lands.

The nature of the challenges between those empires and the independent status of castellated city structures in the "Perso-Turkish" frontiers (Minorsky, 1943) contextualised the idea of departure from that structure to a new city to some extent capable of control by the Iranian side (Alizadeh, 2005). For Vasilyeva (2000), the main inducement to return to the city was the conclusion of the Iran-Turkey peace treaty of Zuhāb on 17 May 1639 – “they decided to destroy all Kurdish citadels”. Under the terms of this peace treaty, Sulaymân-khân Ardalân (who was one of the commanders of Shâh Safi’s army) was ordered to move his residential site from the fortresses and to destroy them. This meant centralizing the government of Kurdistan in a single point accessible to the Iranian state, creating a gateway for the government to control the region through local representatives. Considering these points, the city of Sanandaj was founded in 1639 by the Ardalân family with an unusual urban form distinct from other Iranian cities.

### 4. Evolution of Character

From the first review of the background of the city, it was found that the political importance of the city far outweighed its economic function. This means that its political dimension was the main stimulus for city formation and even its later development. In line with this view and that the founders of the city, mainly Wâli Sulaymân-khân Ardalân, were aware of four centuries experience of castellated-cities as a strong point for security, the core of the city was again settled on the top of a hill, where it gave a convincing sense of being and the possibility of overlooking the surrounding areas. However, the new experience of place needed to be different from the previous one (mound-cities) because it was intended to project a structure for a new city. From this perspective, the seat of power, in contrast with previous generations, needed to be settled in a position which could facilitate the structure of a medium size city, the city was to be known in the future as the capital of Ardalân by merging the mobile capitals in the Qalâs. This means that the seat of power is still the main core but in a joint structure with other parts to create an entity named the city of Sennah-dej (Sanandaj). In line with this argument, although, there are many hills on the site of the city with different dimensions, for instance the large hill of Toos-Nauzhar which dominated the macro and micro-regional settings of the city (the close and distant boundaries of the site of the city) in the east, but the seat of power was fixed on a hill in the centre of the site, where it
Fig. 3. The City's Main Components in the First Period of the 19th Century

Fig. 4. The Course of the Principal Route Across the City
was possible for the other elements of the city to be structured around it, Fig.2.

Other factors were also important in selection the seat of power. The main one is the sacred site of Peer Omar close to the top of the hill which gives a ritual importance to the place. The next one could have been the availability of the remnants of an old Qalâ on the hill and settlements around which gave a point of reference to the founders to settle there. In addition to those factors, we can mention the existence of a caravan road to the other parts of Kurdistan in the west of Zagros close to the site of the Qalâ which also formed the course of second wall of the city around the quarter of nobles, Fig.2., 3.

With this move from castellated cities, the Wâli, who had lived in Isfahân and experienced it as a splendid city, tried to build a city similar in splendour to Isfahân but on a smaller scale. For this reason, he invited professions such as architects, stonemasons and carpenters from Isfahân "to revive what was left from the city which had actually disappeared" Vasilyeva, (2000) and to build new mosques, Hammâms, Madrassa, the bazaar and bridges around the Qalâ and a range of Qanâts (subterranean canals) for the main mansions of the city.

More important is that the settling of the people on the site reflected the interests of the Khâns so that they occupied the central area and allocated the other areas to people with regard to their socio-professional backgrounds. This was due to the structure of the semi-feudal community, where the leader (Khân) is a source of both continuity and change. He is a decision-maker and a determiner of social organisation. From this point and by reference to the Russian map (Mehriar et al. 1998), it can be seen that the social structure of the city was conceived based on four parts in order to convey the function of the city in that period. This means building a physical structure which comprised a core in the middle, as the seat of power and nobles with the dominant features of the Qalâ (named Miyân-Qalâ, which means the citadel in between), a quarter for servants adjacent to the nobles in the north (called Jawr-âwâ, meaning the place developed by toilers/workers), the site of merchants with the dominant feature of the bazaar at the bottom of the Qalâ's hill in the east (named the quarter of Bazaar), the quarter of transport organisers situated on the other side of the river to the south (with the name Qtâr-chyân, the people that used mules to transfer goods), Fig.3. This structure is similar to that conceived by Kostof (1992: 73):

"The hilltop is where a town usually begins, with a princely citadel, a cathedral [or Mosque], a basic nucleus of feudal authority. Down in the valley is a civil core of craftspeople and traders".

From the above quotation, the only exception is in the location of the Jumaa Mosque (Friday mosque) as the main element of an Islamic city. Instead of being with Qalâ, the first Friday mosque was located close to the bazaar accessible to the populace. But its location was gradually set way from the main foci of the city as it was maintained in the quarter of ruling class due to some political conflicts over history.

The above structure of the city remained unchanged up to 1750, when Karim-Khân Zand sacked and burned most of the city (Sharafkandi, 2002). Reconstruction of the city saw great change that permanently affects the structure of the city. New Chahâr-bâq (four gardens) was built or reconstructed named Bâqa-mayân northeast of the city, which later became the Quarter of Chahâr-Bâq. The creation of this garden is an important event in the city structure which implies a particular idea of the time, that later became a basis for the city development in a rectangular form following the existing quarter of Chahâr-Bâq, Fig.3.

Another major change to the structure of the city was initiated by Aman-Allah Khan the great (1799-1825). He undertook important works relating to the site of the Jumaa mosque and a new Chahâr-Bâq south-west of the city, on the opposite side from the first Chahâr-Bâq, Fig.3. The previous Jumaa mosque, close to the seat of government and the bazaar, was destroyed and the existing one was erected elsewhere far from the bazaar and core of the city in the quarter of ruling class. This means that the Jumaa mosque became detached from the commoners not only by its location in that quarter but also by the image of the wall as a strong barrier and its action as a symbol of power and status. This is somewhat in contrast to that of the Islamic city in general and Iranian one in particular, where either the bazaar was adjacent to the Jumaa mosque or its continuation created a spatial structure for their interaction.

From evidence in the local chronicles, the creation of the new Chahâr-bâq caused the deterioration of the former Chahâr-bâq (Vasilyeva, 2000 & Sharafkandi, 2002). This point alongside the natural growth of the city population, especially those who engaged with the functioning of the bazaar due to the city's economic prosperity at that period, led to the occupation of the site and its gradual construction as another quarter. As the second place of power, it also influenced the course of principal route.

Due to the pre-eminence of the political dimension of the city over other socio-economic factors, the course of principal route as the backbone of the city was directed alongside the poles of power (Qalâ Emarat and the garden complex of Khusrav-âwâ) instead of the main bazaar in the whole structure of the city, Fig.4. Other Iranian cities in contrast represent different structural pattern within which the poles of gravities were not bound to the same characters; on the one hand to the palace precincts, but on the other hand to the city's symbolic heart (Masjid-e Jumad as two separable entities (Ardalan, 1973). Therefore, it is a logical point to make that the role of power
| The level of Analysis       | Strengths                                                                 | Weaknesses                                                                 | Opportunities                                                                 | Threats                                                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Natural setting             | - Geophysical setting and climate condition which is attractive for tourism - Existence of Awear Mountain and Toos-nawzar hill which have symbolic values to the city - The course of Gheshlagh river which directed the city development to the east | - Hilly pattern of the city site, this is an opportunity to site the symbolic elements, extracted from the value of Kurdish culture, on the top of the hills | - More deterioration in the monumental and traditional houses - More visual misery - Physical, functional, locational and image obsolescence within the quarters bordered by crossroads - Lack of maintenance in private, semi-private and public spaces - Weaknesses in the master plan - Some misery intervention through implementing the crossroads, demolition of traditional buildings to erect multi-story ones addition to the traditional human scale pattern abutting to the crossroads |
| Built environment          | - Being the main foci of the city - Existence of identical quarters and some monumental buildings (the site of Qalâ, covered bazaar, baths, mansions, …) - Mix-use within the historic site - Existence of reference points in each quarter - Predominant human scale pattern - Existence of various traditional housing dwellings which represent the concept of duality: introverted and extroverted structure - Existence of some well defined urban form components which make it unique among other Iranian cities and create sense of place | - Limited area for development - Scarce amount of spaces for any change to supply other needs - Car parking problems - Inadequate and inappropriate street furnishing elements - Inappropriate additions to the building facades such as architectural and advertisement boards - Lack of unity and harmony among the old and new buildings | - Opportunity to renovate the principal route | - Decay of natural beauty |
| Socio-economic environment  | - Being the capital of Kurdistan - A shared culture - Responsiveness of Kurdish culture to the Genius Loci, to the setting of the city as a whole and to the dwelling in a particular relationship to the landscape | - Lack of commitment to the environment - Immigration of the actual owners of the houses to new developing suburbs - High unemployment rate - Existence of many immigrant low-income settled in the historic core and poor areas in the suburbs - Economic crisis - Inadequate municipality services - Inadequate mass transportation - Inadequate use of public transportation systems - Lack of social welfare - Lack of any urban transportation plan - Daily routine activity of municipality | - Tourism potential from both cultural heritage and environmental resources and - Existence of department of architecture in two universities - Existence of some NGO which work for preserving and enhancing the city cultural heritage - Sensitivity of some local people (mainly historians) to the historic core and its relevant environmental policies - Existence of organization of tourism and cultural heritage - Existence of organization of housing and urban planning - cultural events - Increase of interest to the cultural tourism in world scale -Cultural minority which increase the sense of place and commitment to the value of the culture | - Loss of the historical heritage - Loss of commitment to the place - Loss of sense of place - Decrease of public activities - More migration of the main residents and their replacement by other people with rural background - Limited area for development increased the land prices, this affected the land to became the main urban commodity which changed the people and even authorities' perception to the historic core as the best alternative for development - speculative increase in land values - Weak financial background of municipality -Existence of different organization (means different approaches towards the historic core) dealing with historic core |
relationships had a major influence on the structure of urban spaces in the city of Sanandaj.

Following demolition of the city walls and construction of the first crossroads initiated by the wave of modernization, some major changes happened in the social structure of the city. This mainly affected the middle part of the city recognized as the quarter of Khâns. The inhabitants of this part, which contained most valuable features of the city architecture, moved to suburb or upper cities in search of new life style imposed by modernization. They replaced by wave of migration from rural areas forced by the land reform policy. The continuation of such policies led to expansion of the city suburbs in expense of the old part. As the growth of the urban fabric has been constrained by the mountains, this expansion, in both rich and poor areas, happened in the remote areas either by leveling the heights or organic occupying them.

As the city alongside new emerging suburbs still remained on the functioning of the civic core (Bazaar), the historic core, based on pedestrian movement, was gradually became detached by orthogonal network of roads, "an open matrix which would ease the flow of people and resources into and around urban space" (Madanipour 1999). On the one hand this affected the integrated image of the historic core, but on the other hand it intensified its function for the whole city and even surrounding villages. Now, the place of traditional bazaar and surrounding lines of streets act as the foci of the city in unifying the streams of life from dispersed suburbs.

Although, the perceived image of the city was gradually changed due to the removal of the Ardalan's family from the power and socio-cultural forces of the time, the structuring elements of the historic core (old quarters, the site of Qalâ/citadel, bazaar and the course of principal route) alongside the features of the terrain are still the main components of urban character. More importantly, the main residents still recognize themselves with the name and places of old quarters. For non-residents the name of Sanandaj reflects its well defined location in the intermountain basin of Zagros, particularly on the slope of Āwear Mountains.

5. SWOT Analysis of the Historic Site

Following the general portrait of the historic core, it is time to answer the second research question (What socio-spatial qualities it contained which gave birth to its character?) To do this, it is necessary to identify and assess the quality of place using the research findings and through four elements of SWOT analysis: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This part has been summarized in the following table, which is based on the above review and some findings presented in the author's theses (Alizadeh, 2005).

6. Conclusion

The perceived structure of the city to some extent shows a particular character which no other traditional Iranian city had shown during the Islamic period. Its main structure sprang from the castellated cities, which contained three layers of urban spaces; the citadel or Qalâ on the top of a hill in the centre of the city's setting was surrounded by a wall, the quarter occupied by the ruling class was again enclosed by a wall, and, beyond these two parts, is the rest of the city comprising three main quarters and one newer quarter free of man-made walls. These three quarters as a collection of villages circled the nucleus of power and were partitioned mostly based on the professions to build the third layer of city walls and to supply the needs of the ruling class and whatever else a medium sized city needed to function. Therefore, as a founded city it can be recognised as an important built form which presents the Kurdish understanding of the environment.

For the first time, the principal route of the city was identified. It was the backbone of the city in structuring the old quarters (Jawrawâ, Chahâr-bâq, Myân-galâ and Qatâr-chyân) and various other physical and spatial urban elements. It served as an articulation of entry, and a means of leading high-ranking authorities (the Wâli and the King) and their escorts to the seat of power within the Qalâ. As described, it ran from north (the route towards other Iranian cities) to south (the slopes of the Āwear Mountains) crossing the Dara-bayân River. The Dara-bayân River, as the structure of natural setting, defined the longitudinal axis and the principal route, as the man-made environment, structured the latitudinal axis. These two linear forms had major roles in the organisation and orientation of the spaces. Contrary to the common notion about the course of principle route in other Iranian cities which is mainly bound with the structure of bazaar, the principal route was mainly oriented by the poles of powers within the inner-shâr due to the political dimension of place and even continued towards the slope of the Āwear Mountains where the second seat of power was located (the mansion and garden complex of Khusrav-dwâ) along which the Arg square, the Qatâr-chyân bazaarchê, hammâns, mosques and many architectural buildings evolved.

Apart from the first review of the city's evolution character, which characterised the city's urban components and their arrangement (physical substance and pattern of material), the outcome of the SWOT analysis is that the historical site of Sanandaj has the potential for natural and cultural resource-management plans, qualities (strengthens and opportunities) that should be protected and enhanced. Thus, conservation plan need to emphasis the city's unique selling out: what makes it distinctive and different from competing
tourist destinations. As clarified, the city of Sanandaj has attractive natural and built environments, it should strive to enhance and develop its distinctiveness and authenticity. In line with this, a pragmatic, rather than a purist, approach to conservation is most beneficial in the cultural resource-management plans. The historic buildings should not be retained as artefacts, relics of a bygone age. New uses should be allowed in the buildings and sensitive adaptations facilitated, when the original use of a historic building is no longer relevant or viable.

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Endnotes
1) Shah of Iran from 1629 to 1642.
2) For more information, reader is referred to author's article, Alizadeh (2005).
3) None of the historical books mentioned anything about the destruction of the wall. Based on the evidence from other Iranian cities, where most were destroyed in the period of Naser o-Din Shâh (1848 – 1896), we can understand that the city walls were destroyed after the fall of the Ardalan family because it coincided with the period of Naser o-Din Shah-e Qajâr in 1868.
4) A significant land reform was part of Muhammad Reza Shah's so called white revolution of 1963.
5) The last Wâli of the Ardalan family died in 1867. This can be marked as the end of Ardalâns government over Kurdistan. After this, the city walls and even the prosperous image of the Qal were destroyed.
6) This has been done through Moughtin's approach.