

INTRODUCTION TO TRANSITION SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN HOUSING TYPOLOGY

Mohsen Asadi, Mazlan Mohd Tahir, M.M.Shabani & H. Arjmandi

ABSTRACT

Iranian Islamic traditional houses have changed fast in recent decades. These changes put influence on social life and architecture in the traditional housing plan. For instance, internal architecture of an Iranian house included a courtyard surrounded by rooms and transition spaces for control in privacy, movement and separating people in different situations, but in contemporary housing this cultural element is lost. This paper arguments the quality of changes and stresses the importance of suitability between culture and transition space of the housing plan in Iranian Islamic culture and architecture. Iranian traditional housing plans depended on climate and reflected the culture, people's beliefs and religion; also, the plans had harmony in lifestyle and the relationship between the spaces of a house. In the contemporary designs of house plans, the transition spaces omit attention to culture and residents' habits more times than not. The new apartments have many cultural limitations for the relationships of residents. This paper concludes that there is a connection between culture, inhabitants and their beliefs, and the kinds of houses designed (architecture) that the Islamic culture and architecture aim to revive for the future. It also hopes it can have some influence on the large world of Islamic culture, be it the smallest influence.

Keywords: transition space, Islamic culture, Iranian culture, Iranian architecture, housing

INTRODUCTION

Transition space is a place that has control on privacy, movement, and covers spaces from foreign sight. In fact, all of these are included in the function of transition space in the housing plan according to Islamic culture in Iran. Unfortunately, like more of the third world countries, mimicry of mode and modernization in Iran influences culture too much, as well as social and physical metamorphosis as transition space in housing plans; whereas it is lost in the more contemporary dwelling plans.

Samer Akkan says that symbols "are to ideas as signs are to things". Also, he writes that Islamic symbolism often becomes a pursuit of esoteric knowledge in religion or culture values; furthermore, architectural symbolism is included in this thought. [1]

The transition space with its function plays the role of symbol in Islamic culture and architecture in Iran, which as a bridge, joins the past and present by discovering new communities. On the other hand, progress in urbanization in Iran is leading dwellers to divide the house from a traditional multifamily house to the single house in an apartment. Joining each unit together, even connecting and the relationship of spaces inside each housing by the transition space, are practical experiences that Iranian Islamic architecture has had, and were being utilized

in traditional housing plans.[12] However, the new architecture which assumes western architecture has lost the Islamic culture factor in the design of a house plan to include the kitchen with an open view, connect the rooms and general place without filtering, and design several units in a common place without attention to habits and culture of people.

In contemporary architecture in many housing plans, without attention to the importance of transition space, many problems are created in the values of Islamic culture and lifestyles of dwellers. Because the function of transition space is rooted in habitants, it has been the identity of Iranian lifestyle. With this analytical approach and focus on the conflict of architectural design in traditional and modern architecture of housing plans, we can find that many traditional design spaces, such as the transition space, have been lost in the new housing design. As a result, foreign factors have influenced and changed life inside and outside the house, especially for the youth. On the other hand, in human societies many factors can change, but some elements are joined to people's identity and are very difficult and dangerous to change.

Traditional Housing and Transition Space in Iranian Architecture

The Iranian Muslims' concept of housing and family

One of the main ways to resave housing in the third world is to pay attention to traditional housing and the family in society. According to Islam, the family is the base of the structure of culture and the family is the power point for transition in the culture of society for the future. The family is the main factor in Muslim society because it is the basic separating and support source of society; the relationship between family members is so strong and it is the spiritual relationship that supports and brings love, mercy and other positive points to human life [8]. Following this thought and culture, family members like to live together, so gradually the growth had an influence on the development of the house for the family group. House architecture and design in this situation and limitations of culture are important, but the traditional architecture in Iran has solved this problem with lots of transition space.

The function and location of transition space in traditional Islamic architecture in Iran

The internal architecture of the Iranian Islamic area is simple and yet difficult to comprehend. In fact, it follows internal architecture with special functions, for example transition spaces for different situations in a house, a courtyard, iwan, two kinds of doorbell (one for women and one for men) and a wind tower. In this type of architecture in Iran, all rooms and spaces (iwane, tallar) were arranged around an open area, using the rectangular courtyard for the relationship between different spaces and areas of the dwelling. Furthermore, spaces had less opening to the outside, only a single low door; in fact, many houses were arranged together in a big walled area with access to the outside possible only by passing through a single, low door [7].

In this model of traditional housing plan design, the transition space is an important factor in Iranian culture and in the design of housing plans. With attention to traditional plans, we can find the following important. Transition space is used to lead people to find their way and maintain the relationship between them (privacy).



Figure 1: Iran – the traditional house and arrangement of spaces around the courtyard

In addition, transition space can fulfill the work of divider space in a house plan. Therefore the function of this space has root in Iranian culture, and it influences people's lifestyles and relationships of staying indoor or outdoor. On the other hand, we can see immunization and preservation of personal limits in the traditional housing plan. The traditional space

is designed for different conditions and situations in the dwelling plan.

According to the relationship between the spaces in Iranian traditional dwelling, and with attention to Islamic culture, the inhabitants, and the privacy in Iranian lifestyle, separating and making a cover in the direction of the outsider's view was very important and can be seen in the transition space as described below.

Transition space outside the house as a first-stop point

The Islamic traditional housing plans follow Islamic culture and beliefs on the separation and control of relationships between the family members and the outsiders, and women and foreigners. This propels at the first point of entrance, exactly, between the inside and outside of the house. The door of the house in this place had retreat, and it created a place (transition space) for waiting until the door was opened, or for discussion. Usually, this place had two platforms for the elderly to sit on and rest. Also, people could stay in that place without inconvenience to other passengers in the alley or street. Furthermore, the door had two bells with different tones of sound, one bell with a low sound for women to use and the other with a high sound for men. Using either one of the bells outside gives information about the visitor's gender. For the ones behind the door, this is of importance for women inside the house to use cover or veil when answering the door.[10]

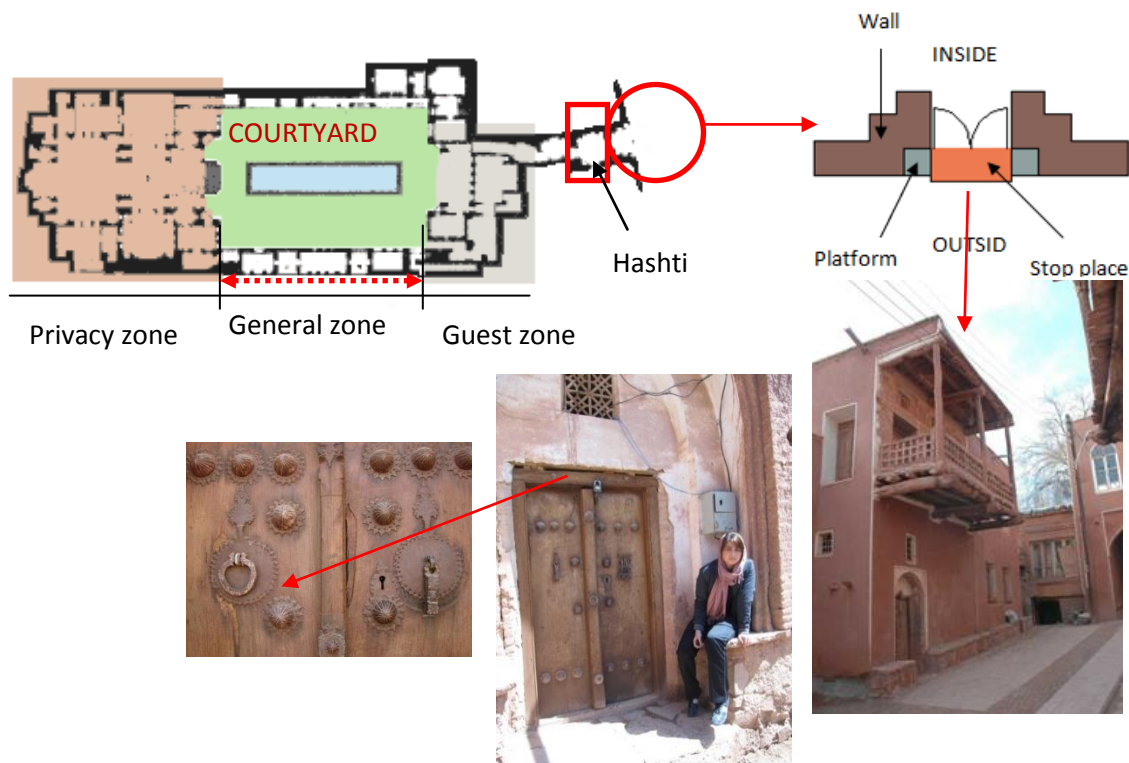
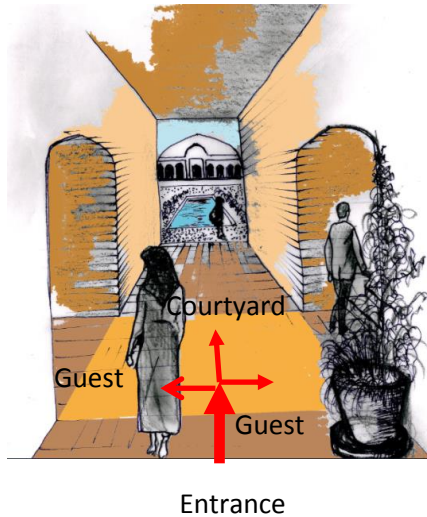




Figure 2: A traditional housing plan, showing the variety of zones and main door of a building with different bells for use of men and women, and platform in transition space outside for rest in traditional housing in Iran- Kashan

The second-stop point (transition space) in traditional Islamic architecture in Iran

The traditional housing plan in Iran in this place includes the inside of a house but isn't in the family place, in fact, it is a second filtering place, between the main door of the house and yard. Usually the passengers passed this way, which was sometimes a narrow passageway, after which they would be redirected to the general place (transition space) for dividing family people from foreigners or guests. This is where the change of direction in moving to and out of the house took place. This place in a traditional house is called "hashty", and it includes eight sides from which several ways are opened. Of course, the plane of this place was sometimes a different shape such as rectangular, square or round.



Hashti

Figure 3: The location of the dividing “hashti” with a variety of ways, and showing the courtyard at the end of it.

Source: author

Transition space inside the house as a third-stop place

Separating the private space from the general place is very important in Islamic culture in Iran. With regard to the traditional dwelling plan we can find this condition of transition space in several situations inside the house. For example in the middle of a private space and general space, between rooms, corridors and other spaces, and between the courtyard and other rooms and corridors (iwan).[9]

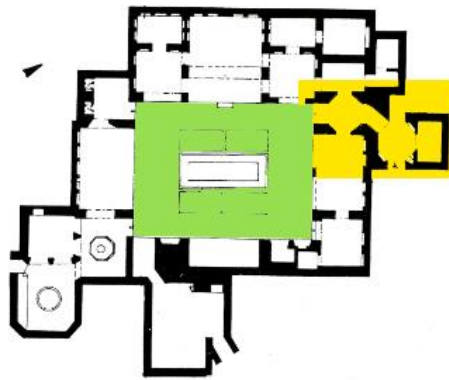


Figure 4: Location of the transition space for relationships in different conditions in the traditional housing plan – Iran

Transition space and problems in contemporary architecture of housing plans in Iran

Cultural elements such as the transition space in the design of housing plans are an important factor and place in Iranian architecture, which is more and more forgotten in the design of new housing plans. Transition space includes two roles, cultural and functional. Both have significance in the housing plan when people have Islamic culture and Islamic identity in their lifestyle.[3] Today, people live with Islamic culture in new house designs in Iran. Many of these plans have the symbol of foreign architecture such as open kitchen and open spaces without limitation in the relationship of spaces. If we want to show the location of transition space and expand the problem of that in Iranian architecture we can follow the sequences bellow.

Deleting the transition space outside the house as a first-stop point

This place includes the relationship between the building and alley or street. Usually this place is the main entrance of a building (previously explained). In fact, it creates problems for visitors when moving outside and even for dwellers. Also, it is serious for drivers when they want to park their cars, it has especially been a problem in alleys of 6m or 8m in width (minimum width in the design of alleys in Iran). The buildings are arranged opposite each other with car park doors and many windows in this vicinity, that it forces dwellers to use thick curtains to cover at all times (keep privacy).

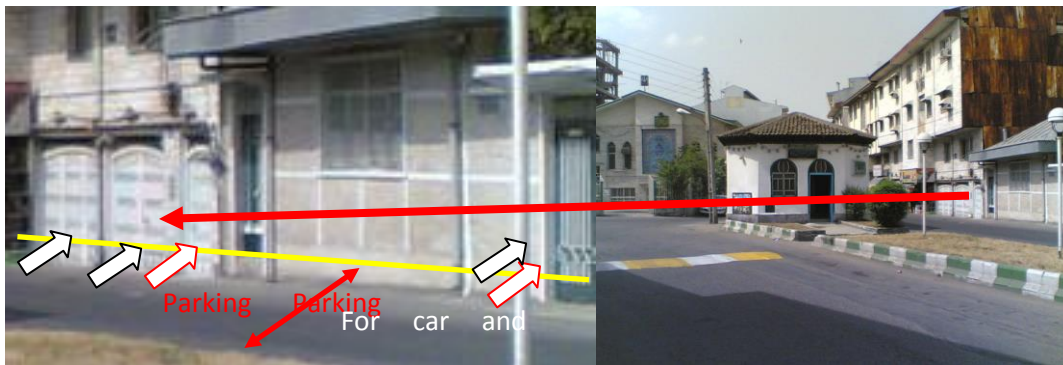


Figure 5: The problem with distance between buildings and doors for parking and passengers

The transition space in the stairway (landing) as a common place for neighbors and problems in privacy

Transition space in the stairway (landing), is usually small (minimum 120cm width in the design of stairways of a house), without enough natural light, and is mostly common between two or more units. Of course, this width gives service for the units, with lift and stairs. On the other hand, all these services are open in this width of space. Furthermore, unit entrances open opposite each other (most times they are designed face to face). Without changes of sight and direction, with no attention to identity and culture of people and relationships between them, this can create many problems for the dwellers. In fact, in this design they lose privacy and culture values. Furthermore, if we pay attention to this layout we can see the first stairs pose dangers to residents because of their design near the entrance.[5]

The Persian people are sensitive to the quality of relationships and quality of living place inside and outside the house. They attempt to help each other in different problems. Unfortunately, the senses and behaviors of people are changing in today's cities in Iran [2]. Also other Iranian scholars, write that close family relationships between neighbors are less commendable. Many housing apartments in the city are designed without transition space (stop place) in the first area of entering the house [11]. In fact, we cannot find filtering or limitation for outsiders and foreign people (non-family), who upon opening the unit's door, will appear in the family zone without limitations or curtains of sight. This is in fact not according to Islamic

culture, as well as dividing the women from men, and it creates contradiction in people's culture and their identity and makes problems in relationships between residents. (Following the second column)



Figure 6: Entrance to the house without limitations to seeing the family zone and general place upon entering

Separating the private space from the general place is very important in Islamic culture, but we can find many plans that do not completely abide to separating, for example separating the bedrooms from the living room. In fact, there is no transition space for cover of sight and relationship between rooms. Sometimes, the general space door is open, whereas attention to it and the principle are necessary for the welfare of dwellers. (Following the third column).

LANDING	FAMILY PLACE	ENTRANCE TO INSIDE	FIGURE OF PLAN	
				1 1 U N I T
				4 2 U N I T

Figure 7: the problem of contemporary Iranian house, Comparing 4 of today's typical Iranian houses based on supplying transition space

Reviewing the transition space in sequence of contemporary housing and suggestions to solve this problem

Renewal of the transition space outside the house

The transition space here is actually designed for the comfort of dwellers. They need to stop for a short time, talk on the phone and stop to unlock the door. The main door of the building with a shift to the inside should create enough space for dwellers to stop. Usually, the length of this area is equal to the door's length and the width depends on the dwelling members. Of course we don't have a standard for that, but according to traditional plans and culture regarding the other passengers on the sidewalk or alley, a minimum has to be enough for two people to be able to stay beside each other.



Figure 8: Design plan of stop place as a transition place outside the house

The transition space in the stairway (landing) in common places for neighbors

The landing with minimal dimensions is the transition space for a building. Many times, it is the communal place between several units. The location and direction of doors, with regards to culture and habits of people is very important. This can be changed and a different direction for design of doors can be chosen, where two units do not face each other. Furthermore, the door of the unit is often designed so near the stairs that it is dangerous for dwellers, especially children and the elderly. On the other hand, we have many standards for designing stairs without paying attention to this important factor. The quality of this area with its dimensions becomes only a passing way without care to culture and identity of residents.

The aim of using the minimum dimensions for the landing is only to maximize the area inside houses. However, if the government supports the residents, they could make a communal place such as a room in a building, for example on the ground floor, without limitations of occupation area. In fact, that area would be a good place for the relationship between residents in a building.

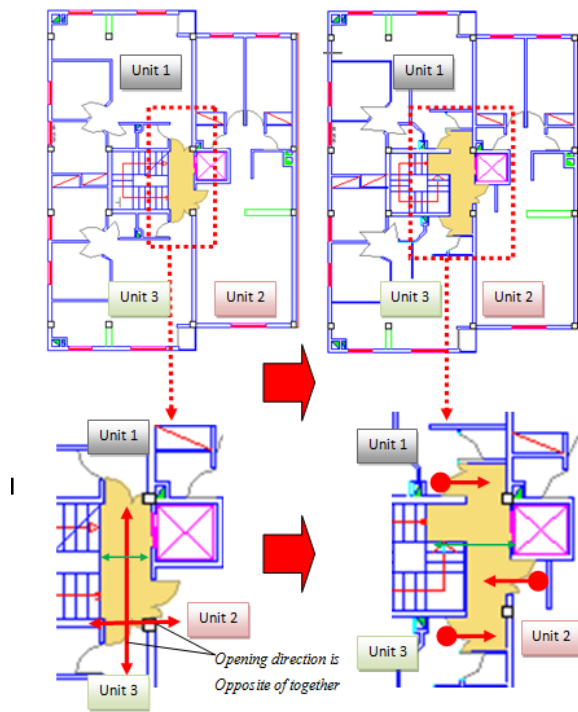


Figure 9: Design of different shapes and directions of doors in a stairway with respect to today's government orders in the country

Reviving the transition space inside the house (between rooms)

The function of transition space inside the house is to separate the private space from the general place. The relationship between the rooms to each other, and all of them with the bathroom are included in the private place of the house. The private space,[4] in Islamic culture, should be covered from other places or the sight of others. Separating this place has different ways in the design of a housing plan. It can be divided into two places (private and general) in different locations or levels, and this method can be achieved in an apartment house.[6]



Figure 10: Effort in designing good quality transition space in same-level housing apartments

CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the sequence of designing the transition space in the traditional housing plan in Iranian architecture, and reviews the relationship between the different spaces to the transition space. Also, the traditional and new housing plans in Iran are analyzed, with a comparison between them. In this paper is expressed the necessity of reviving the usage of a

transition space in the new plans for comfort in dwellers' lives and preservation of Islamic culture values and identity of the people. Culture is a base for design of architecture in each society, so we can find its influence in the people's lifestyle, even when it changes. With regard to traditional architecture and use of transition space in housing plans and its cultural function, it can be useful to divide places in contemporary architecture and it is attempted to remove the problems of privacy in the new design. It is hoped there can be a positive pace for keeping the values of Islamic social ways in young people, even in the least.

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Mohsen Asadi, Mazlan Mohd Tahir ,M.M.Shabani ,H.Arjmandi
Department of Architecture
Universiti kebangsaan Malaysia
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,43600,UKM,Bangi,Selangor
MALAYSIA
Ar-asadi46@yahoo.ie, designaar@gmail.com