

## **The Synchronic Continuity of the Traditional Bazaar Traditional and Modern Bazaar: Tajrish and Ghaem Shopping Center**

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### **Abstract**

Bazaar in Iran has a long history and has always been a main element in forming Iranian cities. The Iranian bazaar is the symbol of urban life and the obvious emblem of habitancy in the Iranian ecosystem. It has always had an influence in the city and the developments of depend on the bazaar's location and its features in many cities. The bazaar was the backbone of the city formation and indicated that the main route, which joins the outer port of the city to the high priority core of the city, was the central square and the grand mosque. Further, the substantial paths are always directly or indirectly led to the bazaar and the successes in cities are phenomena related to the functions of the bazaar. Heavy traffic in downtown areas, air pollution in cities, the transformation of the structure of

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economical activities, the flow of immigrants on the market, the transfer of certain functions of the bazaar to commercial companies have created problems for the bazaar. "Bazaar" has faced a new and distinguishable rival in Iran for a decade through everyday "Shopping Centers" in cities all over the country. They is a symbol of the extension of consumerism and the occurrence of a consumer society and globalization. These places represent youth subcultures and cultural challenges against the hegemony nationally. Will bazaar tolerate and survive these changes, or has it already been eliminated from the urban cycle?

### **Key words**

Modernism, Coexistence, Modern shopping centers  
Traditional bazaar, Tajrish, Consumerism

### **Introduction**

Iran is a country with more than three thousand years of history; some cities in Iran have the same age as its bazaar and during this period, and it has often attended various conflicts and challenges. The international and regional externalities and the various internal factors in turn led to successive conflicts in the history of this country. Bazaar is one of the institutions having an irreplaceable function in conserving the cultural identity of Iran."Bazaar" is one of the main segments of an Iranian city and has thereby formed a social institution relative to other institutions in other cities. This social institution has always been in relation with two other important social institutions of the Iranian and eastern history, which focuses on religion and politics (Azadarmaki, 2012).

The emergence of these three institutions in the central parts of Iranian historical cities is an index for this issue, mentioning that these three institutions have always been the moderation of power in Iran. In Iranian cities, "Bazaar", is somewhat different from the Market. It is not merely an economic connection, but its social and cultural functions have the same importance as its economic connections. Some believe that Bazaar is a representation of the identity of a social location, because it contains different functions in one complex.

After modernity appeared in towns, cities never again had the chance to experience the traditional daily life, yet many tried to bring back old social and cultural life; however, the human being was changing rapidly and nothing could stop him from experiencing the pleasure of modernity. People had now achieved a new lifestyle, which meant dressing differently, eating variously and shopping from modern eras which led to the decrease of the traditional bazaar's flourish and gradually decline. Today, bazaar is still one the very most important public city monuments, despite losing many of its former functions and values, it still holds a very high seat in the city, with a great reputation.

Today, due to modernity and its attractions, the desire to shop and consume decorative products has increased among all groups, this had resulted in more referrals to particular shopping spaces and purchasing centers, which are more significant than others, particularly the more moderns comparing with the old traditional bazaars. Modern shopping centers which were the result of the modern age and modern man, attempted to replace traditional bazaars in many cases by attracting more clients. In this case, these two different architectural spaces have created coexistence in Tajrish.

In this paper, our case study is the Tajrish traditional bazaar in the northern part of Tehran in the Shemiran district, and this traditional bazaar sits near two modern shopping centers known as the most stylish modern shopping centers in Tehran; the coexistence of the two modern and traditional shops is the reason for choosing this site. This site will be studied mainly through the concept of consumer society via theoretical approaches derived from George Ritzer and Jean Baudrillard. Some of these special criteria are as follows:

- Types of people who refer to each space (including social class, age and fashion)
- The variety and kind of occupations in each space
- Types of products presented in each space
- Differentiation in architectural features inside each space
- The city elements dependent to each space

### **Problem Statement**

The Tajrish district located in Shemiran area, a northern zone in Tehran with a good standard of climax and life, can be seen as a suitable case for this issue. This site used to be allocated to the kings and governmental powers in the Pahlavi period (1920-1978) and always known as a place with high living standards including natural matters. Today, Tajrish is an important trade affair center in the north sector of Tehran which has allocated many superior social classes to itself. It holds the important and old Tajrish traditional bazaar, as the core of the district from the past. Therefore, the existence of Ghaem modern shopping center and Tajrish traditional bazaar

both in one place and the modernization of some borders of the traditional Tajrish bazaar due to its adjacency with the Ghaem modern shopping center and is a suitable example to focus on.

### **The Main Question of the Paper**

The question is to focus on what may have caused the downturn of the traditional bazaar is a very important problem; hence, attempting to achieve the response needs studies on social, economical and architectural aspects. The purpose of this paper is to answer this main question:

*What are the shopping center features in comparison with the traditional bazaar and have these distinctions in Tajrish resulted to a substitutional relationship or a coexistence relationship?*

According to main question above, many other minor questions may be proposed. Finding the answer to these questions may help facilitate responding to the main question. The minor questions are:

1. Why does the Tajrish traditional bazaar, due to the emersion of popular attractive shopping centers in the Tajrish site, continue to live?
2. How is the relation among the emersion of shopping centers with the Tajrish traditional bazaar?

### **Importance and Necessity of the Paper**

Traditional bazaars operate systematically with other important architectural spaces such as schools, mosques, holy shrines, water storages, whereas many other main or minor Iranian architectural elements were connected to this system. This is the reason why the destruction in the traditional bazaar leads to the loss of the Iranian cultural heritage. Iranian traditional bazaars were a significant element in the cultural and social system of the city, and they had various social, economical and religious functions and the Tajrish traditional bazaar is an example.

Traditional bazaars and modern shopping centers are two important urban spaces; they are significant in the urban landscape, in public transport, new constructions and even the formation of ancient urban fabrics. Therefore, they are not only specified as trade affair centers but also known as principal social systems, which create a high priority stand. The relationship between the formation of modern shopping centers and the traditional bazaars is a very important issue; also modern shopping centers nowadays have significant key roles in Iranian cities.

The Tajrish district is one of the most important locations in Tehran due to the upper social class it holds, its geographical location in the north side of Tehran and its holy shrine spot. It is one of the most modern zones of the Iranian society and Tehran. It has a high potential as the adjacency of the traditional bazaar with two well-known modern shopping centers such as Ghaem and Tandis. Here the traditional bazaar is the backbone of the formation of this zone and the most considerable active system in Tajrish situated beside other important architectural monuments such as mosques, the Hammam, the Takiyeh and most significant of all, the

Imamzadeh Saleh shrine. On the other hand, it is adjacent to the Ghaemnear the Tandiis modern shopping centers.

There are some evidence that indicate the reality of this coexistence such as the close relationship of investors or investors who have invested in both places. Similar commodities presented in the two places are another true example. Therefore, the unique condition of this place, the adjacency of two different modern and traditional spaces, promoted and incited the arrival of the following paper.

## **Theoretical Approach**

### **The Consumer Society**

Baudrillard has very much considered the emersion of the consumptive society in his thoughts. He has been mostly affected by the theories of Marx and different branches of the Neo Marxi theory. He believes the productive powers rule the consumptive world and systemize it. In his categorization, he states consumption as a language. He sees the consumption of objects a language where in the area of this language each consumptive object has a symbol related to it. He believes such a consumptive pattern is more often described through differences rather than utilities. "We consume in order to be different from others; therefore, these differences are described through what we consume and the way we consume it" (The Micro post-modern theories, 407). Besides Marx and Baudrillard name consumptive status as consumptive instruments. These instruments make consumption possible similar to a factory which makes production possible, a shopping center can also make consumption possible (The Micro post- modern theories, 422).

He sees consumption as a way of relationship. He believes when we use something particular we are somewhat announcing what group we belong to and what groups we do not belong. Others will understand what we say because they are also familiar with the codes and the meaning of these symbols ...An important issue Baudrillard points to, is that consumption has no relationship with what we assume as reality. For example when we buy a double burger at MacDonalD's, we are mostly consuming the symbols and not the food. Therefore, we are not consuming the reality of food but consuming the unreality of its codes and symbols, which describe it (The Micro post modern theories, 410-411). He claims "in a society which is controlled over symbols and codes, we are often in a relationship with consumptive objects and the environment presenting these objects rather than the people around. Therefore the relationship with objects and the environment, replaces human relationships" (The Micro post modern theories, 410-411).

### **Shopping Center as an Instrument of Consumption**

In Ritzer's "Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption" book, Marx differentiates between subsistence and luxury consumption. On the one hand, are the "necessary means of consumption" or those "that enter the consumption of the working class" (Marx, 1884/1981:479). On the other are the "luxury means of consumption, which enter the consumption only of the capitalist class, i.e. can be exchanged only for the expenditure of surplus – value which does not accrue to the workers (Ritzer, 2001, p. 110). When we consume objects, we are consuming signs and in this process we are defining ourselves. Thus categories of objects are seen as producing categories of persons... In other words, people are what they



consume and differentiated from other types of people on the basis of consumed objects. What we consume is not so much objects but signs. Consumption is a systematic act of the manipulation of signs. The Poster book Baudrillard says in order to become object of consumption, the object must become a sign. In consuming certain objects, we are signifying that we are similar to those who also consume those objects and that we are different from those who consume other objects. It is the code then that controls what we do and do not consume (Ritzer, 1997, p. 80). The traditional bazaar in Iran and modern shopping centers culturally differentiate to a great deal. The objects and signs proposed and consumed in the traditional Tajrish bazaar, which is different in many aspects from the ones in the modern Ghaem shopping center. This issue is directly relevant to the types of people who consume these spaces and objects, as Ritzer claims people are what they consume. Also, there are certain objects, which can particularly be found in the traditional bazaar and not in the modern space, unless it has become very fantasized and decorative. Therefore, the ones who still intend to consume these objects are obliged to refer to the traditional bazaar.

Modern shopping centers are appraised as consumptive instruments which encourage the young moderns to buy modern objects and consume either modern spaces like the coffee shops or simply the modern shopping center area via strolling inside it. In many cases the modern shopping center obliges costumers to purchase products they do not functionally need or consume. Therefore, the Iranian young ones are fallen into a fantasy as Campbell said by consuming modern objects presented in the named shopping centers very far from the reality they are situated in. The most significant

icon that performs the role to lure the customer in these shopping centers is window shops which attract customers to enter the shops and participate in the circuit of consumption. The development and place gradation of modern shopping centers in Tehran are eventually increasing due to the increase of interest of Iranian youth to modernity

## **Methodology**

This paper has used the qualitative method. One advantage of qualitative methods is the use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond to their own words, rather than force them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. Therefore, according to the multidimensional nature of this work and the interdisciplinary focus needed, the following methods have been used:

1. Documentary Studies
2. Observation
3. Experimental and field studies including interviews
4. Case study

To facilitate the process of finding an answer to this paper's main question classified to 5 smaller questions, which are as follows:

1. *What were the features of a traditional bazaar?*
2. *Have these features changed? How and what are the factors?*
3. *What are the results of these changes?*
4. *What is your sensation towards this issue?*

Each of the above questions has been minored, including certain subsets and more detailed questions, which come along.

1. \* **What were the features of a traditional bazaar?**
  - What are some of its Iranian or Islamic features?
  - What are the functions of the mosques, shrines and coffeehouses inside the Bazaar?
  - How do you see the Architecture of the traditional Bazaar?
2. \* **Have these features changed? How and what are the factors?**
  - What types of people come to the traditional Bazaar for shopping?
  - What is the purpose of these groups who refer to the traditional Bazaar for shopping?
3. \* **What are the results of these changes?**
  - What factors destroyed the Iranian Bazaar's features?
  - Has the population of customers changed during the last ten years?
4. \* **What is your sensation towards this issue?**
  - Do you have the sense of familiarity in the Bazaar?
  - Do you enjoy working in the Bazaar atmosphere?
  - If there are opportunities of replacing your shop in the modern shopping center with the one you now have in the traditional Bazaar, are you willing to do so?

## **Conclusion**

The main question of this research was: "What are the shopping center features in comparison with the traditional bazaar and have these distinctions in Tajrish resulted to a

substitutional relationship or a coexistence relationship”? The feedbacks in this research including interviews, observations, documentary studies and the presence inside the district reveals that this site –the Tajrish site- unlike many other sites, has confronted a coexistence among the two different traditional and modern spaces and not a substitutional situation. It is obvious in most sites in Tehran or Iran, the appearance of a modern shopping center aside or near a traditional bazaar has resulted to a failure in the boom of that bazaar. The emersion of a completely different phenomenon - a modern ambience known as the modern shopping center- in most cases is an emanation of a different life style, attitudes, specific social systems and relationships which in a high rate has ended to the destruction of the traditional bazaar. This has happened in many other historical cities where the boom of a shopping center has imposed marginal roles to the traditional bazaar and finally eliminated it. Therefore the adjacency of the two utterly distinctive places, demands the choice of alternatively or contiguously for the two architectural spaces.

In this case however the answer to the mentioned question is regarded differently, where the adjacency of the Tajrish traditional bazaar and the modern shopping centers is a coexistence relationship and not a substitutional one. There are special reasons and causes for this fact which will be briefly studied as follows:

1. The modality of the shopping center and traditional bazaar articulation
2. The existence of similar guilds in connective spaces
3. The existence of specific and identified guilds in each spaces
4. The existence of *some* common investors

5. Different attractions
6. The adjacency of the traditional and modern space in one place has propinquity with the dual Iranian subjective desires

There is an articulation among the two different ambiances, the modern shopping center and the traditional bazaar. This modulation is the entrance or opening from the Ghaem shopping center to the Tajrish traditional bazaar which helps to step up from one atmosphere to the other. There are similar guilds situated at the linkage points of the two modern and traditional spaces. Therefore, the customer in one space becomes the client for the other atmosphere and creates an organic connection at this point.

The existence of some similar investors in the two spaces has led to a higher coexistence in this site. Some investors have bought shops and invested in both places which have resulted to a relatively balanced and fair commerce among these two places. In this particular case, the presence of similar investors never results to the move of investment from one space to the other and the working capital will not intensify in either the bazaar or the shopping centre. It is obvious that places lose their creditability when investment is taken away from them and centralized in another location, yet in this case, the common investors find their interest in conserving the profit at both places. As a result, the existence of the shopping center along with bazaar has not led to the abandonment of the bazaar unlike many other such adjacencies, and has improved its coexistence.

Most Iranians have a dual taste of tradition and modernity. They have both desires of experiencing modernism while

conserving their nostalgic tendencies. Some believe the simultaneously presence of tradition and modernism is a paradoxical issue, but Iranian people are suitable for this demand; the demand of requiring a modern space and a traditional space where some of the aspects of their subjectivity and personality are modern and others are traditional. They have a reciprocal and zigzag move from tradition to modernity and a mutual movement from the bazaar and shopping center. This is an ironic coexistence of tradition and modernism unlike the antagonistic of other sites. It seems this particular site-the Tajrish site- is very suitable in responding to this special Iranian human being demand and from homological aspects and it is very appropriate for Iranian tendency.

All the reasons above are causes which have resulted to an appropriate coexistence in the traditional and modern shopping areas in this district. There are times when the high congestion of the bazaar unwillingly leads the crowd to a more silent, cooler and more open space like the modern shopping center, where they make a turn and go back to the traditional bazaar to continue their route. This reciprocating among the two induces coexistence. Therefore, despite all attempts for modernism in fading traditional criteria, in this particular case, the two very differing modern and traditional place, coexist.

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