

Resiliency of Open Public Space (Streets) through Transferring Memory “Graffiti and Wall Arts in the Tehran Streets”

Yasin Lotfata¹, Aynaz Lotfata¹

¹ Architecture Faculty, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

ABSTRACT: *Inhabitants find the traces of public life through continuous construction, remembering and transference of memories in built spaces. Built spaces convey previous experiences through physical markers in space and collective memory about the place and adapt to today’s emergences of public life by terrorism, wars, urban conflicts, environmental changes and so on. Open public spaces, particularly the streets, are places which accommodate these emergences and play a role in de-constructing the individual-world relationships. Transferring memories from the past fasten the adaptabilities of public life with the prevailing conditions. In the case of Tehran, this leads to the question of how streets self-organize in traumas through the transference of constructed memories. Graffiti and wall arts integrate public life to the past. This paper aims at exploring the streets of Tehran, Iran as a resilient form shaping and re-shaping itself through the self-manifestation of street youth in graffiti and wall arts. Graffiti and wall arts make the memorial edges of urban spaces. This study defines resiliency as the adaptability of open public space through the accumulation and manifestation of people’s spatial memories. We observe that elements of the streets of Tehran have changed over time from one regime to the other prevailing differing ideologies in public life. Tehran, the capital of struggles, inhibits open public spaces which identify themselves through the reflections of inhabitants against dominating powers in the representation of graffiti and wall arts. These reflections represent the street memories collectively experienced by inhabitants over time. Graffiti often encounter the threat of being erased and diverted into desired ideologies of the time. In response, they resist, and yet, then, adapt to new emergencies and transform into new manifestations. This study pursues the historical documents to explore the adaptive street phenomenon in Tehran and aims to discover the relations between memory and resiliency of space.*

KEY WORDS: *Transferring Memory, Resiliency, Public Space, Graffiti, Tehran*

I. INTRODUCTION:

“Memory is a process, not a thing; and it works differently at different points in time.”

Olickand Robbins (2002)

The socio-spatial interaction fosters the construction of, the collective memory knowledge transferring in time from and/or within one context/generation/group to the other. In each phase, the transfer of knowledge adds new meanings, patterns upon the existing patterns and symbols. Collective memory knowledge is built upon the shared action and the experience gained from encountering the uncertainties of the specific socio-spatial context and finding new solutions to adopt, and hence, to change. Learning takes place when individuals encounter with uncertainties in a specific socio-spatial context and explore the mechanisms of resiliency through the use and development of the self-organizing capacity and the application of flexibility and adaptation principles (Figure 1).

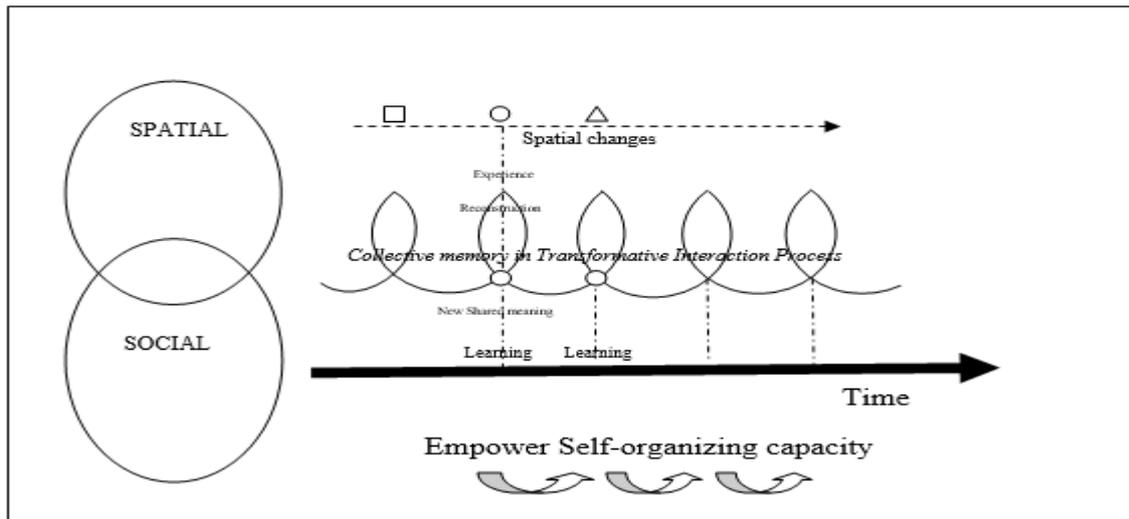


Figure 1. Socio-Spatial Interaction in Construction and transference of Collective Memory

There is no such a reality as “individual memory” but the only real memory is collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Collective memory is knowledge rising from context and is socio-space texture. Indeed, collective memories knowledge has gained on its shared action potential. The ignorance of the experience-based knowledge achieved from the shared action that in fact constructed collective memory can trigger a heavy reaction in time from the civil society in the form of civil movements and graffiti. Collective memory takes to change in the whole system. A person engages into a relationship with other people as well as with open public space. Human being should not be thought, it must be felt. If the structures of human mind remain unchanged, we will always end up re-creating the same world, the same evils, the same dysfunction (Tolle, 2005). Living space is space of memories where memories transformed and recreated over time. Graffiti and wall arts remind the forbidden memories and are a way to resist the imposed sociocultural and political changes. “Humans are not passive disembodied spectators of a world of objects. Instead they are essentially embodied and active.” Human will is action (Marshall, 2001). This paper pursues the historical documents and images to explain how transferring memory makes streets in general, public space resilience in Tehran Streets. Graffiti as the socio-spatial practices shifts the public space to site of the political contest.

II. DEFINITION

Resilience is introducing by its creativity, its recovery and its stability (Folke, Carpenter, Elmqvist, Gunderson, Holling and Walker, 2002). The resilient space is dynamic and context-dependent (Leydesdorff, 2010). Sociocultural system is resilience when that adapts to changes. Socio-spatial system is not static system, in contrary that is capable of continual adaptation, learning and innovation (Mingers, 2002). Resilience has three characteristics, the amount of change a system can undergo (and, therefore, the amount of stress it can sustain) and still retain the same controls on function and structure (still be in the same configuration—within the same domain of attraction), The degree to which the system is capable of self-organization and the degree to which the system expresses capacity for learning and adaptation (Holling, 1996).

The Ritual of Street: *Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its streets. (Jacobs, 1961)*

The street intensifies and preserves life, however through the twentieth century mechanistic framework, the street ritual lost its livingness. Street identified as a material object for transportation, housing, work, poverty and market beneficiary. But, street is the passage to shape human thoughts as well as it is reflection of humans’ understanding of the world. Street is not only to move through, it is designed a place to be in (Sennett, 1977 and Lotfata and Sadeghi, 2009). They are place of civic life. Streets are not only a means of access but also the sphere of social expression. Streets are not primarily place of surveillance and control by police and authorities, streets are place of voluntary actions. It is the place to live, emotional and social expression, performance, existence, experience, perception and discover the world and life. Mumford says, it is the place of adventure and noble leisure. Streets embody democracy and serve as the heart of city and where civic emotions and memories persist, streets are the means for socially, physically and symbolically transform and reconstruct the city (Sennett, 1992).

In the words of Norberg-Sculz the street, in the past Was a small universe' where the character of the district, and of the town as a whole was presented in condensed form to the visitor. The street represented a section of life-history has shaped its details. On the other side, street structured, consumerized intend to prohibit social expression produce different level of resistance from graffiti to street riots (Cresswell, 1996). Indeed, the lack of sense of existence results in the stressful place of inhabitants through insulation of individuals of the communal life. Under the modern liberalism, the communal culture of public spaces is in decline (Lotfata and Lotfata, 2018). Sennett (2000) puts it 'attachment and engagement with the specific places is dispelled...and the accumulation of shared history and of collective memory, diminishes.' History is the central focus of contest, the past collective actions define present (Alonso, 1988 and Lotfata, 2015). 'A good place is one which, in some way appropriate to the person and her culture, make her aware of her community, her past, the web of life, and the universe of time and space in which these are contained (Lynch, 1981).'

Graffiti are the cultural tactics that people use tactics as tools to escape the cage of the discipline (De Certeau, 1984 and Lotfata,2013). People tactically reconfigure space (Cresswell, 1997). Tactics as the art of the creative mind 'the artistic surfing' (De Certeau, 1984) actualizes the real world outside of world of false consciousness (Baudrillard, 1988). Resistance happens when human life is empty of meaning and graffiti and wall arts as the cultural tactics regain meanings to human world (Geertz,1973). But, the meaning production is the incomplete process. Durkheim (1965a); Geertz (1973); Madsen (1984); and Parsons (1968), culture as the system of meanings able to (re)produce cultural patterns under contextual dynamics is resilient. The 'lived space' presents the site of resistance (Lefebvre, 1991), in that people appropriate the embodied values while adapting to the spirit of time (de Certeau, 1984). In this regard, people actively should participate in collective experiences and generate new meanings and memories. Meanings and memories will disappear, but the communicative dynamic will remain (Buchinger, 2010 and Lotfata, 2013). Created artifacts is the created language for communication with others. The created artifact represents the cultural achievements of people (Taylor,1877). Graffiti and wall arts as artifacts make the memorial edges of urban space where presence in-between past and future insists on the ritual of resistance (Santanaya, 2010).

III. DEFINITION OF STREET IN IRAN CONTEXT

Street in Pahlavi Period

1920's and late 1940's the government attempts to expand political and social institutions as well as economic institutions as means of securing long term political and economic intentions in order to prepare the ground for the transformation of the social structure (Rahnamae and Shahhosseini, 2005 and Lotfata, 2008). Street is as an object of representation shifted the Islamic understanding of space as the subject of attention to a void where the ideas of openness of space and modern spaces were introduced. Street as a new urban symbol was added to the urban vocabulary in this era. The street is no longer a track for cattle, but a machine for traffic, an apparatus for its circulation.

The centralized Pahlavi government presents its power by building of monuments, modern squares and large avenues. Those were supposed to inspire openness, honesty and democracy in their appearance and be reflective of the new state by their own physical character. The undermining traditional elements introduces a new relationship between state and people (Grigor, 2009). In the second Pahlavi era 'Reign of Mohammad Reza shah', with white revolution, Shah aims to westernizing image of cities from not only dismantling physical principles of modernization but also culturally, politically and economically changes of Tehran city. The second Pahlavi era has re-named era of land reform and privatization of government. Parallel to market-led modernization of 1963, theories of equity and humanity also pose among Mohammad Reza shah white revolution.

Street in Islamic Republic Period : 1979's revolution in Iran caused a great transformation in ideological system that affected whole thoughts and practices in country management and planning system. Royal system of country administration changed to republic-religion one and transformed from modernization path to radical revolutionary thoughts. In addition to revolution problems, Iran had involved a long-time war for eight years (1979-1989). In last forty years, Tehran' s streets witness sociopolitical events, including Islamic revolution (1978-1979), Iran-Iraq war (1979-1989), Reconstruction and Reform movement (1990-1997), green movement (2009) and mass protests over economic grievances (2017). Social movements and graffiti are the ways, humans have complained about the things they disliked or feared. Graffiti as art have efforts to express sensibilities. They say that men and women produce their own history through cultural creations and social struggles. Graffiti and social movements are conflictual actions which contribute to a (re)creation of a resilient public space. They work as moments of collective creation that provides societies with ideas, identities, values, thoughts and even

ideals. Memorial edges (re)produces space of togetherness and the site for resistance. In fact, by spraying graffiti, people re-appropriate social space to revitalize the embodied cultural values.

During political transformations, graffiti played a significant role. During the 1979 Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1979-1989), graffiti used to popularize the ideological values.

Political slogans, anti-western propoganda, religious symbolic elements, or images of leaders of the revolution were posted walls during the post-revolutionary period. Mostly, graffiti and street arts in Iran has a political purpose.



Figure 2. Graffiti in Canal wall northwest of Tehran



Figure 3. The founder of Iran as an Islamic Republic and the leader of its 1979 Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Khomeini was portrayed on a building in Tehran

Since Iran government does not specify a punishment for spraying graffiti, it is growing in Iran. Municipalities wash up the political themes to keep control upon the public sphere. Graffiti themes are cultural values and achievements which reidentify a civil society and strengthen togetherness. In fact, cultural values as symbolic elements re-appropriate space and the created memorial edge reminds and criticizes humanity, ideologies and limits. Graffiti creates a hidden social network connecting generations.

IV. CONCLUSION

Culture is as the self-regulating system with feedback loops tends to keep the cultural system in balance (Rappaport, 1971). In fact, it is like grammar includes the rules which allow people to interact within inner regulations. The relational cultural system is open system and exchanges values with the envioning system.

Culture produces the shared meanings; people who belong to the same culture interpret the world in roughly similar manners. Graffiti and wall arts are cultural productions contribute social space to dig into own traditional and historical achievements. Resilient public space that emphasizes that past and present cultures assigns to one another. “there would not be a fixed center or order so much as multiplicity of expanding and overlapping connections (Delouze, 1993).” This shows how inadequate might be to look at a place just from an aesthetic point of view as the urban design profession often does (Appleyard, 1982). An understanding of the place requires rather a more complex examination considering the intertwined aspects of life, social and spatial, the present and the past.

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