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Original Research

New Towns and Probing the Identity: Features and Strengthening Approaches

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Abstract:

Humans are the only being who cares about identity, they are always looking for a means by which to explain themselves. The new towns are also a man-made product, an evolving product that changes its traits and identity in the path of evolution, this identity of the new towns has various effects on the collective life of human beings or citizens.

In the construction of new towns propriety is to pay attention to mega structures, housing, and settlement, then attention is paid to public and open spaces that are effective in creating a sense of belonging and identity. Such a process reduces the sense of belonging, ownership, and identity of new towns.

This article expresses the importance of identity in the new towns and examines the features that form identity and strengthen identity in new towns using library research methods. Moreover, aims to solve the problems of anonymity and suggests solutions to strengthen the identity of urban spaces. Similarly, answers to the questions of what is the identity of the towns? What are the features that create the identity in new towns? and how can the identity of the palace or town be strengthened?

Keywords: new towns, identity, identity-building features, strengthening approaches.

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1. Introduction: The Emergence of New towns

New towns are fundamentally different from the cities that have grown and flourished slowly and over time, such differences have a variety of reasons. The purpose of this study is not to point out all these differences, but to try to address the issue of identity and sense of belonging in new towns.

New towns refer to those groups of settlements that are built from nothing on the natural ground which made an artificial environment, the construction and emergence of new towns are conscious, planned, and based on the consideration of the necessities of the people and societies.

In other words, new towns are built with a pre-planned design and come into existence, with the hope that after the initial stages of formation and with the residence of various socio-economic groups they would become normal towns. Furthermore, new towns are planned to find their own city life, and accordingly to attract new groups, each of whom has his own socio-cultural characteristics in the new city in order to create an identity for the towns. In this way, new towns gradually acquire their own identity, grow history and culture, and join the list of conventional towns of a particular territory.

New towns are purposefully planned urban communities that have been established since the beginning of the twentieth century to solve the demographic (overcrowding and congestion of large cities) and economic problems of metropolitan areas and countries. New towns are created in rural or undeveloped areas to be self-sufficient and mostly their land is transformed from rural to urban. New towns are constructed within a predetermined period of time generally with government sponsorship [1].

The construction of new towns has an old history and is not a new phenomenon, although, despite the long history of urban development, nowadays governments have built several new towns with such speed and variety that it is unprecedented in the history of human life. Tracing the history of new urbanism and new towns is an indicator of the social, economic, political, cultural, and technical developments of civilizations and societies which are living in such towns.

The first experience of urban development took place in Mesopotamia [7]. Such an experience goes back to a time when the political model in Mesopotamia was the city-state model. And yet the authoritarian system, under the influence of agricultural necessities, especially the vitalization of massive construction work for irrigation and the need for mass unemployment, had not entered the realm of life.

Thus, the city-state political model first appeared not in the Hellenic world, but in the eastern part of the world [6]. The reason for the attempt to build a new town was the protection of the basic type of citizenship system. As Aristotle emphasized in his book (Politics), one of the conditions for maintaining and stabilizing a limited democracy in the form of an oligarchic system is the existence and continuation of familiarity with the citizens, and thus having the reliable familiarity with each other when choosing politicians. So it is used for political purposes and such acquaintance is possible when the population of the towns remains at a certain level and does not exceed. It is not in vain that the thinkers of ancient times, including Plato and Aristotle,

have mentioned the limited desirable population of cities which they are opposed to overpopulation. Accordingly, modernization has been common to counter the growing population of urban areas [2].

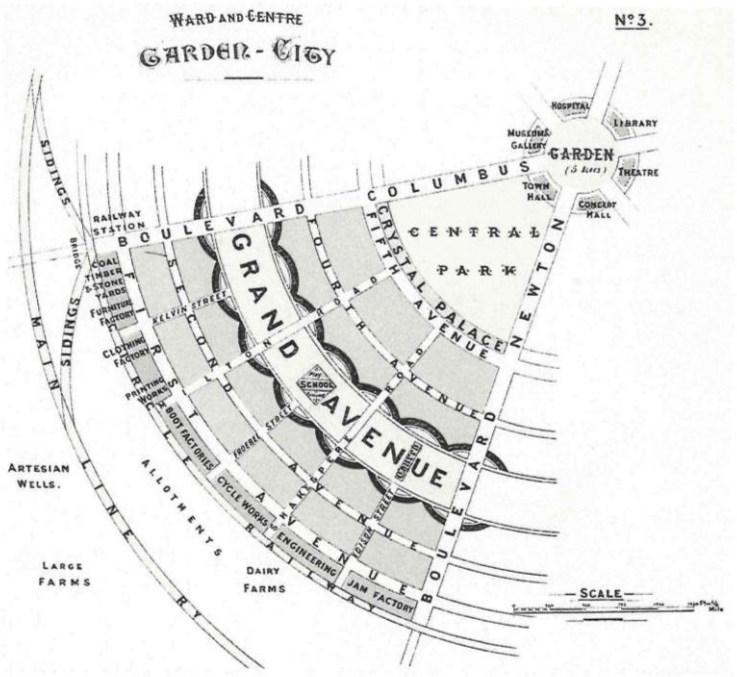
Alexander the Great built more than a hundred new towns during his conquests, in the style of Hellenic cities, which bore the name of Alexander. Today, only a few of these cities remain under the name of Alexandria. Later the Europeans deforested part of North America's continent to build new towns, thus the USA is also home to hundreds of new towns [13].

Apart from the historical cases of urban development that can be traced in all the civilizations of the riverside or the first origins of urban life, the prosperity of this man-made environment is due to the emergence and evolution of the capitalist system. Urbanization took place in the ancient world of the West to preserve the limited and conditional democracy of a part of the inhabitants of cities who are called citizens, furthermore, urbanization in the East recalls the power of authoritarian rulers, capitalists. Thus, urbanization occurs for a variety of reasons.

Planning New towns are an important tool of economic development for policymakers and planners in the capitalist world, which occurs through the stimulation of spatial development. Europe, devastated by the First and Second World Wars, has experienced urban development many times, raising the living standards of its residents, providing better living conditions for families, and viewing new towns as small engines of development. By turning on these engines, dozens of industrial and service disciplines are started.

With such a viewpoint, new towns have been built in England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and other countries, to that extent, urban development in the UK is known as the (Newt Town Movement). A movement that dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Ebenezer Howard put forward his ideas on the need to build new societies and in general, in The Tomorrow, a Peaceful Path to Real Reform (1898). When reprinted, its name was changed to (Garden Cities of Tomorrow) (1902). In this book, he emphasized that the purpose of a garden city is no longer a form of suburban development and strengthening of suburbs, but the purpose of creating independent towns that can accommodate up to 30,000 people and be considered a full-fledged towns in various ways. To achieve this goal, the response of cities, in addition to providing a calm and challenging environment for the residence of its residents, who have come to life from the smoky and crowded world of metropolises that have been constantly worried about cars invading urban areas, should offer job, education and leisure opportunities similar to any developed city [4].



Fiqure1. The garden city. [4].

Howard's emphasis on creating a conventional, self-sufficient town with work and living facilities is a concern that has always been associated with the name of new towns. In other words, Howard's statement refers to places with a full and urban identity, and this has created serious challenges in the towns. The main question of the present article is dedicated to this issue. Such a question contains several vital points.

First, New Towns are usually designed and implemented for specific function or functions. One of these functions is the focus of the spatial development through which inclusive occurs. Another common function of New Towns is to homogenize and balance the distribution of the population over geographical space. For this reason, most New Towns have been formed to regulate the overflow of metropolitan populations, and this is the function behind the idea of contemporary New Towns in today's world.

The relocation of capitals also origin from this, although geopolitical and security considerations are also involved. Islamabad in Pakistan, Sao Paulo in Brazil, and dozens of other capitals are the product of such concerns.

In addition to the neglect of growing urban growth and the heterogeneous and unbalanced concentration of population in the few urban spaces, the issue of informal settlement, slums, and the emergence of informal settlements has become a tangible

reality in the life of the Third World metropolises. In the western metropolises, due to the impossibility of illegal occupation of land to build overnight settlements, the emergence of informal settlements has given way to form road dwellers or sleeping on the streets. Such a phenomenon is gradually becoming a serious problem in Third World metropolises [12].

Now, if thoughtful development and organic development of villages and small towns are added to the definition of New Towns and this concept is not limited to Pre-Planned Towns, so the list of New Towns that have emerged for various reasons will become so long. However, despite the valuable efforts made, the concern of identity in New Towns remains. The essence of the aforementioned concern goes back to the lack of history and culture in a fundamentally founded and designed New Towns. But what is spatial identity, including urban identity, and through what approaches and tools do New Towns have to achieve identity?

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are to find out the identifying elements of towns, Moreover analyze and evaluate problems related to the lack of identity in new towns. The theoretical framework of the following article provides the basis for examining the social and technical issues of the lack of identity of new towns and also facilitates methods for improving existing potentials.

In order to explore the issue of identity and its role in new towns, it is necessary to make its various dimensions more practical and specific such as improving environmental conditions by properly emphasizing the relationship between man and the environment, strengthening the role of religious-historical elements, activating the social groups and considering the needs of the town and the promotion of the economic rule of the town should be followed.

3. Research methodology

The methodology for this study is reviewing prior works of literature using the library research method with a combination of phenomenological science and using the suggested approaches to adapting the identity in new towns.

Phenomenology or the science of recognizing phenomena, as it reaches the existential principle of that phenomenon and its deep cognition. Phenomenology is used as a qualitative method to understand research issues in many scientific fields today. A phenomenon can be a type of disease, a behavior, and a place with which cognition is studied with an understanding of being experiential. This science is the study of people's experiences. In phenomenology, the researcher seeks a description of the essence of the phenomenon experienced by individuals, which includes what individuals experienced and how they experienced it. This method of research reveals the environmental situation, events, movements, and perceived meanings as they occur in the daily life of human beings.

In this research, the studied phenomenon is place identity. Scientists consider the physical environment or place to have intrinsic qualities, and human intervention

in the place is effective when the main character of the place is known. In addition, the experience and connection of people with the environment or place grow when it is remembered that this connection with the environment occurs through human feeling, memory, imagination, and subconscious. Which creates the space identity that is the main issue of this article.
The use of this method led to the formation of deeper information that made it possible to better understand the indirect aspects of various phenomena. This study also uses the texts of articles, books, and reports. Thus, through the process, the theory of the space identity has been found and considered in the planning of new towns. In the end, approaches are suggested to improve the space identity and sense of belonging in new towns.

4. What is urban identity?

Identity is synonymous with essence, nature, being, or existence or identity is a set of attributes and characteristics that distinguish a person or object from other people and objects.
The issue of identity in urban design refers to the characteristics of the environment in various dimensions, which collectively represent the character or identity of a place or identity space and urban area. Therefore, the identity of urban space is different dimensions of sense of place that give meaning to the environment and make it possible for the citizen to observe urban space.

Identity of place is a set of characteristics that distinguish a place from other places. This includes the physical characteristics of the appearance and the landscape and quality of the environment and is perceived by the presence of social activity and behavior, ecological qualities, the natural environment, behavioral activities or collective memories, sense of belonging, and other qualitative contexts of the environment [14].
The identity of each town gives it a feature and makes it different from other towns. Every town affects the way of life of the inhabitants and every urban environment can create a special spirit and place-bound identity in its citizens. Thus, the identity of the city is inseparable from the identity of the citizens.

4.1. Place-bound identity

It is surprising to note that the concept of place identity has fewer sources and texts that are called architectural and urban literature. However, its prominent presence can be seen in the daily specialized dialogues of architects and urban planners.
Although some scholars refer to the destruction of the place identity of towns or cities and the anonymity of new constructions, there is less consensus on what it means to lose identity or anonymity in today's urban planning and architecture [9].

It is obvious that the concept of identity arises from differentiation and classification, which itself creates diversity. For this reason, sociologists and social psychologists always discuss the concept of identity in a way that is related to the three concepts which are context, content, and commitment. These three concepts are

the foundation of various theories related to identity, including the newer theory of self-classification. According to this theory, people use the group in comparison with other related groups to define their identity [10]. Such ann interpretation can also be used to understand the concept of spatial place identity. Every place or space (including the town) is supposed to have its own special context and content and to induce a kind of dependence and a sense of belonging and commitment among the residents of that place. These three elements, due to their special formation are important elements in distinguishing a place from other places and underlie the foundation of spatial place identity. Such perceived identity is used in answer to questions related to what are you? Who are you? How are you? What are you doing?

In addition, such questions always refer to two important dimensions, the first of which is external, objective, and tangible dimensions of identity in relation to the material extents, and the second is the observation, perception, and mental image of the presumed identity, which is immaterial and intangible. Therefore, whenever we talk about the identity or lack of identity, the existence or lack of elements always comes to mind, and also it is discussed in the dialogue between people.

4.2. Factors forming Place Identity

In short, the concept of identity, which refers to who, what, which, when, and other distinguishing features, always shows the entanglement of context and content. These two concepts are formed in two directions or carriers which are time and space. Therefore, the elements of time-based and place-based play a stable role in defining, perpetuating, and inducing identity [6]. By this account, anonymity is indicative of a perturbation that occurs in one or more of the stated central concepts. Such cases can be listed as follows:

1. Heterogeneous combination of two contrasting or heterogeneous and different spatial place identities with each other (imposition of modern architecture and urban planning to the traditional urban fabric) or exogenous development of Third World towns.
2. Majoritization of an external function in relation to the town and the dominance of that function over the developments of spatial space.
3. Lack of functional, social, ethnic, and cultural diversity.
4. Lack of man-made eye-catching structures and environments.
5. Limited or lack of natural eye-catching places.
6. Limiting public spaces and therefore reducing social and cultural movements and activities.
7. Become a sleeping place or dormitory stay.
8. Low level of social solidarity compared to blood and ethnic solidarity.
9. Lack or low sense of belonging to the urban spaces among residents.

This list can be long, but endeavors have been made to point out the most important identity-forming factors in various ways.

5. The necessity of the identity of towns

Nowadays, in scientific and policymaking forums countless questions arraisedng about new towns and the reasons for their failure. The answer to many of these questions goes directly or indirectly to the issue of urban identity and its role in the planning of new towns. On the subject of urban identity, people's participation in the process of creating and building urban spaces, presence in urban areas, establishing proper communication between the place (town or city) and the citizen, and founding the sense of belonging of residents to the urban environment with their town, are considered.

By investigating the problems of new towns, especially in the perceptual and emotional fields, it is concluded that the role of identity and meaning in the new towns are considered weak in the process of creating, and locating. , Planning, designing, implementingtion of new towns [14].

This problem in new towns is seen in the absence of people in urban and public spaces, also the lack of belonging of residents to the new town, which shows that the formation of urban spaces was based on artificial norms and not based on the needs and values of the people. Therefore, from the perspective of many experts, the environment of new towns is artificial and empty of human identity. Although, paying attention to the role of urban identity and its scientific application can solve many problems of new towns and in the process of public-people participation, the desired results can be achieved.

6. Identity in new towns

As mentioned earlier, most new towns have been deprived of identity for a long time due to the lack of history, culture, and collective memory emanating from space. Only when the new towns move towards the conventional town, the identifying elements are gradually take shape the most important of which is collective memory, slowly the new town acquires its own special identity. In this long journey, sometimes several factors show themselves as facilitators of identification.

The most important matter that helps the identity of new towns is that, for whatever reason or cause, the population that gradually comes to the new town from other places is not without history, deprived of culture and lacking collective memory. This opportunity, if used consciously, facilitates the process of gaining identity in new towns. Of course, an important condition for the occurrence of such a process is that the formation of population in the mentioned towns is accompanied by social, economic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. For example, if the residents of new town hold special religious, cultural, social, and similar ceremonies in the first months of their stay, the local authorities facilitate and glorify the performance of the said ceremony. By doing such activities the process of gaining identity will take an astonishingly fast expedition [8].

One of the problems of the new towns is the low level of their social, economic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. The next important point is the conscious use of identity-creating symbols. For example, the major cities of the world have chosen various

symbols for themselves and use them on a daily basis for dozens of reasons, such symbols create boldness and identity in the city.



Figure 2. Identity of some cities through landmarks [17].

Efforts to cover in media indirectly and without consciously or commercially promoting it is another common approach to improve place identity. In this regard, creating exhibitions, and holding competitions with the participation of new town sports teams, local, regional, national, and sometimes international gatherings can be very effective.

In many countries, financial instruments such as tax cuts, and subsidies, encouraged certain groups to settle in new towns. For example, officials in Lasvigas of Nevada in the USA, have reduced the taxes for retired people which led many retirees to choose to live there, without regard for other activities in the city [5].

Unifying new towns by creating facilities for the centralization of educational, medical, sports, etc. institutions is another way to accelerate the process of obtaining the identity of new towns. What seems sure is that in addition to the conscious and intelligent use of every possible opportunity, the creation of various facilities, the use of various symbols, the existence of a comprehensive program to improve the identity of the new town is absolutely necessary. Because in many cases, the survival of a new town depends on the formation of a special identity for them. Otherwise, the new town will become an identityless dormitory, lifeless and free of the necessary urban noise, lacking functional diversity, and so on. Similarly, such sitituation will remain the same for years to come [11].

6.1. Dimensions of identity in new towns

The town and its features and components as a set of external elements affect the citizen. The impact of these elements on the individual leads to the individual's spatial perception and experience of the place, as well as ultimately this spatial experience and perception lead to the formation of personal, collective memory, and citizen experiences [16].

Therefore, it can be said that urban identity is the process of creating a feeling between the individual (citizen), the place (town) and its elements [3]. This connection can be examined from the interaction of person and space by different components, the desired urban identity is the result of several factors and various components that are mentioned below:

1. Environmental components: originated from the improvement of the quality of life in the artificial environment which is done by applying natural patterns and variables.

2. Historical-religious components: Emphasis on historical-religious symbols to help communities to understand the past and enriches their perceptual set of experiences that affect the identity of the place.

3. Socio-cultural components: Socio-cultural spaces create a sense of belonging in new residents.

4. Functional (land use) components: Physical-spatial divisions of the town so that each division meets specific needs and specific tasks, is an vital factor in improving the identity of the place.

5. Physical components: It is the main element of the town that represents the true personality of the place.

6. Psychological and perceptual components: People's perspective and the mental image of the place or town is created from the interaction between them and the place. Therefore, it can be considered that the existence of a strong image of the town or a concrete mental perspective of place, can be the creator and supporter of urban identity.

6.2. The role of natural and artificial features in the identity of towns:

In the past, communities were embedded in nature, and the role of communities and nature was to help form and promote each other. Thus, Nature often represented the specific identity of a place and defined its physical boundaries. The local climate, the vegetation of the natural landscapes, the bays, the hills, and so on, represented the special and memorable qualities and identities of each place.

Nowadays, the smoke and pollution, land cover, toxic soils, declining natural habitats, polluted water, and so on, are all involved in the large-scale destruction of homes, neighborhoods, and their identities. Such issues cause us to consider environmental-sustainable planning as the only solution for new settlements [13].

Environmental sustainability is possible only in new towns and should be considered as a vital strategy in the direction of future environmental-based planning. Adaptation of the physical features of the built environment with the natural is the base of most important principle of sustainability of new towns development. The influence of green areas in the topographic context and in combination with the physical features are to improve the quality and environment of public areas also help out the places gain identity. In this way, the natural and artificial environments exchange with each other in a gradual process, which is itself a factor in the formation of a special identity for the new towns.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the authors tried to evaluate the identity of the towns according to the identification factors of places. Studies can show that a good urban environment with a better identity is a place that is to some extent appropriate to the people and their culture, also identity is a tool to establish a link between the individual and his community, creates history, and improve urban life.

Components of place identity are qualities that should be created in new towns and should be considered as one of the main pillars of urban planning and design to create, promote and maintain urban identity.

In new towns, although due to the lack of many historical and ancient values, urban designers face limitations and problems in creating and promoting the historical identity of towns, on the other hand, they have lots of opportunities for creativity and initiative that arise from the need of the people in New towns.

Therefore, providing urban or place identity can be done in all stages of work, by considering the components of the place identity during strategic planning, policy-making for the construction of new towns, locating, and finally choosing the form of a new town.

Factors forming identity in new towns can be classified into environmental, historical-religious, socio-cultural, functional, physical and psychological components of the population.

8. Suggested Approaches Strengthening the identity

As mentioned, with the passage of time and the overcrowding of cities, the chaos, and unfriendliness of urban space increase. People gradually become disinterested in their living environment and lose the desire to be in urban environments and stay at home while a people's connection to the place is gained through communication with others.

The presence of people in public spaces has positive effects, and if quality urban spaces are created, citizens will show a desire to be outside. Therefore, urban spaces should be attractive, diverse, and commensurate with the human scale in order to help users clearly observe the places. Moreover, people should be able to establish a proper relationship with the space and remember the impact of space which create memory and a sense of blonging. In this case, a suitable bases for identity in towns are provided.

Considering the the above texts, the proposed solutions for creating and strengthening identity in new towns at both macro and micro levels are presented as follows:

8.1. Macro Level

- Creating local self-governing associations or CBOs and NGOs can be considered a solution. These organizations at the level of neighborhoods and the whole complex of new towns can be considered as an intermediary bond between the people and the officials of the relevant government institutions.
- Changing the prespective and attitude of town managers or urban local authorities and creators of new towns, in order to pay attention to the quality of the built environment and life to gain identity in urban places.
- Allied education and awareness should be considered for all people who are somehow related to the issues and affairs of new towns.
- Guide urban planning and design towards participatory models, because people's participation in shaping their living space creates and strengthens a sense of belonging to the built environment.

8.2. Micro Level

- Creating diverse and comprehensible spaces that have a human scale, these spaces such as roundabouts, corners, nodes, landmarks, sidewalks, open space between buildings, setbacks can create Citizens' presence and collective activities which led to creating memorable spaces.
- Strengthen sidewalks and increase the possibility of face-to-face communication between citizens by creating continuity of paths, pauses and stops along the route and observing design principles for the presence of children, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Furthermore, most of the collective memories in space are transmitted to citizens through the names of the places, so it is essential that urban spaces have meaningful names.

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