

The tale of two cities:

Urban planning of the city Isfahan in the past and present

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Abstract

This paper investigates the grid dynamics of the world-famous Iranian city of Isfahan in the past and present. The study uses the techniques of space syntax to analyse the city during its long history of evolution, but the major focus of the paper is to compare the differences between urban planning and growth of the city in the past and present. The use of space syntax methodology is particularly helpful in understanding the mechanism of transformation in Isfahan, because a major part of it has a spatial nature. The paper analyses the old transformations of the city and explains how the historic developments of the city, in particular the vast growth of the city about 3 hundred years ago, were in harmony with its spatial, as well as social structure. Then it will be demonstrated in details how the 20th century planning solutions have failed to continue the thoughts of the past. The initial acts of road building in the beginning of the previous century, as well as the new comprehensive masterplans drawn for the city during 50s and 60s, are evaluated and their positive and negative sides are investigated. The study will go further to examine the very current debates in the city, including a controversial proposals for creating two more new streets parallel to the central street of the city. The results of the study provide a general knowledge for the city of Isfahan, which are very important for any planning and urban design decision making process in present and future; but more importantly, these results offer a useful source for contemporary urban planning in historic cities with similar characteristics to the city of Isfahan all over the world.

Keywords

spatial structure,
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