

Middle Eastern maidans: the role of interactive and integrated public squares in urban social sustainability

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on two public squares (Maidans) in rapidly growing cities in the Middle East: Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran and Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, UAE. These cities are selected for their social diversity and the intentional use of public squares in formalizing and directing city growth. As epicenters of urban performances, both Maidans have historically attracted diverse people across social strata and age. While Iran and UAE may not be considered model democratic states and each has a distinct demographic composition, the enhanced social interaction that takes place in the two case Maidans have lessons for making “safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces” (Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). In comparatively analyzing the two case Maidans, we aim to: 1) Identify their socio-spatial features; 2) present indicators of socially interactive and integrated public places. Using mixed-methods research, we first layer historical maps of the two cities to identify the case Maidans that have persisted over time. Second, we use “Space Syntax” to assess their integrative character. Finally, engaging Projects for Public Space criteria, we comparatively assess their interactive aspects to illustrate their shared urbanity.

KEYWORDS: Urban Social Sustainability; Social-Spatial Framework; Public Squares; Middle East; Maidans.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability embraces three equally significant aspects: environmental, economic and social. Until the 1990s, environment and economy dominated the discourse on sustainability. Though social issues have surfaced since then (Dempsey et al. 2012) and social progress is seen as instrumental for this urban millennium, the role of interactive and integrated urban spaces in sustainable development of cities remains under explored. This paper comparatively analyzes two Middle Eastern Maidans (Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran and Maidan Rolla in Sharjah) to identify historic socio-spatial parameters that facilitate and enhance chance encounters in spaces for unplanned uses, and develop place attachment for people of diverse backgrounds. Identifying urban continuity, spatial integration and social interaction as key factors, this research transcends most comparative discourse on global cities that use the framework of urban political economy in general and neoliberalism theory in particular (Peck, 2015).

1.0 PUBLIC SQUARE, SOCIAL INTERACTION, AND URBAN SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

1.1 Literature review

Public Square defined as an urban open space between buildings may or may not be equally accessible to city residents, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or socio-economic level. While public squares may be multi-functional or exclusive centers for political, economic, cultural activities, they operate as conduits of social interaction (Kirchner and Soflaei 2017). If public spaces are designed in a way that connects them to the larger city, they become socially interactive and attract people from all walks of life. Vibrant public squares are great venues to observe how people interact (Whyte 2001) but very few urbanists have revealed how people shape their experiences of difference in these spaces. This research builds upon the seminal work of Jan Gehl on the socially “self-reinforcing process” of public space and, Ali Madanipour

on urban design as multidisciplinary practice, respectively. Gehl (2010) focused on how to observe performance of public spaces in urban environments. Examining issues of sustainability, shared spaces, mixed-uses, the psychology of security, usability and levels of pedestrian comfort, he proposes empirical observations to demonstrate what makes public spaces 'alive'. He identifies methods and tools to reconfigure public spaces into places for social cohesion and interaction. In contrast, Madanipour (1996) focuses on the intersection between urban design, the development process and everyday life, and, most recently (2017), has explored why the phenomenon of holding short term events in city spaces has gained traction today. While Gehl examined the varied uses of the same space in his studies, Madanipour explores the temporary construction and use of urban spaces that reflect the deep recurring crises of our age in which information technologies drives economies to remote consumption that are no longer place-specific. While city culture is diversified through ease of mobility, distinct classes of people driven by particular roles of monetary (private), regulatory (public) and experiential (social) uses of a city creates distinct types of urban spaces. Gehl's tools of observing spatial uses of public spaces may be used to test Madanipour's classification of social interactions across time to address the gap in merging theories on sustainable urbanism that usually prioritize economic and environmental concerns, or separately address spatial versus social performance of public places. Our conceptualization of the intersections between spatial and social aspects of urban sustainability helps identify indicators of effective public places and our comparative methodology generates a framework for urban analyses and design.

1.2 Research methodology

The recent "anti-Maidan" movement in eastern Europe acknowledges that, after Tahrir Square revolt (the "Arab Spring" of 2011), "the Kiev Maidan of 2013-14 gave a sense of what a successful urban revolt might look like" (Zelinska 2017) that could trigger a "Russian Spring". This prompted our curiosity for understanding: What makes absolute states like Iran and the United Arab Emirates invest in creating Maidans that persistently accommodate upheavals through time? Why are diverse people across a growing city still attracted to the same historical Maidans? How have these two Maidans become successful as eventless public spaces lost in time where city residents congregate to observe and encounter strangers? These are questions that urban designers have long been occupied with, leading to an evolving focus on place-making. The concept of "Place-making" is a multi-layered and people-focused approach to planning and urban design that draws together the unique qualities of a place, including the social, environmental, physical, historical and aspirational attributes. The tradition of place-making is well established globally with organisations like the US-based Project for Public Spaces (PPS) set up to help people create public spaces that build strong communities, since 'it takes a place to create a community and a community to create a place'. Engaging the four parameters used by PPS, our comparative analyses examines the two case Maidans through the lenses of:

- 1) Access and linkage: Access concerns how well a place is connected to its surroundings both visually and physically. Accessible public places have a high turnover in parking and, ideally, convenient public transit.
- 2) Comfort and image: Comfort and image are key to whether a place will be used. Perceptions about safety and cleanliness, the context of adjacent buildings, and a place's character or charm are often foremost in people's minds—as are more tangible issues such as having a comfortable place to sit.
- 3) Uses and activities: Activities that occur in a place—friendly social interactions, free public concerts, community art shows, and more—are its basic building blocks: they are the reasons why people come in the first place and why they return.
- 4) Sociability: Places that avoid strict monoprogramming and instead foster diverse types of social activities for different people, what we call "eventless" places where people go to observe or interact with strangers (Project for Public Spaces (PPS 2017).

Both the cities of Isfahan in Iran and Sharjah in UAE offer large open Maidans for social performances. These cities are selected for their social diversity and intentional public places

that guided the city growth. The Maidan Naqsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan and the Maidan Rolla in Sharjah were both intentionally designed to direct city growth and now act as epicenters of urban performances, attracting diverse people across social strata and age. While the countries where these Maidans are located may not be considered model democratic states, the enhanced social interaction that takes place in these squares across time has lessons for making "safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces (United Nations 2015)". Our research aims to: 1) Identify socio-spatial features of two integrated Maidans; 2) Decode the role of design in encouraging diverse social interactions. We propose a mixed-method approach to analyze the case Maidans: first, we layer historical maps of the two cities to identify persistent open spaces over time. Then, using "Space Syntax" we assess and measure urban connectivity to identify case squares (Kirchner-Rab & Kubat et al. 2012). Space Syntax is used here as a diagnostic tool to understand how the history and evolution of the city's structure had led to patterns of density, land use and socio-economic settlement. We hope to identify spatial causes of what are seen as barriers to social cohesion and scientifically evaluate the current problems, determine which land uses are appropriate for the continuance of economic and social gains, and develop priorities for increasing livability for visitors and inhabitants. As part of the Space Syntax study, we surveyed the pedestrian and vehicular activities in each case city in order to understand current movement patterns. Data obtained from the analyses generated a multilevel, electronic database of urban form and function, containing: levels of spatial integration in the current street networks; levels of pedestrian and vehicular movement. The survey of pedestrian and vehicular activity to designate the relations between movement patterns and the function areas has been done using the gate method. To define daily densities in both working days and holidays the counts has been conducted at different times of the day and distinct days of the week. Finally, we have conducted non-participative observations and periodic fieldwork spanning over a decade individually in the two cities and the results achieved from individual case analyses have been comparatively evaluated using the PPS criteria of assessing public spaces.

1.3 A Comparative case investigation: socio-spatial analysis of maidans in the middle east

Maidān in Urdu or Meydān in Persian, is defined as an open space either inside or near a town. The external Maidans are usually configured for events such as public meetings, polo matches, informal trade and largescale prayers for celebrations that could not be accommodated within the city mosques. The internal city Maidans, according to Dehkhoda dictionary (1931), are open spaces flanked by houses and/or shops. As landmarks, the internal Maidāns in Middle Eastern cities are the most effective urban spaces imprinted in minds of citizens and distinguish different parts and districts within a city. External Maidans are often internalized as cities grow, as revealed in the two case studies from Iran and the UAE, as follow:

- a. Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran: Isfahan is as one of the old cities in Iran that its historical identity dates back to 2,000 years ago. It was twice capital of Iran: once in 11th-12th centuries, and again in 16th -17th centuries. Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan was constructed between 1598 and 1629 in Safavid era as the most significant period in the history of Iranian urbanism. It is one of UNESCO's world heritage sites that was conceptualized with careful attention to the socio-cultural values. It was designed in Isfahani style, by two famous local architects namely, Mohammad Reza Isfahani and Ali Akbar Isfahani, who were the best architects in that time. The concept design of Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan illustrates a dynamic confluence in Iranian Safavid architecture of power (royal palace), public realm (square), and society (people). It was both a ceremonial place for the government and a multi-purpose urban space served for commerce, civic, religious, and political activities by the residents (Soflaei and Zhu 2013). Figure 1 shows the historic urban development of Isfahan metropolitan area, in 1976, 1990, 2001 and 2010. As it can be seen Isfahan was developed toward Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan as the main public open spaces in this city (Bihamta et.al 2014).

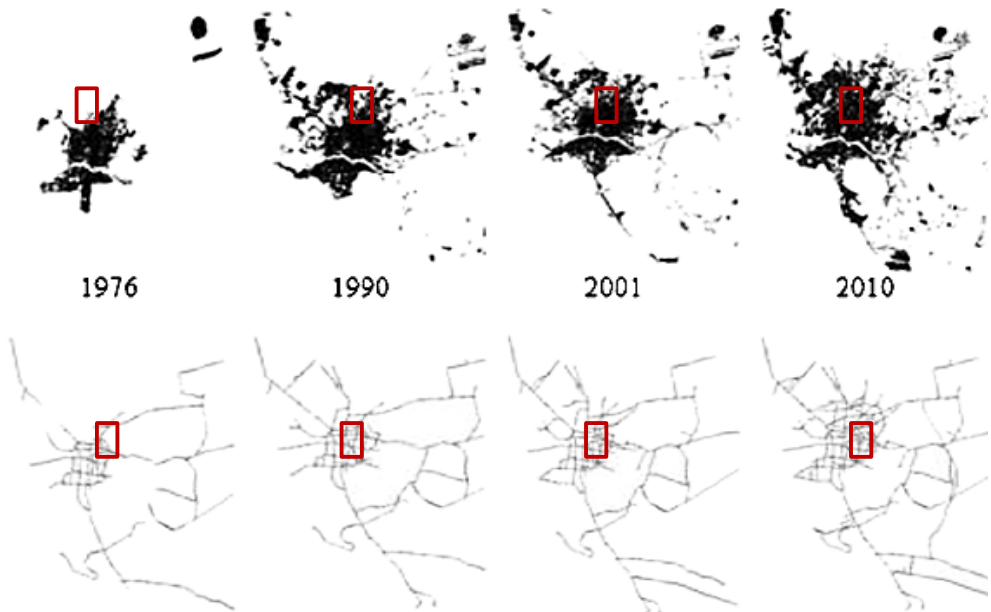


Figure 1: Historic Development of Isfahan in Iran from 1976-2010 (Bihamta et al. 2014)

- b. **Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates:** Sharjah is the third largest city in the United Arab Emirates with coastlines along the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Sharjah's historic urban configuration and the architectural features supported "seascape urbanism" (Kirchner 2012) where the souk (market) comprised of shops open on two ends lined the water as "floodable space" while a defensive wall with Al Hisn Fort lined the outer edge of the city, guarding the merchant houses in between from rising water and the desert nomads. While Sharjah has transformed significantly since the discovery of oil and associated rentier economies, mapping urban continuities reveals the persistence of Maidan Rolla first as an external open space outside the Al Hisn Fort, known in historical records as Saht Al Hisn, where the settled community traded with the nomadic tribesmen travelling to Sharjah from the desert hinterland. Figure 2 illustrates the urban growth of Sharjah from 1820 to 2012, illustrating urban continuity of the Saht Al Hisn at the cross axis within the historic district. Sharjah's seascape urbanism was first transformed by the city's encounter with the air in 1931 with the construction of the first landing strip and an "air fort" for the British Imperial Air (Stanley-Price 2012). In the 1960s, Sharjah planned its second transformation by hiring the British firm Halcrow to plan its modern extension into the desert, facilitating vehicular mobility and allowing its rapid urban expansion into the desert. Beginning in the 1970s, planned modern interventions in Sharjah imagined a new city with its back to the gulf facing the desert, rather than defending against it. The introduction of Bank street perpendicular to the water required the demolition of the old Al Hisn Fort, which was "reconstituted" soon after through a ruler's Decree. Though the city's relationship with water drastically changed after the introduction of Bank Street, the Saht Al Hisn remained an open and inclusive public space renamed as Maidan Rolla, commemorating the banyan tree (tr. al rawla in Arabic) planted by Sultan Al Saqr al Qasimi in the late 19th century.

Comparing the Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan and Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, this paper focuses on issues social interaction and urban integration through factors identified in the PPS Methodology. Comparative analyses of the two Maidan's access and linkage, comfort and image, uses and activities, and sociability are presented as follows:

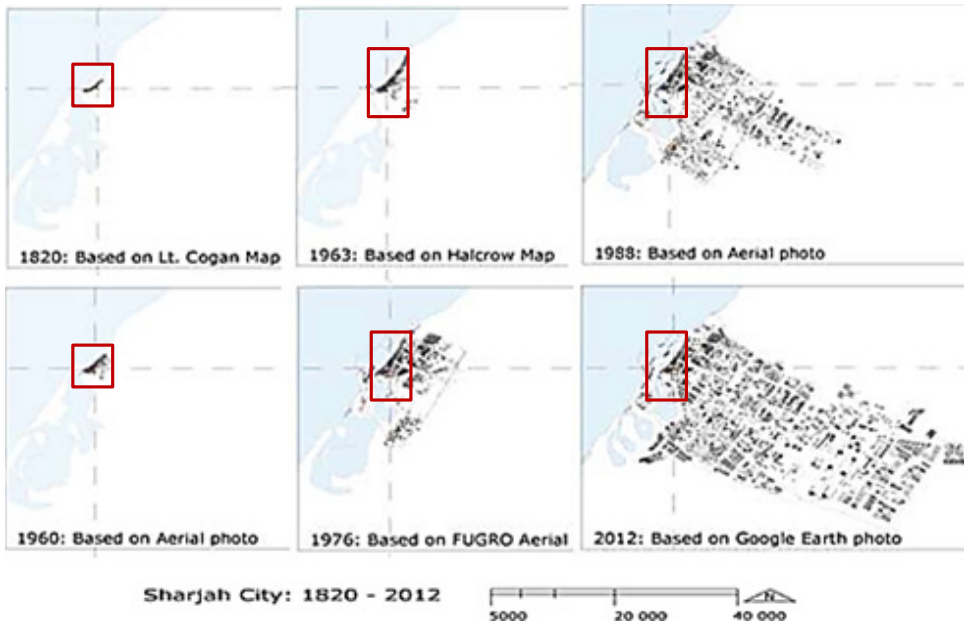


Figure 2: Historic Development of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates from 1820-2012 (Kirchner, 2012)

1.3.1 Access and Linkage

1.3.1.1 *Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran:*

As a large-scale monumental urban space, it is located in the center of city to provide easy and direct accessibility for residents. It with the dimension of 160 meters wide and 560 meters long, was designed as social places to stop, integrate and watch in this period of time. It is surrounded by the Shah Mosque in the south, Ali Qapu Palace in the west, Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque in the east, and Keisaria gate opens to the Isfahan's grand bazaar in the North side. Maidan is contributed to the urban transition by the concept of connectivity that emphasizes on a system of streets with multiple routes and connections serving the same origins and destinations. It is not only relates to the number of intersections along a segment of street, but how an entire area is connected by the transportation system (Soflaei 2014). The car accessibility has been restricted in only two main streets and the other 15 streets has been designed just for pedestrians. This idea provides a strong connected network of roads and pedestrians to help traffic move smoother, reduce travel distances and times, and enhance walkability, safety, and urban vitality around the Maidan. It also provides better routing opportunities for emergency and delivery vehicles (solid waste, recycling, mail). Figure 3 shows integration map of historical fabric of Isfahan (using space syntax method), which the spectrum blue to red presents the increasing of global integration. Blue (higher) to Yellow (lowest) spectrum shows the value of global integration in urban spaces. Thus, in this way one can identify the organizer structure by integration of urban functions. The results of analysis have shown that Chahar- Bagh as the main north-south urban axis, and also Amadgah-Sharif Vaghfi as the main east-west urban axis have higher global integration value (Azari and Khakzand 2014).

1.3.1.2 *Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates*

The transformation of Saht Al Hisn to Maidan Rolla from an amorphous open space to a defined and rectangular public place was framed within the grid-iron plan to extend Sharjah into the desert. Al Hisn Fort was demolished in 1971 to make room for the 18 concrete buildings introduced along the first vehicular Bank Street (also known as the Burj Road) that ran perpendicular to the water. The Fort was later re-compiled following a decree and converted to a museum from 1995-97. The Fort Museum now exists as a precarious island within the Bank Street that divides the historic core into two distinct zones, Al Mureijah heritage area and

Al Shuweyhein arts area. While the Bank Street divides the historic district, it connects the Rolla Square to the water and the rest of the city. The waterfront and souqs (market) that once acted as a primary entry point to Sharjah ultimately became an industrial backdrop. Investigating accessibility issues in the historic area of Sharjah through the application of the Space Syntax methodology revealed that vehicular roads running parallel to the waterfront (connecting Sharjah to Ajman and Dubai cities) and the roads that run perpendicular to these, like the Bank Street, are the most integrated streets forming a grid-pattern integrated streets system (Figure 4). Inside of each integrated grid road system, the center, where the residential neighborhoods are located, is rather segregated. This finding might be reflecting the characteristics of residential neighborhoods where privacy is emphasized (Rab et al, 2012b).



Figure 3: Integration map of historical fabric of Isfahan, as it is clear the " Ghahar Bagh" axis has the highest global integration value (Azari and Khakzand 2014).



Figure 4: Segment Space Syntax map of Sharjah shows the streets surrounding Maidan Rolla as integrated (Kirchner-Rab & Kubat et al, 2012).

1.3.2 Comfort and Image

1.3.2.1 Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan

Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan is designed based on the relation between human-god through flanking mosques and religious schools, between human-human through commercial, governmental and recreational spaces, and between human-nature through natural elements like water and plants. The location and design meet various needs (physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually) of residents and provide a space for participation and social interaction for all people regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level. This spatial continuity has also caused three dynamic relationship between nature (square), human (main bazaar) and God (mosque) as a philosophical ideology. Studying the evolutionary process of Iranian Maidan in Safavid era has shown that they have experienced many changes in the passage of time. However, the continuity of their use through the time in respect to the socio-cultural values and user satisfaction has led to enhance the identity and sense of belongings

for residents. Some aesthetic factors like symmetry, rhythm, geometric proportions, low-rise and human-scale enhance visual richness of this place (Figure 5).

1.3.2.2 *Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates*

The Bank Street is a prime example of struggle between the progressive spirit of borrowed modernity and nostalgic reverence for an authentic heritage. Once past the Fort, the Bank Street intersects with a major artery running parallel to the water linking Sharjah to the city-states of Ajman and Dubai along the sides. The Saht Al Hisn modernized and formalized to first Maidan Rolla and later Rolla Square when the city extended into the desert. Private investors and city officials have planned and are implementing a large-scale urban transformation in the Heart of Sharjah project. This urban regeneration aims to demolish 68 tall buildings along the Bank Street and the water front to make room for reconstructed traditional houses that were erased in the 1970s modernization. The banks are moving out and demolition already under way to make room for a leisure and culture district across the Al Mureijah Heritage Area and Al Shuweyheh Arts Area. Almost 30% of Sharjah resides in this historic district but growing success of the annual Heritage Days and the Sharjah Art Biennales have presented the need for appropriating public places as event spaces. The urban regeneration project intends to replace 300,000 square meters of prime real estate with 14,000 square meters of low-rise buildings supporting the emerging need to host events related to heritage, culture and art industries. By 2025, the Heart of Sharjah project will demolish mixed-use buildings along the Bank Street, where approximately 50,000 diverse inhabitants live, mostly walking or taking the boats to work. Maidan Rolla was redeveloped in 2014 as a family-friendly space, fenced to keep the "bachelors" (low-income migrant workers) out and attract more affluent visitors (Figure 6).



Figure 5: Aesthetic factors (symmetry, rhythm, geometric proportions, and human-scale surrounding bodies in Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran (Fars News, 2015)

1.3.3 *Uses and Activities*

1.3.3.1 *Maidan Naqsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran*

It and other monumental buildings around it including Imam Mosque in the south, Aliqapoo palace in the west, Sheikh Lotfolah mosque in the east, and entrance gate of Qeysareyeh bazaar in the north side, all are masterpieces that were designed by creative Iranian Muslim architects such as Sheikh Bahaaee, Ali Akbar and Mohammad Reza Ifahani. This multi-functional Maidan is a formal landscaped and eventless open space surrounded by distinct religious, recreational, educational and commercial facilities. It is integral to the city because of its unprogrammed attribute that provides equal opportunity for all residents of distinct neighborhoods who visit the different religious and non-religious buildings around the Maidan (Soflaei 2013). Bounded by distinct functional buildings, Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan has been used for different religious ceremonies, national celebrations, sport matches, resting place for commercial caravans, and polo as one of the main social activities. Field investigation reveals that the intersection of political power and religious belief anchor the Maidan as a key social place.



Figure 6: Maidan Rolla redeveloped in 2012 is now fenced limiting access to “workers” (Gulf News, 2014)

1.3.3.2 *Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates*

The open and formal shape of the Rolla Square made it a viable and accessible public place in Sharjah, attracting people from all walks of life, including low-income “bachelor” workers. It represented the demographic structure of the UAE, where citizens constitute less than 18% of the total population. The non-citizen working class is divided into low-income “workers” and middle-income professional “expatriates”. The Sharjah Art Spaces adjacent to the Rolla Square are experimental urban infill buildings designed by architects. It has received international acclaim as “Sharjah biennial’s biggest architectural surprise turning pedestrian alleys into continuous shaded passages at both street level and roofscape” (Universe in Universe, 2016). During the Biennale, for a few weeks every other year, Sharjah’s urban condition becomes a spectacle. The Biennale artists love the attention they attract from the diverse residents in the Heart of Sharjah and have repeatedly in interviews conducted from 2010-2016 said that Sharjah’s cosmopolitan residents from all walks of life are their biggest attraction. Some even employ them as part of their performance. Once the Biennale artists are gone, these exhibition and “event” spaces revert back to the Central Business District character of the historic district. The open and formal shape of the Rolla Square presented these residents with a clear and accessible public place, but it is now off-limits to migrant workers who reside in Sharjah without their families.

1.3.4 *Sociability*

1.3.4.1 *Maidan Naqsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, Iran*

It were designed as multi-functional urban spaces to invite people for different events (religious and non-religious) and activities (actively and passively), and have never lost its social function in the passage of time (Aghajani and Soflaei 2013). Table 1 shows the social function of Maidan Naghsh-e-Jahan in the passage of time, from the beginning of Safavid era till present time.

1.3.4.2 *Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates*

The trading harbour along Sharjah’s historic centre was relocated across the water in 2010, disrupting the historic relation of souq shops with the sea port and the traditional exchange between buyers and sellers. As the public places transform to accommodate visitors, these shops are now selling commodities attractive to tourists rather than residents. By demarcating the fenced boundaries of the Maidan Rolla, Sharjah is denying its working class the historically continued use of an inclusive public place for social encounters across class, gender and ethnic distribution (Table 2).

Table 1: Urban development and social transition in Naghsh-e Jahan square through the time

Dynasty	Social Activities	Image
1788	Political activities, religious ceremonies, commercial activities, traditional gatherings, military marches, polo matches, horse riding competitions, Festivals, religious festivals, fireworks, puppetry, acting, storytelling.	
1925	Permanent commercial space, temporary Friday's Market, demolishing the green space in the middle of <i>Maidan</i> for military training (barrack).	
1970	Revitalization of <i>Maidan</i> and design accessibilities for car and pedestrians, consideration of fountain and green spaces (landscape) in the middle of <i>Maidan</i> for recreational and civic activities.	
2014	Restricting the entrance of cars to the <i>Maidan</i> to provide safety and security, paving open spaces and design a landscape in the middle of <i>Maidan</i> to minimize the air and visual pollutions such as traffic lights, bus station, bars and etc.	

Table 2: Urban development and social transition in Rolla square in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Dynasty	Social Activities	Image
1931	Saht Al Hisn, as the external Maidan outside the Al Hisn Fort, where the settled community of Sharjah traded with the nomadic tribes of the desert hinterland.	
1978	Rolla Tree in a Maidan in Sharjah, served residents for almost 150 years and withered away in August 1978 by unknown disease.	
1990	Rolla Tree memorialized as central sculpture of Maidan Rolla in Sharjah, 1990s, provided a shaded respite to the working expatriates.	
2001	Maidan Rolla revitalized as Rolla Park with fenced enclosure that limits the use of the public space by families and excluding the "workers".	
2013	SUPERFLEX's <i>The Bank</i> project introduced benches, bins, playground toys for the residents of the tall buildings and imagined a new non-monetary banking model for the street. <i>The Bank</i> is an urban currency converter of personal memories and stories, bringing social profit to Bank Street.	

CONCLUSION

The history and transformation of both case studies of Middle Eastern Maidans reveal that land uses are important determinants of the pedestrian movement in an area, and any interference with the land use might have a significant effect on the movement potential of the area along with the demographic configuration. The problem faced by both Maidans since the introduction of vehicular traffic is very similar to the cases of other Islamic cities as Jeddah (Hillier, 2008) and Isfahan (Karimi, 1997; Karimi, 2003), where the modern development of the

city has caused the old heritage districts to become disconnected from the city at large. In these cases, as in Isfahan and Sharjah, the city developed based on modern urban planning principles focusing on the primacy of vehicular traffic the scale of the context increased. The historic fabric of these cities has changed as a result of major program of road building and physical reshaping which in turn has shifted the structure of the integration core and thus weakened the connection of the heritage district. In all these cases we can observe that the historic core has a structure itself but as the city gets developed this structure gets disconnected and the challenge for urban designers is not to “redesign” but to reconnect. While both Isfahan and Sharjah as growing cities envision demographic shifts, each is distinct from the other in the demographic composition of residents, citizens and visitors. While Isfahan is city of Iranian residents receiving a fraction of tourists, Sharjah’s transitory population contains a fraction of UAE nationals, who are a minority in their own country. Oil economy has played a significant role in generating a transitory work force in most Gulf Corporation Countries. Despite distinct demographic composition, both cities transform their historically inclusive public places by connecting them to the suburbs for easy access. The integration map of historical fabric of Isfahan have also shown that Chahar- Bagh (as the main north-south urban axis) and Amadgah-Sharif Vaghfi (as the main east-west urban axis) make the connection between Maidan Naqsh-e-Jahan and grid street pattern of the city. The urban transformation in Sharjah’s historic district is creatively demolishing existing buildings and redefining the role of public spaces from historically inclusive Maidan Rolla of chance encounters to a restricted fenced park. Sharjah’s initiative to redevelop Maidan Rolla will limit enhanced chance encounters and unplanned uses that develop place attachment for people of diverse backgrounds. Social sustainability of cities will require redefining and broadening key concepts such as inclusiveness and quality of life to include accessible participation of people from all city residents. Urban integration and social interaction are key factors in public places that perform as anchors of socially sustainable cities. Both Maidans examined illustrate urban continuity and enhance chance encounters between residents and visitors.

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