

# Study of the Status of Non-Official Geographical Names in Spatial Identity of Hamadan City

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## Abstract

Humans give cultural features to places because of changes and transformations in their communities. Among the most important features, naming places and geographical areas may be mentioned. In other words, humans give identity to geographical places by naming them. Thus geographical names represent the cultural identity of geographical places with specific functions. On the other hand, some factors influencing the dynamic relationship between space and time lead to changes in geographical names and this phenomenon may change their identity and function too. During few last decades, with occurrence of Islamic Revolution in Iran, changes in political thought of the Iranian governance, increased population and urban growth, squares, streets, urban spaces, etc. have become subject to serious evolutions. In this regard, names of many places and locations were changed and using names and titles with Islamic and revolutionary contents became prevalent. In Hamadan city, study of geographical names is significant from three viewpoints: a) names of most urban spaces and places are of Islamic and revolutionary nature and represent the ideology governing the society. B) Selection of names for various urban areas and public spaces is not based on needs and sense of place of citizens and it mostly reflects urban management and government viewpoints towards the city. C) In some urban areas of Hamadan, the selected names are not in common use by people and they still use non-official names which represent nature and characteristics of places or reflect their functions. The questions being raised in present research are as follows: what is the process of appearance of non-official names in Hamadan city? What aspects of the cultural identity, geographical functions and citizens' sense of place are associated with non-official names?

**Keywords:** non-official names, geographical role and function, identity, sense of place

## 1. Introduction

In addition to geographical areas where places and spaces are located, other geographical, cultural and historical factors influence identity of places. According to this fact, historical background and geographical factors influencing formation of human environment may be identified based on names of urban spaces. Today, in many countries it is tried to focus on geographical names as one aspect of spatial identity to protect local culture and history. With expansion and development of new urban spaces every day being added to previous ones, paying attention to geographical identity of a place through protection of historical works and names representing that heritage is of significant importance. In this respect, scientific and cultural progression and appearance of anthropologic phenomena, especially during the recent century, create extensive landscapes and changes in historical geographical spaces of an area.

With creation and introduction of these new geographical phenomena to the human life, these are names that are used more than anything else. Correct use of geographical names and paying due attention to human culture of geographical areas in addition to urban space uses which partly determine the identity of urban spaces enable human society to protect a part of its historical identity and create a strong link between history and present life in the cities.

## 2. Research Methodology

Because of certain reasons, no adequate geographical and historical documents are available to study on non-official names and these names are not generally used in correspondence and documents. Thus present research relied on library research on theoretical issues and field studies to identify non-official names in oral culture of people in Hamadan city.

## 3. Research Theoretical Bases

Every group and human society living in a geographical area and having a certain history, seeks their identity in their land territory. Land territory is a part of earth surface occupied by an individual, human groups and/or a government (Hafez Nia 2006: 151). Land territory prepares the ground for growth and development of humans

based on its facilities and resources offering for human life and develops sense of belonging in the nations and leads them to define their identity within its framework. National identity comprises a set of common characteristics and values of a nation which members of the nation are aware of it and feel solidarity and unity towards each other because of it (Hafez Nia 2006:149). One thing representing national identity and local identity of human society is geographical space which is formed under management and presence of a form of ideology that reconstructs surrounding environment. Geographical space is a representation of essential insights of humans derived from the world, their life experiences and their intentional dependencies to the geographical environment (Shokuei, 1996:300). More than anything else, humans find their memories and historical past in the spaces where they lived over successive generations. Through this process, they engage in reorganization of their living geographical spaces and represent the values governing their thoughts and society. Geography has desirable values in its deep core because the human life is based on them (Hafez Nia 2006:155). These common values and goals choose symbols to represent them and make it possible to identify national and local identity based on them.

An area in human daily life is represented by symbols identical to those of all people of that area. However many meanings are attributed to these symbols based on life conditions and history of every individual (Johnston, 1990:104). Among these symbols the names selected for geographical phenomena, places and geographical spaces may be mentioned. These names reflect various identities and also some urban spaces reflect values governing the society and functions defined for those spaces.

Social values influenced by cultural variations, organize urban morphological quality and life conditions in big cities in various forms (Shokuei, 2006:12). During three recent decades, after collapse of the monarchy and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, many urban spaces have been subject to changes. Notwithstanding the fact that from physical viewpoint many of these changes were not significant compared to the modernization wave in the Iranian cities during that time, but on the other hand predominance of values based on the Islamic Revolution managed to establish its presence within the naming framework associated with various urban places.

Among the most important changes in names of geographical places, changes in names of cities, squares and streets may be mentioned. Before 1978, names of these places were various combinations of the word "Shah" or a derivation from it. During this period, these names were changed and instead name of Imam Khomeini was widely used in naming of these places. Of course the changes were not solely associated with those places which had a form of the word "shah" in their titles. But many of the names and titles reflecting the Iranian monarchy were eliminated and instead of them, Islamic and revolutionary names became prevalent.

Non-official names may be of importance because of the fact that they reflect people's views on their residential cities. Since 1921 which naming of urban places and spaces became prevalent, in part this naming process was not in accordance to geographical culture and did not represent historical aspects and cultural identity of these places. Also in various parts of the country, people do not use the official names selected by governmental authorities and public entities but in some cases they try to employ names which are of more use in their daily life and are more closely associated with it.

#### **4. Research Findings**

From historical viewpoint, Hamadan is classified as a city with a historical identity with respect to its culture. In addition to the fact that this city has a 3000 year history, names selected for places and urban spaces are not closely associated with the historical background of the city and do not have a strong association with its history. The only historical place managed to influence the names of the surrounding urban spaces is the ancient place Hegmataneh Hill. Gradual changes of the urban physics and redefinition of urban identity all are reflected in urban landscapes and spaces. Change in names is one of them directly associated with the relationship between landscape and citizen's sense of place. According to Karl Sawyer, we are not able to provide a theory about landscape unless it is assessed based on its own temporal and spatial relationships. It is concluded that a landscape is either in a continuous and permanent [process of development or it is in the process of decline and replacement (Crang, 2004:36).

Every space, environment and geographical phenomenon is a symbol of a certain thought or a function of the ideology of the social-governmental system (Shokuei 2003: 54). In Hamadan City, among the geographical landscapes which have a transformed identity because of ideological factors in urban culture, Shariati Street may be motioned. Name of this street was changed to Shariati after the Islamic Revolution. During mid-80s, with construction of Mahdieh Complex of Hamadan city in the mentioned street along with increasing revolutionary development and behaviours of people, this street obtained a new identity and gradually the name Mahdieh was widely used as a non-official name for this street by citizens of Hamadan city.

Public urban spaces including squares, parks and streets are places where various people and social groups interact and communicate with each other. Public spaces often are associated with beliefs and spaces where everyone is able to access them and/or meet people officially and in the same way as others (Crang

2004:234). In Hamadan city, some public spaces have obtained a multiple identity over time because of playing the role of a point where people are able to access certain geographical locations. During this process the official identity of those places appears besides their non-official one. One example for this case is Shohada Street on northern side of the central square of Hamadan city (Imam Khomeini Square). It is one public urban space of this city where two official and non-official identities are sustained in daily life of citizens and also survived in the geographical name of the place. Since Shohada street represents a place through which Shourin Village is connected to the central point of Hamadan city, this street has obtained an identity associated with this village located in marginal part of Hamadan city. Thus over time the non-official name of Shourin Village has been chosen to identify this geographical space by the Hamadan citizens. Among other urban spaces of the city which has obtained a non-official name because of providing access to a certain geographical place Shariati Square may be mentioned. In the same vein, this square has been referred to as Abbas Abad Station because since past times it has functioned as an access point to the summer quarters of Abbas Abad.

Geographical space is continuously under change because of human decisions either individually or collectively, compulsorily or optionally and consciously or unconsciously (Shokuei 1996:300). These changes in geographical spaces in some cases are together with name changes. Some of these changes in names may be successful because of their compatibility with geographical functions of these spaces and sometimes they fail because of lacking a proper assessment by urban management before the change process. Two squares i.e. Daneshgah Square and Shahid Mofatteh Square can be considered as proper examples for the above cases. Choosing the name of Shahid Mofatteh for a place where industrial and transportation products are manufactured and supplied in Hamadan city after the Islamic Revolution was a failure and citizens did not widely use the name. In 2007, after transfer of the Children Film Festival to Hamadan city, according to another ill-designed measure by the urban management the name Parvaneha Square was chosen for this square and a statue was installed in it. But after 4 years this name has not still managed to find its place in Hamadan city and citizens still use non-official name of "Chapar Khaneh" for this place.

After the Islamic Revolution, a square opposite to the BU Ali Sina University was named as Daneshgah Square. The interesting point with respect to this name was that it never used by citizen of Hamadan city even after 30 years. In contrast, the name Daneshgah Square is widely used instead of the official name of Azadi Square for a square located at the southern part of the city. This created many difficulties for Hamadan citizens and also for travellers from other cities of the country for many years. When the main Daneshgah Square opposite the Bu Ali Sina University was destructed to solve a traffic problem and instead a crossroads was built in its place, the name Pajouhesh Intersection was chosen for it. Of course this event may be interpreted as selection of a name based on the geographical functions of this place located near the university.

Every phenomenon has a certain individual scale and pattern of dispersion which is not completely random and is related to social and economic processes (Pour Ahmad 2006:96). Prevalence and multiplicity of non-official names (Map 1) for geographical places in Hamadan city show that there is a close relationship between cultural structure of the society and use of geographical names (Table 1). This fact shows that Hamadan municipality which is the authority for selection and use of geographical names in Hamadan city did not do a good work in identification and naming of various geographical places. On the other hand, this shows that urban communication system has not adequate effectiveness so that citizens are informed of correct and official names for the urban places.

One reason for this fact is that names chosen for urban spaces are not compatible to the nature and identity of their surrounding environment. This inattention to functions and identity of the places and cultural backgrounds of urban spaces results from the fact that some urban authorities are not able to differentiate public demands from personal ones. Public demand is solely associated with collective benefits but the personal demand focuses on personal interest (Laurie and Kamp, 2007:67). If in naming public spaces of the city more attention is paid to public demands and desires and names are chosen in a way that people are able to use them more widely, then it is more likely to see wide use of these names by the public.

Every society consists of two elements of thought and structure. Thoughts are the same as mental and psychological ideas which include values, norms, beliefs, feelings and mind-sets that form mental aspect of that society. But structures are a set of defined and institutionalized basics and roles having mutual relationships and interactions with each other (Abolhasani, 2009:30). In Hamadan city, focusing on social thoughts common in the society in the process of naming geographical places has resulted in a condition in which the selected names reflect the functions of the relative urban spaces and geographical places are even more identified with urban functions.

To analyze this subject with a more serious focus, it is necessary to examine urban spaces of Hamadan city from a critical viewpoint. This critical viewpoint shows that urban management of Hamadan city has not chosen the name of urban spaces based on their functions. Recognition of modern thought and wisdom starts with a critical view towards the history and inquiring about causes and quality of transformation of biological structures. It means allocation of time to inquiry, questioning retrospective and previous mind-set, suspecting

principles and focusing on new thinking patterns (Yourdshahian, 2007: 243). Nameology of geographical names in Hamadan city suggests that up to now no ordered and accurate model is developed for choosing names and no attention is paid to sense of place of Hamadan citizens in choosing names for geographical places.

Table1. Places in Hamadan city where non-official names are more prevalent

| No. | Official Name                             | Non-Official Name                  | Cause of appearance of the non-official name  |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|---|
| 1   | Ayatollah Najafi Crossroads               | Baar Square Crossroads             | Location of two main squares for distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables of Hamadan city besides this crossroads  |
| 2   | Sepaah Square                             | Cherag Qermez (red light)          | The first red light in Hamadan city was installed in this place   |
| 3   | Shahid Square (Parvaneha Square)          | Chapar Khaneh Square               | Streets surrounding the square and also marginal parts of the square are places for sales of automotive parts; in addition during 1940s and 1950s, many garages in this place were a place for keeping beasts of burden of Hamadan city.  |
| 4   | Mosalla Hill                              | Haj Enaiat Hill                    | The main name of this place was Haj Enaiat Hill, later it was chosen as Mosalla (place for prayer) of Hamadan City  |
| 5   | Shohada Street                            | Shourin Street                     | After reformation of the central square of the city during first years of 1920s, the street was named by this title because it connected Shourin Village to central Hamadan   |
| 6   | Doctor Ali Shariati Street                | Mahdieh Street                     | During 1980s, with construction of Mahdieh Complex of Hamadan city in this street, name of Mahdieh Street became prevalent besides the main name of the street  |
| 7   | Shariati Street                           | Abbas Abad Station- station        | This square was a place where citizen travelled to reach tourist place of Abbas Abad  |
| 8   | Honarestan-Mir Zadeh Eshghi Intersection  | Prison Turn(Piche Zendan)          | For approximately 5 decades, location of Prison of Hamadan city near this intersection led to choosing name of Prison Turn to identify this point of Hamadan city   |
| 9   | Azadi Square                              | Daneshgah Square                   | Multiple name changes for this square finally resulted in choosing a name which was officially in use for a short term as the non-official name for this place  |
| 10  | Pajouhesh Intersection (Daneshgah Square) | Pajouhesh Crossroads (Park Square) | Daneshgah Square Initially located in this place resulted in a condition in which one single name simultaneously was used for two different parts of the city, but with change in function of this square and conversion of it into a crossroads, this problem has been solved during recent years. |

## 5. Conclusions

Non-official names in Hamadan city for identification of urban spaces and some geographical phenomena are noticeable from three viewpoints:

1. A group of these non-official names became prevalent in the Iranian society during 1980s and under influence of revolutionary-Islamic thoughts
2. Some places in Hamadan city have non-official names because of providing access to some near areas
3. Third group of non-official names being in common use in these cities reflects functions of urban spaces surrounding these places. These functions are of such importance in the daily life of people in this city that they use names of those surrounding urban spaces to refer to these certain points of the city.

In total, field studies conducted on non-official names in Hamadan city in present research showed that three major issues including mainstream thoughts of the Iranian urban society, functions of urban spaces and establishment of emotional relationships between two geographical places, play significant roles in appearance of the phenomenon of non-official names.

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