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Contemporary Green Spaces as an Afterthought in Urban Development Plans: A Critique of the Quantitative Approach

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Abstract

This study critiques the prevailing quantitative paradigm governing urban green space development in Iran. This approach predominantly treats the expansion of total area and per capita green space as the primary metric of success in urban management, largely neglecting qualitative dimensions, local identity, and contextual integration. The core issue lies in the proliferation of placeless green spaces that, despite their physical expansion, remain inadequate in fulfilling the social, cultural, and environmental needs of inhabitants, ultimately lacking fundamental sustainability. Consequently, this research asks: What are the primary placemaking components of traditional Iranian green landscapes, and how can a comparative analysis with contemporary green spaces elucidate the fundamental flaws of the current context-detached approach? The primary objective is to delineate the characteristics of place-based green landscapes and propose a conceptual framework to enhance the quality of urban green infrastructures. Methodologically, this study employs a comparative analysis between the attributes of contemporary urban green spaces and traditional Iranian green landscapes. The findings reveal that contemporary green spaces, by disregarding spatial capacities and community needs, are predominantly developed as mono-functional areas strictly for leisure and recreation. As a result, they lack a meaningful connection with the historical consciousness and collective memory of the residents, while their incompatibility with local environmental conditions demands intensive, continuous maintenance. In stark contrast, traditional green landscapes actively foster a sense of place and ensure sustainability through mechanisms of social participation, equitable spatial distribution, integration with local identity, and multi-functionality. The study concludes that a paradigm shift from quantitative expansion to qualitative enhancement, with a profound emphasis on spatial capacities, is an imperative prerequisite for the revitalization of placemaking urban green landscapes.

Keywords: Urban green space, Green landscape, Place-based development.

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How has the dominance of the quantitative paradigm reduced urban green spaces to "supplementary and placeless" entities, and what is the pathway for transitioning toward an "identity-driven and high-quality green landscape"?

Extended Abstract

Contemporary urban planning, by disregarding intrinsic spatial capacities, has reduced the "green space" land-use paradigm to a mere recreational add-on. Ubiquitously incorporated into development plans, it is routinely extolled for purported environmental and aesthetic benefits. Urban management perceives the quantitative expansion of per capita green space as a primary success metric, persistently maximizing physical area at the expense of qualitative considerations. Consequently, these context-detached, or "placeless," green spaces exhibit profound incompatibilities across multiple dimensions. Physically, their incongruity with local climatic conditions and environmental constraints results in exorbitant maintenance costs. Socio-perceptually, they fail to integrate into communal events and the daily routines of the populace. Furthermore, from a historical perspective, these spaces lack meaningful cognitive or cultural resonance with the residents' collective memory and belief systems. This culmination of spatial incompatibilities renders such green infrastructures highly ineffective in addressing inhabitants' needs, severely compromises their long-term sustainability, and ultimately results in a profound deficit of both place attachment and a genuine sense of place.

In stark contrast, the traditional "green landscape" in Iran functions as a highly integrated, multi-functional entity. Strategically situated within neighborhood social hubs, it actively facilitates communal events and daily life, possessing profound ties to the residents' cognitive framework and local identity. These traditional landscapes are fundamentally shaped by spatial perception while meticulously accommodating environmental constraints. Environments fostering such robust place attachment and active community participation inherently circumvent the need for exorbitant maintenance expenditures. Table \ presents a comparative synthesis of contemporary, placeless green spaces versus traditional, place-based green landscapes.

A genuine placemaking green landscape leverages inherent spatial capacities, playing a fundamental role in shaping macro-level territorial perception. Therefore, contemporary urban development must explicitly shift from a purely quantitative focus to a fundamentally qualitative paradigm. Prioritizing context-specific spatial capacities in designing green landscapes is an absolute necessity to arrest their continued inefficiency and revitalize their indispensable placemaking function.

The reduction of urban green space development to mere quantitative metrics has generated "placeless" environments that are fundamentally detached from both the local climatic context and the collective memory of the citizenry. Green infrastructure must no longer be relegated to a "supplementary add-on" within urban planning frameworks; rather, by transcending this quantitative paradigm, it must evolve into a "place-based, identity-driven, and multi-functional green landscape." Ultimately, the meaningful reintegration of natural elements with the social imperatives and the historical-cultural identity of the spatial context remains the sole viable pathway to overcome the prevailing inefficiencies.

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