Critical Reviews
No. 9
November 2026
4

The Pedestrian Walkway: From a Path for Walking to a Pedestrian-Oriented Lifestyle

Mahmoud Teimouri
PhD in Architecture, Faculty Member, Islamic Azad University, Arak Branch, Iran

This editorial critically analyzes and problematizes the fifteen-year experience of developing pedestrian streets in Iranian cities, raising the fundamental question of why, despite diverse implementations, these projects are often stripped of the essence of «pedestrian life» and reduced to soulless «pedestrian pathways.» The core issue lies in the departure from the philosophy of the pedestrian›s presence in the city and the predominance of reductionist approaches. The critique is directed not at the very concept of pedestrian presence, but at how it is understood and realized. Pedestrian projects in Iran face three fundamental challenges: first, the reduction of pedestrianization to mere hardscaping within a traffic-centric framework; second, the absence of authentic goal-setting and the predominance of the logic of spectacle over the logic of lived urban life; and third, the profound gap between the lived perception of the public and the self-referential ideology of urban managers and consultants. Although seemingly independent, these three issues are deeply intertwined in practice, resulting in spaces labeled as «pedestrian streets» yet entirely devoid of «pedestrian life.» In the first section, the conceptual dichotomy between «pedestrianization» as an urban paradigm and «pedestrian hardscaping» as a purely physical intervention is examined. The traffic-centric and instrumental perspective, which equates the removal of cars with the creation of urban space, has led to the formation of paved deserts devoid of any flow of life. Authentic pedestrianization requires

Email: mteimoury@gmail.com

[Downloaded from jcr-sj.com on 2026-10-16]

[DOI: 10.22034/jcr.1.1.4.2.9.4]

redefining accessibility, organic integration with the surrounding fabric, ensuring the human scale, and managing an appropriate spectrum of public transportation, for the balanced presence of these elements reinforces the flow of life and accommodates demographic groups with lower mobility. However, a car-free street is not necessarily a vibrant urban space.

In the second section, the challenge of «goal-setting» within Iran›s urban management system is critiqued. Pedestrian streets are defined either as ultimate ends in themselves or as mere means to achieve instrumental objectives such as tourism, economic growth, and pollution reduction. Both approaches reflect a neglect of the intrinsic value of urban space. The root of this hidden aimlessness lies in the «project-oriented» and «spectacle-driven» mindset of urban managers; spaces are designed to be «seen» during inauguration ceremonies and to generate statistics, rather than to be «lived» in the everyday life-world. Mistaking consequences for goals diverts the project from authentic evaluation. Enhancing social cohesion and elevating the quality of collective life must be the authentic ultimate objectives of such interventions.

In the third section, the profound epistemological gap between the «ideology of managers and consultants» and the «lived perception of the people» is elucidated. Citizen participation in these projects has often been reduced to the most superficial layer, namely aesthetic and taste-based choices. Relying on a phenomenological approach, this editorial emphasizes that a vibrant urban landscape is the product of a deep understanding of temporality, behavioral diversity, and the psychological needs of pedestrians. Transitioning from physical aesthetics to the discovery of the urban landscape necessitates a transformation in the design process, where the central question shifts from «which color is more beautiful?» to «what sense of agency does the pedestrian experience along this route, and which nodes provide spaces for pausing and dialogue?» Design must distance itself from the imposition of managers› personal tastes and instead become a facilitator of perceptual affordances, psychological security, and a shared sense of belonging.

Ultimately, this editorial concludes that reconceptualizing pedestrian streets requires a paradigm shift from «spectacular transit corridors» to «settings for collective life.» As long as the prevailing logic governing the production of these spaces is the visual persuasion of passing observers, pedestrian streets will remain neutral showcases through which pedestrians merely pass at speed, without any opportunity for pausing, dialogue, belonging, or lived experience. The strategy to overcome this crisis lies in redefining the relationship between human agency, movement, pause, and collective life at both the neighborhood and urban scales.

COPYRIGHTS
Copyright for this article is retained bye the authors with publication rights granted to Journal of Critical Reviews (JCR); The Iranian Journal of Critical Studies in Place. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/version4/)

[Downloaded from jcr-sj.com on 2026-10-16]

[DOI: 10.22034/jcr.1.1.4.2.9.4]